The Digital Dionysus: Nietzsche and the Network-Centric Condition

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The inspiration for this volume of essays, drawn from the proceedings of the Nietzsche Workshop @ Western (held at Western University, London ON, and the Center for Transformative Media at The New School, New York NY), comes from the hypothesis that Nietzsche’s thinking is pertinent to a phenomenon which can be described as the planetary propensity toward the digitization and networking of information. Moreover, “Nietzsche-Thought” — to lift a phrase from philosopher François Laruelle — provides unique insights about the complexities

1 The Nietzsche Workshop @ Western (NWW) was co-organized by the editors of this volume in 2009 (NWW.I), 2010 (NWW.II), 2011 (NWW.III) and 2013 (NWW.IV).

2 As was stated in Nandita Biswas Mellamphy, “Nietzsche’s Political Materialism: Diagram for a Nietzschean Politics,” in Nietzsche as Political Philosopher, ed. Barry Stocker & Manuel Knoll (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 78: “From the outset, Laruelle makes it clear that what he means by Nietzsche’s ‘thinking’ does not refer primarily to what Nietzsche said or wrote — or neglected to say or write — but rather to the way in which Nietzsche’s thinking functions, i.e. operates. Needless to say, with this type of agenda, Laruelle’s interpretation does not focus on the hermeneutic, exegetical or doctrinal dimensions of Nietzsche’s many explicit political statements; indeed one of Laruelle’s main contentions is that although these signifying elements in no way need
of our contemporary network-centric condition, especially in relation to the all-important notion of “information,” which has been conceptualized primarily in terms that are *protocological* and *computational*, hence almost exclusively *Apollonian* (or as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari would say, “striated”), rather than *Dionysian* (or as Deleuze and Guattari would say, “smooth”) terms. As Manav Guha argues in his contribution to this volume, the current military understanding of net-centricity is “a project of extreme striation involving the harnessing of *Dionysian energies* of the yet-to-be-processed with the *Apollonian reigns* of the processor.”

Primary among the conceptual tools provided by Nietzsche’s thinking is the pairing of Apollo and Dionysus, which Nietzsche initially presents as artistic and psychological tendencies in *The Birth of Tragedy*, but later reconceptualizes more fundamentally as ontological and (in)formational tendencies out of which empirical matters/materials arise and are individuated in terms of the will-to-power’s “form-giving” functions: “Thus the essence of life, its will-to-power, […] [involves] the essential priority of the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, form-giving forces that give new interpretations and directions.”

For Nietzsche (who took this from the ancient Greeks), *life itself* — or again, *will-to-power* — expresses itself through the duality of Apollo, god of the *eye*, of *vision*, of the *visual arts* (including musical *notation* and *composition*), of *order*, *memory*, and *civic affairs*, and Dionysus, god of the *ear*, of *hearing*, of *sonic perception*, *musical performance*, *dissonant dynamics*, *dissolution into soundscapes*

be repressed or suppressed, they are nevertheless secondary features of the fundamental design or layout (agencement) of Nietzsche’s thinking. The basic and most important characteristic — the one that makes Nietzsche’s political thinking unique from Laruelle’s point of view — is the operation of an elementary and fundamentally non-signifying force-mechanics that activates the virulence of Nietzsche’s thought.”

3 Manabrata Guha, “Networked Nightmares: On Our Dionysian Post-Military Condition” (chapter three of this volume), 66.

(or immersion into noise), intoxication, self-abandon, oblivion, and revelry. Ontologically, the duality of Apollo and Dionysus is reflected in the constancy of becoming, of the regeneration and degeneration of all forms, as Horst Hutter suggests in his contribution to this volume. Informatically (and physiologically, as Nietzsche would have surely said, and as Scott Bakker reminds us in his contribution to this volume), Dionysus symbolizes the “forgetfulness and random noise,” the pre- or proto-individual “background of all media” out of which arises the Apollonian signal qua ordering “principle of individuation” (the principium individuationis of the Birth of Tragedy §1–2).

According to Nietzsche’s thinking, then, we can conceptualize the Apollonian as the tendency toward concretization via selection, individualization, and formalization (e.g., the complex computational processes required for physiological formations, including cognition, representation, signification); the Dionysian, by contrast, is that tendency which continuously mediates the former — threatening to dissolve, disrupt, and dissipate it (chaos in this sense is the Dionysian weapon par excellence). To date, we have tended to view networks and our current network-centric condition in almost exclusively Apollonian terms — that is, in terms of networks of discrete elements, informational protocols, and platforms. From the Apollonian perspective, the Dionysian is “a chiasmic turbulence that the computationally-centric [viz. Apollonian] concept of network[s] tries to keep at bay.” The result is that “so far, there is no digital Dionysus” — hence a fundamental aspect of network-centricity remains almost entirely occluded (i.e., unthought).

6 Horst Hutter, “The Internet as a Development from Descartes’ Res Cogitans: How to Render It Dionysian” (chapter two of this volume).
9 Guha, “Networked Nightmares.”
10 Hutter, “The Internet as a Development from Descartes’ Res Cogitans.”
What would it mean to re-imagine the network-centric condition in terms that privilege the Dionysian background of all information rather than its Apollonian signals and figures? This is a very complex question, and the essays in this volume are, first and foremost, experimental responses to this very question from various perspectives—political, politico-theological, philosophical, aesthetic, media-archaeological, psychological, neuro- and/or techno-physiological, etc. One gleans from Babich’s essay, for instance (chapter one of this volume), that to understand the network-centric condition in Dionysian terms would entail a de-privileging of visible and optical aspects of mediation, (at)tuning one’s ear instead to the hidden, dissonant, puls(ational), or rhythmic affinities of information flow here understood in *Dionysian* terms—that is, as the winding and widening “wound” out of which discrete Apollonian forms or “idols” emerge. In a well-known and oft-cited passage from *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche writes:

> A maxim — the origin of which I withhold from scholarly curiosity — has long been my motto: “increscunt animi, virescit volnere virtus” (the spirits increase, vigor grows through a wound). Another mode of convalescence (in certain situations even more to my liking) is sounding out idols. There are more idols than realities in the world: that is my “evil eye” upon this world; that is also my “evil ear.” Finally to pose questions with a hammer, and sometimes to hear as a reply that famous hollow sound that can only come from bloated entrails—what a delight for one who has ears even behind his ears, for me, an old psychologist and pied piper before whom just that which would remain silent must finally speak out.12

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11 Babich, “*Digital Alexandrians*: Greek as Musical Code for Nietzsche and Kittler” (chapter one of this volume).
It is the wound that permits sounding-out idols. Rather than think the conceptual pairing of Apollo and Dionysus as a dialectical dualism, it is revealing to think of it instead as a two-headed “interface”—a concept mobilized in this volume by Nicola Masciandaro. In the interface of Dionysus and Apollo (especially when relating this conceptual pairing to the notions of network-centricity and information), the ear (Dionysus), not the eye (Apollo), is revealed to be the aperture of subversion, overcoming, and transformation. As Nietzsche stated, Ariadne has Dionysus’s ears, and Nietzsche’s teachings address the disciples of Dionysus: those who alone possess such a third ear can hear his words. It was Sarah Kofman who noted that “the aphorism becomes a precaution against feeble minds, against the profanum vulgus; it allows one to express revolutionary ideas in the knowledge that one will be understood only by those who possess the third ear.”

The ear deciphers the aphorism, and in so doing activates what Masciandaro calls a “navigational protocol”—Dionysian love, amor fati: “a medium that does not mediate,” a kind of “magic non-medium at play between the solid of being and the liquid of thought.” As Masciandaro suggests, with Nietzsche we return “to the scene of modern philosophical decision in order to reopen the wound it hastily bound—to let it, like the blood of Saint Januarius, heal in bleeding anew.”

Dionysus, as such, cures by cutting, a theme that is explored in

14 Nicola Masciandaro, “Nietzsche’s Amor Fati: Wishing and Willing in a Cybernetic Circuit” (chapter seven of this volume), 132.
15 Ibid., 135.
16 The Dionysian ear is thus the third eye of Shiva: not the eye that sees, but the eye that sees/sears—the eye that hears; as Kodwo Eshun says, “the 3rd Eye is a secret faculty that scans the non-visible spectrum for radio, ultraviolet, daemonic, acoustic waveforms” (More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction [London: Quartet Books, 1998], 71, our emphasis). Enter the pineal eye of Georges Bataille: “the eye, at the summit of the skull, opening on the incandescent sun in order to contemplate it in a sinister solitude, is not a product of the understanding, but is instead an immediate existence; it opens and blinds itself like a conflagration, or like a fever that eats the being,
another one of the contributions to this volume: one in which Shan Bell “philosophizes with a scalpel.”¹⁷ In yet another contribution, Sarah Choukah suggests that the curative and transformative effects of these cuts — of this “cutting” — can be the catalysis for veritable transindividuation, precisely in the senses outlined by the techno-philosopher Gilbert Simondon.¹⁸

The current and prevalent computational paradigm of information and communication technology (e.g., “Big Data”) is vindicated only at the cost of downplaying the double-sided interfaciality of information — and in particular, of denying the Dionysian aspect of the cybernetic interface. One of the reasons may be that Apollonian tools and Apollonian perspectives — which are designed to parse-out and calculate discrete elements within a medium or media — cannot compute the Dionysian aspect of information, which is incommensurable and cannot be rendered into discrete computable elements. Dionysus, unlike Apollo, mediates without being mediated — and this is, indeed, the troubling (even “nightmarish,” pace Guha) Nietzschean insight regarding the doubleness of the interface. To mediate without being mediated can here be equated with a capacity to bind without being bound, to elude capture while at the same time being able to set traps and go undetected. In this very important sense, Dionysus is not a god that relies on the logos (word, measure, logic, or logical intelligence) as does Apollo, but rather on mētis (ruse, cunning, craftiness, double-dealings, and technical trickery), which for the ancient Greeks, as Marcel Detienne and Pierre Vernant have shown, was often conceptualized in terms of nets, i.e. as itself being net-like. Mētis — metic duplicity, technical trickery — involves an “interlacing of opposite directions […] and imprints,” producing

or more exactly, the head” (Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, trans. Allan Stoekl [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1985], 82).

¹⁷ Shannon Bell, “‘Philosophizing With a Scalpel’: From Nietzsche to Nina Arsenault” (chapter 15 of this volume).

¹⁸ Sarah Choukah, “The Rope-Dancer’s Fall: ‘Going Under’ as Undergoing Nietzschean-Simondonian Transindividuation” (chapter eleven of this volume).
“an enigma in the true sense of the word”: an enigma and sometimes griphos, for an enigma is twisted together like a basket or a wheel. In one of his dialogues, Plutarch writes of the Sphinx twisting together her enigmas or riddles (ainigmata kai griphous plekousan), devising the questions which Sophocles describes as poikila: shimmering, many-coloured, shifting. The composition of some of the best known riddles reveals the tangle of forms and the shimmering of different colours which give them the disturbing mobility of speech which seems constantly vibrating, never for a moment remaining the same as it was. [...] The answer which allows Polyeidos to escape from the aporia is the infallible grip with which he catches and binds the shifting and mobile words of the riddle” (Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society, trans. Janet Lloyd [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978], 303–4); for more on the latter, see Marshall McLuhan and Vilém Flusser’s Communication and Aesthetic Theories Revisited, ed. Tom Kohut and Melentie Pandilovski (The Video-Pool Media-Arts Centre, 2015), 260–80.

21 Detienne & Vernant, Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society, 41–42.

22 See Dylan Wittkower’s essay on a Dionysian notion of gamification that remains true to the earth, “Farmville, Eternal Recurrence, and the Will-to-Power-Ups” (chapter thirteen of this volume).
litical physics of action and reaction that exists within network structures,” nonetheless fails to “account for conflict within networks — or better, between networks” (the latter c/o Alex Galloway’s and Eugene Thacker’s publication The Exploit23). From this perspective, Nietzschean arguments are too local — “in effect moving from node to node” — and even atomistic (this despite Nietzsche’s explicit statements against atomism) to be able to be revealing about how networks behave:

Nietzsche’s notes in The Will to Power reveal this atomistic bias. Nietzsche begins from the analysis of “quanta of power” in constant interaction, and these quanta of power are understood somehow to compose the “will to power.” Network structures challenge us to think about what happens outside scale — that is, between the jump from “quanta of power” to “will to power.”

Here the focus on Nietzsche’s “atomistic bias” interprets Nietzsche in Apollonian terms — that is, literally in terms of the primacy of the Apollonian tendency which by definition and function does proceed by way of discretization, atomization, and individualization. Taken as a whole, the impact of Nietzschean concepts has enabled the conceptualization of power in material and relational — mainly subjective and intersubjective — terms, but not in relevant systemic, machinic, or network terms. This viewpoint seems to be responding to (and mobilizing) a particular kind of prevalent interpretation of Nietzsche inspired by Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, adopted by phenomenologists and post-structuralists (this popular version of Nietzsche itself being part of the response to early twentieth-century interpretations of the “fascist” and later “literary” as well as “psychological” portraits of Nietzsche). Here — or rather, therein — Nietzsche is the icon of difference and differentiality as well as multiplicity and heterogeneity: from the

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
“thermodynamic” version of Nietzsche—the thinker of energetic and kinetic force-relationality or power-associations (Spinozan power and potentiality) as espoused by Georges Bataille and Pierre Klossowski—to Michel Foucault’s “genealogical” Nietzsche and Sarah Kofman’s “metaphorical” Nietzsche—the thinker of corporeality and discursivity—and Gilles Deleuze’s “mutating”/“metamorphosing” Nietzsche (initially as the exemplary thinker of “tragic contingency”—in Nietzsche et la philosophie—then subsequently of “nomad thought,” “virtuality,” and “immanentism.” In this respect, Jean Baudrillard is another notable interpreter of Nietzsche in the historical developments of post-structuralism).

By theoretically rooting itself in subjectivity and intersubjectivity, however, the “Nietzschean Argument” is also perceived to root itself in a dialectical politics of identity and difference, which, while being a revealing lens for subjective and intersubjective insight, does not provide any systemic or machinic (“machine-system”) vantage-or-viewpoint that would be relevant for understanding network-centricity. As we are reminded in The Exploit, “decentralized networks are not simply the opposite of centralized networks,” and Nietzschean rebellion qua agonism and pluralism—while decentralizing power—does not solve the problem of hierarchical power altogether (nor does it explain more diffused modes of power such as distributed or network control). The post-structuralist model of endless deferral or difference is therefore trapped in a kind of performative and communicative game-space that simply enacts and oscillates between various positions, or “nodes” as Galloway and Thacker call them (post-structuralist discourses tend to understand these as “subject positions” or “subjective identities” that are embodied corporeally).

Perhaps there is no greater lesson about networks than the lesson about control: networks, by their mere existence, are not liberating; they exercise novel forms of control that oper-
ate at a level that is anonymous and non-human, which is to say material. The non-human quality of networks is precisely what makes them so difficult to grasp. They are, we suggest, a medium of contemporary power, and yet no single subject or group absolutely controls a network. Human subjects constitute and construct networks, but always in a highly distributed and unequal fashion.  

From the viewpoint of network theory/theories, hermeneutic, phenomenological and post-structuralist frameworks have been somewhat constrained by their own rationales and dialectical models (e.g., favoring theoretical over empirical dimensions of thought) and have emphasized energetic and vitalistic interpretations that focus on differentiality and multiplicity in intersubjective terms. What post-structuralism has tended to leave undertheorized, as such, is the nature of the impersonal and perpetual mediation machine itself, the machinic aspects of network-centricity that are anonymous, non-organic, and non-human. Even though Nietzsche has been acknowledged to be the “bridge between the processual/machinic philosophies formulated in Greek thought (predominantly Ionian cosmology) and the post-structuralist/post-modernist enterprises emanating from France in the 1960s and beyond with such figures as Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida,” there is a strong tendency to resist interpreting Nietzsche outside the register of the “organic” bias in his philosophy of life. What we are trying to suggest here is that the post-structuralist-inspired “Nietzschean Argument,” insofar as it shows a bias towards the organic, is “missing the boat,” so to speak (giving a nod to the cybernetic etymon), with respect to an important insight about how “distributed” control works in networks. Far from being a “liberation” demanding either optimistic or pessimistic human-centered responses (or a combination of both), from the perspective of the anonymous,  

26 Ibid., 5.  
non-human, machinic–cybernetic, and distributed tendencies of current and future planetary conditions, any emphasis on anthropocentrism can only be seen as another tactic in an overall strategy of pyramidal/hierarchical control. Rather, what is really needed, argue the political theorists of media, is to understand how networks “act politically, both as rogue swarms and as mainframe grids.”

So, are we forced to agree that the “Nietzschean Argument” cannot tell us anything meaningful about how networks work? If we had to stop at the post-structuralist vision of Nietzsche, then we might, indeed, be forced to concede. But we shall not stop here. As Scott Bakker stresses in his contribution to this volume, Nietzsche was actually and actively thinking past post-structuralism a century before it! Perhaps we get an intuition of Bakker’s claim in Laruelle’s distinct-and-compelling yet overlooked and generally-unknown take on Friedrich Nietzsche — his 1977 Nietzsche contre Heidegger: thèses pour une politique nietzschéenne. While admittedly not disengaged — not yet disengaged — from post-structuralist theory, and while it doesn’t offer a machinic Nietzsche per se (this is also lacking in Deleuze and Guattari as well as in Derrida’s “Nietzsche and the Machine”[31]), Laruelle’s Nietzsche contre Heidegger is nevertheless a rather remarkable rethinking of the material political effects of a “Nietzsche Machine,” a way of Nietzschean thinking that Laruelle defines as a generic schema or “ensemble of rela-

28 Galloway and Thacker, The Exploit, 15. “Like it” or not, the new culture is networked and open-source, and one is in need of intelligent interventions to evaluate it,” states Alexander Galloway on the very first page of The Interface Effect (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), a book and book title with many resonances in this volume (most explicitly in chapter seven and the present introduction).


tions [of power] without terms, crossed within a chiasmus or a problematic".  

In the sense that one speaks of logical or mathematical machines, reading machines, calculators, or infernal machines, there is a “Nietzsche Machine” — but with a way of operating that is specific to it, since it is an intrinsically political machine rather than logical or mathematical. […] There is only affinity, no identity, between what Nietzsche calls “forces” — which are non-signifying elements [that] […] become an autonomous process of rebellion. […] The rationale of the Nietzschean revolutionary power thus begins to appear: Rebellion and Mastery are in a relation of positive disjunction without mediating negativity. […] They are not predominantly exclusive to one another; they are not closed entities of transcendent essence to one another in the ontological or gnostico-christian manner; their relation of co-belonging is a relation of duplicity rather than of duality.

In Laruelle’s quadripartite — rather than dialectical — schema, a schema he calls the “Nietzsche Machine,” the Dionysian (that is to say, the non-signifying but active and unmediated forces, or what he calls “Rebellion”) mediates the Apollonian (that is to say, the signifying forces of “Mastery”), but only as the other side of a duplicitous interface. “The Nietzschean Cut contains no term, no essence, but only relations of duplicity and of chiasmus.” Both poles of the interface are active in the “Nietzsche-Thought” (i.e., in Nietzschean thinking); the one does not

32 Laruelle, Nietzsche contre Heidegger, 11. Rather ironically, we would argue that (despite his critique of Deleuzian thought) Laruelle — in his post-1970s “non-philosophy” works — adopts the Deleuzian portrait of Nietzsche-as-theorist-of-“difference” and thereby makes Nietzsche part of his own critique of differential philosophy. In this sense, Laruelle’s earlier engagements of Nietzsche as political materialist, in his pre-“non-philosophy,” are much more subversive and compelling takes on Nietzsche(an) thought.

33 Ibid., 19 (All translations by the present editors). Also see Biswas Mellamphy, “Nietzsche’s Political Materialism.”

34 Ibid., 33.
annul or sublate the other, but instead crosses-over or better-yet double-crosses the other. This “duplicity” (as Laruelle calls it) accounts for the presence of both fascistic and subversive tendencies in a Nietzschean mode of thinking. It is from this duplicity that Laruelle develops a theory regarding the inherently political function of Nietzschean thinking: “The Nietzsche-Thought is a complex political process with two ‘contradictory’ poles that are not mediated: the subordinate relation of a secondary ‘fascistic’ pole (Mastery) to a principal revolutionary’ pole (Rebellion). Nietzsche became fascist to better defeat fascism; he assumed the worst forms of Mastery to become the Rebel. […] We are all fascist readers of Nietzsche, we are all revolutionary readers of Nietzsche.” Indeed, Laruelle goes as far as to claim that “[t]his internal duplicity of the two poles in relation to immediate contradiction and its plasticity makes Nietzsche superior to Marx for reflecting on the political problems of our times.”

This principle of methodological duplicity is intrinsic to the interface of Dionysus and Apollo and thus also intrinsic to the Nietzsche Machine (the function of which, as has already been suggested — following Laruelle and borrowing a phrase from Masciandaro — is to “cure” by “cutting”). Both the “fascistic” and the “revolutionary” poles (what Heike Schotten, in her contribution to this volume, describes in terms of “master”-and-“slave” or “strong”-and-“weak” types, which we have contextualized in terms of Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies) are intrinsic not only to Nietzsche’s texts, but to the Nietzschean conception of will-to-power in general. The built-in duplicitous interface of Dionysus and Apollo is a mechanism that collapses not just all subjectivities but all ecosystems of thought and experience. This intrinsic explosion or extrinsic implosion is often felt as something that is not only morally uncomfortable, as Schotten suggests, but also, following Bakker, as revelatory and

36 Ibid., 28.
37 Heike Schotten, “Reading Nietzsche in the Wake of the 2008–9 War on Gaza” (chapter six of this volume).
numinous, and perhaps even as the (re)gaining of a vital “sweetness,” as Masciandaro says.

The Cloud, we remind ourselves, is both vaporous (Dionysian) and vectoral (Apollonian). Nietzsche might still qualify as the thinker of the yet-unthought contingencies of network-centricity—not just a thinker of ecosystems, but more precisely, as Bakker asserts, “an annalist of collapsing ecosystems” (and in this case not only biological, but informational ecosystems). “He understood that the Enlightenment would not stop exploding our ingrown vanities, that sooner or later the anthropos would fall along with the anthropomorphic […] This is the moment he had glimpsed, however obscurely: the moment when our methods crumble, and our discursive domain slips away—when science asserts its problematic cognitive rights.” Nietzsche is the thinker of the dethroning and decline (i.e., fall) of the anthropos and the collapsing of anthropocentric ecologies. Thinking about the network-centric condition through the Nietzschean Interface prompts a revaluation—and perhaps even eventually a transvaluation—of our current conception of information, as well as the informational nature of our being, which Guha describes as an incomputable and impersonal “Becomingness that drives our Being.”

Laruelle’s notion of “generic ecology,” which is to be understood neither as a general ecology nor as an ecological philosophy (since philosophy is but one “productive force” among others—such as science, art, and religion—from the Laruellian vantage-point) might be useful here. “Generic ecology” is concerned with what Laruelle described as the “generic degrowth” in which philosophy is not only reduced to being one “productive force” among others, but in which this movement of degrowth or receding becomes constitutive of philosophy it-

38 We take the notion of “the vectoral” from our colleague at The New School, McKenzie Wark; see his Virtual Geography: Living with Global Media Events (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 3–26. E.g., Ch. 1.1 on the “vector.”
40 Guha, “Networked Nightmares,” 77.
self.41 “Obsolescence,” as Jen Boyle’s contribution to this volume highlights, becomes a fundamental functional feature of life itself—not just the “vital site of events and processes of becoming (becoming history; becoming machine; becoming human) but suddenly, violently, grasped as an imagething of the dead object.”42 The customary vitalist interpretive focus on life, death, growth, and organicism gives way to a double-headed (Janus-faced43) understanding of the equally important role of non-life, degrowth, and the inorganic (or non-organic, inclusive of the cyborganic, and, as in Guha’s contribution, the inforganic): a richer but also darker and—in the senses invoked by Thacker’s contribution to this volume44—more pessimistic understanding of information and network ecology. This is admittedly a hard pill to swallow (or, for fans of The Matrix, a very well-“Red pill”

43 Janus, the god at the top of the heap (Mount Olympus), is also the god of the garbage heap and of all custodians of the latter (janitors), as the editors of this volume explained in a paper—“What’s the ‘Matter’ with Materialism?: Walter Benjamin and the New Janitocracy”—presented to the Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Toronto Munk Centre for International Studies in May 2002. The two faces or sides of the Janus-face look not only backward and forward—into the background as well as into what is foregrounded—but also, in addition, upward and downward: up to the loftiest of Olympian (viz. Apollonian) heights and down to the grimiest chthonic (viz. Dionysian) depths. According to Babich in her contribution to this volume, Nietzsche had “noted in passing—in passage, in transit—that behind the scenes, every porter wants to have an admirer” (chapter one, 47). “wants to” precisely because in the typical Janus-faced interface this is not the case. Here again we have “Wishing and Willing in a Cybernetic Circuit” (chapter seven). “The natural connection between the cybernetic and Nietzsche’s amor fati is evident in their intersection within the principle of interface as the site of steering or helmsmanship (kubernēsis),” states Masciandaro, “Nietzsche names this love [viz. this amor fati] under the double sign of Januarius: at once the two-faceted god of beginnings/doorways/gates and the saint whose annually liquifying blood signals the miracle of spiritual renewal” (131–32) “For Nietzsche,” says Babich, “we are here to learn to love one thing; that is amor fati […] life as it is” (chapter one, 34).
44 Eugene Thacker, “All for Naught” (chapter nine of this volume).
indeed, with darkened tinges/tinctures of Baudrillard/Lewis-Carroll); as disciples of Dionysus would say, however, the bitter pill goes down much better with wine — and here Gary Shapiro reminds us, in “A Philosophy of the Antichrist in the Time of the Anthropocenic Multitude,” that the Antichrist’s true name is Dionysus (wink, wink).

The duplicitous interface of the Nietzsche Machine collapses the unitary and sovereign principle of life-as-growth or life-as-mastery. Instead of a transcendental theory of life that privileges the Apollonian aspect — a clear example of this being the liberal biopolitical view, as outlined in Julian Reid’s contribution, in which life and the legitimacy of liberal regimes remain firmly grounded in promises to secure futures through the continual mastery and technologization of life, which amounts to what Dominic Pettman, in his contribution, describes in terms of a “hierarchical parsing of species-based ontologies” — the Nietz-


46 Julian Reid, “Occupying God’s Shadow: Nietzsche’s Eirôneia” (chapter five of this volume), 49.

47 Dominic Pettman, “A Horse is Being Beaten: On Nietzsche’s Equinimity” (chapter ten of this volume). Hutter’s donkeys (his statement that “we are all donkeys that celebrate for a while, welcoming new donkeys to the celebration before singing our songs of goodbye” in chapter two of this volume, 49) lead, via various Holzwege, to Nietzschean mania (or frenzy, as Nechvatal says in chapter fourteen) and through this to Pettmanian equinimity: “a horse-like mind: wild, kicking, unbridled — yet because of this, more sensitive to alterity, and capable of responsible response. The common hierarchical parsing of species-based ontologies is thus dispelled for an intense form of intersubjective feedback: a negative and diminishing spiral which inverts the disciplined joy in things which Nietzsche sought in his less stricken days” (chapter ten, 181). Nietzsche and Nietzschean thought come across as a veritable Trojan Horse — in both the classical and computational, technically Greek and techno-Geek senses — in that it packs in itself what Guha describes as the “nightmare” of Apollonian arrangements (Apollonian arrangements qua Pettman’s “common hierarchical parsing”). One might recall here the passage on equinimity avant la lettre in Gilbert Durand’s Structures anthropologiques de l’imaginaire: Introduction à l’archétypologie générale, the first edition of which was published by the Presses Universitaires de France in
sche Machine ruthlessly cuts-up/cross-cuts (mixes, modulates) any relation one might make between life, being, and thinking. “Tuning into” the Dionysian tonalities of information becomes a kind of tragic fatum for the subject (cf. Pettman’s account of Nietzsche’s equinimity) — a necessary attunement, admittedly — but one that is also felt as amor fati: a love not just of life (the sovereignty of life) but of the unlife/non-life of life (the non-sovereignty or contingency of life) or that “point of identity between law and sweetness lost in the splitting of life into bios and zoe.”48 Perhaps herein lies Nietzsche’s most unique contribution to contemporary theorizations of network-centricity: the “Nietzsche Machine,” like Heraclitean fire, cures by cutting and creates by destroying. “Dare one hope for a philosophy of futility? Phosphorescent, moss-ridden aphorisms inseparable from the thickness and ossification of our own bodies, inseparable from the stillness of breathing”?49

The Nietzsche Machine connects — connects objects, subjects, what-have/haven’t-you — by cutting, making bodies part of the collapsing ecosystem(s) of thinking and being. The philosopher of futurity is, after all, a vivisectionist, as Nietzsche declared in Beyond Good and Evil §211–212, and would indeed “philoso-

1960 and second/updated edition in that most Orwellian — not to mention Animal Farmville‡ — of years, 1984.
† “[A]s a friend of a friend said about [Robert Bresson],” Pettman noted in his lecture, “every film in his oeuvre essentially says, Life sucks, then you die. However, in the case of [Bresson’s] Balthazar there is a caveat: Life sucks, then you die. But you’re a donkey” (again: in chapter ten of this volume).
‡ A nod to Wittkower’s essay (chapter thirteen). One of the sources in Wittkower’s contribution, Ian Bogost, posted the following question on Twitter (which we are adding to this endnote at the very last minute, or “in the last instance,” as Laruelle would say): “Are My Little Ponies transformers now? They turn from ponies into Equestria Girls? Or is that something else entirely?” — “In my day, a pony was a plastic horse!, grandpa shouted at the empty room.” Twitter.Com/iBogost/status/660268080916926464, Twitter.Com/iBogost/status/660268849909010432 (Oct. 30, 2015).

48 Masciandaro, “Nietzsche’s Amor Fati.”
49 Thacker, “All for Naught,” 163.
phize with a scalpel,” to use (once again) Bell’s titular phrase from her contribution to this anthology of essays. Bodies and bodily order(s) break apart into multiplicities, and even further into flux and incommensurability. The Dionysian aspects of the process of becoming, the frenzied underside of beauty, and the “cut” — or what we might call the Dionysian “hack” — each entail various intensities of entanglement between drifting detritus, materials, and materialities (e.g., in the Krokerian sense of that “body drift” wherein Judith Butler becomes the alter-ego/embodiment of Friedrich Nietzsche and/or a “Nietzsche in drag” — here be dragons — in the sense taken up by Bell in her reading of Nina Arsenault’s body/bodies). But it’s not just about recombinable bodies and body parts (or what poet Christopher Dewdney called “permugenesis” in a more geophilosophical/geopoetic “Erde treu” context). The curative capacity of the Dionysian hack comes from what can be called — following Gilbert Simondon and (in this anthology) Sarah Choukah — its “amplifying” effects, in which (as Choukah very nicely explains) “great magnitude can be triggered by relatively little quantities of energy.” What the curative aspect of transindividuation produces is not a single or singular distributed being — as in the


51 Arthur Kroker’s presentation at our third Nietzsche Workshop (Oct. 1, 2011) was published the following year, 2012, in a book with the very relevant/very topical title of *Body Drift: Butler, Hayles, Haraway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

52 Joseph Nechvatal, “Aesthetic States of Frenzy: Nietzsche’s Aesthetic Palimpsest” (chapter fourteen of this volume).

53 Shannon Bell, “Philosophizing with a Scalpel.”


55 Choukah, “The Rope-Dancer’s Fall,” 186.
Apollonian version(s) of network theory — but rather a singular contagious becoming in which the material activities of ecosystemic collapse nonetheless undergo a process of amplification-without-figuration in which all bodies fold back onto and into their Dionysian background (e.g., random noise).

In terms of communicative mode(l)s, the contagious or virulent aspect of today’s “viral media” can thus be understood as Dionysian because its mode of expression proceeds by way of the positive amplification of information (rather than by way of negation, negativity, or the negotiated parsing of information). In this sense, even the Erinyes (the Furies) of Greek antiquity would be accomplices of Dionysus. What Galloway calls “furious media” — after the Furies, that “bloody ravening pack” described by Aeschylus, amongst others — so as to distinguish this mode of mediation from two other, more well-known, communicative models (namely the hermeneutic and iridescent mode(l)s), can also be called a Dionysian mode.\(^56\) If hermeneutics en-

56 “Given the convoluted twists and turns of Hermes’ travels, the text is best understood as a problem. Likewise, given the aesthetic gravity of immediate presence in Iris’s bow, the image is best understood as a poem. Thus, whereas hermeneutics engages the problem of texts, iridescence engages the poetry of images, be they visual or otherwise. Hermeneutics views media (of whatever kind — be it text, image, sound, etc.) as if they were textual problems needing to be solved. Yet iridescence views these same media as if they were poetic images waiting to be experienced […]. The culminating moment of hermeneutics is always a type of mystical revelation — a lightning-strike. Yet the culminating moment of iridescence is an aurora, a blooming — the glow of a sacred presence,” writes Galloway in “The Love of the Middle” (a version of which was presented at the 2013 Apps And Affect conference in London on, as “Three Middles: Mediation in Networks”). See Alexander Galloway, Eugene Thacker, and McKenzie Wark, Excommunication: Three Inquiries in Media and Mediation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 46, 55. The key passage for us is the following one: “After Hermes and Iris, instead of a return to hermeneutics (the critical narrative) or a return to phenomenology (the iridescent arc), there is a third mode that combines and annihilates the other two. For after Hermes and Iris there is another divine form of pure mediation: the distributed network, which finds incarnation in the incontinent body of what the Greeks called first the Erinyes and later the Eumenides, and the Romans called the Furies. So instead of a problem or a poem, today we must confront a system. A third divinity must join the group:
engages problems of the text, and iridescence engages the poetry of images, then “furious media” engages affects as agents of ontological sabotage (cf. Guha’s essay) and communicates through contagion, cutting through the distributed logic of the swarm. The Dionysian mode is thus a weaponized environment where transindividuation can have disruptive, even lethal effects; as Guha notes, “the Apollonian mask that covers the visage of the genius is stripped aside to reveal a truly Dionysian core, which is corrosive to the cohesiveness of the network.”

It has been our aim in this introduction to show that “Nietzsche-Thought” does indeed provide unique insights about the complexities of the contemporary network-centric condition — especially in drawing attention to the occluded Dionysian dimension of information, mediation, and technological transduction. We have tried to give an overall thematic portrait of how the various essays in this volume can be considered to engage Nietzsche-thinking, as well as engage in the activity of thinking about network-centricity along with Nietzsche. We would very much like to thank (and do so here, in this closing paragraph of our introduction) the students in the Department of Political Science, at the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism, and in various other centers and departments in the vicinity of Western University who participated in the first three Nietzsche Workshops @ Western (NWW.I 2009, NWW.II 2010, NWW.III 2011) as well as all of those who ventured to The New School in New York for the fourth one (NWW.IV, 2013). We would also like to thank the late great Bibi Pettypiece — to whom and in whose memory this anthology is dedicated — for her dynamic support of the workshop initiative, and our colleague Ed Keller, Series Editor of the CTM Imprint under which this volume has been published, whose fantastic presentation at the third Nietzsche Workshop (NWW.III) is one of the very-much-missed missing-pieces of this anthology. Thanks also go

not a man, not a woman, but a pack of animals” (56, our emphases). Incipit Dionysus!

57 Ibid., 75–76.
to Jeff Moen at the University of Minnesota Press for permission to reprint the lecture that Arthur Kroker presented on October 1, 2011 at nww.iiii, subsequently published in *Body Drift*,58 to Eileen A. Joy, Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei, and Natalia Tuero at punctum books, and—last but not least—to the authors and presenters themselves: you have all made the Nietzsche Workshops truly wonderful events.

— DM+NBM, October 2015.
