Nietzsche's Dionysus vs. The Nihilism of Social Media Shitposting

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Introduction

A quick survey of the landscape of the internet reveals strong nihilistic trends. Meme trends on the political left and right, as well as those published by a sizable apolitical internet usership, often tend toward despondence, depressive ideation, amoralism and, at times, misanthropy. Masculine right-wing online subcultures associated with 'incels' and practices of 'blackpilling' essentially reject society and its ethical parameters as a means of processing perceived rejections from the labor market and the female gender.[1] Meanwhile, on the left a meme tendency has

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[1] Glace, A. M., Dover, T. L., & Zatkin, J. G. (2021), "Psychology of Men and Masculinities: The Journal of Big Ideas.," *Psychology of Men & Masculinities* 22, no. 2 (2021): pp. 288–297, https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000328.

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grown up around the image of the late British theorist Mark Fisher, who bemoaned the lack of alternatives to capitalism and its tendency to cause what he called a 'depressive hedonia' in the millennial generation students he taught in the '00 s.[2] However, rather than a problem to be overcome, many Mark Fisher meme creators appear to embrace inertia and the inevitability of depression, despite Fisher pointing to fissures in the system that may allow for alternatives. Additionally, a number of non-politically aligned trends have grown up around the social media video platform TikTok, involving a degree of dissociation from everyday life. For example, 'reality shifting' involves altering one's reality through a trance induced just prior to sleep, to that of another dimension (your 'desired reality'). Adherents claim that they are able to shift to a reality entirely of their own choosing, (including the most popular choice for shifters, 'Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry', from the Harry Potter book and films series).[3] Some TikTok users claim to have shifted reality during their sleep for as long as several years, before returning to this 'dimension' as they awake, often bitterly disappointed at having returned to the same spot they had been only hours before they woke. In all three of these examples, a sense of rejection, inertia or escapism indicates an embrace of nihilistic tendencies, where the prefix 'nihil' is taken as implying hopelessness, and a desire to erase one's self, the wider world, or both. In this essay it will be argued that the contemporary nihilistic turn seen in internet trends coincides with the nihilizing effects of habitual internet usage and the concomitant disappointment wrought by the data economy. It will be further asserted that this case of 'depressive hedonia', caused by digital-era living is comparable proportionately (if not in kind) with the catatonic effects of bourgeois morality and Christianity identified by Nietzsche. This catatonic effect—described by Adorno in relation to the rigidification of life under Late Capitalism as

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[2] See my own study on the subject of the partial derailment of Fisher's message via memes. Ultimately I argue that memes of Mark Fisher's image and theory have positive and negative consequences: Mike Watson, "The Memeing of Mark Fisher: How the Frankfurt School Foresaw Capitalist Realism and What to Do about It" (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2021), 47–60.

[3] See: Eli Somer et al., "Reality Shifting: Psychological Features of an Emergent Online Daydreaming Culture—Current Psychology," SpringerLink (Springer US, October 30, 2021), https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12144-021-02439-3.

a "mimesis of death"[4] undertaken to ward off mortality—can be countered according to both Nietzsche and Adorno by the embodying effects of engagement with art, particularly dissonant music. Looking to the parallels between Adorno's conception of the 'shudder' and Nietzsche's conception of Dionysian revelry as outlined in the Birth of Tragedy, an antidote will be proposed to the depressive lassitude and dissociation that accompanies the terminally online lifestyle.

Nihilism Misrepresented

Nihilism has been seen as a philosophical refuge for adolescent depressives, artists, Anarchists, Punk Rockers and a myriad of other perceived misfits, to whom the notion of 'no meaning' in life presents a divergence from the obligation to duty (to work, to pay rent, to maintain a relationship) which characterizes the hum-drum of the socially conservative (or 'normie') lifestyle. The sense of amorality insinuated by the declaration of meaninglessness in life has been seen by successive generational subcultures as liberating, often being associated with drug culture and libidinal freedom. However, this would in reality accord with Nietzsche's embrace of the Dionysian aspects of the human psyche as a counter to the nihilistic tendencies embodied by bourgeois morality and the church. It might indeed be argued that in many cases where nihilism is invoked (or where nihilism is used as an accusatory term against a subculture as part of a wider moral panic), it is actually the case that life is being embraced in opposition to the nihilizing forces of moral conservatism and/or capitalism. However, whereas tendencies once existed that brought people together in the appreciation of music and intoxicants as a community, the millenial and zoomer generations have been denied what were once held to be normal processes of socialization, leading them to descend into the actual nihilism that Nietzsche decried. Trends such as 'shitposting'

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4 See: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "Dialectic of Enlightenment," trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 44. "The reason that represses mimesis is nor merely its opposite. It is mimesis of death".

and 'edgelordism' signify an embrace of meaninglessness and senseless-ness that refuses any kind of reversal into life-affirmation. 'Shitposting' implies a deliberate post of poor quality images and/or texts with often deliberately antagonistic intentions, or a deliberate embrace of obscurity. 'Edelordism', on the other hand, denotes the deliberate embrace of extreme views with the explicit intention of thwarting attempts to signify meaning.

Many such tendencies can be seen today revolving around the production of philosophical memes in the form of still images or videos shared on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and Tumblr. One example, found on Instagram by searching the hashtag #philosophymemes, features a crudely drawn punter at a bar explaining to a similarly styled barman that: "Yah, so basically I googled, 'what's philosophy?' at 15 and nothing's been right since." An Instagram search for #markfisher features, alongside 13'000 other memes, a cartoon panel depicting an image of the Doomer character (a depressed young man, smoking and wearing black) opposite a copy of Capitalist Realism. The Doomer figure says "Thank you for changing my life," to which the book replies "I am literally the reason you can't enjoy anything anymore." A search for #Nietzsche reveals a photographic image of Nietzsche along-side the quote, "Everything the state says is a lie, and everything it has is stolen."

The above examples demonstrate two main tendencies of philosophical memeing: firstly, negative quotes are taken out of context giving no opportunity for redemption; secondly, philosophical inquiry itself is seen as tending toward nihilistic despair and/or depressiveness, rather than as identifying nihilistic tendencies in society or as embedded into existence, and mitigating against them.

Adorno gives an account of nihilism's genesis and subsequent misap-propriation, albeit with regard to philosophy, rather than memes, in *Negative Dialectics*:

> Associated with slogans of 'emptiness' and 'senselessness' is that of 'Nihilism'. Jacobi first put the terms to philosophical use and Nietzsche adopted it, presumably from newspaper accounts or terrorist attacks in

Russia. With an irony to which our ears have been dulled in the meantime he used the word to denounce the opposite of what it meant in the practice of political conspirators: to denounce Christianity as the institutionalized negation of the will to live.

Philosophers would not give up the word anymore. In a direction contrary to Nietzsche's, they re-functioned it conformistically into the epitome of a condition that was accused, or was accusing itself, of being null and void.[5]

Adorno here sums up nihilism as an effective refusal of all that *is*, politically, socially, existentially. That such a tendency actually came about as a refusal of the nullity wrought by the moralizing influence of the Church can be seen clearly in the affirmative tendencies of nihilist philosophies which while—following on Nietzsche—refuting God and intrinsic 'meaning' in life, bear an affirmative aspect all the same. Like dark theologies, the work of Georges Bataille and Ray Brassier, among others, suggests that, for far from being '*nil*', as its name suggests, nihilism all too often harbors an irrecusable trace of its opposite, which succumbs to 'being'.[6]

Nietzsche's Radical Yay-Saying

This pathway from nihilism to abundance can be traced to Nietzsche's first published work, *The Birth of Tragedy*. Although the author himself prefaced the book with an apologia in later editions—given its naive style and obsequious appreciation of Wagner's music and character—its outlining of the Dionysian tendency in art is valuable for this study.

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[5] Theodor Adorno, "Negative Dialectics", trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 2003), 379.

[6] Brassier ends his book Nihil Unbound—an uncompromising attempt to entrench Nihilism with no hope of redemption—on the note that: "But to acknowledge this truth, the subject of philosophy must also recognize that he or she is already dead, and that philosophy is neither a medium of affirmation, nor a source of justification, but rather the organon of extinction." Not only does Brassier hereby conceive of an affirmative role for philosophy within the null void, he also effectively 'plays dead' by declaring everyone to already be dead in order to elevate philosophy (and thereby philosophers) to a special role. The registering of such differentials within the realm of death makes the proclamation of death/nullity itself meaningless in any sense usually understood.

In that first work, Nietzsche already strongly identifies the self-denial of Christianity as representing nihilism, stating that:

> For in the face of morality (particularly Christian morality, unconditional morality) life must constantly and inevitably be in the wrong, because life is something essentially amoral—in the end crushed between the weight of contempt and eternal denial, life must be felt to be undesirable, valueless in itself.[7]

It is as clear in this passage as in similar passages in the Antichrist, that Nietzsche sees the stultifying practices and morality of Christianity as the principle enemy of life. In the latter work he states that:

> Christianity has taken the side of everything weak, base, ill-constituted, it has made an ideal out of opposition to the preservative instincts of strong life; it has depraved the reason even of the intellectually strongest natures by teaching men to feel the supreme values of intellectuality as sinful, as misleading, as temptations.[8]

Looking to these works that bookend his career (The Antichrist came out in 1888, the last year that Nietzsche actively published) it is possible to see that the notion of a life-denying creed was the central negative motif against which he posited his 'Overman'. Now nearly 150 years after the publication of his last works (*Ecce Homo* and *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* were also published in 1888), it is arguable that while Christianity has declined, life-denying processes as such are very much with us in the form of commodification and reification. As Adorno and Horkheimer explain in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), mimesis is a byword for the way in which humans substitute objects for experience, in order to ward off either primary nature, as with the use of magic charms, mythic tales and religious rituals which mime the power of nature in order to once remove its threat. Or to ward off secondary nature, the

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7 Friedrich Nietzsche, "Birth of Tragedy", trans. S. Whiteside (London: Penguin, 1993), 9.
8 Friedrich Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ", trans. R. J.Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), 129.

threat posed by other men, through, for example, capitalist subjugation. Mimesis is ultimately a ruse performed to stave off death and plays out in a manner not dissimilar to the natural animal act of mimicry in 'playing dead' in order to ward off predators.[9] While mimesis and mimicry are actually distinguishable, with the latter marking a simple copying of nature and the former a more rational adaptation of nature, whereby elements are copied in order to supersede nature, for Adorno and Horkheimer mimesis tips over into mimicry under Late Capitalism. As argued in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the mimesis of nature by the social system results in the domination of the subject recurring as capitalism, as second nature objectifies all subjects as monetary values. So the Christian in deep prayer in front of a religious icon assumes a position of stasis akin to the stillness of the dead matter that materially comprises the icon itself. In this sense bourgeois morality, with its sense of piety and pity, intends at a hollowing out of life in the same way that, later, fascism would compel people into rigidified militaristic stances that themselves mimic death.[10] The question here is over the degree to which the meme—or more particularly the tendency to meme repeatedly—represents an instance of mimesis and indeed mimicry.[11]

By the time Nietzsche wrote the Antichrist, he had firmly committed himself to the polemic device of the Overman (first introduced in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), a future embodiment of humanity that would no longer be impelled to follow the weak and death-embracing morality (effectively a form of mimesis of nature's harsh injunctions) that had for Nietzsche laid waste to European civilization. For Nietzsche, the

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[9] As Horkheiner and Adorno argue: "...when men try to become like nature they harden themselves against it. Protection as fear [Schrecken] is a form of mimicry. The reflexes of stiffening and numbness in humans are archaic schemata of the urge to survive: by adaptation to death life pays the toll of its continued existence." Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "Dialectic of Enlightenment," 180.

[10] Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "Dialectic of Enlightenment," 149–150.

[11] This accords with the research of Susan Blackmore into memetics, which effectively asks, "Are we being memed?," rather than being subjects who ourselves make memes. In the opening chapter, Blackmore states, "Instead of thinking of our ideas as our own creations, and as working for us, we have to think of them as autonomous selfish memes, working only to get themselves copied. We humans, because of our powers of imitation, have become just the physical 'hosts' needed for the memes to get around. This is how the world looks from a 'meme's eye view'." Susan Blackmore, "The Meme Machine", (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8.

Overman takes shape as a man who can say 'yes to all things', and therefore suffers the slings and arrows that life throws at us with humility and grace. This ability to accept one's fate is—contrary to the title of the book if read alone and out of context—embodied by the figure of Jesus himself. It is Christ's "demeanor on the cross"—as he accepts a fate he knew he would encounter, given his dissidence—that for Nietzsche signals it is the Christian Church that is at fault and not Christ himself. Christ's acceptance of his fate was exemplary of the acceptance of all things, which Nietzsche posited in distinction to what he saw as the over-pitying nature of the Christian Faith.

> He does not resist; he does not defend his rights; he makes no effort to ward off the most extreme penalty—more, he invites it.... And he prays, suffers and loves with those, in those, who do him evil.... Not to defend one's self, not to show anger, not to lay blames…[12]

It was arguably in the interest of this acceptance of all things that Nietzsche developed the concept of Eternal Recurrence—the notion that all of reality will repeat infinitum—which appears across his works from *The Gay Science* (1882), where it is cast as rhetorical device. Nietzsche postulates the existence of a demon who tells you:

> This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you…[13]

For Nietzsche the correct response is to tell the Demon, "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine."[14] Christ is then, for Nietzsche, an example of the Overman who can accept fate over again and again. Leaving aside the figure of Christ, this characterization of the Overman, with his ability to accept all things, stands in stark contrast

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[12] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ," 160.

[13] Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Gay Science", trans. S. Whiteside (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 194.

[14] Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Gay Science," ibid.

not only to the meek Christian, but to the terminally online nihilist of today. The contemporary nihilist, confronted with a myriad of images and an endless stream of information maintains a rigid and closed countenance. Far from Christ's "demeanor on the cross", as Nietzsche has it, the nihilistic youth of meme culture, as much as the political meme poster is vehemently closed, exhibiting a demeanor of rigid refusal.[15] Where social media users do appear to express agency, by 'liking' everything on their feed, opening as many Instagram stories as possible, or simply looking constantly at content presented to them by algorithms, they are in fact arguably doing the opposite, given the habitual and indiscriminate nature of their engagement.

Shudder as Antidote to Being Memed

The vibrant affirmation of an eternally recurrent existence is closed to the perpetually online internet user because he or she has already closed himself or herself to the offline (or 'real life') realm. This initial closure leads to a further closure in the face of the intense image-oriented bombardment of online media objects. Ensuing negative memes are an outwards projection of self-inadequacy in the face of the overwhelming force of nature (ultimately, mortality) as refracted via the screen of the internet as second nature (the overwhelming force of data capitalism). This reflects the rigidification of the alienated subject of Late Capitalism, as outlined in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Elements of Antisemitism*, the last chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where the facial grimace of the banker, the rag and bone man, and the Fuhrer, is idenfitied as a mimetic comportment to death:

> Such mimicry provokes anger, because it puts on show, in face of the new relationships of production, the old fear which one has had to forget in order to survive them. It is the compulsive moment in behavior, the rage

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[15] Mark Fisher, "Exiting the Vampire Castle," open Democracy, November 24, 2013, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/exiting-vampire-castle/.

of the tormentor and of the tormented, reappearing indistinguishably in the grimace that triggers the specific rage of civilized people.[16]

We might today similarly identify the stricken tight-jawed expression of our national leaders as much as of populist right wing protesters, as well as impoverished commuters and other functionaries of capitalism. This grimace starts as an expression of will, set in on the face to ward off threats, before degenerating into stress, taking on the semblance of *rigor mortis*. In relation to the issue of memes, this same process can be seen as arising from an initial inadequacy felt by the subject in face of both nature and capitalism, which is confronted by the production of a meme displaying comic and/or aggressive tendencies expressed against a perceived threat, which is in fact a projection of our fear and disgust at our own mortality. Once posted, the meme commits the poster to its defense as negative comments are fended off, as well as to further posting and to interaction with the content of other meme posters. The countenance of the meme producer may have begun as a comical grin or grimace, though the overall bearing becomes one of rigidified determination, giving into acquiescence—the memer as subject becomes an object of data capitalism. Ultimately mimesis of death via the reaper's grin or mortis jawed grimace will backfire, just as the individual jpeg meme meets its fate as a determinate and finite object—one which in the era of the meme is fleeting to a degree previously unknown in the history of image-based media.

It is arguably the rigidification that occurs as an objectification of the individual subject in spite—*or even because*—of its rejection of objectification which prompted Adorno to develop the theoretical device, the 'shudder' which he elucidates most clearly in *Aesthetic Theory*, his last unfinished work, still in progress when he died in 1969:

> The experience of art as that of its truth or untruth is more than subjective experience: It is the irruption of objectivity into subjective consciousness. The experience is mediated through subjectivity precisely at the point where the subjective reaction is most intense. [...] It

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16 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "Dialectic of Enlightenment," 149–150.

[Beethoven's 9th Symphony] resonates like an overwhelming 'Thus it is'. The Shudder is a response coloured by fear of the overwhelming. By its affirmation the music at the same time speaks its truth about untruth.[17]

In the moment of shudder the subject is objectified (again, the irruption of objectivity) but remains simultaneously alive as a subject, able to witness this truth, crucially accepting its concatenation with the object. This moment of truce or oneness with the object has parallels with the eternally recurrent 'everything' which Nietzsche postulates in order to set up his radical affirmation, which he opposes to the nay-saying of Christians and bourgeois Enlightenment moralists. Jay Bernstein's characterization of the shudder supports this argument, underscoring the openness of the subject to objectivity in *The Fate of Art*:

Shudder and mimesis are different aspects of the same moment. Through them there occurs a joining of eros to knowledge which is art's articulation of ethics and knowledge.

Shudder, as dissonance is staged aestheticised, sublime fear, it is the affective acknowledgement of the otherness of the other.[18]

This openness of the shuddering subject to otherness and arguably a saying yes to everything in the Nietzschean sense is useful to us here even if Adorno and Nietzsche could never be reconciled.[19] Nietzsche was ever-scathing about the Kantian sensibility, which aimed to reconcile Christianity with rationality, via the universalization of common sense (*sensus communis*) in the moment of appreciation of aesthetic beauty. As such, he arguably would have had little time for Adorno's acquiescence to the possibility of art's reconciling glow (or its "articulation of ethics and knowledge" as Bernstein would have it) despite the thoroughgoing

[17] Thedor Adorno, "Aesthetic Theory," trans. R.Hullot-Kentor (London: Athlone Press, 1997), 244.

[18] Jay Bernstein, "The Fate of Art," (Cambridge: Polity Press,1992), 222.

[19] A comparison and contrast between Adorno and Nietzsche on the topic of the effects of art on the subject are worthy of a book length study. As regards this essay, the inclusion of Adorno's shudder serves to include capitalism among the forces that nullify life by objectifying the subject,allowing for Niezsche's critique of nihilistic processes (which he associates with Christianity and bourgeois moralism) to be extended to digital capitalism, via Adorno's critique of Late Capitalism, which necessitates the shudder.

negativity of the Adornian project in general. Adorno's shudder allows for a momentary experience of oneness with the object (i.e., with nature). While Adorno stops short of declaring this as exemplary of the possibility of a common ethics, he does imply over his oeuvre that it is exemplary of the possibility of there being a common ethics, if such a thing were not in fact impossible! As it is, such a mechanism was impeded for Adorno by the irreconcilability of the subject and object on account of the impossibility of the human ever really knowing the natural object (a fact Kant never himself resolved either, though he didn't have to contend with the horror of World War Two and the diminishing effect it had on any hope of finding common human ethical accord). Nietzsche would rather have done away with any hope at reconciliation at all (and with 'hope' itself, which he saw as central to the pitying aspect of Christianity), preferring to simply accept the facts of human behavior.

Despite the lack of congruence between Nietzsche and Adorno's thought, they do find some degree of accord in terms of their proposed response to the nihilizing impulses of, respectively, Christianity and Late Capitalism. Indeed, Nietzsche directly cites Beethoven as one of the contemporary philosophers whose music embodies the Dionysian impulse:

> From the Dionysiac soil of the German spirit a power has arisen which has nothing in common with the original conditions of Socratic culture: that culture can neither explain nor excuse it, but instead finds it terrifying and inexplicable, powerful and hostile—German *music*, as we know it pre-eminently in its mighty sun-cycle from Bach to Beethoven, from Beethoven to Wagner.[20]

Towards a Dissonant Meme

Though what precisely is this Dionysian tendency for Nietzsche? Given the impenetrability of the manic prose in Birth of Tragedy, it is difficult

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[20] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Birth of Tragedy," 94.

to say with accuracy. Not least, in part as Dionysian practice—as a kind of inebriated revelry—does not give itself to rationalization.

It is perhaps therefore most expedient in the text format to determine the Dionysian by what it is not, recalling the popular twentieth-century maxim that 'Writing about music is like dancing about architecture.'[21] Perhaps cognizant of this Nietzsche wrote in the Birth of Tragedy, recalling St. John's and St. Vitus's dance that:

> Some people, either through a lack of experience or through obtuseness, turn away with pity or contempt from phenomena such as these from 'folk diseases', bolstered by a sense of their own sanity; these poor creatures have no idea how blighted and ghosty this 'sanity' of theirs sounds, when the glowing life of Dionysian revelers thunders past them.[22]

The St John's or St Vitus's dance (they are in fact different names for the same phenomenon) were instances in the medieval to early Enlightenment period in which dancing epidemics broke out and spread to include entire communities. While variously diagnosed (largely in retrospect) as resulting from the neurological condition, Sydenham's chorea, from collective hysteria or psychosis, or ergot poisoning, the meme-like quality of a contagious and fevered dance has parallels with online hysteria. Yet neither of these phenomena would pass as in any sense usefully Dionysian for Nietzsche, as he posits the Dionysian as part of the Ancient Greek dyad, containing the Apollonian and Dionysian, deriving from the respective gods Apollo and Dionysus, which stand, respectively, for harmony and rationality, and intoxication and disorder. What Nietzsche saw in Ancient Greek Tragedy was a combination of Apollonian and Dionysian values acting as a counterpoint to each other, thereby expressing the contrary forces of nature. For Nietzsche the art of his contemporaries lacked the Dionysian counterpoint to the Apollonian aspect, appearing over codified and rigid as a result. If anything, this would be the position of today's online activity, which despite appearing

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[21] The maxim has been attributed to multiple celebrities and is by now a shorthand for describing the difficulties in doing justice to physical and visceral activities through writing, particularly academic research.
[22] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Birth of Tragedy," 17.

erratic and uncontrolled, leaves the user of the internet (who is also effec-
tively also the publisher and protagonist) arguably devoid of both the
Dionysian and Apollonian poles of being. Indeed, the aggressive posi-
tions of nihilistic, far right or far left meme posters, who reject the
perceived bourgeois niceties of the Apollonian, are far from reaching
any state of Dionysian ecstasy, as they harden into mimetic copies of
the empty husk of corpses, hunched over in their gaming chairs. To
meme constantly equals to mime—that is to copy, and thereby become
comported and assimilated within that which you copy. In this sense, to
meme with no Dionysian or Apollonian input is to mime death, as the
frantic activity of copy pasting images and texts, posting them online,
then entering into the barrage of discussion before repeating the process,
leaves one immobile in face of the screen. In the age of data capitalism,
the social media addict befalls the same fate as the religious zealot in
front of a Christian icon. In order to ward off death (in the social media
age, irrelevance, or being 'canceled') the individual subject submits itself
to an object of second nature, in front of which the subject carries out
repetitive rituals to stave off nature's threat.

In this light, far from being 'edgy' the individual meme poster fully
supports the status quo in their inaction. The memes they post may
prompt outraged response, but it will only lock them into further posting
activity, and a process of objectification. Contrasted with the following
description of the experience of Dionysian art', activities of the online
community even in its most extreme forms seem decisively conservative
by comparison:

> For a brief moment we really become the primordial essence itself, and
> feel its unbounded lust for and delight in existence. Now we see the
> struggles, the torment, the destruction of phenomena as necessary, given
> the constant proliferation of forms of existence forcing and pushing their
> way into life, the exuberant fertility of the world will.[23]

Just as with Adorno's description of the experience of listening to
Beethoven's 9th Symphony, we see the irruption of objectivity into the

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[23] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Birth of Tragedy," 17.

subjective sphere as an acceptance of nature in its wild abandon. It is essentially the 'saying yes to all things' that recurs as a theme in Nietzsche's later works in response to his hypothesized Eternal Recurrence. If this is the case, then the activity of the internet shitposter, hunched over his or her screen, is both in its formal tendency and its actual messaging, a '*saying no to all things*' . It is worth noting here that Mark Fisher bemoaned what he called the depressive hedonia of life under capitalism, characterized by among other things, internet addiction, fast food and aversion to Nietzsche.

> To be bored simply means to be removed from the communicative sensation-stimulus matrix of texting, YouTube and fast food; to be denied, for a moment, the constant flow of sugary gratification on demand. Some students want Nietzsche in the same way that they want a hamburger; they fail to grasp - and the logic of the consumer system encourages this misapprehension - that the indigestibility, the difficulty is Nietzsche.[24]

It is not hard to imagine that Fisher chose to cite Nietzsche here, as it was he of all philosophers on the A-Level syllabus,[25] who offered the best antidote to the myopia and lassitude of digital-era life. Indeed, in a blog post of 2006, called *We Want it All*, Fisher asked, '… *which* Nietzsche might be of use, now?'.[26] While he quickly dismissed the 'Dionysian Nietzsche', it was on the pretext that in any case it is the "lost tension *between* Dionysus and Apollo," that Nietzsche mourns . That is to say, Nietzsche was no more Dionysian than he was a nihilist (both being popular misconceptions). Fisher finds "Nietzsche the aristocrat" to be

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[24] Mark Fisher, "Capitalist Realism" (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009), 24.

[25] Fisher talks of his "A-Level" students studying at "college", a point which causes confusion with some non-British natives, given that college in the US and some other systems is equivalent to university in the UK system, while High School is equal to the UK college. Similarly, the A-Level is a qualification taken in UK colleges by around 50% of people aged between 16 and 18. A-Level students are not necessarily among the highest level students as the name may suggest (though it is the highest academic qualification offered at that age). This is perhaps significant as Fisher is effectively berating mostly 16–18 year olds for preferring video games and recreational drug use to Nietzsche, whereas Nietzsche makes platitudes to "narcotic potions" in *Birth of Tragedy*.

[26] Mark Fisher, "We Want It All," k-punk, February 12, 2006, http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/007348.html.

of more use to us, meaning the Nietzsche who despised, "the insipidity and mediocrity that result from democracy's leveling impulses." Fisher uses this observation to launch an attack on the victory of Celebrity Big Brother contestant, Chantelle Houghton, a bleach-blonde nobody whose role was actually to convince the other celebrities she was a somebody despite having no particular talent or fanbase. Going undetected, she eventually won the series by popular vote. Rags to riches stories such as these promote the idea that anyone can be famous, without regard for differentiation in capability or aesthetic values. Such notions underpin the idea that meme culture (especially at its most sardonic) is in fact a process of radical usurpation of power—precisely a 'saying yes' to all things by saying no quality control. Yet both Nietzsche and Adorno believe that nihilism can never in itself be a creative force. Saying 'no' can simply never be equated with saying 'yes'.

Negation requires further acts to become generative, while saying yes to all things fundamentally cancels the act of choosing that 'yes' entails. Rather, even Nietzsche's radical yes-saying requires the entwinement of harmonic and chaotic forces, of life and death (the originary yeses and nos, which gave birth to affirmative and negative practices). Ultimately, therefore, Nietzsche must be seen as saying yes to all 'yeses', as well as to all 'nos', and to everything in between.

Yet, how can the disorderly aspect of Dionysian Art, which potentially comprises all things, ever give rise to something positive that might offset the depressive hedonism of twenty-first-century digital life? How might the objectifying forces of bourgeois moralism (for Nietzsche) and capitalism (for Adorno) be countered from amidst the overwhelming din of twenty-first-century image culture (including Fox News, Kardashian-style selfies, conspiratorial youtube videos, New Age spiritualist mulch, in addition to shitpost memes?).

For Nietzsche, as for Adorno, it is the rupture caused by the dissonant in music (and particularly, at the time of writing *Birth of Tragedy*, in Wagner's compositions), which gives the effect of making us "want to hear and long to go beyond hearing."[27] This "longing to go beyond" implies the opening up of a potentiality via the suspension of reason

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[27] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Birth of Tragedy," 115.

which the dissonant form induces, alongside the physical disjoint it creates. The "beyond" implies a new movement, one which is opposed to the rigidified singular death of the petrified individual. Today, to go beyond means to go offline, off Zoom, off Facebook, Tumblr, TikTok. It might also mean to go beyond one's cellular self, to collectivize. In this endeavor, new online trends are needed, encouraging physicality, and a sense of affirmation that comes from openness rather than refusal.

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