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Art and Self-creation: An Encounter of Nietzsche and John Cage

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Art and Self-creation: An Encounter of Nietzsche and John Cage

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
Of Bard College

by
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Abbreviation for titles of Nietzsche's works:

BGE = Beyond Good and Evil

BT = The Birth of Tragedy

CW = The Case of Wagner

GM = The Genealogy of Morals

GS = The Gay Science

TI = Twilight of the Idols

Z = Thus Spoke Zarathustra

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Introduction

This project is an attempt of unpacking Nietzsche's understanding of art and its relation to self, existence and suffering. What makes me so curious about Nietzsche's view of art is his unique perspective of viewing art. Unlike other philosophers, Nietzsche does not spend much time discussing what is a good kind of art or what is the responsibility of the artists. He focuses on the meaning of art, of what kinds of effects art is able to bring to ourselves and the world around us. A strikingly powerful claim of art goes like this: "as an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still bearable for us, and art furnishes us with eyes and hands and above all the good conscience to be able to turn ourselves into such a phenomenon" (GS 164). This project takes this argument as a start point.

The first chapter is devoted to providing an interpretation of the quote that is mentioned above. It concludes with an interpretation that art makes our existence bearable by endowing sufferings with meanings. The second chapter focuses on the self-transformation, or self-creation, which is one of central themes in *GS*. It concludes with four stages of self-creation: an observation, a seek of tendencies of value judgments, a formation of value system and the actions.

The third chapter aimed to answer the question of whether the approaches of artistic creation can be applied to the process of self-creation, or whether we can create ourselves as we create art. By comparing the two activities of creation, it answers the question with a yes. Following from this answer, some new questions come up regarding the product of art and Nietzsche's writing style. The third chapter also aims to explain these questions and it ends with an answer regarding Nietzsche's intention of writing in such a style.

Nietzsche's works are written in a style that is unique, free and appealing. To study his way of writing is equally important as studying the ideas within his writing. Although in many places, Nietzsche's own views are usually regarded as ambiguous. Therefore, many ideas that appeared in this project should be seen as attempted interpretations of Nietzsche, but I do believe that an interpretation should be worthy of trusting if it is followed from a systematic examination of Nietzsche's arguments with a careful analysis.

Chapter 1. Art and Suffering

“We are always chasing after illusory lights in our lives, but whoever sees the illusory light as it is, he/she will be falling into the sea of eternal suffering”

-- Zang Kejia

Reading this line by a Chinese contemporary poet Zang Kejia, I did not realize it would have such a strong connection with Nietzsche and his ideas about art and suffering, which I am going to examine in this chapter. Frederick Nietzsche is a philosopher who writes in a style that is unique in his own. Different to other philosophers, his works lack a systematic demonstration of arguments. But the way Nietzsche approaches his arguments is usually strikingly immediate and powerful. In this chapter I am going to examine a very important argument of Nietzsche that is related to the power of art. In *GS*, Nietzsche writes “as an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still bearable for us, and art furnishes us with eyes and hands and above all the good conscience to be able to turn ourselves into such a phenomenon” (*GS* 164). In this chapter, I do not only hope to interpret this argument but I also hope to see what kind of argument we will arrive at by studying this argument within the context of *GS* and other works of Nietzsche.

In order to unpack this argument, it is necessary to know what Nietzsche means by “aesthetic phenomenon”. The meaning of “aesthetic phenomenon” is hard to acquire because Nietzsche never offered any explanation of this term, but we can understand it (for now) as a mode of existing (or living) that is acceptable by Nietzsche. Art has the power of changing our way of living into a mode that would make our existence “bearable.” What does Nietzsche mean by “bearable”? In order to answer this, we need to first know what are the things that are unbearable in our current lives. I am going to propose that what makes our existence unbearable is the inevitable sufferings that we are all going to experience in our lives. I am going to first

examine Nietzsche's view of suffering and propose that the meaninglessness of suffering is what makes it unbearable. Then I am going to propose that art makes life bearable by endowing suffering with meanings.

Before I start explaining different ideas within Nietzsche's work, it is important to keep in mind that Nietzsche writes his book for a special and specific purpose. For most parts of his works (if not all), they are written for specific readers who can understand what he means and has the will of trusting him. When I read Nietzsche, sometimes I feel that he is revealing a big secret to his readers: a secret that is only understandable by a small group of people. Therefore, although we might not know if we are the readers that Nietzsche envisioned, it is important to think about what kind of readers are specific passages written for and try to imagine their perspectives. I will explain more by what I mean by this later in this chapter.

As of what makes life unbearable, I propose the meaninglessness of sufferings as the main reason, according to Nietzsche. I will explain Nietzsche's view of the world and life first and then go into the suffering part. According to Nietzsche, we live in a world of appearances; the human life is a life of appearances. Appearances are whatever that exist in our perception, they are the sensible pictures of the existing "objects" in the world.

Nietzsche writes "that mountain there! That cloud there! What is 'real' in that? Subtract the phantasm and every human contribution from it, my sober friends! If you can! If you can forget your descent, your past, your training--all of your humanity and animality. There is no 'reality' for us--not for you either, my sober friends" (GS 121). This quote reveals an important thought of Nietzsche: we perceive the world through a personal perspective that consists of our own "descent", "past" and "training"; we cannot recognize the world without our own prejudices

and preferences. It is also not only about the preference, but that we as humans can only perceive the world through our senses, which is fundamentally “humane” and has its limits. For Nietzsche, it makes no sense to talk about the “real” world, which is by definition a world free of “human contribution”. That is the reason for Nietzsche to disagree with anyone who imagines a “real” world abstracted away from appearances. People who believe in this kind of “real” world think that our world is the reflection of the “real” world; they create the word “reality” to separate such a “real” world from the world of appearances. Nietzsche despises this kind of view and proposes to abolish the concept of a “real” or “true” world. He says: “the ‘true’ world—an idea which is no longer good for anything, not even obligating—an idea which has become useless and superfluous—consequently, a refuted idea: let us abolish it” (TI, 485)! Then he goes on to say: “the true world—we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! *With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one*” (TI, 486). If we are not using the term “true world”, the world of appearances becomes the only world existing and we can then just use the word “world” to call it. But for the sake of discussion, I will continue using the term “world of appearances” in this paper, as Nietzsche does too.

About life, Nietzsche thinks that it is essentially about self-transformation and self-overcoming. He writes a passage about an ideal life for philosophers.

We(philosophers) are not thinking frogs, nor objectifying and registering mechanisms with their innards removed: constantly, we have to give birth to our thoughts out of our pain and, like mothers, endow them with all we have of blood, heart, fire, pleasure, passion, agony, conscience, fate, and catastrophe. Life—that means for us constantly transforming all that we are into light and flame—also everything that wounds us: we simply can do no other. (GS 36)

This passage describes a kind of life that Nietzsche envisions for philosophers, which includes himself. The basic activity of this life is to “give birth to our thoughts out of our pain,” it is an act of transformation and creation. Later in *GS*, Nietzsche again writes the following.

What is life? — Life—that is: continually shedding something that wants to die.
Life—that is: being cruel and inexorable against everything about us that is
growing old and weak—and not only about us. Life—that is, then: being without
reverence for those who are dying, who are wretched, who are ancient?
Constantly being a murderer? —And yet old Moses said: “Thou shalt not kill”.
(GS 100)

Life is to get rid of things that are “dying” and pursue a life that is healthier and livelier. It is about transforming ourselves into healthier and stronger beings. We can see more discussions about life and self-transformation in the second and third chapter too.

Nietzsche thinks that suffering is an inevitable part of life, and any attempt to extinguish suffering is a denial of life. Though he holds that there can be many types of suffering, he nevertheless believes that all kinds of growing and becoming involve pain and suffering. He says: “every single element in the act of procreation, of pregnancy, and of birth aroused the highest and most solemn feelings. In the doctrine of the mysteries, pain is pronounced holy: the pangs of the woman giving birth hallow all pain; all becoming an growing—all that guarantees a future—involves pain” (TI 562). Here, he was using the example of pregnancy to argue that “all that guarantees a future” involves pain. This argument is the same as saying that “all changes involve pain” because change is what guarantees a future--we change towards a state in the future. To change means to step out from the zone that once brought us comfort and to embrace the unknown, which will normally lead to psychological uncertainty and suffering. Therefore, living an ideal life would mean to live with sufferings because an ideal life points to a future.

Nietzsche thinks that there are countless types of suffering and describes suffering as a deeply personal feeling.

Our personal and profoundest suffering is incomprehensible and inaccessible to almost everyone; here we remain hidden from our neighbor, even if we eat from one pot. But whenever people notice that we suffer, they interpret our suffering superficially. It is the very essence of the emotion of pity that it strips away from the suffering of others whatever is distinctively personal ... one simply knows nothing of the whole inner sequence and intricacies that are distress for me or for you. (GS 269)

Sufferings are deeply personal and they are generated from complicated “inner sequence and intricacies” that are also personal. Suffering is “inaccessible to almost everyone”, which means that it can also be inaccessible to me, the sufferer. We can perceive the feeling of sufferings, but we can never know of the reasons behind it -- we know “nothing of the whole inner sequence”. The unknowability of suffering implies that it seems impossible to get rid of suffering from the perspective of reasoning. We cannot find something that would solve the reason that makes us suffer because we simply cannot know of the reasons that make us suffer. In order to alleviate the pain of suffering, we need to find another approach.

Nietzsche is smart because he realizes that what makes suffering unbearable is not suffering itself, but the meaninglessness of suffering. In other words, whether suffering would be bearable is depending on what we think of it, of what meanings we endow to it. In *GM*, Nietzsche writes the following passage.

He also suffered otherwise, he was in the main a sickly animal: but his problem was *not* suffering itself, but that there was no answer to the crying question, “*why* do I suffer?” Man, the bravest of animals and the one most accustomed to suffering, does *not* repudiate suffering as such; he *desires* it, he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a *meaning* for it, a *purpose* of suffering. The meaninglessness of suffering, *not* suffering itself, was the curse that lay over mankind so far---and *the ascetic ideal offered man meaning!* (GM 162)

What makes people stress about suffering is not suffering itself, but the meaninglessness of it. We have to find a reason for our suffering, otherwise we need to interpret and endow it with a reason. Therefore, the statement “as an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still bearable for us, and art furnishes us with eyes and hands and above all the good conscience to be able to turn ourselves into such a phenomenon” (GS 164) could perhaps mean that aesthetic phenomenon makes our existence bearable by endowing our sufferings with a meaning. Since it is art that enables us to turn ourselves into such a phenomenon, could it be that aesthetic phenomenon actually means a state of artistic creation? If it is true, how can artistic creation make our suffering purposeful?

I propose that art could serve as the purpose of our sufferings because of the inseparable relation of suffering and art. In *GS*, Nietzsche introduces this inseparable relation.

Every art, every philosophy may be viewed as a remedy and an aid in the service of growing and struggling life; they always presuppose suffering and sufferers. But there are two kinds of sufferers: first, those who suffer from the *over-fullness of life*--they want a Dionysian art and likewise a tragic view of life, a tragic insight--and then those who suffer from the *impoverishment of life* and seek rest, stillness, calm seas, redemption from themselves through art and knowledge, or intoxication, convulsions, anaesthesia, and madness. (GS 328)

Art is something that requires suffering and pain. Nietzsche first talks about two kinds of sufferers: people who suffer from “the *over-fullness of life*” and those who suffer from “the *impoverishment of life*” (GS 328). People who suffer from “overfullness” can be regarded as the strong ones who have power and satisfaction in oneself. In contrast, people suffering from “impoverishment” can be seen as the weak ones who are lacking power within themselves. The strong ones desire a “Dionysian art” to transform their lives into a life of self-overcoming.

“Dionysian art”, a term first appeared in *BT*, has later on been mentioned and described for countless times.

In *TI*, Nietzsche writes about the Dionysian state as a state of transformation. The passage is cited below.

In this state (artistic state of frenzy) one enriches everything out of one’s own fullness: whatever one sees, whatever one wills, is seen swelled, taut, strong, overloaded with strength. A man in this state transforms things until they mirror his power—until they are reflections of his perfection. This having to transform into perfection is—art. Even everything that he is not yet, becomes for him an occasion of joy in himself; in art man enjoys himself as perfection. (TI 519)

Here, the state of making art is being described as a state with a strong impulse of transforming, as well as passion and joy. Before this passage, Nietzsche writes about the feeling of frenzy within the state of artistic creation: “If there is to be art, if there is to be any aesthetic doing and seeing, one physiological condition is indispensable: frenzy. Frenzy must first have enhanced the excitability of the whole machine; else there is no art” (TI 518) and “what is essential in such frenzy is the feeling of increased strength and fullness” (TI 518). In this feeling of artistic frenzy, we become stronger and fuller, our imperfections as sufferers seem to disappear. If we look at the quote at the beginning of this paragraph, a man in artistic state “transforms things until they mirror his power” (TI 519), the “things” here can include the man himself. It seems to be a reasonable point because man does become a “perfection” from his imperfect state (overfullness or impoverishment) as a sufferer. In Dionysian state, man transforms everything around him and himself into perfection, and that is the reason for why art presupposes suffering. It is from the suffering of the imperfection of one’s self that one wants to change oneself towards another state, namely the state that is closer to one’s perfection. Art, especially the Dionysian art, provides the

sufferers an opportunity to do so. For someone who does not suffer and is satisfied with his current state, it is impossible for him to actively want to transform himself towards another state.

In *GS*, there is a rare passage where Nietzsche seems to be appealing to the young generation of Europe. He writes “*The craving for suffering*.—When I think of the craving to do something, which continually tickles and spurs those millions of young Europeans who cannot endure their boredom and themselves, then I realize that they must have a craving to suffer and to find in their suffering a probable reason for action, for deeds” (GS 117). Nietzsche seems to be appealing to the young people that they should see a “probable reason” within their suffering for action and deeds. They should see their suffering as an opportunity to change themselves, towards a state of perfection, and that change is made possible by art.

We have previously explained the meaning of “aesthetic phenomenon” as a state of artistic creation. This explanation seems to make sense but the word “phenomenon” has not been really explained. After analyzing Nietzsche’s view of artistic state in *TI*, I propose that we may understand the “aesthetic phenomenon” now as an artistic state of self-transformation and perfection. This state is “aesthetic” because it is initiated by art and the activities one does in this state are related to art creation; it is a “phenomenon” because it is a status that is different to our normal status. If we think of the important argument that is mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: “as an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still bearable for us, and art furnishes us with eyes and hands and above all the good conscience to be able to turn ourselves into such a phenomenon” (GS 164), we now know that aesthetic phenomenon (or state of self-transformation and perfection) is able to make our existence bearable by endowing meaning to our sufferings. It is important to note that “meaning” is something that is highly personal and

whether a thing is meaningful to one person might be meaningless to another one. However, we are only considering the question of whether a person might consider suffering as something meaningful if he sees the possibility of having a life of self-transformation that is envisioned by Nietzsche. And we are only considering someone who would agree with Nietzsche's view of an ideal life here, who are the readers that Nietzsche envisioned.

I think it will be likely for such readers to view suffering as something that is meaningful because they will realize that their suffering was a gift that helps them to practice art and live in a life of self-transformation. If they agree with Nietzsche's view of the inseparable relation of suffering and art, they would realize that they are able to live in a life of self-transformation because they were suffering. It is the sufferings that push them to transform themselves. As they are living in a life of self-transformation, they would recognize their sufferings as having values and purpose, which is to provide them a life like this. Therefore, living in a state of self-transformation would make a life that is full of sufferings become bearable because it endows one's sufferings with meanings and values.

If we recall Zang Kejia's quote at the beginning, it is essentially saying that we have the freedom and power of endowing things with meanings; we should view things as meaningful even that they actually do not possess any meaning. It is a similar worldview to Nietzsche, who soberly sees the world as full of chaos and suffering, yet encouraging people to endow their suffering with purposes and therefore make it meaningful. The chapter starts with an explanation of Nietzsche's views of the world and what an ideal life should look like. Then I explained Nietzsche's view of the relation of art and suffering to propose that art presupposes suffering because it would be impossible for people to have the willing of transforming themselves if they

are satisfied with their current status, as sufferings involve dissatisfaction of one's current state, whether it is overfullness or lack of power. Then I explained the artistic state as a state of self-transformation and pointed out that we could understand "aesthetic phenomenon" as such. As a conclusion, I propose that art will endow suffering with meanings because people in a state of self-transformation would regard their sufferings as something that motivate them to achieve the ideal life that they desire, therefore regarding suffering as meaningful. If suffering is meaningful for them, life is also bearable. Therefore, that is the reason why Nietzsche writes "as an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still bearable for us" (GS 164). By stating that, Nietzsche is proposing a life of self-transformation and change -- an artistic way of living.

Chapter II. Self-Creation

I. A View of Self

The first chapter examines the relation between art and suffering, and it takes many of Nietzsche's ideas for granted. In this chapter, I hope to delve into Nietzsche's ideas which have not been explained yet in the first chapter. One of the important ideas is the relation of art and the state of self-transformation. In *TI*, Nietzsche thinks that art has the power of transforming ourselves into a state of transformation and perfection, but how exactly is art able to do that? If we look back to the argument "art furnishes us with eyes and hands and above all the good conscience to be able to turn ourselves into such a phenomenon" (GS 163), we also have the question of what Nietzsche means by "eyes and hands" and "good conscience" here, as these concepts are essential to understand the relation of art and the state of self-transformation.

In order to study this relation, we need to first know what the state of self-transformation is really like for Nietzsche. In this chapter, I am going to focus on the concept of self-transformation, which can also be seen as self-creation. I am going to first explain Nietzsche's view of self, along with why self is something that needed to be created. Then I am going to study the question of what can possibly be an ideal result of the process of self-creation by looking at the passages where Nietzsche writes about the higher, or the noble type of people. By studying the requirements that one needs to acquire to become such a kind of person, I am going to envision what one's process of self-creation looks like. As a conclusion, I would like to suppose that it is going to experience four stages: 1) a comprehensive observation, 2) a seek of the existing tendencies of making judgments, 3) completion of them into value systems, 4) act in

accordance with the system we created. They can also be viewed as one's disciplines for a successful self-creation.

In fact, the topic of self-transformation or self-creation has been implied for many times in *GS*, as well in *Z*. For example, the passage about us being the “mothers”: “life—that means for us constantly transforming all that we are into light and flame—also everything that wounds us: we simply can do no other” (*GS* 36). A succinct sentence mentions the same idea too -- “What does your conscience say?— “You shall become the person you are” (*GS* 219).

Before we look into the idea of self-creation in *GS*, it is necessary to first examine what Nietzsche means by the “self”, as we have to know what the “self” is to Nietzsche before looking into how we can create it. In response to the sentence “you shall become the person you are”, Alexander Nehamas responds with the following claim in his book *Nietzsche, Life as Literature*.

The phrase “become who you are” is problematic, and not only because Nietzsche denies the distinction between becoming and being. Its interpretation is made even more difficult because he is convinced that the very idea of the self as a subject in its own right, from which he claims this distinction is derived, is itself an unjustified invention: “There is no such substratum; there is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything” (*GM*, I, 13). But if there is no such thing as the self, there seems to be nothing that one can in any way become. (Nehamas 172)

Nehamas pointed out that Nietzsche thinks that the “very idea of the self as a subject” of our thoughts, emotions and all activities is unjustified and there is actually nothing as a “doer”, or “self”. Interestingly, in the quote of *GM*, Nietzsche says that there is no “being” behind “becoming”, then how should we understand this quote and what is the thing that is “becoming” then?

It seems to me that when Nietzsche says “there is no being behind doing”, he is going against the idea of “being”, which is a fixed idea of a subjective being, or the “self” as we may

traditionally understand it. He is trying to disconnect “being” from “doing”, and the main idea remains that there is no fixed subjective “self” that is doing anything, or exerting any effects. The idea of a self behind “doing”, is just as illusory as supposing that there is a “real” world behind appearances. In order to better understand Nietzsche’s idea of self and doing, we could look into the passage of “I think” that is in the first chapter of *BGE*.

Nietzsche writes, “in short, the assertion ‘I think’ assumes that I compare my state at the present moment with other states of myself which I know, in order to determine what it is; on account of this retrospective connection with further ‘knowledge,’ it has, at any rate, no immediate certainty for me” (BGE 23). In the next section, Nietzsche writes the following passage.

I shall never tire of emphasizing a small terse fact, which these superstitions minds and not when “I” wish, so that it is a falsification of the facts of the case to say that the subject “I” is the condition of the predicate “think.” It thinks; but that this “it” is precisely the famous old “ego” is, to put it mildly, only a supposition, an assertion, and assuredly not an “immediate certainty.” ... one infers here according to the grammatical habit: “Thinking is an activity; every activity requires an agent; consequently--”. (BGE 24)

This critique of Descartes contains two small critiques: 1) a critique of a unified self; 2) a critique of the idea of it is “I” who initiated the activity of thinking. I am going to explain the second critique first. Nietzsche thinks that the reason for the thought “I think” to appear is because we find a state of ourselves that is different to other states and then we call it a state of thinking. Because of the fact that “I” experienced the state of thinking, we think that that is “I” who initiated the activity of thinking based on our “grammatical habit” (BGE 24) that every activity requires an agent. However, there is no way to prove that it is “I” who initiated thinking, as there is no way we could know whether a state of us is “initiated” by us or not: we just

encountered and experienced such a state, perhaps thoughts do not need to have an agent.

Nietzsche thinks that it is “it” thinks. “It” here could mean unconsciousness, but it can also mean something unknown: our thoughts come from somewhere that is unknown to us. Nietzsche does not regard the relations of “self” and activities such as thinking, willing, feeling as the relations of subject and its activities, he sees them in a more equal way, like encountering.

Now let us look at the first critique: a critique of a unified self. When Nietzsche criticizes Descartes’ “I think”, he is also criticizing an implication that the thinking faculty of a man is the essence of a person and that a person is a unified being by virtue of this essence. Descartes would view “consciousness”, or the part that is capable of thinking as the essence of a person and every state (thinking, acting) that this person experiences is generated by this consciousness. If this is the case, it would be reasonable to suppose that the person is a unified being that is unified by his consciousness. However, Nietzsche does not think it is the case. In *GS*, Nietzsche satirizes the idea of viewing consciousness as something that “constitutes the kernel of man; what is abiding, eternal, ultimate, and most original in him” and the idea of viewing consciousness as “the unity of the organism” (GS 85). I think the reason for Nietzsche to criticize the idea of viewing consciousness as the unity of a person is because there are other states of ourselves that are not generated by consciousness, such as our unconscious states. Besides that, we simply never experienced ourselves as an unified being, all we experienced about ourselves is the different thoughts, feelings, and actions. We just cannot see what is this “something” that is behind all of our thoughts, feelings and actions. That is the reason for Nietzsche to disagree with the traditional Cartesian view of consciousness and any claim about the “unity” of self at all. Nietzsche mainly criticizes the idea of the self as “unity” through the criticism of the view of self

as having something essential and indestructible with it, as the above passage about Descartes' "I think", but also as his critique of Kant's idea of "the faculty for synthetic judgements, a priori" (BGE 17).

Nietzsche writes, "one had been dreaming, and first and foremost--old Kant. 'By virtue of a faculty'--he had said, or at least meant. But is that--an answer? An explanation? Or is it not rather merely a repetition of the question" (BGE 18)? Nietzsche thinks that Kant "invent" the idea of some kind of faculty rather than "discovering" it, as himself has claimed. Synthetic a priori arguments are the synthetic arguments (description of the world) that are not formed from knowledge we gained in experience, for example the statement: all events have a cause. Synthetic a priori statements can be seen as the basis of many of our knowledge. Nietzsche feels the need to criticize this idea because the faculty of making synthetic a priori statements to some extent represent a unifying self, an essence of a person that is indestructible and coherent. In other words, a normal person would not believe in something that is in contrary to what its "faculty" would generate. A person with the Kantian "faculty" does not contradict himself.

Nehamas quoted a passage from *BGE* in which Nietzsche (similarly) denies the idea of the soul as "something indestructible, eternal, indivisible, as a monad, as an atomon" (BGE 20) and suggests us to think of "new versions and refinements of the soul-hypothesis", such as "soul as subjective multiplicity" (BGE 20). Denying the soul as something essential goes parallel with Nietzsche's critiques on Kant and Descartes. Here, Nietzsche is suggesting the new possibility of the soul as "subjective multiplicity", and it shows that it is very likely that Nietzsche actually regards "being", or the self as something that is not unified but actually something that is composed of highly diverse and even contradictory states. What he dislikes is the idea which

assumes that the self is unified by itself, such as Descartes' "I think", which leads to the assumed coherence of one's different states, such as thinking, feeling and willing.

One might suppose that even if Nietzsche suggests that the "self" is composed of highly diverse states, it does not show that the self is not unified. People who suppose this might think that a thing can still be unified even if it has different states that are highly diverse, for these common states might still share some commonalities with each other. I believe what Nietzsche would have to say is that it is not about the "commonalities" which support the traditional Cartesian view of self, but rather it is about the idea that one's different states are all "emanated" from a single thing, whether it is "soul" or other names. Nietzsche does not think it is the case; it is not "I" who thinks, but rather it is "it", the unconsciousness, which thinks. If it is the unconsciousness that thinks (or wills or acts), our different states become random and not controlled. If they are not controlled by a conscious "self" and are seemingly chaotic and even contradicting one another sometimes, how could we claim that they constitute a unified self? Therefore, we cannot accept the idea of the unity of self as presupposed, instead the unity of self is something that must be achieved. To achieve a unity of one's self and to make it strong is I think what Nietzsche means by "self-creation".

II. Self-creation in *The Gay Science*

The topic of self-creation is one of the central themes of *GS* and is closely related to other important topics that are mentioned in the book, such as the perspectivism and art. The places where Nietzsche explicitly mentions the word "self-creation" are mainly the passages about the "higher" being, or the strong ones. Nietzsche admits that the capability of self-creation is a sign

of the individuals who are strong and “higher”. Besides this, I think it is necessary to write about what Nietzsche views as the good human-beings because I assume that the purpose of self-creation is to become ones that are stronger, better and, in Nietzsche’s word, “higher”. It is only with a good purpose that self-creation is meaningful and worthy of discussion.

Nietzsche writes, “What distinguishes the higher human beings from the lower is that the former see and hear immeasurably more, and see and hear thoughtfully” (GS 241). Later in the same passage, he writes the following passage about the creative power of the higher men.

The higher human being always becomes at the same time happier and unhappier. But he can never shake off a delusion: He fancies that he is a spectator and listener who has been life: he calls his own nature contemplative and overlooks that he himself is really the poet who keeps creating this life. Of course, he is different from the actor of this drama, the so-called active type; but he is even less like a mere spectator and festive guest in front of the stage. As a poet, he certainly has *vis contemplativa* and the ability to look back upon his work, but at the same time also and above all *vis creativa*(creative power), which the active human beings lacks, whatever visual appearances and the faith of all the world may say. (GS 241)

Nietzsche describes the “higher human being” as someone who did not realize that himself is someone who is creating his life, he is a “poet” that is “different from the actor of this drama, the so-called active type” (GS 241). I assume that the “drama” here refers to “life”, but it is not the particular life of such a higher human-being, it is everyone’s life in general.

It seems that Nietzsche is suggesting that the “higher” human beings are the ones that are not merely living a life, but also creating a life. He is the one that possesses a strong creative power, and such power is poetic and artistic, as the higher one himself is a “poet”. I believe that there might be a new way of understanding the “life” here. If we recall Nietzsche’s arguments about self in the previous passage, we might get an impression that most people still hold “self” as an unified existence by itself. The consequence of such a belief is that people will tend to

make attempts to discover their “self” rather than creating it. For me, the view of life that is influenced by such a view of self carries a deterministic sense with it. We would tend to think that our life is already determined by our “selves” because our “selves” is something fixed that awaits discovery, and we ought to live a life which our “selves” provide us.

Nietzsche sees the problems within the traditional Cartesian view of the self, which is not only that we have no evidence to presuppose the unity of self, but also that what follows from this view of self is an accepting attitude of the life as it is and the improbability for this life to be otherwise. That is why Nietzsche proposes that the higher human beings are not the “actors” of this kind of determined life, rather they create lives. In other words, the higher human-beings are the ones that define how they should live their lives and aim to carry it out.

We should note that an interesting feature of the “higher ones” here is the lack of awareness of himself as the “poet who keeps creating this life”. Such a lack of awareness of one’s nature has also appeared in another passage which Nietzsche talks about nobility.

Nietzsche writes the passage as follows.

What makes a person ‘noble’? Certainly not making sacrifices ... perhaps nobody is more consistently selfish than those who are noble. Rather: the passion that attacks those who are noble is peculiar, and they fail to realize this. It involves the use of a rare and singular standard and almost a madness: the feeling of heat in things that feel cold to everyone else ... it was rarity and a lack of awareness of this rarity that made a person noble. (GS 117)

Here, the “rarity” refers to the rarity of the standard that one takes to evaluate other things and the rarity of one’s ability to create this standard.

The lack of awareness of one’s rarity may reveal something important of Nietzsche. If a person does not realize how rare his standards, it has two meanings: (1) such kind of standards are completely normal to him so that he thinks everyone has the same one; (2) the person was not

intentionally trying to pursue something that is unique and different, his traits are completely natural to him. For the second meaning here, the person does not use a common standard to judge himself (that one should be different to others), rather he is just becoming who he is, following Nietzsche's doctrine that "you shall become the person you are" (GS 219). It should be noted that the second "you" here should be understood as a person who is freed from a substantively fixed "consciousness" and actively comes up with his own standards and uses them to judge himself. One should follow one's instincts in order to become the person that one satisfies with.

In *BGE*, Nietzsche writes the following passage about the value-creating power of the higher men.

The noble type of man experiences itself as determining values; it does not need approval; it judges, 'what is harmful to me is harmful in itself'; it knows itself to be that which first accords honor to things; it is value-creating ... the noble human being, too, helps the unfortunate, but not, or almost not, from pity, but prompted more by an urge begotten by excess of power ... who delights in being severe and hard with himself and respects all severity and hardness. (*BGE* 205)

The noble, or higher men are the ones that determine his own values and who act in accordance with his values. It is reasonable to suggest that creating (or recognizing) one's own value standards can be regarded as a starting point of one's process of self-creation.

Then the question becomes how can we create our own value standards. Since Nietzsche believes that there is no doer behind all deeds, all we know about ourselves are those things that are considered as "surfacial", such as behaviors, thoughts, feelings. To know about our own system of judging values, we have to first observe our behaviors, thoughts and feelings, maybe in this case the behaviors are more important. We have to observe our own behaviors and figure out what are the things that we tend to do and what are the things we would avoid doing. From

analyzing our actions, we might be able to know about some of our tendencies or habits of judging values, as we tend to do things that we value as good and not do those we view as bad.

To Nietzsche, “self” is not a single thing, rather it is something that is composed of many different states that seems random and even conflicting to each other. Nehamas writes the following passage about the relation of one’s acts to one’s self.

This unity (of the self), he seems to believe, is to be found, if it is to be found at all, in the very organization and coherence of the many acts that each organism performs. It is the unity of these acts that gives rise to the unity of the self, and not, as we often think, the fact of a single self that unifies our conflicting tendencies. (Nehamas 180).

Nehamas held that it is the unity of our acts that form a concrete self, but not the other way around, at the same time he also points out that our tendencies can be “conflicting”. Furthermore, he thinks that “The self-creation Nietzsche has in mind involves accepting everything that we have done and, in the ideal case, blending it into a perfectly coherent whole” (Nehamas 189). I think that it is a reasonable thought because in order to create one’s self, one has to start from his “states” (behavior, thoughts, feelings) because they are the only resources that are available to him and links closely to his identity. Starting from the “states”, one can probably find some of his tendencies of judging values and might create a system of value standards from these tendencies that one already has. An important ability here is the ability of observing and classifying one’s different states; that ability has a close relationship with Nietzsche’s notions of the “artistic distance” and perspectivism that he continually emphasizes in *GS*.

III. Self Creation, Art, Distance and Perspectives

Perspectives and distance are the two essential factors of what we need to observe different states of ourselves. In a passage which describes the power of art in facilitating us to look at ourselves, Nietzsche writes as follows.

Only artists, and especially those of the theater, have given men eyes and ears to see and hear with some pleasure what each man is himself, experiences himself, desires himself; only they have taught us to esteem the hero that is concealed in everyday characters; only they have taught us the art of viewing ourselves as heroes--from a distance and, as it were, simplified and transfigured--the art of staging and watching ourselves. (GS 133)

Later in the same section, he writes “perhaps one should concede a similar merit to the religion that made men see the sinfulness of every single individual through a magnifying glass, turning the sinner into a great, immoral criminal. By surrounding him with eternal perspectives, it taught man to see himself from a distance and as something past and whole” (GS 133). Nietzsche thinks that art teaches men to look at themselves as heroes and from a distance. The “heroes” here can be understood as one’s merits--qualities which one views as valuable. To look ourselves from a “distance” means to look at ourselves from different perspectives and find different qualities of ourselves. The idea here is to make separate observations of different states of oneself (such as sinfulness) and to imagine each of them as an independent character. At the same time, man should not be limited by this one state of sinfulness, he needs to look at himself from different perspectives to discover other states of himself. After a comprehensive observation of oneself, one would see himself as “something past and whole”.

The section 290 of *GS* is usually considered as a passage that is essential to Nietzsche’s idea of self-creation, and it goes as follows.

To ‘give style’ to one’s character—a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into

an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a large mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed—both times through long practice and daily work at it. Here the ugly that could not be removed is concealed' there it has been reinterpreted and made sublime. Much that is vague and resisted shaping has been saved and exploited for distant views; it is meant to beckon toward the far and immeasurable. In the end, when the work is governed and formed everything large and small. Whether this taste was good or bad is less important than one might suppose, if only it was a single taste! (GS 232)

The “style” here seems to refer to something that is essential of one’s identity, and here it can be regarded as ways of acting or reacting. The “artistic plan” later on reveals the artistic attribute of the process of self-creation, to create oneself is just like forming an artistic style. It should be clear that “to give style” is to create an essential part of self, so this passage is about self-creation.

In section 290 of *GS*, self-creation seems to be a process of organizing things into a “plan” that is “artistic”. I think the artistic attribute here is referring to one's own attitude of viewing things. If one looks at something artistically, that thing would be “artistic” for him. Therefore, to have an artistic plan of self-creation is to first learn to appreciate ourselves and accept every single detail of ourselves, as the “plan” here(which is linked to the “work” later) seems to refer to the new self that one creates, for appreciating is a common attitude of treating an artwork. Of course, to appreciate ourselves we must first know who we are, and that requires the ability of surveying “all the strengths and weaknesses” of our nature. After surveying one’s nature, one also needs to “fit them into an artistic plan”, which means to classify them and know what they reveal about one’s nature, things like one’s tendencies of making value judgments. It is not very clear what Nietzsche means by “second nature” and “original nature” in the next sentence, but it is likely that the “second nature” might refer to one’s own ideas and preferences

of what kind of value system he would like to hold. The influence of “second nature” within the process of self-creation should not be neglected because one must have put in his preferences into this process of discovery, as we tend to neglect some things which we do not like and prefer to recognise others that we like. The “original nature” might refer to one’s existing traits, such as the already-existing tendencies of making decisions and judging values. Throughout the process of self-creation, the tendencies which we hope to recognize will replace some tendencies that are already existing, but this replacement might happen without notice as we might have no idea of what our “original nature” is, either.

I believe that the next step for us in the process of self-creation is to employ more “second nature” to enrich and complete the tendencies of judging values that we discovered into a system of value judgments. This process of creating value standards requires one’s “second nature”, which is one’s preference of what value standards he would prefer to hold. These preferences are partially influenced by one’s “social self”, which is one’s role among his family, friends, colleagues, and one’s social self is greatly affected by his environment. One’s preference of value standards is usually about how he understands what is going on around him and how he is influenced by other people. Nietzsche thinks that our second nature is important in the process of completing a system of value standards. That is why he writes “here a large mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed—both times through long practice and daily work at it” (GS 232). The completion of one’s value standards requires one’s continuous efforts and daily work, and this process might not come to an end because we are continuously absorbing new influences into ourselves in order to achieve a more comprehensive system of value standards.

Nietzsche admits that one needs to stay open-minded during the process of self-creation.

He criticizes the ones that guard themselves against other people.

No longer may he entrust himself to any instinct or free wingbeat; he stands in a fixed position with a gesture that wards off, armed against himself, with sharp and mistrustful eyes—the eternal guardian of his castle, since he has turned himself into a castle. Of course, he can achieve greatness this way. But he has certainly become insufferable for others, difficult for himself, and impoverished and cut off from the most beautiful fortuities of his soul. Also from all further instruction. For one must be able to lose oneself occasionally if one wants to learn something from things different from oneself. (GS 245)

For the ones that refuse to be influenced by others, they are rejecting the “beautiful fortuities of his soul”, which is the possible change of his preferences of values during the interactions with other people. We have to “lose oneself occasionally” to be influenced by others because we cannot deny that we are also living in a social life. However, it is important to note that we should only do so “occasionally”, which means that we should spend most of our time focusing on ourselves, to observe ourselves. And I do not think Nietzsche is encouraging us to borrow other people’s way of living either; we should lose ourselves sometimes to “learn something different from oneself”, to learn how others observe themselves and how they create their value systems.

For Nietzsche, self-creation is a lonely but not isolated process. Because we are growing and experiencing different things all the time, our value standards are subject to changes at any time too. With a system of value standards in shape, the next step would be to act in accordance to these standards. Nietzsche writes, “to come to the point: when a human being judges ‘this is right’ and then infers ‘therefore it must be done,’ and then proceeds to do what he has thus recognized as right and designated as necessary—then the essence of his action is moral” (GS 263). We must act in accordance to what we view as right and in doing it we are carrying a sense

of responsibility, and that action should be viewed as a moral action. We might become the “higher beings” if we can create our own value systems, but these value systems are not “laws” until they have been practiced and followed as they are. By practicing our own value systems, we become the individuals who “give themselves laws” (GS 266).

Generally speaking, the “stages” we have to go through during the process of self-creation is a comprehensive observation, a seek of the existing tendencies of making judgments, completion of them into value systems and doing actions in accordance with the system we created. We should sanely realize that when we create our own value systems, they cannot be applied to other people by any means as Nietzsche thinks “it is selfish to experience one’s own judgment as a universal law” (GS 265). We should avoid wasting time to apply our laws to others as they only make sense to ourselves. It is important to not be satisfied with anything during the process as a final state, as self-creation is an endless and continuous process.

Chapter III.

Create Self as an Artwork: An Encounter of Nietzsche and Cage

I. Can we create self as art?

One topic that Nietzsche is particularly interested about is the power of art, which he has talked about from *BT* to *GS*. In the quote that starts with “giving style to one’s character” that is mentioned in the second chapter, Nietzsche affirms the artistic quality of the process of self-creation. One can infer that the importance of art lies in its relation to a successful self-creation. Therefore, a question arises: how should we understand the relation between the process of artistic creation and self-creation? Nietzsche seems to claim that self-creation is an artistic process, so does that mean that the artistic creation is applicable to the process of self-creation? Can we create ourselves by the same way that we create a piece of music, or a poem? If self-creation is artistic, can our knowledge of art help us to achieve creating a better self?

In this chapter, I am going to first study the question of whether artistic creation can be applied to the creation of self. By asking this question, I am asking about everything that is involved in the process of an artistic creation, of whether any or all of its approaches can be useful and applicable within the process of self-creation. I will start examining this question by first talking about Nietzsche’s view of art and artists. By comparing it with the process of self-creation, I am going to propose that the approaches of artistic creation can be applied to self-creation because one’s mode of actions is the same in both activities. In other words, the process of creating art teaches us of the ways of self-creation. From this statement, I delve into another interesting question of whether the product of art (an artwork) would also have the same

function. As an answer, I propose that Cage's chance music can be seen as having such a function, yet his way of doing art is radically different from Nietzsche's view of how we should do art. By comparing Nietzsche and Cage's artistic style, we get closer to Nietzsche's intention of writing in his own unique style, which is that he intends to use his work as an opportunity for the readers to practice the ability of self-creation.

Nietzsche's view of artistic creation draws emphasis on the attitude and spirit of the artists; he hardly talks about the specific methods of doing art. In short, Nietzsche thinks that to create art is to incorporate everything we could gather, including those that are seemingly ugly and unworthy into a transformation process towards perfection.

Nietzsche believes artists should take their artistic materials as the first priority. In the preface of the second edition of *GS*, a paragraph goes like this.

Oh Greeks! They knew how to live. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial—out of profundity ... Are we not, precisely in this respect, Greeks? Adorers of forms, of tones, of words? And therefore—artists? (GS 38)

The artists are the "Greeks" that "stop courageously at the surface" and accept things as they are. They are the people who "adore" forms, who respect the "forms, tones, words" just as what they are and do not want to chase after the order or other "deeper" aspect of these things. In *CW*, Nietzsche writes the following passage.

Music can never be anything else than a means": this was his theory, but above all it was the only practice that lay open to him. No musician however thinks in this way. —Wagner was in need of literature, in order to persuade the whole world to take his music seriously, profoundly, "because it meant an infinity of things", all his life he was the commentator of the "idea". (CW 42)

Wagner's idea of "music can never be anything else than a means" is what Nietzsche criticizes; he thinks that music should be regarded as something that exists for the sake of itself, and should be seen as an end. This view of the artists' attitude of art goes parallel with the previous quote of artists as the adorers of appearances. If we think about the materials of art such as sounds, colors, shapes, we would recognize that they are all "appearances" in the sense that they are sensible. Nietzsche thinks that the primary attention of artists should be the artistic materials, of their characteristics and possibilities.

Nietzsche thinks that artists should see new possibilities of the materials that are even usually considered as ugly and unworthy of art.. He says: "As the Orpheus of all secret misery he is greater than anyone, and he has incorporated in art some things that had previously seemed to be inexpressible and even unworthy of art, as if words could only frighten them away, not grasp them—very small, microscopic features of the soul: yes, he is the master of the very small" (GS 143). In *BT*, such a passage appears.

How can the ugly and the unharmonious, the substance of tragic myth, excite esthetic pleasure? Here it becomes necessary to raise ourselves with one daring bound into a metaphysics of Art. Therefore I repeat my former proposition that only as an esthetic phenomenon may existence and the world appear justified: and in this sense it is precisely the function of tragic myth to convince us that even the ugly and unharmonious is an artistic game which the will plays with itself in the eternal fullness of its joy. (BT 90)

Nietzsche encourages artists to use things that are seen as "unworthy of art" and thinks that the "ugly and unharmonious" things can also be regarded as the materials of doing art. Why are the materials that are usually considered as "ugly and unworthy of art" so important? I think the benefits for artists of practicing seeing new possibilities from "old" materials is the enhancement of their ability of looking at things from different perspectives. It is an ability that is not only

important when one selects one's materials, but also essential within the process of creating art. In *TI*, such a statement "A man in this state transforms things until they mirror his power—until they are reflections of his perfection. This having to transform into perfection is—art" (TI 518) is claimed. What one needs to transform is whatever one regards as worthy of transformation. To create art requires an ability of observation, as the process of self-creation does too.

As we have recognized, to create art is to transform one's materials into perfection. But what does "perfection" here mean? If we look at the passage that is at the end of the last paragraph, the perfect state of material is when a material reflects the perfection of the artist. Such a perfection is the reflection of the perfection of the artist's "self". What is this perfection of "self" then? We will need to find the qualities of one's self when it is in a state of "perfection". Then we have to look back to Nietzsche's idea of self-creation and decide what could be regarded as a perfect state of self. I think the perfect state of self can be regarded as a state when the "self" is highly unified and governed by a system of value standards of good and evil that are created by his own. As we talked before about the "higher beings" in the last chapter, they are the ones that are creating their lives, by which can be understood as the ones that affirm specifically what kind of life they would like to live and intend to carry it out. For an artwork to reflect the perfect state of self, the artwork itself needs to be highly unified.

Besides unification, a successful artwork also needs to show different states that are highly diverse and even contradicting. The reason for me to propose this is because the ability of contradicting oneself is a sign of the stronger being, according to Nietzsche.

The ability to contradict.— Everybody knows nowadays that the ability to accept criticism and contradiction is a sign of high culture. Some people actually realize that higher human beings desire and provoke contradiction in order to receive some hint about their own injustices of which they are as yet unaware. But the ability to contradict, the attainment of a good conscience when one feels hostile to

what is accustomed, traditional, and hallowed—that is still more excellent and constitutes what is really great, new, and amazing in our culture; this is the step of steps of the liberated spirit: Who knows that? (GS 239)

The ability to contradict oneself is important because it means that one can look at oneself from different perspectives and realize the existence of different states. It is important also because our “original self” is something that is “seemingly chaotic and even contradicting”(7 Yang) within itself, and the more we accept different states, the more comprehensive ourselves are. Lastly, the more contradictory states that a person has represents that this person has a stronger power of unifying different states, and therefore such a person can be viewed as the ones that are better at self-creation and they are viewed by Nietzsche as the higher ones.

Therefore, for an artwork to reflect the perfect state of self, it would need to reflect the unification within highly contradictory states, just as how the powerful human beings are. By creating a successful artwork, we are able to learn the way of unifying different states that are seemingly contrasting and even contradicting. For example, when we compose a piece of music, the composer must think of having different “states” in the piece to keep it interesting. But in order to make the piece make sense of itself, these “states” need to reflect a single theme or motif that unites the different parts of the piece. To create an artwork is just like Nietzsche’s idea of perspectivism, we need to look at something (a musical theme, or an object) from different perspectives and find a way to combine them together in a way that makes an artistic sense.

Therefore, I believe that the process of self-creation is just like that of the creation of an artwork because we need to create ourselves in the same manner that we create art. In the process of self-creation, we need to first observe and collect different states of ourselves, and then we have to fit those states in a single self by establishing a system of values that govern from which

those states all make sense. In artistic creation, we need to observe our artistic materials, then fitting them into a single artwork in a way that would somehow make these materials unified by a single theme. Someone might point out in most types of arts (painting, music, etc.), we usually have a theme first, and then we develop different materials from this single theme. But in self-creation, we are facing different kinds of states that are preexisting, and that is the difference between the two activities. As a response, I would say that the question here is not whether the creative activities of self and art are the same, but it is about whether we can create self in the same manner as we create art. The main ways of artistic creation involves an observation of artistic material and unification of different states of the material; they are essentially the same kind of activities that we do within the process of self-creation. Self-creation and artistic creation share a very similar mode and process. Therefore, we can also suppose that artistic creation is able to teach us the way of looking things from different perspectives and unifying different states, therefore it is helpful for our self-creation.

To the statement that artistic creation is capable of facilitating self-creation by teaching us the way of unifying different states, someone might question that even if the processes of self-creation and artistic creation seem to be pretty similar and involve the same model, their practical similarity is still lack of discussion. In a process of artistic creation (music composition for example), we are dealing with sound materials that have different characteristics. We need to find a way to unify them by maybe observing their similarities and rearrange in a way that would make the underlying theme be discoverable for the audience. However, in a self-creation process, we are analyzing behaviors which include mind behavior (thinking) and physical actions. It seems that the musical creation requires the composer's musical intuition, whereas the

self-creation requires the person's ability of observation and behavioral analysis. It seems that the enhancement of one's musical intuition does not facilitate one's ability of behavioral analysis necessarily.

As a response to this argument, I would like to indicate that the person who claims this kind of argument lacks an awareness of the fact that the sound materials we use during the process of composition comes from ourselves. For a successful composition, its musical material must come from the composer's heart and involves deeply with his experience. Nietzsche has indicated that too: "Wagner is one who has suffered much—and this elevates him above other musicians.—I admire Wagner wherever he sets himself to music" (CW 57). Artistic creation presupposes sufferers, and it follows that the suffering composer must set his own suffering into the artwork, as Nietzsche says: "Here is a musician who is a greater master than anyone else in the discovering of tones, peculiar to suffering, oppressed and tormented souls, who can endow even dumb misery with speech" (CW 57). The suffering musician must write his own music, the music which expresses the suffering of the soul. If the sound materials we are using represent some part of ourselves, I think it would be reasonable to state that when we are organizing the sound materials, we are actually organizing different states of ourselves. It is the same as self-creation. From here we could infer that in order for us to learn the way of self-creation from making art, we have to create something that comes from our heart -- that is sincerely ours.

Now we are able to get some new insights when we look back to the famous statement in *GS*: "as an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still bearable for us, and art furnishes us with eyes and hands and above all the good conscience to be able to turn ourselves into such a phenomenon" (GS 164). The "eyes" is the eye of observing ourselves, "hands" are the hands that

are capable of classifying our different states. “Good conscience” can be seen as an honest attitude of viewing ourselves, it is about treating our states as they are and not trying to suppose that there is an underlying self which generates those states -- it is similar to “good will to appearances”(GS 163). If we quote what we have discussed in the first chapter about the “aesthetic phenomenon” as a state of transformation, such an explanation would make perfect sense here: art teaches us of the tools and abilities that we need to start the process of self-creation. In order to improve on our ability of self-creation, we need to become artists that create art.

II. Product and Process of Art

Nietzsche thinks that the importance of art in relation to self-creation lies in the *process* of artistic creation. It made me think about another aspect of art, which is the outcome of art: an artwork. Would an actual artwork also be able to facilitate (its audiences) the ability of self-creation? I suppose Nietzsche might answer with a tentative yes. Nietzsche thinks that great art is a kind which reflects the perfect picture of its creator; it is a kind of art which consists of a unification of highly contrasting states. By looking/hearing an art like this, we as audiences might be able to learn the way that the artists combine these different states. Although the way other people create art can be radically different to the way we create ourselves, I think the audiences can still learn things of self-creation if they know how other people create art and experiment with applying different ways to their own. However, I am not very satisfied with this imagined answer of Nietzsche and I think if we want to study this question seriously, it would be

best if we can find a real example of art which can facilitate its audiences of their ability of self-creation.

As a response, I would like to propose that John Cage's chance music could be regarded as such kind of art that is particularly effective in facilitating its audiences of the ability of self-creation. I believe that the Cagean type of music is able to inspire its audiences to actively start doing what the artists have been doing when they are composing, and that is going to facilitate their ability of fitting their states into an "artistic plan" (GS 232). I am going to first introduce John Cage's philosophy of music and then explain why his music has such amazing effects.

What makes Cage's philosophy of music unique is, first of all, his view of seeing noises and random sounds as musical materials. Cage's emphasis on the randomness of sounds is closely related to his view that sounds should be free of human desires. He thinks that we should not be expecting anything from a piece of music, just like we should not expect any orderness from the reality. In his book *Silence*, Cage writes the following passage.

What is the purpose of writing music? One is, of course, not dealing with purpose but dealing with sounds. Or the answer must take the form of paradox: a purposeful purposelessness or a purposeless play. This play, however, is an affirmation of life-not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord. (Silence 12)

To create music is not to "bring order out of chaos" but rather a way of affirming life for its chaotic nature. Music is a way of "waking up", of reminding people that the lives we have is chaotic.

Cage wants to create music that reflects the disorder of the world and one of the products of this thought is his chance music. Chance music is a method of composing music by using chance operations that generate random and uncontrollable results. A common manner of chance composing is to have a chart of all the “parameters” of music such as duration, pitch, timbre and tempo, then use some chance operations to generate numbers that direct the composer to certain “parameter” (certain pitch, timbre, etc.) which he is going to input into his composition.

One of Cage’s famous chance compositions is a piece titled *Music of Changes* (1951). In this piece, Cage used a Chinese ancient book *I Ching* as a chance operator and used the results he got from *I Ching* to write(or assemble) the piece *Music of Changes*. The difference of *Music of Changes* with his previous chance compositions is that this work uses chance operations throughout and all of its musical elements are completely random. It is a piece of chaos and I have had some interesting experiences while listening to this piece. My first listen of *Music of Changes* (Book 1) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_r5kJ8XGU_g) is an impression of nothingness. I found no subject, emotion, or form within this piece of music. I tried to listen to it again and something became different. I am not satisfied with just an impression of nothingness and desire to get something from this piece. So I paid very close attention to each detail of the piece and tried to find some similarities of the sounds Cage used. In a sudden, I have this picture of a sharp-pointed object in my mind that I think can be served as a subject of this work. I think the reason for me to think of that is because there are lots of rapid passages and wide use of ranges in *Music of Changes* (Book 1) that give me an imagination of something sharp and long. The formation of the image is not easy, I have to find something consistent within the chaos, which requires the ability of observing, classifying, imagining and analyzing. As I listened to the

piece more and more, I found that I started to respect the randomness of the sounds and gave up the effort of looking for something within the piece, and even the image of this sharp object started to disappear.

Music of Changes is a piece about random sounds, Cage did something that is completely opposite to what other composers have been doing -- to put themselves in composition. The experience of listening to *Music of Changes* helps me to affirm my ability of appreciating something as an art even if it is not about anyone or anything. In his book *No Such Thing as Silence*, Kyle Gann writes:

If you can turn toward the whir of the wind in the oak trees or the pulse of the ceiling fan the same attention you were about to turn to the melodies of the pianist, you may have a few moments of realizing that the division you habitually maintain between art and life, between beautiful things and commonplace ones, is artificial, and that making it separates you off from life and deadens you to the magic around you. (No Such Thing as Silence, 145)

Indeed, the distinction of art and life is created by ourselves and our faculty of artistic appreciation, is boundless. Cage's chance music tells us that if we put enough attention into something, we will receive something that is also valuable.

What is it that makes Cage's music so magical? I think it is about the invitation of its audiences to participate in the work that artists have been doing. Cage's idea of including noise into the materials of music reflects perfectly in his chance compositions, those unintended random sounds can be regarded as "noise". His piece defines a length of unintended sounds as "music", yet these sounds seem to have nothing to do with "music". What would audiences do when they encounter such work? Some might feel cheated, as many audiences during the premiere of 4'33" did. Some might take these sounds seriously and try to make sense of them. By "make sense", I am talking about finding the reason for making these sounds as a music

piece. It can be an attempt of finding something that could unify these sounds, which I believe to be pretty common because that is something that we would usually experience when we listen to music (in a traditional sense), of noticing something that unifies the whole piece. Or it can be an attempt of accepting and appreciating every sound as it is, without the intention of unifying them. But whatever the audiences do, the first thing they need to do is to take everything they hear seriously and that is an important step in the process of Nietzschean self-creation too. We need to first do a comprehensive observation of our different states and examine their aesthetic possibilities (of how these states can reconcile with other states, etc.). Some audiences who are more serious might start to make attempts to unify these random sounds, and that give them the opportunities of learning how to unify different states that are seemingly contradictory to each other. They are doing the work of the artists, namely to reconcile and unify different states. Therefore, I believe that Cage's music is able to facilitate the audiences' ability of observing and unifying different states.

It seems that Cage's chance music is a good example of how an actual artwork is able to facilitate the audiences' ability of self-creation. Cage might have not thought anything about the Nietzschean self-creation when he wrote his chance music, but somehow his music is able to provide a space and time for the audiences to participate in the work of the artists. If we think about how Cage's music affects us, we can find that Cage's music actually offers us an opportunity to get into the process of artistic creation, it is a way of encouraging us to become artists. Somehow, Nietzsche and Cage's philosophy overlaps in this interesting way. Nietzsche emphasizes the power of creating art in facilitating us to better create ourselves; Cage actualizes this power of art by introducing music as an invitation of participating in artistic creation. It

might be supposed that Cage's way of creating art is what Nietzsche would admire because it facilitates self-creation, but it turns out that Nietzsche might strongly oppose Cage's music.

III. An Encounter: Nietzsche and Cage

In *CW*, Nietzsche writes: "but this is the formula for every decadent style: there is always anarchy among the atoms, disaggregation of the will,—in moral terms: 'freedom of the individual,'—extended into a political theory 'equal rights for all'" (CW 35). The "atoms" here can be understood as artistic materials or elements and "will" can be seen as the will of the artist. He criticizes the tendency of having "anarchy among the atoms" and "disaggregation of the will" in art. Cage's art would be regarded as decadent by Nietzsche because his music is obviously chaotic.

Besides that, Nietzsche and Cage also seem to have pretty contradictory views of art. As we talked before about Wagner, Nietzsche admires the art which represents the strong will of the artists and he encourages the artists to set themselves into their work. Cage on the other hand, prefers to remove himself from his work and intends to claim something which he did not create himself as an artwork (such as 4'33"). But interestingly, though Cage makes art in a way that Nietzsche would never do, his works still have a tremendous positive effect on our ability of self-creation.

Although Nietzsche and Cage hold very different points of view of art, I believe there are similarities between their artistic style and their relationship to their audiences. Nietzsche's style of writing, first of all, is very multifarious and has experienced many stages of changes. Within his multifarious styles of writing, there are some commonalities: hyperbole, use of aphorisms,

and what I call as the fragmentation of arguments. When reading Nietzsche, it is hard to find a single thread of thoughts that is present throughout the whole work. For example, in *GS* we might find occasional recurrence of similar statements, but most of the time we are just reading something that seems unrelatable to such a statement. His exaggerated use of language makes his arguments even more ambiguous because sometimes we do not even know whether he is serious with these seemingly exaggerations. The extensive use of aphorisms in *GS* also makes his view harder to understand, because he hardly provides any reasons for claiming those aphorisms or clarifies these views. All of these elements of Nietzsche's writing endows his work with an everlasting sense of ambiguity but at the same time, endows the readers with great freedom of interpretation.

As an author, Nietzsche's relation to his readers is very complicated. To unpack this question, we need to first get an idea of the presence of Nietzsche within his works. Nietzsche's works are passionate and powerful, they undoubtedly carry a strong personal style of Nietzsche. However, on the other hand, it seems that Nietzsche also leaves a great amount of freedom to the readers to interpret his work. There is always a distance between Nietzsche and his readers. In *Z*, Zarathustra says: "go away from me and resist Zarathustra! And even better: be ashamed of him! Perhaps he deceived you" (*Z* 78). Zarathustra is the main speaker of many important ideas of Nietzsche, yet he is telling his followers to leave him. Zarathustra's word is a reminder for the readers: if any of you blindly trust what I propose, you should stop doing so. As an author, Nietzsche hopes to use his work as a way to challenge his readers and encourages them to form their own opinions of his text. He always keeps a polite distance from his reader and refuses to be the only interpreter of his texts.

The relation of Cage to his audiences is very similar to Nietzsche's. Although Cage tries to remove himself from his work, he still remains in his work to a pretty great extent. The presence of Cage within his work is not through musical elements, like Beethoven does, but it is through the methods and ideas of the music. Cage's music asks the audiences of why the composer chose to write a piece like this and what is the importance of doing so. Cage's music does not provide answers, it asks questions and allows different answers from different audiences. Like Nietzsche's work, Cage does not want to impose anything to the audiences, it allows a great extent of interpretation to listeners. Nietzsche is similar to Cage in terms of inspiring the audiences to think of the intention of the artist/author; a curious reader of Nietzsche might keep asking the question of why Nietzsche writes in this particularly unique style.

It should be noted that Nietzsche's work itself is pretty much like an artwork which speaks for itself through its unique form. In *GM*, he writes

If this book(*GM*) is incomprehensible to anyone and jars on his ears, the fault, it seems to me, is not necessarily mine. It is clear enough, assuming, as I do assume, that one has first read my earlier writings and has not spared some trouble in doing so: for they are, indeed, not easy to penetrate. Regarding my *Zarathustra*, for example, I do not allow that anyone knows that book who has not at some time been profoundly wounded and at some time profoundly delighted by every word in it; for only then may he enjoy the privilege of reverentially sharing in the halcyon element out of which that book was born and in its sunlight clarity, remoteness, breadth, and certainty. (*GM*, Pref., 8)

Nietzsche hopes that the reader of *Z* can "at some time been profoundly wounded and at some time profoundly delighted by every word in it". It shows that he allows change of interpretations when we read *Z* in different times and that change could be tremendous. He encourages the readers to read the work differently, from different perspectives, and it is only in doing so we are

able to know the book. In another passage, Nietzsche affirms the power of interpretation as the “essence of life”. This passage is cited below.

Thus the essence of life, its will to power, is ignored; one overlooks the essential priority of the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, form-giving forces that give new interpretations and directions, although ‘adaptation’ follows only after this; the dominant role of the highest functionaries within the organism itself in which the will to life appears active and form-giving is denied. (GM 79)

To “give new interpretations and directions” is what drives one forward and keeps one active. It is reasonable to suppose that Nietzsche wants to arouse the power of interpretation within the readers through his work.

If it is Nietzsche’s intention of inspiring the power of interpretation within his readers, the question of the curious reader that is mentioned before about Nietzsche’s intention of writing could probably be answered. Similar to Cage’s music, Nietzsche’s work as a product of art is able to encourage the readers(listeners) to look at one thing from different perspectives and form their own interpretations. Our understanding of Nietzsche’s work would not be comprehensive if it is not generated from our different interpretations. It is reasonable to suppose that we need to examine our different interpretations and form the most likely one based on the advantages of each interpretation. It is also similar to the process of unifying different states: to find commonalities of different interpretations and enrich these commonalities into a comprehensive explanation of Nietzsche’s work. Therefore, I believe that reading Nietzsche’s book is able to facilitate our ability of self-creation, and that is probably Nietzsche’s intention of writing in such a unique style. If it is true, Nietzsche as an author has achieved an unification of content and form: his form(style) speaks for what he proposes in the content.

IV. Retrospect

If we hold a conversation between chapters two and three with chapter one, we will find out that we will gain some new insights of the arguments we achieved in the first chapter. In the first chapter, we said that artistic creation and self-transformation requires suffering, and we can still see the existence of suffering within the context of chapters two and three. The reason for Nietzsche to introduce the idea of self-creation is because there is no presupposed unified self. People who would like to start the process of self-creation are also the ones who would agree with Nietzsche's view of self and it would be reasonable to state that what motivates them is also the suffering of the fact that there is not a unified being behind their thoughts, behaviors and feelings. It is perhaps this psychological suffering of existing without any identities that drives one to create a unified strong self.

Conclusion

My project is centered by the theme of self-creation, and its inseparable relation with art and suffering.

The first chapter is devoted to providing an interpretation of the quote of Nietzsche that is about art turning our existence into an “aesthetic phenomenon”(GS 164), which makes our existence bearable. The chapter starts by explaining Nietzsche’s view of the world and life. He thinks that an ideal life is a life of self-transformation. Then I propose that it is the meaninglessness of suffering as something that makes our lives unbearable. Regarding suffering, Nietzsche also views it as something that one needs to bear in order to create art and transform oneself. In order to make the meaningless sufferings to become meaningful, the sufferers need to endow suffering with a meaning: that meaning is brought by the attitude of viewing suffering as an opportunity to create art and live in a state of self-transformation. Therefore, living a life of self-transformation would make suffering meaningful because suffering has achieved its purpose.

The second chapter starts with the question of how art turns our existence into a state of self-transformation. I spent the chapter mainly focusing on Nietzsche’s idea of self-transformation. The process of self-transformation is actually a process of creation because Nietzsche does not believe in a concept of presupposed self, and self is something that needs to be created. I explained Nietzsche’s view of self through his critique of Descartes and Kant; he denies that there is anything which is essential and indestructible within a person. Then I introduced Nietzsche’s view of a higher or stronger being as someone who determines values and who lives in a life that he desires. From here, I propose the key thing within the process of

self-creation is to have a system of judging values that is created by our own. I propose that we can do so by observing our different states from different perspectives to find our tendencies of judging values. The second chapter concludes with four stages of self-creation: an observation, a seek of tendencies of value judgments, a formation of value system and the actions.

The third chapter aimed to answer the question of whether the approaches of artistic creation can be applied to the process of self-creation, or whether we can create ourselves as we create art. It starts with Nietzsche's explanation of art and indicates that Nietzsche thinks the purpose of a successful artistic creation is to create an artwork that has a strong unification within highly contrasting states. By comparing the process of artistic creation with that of self-creation, I find that their approaches are pretty similar: they both involve a comprehensive observation and a unification of different states. Therefore I hold that the process of artistic creation can be applied to self-creation. I defend the validity of this statement by examining an opposing argument regarding the difference of art and self. By affirming the positive effect of art in enhancing our ability of self-creation, the question that is at the beginning of the second chapter is also answered. Art helps us to turn ourselves into a state of self-transformation because it teaches us the abilities we need to acquire for a successful self-creation. While Nietzsche focuses on the process of artistic creation, I become interested in the product of art creation and I find Cage's chance music as an example of how an actual artwork is able to facilitate people's ability of self-creation too. In the end, by comparing Nietzsche and Cage's artistic styles, I arrived at the claim that Nietzsche writes in such a unique style because he wants to use his work to inspire us to practice the ability of observation, interpretation and unification. He hopes to use his works to enhance our ability of self-creation.

Some of the topics and questions discussed in this project can definitely be discussed further. A question I am really interested in but do not have much chance to talk about it in the project is a question of whether artistic creation is necessary in order to start the process of self-creation. My feeling is that artistic creation is not necessary, but Nietzsche seems to draw too much emphasis on the effect of art on self-creation and hardly introduce any other thing that is also beneficial for self-creation. Another question which we can think more after reading this project is a question of whether there is a starting point for self-creation. Nietzsche seems to claim self-creation as a continuous and consistent project, but he hardly talks about whether there is a startpoint of self-creation.

Throughout his life, Nietzsche continuously emphasizes the power of art in transforming our lives. Nietzsche talks about art in different senses: it can be the specific genre, or it can be an artistic way of appreciation and observation. To Nietzsche, art does not just bring us emotions, it connects with our fundamentally existence and ways of living. Living in the world of appearances, it is necessary to acquire an artistic attitude of living: the artistic way of observing things from different perspectives teaches us how to observe ourselves; the artistic way of unifying different materials teaches us how to manage our different states. The appearance of Cage's music provides a new possibility of actualizing Nietzsche's power of art -- to use an actual artwork to invite audiences to participate in the work of the artists. Though Nietzsche would dislike Cage's music, one has to admit that the experiences of reading Nietzsche and listening to Cage are pretty similar -- one is able to participate in the process of artistic creation. I appreciate Nietzsche's continuous efforts of emphasizing the importance of self-creation both

through the content of his work and his style of writing. Nietzsche as a thinker and as an artist is in a unified image from this respect.

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