



Becoming-Dionysian: Art, Exploration and  
the Human Condition in the Works of  
Rimbaud, Burroughs and Bacon

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Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

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Private Collection

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Photographic print

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Private Collection, New York

Source: Ades

# Abstract

Combining the Nietzschean concept of the Dionysian with the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of becoming, this thesis proposes a theory which will be called Becoming-Dionysian and applies this theory to selected works of Arthur Rimbaud, William Burroughs and Francis Bacon.

As elaborated in *The Birth of Tragedy*, for Nietzsche the human condition oscillates in between the world built by social relations (the Apollonian) and the primal, basic realm of existence (the Dionysian). Art, in Nietzsche's view, is not only the true metaphysical labour of human life, it is also more important than truth and it is thus in the space of art that the interaction between these two poles can be explored.

The dynamism implicit in Nietzsche's schema is systematised by the notion of becoming in the thought of Deleuze and Guattari. For them, existence is not a static state of being but rather an involutory process of creation they term becoming. By translating Nietzsche's grand pronouncements on the necessity of art within his idealised Attic culture to the level of the individual, Deleuze and Guattari provide a more useful framework from within which to analyse specific aspects of human existence.

Combining the insights of Nietzsche with the system of Deleuze and Guattari, this thesis proposes a theory called Becoming-Dionysian which aims to show how the works of specific artists can be seen to engage with Nietzsche's understanding of the human condition.

Becoming-Dionysian as a theory argues that the exploration of the human condition undertaken by some artists is manifest not simply in the finished

work, as in many analytic models, but in the entire creative process. As such, the practice of the artist is as relevant for an understanding of their work as the finished work itself. Rimbaud, Burroughs and Bacon are all artists who in some way expand their spectrum of human experiences by using intoxication. It is for this reason that they are particularly relevant for this study because through intoxication they precipitate an experience of the Dionysian. Upon return to the Apollonian / consciousness, the artist explores the relation between these two realms and it is this process of exploration and relation that Becoming-Dionysian as a theoretical construct is designed to explore.

# Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

I give consent for this thesis, when deposited in the University Library, to be made available for loan and photocopying.

Brodie Beales

March 2005



# Acknowledgements

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Finally, I want to dedicate this thesis to Eileen Merle Nicholls, who would have kept a copy somewhere prominent and bragged about it. Thanks for all teaching me the importance of wilfulness! I hope that the bragging rights arrive intact.

*This thesis was produced using OpenOffice.org, typeset using L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X 2<sub>ε</sub>, and the GIMP for the images, all of which were run on the Ubuntu Linux distribution.*

## Note on the Text

All quotations from the works of Nietzsche retain his original spellings as reproduced in *Nietzsche: Werke Kritische Gesamtausgabe* ed. by Giorgio Colli andazzino Montimari.

As *Der Wille zur Macht: Versuch einer Umwertung Aller Werte* consists of a vast number of fragments from Nietzsche's Nachlass compiled by Peter Gast and Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche and published as a book in its own right after Nietzsche's death, it is referenced under its own title.

Unless otherwise specified, all translations are my own.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In his introduction to *Art, Origins and Otherness: Between Philosophy and Art*, philosopher William Desmond claims that: “[in art] some important communication of *significant otherness* happens”.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Desmond insists that the communication of otherness in art that is recognised as exceptional relates directly to the exploration by the artist of his reality. Desmond explains: “Great Art has always drawn its admirers by its power to renew our astonishment before the mysterious happening of being, not of course in a seemingly generalised way, but by an aesthetic fidelity to the inexhaustible singularities of the world, human and nonhuman”.<sup>2</sup>

Exploring Desmond’s notion of the importance of art and its relationship to the human condition, by creating and applying a theory of Becoming-Dionysian, this thesis will explore the way in which artists make art that retains significant connection with the artist’s experience of the human condition. The central argument of this thesis is that in creating a work of art that surpasses the restrictions of purely mimetic or expressionistic modes, the artist may be understood as engaged in a process of becoming. This thesis argues that the becoming in which the artist is involved is a dynamic, multiplicitous relation between internal states (here designated with the term

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<sup>1</sup> William Desmond, *Art, Origins, Otherness: Between Philosophy and Art* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 1. (italics in original)

<sup>2</sup> Desmond, p. 2.

Dionysian) and external learning (designated with the term Apollonian), to which the term Becoming-Dionysian may be applied.

Central to the argument put forward by this thesis is that Nietzsche's concept of the Dionysian may be usefully understood as a space of otherness in which the normative restrictions of civilised behaviour, rational thought and personal identity do not apply. One way of reaching such a space is through intoxication. The artist involved in Becoming-Dionysian must experience such a space in order to explore the interaction between this Dionysian realm and the rational self in his art. Exploring such interaction in his art, the artist involved in Becoming-Dionysian may be understood as using art as a process and a space in which the human condition can be problematised and explored.

Becoming-Dionysian as a theoretical proposition originates from Nietzsche's postulation of the two opposing but symbiotic principles which for him govern the human condition. Nietzsche names these principles Apollo and Dionysus. Derived from the attributes of the Greek deities whose names they bear, in Nietzsche's system the principle of Apollo designates civilised learning and individuality, whereas the principle of Dionysus designates instinct, intoxication, irrationality and excess. The interaction between these principles is a defining element of Nietzsche's understanding of the human condition. In order to create a theoretical construct applicable to art from Nietzsche's elaboration of the human condition as a flexible synthesis of these two principles, this thesis draws on the idea of becoming that is elaborated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The use of the idea of becoming as a means of articulating the relation between these principles allows the interaction between the principles of Apollo and Dionysus to retain a dynamic flexibility. Retaining dynamic flexibility within the creative relationship allows Becoming-Dionysian to function both as a theory of understanding the way in which art is created and as a theoretical tool for the analysis of works.

Using Becoming-Dionysian as the theoretical basis of its investigation of art and the role of the artist, this thesis argues that artists making

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use of experiences enabled by intoxication in their work may be seen as actively to precipitate a Dionysian state to which they must later relate. Indeed, intoxication plays an important role in both expanding the theory of Becoming-Dionysian and shaping the choice of artists to whose work Becoming-Dionysian as a theoretical tool is applied. In his own expansion of the Dionysian concept, Nietzsche turns to intoxication both as a means of communicating his understanding of the Dionysian state as the primal state of human being without the restrictions of conscious self and as a means of providing an accessible parallel for his audience of the Dionysian concept of uninhibited, instinctive excess. Following Nietzsche's example, this thesis argues that states of otherness in which the rule of consciousness and rationality is subverted through intoxication bring the artist into direct contact with that which is here termed the Dionysian state. Indeed, it is argued below that such a state is characterised by the incident of experience that is unmitigated by conscious control. Yet, an artist engaged in Becoming-Dionysian must do more than be subject to the states of consciousness and intoxication. Indeed, the fundamental task for the artist of the process designated by the term Becoming-Dionysian lies in exploring the interaction that takes place between the intoxicated, Dionysian state and that which Nietzsche argues is its rational, Apollonian mutation.

As such emphasis on the role of the un-selving of the artist through intoxication may seem to suggest, Becoming-Dionysian defines a theoretical approach to art that does not privilege the role played within the work by its 'content' or message. Instead, the theory of Becoming-Dionysian is created as a frame that enables the examination of the way in which works of art may be seen as spaces of exploration in which the artist explores their own reality of the human condition that derives from the interaction between Nietzsche's principles of Apollo and Dionysus. To use Susan Sontag's terminology as a means of approaching Becoming-Dionysian as a theory, Becoming-Dionysian does not contend that art is either "a picture of reality"<sup>3</sup> or "the statement of

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967), p. 4.

the artist”,<sup>4</sup> both of which presume that the primary role of art is to convey or communicate content to the viewer. Rather, in creating the theory of Becoming-Dionysian this thesis argues that in works of art, artists explore the dynamic interaction between the Dionysian and the Apollonian principles that Nietzsche argues characterise the poles of the human condition.

Using the Deleuzian concept of becoming, Becoming-Dionysian explores a new approach to non- or anti-mimetic creative practices. Mimetic creative practices achieve their aim of re-presenting a subject by imitating the subject as closely as possible in the chosen media of the artist. As such, mimetic creative practices produce a finished product (or work of art) as soon as the artist has completed the imitation of the subject to the best of this ability. Indeed, it may be argued that driven by the aim of imitation, mimetic practices produce a self-sufficient artistic product. Rather than focussing on the product of a structured artistic process, Becoming-Dionysian is focussed on the process by which the art is created and not on the product of the process alone. One way in which this focus on process, rather than product, is achieved, is through the application of the Deleuzian idea of becoming. Applying the idea of becoming to artistic endeavour removes the essential imitative focus of mimesis from creative practice. Becoming does not focus on the achievement of an aim or realisation of a static purpose as mimesis must. Rather, becoming is concerned with continual movement and diversification between heterogeneous entities and does not focus on a single, defined purpose.

One significant implication brought into being through the application of becoming for critical examination of artistic endeavour is the transformative nature of becoming as a process and concept. Becoming does not proceed in a linear fashion, moving from cause to effect or state to state. Instead, through involutive movements of diversification, becoming effects a theoretically endless process of transformation characterised by movement and diversification between heterogeneous entities.

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<sup>4</sup> Sontag, p. 4.

This thesis foregrounds the role of intoxication as a means of shifting focus from artistic intention of the final work to the process by which the work is created. Nietzsche employs the concept of intoxication to communicate to his reader a comprehensible parallel for the Dionysian state in which consciousness or intentionality is absent (or at the very least relegated to a less prominent role than in conscious reality). In this examination of the relationship between chance and intentionality in artistic endeavour using the critical notion of Becoming-Dionysian, intoxication is used to signify a state of being in which consciousness is not the primary controlling principle. Using intoxication as the primary signifier for the Dionysian state, this thesis follows Nietzsche's example as elaborated in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Other states in which consciousness is not the primary controlling principle are not restricted to those related to and with intoxication. Indeed, dream, phantasy, unconscious processes and libidinal desires are also means of abdicating conscious control and may also play important roles in creative processes. Yet, rather than examine the different roles played by these states in the creative process, this thesis has concentrated on intoxication as the primary signifier of a state in which the artist's intentionality is removed from the centre of attention.

For Nietzsche, life should not be viewed as the progression of a single static subject through time, but, rather, the existence of the human being should be seen more as a multiplicity or synthesis consisting of a number of fixed and fluxal forms. Nietzsche describes human being as an "ungeheure Synthesis von lebendigen Wesen und Intellekten, welche „Mensch“ heißt".<sup>5</sup> Describing the elements of the human synthesis in more concrete terms, Nietzsche writes:

Wenn ich etwas von einer Einheit in mir habe, so liegt sie gewiß nicht in dem bewußten Ich und dem Fühlen Wollen Denken, sondern wo anders: in der erhaltenden aneignenden ausscheidenden

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<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1967 - ), VII3 (1974), p. 302. "Incredible synthesis of living beings and intellect that is called 'Man'".

überwachenden Klugheit meines ganzen Organismus, von dem mein bewußtes Ich nur ein Werkzeug ist. — [...] Der Intellekt und die Sinne sind ein vor allem vereinfachender Apparat.<sup>6</sup>

However, rather than explore the socially accepted idea of the self as a unified entity and the importance of understanding the role of these multiplicities and their valuation in human reality as Nietzsche himself went on to do, the present argument takes a more modest and contained approach. This thesis takes Nietzsche's idea of human being or first person synthesis as being composed of a number of complex interactions and focuses on the way in which some of these interactions can be seen in works of art. Indeed, Nietzsche began his own investigation into that which he termed the human condition using classical Greek literature, architecture and drama as his point of entry. Rather than return to Nietzsche's Greek model, this thesis expands upon Nietzsche's idea of the two basic groupings of agents active in the human multiplicity, outlined in his book *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*,<sup>7</sup> and uses them as the basis for a theoretical approach to understanding some examples of more modern artistic endeavour.

The concept of art used in this argument is one that differs in scope and nature from Nietzsche's own understanding of art exemplified by the Classical Greek archetype employed in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche cites the tragic drama of Aeschylus, Wagner's music<sup>8</sup> and Classical architecture as exemplars of his ideal notion of art and creativity. Rather than use Nietzsche's tragic, Attic ideal, this thesis takes a broader and more contemporary approach to the term art and artistic endeavour. Art in the context of this argument is the

<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke*, VIII3 (1974), p. 154. "If indeed I possess any unity within me it does certainly not lie in the conscious 'I' and the feeling, desiring and thinking of this entity, but somewhere else: rather [if extant, such unity may lie] in the astute nature of the sustaining, appropriating, excreting principle that governs my entire organism of which the conscious 'I' is only a tool. — [...] Indeed, the Intellect and the Senses are little more than tools for simplification."

<sup>7</sup> Published in English under (and hereafter referred to by) the shortened title: *The Birth of Tragedy*.

<sup>8</sup> Note: *The Birth of Tragedy* was written at the outset of Nietzsche's idolisation of Wagner and therefore predates the acrimonious conclusion of their friendship.



term applied to human creative endeavour that falls under the heading of fine art. As such, this broader definition includes painting, writing, sculpture and many other media that Nietzsche precluded from his study on the grounds that they were primarily frivolous and decorative. By broadening the narrow scope of idealised art forms employed by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* to include literature, the plastic arts and painting, this thesis uses a notion of art that is more generally accepted and culturally accessible than Nietzsche's ancient model.

In addition to the Introduction and Conclusion, this thesis is composed of four chapters. These four chapters fall into two categories. Chapter Two is concerned with expanding the theory of Becoming-Dionysian, and as such forms the first section and theoretical core of the thesis. The second section, comprising the remaining three chapters of the thesis, is devoted to applications of the theory of Becoming-Dionysian to the works of three artists. The conclusion of the thesis briefly recapitulates the developments that occur in the theory of Becoming-Dionysian through its application to the works of the three artists undertaken in the second section of the thesis and concludes with some suggestions as to areas and artists' works to which Becoming-Dionysian may be usefully applied.

This theoretical chapter begins by asserting the importance of art and the vital role that Nietzsche considers artistic creativity to play in his vision of the human world. The role of Chapter Two is to establish the background of the specific ideas used in creating the theory of Becoming-Dionysian and to show the way in which Becoming-Dionysian expands, extends and makes use of these ideas by joining them together in the creation of a new theoretical application. As such, Nietzsche's ideas of Apollo and Dionysus as they are established as principles in *The Birth of Tragedy* are explored as independently defined but symbiotic in nature in order to provide a background and definitions for key referents used in expanding Becoming-Dionysian as a theory. As it assumes a central role in creating the theory that this thesis expounds, the focus of this explanation then shifts to defining Nietzsche's Dionysian and the notion of intoxication is explored as a means of both communicating

and embodying the Dionysian state.

Having outlined the Dionysian state and the possible means by which such a state may be experienced, this chapter then develops Nietzsche's concept of a Dionysian-Apollonian dichotomy as it relates to creative endeavour by making use of the Deleuzo-Guattarian idea of becoming. Indeed, the concept of becoming as a means of explaining the movement between a Dionysian state and its conscious Apollonian counterpart are for Nietzsche the poles between which the human condition may be seen to oscillate. Making use of Nietzsche's idea of intoxication, becoming allows for the creation of a theory of Becoming-Dionysian insofar as Becoming as a non-linear, non-goal-oriented process is able to embrace the multiple nature of Nietzsche's idea of human self that his archetypes of Dionysian and Apollonian and their symbiotic interaction serve to explain.

Finally, this chapter uses the relationship between the artist and the creative process to demonstrate the reality of Becoming-Dionysian in the context of making art. This thesis argues that it is within such a context that Becoming-Dionysian is able to provide insight into the artistic process by examining the way in which the artist makes use of both his experiences of inner states (or the Dionysian) and conscious reality (the Apollonian) in the creation of works of art.

In order to establish from the outset of analysis Rimbaud's connection with Becoming-Dionysian as a theoretical frame Chapter Three, entitled 'Am I escaping? I am explaining: Rimbaud's Necessary Revolution' begins with a reading of Rimbaud's famed *Lettres du Voyant*.<sup>9</sup> Written in May 1871, in these two letters Rimbaud expounds his vision of poetry and art as intimately connected with a program of experiential experimentation and expansion that Rimbaud deems necessary to become an artist. It is Rimbaud's prescription for authentic creativity that places the experience of the artist at the centre

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<sup>9</sup> Whilst known popularly as *Les Lettres du Voyant*, as befits their status as personal letters, Rimbaud's letters are given no official collective title by their author. As such, because the term 'Lettres du Voyant' is not a true title, but rather a convenient term of designation for these two letters, it is not italicised.

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of the creative process that this thesis contends is Becoming-Dionysian in nature. Yet, at the time of writing these letters, as a poet Rimbaud was still using the antiquated forms and language against which he advocated rebellion in his missives. Following the examination of his *Lettres du Voyant*, this chapter uses the theoretical frame provided by Becoming-Dionysian to explore Rimbaud's poetic journey as it departs from the ideals and ideas in the letters of May 1871 until his abandonment of poetry following the *Illuminations* and *Une Saison en Enfer*.

Examining Rimbaud's poetic development in this way allows the concept of Becoming-Dionysian to frame the incremental developments Rimbaud makes in his journey toward the realisation of his ideal of authentic creativity. In order to realise the aims laid out in his *Lettres du Voyant*, Rimbaud embarks on a process of experiential experimentation that is understood in the context of the present argument as Becoming-Dionysian in order to gain an understanding of that which Rimbaud terms 'the unknown'. As a result of this experimentation and his desire to place the experience of the artist at the centre of his creative revolution, Rimbaud is forced to make a number of subsequent alterations to concepts such as poetry itself and the language with which it is created. This chapter traces the necessity and the impact of these alterations on the development of Rimbaud's project through his poetry, arguing that it was only through the Becoming-Dionysian process of which these alterations were part that the *Illuminations* and *Une Saison en Enfer* were made possible.

Moving away from Rimbaud's comparatively focused example, yet continuing the theme of intoxication and experimentation, the second of the case studies examines the work of novelist William Burroughs. Entitled 'The way OUT is the way IN: William Burroughs' Brave New (naked) World', Chapter Four argues that Burroughs' work draws from his own experiences of social alienation, intoxication and sobriety to arrive at a creative process dependant on the kind of oscillation that is seen in what is here termed Becoming-Dionysian. In order to demonstrate the validity of this claim, this chapter explores Burroughs' earlier works such as *Junkie* and *Queer* to

demonstrate that the development of his creative process is directly influenced by the social stigmatisation of his homosexuality and his experiences as a heroin addict. It is argued that these experiences caused Burroughs to realise a space of otherness or escape that is here termed a Dionysian space as an alternative to rational consciousness. Indeed, this chapter argues that it is the oscillation between this Dionysian space and the auspices of social reality that defines Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian creative process.

The discussion of Burroughs' work begins with an examination of the role of intoxication in actualising Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian. This chapter argues that intoxication was vital to Burroughs' creative process because through intoxication Burroughs was initiated into an intoxicated space that was apart from his experience of normative, sober consciousness. It is argued that the initiation of this space of 'otherness' may be seen as a Dionysian sphere and that the movement to and from this space follows exactly the cycle of need and fixing that defines Burroughs' junkie state. In order to show the importance of a space of otherness in his writing, and the varied ways in which Burroughs used these spaces, this chapter examines a number of Burroughs' early texts. Burroughs' early writings are examined in order to show the ways in which he experimented with a number of different techniques and methods of accessing and exploring a Dionysian space of otherness and its implications in his work. By using the concept of Becoming-Dionysian to frame this analysis, it is argued that Burroughs' characteristic technique present in *Naked Lunch* is reliant on his discovery of the intoxicated space, and, indeed, that his written works may be usefully understood as realms in which he explores the interaction between his intoxicated experience and his sober, rational world. This chapter concludes with Burroughs' schematisation of his technique of accessing and relating to spaces of otherness called the cut-up. Placing the cut-up at the conclusion of this analysis of Burroughs' work using Becoming-Dionysian makes the point that in the cut-up Burroughs systematised a means of achieving a space of otherness that he had hitherto achieved through junk. Thus, presenting the cut-up as a schematised version of Burroughs' greater Becoming-Dionysian seen in the

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texts examined in this chapter makes a logical point of conclusion for this examination of Burroughs' work.

Departing from the concern with the written word in the preceding case studies, the third and final case study concentrates on the painting of Francis Bacon. Bacon is famous for commenting that his pictures were not intended to incite horror in the viewer and that, as an artist, he was trying only "make images as accurately off my nervous system as I can".<sup>10</sup> Focussing on Bacon's works in combination with a series of interviews with the artist in order to investigate Bacon's painterly technique, subject matter and creative processes, this chapter uses Becoming-Dionysian to frame the way in which Bacon sought to explore in his work the immediacy of his own experience whilst retaining control over the image as an artist.

This chapter retains a focus on Bacon's desire to explore in his art his own human experience with the greatest clarity. As such, the first issue this chapter deals with is Bacon's definition of himself as a realist and his art as realistic. Understanding Bacon's goal of image-making as a struggle for a 'human realism', the means by which Bacon sought to bring such realism about are examined using the critical tool of Becoming-Dionysian to show the ways in which Bacon drew on his understanding of the importance of inner and outer realities in art. One key element in Bacon's art is that of chance, and chance is manifest in his work in a number of ways and plays a number of roles. This chapter argues that by directly precipitating the influence of chance in his works, Bacon brings a manifestation of Nietzsche's Dionysian principle into his painting. Since chance is such a key element of Bacon's technique and method as a painter, this chapter then proceeds to examine the ways in which Bacon used and interpreted chance throughout his career. Beginning with *Painting 1946*, moving through his Grisaille Period and on to the expansion of his palette and his concern with colour and movement, this chapter traces the ways in which Bacon made use of a creative process

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<sup>10</sup> David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987), p. 82. Bacon deliberately uses the word "off" rather than "of" in this instance.

that drew on his fundamental understanding of the importance not only of the appearance of a subject, but also that which Bacon termed “the energy within the appearance.” Indeed, it is Bacon’s struggle to incorporate both of these elements into his work and his experience of the creative process, that this chapter contends, is Becoming-Dionysian in nature, and it is this struggle also which is vital to his creation of his ‘human realism’.

The possible implications of Becoming-Dionysian as a theoretical model impact on a number of theories concerning the role of art as a conceptual space, the role of the artist and the idea of art as a primarily mimetic undertaking. To contest that art is the space in which Nietzsche’s pre-eminent human interactions are explored may be seen as a move towards a re-orientation of the notion of realism in art and the role of art as a space in which the human condition may be both problematised and explored. Indeed, by viewing art as a designated plane upon which the artist explores a number of interactions, this thesis hopes to go some way towards supporting Nietzsche’s proposition that art is undeniably the true metaphysical activity of human life.

## Chapter 2

# Becoming-Dionysian: Nietzsche, Art, Becoming and the Human Condition

### 2.1 Introduction

This thesis takes the position that all art that explores the human condition is created through a continually shifting series of dynamic relationships within and around the artist. The purpose of this chapter is to elucidate a theory of Becoming-Dionysian that may aid in better understanding the nature of these relationships and their interaction in the creative process.

### 2.2 Nietzsche and Art

In his study of Nietzsche, J. P. Stern carries out a distillation of Nietzsche's own fundamental position in regards to art, literature and creative

expression. According to Stern, Nietzsche's position contradicts the commonly accepted Kantian lines of contemporary thought on the role and importance of art. Stern writes:

[For Nietzsche] the activity of artists — traditionally seen as the makers of metaphors — and the aesthetic activity in general assume an entirely central position in the world. Art is in no sense esoteric or marginal, but becomes the human activity *par excellence*: it is creative existence. The 'justification' of the world through 'the aesthetic activity' is identical with the 'justification' or meaning imprinted on the world through man the maker of linguistic conventions, that is, of a system of 'metaphors'. This in turn implies that gnosis on which Nietzsche's theory of tragedy was founded: it implies the existence of a hostile universe of silence before and beyond language, within which our little human world of language is an oasis of life, comfort and sustenance, but not of *truth*.<sup>1</sup>

For Nietzsche, then, art provides a way of approaching and exploring this 'hostile universe of silence' that envelops human being. Within the Nietzschean cosmology, artistic journeys of experience and exploration and their expression in what must necessarily be metaphor are what Stern terms the "justification" of the world in which human beings struggle for knowledge of themselves and the origins of their becoming. This being the case, the understanding of the role and nature of art in the Nietzschean cosmology is consistent with his creative doctrine of the will to power (as outlined in chapters one and two of *Also Sprach Zarathustra*) and the emphasis on the 'whole man' for whom, and towards whose creation, everything is a means. Indeed, Nietzsche makes the point that in such a world: "daß die Kunst mehr wert ist, als die Wahrheit".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. P. Stern, *Nietzsche* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Wille Zur Macht; Versuch einer Umwertung Aller Werte*, ed. by Peter Gast and Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1964), p. 578, "That art is of greater worth than truth".



However, due to their inherently personal nature, metaphors are the exact opposite of accepted 'truth' which in this instance is for Nietzsche a fixed state or linearly-defined aim that prevents man from embracing the diverse facets of experience that form the basis of his existence. Thus, for Nietzsche, it may be argued that the metaphors of art explore the myriad of personal perceptions and possibilities of first-person human being through aesthetic/creative endeavour.

Embracing the reality of a truthless world through an active engagement in creative existence and accepting the certainty of 'untruth' as a fact of this existence is the path of the *Übermensch*.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it follows that any activity that has as its emphasis both creativity and exploration through experience is the centre of a Nietzschean cosmology that strives for an understanding and experience of all parts of life. However, the art defined by, and itself defining, conventional aesthetics is not the same art that lies at the heart of the Nietzschean universe. In Nietzsche's view, the art that lay at the centre of his world view necessitates active involvement of the audience with the art itself. In order to justify his understanding of art as "die große Ermöglicherin des Lebens",<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche was obliged to engage in a revolution of the notion and role of aesthetics in both the human and philosophical contexts. In giving art such importance in his cosmology (a cosmology that has as its focus the attainment of the will to power), the scope of Nietzsche's reevaluation of the role of aesthetics amounted to an explosion of the practical discipline of aesthetics and the idea around which the practical aspect of aesthetics was centred.

Such an explosion was required because conventional aesthetics could simply not be expanded to the extent required by Nietzsche. As he explains: "Was liegt an aller Erweiterung der Ausdrucksmittel, wenn Das, was da ausdrückt, die Kunst selbst, für sich selbst das Gesetz verloren hat!"<sup>5</sup> For Ni-

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Nehmas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, p. 577, "The great enabler of life".

<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, p. 562, "What is the point of expanding the means of expression, when that which is expressed, art itself, has lost the law of its very being!".

etzsche, this explosion was needed in order to have what was conventionally understood as a narrow doctrine under Kant and Hegel open up to embrace the whole of reality.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it may be argued that the Nietzschean notion of art is necessarily one of active and total engagement, involving: “appropriating, possessing, subjugating and dominating”<sup>7</sup> actions through which this new aesthetics “means to impose forms, to create forms by exploiting circumstances”.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Nietzsche’s new concept of a total aesthetics sees the very deployment of creativity as a means to explore and understand being and to form its destiny through the exercise of will in creative expression. Nietzsche’s art was indeed the art of life itself. Nietzsche writes:

Die Kunst und nichts als die Kunst! Sie ist die große Ermöglicherin des Lebens, die große Verführerin zum Leben, das große Stimulans des Lebens.

Die Kunst als einzig überlegene Gegenkraft gegen allen Willen zur Verneinung des Lebens, als die Antichristliche, Antibuddhistische, Antinihilistische par excellence.

Die Kunst als die Erlösung des Erkennenden, — dessen, der den furchtbaren und fragwürdigen Charakter des Daseins sieht, sehen will, des Tragisch-Erkennenden.

Die Kunst als die Erlösung des Handelenden, —dessen, der den furchtbaren und fragwürdigen Charakter des Daseins nicht nur sieht, sondern lebt, leben will, des tragisch-kriegerischen Menschen, des Helden.

Die Kunst als die Erlösung des Leidenden, — als Weg zu Zuständen, wo das Leiden gewollt, verklärt, vergöttlich wird, wo das Leiden eine Form der großen Entzückung ist.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze, ‘Active and Reactive’, in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, ed. by David B. Allison (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), p. 83.

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze, ‘Active and Reactive’, p. 83.

<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, p. 577, “Art and nothing but art! Art makes life possible, seduces one to life, is the great stimulant to life. Art as the only counterforce against the will to deny life. Anti-Christian, anti-Buddhist anti-nihilist par excellence. Art as the redemption of the knower, — of those who see the terrifying and questionable character of being, those who want to see these things. Men of tragic knowledge. Art

### 2.2.1 Nietzsche and *The Birth of Tragedy*

This notion of a total aesthetics both drawn from and necessitating an art of engagement is the subject matter of the first book published by Nietzsche in his capacity as professor of philology. In both subject matter and style, *The Birth of Tragedy* was neither overtly philological nor philosophical in nature. To make matters worse for the young professor it was poorly received by his peers who, on the whole, either ignored it or, when they wrote of it at all, gave it blisteringly acerbic, negative reviews.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps due in no small part to its lack of pronounced philosophical or philological perspective, *The Birth of Tragedy* has been afforded little attention by Nietzsche scholars who see it, on the whole, as ‘anthropological’<sup>11</sup> or, at best, as evidence of his move away from philology and towards philosophy.<sup>12</sup> Dennis Sweet summarises the attitude of most Nietzsche scholars to this text when he writes, “*The Birth of Tragedy* is ostensibly an account of the psychological motives behind the creation and modifications of Greek drama”.<sup>13</sup> However, Sweet goes on to add that such a limited reading leads to a shallow understanding of Nietzsche’s critique, insisting, “it [*The Birth of Tragedy*] is really much more than this, it is the author’s first attempt to understand the dynamic processes of human creativity in general”.<sup>14</sup>

In order to contextualise the contemporary political and aesthetic environment in which his radical concept of the role and foundation of art was

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as the redemption of the one who acts. — Of those who not only see the terrifying and questionable nature of being but live it, and want to live it. Those who are tragic-warriors. The heroes. Art as the redemption of those who suffer. — As the path to states in which suffering is willed, transfigured, deified, a place in which suffering is a form of rapture”.

<sup>10</sup> See: Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, *Zukunfts-philologie! Eine Erwiderung auf Friedrich Nietzsche’s “Geburt der Tragödie”* (n.p.: [n. pub.], 1872).

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin Bennett, ‘Nietzsche’s Idea of Myth: The Birth of Tragedy from the spirit of Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics’, in *PMLA*, 94.3 (1979), 420-433, p. 420.

<sup>12</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy* is, however, dealt with in many examinations of the art and aesthetics of the ancient Greeks and remains of at least passing interest in the sphere of Classical historiography.

<sup>13</sup> Dennis Sweet, ‘The Birth of *The Birth of Tragedy*’, in *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, 60.2 (1999), 345-359, p. 345.

<sup>14</sup> Sweet, p. 345.

conceived, Nietzsche begins *The Birth of Tragedy* with an ingratiating dedication to his then close friend Richard Wagner and a series of jibes aimed at conventional arbiters of taste and judgement. To readers heavily involved with the contemporary cults of faith in reason, the traditions of society, current events and the narrow Kantian understanding of art as the product of disinterest, Nietzsche addresses the following paean:

Doch werden diejenigen irren, welche etwa bei dieser Sammlung an den Gegensatz von patriotischer Erregung and aesthetischer Schwelgerei von tapferem Ernst und heiterem Spiel denken sollen [...] Vielleicht aber wird für dieselben überhaupt anstössig sein, ein aesthetisches Problem so Ernst genommen zu sehen, falls sie nämlich in der Kunst nicht mehr als ein lustiges Nebenbei, als ein wohl zu missendes Schellengeklingel zum „Ernst des Daseins“ zu erkennen im Stande sind: als ob Niemand wüsste, was es bei dieser Gegenüberstellung mit einem solchen „Ernst des Daseins“ auf sich habe. Diesen Ernsthaften diene zur Belehrung, das ich von der Kunst als höchsten Aufgabe and der eigentlich metaphysischen Thätigkeit dieses Lebens im Sinne des Mannes überzeugt bin, dem ich hier, als meinem erhabenen Vorkämpfer auf dieser Bahn, diese Schrift gewidmet haben will.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1967 - ), IIII (1972), pp. 19-20. Rather than undertake my own isolated fragments of translation, for the sake of continuity (and with an appreciation of the importance of specific terminology in translation of Nietzsche) the longer translations from *The Birth of Tragedy* provided are taken from *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. by Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). References to Smith's translation will be referred following each translation using (Smith, p. ). Using a complete translation of *The Birth of Tragedy* allows the reader to familiarise themselves with the translation and its vocabulary and in so doing to orient themselves in Nietzsche's text. "Readers would be mistaken who approach this collection of ideas with an opposition between patriotic excitement and aesthetic indulgence in mind, an opposition between bold seriousness and the serenity of play [...] But perhaps such readers are in any case the kind who will take offence at the sight of an aesthetic problem being taken so seriously, if they can see in art nothing more than an amusing sideshow, a readily disposable tinkling of bells to accompany the 'seriousness of existence': as if no one knew what is at issue in this contrast with the 'seriousness of existence'. May it serve as a lesson to these serious people that I am convinced that art is the highest task and the real metaphysical activity of this life in the sense of the man whom, as my sublime pioneer on this trail, I wish to dedicate this book." (Smith, pp. 17-18.).

In order to provide proof of the radical severity of his revolutionary conception of the nature and role of art and its eternal relevance, Nietzsche chooses to demonstrate that which he saw as the Classical lineage of the work of Wagner. Nietzsche viewed Wagner's work as growing from the perfect synthesis of human darkness and light, chaos and reason and the island of human reason in the sea of hostile silence that surrounds the human experience seen in Attic Tragedy. One important feature of Nietzsche's position concerning creativity is his insistence on the power and significance of the so-called 'negative' in both art and human experience. Nietzsche uses the term 'negative' as a means of representing the way in which society views and explains what have become the neglected and the dark elements of pain, terror and suffering inherent in human existence. Through his argument for an understanding of the importance of the 'negative' human experience to the production and relevance of authentic creative activity, Nietzsche also succeeds in roundly criticising contemporary attitudes to art as mere 'diversion' or 'decoration'. By defining a new concept of authentic art for his readers, it may be argued that in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche creates an ecstatic affirmation of the principles and process behind the fundamental and eternal dualism that he considers to be at the heart of true art and creativity.

Contrary to the way that some scholars have received it, *The Birth of Tragedy* is not a critical polemic chastising conventional aesthetics under the auspices of history (witness the proliferation of works concerning Nietzschean aesthetics). Rather, this thesis argues that the importance of Nietzsche's revolution lies in the fact that it sweeps aside the notion of conventional aesthetics, choosing instead to establish new criteria for art and artist with less regard for the product than for the process from which it is created. This disdain for artistic production, with its emphasis on appearance at the cost of all else, contributes to a process Deleuze identifies as Nietzsche's "esthétique de la création".<sup>16</sup> Robert McGahey goes so far as to claim that it is precisely because of this radical vision of the role and importance of creativity and art

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<sup>16</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la Philosophie* (Paris: Quadrige / Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), p. 116.

found in *The Birth of Tragedy* that it is in fact Nietzsche's "most important book".<sup>17</sup> Indeed, it may be argued that what Nietzsche seeks in his radical reevaluation of art is more than a return to the classical forms and ideals, it is in fact an active seeking and engagement with the principles and experiences that shaped Attic Tragedy. Significantly, Nietzsche names these poles of experience after the Hellenic gods whose personalities and responsibilities align with responsibilities and ideals that Nietzsche intends the artist to be familiar: Apollo and Dionysus.

In positing Dionysus and Apollo as the two poles of his dichotomy, it may be argued that Nietzsche seeks to demonstrate to the reader the value of artistic endeavour for humanity as a whole. As with all Nietzschean revaluations, Nietzschean aesthetics are concerned with the *origins* of artistic thought and creative endeavour. In order to explain his understanding of the origin of art in the most comprehensible way, Nietzsche chooses to illustrate his concept using the traditional philosophical method of dichotomy. Yet, the poles of Nietzsche's dichotomy are not the conventional, irreconcilable opposites of black and white, right and wrong, good and evil. Rather, they are engaged in a more complex relationship of mutual dependence and are essentially and fundamentally challenging to one another.

Asserting two anthropomorphic poles in Dionysus and Apollo, between which art and human experience and expression move, Nietzsche indulges in a dramatisation of his dualistic concept of creativity. The desire to understand what may be seen as the oscillation inherent in the human condition has long been of interest to Western thought. Indeed, a great deal of Western thought may be traced through the dualisms postulated to explain and render rational the ways in which human nature seems to combine the influence of two disparate yet equally tangible extremes. Thus Nietzsche's postulation of the Dionysian and the Apollonian as the poles between which human existence spins its web sits alongside more established dualities such as the psychophysical dualism of Plato's *Phaedo*, the metaphysical dualism

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<sup>17</sup> Robert McGahey, *The Orphic Moment: Shaman to Poet-Thinker in Plato, Nietzsche, and Mallarmé* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 56.

of Descartes and the religious dualisms of God and Devil, good and evil and Heaven and Hell that characterise Christianity. Even Nietzsche's own Apollo – Dionysus dichotomy engendered followers. Amongst others, psychologist C. J. Jung was deeply influenced by Nietzsche's dualism put forward in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and equated Nietzsche's eventual madness or mental collapse as a manifestation of his immersion in the Dionysian (something of which Jung was pathologically afraid). Putting such speculation aside, what is certain is that in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche draws on elements of all of these established dualisms in order to create a principle that he considers to render with clarity the profound depth of that which he considers humanity's greatest achievement: art.

### 2.2.2 Apollo and Dionysus

Amongst the gods of the Hellenic pantheon there exist no two gods further estranged from the roles and existence of one another than the artistic deities Apollo and Dionysus.<sup>18</sup> Whereas Apollo was the chief of the muses and aligned with the protection and inspiration of the rational and cultured arts of architecture and poetry, Dionysus was something of an anomaly among the Greek deities and was characterised by ambiguity, frenzy and excess as the god of mystery, wine and the theatre. Apollo was beautiful, eternally young and sophisticated whereas, as the pious scholar Pausanias documents, the child Dionysus was killed by the Titans and born again.<sup>19</sup> According to Orphic doctrine, the slaying of Dionysus and the subsequent reduction of the Titans (and the boiled pieces of the dead god) to dust by Zeus caused humanity to be brought into being from their ashes.<sup>20</sup> Thus, it is important

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<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche designates both Dionysus and Apollo as artistic deities. However little evidence of artistic dominion belonging to Dionysus is found in the works of other classical scholars. For an outline of the traditional understanding of the nature and deeds of Dionysus. See: Robert Graves, *Greek Myths* (London: Cassell, 1955), pp. 103-111.

<sup>19</sup> C. Kerényi, *Dionysus: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, trans. by Ralph Manheim, Bollingen Series LXV.2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 241.

<sup>20</sup> Dionysus was ripped apart by the Titans who were prevented from eating him by the wrath of Zeus who turned them to dust with bolts of lightning. See: Kerényi, pp. 245-246.

to note for the implications of Nietzsche's dichotomy that Dionysus was gifted with first-hand knowledge of the experience of death and therewith the pain, terror and formlessness of non-being. Indeed, it may be suggested that as Dionysus was reduced to dust along with the Titans and as this dust was the matter used by Zeus to make humanity, this understanding of the birth of humanity as an entity may also have been of interest to Nietzsche.

The fact that Dionysus was born again, grew to manhood and used the experiences gained from his physical annihilation as an integral element of his rites and role as an Olympian is tribute to the way in which he appropriated his suffering as a source of strength. The example of Dionysus is one to which Nietzsche frequently alludes in order to demonstrate the concepts of the will to power and the necessity of suffering for the realisation of the latter. In terms of both rites and roles, Apollo was as rational and cultured as Dionysus was frenetic and mysterious. From his understanding of the art, religion and society of the ancient Greeks, Nietzsche extrapolated the characteristics and cults of both Dionysus and Apollo to form the conceptual basis of his examination of the poles of the Apollonian and Dionysian between which he considers art, society and humanity to be in perpetual oscillation. Apollo cannot live without Dionysus, and this eternal bond was one in which "das Dionyische und das Apollinische in immer neuen auf einander folgenden Geburten, und sich gegenseitig steigernd das hellenische Wesen beherrscht haben".<sup>21</sup>

Put succinctly, Nietzsche identifies the principle of Dionysus with the primal ecstatic rush of unmitigated and un-individuated sensation. The riotous sentiment of crowds, mob rule, drunkenness and all manner of 'taking leave of one's senses' were all Dionysian in nature. Indeed, it may be argued that all of the attributes of Dionysus were based on the primal affirmation and preservation of life and strength. Arianna Stassinopoulos and Roloff Beny concur with such a vision, concluding that Dionysus represents:

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<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 37, "The Dionysian and the Apollonian have dominated the essence of the Hellenic in an ongoing sequence of new births in a relationship of reciprocal stimulation and intensification." (Smith, p. 33).



[the] madness of the supreme moment of creation, of the enchanted moment when man is flung out of his routine world, his settled thoughts and feelings, his ordered existence and dives into the cosmic depths in which the forces of life dwell. 'This madness which is called Dionysus is no sickness, but a companion of life at its healthiest.'<sup>22</sup>

In contrast to the Dionysian, Nietzsche identified the Apollonian as resulting from distance and meditation, reliant on appearance and moderation. In working toward defining a theory of Nietzsche's tragic, William Storm insists that in contrast to the primal "oneness" of the Dionysian, the Apollonian "ensures a necessary tempering, returning the spirit to the "illusion" of individual selfhood".<sup>23</sup>

Nonetheless, however polarised the principles of Dionysus and Apollo may appear, Nietzsche is quick to affirm that together they form the symbiotic entity composed of knowledge and sensation, proximity and distance that he considers to be manifest in humanity. Nietzsche explains:

Apollo, als ethische Gottheit, fordert von den Seinigen das Maass und, um es einhalten zu können, Selbsterkenntniss. Und so läuft neben der ästhetischen Nothwendigkeit der Schönheit die Forderung des „Erkenne dich selbst“ und des „Nicht zu viel!“ her, während Selbstüberhebung und Uebermaass als die eigentlich feindseligen Dämonen der nicht-apollinischen Sphäre, daher als Eigenschaften der vor-apollinischen Zeit, des Titanenzeitalters, und der ausser-apollinischen Welt d.h. der Barbarenwelt, erachtet wurden. Wegen seiner titanenhaften Liebe zu den Menschen musste Prometheus von den Geiern zerissen werden, seiner übermässigen Weisheit halber, die das Räthsel der Sphinx löste, musste Oedipus in einen verwirrenden Strudel von Unthaten stürzen: so interpretierte der Delphische Gott die griechische Vergangenheit.

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<sup>22</sup> Arianna Stassinopoulos and Roloff Beny, *The Gods of Greece* (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1983), p. 105.

<sup>23</sup> William Storm, *After Dionysus* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 22.

„Titanhaft“ und „barbarisch“ dünkte dem apollinischen Griechen auch die Wirkung, die das Dionysische erregte: ohne dabei sich verhehlen zu können, das er selbst doch zugleich auch innerlich mit jenen gestürzten Titanen und Heroen verwandt sei. Ja er musste noch mehr empfinden: sein ganzes Dasein mit aller Schönheit und Mässigung ruhte auf einem verhüllten Untergrunde des Leidens und der Erkenntniss, der ihm wieder durch jenes Dionysische aufgedeckt wurde. Und siehe! Apollo konnte nicht ohne Dionysus leben! Das „Titanische“ und das „Barbarische“ war zuletzt eine eben solche Nothwendigkeit wie das Apollinische!<sup>24</sup>

In order to illustrate further the relationship between the principles of Dionysus and Apollo, Nietzsche constructs a perspective on the creation of the system of deities by the ancient Greeks contrary to that held by the traditional and widely accepted schools of classical history.<sup>25</sup> Whereas more traditional scholarly thought sees the creation of a system of deities as a civilising measure inherent in which was a necessary moralising element,<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 36, “Apollo, as an ethical deity, demands of his disciples moderation and in order to maintain it, self-knowledge. And so in parallel with the aesthetic necessity of beauty runs the imperative of ‘know thyself’ and the ‘nothing to excess!’, while arrogance and lack of moderation are regarded as the really hostile daemons of the non-Apollonian sphere, and hence as the characteristics of the age before Apollo, of the Titans, and of the world beyond the Apollonian, that is, the world of the barbarians. It was because of his Titanic love for man that Prometheus had to be torn apart by vultures, it was because of his arrogant wisdom, which solved the riddle of the sphinx that Oedipus had to plunge into a bewildering spiral of atrocities: in such a way did the Delphic god interpret the Greek past.

The effect aroused by the Dionysian also seemed ‘Titanic’ and ‘Barbaric’ to the Apollonian Greek: while he was at the same time unable to conceal from himself the fact that he was inwardly related to those fallen Titans and heroes. Indeed he was obliged to sense something even greater than this: his whole existence, with all its beauty and moderation, rested on a hidden substratum of suffering and knowledge, which was revealed to him by the Dionysian. And look! Apollo was unable to live without Dionysus! The ‘Titanic’ and the ‘barbaric’ were ultimately as much a necessity as the Apollonian!” (Smith, pp. 31-32.).

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche constructs an overview of his position concerning the relationship of the ancient Greeks to their pantheon in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches: Erster Band*. See: Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, IV.2, pp. 117-118.

<sup>26</sup> Nietzsche rebelled in part against the ideas of Johann Joachim Winkelmann who saw in Greek art and culture the expression of “edle Einfelt und Stille Grösse” (noble simplicity and quiet grandeur). See: Johann Joachim Winkelmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (Stuttgart: [n. pub.], 1755), p.

Nietzsche finds himself in direct opposition to the elegant idealism of such conjecture. He contends that the ancient Greeks constructed the gods of Olympus in order to enable the seeming impossibility of everyday life in the face of the primal dread that is an inherent part of the incomprehensible and incomplete nature of human existence. Furthermore, Nietzsche insists:

Derselbe Trieb, der die Kunst in's Leben ruft, als die zum Weiterleben verführende Ergänzung und Vollendung des Daseins, liess auch die olympische Welt entstehen, in der sich der hellenische „Wille“ einen verklärenden Spiegel vorheilt.<sup>27</sup>

Tying the validation of life and art to the same defining principle, Nietzsche then argues that such an example serves to illustrate the relationship of humanity to the gods they created for themselves, saying: “So rechtfertigen sie Götter das Menschenleben, in dem sie es selbst leben”.<sup>28</sup>

As such, for Nietzsche, in the life of the ancient Greeks the assumed existence of the gods on Olympus had the effect of not only validating the life of the masses but in so doing pacifying, civilising and reassuring the general population. This vast and important effect was enabled through the postulated existence of the gods, which created an important illusion of control over life. By placing this control in the hands of gods that mirrored the roles and desires of the ancient Greeks themselves, the day-to-day lives of ordinary people were removed from total responsibility for their condition and situation. Removing this responsibility for their own condition engendered the idea of fate. Before fate, as before the gods themselves, all of humanity was equal. In creating the illusions of society, religion and reason, Attic civilisation engaged in suppressing, controlling or sublimating the reality

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<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 32, “The same drive that calls art into being as the completion and perfection of existence which seduces the living into living on, also brought into being the Olympian world in which the Hellenic ‘will’ holds up a transfiguring mirror” (Smith, p. 28.).

<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 32, “So the gods justify the life of men by living it themselves” (Smith, p. 28.).

of the terror and insecurity of primal life in a morbid and irrational fear of the forces of uncertainty, chaos and darkness that surfaced only in the controlled circumstances of music, religion and art.

In choosing the creation of the Olympian Pantheon to illustrate his concept of the origins of social reality and of art, Nietzsche argues that it is through art and creativity, not ethics or morality, that humanity engages in its essential metaphysical involvement. Nietzsche writes of the primary importance of art to life: “die Kunst als die eigentliche Aufgabe des Lebens, die Kunst als dessen metaphysische Thätigkeit”.<sup>29</sup> The extent of his commitment to this position is evident in his postulation of the rise of culture and beauty embodied in his vision of ancient Athens and Attic culture as born of fear, pain and suffering. Through the postulation of such a position, Nietzsche heralds an understanding that is central to his entire corpus: that greatness (itself the only true art) is born only through the rational appreciation and appropriation of one’s personal suffering. To this end, he concludes *The Birth of Tragedy* with the narrator speculating a dream sequence in ancient Athens in which the reader is:

im Wandeln unter hohen ionischen Säulengängen, aufwärtsblickend zu einem Horizont, der durch reine und edle Linien abgeschnitten ist, neben sich Widerspiegelungen verklärten Gestalt in leuchtendem Marmor.<sup>30</sup>

Whilst strolling the streets of this Athens of the mind and memory, Nietzsche supposes the reader to be so moved as to cry out:

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<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, p. 578, “Art as the work of life, art as life’s metaphysical activity”.

<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 151, “Strolling beneath lofty Ionian colonnades, gazing upwards towards a horizon defined by pure and noble lines, accompanied by reflections of his transfigured form in the shining marble at his side” (Smith, p. 131.).

„Seliges Volk der Hellenen! Wie gross muss unter euch Dionysus sein, wenn der delische Gott solche Zauber für nötig halt, um euren dithyrambischen Wahnsinn zu heilen!“ – Einem so gestimmten dürfte aber ein grieser Athener, mit dem erhabenen Auge des Aeschylus zu ihm aufblickend, entgegen: „Sage aber auch dies, du wunderlicher Fremdling: wie viel musste dieses Volk leiden, um so schön werden zu können!“<sup>31</sup>

Tying the power and potency of beauty to an intimate knowledge of suffering, Nietzsche discloses a bond he considers to be inherent between the forces of chaos and darkness and the illuminating, if fragile, light of civilisation. Nietzsche suggests that the relationship between the two is characterised by tension and the fluidity of a power-defined relation as they fight for supremacy against one another and in so doing maintain a meniscus of calm over the storm of possibility. He uses the example of modern civilisation to demonstrate the real manifestations of this balance. Nietzsche writes: “Wo sich die dionysischen Mächte so ungestüm erheben, wie wir dies erleben, da muss auch bereits Apollo, in eine Wolke gehüllt, zu uns herniedergestiegen sein”.<sup>32</sup> In a modern, popularised (and post-Freudian) context, Nietzsche’s argument has become the embodiment of a civilisation versus instincts discourse (a version of which appeared in Freud’s classic text *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, published in English as *Civilisation and its Discontents*

In exploring the ways in which the principles of Dionysus and Apollo interact with one another in the creative context, Nietzsche employs his diagnostic capacity in relating this interaction to the greater puzzle of human nature. Nietzsche expressed at the outset of his philosophical undertaking the view that he considers art to be the “real metaphysical activity of this

<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 151-152. “Blessed people of the Hellenes! How great Dionysus must be among you if the God of Delos considers such magic necessary to cure you of your dithyrambic madness!” – But a venerable old Athenian, observing him with the sublime eye of Aeschylus, might reply to someone so moved: ‘Yet say this too, you miraculous stranger: how much this people have suffered in order to become so beautiful!’ (Smith, p. 131.).

<sup>32</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 151. “Where the Dionysian powers rise up so impetuously as we are now experiencing them, there Apollo must have already descended to us veiled in a cloud” (Smith, p. 131.).

life". Thus, by his own admission, inherent in any consideration of this position is an examination and understanding of what it is that this perspective reveals about the nature of humanity itself. Although nominally taking as his subject the principles and factors driving the birth and brief blossoming of the Greek art of Tragedy, he goes on to explore the origins of 'true art', that is to say, art that takes as its subject the reality of the human experience. It is through such an examination that he goes on to illuminate that which he considers to be the creative aspect of the human condition.

### 2.2.3 Nietzsche's Dionysus as Idea, Ideal, Reality and State

Superficially, it would appear as though the Dionysian was the sole creative element of human being in Nietzsche's thought. However, as Nietzsche develops the interdependence aspect of his Apollo – Dionysus dichotomy in *The Birth of Tragedy* to demonstrate, this is far from the case. In order to better understand the essence of Nietzsche's dualistic vision of creativity, it is first necessary to understand Nietzsche's vision of the Dionysian and the way in which the Dionysian relates to the reality of all human life.

In outlining the reality of Dionysus as a continual presence in human life, Stassinopoulos and Beny draw attention to the fragile illusion of civilisation which masks the Dionysian teeming beneath the surface of all human endeavour. They write: "[w]e are an Apollonian people living in an Apollonian civilisation. Or so we think until Dionysus rises from the depths and tears the Apollonian order asunder".<sup>33</sup> The Dionysian experience of an all-encompassing state of visceral being is for Nietzsche an experience of the true nature of instinctive (and therewith primal and ultimately real) human life. Indeed, Stassinopoulos and Beny may be seen to expound Nietzsche's own view of Dionysus when they write of the symbolic value of Dionysus as a

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<sup>33</sup> Stassinopoulos and Beny, p. 97.

principle: "it is greater life, beyond conventions, inertia and fear that Dionysus embodies – life in the round, forever coming into being, forever renewing itself, forever dying and being reborn."<sup>34</sup>

As seen in the quotation from J. P. Stern at the beginning of this chapter, an understanding of human existence as surrounded by "hostile silence" informs the very basis of Nietzsche's understanding of the dichotomy from which creativity springs. In this sense, Nietzsche's Dionysus is very close indeed to the classical view of Dionysus as a deity. However, in the Nietzschean cosmology with its emphasis on the will to power, humanity requires the means to form an understanding of this situation in order to incorporate it into creative human existence for this understanding or situation to be of use in bringing the will to power into being. That is to say, Nietzschean creative existence requires this 'hostile silence' to acquire a tangible aspect in the world beyond an abstract (and therefore in the Nietzschean context, useless) idea. Thus, the Dionysian must be accessed and experienced, which is to say, sought out and experienced and then incorporated into creative endeavour. In this way, the concept of the experiential Dionysian can be used to create a bridge between knowledge of the existence of this ominous and intimidating silence and the acceptance of this knowledge through its assimilation into first-person being through experience.

Within the present study, Stern's silence represents the sea of the unknown that surrounds the Apollonian island of civilisation. Existence without voice or form, being in a permanent state of chaos and excess without the characteristics of individuation or identity forms the essence of the Dionysian, a state Nietzsche identifies readily with music as a means of formless and therefore unmitigated expression. Stassinopoulos and Beny concur with Nietzsche's idea of music as Dionysian in nature, asserting: "[m]usic and dance comes from the depths of life, and from the same elemental depths come inspired art and prophecy. Here Dionysus is the enemy of rigid dignity and self-control".<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, this primal Dionysian formlessness echoes in a

<sup>34</sup> Stassinopoulos and Beny, p. 105.

<sup>35</sup> Stassinopoulos and Beny, p. 105.

human dimension the silence that surrounds the human cosmos through the synergies present between formlessness and lack of definition and the primal sensations of fear and terror that Nietzsche identified as fundamental human truths, illustrated by his depiction of the human reality that precipitated the postulation of the Hellenic pantheon. Yet Nietzsche perceives that access to this life-affirming and inspirational Dionysian chaos has been denied civilised humanity through the Apollonian-derived moral regulations and responsibilities that came with the Christian and Semitic civilisations, a situation that Nietzsche refers to as humanity labouring under the “Schleier der Maja”,<sup>36</sup> that is to say, working under an illusion.

While many theorists and artists alike have ventured understandings of creativity based on duality or conflict (see the iconic examples of Goethe, Freud and Baudelaire), Nietzsche does more than simply proffer a theory for the understanding of modern aesthetics as a clash between socially-determined antecedent factors and the reactions they elicit. Instead of postulating a new reading of existing material, Nietzsche calls for a new art defined not by its aesthetic or technique but by its very nature, that is to say the method and process by which it is conceived and brought to life. Labelling the majority of western art decadent, lazy and thereby worthless, as it fails to challenge or expand the perceptions and understanding of its readers, Nietzsche seeks to provoke a sublime reconsideration of contemporary art and culture. For Nietzsche, art that does not engage the reader on more than a superficial, emotive level, or move the audience closer to the spirit of freedom, is a product of a weakened civilisation and such art is thus a symptom of a greater social decay. True art must challenge the audience and involve the reader through simultaneous appeal to intellect, emotion and instinct with the being and experience of the artist. In so doing, Nietzsche provides in his new aesthetic a polar extreme to the objective and disinterested position of Kant expounded in his *Kritik der Reine Vernunft*. In other words, following

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<sup>36</sup> Here Nietzsche uses Schopenhauer’s term ‘Schleier die Maja’ literally translated as ‘veil of Maya’ (taken directly from *Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*) to denote the world of human perception, which, due to its inherent subjectivity, is involved in an uncertain relationship with any underlying reality. See: Smith, p. 21.



his explosion of aesthetics, Nietzsche intends to incite a revolution in creative endeavour based on a radical new concept of authenticity and its role in the creation of both art and artist. In this revolution, intimate knowledge of the Dionysian, negative or dark aspects of human nature play a vital part.

The choice of Wagner as muse and inspiration for this radical project was logical for Nietzsche as a somewhat star-struck twenty-four year old Classics professor. Even before Nietzsche's meeting, and subsequent friendship, with the avid hobby-Classicist in Leipzig, Nietzsche saw in Wagner's epic style, scope and mythological themes both the presence of strong classical motifs and a tension-filled synthesis born of the potent opposing powers of music and narrative. Given what he considered to be its formless nature, music for Nietzsche was the direct route to the soul and spirit of man, untouched by the impure or moral notions of form and allegory. The marriage of music with epic narrative that Nietzsche considered so successful in Wagner symbolised for him both the breadth of Wagner's genius and the importance and volatile nature of the relationship between what he saw as two conflicting principles: the primal and the learned.

For Nietzsche, successful conjunction between an innate or primal experience of essential life and its considered expression was vital to the production of a work of challenging power and formative possibility. An artist without primal or authentic experience to be explored in his work necessarily produces work of insipid character. The author of such a work would produce a display of simple 'disinterested' aesthetics, or, even worse, an expression of personal taste. Yet, the wordless nature of the primal experience itself was incapable of finding its own terms and language to communicate the depth of sensation and the multifaceted awareness of revelation the artist had experienced. Expression of such wordless, nameless experiences required a vast education in the languages and methods best suited to exploring the experience of these new perceptions, without which the experience itself would remain in its chaotic state, without voice or form. Thus, an education in various artistic means and methods would equip the artist with the necessary resources to approach their experience and to go on and express and explore

its realities in the creative medium of artistic endeavour.

In Nietzsche's opinion, the education of the artist in a vast variety of techniques and methods used in the past to explore and express experiences of the primal, experiential state is vital to the artist's ability to contextualise and explore their own experiences of consciousness and the Dionysian state. It is through the lens provided by this education that the artist is able to see the precedents of their experience and recognise the affirmative nature of the judgments and explorations they are about to undertake. Therefore, just as education of the artist is necessary for an exploration and expression of the Dionysian, so it follows that the development of the Apollonian is a necessary adjunct to the realisation of the Dionysian drive for actualised primacy.

Yet, despite Nietzsche's understanding of the Dionysian as the principle that best describes the underlying force behind the natural world, approaching the Dionysiac state is not something that lies easily within the reach of modern, civilised humanity. Importantly, Nietzsche perceives first-person involvement with the formless Dionysian state of visceral flux as involving the removal of the civilised ideas and concepts of self from the first-person in order to connect the first-person, via experience, with the full extent of the reality of nature and the life force that connects all beings. In order to approach the Dionysian, the subject must dispense with the illusory Apollonian chimeras of identity and defined self. This un-selving is vital to the Nietzschean understanding of Dionysus, the un-individuated communal nature of which stands in stark opposition to the notion of Apollo and Schopenhauer's *principii individuationis* that characterises the modern relation to the world through the medium of the self and the idea of man as subject. Through the un-selving of communion with the Dionysian, humanity is able to become a part of "einer höheren Gemeinsamkeit".<sup>37</sup> Such communion is achieved not as a single individual in a greater crowd, but as one manifestation of the primal life force of nature.

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<sup>37</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 26, "A member of a higher communal nature" (Smith, p.23.).

True to his lifelong passion with the discovery and importance of the origins of states, Nietzsche sees the movement towards the Dionysian as being a 'return' to the *ur*-state of chaotic primal humanity. Just as he has described the Apollonian as being a necessary and useful mutation or adjunct to the Dionysian, the notions of individuality, morality, personal self and identity are constructed to demonstrate what is ultimately a superficial level of free will and independence from the demands of instinct. The way in which the Dionysian continues to make its presence felt through the veil of illusion of control through identity to which the modern world subscribes is through the lusts and drives understood as instinct. However, the way in which the Dionysian is approached does not involve merely willing a return to primal and undifferentiated being. Nietzsche is adamant that stripping away the layers of the Apollonian is not as simple as it may appear. Rather, precipitating the Dionysian involves a more complex chain of understandings and a total level of immersion and involvement without which it is nigh impossible to approach the state of myth and chaos that Nietzsche attributes to the state of Dionysus.

In order to render comprehensible a concept as diverse and mysterious as that symbolised by Dionysus, Nietzsche likens the experience of the Dionysian to a state of intoxication, citing the collapse of the principle of individuation inherent in the loss of self-control as one way to gain "einen Blick in das Wesen des Dionysischen".<sup>38</sup> Thus, perhaps it is logical that it is through the use of intoxication as an analogy that Nietzsche finds the best way in which to explain the reality of the Dionysian to the reader. He writes:

Entweder durch den Einfluss des Narkotischen Getränkes, von dem alle ursprünglichen Menschen und Völker in Hymnen sprechen, oder bei dem gewaltigen, die ganze Natur lustvoll durchdringenden Nahen des Frühlings erwachen jene dionysischen Regnungen, in deren Steigerung das Subjective zu völliger Selbstvergessenheit hinschwindet.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 24, "[A] glimpse of the Dionysian" (Smith, p. 22.).

<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, pp. 24-25, "Either under the influence

The analogy of intoxication allows for the destruction of the principle of individuation through total immersion in a recognisable and familiar state of otherness (in this case, intoxication) initiated through the imbibing of a chemical stimulant, intoxicant or narcotic. Importantly, the use of the analogy of intoxication draws Nietzsche's vision of Dionysus closer to the original Greek understanding of Dionysus as "the god of blossoms' (anthios), specifically the vine blossoms that presage the grape. From the juice of the grape comes wine, an 'inspired' drink that contains, through a mysterious transformation, something wonderful, unique, [and] divine".<sup>40</sup> Such a strong and accessible analogy allows Nietzsche to express the violent otherness of the Dionysian experience to his audience. Significantly, however, intoxication is necessarily frowned upon by the Apollonian constructs/illusions of self, civilisation and control as it is seen to abdicate these principles in favour of an irresponsible state of immature and puerile pseudo-infancy. Therefore, it may be argued that Nietzsche's very invocation of the idea of intoxication brings a real-world or moral connotation of the forbidden and the mysterious to the Dionysian, as intoxication is alien to most moral codes for the same reasons that it is abhorrent to the Apollonian elevation of restraint and control. Intoxication is anathema to both moral codes and the Apollonian ideal because in the intoxicated state the instincts (among other things) are allowed to roam free through the body and consciousness of the intoxicated subject. That is to say, under the influence of intoxicants the human subject is immersed only in their own experience and desires and is not subject to conscious reflection or control.

The impact of this chemically induced freedom on the systems of morality, self and control can be seen to demonstrate the reality of Nietzsche's

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of the narcotic drink of which all original men and peoples sing in hymns, or in the approach of spring which forcefully and pleasurably courses through the whole of nature, those Dionysian impulses awaken, which in their heightened forms cause the subjective to dwindle to complete self-oblivion." (Smith, p. 22.).

<sup>40</sup> Barry B. Powell, *Classical Myth*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, Prentice, Hall, 2003), pp. 277-278.

belief that: “[dass] Leben etwas essentiell Unmoralisches ist”.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, following on from this assertion, Nietzsche notes “sollte Moral nicht ein „Wille zur Verneinung das Lebens“, ein heimlicher Instinkt der Vernichtung, ein Verfalls-, Verkleinerungs-, Verleumdungsprincip, ein Anfang vom Ende sein?”.<sup>42</sup> Taking this perspective into account, the freedom of instincts and therewith loss of personal identity and sense of self combined with the natural pessimism and suffering Nietzsche deems this to engender are at the heart of both the Dionysian state and the experience of intoxication and are of vital importance to human creativity. Nietzsche explains: “Der Künstler liebt allmählich die Mittel um ihrer selber willen, in denen sich der Rauschzustand zu erkennen gibt: [...] die Wirkung der Kunstwerke ist die Erregung des kunstschaftenden Zustands, des Rausches”.<sup>43</sup>

More than this, however, Nietzsche’s analogy of intoxication allows readers with little or no obvious experience of the Dionysian to understand the concept more fully by creating a valuable parallel with their own knowledge. In this way, Nietzsche’s analogy of intoxication becomes logical, reasonable and useful as a means of communicating the reality of the Dionysian experience to a readership with no other means of comprehending his message other than through the shadows of personal experience afforded by their contemporary social context.

Nevertheless, the idea and the reality of intoxication in relation to the Dionysian were not restricted to the role of analogy alone. Whilst the state and experience of intoxication itself is an excellent analogy for the explanation or demonstration of the Dionysian state, it is also a means of acquainting the first-person with its experiential diversity. Nietzsche even goes so far as to describe the first-person totally immersed in the wordless states and

<sup>41</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 13, “Life is something essentially amoral” (Smith, p. 9.).

<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 13, “Might morality itself not be a ‘will to negate life’, a secret instinct of annihilation, a principle of decay, belittlement, slander, a beginning of the end?” (Smith, p. 9.).

<sup>43</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, p. 553, “The artist comes to love for its own sake all that initiates a state of intoxication: [...] the role of a work of art is to precipitate the state in which art may be created: intoxication”.

experiences of primal life as being the “dionysischer Rauchkünstler”.<sup>44</sup> Intoxication, then, is of great importance as a means for the artist to facilitate an experience of the Dionysian state. Through the ability of intoxication to rid the Apolline first-person of the notions of self and identity, the fusion of the intoxicant and the Apolline rational being in intoxication produces an un-selved first person able to engage with the Dionysian state. Such engagement in a state of sobriety is, as Nietzsche insists, impossible for most people.<sup>45</sup> Thus, through intoxication the first-person is rid of the fetters of identity and is able to experience the Dionysian. However, an experience of the Dionysian initiated in this manner will and must come to an end.

Nietzsche uses a suffusion of images and the insightful analogy of intoxication to communicate the all-encompassing ‘otherness’ of a brief experience of the Dionysian state in its awe-inspiring immediacy. He is, however, less descriptive in his treatment of the greater project through which the first-person is to embrace the reality of the Dionysian through engagement with and exploration of this Dionysian experience as a source of strength, inspiration and fundamental vitality over time. Whilst Nietzsche describes the Dionysian in *Der Wille zur Macht* as being “zeitweilige Identifikation mit dem Prinzip des Lebens”,<sup>46</sup> he goes on to insist that a relationship with the Dionysian as it progresses over time is not one of perpetual oscillation between temporary states or experiences. Instead, Nietzsche preaches that the search for “ein neues Zentrum”<sup>47</sup> requires treading a path that leads ever “weiter in der Bahn der Auflösung”.<sup>48</sup> That is to say that for Nietzsche, any relationship to, and with, the Dionysian creeps ever further away from the Apollonian into complete disintegration of rational being.

<sup>44</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 26, “Dionysian artist of intoxication”.

<sup>45</sup> Here the term ‘sobriety’ is used to denote a state unaffected by chemical stimulants and residing in the realm of temporal rationality. For the purposes of present argument, states of religious mysticism or trance such as experienced by the Sufi are defined as sharing the defining principles of intoxicated states.

<sup>46</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, p. 283, “Temporary identification with the principle of life”.

<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, p. 284, “A new centre”.

<sup>48</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, p. 284, “Further down the path of disintegration”.

However, through the temporary initiation of an un-selved first-person, intoxication brings the first-person into rapidly initiated contact with an experience of the unmitigated Dionysian and upon sobering up, back to the Apollonian world of rationality. Yet, Paul Van Tongeren suggests that a relationship to and with the Dionysian through time requires an intricate balance of measure between both the Apollonian *and* the Dionysian.<sup>49</sup> This postulation of an emergent and stable balance exists in opposition to the more violent oscillation between the experiences of intoxication and the Dionysian and their flipside, the return to the Apollonian world of appearances, form and reason upon the return to sobriety. The creation of a sliding balance (increasing in the direction of the Dionysian) is one factor in the becoming of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and his ceaseless quest to embody fully the will to power, which is, in itself, an all-encompassing Dionysiac concept. Yet the idea of a true balance, that is the maintenance of a sustainable and stable equality based on reason as Van Tongeren may be seen to suggest, represents a gross miscomprehension of the scope, importance and idea of Nietzsche's Dionysian. Indeed, balance is not a term or concept conducive to defining the relationship between the exuberant vitality and unrestrained, instinctive, pessimism of the Dionysian and the small and defined island of Apollonian ideas and appearances this vast Dionysian realm surrounds.

Given the importance of the term intoxication in the present discussion, it is important at this point to examine the dual significance of this term in both the present context and Nietzsche's understanding of the term in the greater perspective of *The Birth of Tragedy*. The intoxication to which Nietzsche refers in his discussion of 'narcotic drink' in the above quotation is the momentary and fleeting experience of the freedom and amoral irresponsibility of the Dionysian at the behest of an imbibed intoxicant. The experience of Spring, on the other hand, is a radical transformation of the greater human environmental context of nature that awakens the Dionysian life force of organisms that have lain dormant in the sleep of Winter, analogous in

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<sup>49</sup> Paul van Tongeren, 'Nietzsche's Greek Measure', in *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 24 (2002) 5-24. p. 13.

character to the sleep of the instincts under the veil of Apollo. The use of the analogies of intoxication embodied by Spring and 'narcotic drink' are highly successful in demonstrating the radical change in state the Dionysian represents from the perspective of the civilised, rational and cultured self of the reader. However, given the cyclic nature of the seasons and the limited length of time that any given narcotic can remain in the blood stream in sufficient quantities to create an effect of intoxication, these demonstrative analogies show only the way in which the Dionysian can be brought into being. For Nietzsche, the usefulness of the analogy and reality of intoxication as a means of communicating the Dionysian end in their usefulness as sobriety returns to claim control over the thoughts and actions of the self. In order to better understand the way in which the Dionysian reality of experience can be used in a creative context thus requires us to find a means of exploring the relationship to the Dionysian experience and the Apollonian conscious state through time.

The Dionysian is a primal entity the existence of which is at the core of all natural phenomena (human life included) and, as Nietzsche understands it, it is therefore alien to most rational, conscious and static concepts of balance and order. As such, a relationship to and with this force involves movement (taking the form of approach or engagement) on behalf of the human subject in order to engage with the Dionysian experience, an engagement that takes place at the expense of rational, civilised self and order. This movement towards the mysterious Dionysian (which can only be apprehended through experience) and away from the definition and identity of the Apollonian is valuably and comprehensively explained as a series of becomings, or more succinctly as Becoming-Dionysian. In short, understanding and relating to, and with, a concept such as the Dionysian requires the development of an active engagement which engenders a perspectival shift or diversification for the first person. Due to both its diversity and emphasis on movement, this shift is best characterised by the fully engaged movement of approach or closeness generating affinity, that is to say, becoming.



## 2.3 Becoming: Deleuze and Guattari

As theorists of the fluxal possibilities of nomadic existence in *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari are circuitous in their approach to a definition of any given term, preferring instead to evoke a sense of what becoming might be through demonstration or suggestion. They conclude one such demonstrative definition with the statement: “Devenir est un verbe ayant toute sa consistance; il ne ramène pas, et nous «amène» pas à «paraître», ni «être», ni «équivaloir», ni «produire»”.<sup>50</sup> As a greater part of their collective and political project of refusing to “make sense”,<sup>51</sup> the reduction of their notion of becoming to a simple and easily grasped essence is necessarily impossible without significant oversimplification. Rather than use pre-defined concepts or relations that would emerge in the consciousness of a reader with an unknown amount of contextual baggage, Deleuze and Guattari prefer to explain becoming as a process which is “communicative ou contagieuse”<sup>52</sup> and that takes place “entre hétérogènes”.<sup>53</sup> Because of this, Deleuze and Guattari find the evolution-derived term “involution”<sup>54</sup> far more suitable and go on to insist that the idea of involution can in no way be confused with regression. On the contrary, they insist: “Le devenir est involutif, l’involution est créatrice”.<sup>55</sup>

The creativity of becoming is illustrated by the way in which even something as restricted and outwardly linear as evolution can bring about a “vaste

<sup>50</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980), p. 292, “Becoming is a verb with a consistency all of its own; its does not reduce to, or lead back to, ‘appearing,’ ‘being,’ ‘equalling’ or ‘producing’”.

<sup>51</sup> Heffernan describes this refusal to “make sense” as both a demonstration of Deleuze and Guattari’s commitment to the “avant-garde modernist investment in the politics of style” and “crucial to the book’s [and therewith the greater project of Capitalism and Schizophrenia] political ambitions”. Nick Heffernan, ‘Oedipus Wrecks? Or, Whatever happened to Deleuze and Guattari? Rereading Capitalism and Schizophrenia’, in *Redirections in Critical Theory; Truth, Self, Action, History*, ed. by Bernard McGuirk (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 110-165, p. 117.

<sup>52</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* p. 292, “Communicative or contagious”.

<sup>53</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, p. 292, “Between heterogeneous entities”.

<sup>54</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* p. 292.

<sup>55</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, p. 292, “Becoming is involution and involution is creative”.

domaine des *symbioses* qui met en jeu des êtres d'échelles et des règnes tout à fait différents".<sup>56</sup> In other words, evolution created a number of paths and initiated a number of processes that are fused with their individual realities. This situation of subject-object fusion highlights one of the defining features of the Deleuzo-Guattarian idea of becoming: its lack of engagement in a subject-object relationship with an individual not itself involved with the process of 'becoming'. In this respect, the creativity of becoming in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense is similar to the creative existence Nietzsche postulates as being the willed reality of the *Übermensch*. Just as Nietzsche's creative existence envelops the individual, fusing their existence with the process of creativity so that creativity and the first-person are no longer locked in a subject-object relationship, becoming one thing, so Deleuze and Guattari's idea of becoming is such that "un devenir n'a pas de sujet distinct de lui-même".<sup>57</sup> Becoming, then, is not something to which an object is subject.

Becoming-animal and becoming-woman are two of the primary ways in which Deleuze and Guattari demonstrate the initial application of this idea of becoming to the first-person context. The aim of becoming-animal is to allow the individual to un-bond their thinking of the first-person from its attachment to the pre-coded, cultural concepts of 'man'. That is to say, to loosen their dependence on the "Veil of Maya" and individuated identity. Claire Colebrook describes the role of these becomings in initiating perspectival shift succinctly, saying: "becoming other than man requires becoming-woman or becoming-animal".<sup>58</sup> The first of these becomings (and an inherent part of all subsequent becomings) is becoming-woman. For Deleuze and Guattari becoming-woman is "la clef des autres devenirs",<sup>59</sup> such is the quantum leap enabled by the radical perspective-shift or diversification in, and enabled through, the abandoning of majorative perspectives that becoming-woman

<sup>56</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* p. 291, "A vast domain of symbioses that bring into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms".

<sup>57</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* p. 291, "Becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself".

<sup>58</sup> Claire Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2002), p. xxi.

<sup>59</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, p. 340, "The key to all other becomings".

represents. In order to facilitate the perspectival possibility that such a becoming may create, the first-person is required to perceive the world not as a man or an individual fixed self or being, but rather to view, perceive and engage with the world as, in the examples given, a woman or an animal.

Such becomings entail changes in the first-person in a manner other than the majoritarian human code of behaviour, thought, conduct and being. In short, through their concept of becoming, Deleuze and Guattari aim to describe the world as filled with an infinite number of possible perceptions that are not limited to or derived from the fixed perspectival point of first-person man. As such, the idea of becoming-other aims to remove the prevalent emphasis Nietzsche argues makes “[e]ine Art von Perspektive im Sehen”<sup>60</sup> the “Ursache des Sehens selbst”.<sup>61</sup> These new, un-served, or un-individuated perceptions, allow a proliferation of perspectives to open up before and within the first-person. The aim of the first-person experience of such a diversity of points of view is to debunk the notion of man as a fixed and stable centre of a fixed and stable universe. Following the annihilation of the fixed world of beings that radiates from the notion of man as the stable centre of the stable universe, Deleuze and Guattari go on to demonstrate the way in which both the universe and identity can be understood as a web of multi-directional becomings. Thus, becoming is a journey of multiple processes and directions entailing an abandonment of being-man, which is to say of acting or pursuing the goal of civilised and recognisable humanity and morality through individual personal identity.

Whilst a similar fused and dynamic concept of becoming is implicit in Nietzsche’s understanding of human being and that which may be seen as his multifaceted and simultaneous involution, the recurrent failure of Nietzsche to make this concept explicit has resulted in numerous misunderstandings and misleading interpretations of his work, politics and sentiments.<sup>62</sup> Whilst

<sup>60</sup> Nietzsche, *Die Wille zur Macht*, p. 371, “The perspective of seeing”.

<sup>61</sup> Nietzsche, *Die Wille zur Macht*, p. 371, “The ultimate cause of seeing”.

<sup>62</sup> Indeed, an examination of the notion of ‘becoming’ in the work of Nietzsche would call into doubt his suitability as an icon for white supremacists, as his ideal characteristics (those that are features of *Übermenschlichkeit*) can only be brought into being through

Nietzsche does include in his seminal notions of return and acceptance the active idea of becoming, he does not employ specific and consistent terminology to explicitly explain his idea of becoming as a distinct principle. For Nietzsche, expressing becoming as an idea, active terminology (in the use of the word 'becoming') is forgone in favour of seemingly neutral or more established philosophical concepts, the use of which he later laments.<sup>63</sup> The ideas of return and acceptance are the core of Nietzsche's all-embracing suffering and 'strong pessimism', yet, as a part of their philosophical nature they remain somewhat distant from an active pursuit of the first-person, phenomenon-based Dionysiac experience. Nietzsche writes of return and acceptance as being the ideal ways to penetrate the construct of morality, civilisation, narrative, artifice and society in a search for the Dionysian that forms the substrata of all human being. However, upon closer examination the process and movements of which Nietzsche speaks are less those characteristic of 'return' and 'acceptance' than they are of the Deleuzo-Guattarian schematisation of becoming. That is to say, Nietzsche's idea of Eternal Return may be understood to have more in common with becoming in that both notions develop by diversification enabling perspectival shift that is brought about by a positive effort to grasp the phenomenological aspects of experience. Indeed, through embracing of the negation of false or fixed concepts of identity, morality and individuality, both processes seek to affirm life.

### 2.3.1 Becoming and Nietzsche

Deleuzo-Guattarian ideas of becoming are particularly relevant in an examination of the Nietzschean idea of creativity and revolution of values

active instigation of a process of becoming. That is to say that such qualities are, as yet, not innate, nor can they be considered as such.

<sup>63</sup> Nietzsche chastises himself in his 'Attempt at Self-Criticism' published as a foreword to *The Birth of Tragedy* that he "lacked sufficient courage (and arrogance?) to allow myself to express such personal and risky views throughout in my own personal language – that instead I laboured to express in the terms of Schopenhauer and Kant new and unfamiliar evaluations, which ran absolutely counter to the spirit, as well as the taste, of Schopenhauer and Kant!" (Smith, p. 10.).

as they make explicit and systematic Nietzsche's own ideas of becoming, sketched out in aphoristic form in *Prinzip einer Neuen Wertsetzung*, published as the third book of *Der Wille zur Macht*.<sup>64</sup> Concerning becoming, Nietzsche concludes:

1. Das Werden hat keinen Zielzustand, mündet nicht in ein „Sein“.
2. Das Werden ist kein Scheinzustand, vielleicht ist die seiende Welt ein Schein.
3. Das Werden ist wertgleich in jedem Augenblick: die Summe seines Wertes bleibt sich gleich: anders ausgedrückt: es hat gar keinen Wert denn es fehlt etwas, woran es zu messen wäre und in bezeug worauf das Wort „Wert“ Sinn hätte.<sup>65</sup>

Fighting a declared war on the “Logiker-Optimismus”,<sup>66</sup> Nietzsche stresses the need to see the world of ‘being’ or fixed reality as a symptom of the “Veil of Maya”, which is, for him, one demonstration of the way in which the world is ‘being made stupid’.<sup>67</sup> He urges his readers to realise that: “a) Die Notwendigkeit ist kein Tatbestand, sondern eine Interpretation. b) Hat man begriffen, daß das „Subjekt“ nichts ist, was wirkt, sondern nur eine Fiktion, so folgt vielerlei”.<sup>68</sup> As such, Nietzsche (and subsequently Deleuze, both alone

<sup>64</sup> Given the focus of this section is the notion of becoming and its usefulness in extrapolating Nietzsche's concept of creativity it is interesting to note that a German edition of notes not included in *The Will to Power* was published under the title *Unschuld des Werdens* (lit. trans.: *The Innocence of Becoming*).

<sup>65</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, p. 480.

“1. Becoming does not aim at a final state, does not flow into ‘being.’

2. Becoming is not merely an *apparent state*; perhaps the world of beings is mere appearance.

3. Becoming is of equivalent value at every moment; the sum of its values always remains the same; in other words, it has no value at all, for anything against which to measure it, and in relation to which the word “value” would have meaning, is lacking”.

<sup>66</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, p. 368, “Logician's optimism”.

<sup>67</sup> See: Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. by Walter Kaufmann, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 379.

<sup>68</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, p. 376, “a) Necessity is not a state of things, rather it is an interpretation. b) As soon as one has grasped that the ‘subject’ is not itself a causal agent, rather a fiction, much follows”.

and in his collaborative work with Guattari) sees the argument for a fixed subject (in this case, 'civilised man') defined by conventional moral, social and philosophical understandings as a restrictive and debilitating notion, the unquestioning acceptance of which leads to the world being sold into pointless stupidity. This has the effect of anchoring the first-person in what amounts to an illusion of individuality as prescribed by the dominant religions (Nietzsche's basis for all mass ideologies) and moral codes of society.

For both Nietzsche and Deleuze and Guattari, affixing human possibility to the single concept of man and defined position of human being has the effect of narrowing understanding to causes and effects as they are visible and thought. The *a priori* acceptance of thought and appearance as constituting what is known as reality assists in the fastening of human possibility into fixity. Thus fixity in identity through 'self' is the enemy of freedom and possibility. Nietzsche describes stillness and stopping at the idea of 'self' both in learning and in life as being something of an 'easy option'. For Nietzsche, halting "bei einer angeblichen causa prima"<sup>69</sup> is little more than the justification for "Faulheit, die Ermüdung".<sup>70</sup> Indeed, in Nietzsche's opinion, this laziness acts as the justification for accepting and reinforcing the "Veil of Maya", insofar as it demonstrates a lack of will to seek out and engage with challenging alternatives. In order to counter the effects of the notions of fixity and the *a priori* acceptance of appearance, both Deleuze and Nietzsche employ the notion of becoming (Deleuze and Guattari employ becoming explicitly, whereas whilst using a technique recognisable as becoming Nietzsche's use thereof remains, more often than not, implicit) to negate the popular concept of 'I' or the 'subject', which entails as its optimistic-logical effect "[e]ine Art von Perspektive im sehen wieder als Ursache das Sehens selbst zu setzen".<sup>71</sup> Nietzsche defines the importance of becoming in the face of fixity as: "in ein werdenden Welt ist „Realität“ immer nur eine Simplifikation zu praktischen Zwecken, oder eine Täuschung auf Grund grober Organe,

<sup>69</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, p. 391, "At a supposed *causa prima*".

<sup>70</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, p. 391, "Laziness, weariness".

<sup>71</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, p. 371, "Making (and thereby confusing) the perspective of seeing with the causal act of seeing itself".

oder eine Verscheidenheit im Tempo des Werdens".<sup>72</sup>

However, despite such insightful clarity, Nietzsche fails to further his argument with an examination of the nature and the manifestations of becoming, preferring instead, in his typical fashion, to pitch the possibilities of becoming against the crushing armies of self, soul, subject and ego true to his concepts of warrior and the necessity of suffering. In place of illuminating his position through argumentation, Nietzsche simply states: "Die „Seele“, das „Ich“ als Urtatsache gesetzt; und überall hineingelegt, wo es ein Werden gibt".<sup>73</sup> In the absence of an explanation and argumentation of his idea of becoming, the importance of the theory of Deleuze and Guattari, then, is to systematise Nietzschean ideas of becoming and to delineate a path through the spaces that Nietzsche leaves open to the reader. In short, Deleuzo-Guattarian theory makes explicit and logical the leaps of inspiration and chasms of conviction that are left implicit, presumed, unelaborated or inadequately explained in Nietzsche's radical, critical and aphoristic style.

In contrast to the image-rich battlefield depiction of what Nietzsche sees as the war between flux and fixity, Deleuze and Guattari develop the human dimension of the Nietzschean understanding of becoming and extrapolate from it a way of approaching existence through a diversification of perspectives beyond that which may be construed as the 'necessity of reality'. Whereas Nietzsche sees fixity as laziness enabled through the institutionalisation of social conditioning and dependence on the Apollonian illusion of appearance, Deleuzo-Guattarian becoming, viewed in relation to human existence, is a means of loosening (with the aim of separating) human being from the pervading philosophical and practical understanding of the world as a set of fixed states. Deleuze and Guattari describe the growth and development of such ideas themselves as an inherent part of the greater process of becoming. Instead of a chain of 'beings', Deleuze and Guattari encourage

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<sup>72</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, p. 395, "In a world of becoming, 'reality' is a simplification for practical purposes, or a deception perpetrated through the coarseness of organs, or a variation in the tempo of becoming".

<sup>73</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, p. 396, "The 'soul', and the 'self' as fundamental fact are posited and placed everywhere there is any becoming".

the reader to view the proliferation of things and possibilities in the universe as being involved in an infinite (in both number and in scope) process(es) of becoming.

## 2.4 Becoming-Dionysian

Taking the theoretical perspectives and schemata of Nietzsche and Deleuze and Guattari into account, the concept of Becoming-Dionysian is intended to serve as a means of approaching the dynamic nature of the interaction between the political, Apolline, conscious first-person and the Dionysian state of immersion in experience as it is manifest in the works of many artists. Using the idea of Becoming-Dionysian allows creative endeavour (and, by extension, human reality) to be examined as the dynamic interface between Nietzsche's poles of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Using Nietzsche's model of an intoxication initiated experience of the Dionysian state initiated by intoxication in combination with Deleuze and Guattari's schematisation of becoming, Becoming-Dionysian creates a theoretical framework through which to view the dynamism of the human creative process.

Such a frame is useful for examining the works of artists whose creativity draws from un-served intoxicated experiences and explores the interaction of these experiences and memories with sober, rational, Apolline consciousness. Using Becoming-Dionysian as a critical tool, the importance of Dionysian or intoxicated experiences within the creative process can be more fully understood and interpreted as more than mere biographical facts.

Becoming-Dionysian differs from a number of currently used theoretical structures in that it acknowledges the role played by intoxicated states and experiences as important elements of the creative process. Deleuze and Guattari find intoxication initiated by the taking of drugs (and the addiction they deem all drugs capable of bringing about) to be a limiting and ultimately imprisoning state, as substance users will only "retomber dans ce qu'ils voulaient



fuir”.<sup>74</sup> This being the case, for Deleuze and Guattari drugs necessarily inhibit if not totally prevent the actualisation of becoming. Thus, Nietzsche’s analogy of intoxication as an enabling tool that facilitates an experience of the Dionysian does not find a parallel in Deleuzo-Guattarian thought as they consider drugs and the fixed dead-end of addiction to be integrally linked.<sup>75</sup> However, as can be seen in Nietzsche’s use of the both the analogy and the reality of intoxication as a means of initiation into the extremity of the Dionysian experience, the space of otherness actualised through intoxication is both useful and important in the context of the present argument. The unselfing action of intoxication does provide a significant and valuable initiation of the Dionysian experience and, perhaps more importantly, chemical intoxication provides a means of approaching this experience that lies within the reach of most of humanity. As a means of approaching texts whose writers make use of an intoxication-enabled Dionysian space, Becoming-Dionysian situates the role of the Dionysian intoxicated experience within the context of a greater movement of becoming that draws on the pure experience of unmitigated being and the human experiences of consciousness and reality that are shaped by education, society and learning.

As such, the process of Becoming-Dionysian has at its core a movement that aims beyond average human existence defined by conformity, rationality and lack of excess and into a primal space of pure experience. It is important to acknowledge, however, that reaching beyond first-person, selfed experience is only one step in the process. The artist must return to rational Apolline consciousness from immersion in the Dionysian state in order to fully explore in art their reality as a human. Yet, if Becoming-Dionysian entails the abandonment of conformity to the norms and unwritten prescriptions of society how is the production of expression in the form of artistic exploration possible? Deleuze argues that art (his chosen example is liter-

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<sup>74</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, p. 349, “Continue to fall back into that which they sought to escape”.

<sup>75</sup> This inability to separate drugs from addiction creates an interesting point of intersection between the theoretical perspective of Deleuze and Guattari and the experiential reality of William S. Burroughs. See: ‘The Way OUT is the way IN: William Burroughs’ Brave New (naked) World’ (below).

ature) is not itself the expression or achievement of a state or product in the telling of a story. Instead, Deleuze conjectures that words themselves, when used in a literary context, contribute to the becoming of the writer, of drama and of art. Rather than being a “vehicle for veiling and representing unconscious and timeless dramas”,<sup>76</sup> literature enacts a becoming that “is the very opening of the political and the future”.<sup>77</sup> This understanding of the relation of becoming between reader and the writer reveals similarities of sentiment concerning the nature and properties of literature between the thought of Deleuze and the ideas of Nietzsche who saw art and his own philosophy (Deleuze considers philosophy ‘Nietzsche’s art’)<sup>78</sup> as possessing radical transformative capacities. For instance, *Morgenröte* sees Nietzsche prescribe the use of his text to readers thus:

Ein Buch, wie dieses, ist nicht zum Durchlesen und Vorlesen, sondern zum Aufschlagen, namentlich im Spaziergehen und auf Reisen; man muß den Kopf hinein- und immer wieder hinausstecken können und nichts Gewohntes an sich finden.<sup>79</sup>

Both the otherness of the text and the physical movement of travelling contribute to the unfamiliarity of the reader with the world into which he emerges from the confines of the text. However, it is through an engagement with the text that the reader has experienced the radical ‘otherness’ that for Nietzsche characterises his thought. This momentary familiarity with the radical shift in perception he considers necessary for the reader to engage more fully with his text has enabled a movement towards the text in the becoming of the reader. Thus, in combination with the change of scenery that walking or travelling provides, in Nietzsche’s opinion the becoming-other of

<sup>76</sup> Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 145.

<sup>77</sup> Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*, p. 145.

<sup>78</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la Philosophie* (Paris: Quadrige / Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), p. 225.

<sup>79</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke*, VI, p. 278, “A book such as this is not to be read through or read aloud, rather, it should be simply opened at random points whilst travelling or walking; one must be able to put one’s head in the book and upon taking leave of the book again find nothing familiar in one’s surroundings”.

the reader enabled through engagement with the text transforms the reader's perception of the world to such an extent that upon re-emergence from the text the world is no longer the recognisable space it appeared to be prior to immersion in the text.

This idea of art itself as both being and, more importantly, demonstrating and engendering becoming is approached by Nietzsche in *Menschliches, Alzumenschliches* in which he observes that, upon completion, "Das Buch fast [sei] zum Menschen geworden".<sup>80</sup> Explaining his concept further, then, requires the attribution of characteristics to the book that Nietzsche considers otherwise essential to humanity; those of becoming, soul and spirit. Having been written and therewith separated from the consciousness and process from which it has developed, the text itself is launched on its own independent trajectory, engendering and experiencing its own becomings in a series of events which are symbolised for Nietzsche as the text leaving the author to lead: "ein eigenes Leben für sich".<sup>81</sup> That is to say, following the detachment from the author inherent in the act of 'completion', the trajectory of a text diverges significantly from that of its creator.

For Nietzsche, the becomings of this divergent course are themselves vital elements in the becomings of others. The book once separated from its creator embarks on its own becoming: "währenddem sucht es sich seine Leser, entzündet Leben, beglückt, erschreckt, erzeugt neue Werke, wird die Seele von Vorsätzen und Handlungen – kurz: es lebt".<sup>82</sup> Through this depiction of what is commonly considered a fixed entity (a book) as a dynamic body involved in both its own process of becoming and the larger becoming of art, Nietzsche demonstrates an allegorical unity between the physical understanding of movement and his understanding of the multidimensional (physical, metaphysical etc.) nature of becoming. Physical movement is a metaphor

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<sup>80</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, IV2, p. 173, "The book itself has become almost human".

<sup>81</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, IV2, p. 173, "A life for itself and of its own".

<sup>82</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, IV2, p. 173, "During which it seeks out new readers for itself, it enkindles life, makes happy, terrifies, engenders new works, becomes the soul and design of new undertakings – in short, it lives".

commonly employed by Nietzsche in his creation of a terminology to explore the becomings of ideas or the necessity of expression. Such metaphors have at their core his idea: “dass jede Handlung eines Menschen, nicht nur ein Buch, auf irgend eine Art Anlass zu anderen Handlungen, Entschlüssen, Gedanken wird, dass Alles, was geschieht, unlösbar fest sich mit Allem, was geschehen wird, verknotet”.<sup>83</sup> This idea in turn reveals the essential Nietzschean notion of the *actual* immortality of motion, as he writes: “was einmal bewegt hat, ist in dem Gesamtverbande alles Seienden, wie in einem Bernstein ein Insect, eingeschlossen und verewigt”.<sup>84</sup>

The becoming-human of the text, or the way in which the text acquires the characteristics of becoming, self and soul, demonstrated through its creation of an independent trajectory to that of the creator, mirrors the effect of the Becoming-Dionysian of the creator. The text is the considered record of the movement of the author between the Becoming-Dionysian of experience and the Apollonian concepts of language, form and recording. As such the completed text is identical in situation to the insect enshrined in amber whose encapsulation has immortalised movement in an ‘eternal union’ of being and becoming. Yet, at the same time, each text is itself the catalyst for further development of the Becoming-Dionysian of the artist and the ways in which their work will develop.

The idea of the world as connected through an infinite and ever-more dynamic web of physical and allegorical motion that characterises the becomings that constitute it, is common to both Nietzsche and Deleuze. Yet, if art itself is involved in a fluid interactive process of becoming along with the dynamic becomings shaping and shaped by the artist, then what is the relevance of Nietzsche’s seemingly fixed concepts of the Apollonian and the Dionysian to the project of the artist who engages in the exploration and expression of the becoming reality of human experience? The role of the di-

<sup>83</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, IV2, p. 173, “Every action performed by a human being, not only the action of creating a book, becomes in some way the cause of other actions, decisions, thoughts that everything that happens is inextricably linked”.

<sup>84</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, IV2, p. 173, “That which has once moved is enclosed and eternalised in the total union of all being like an insect in amber”.

chotomy illuminated by Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian extremes is to demonstrate the disparate poles of human experience from which authentic art draws and combines its subject and method in text. An extension of this concept is the adaptation of the ideas of the Apollonian and Dionysian as tools for the examination of the nature of humanity and the role and nature of its authentic expression. Authentic expression at the time of his writing had dissolved into a subjective debate of taste, morals and aesthetics, drawing on philosophers such as Kant and Hegel for the legitimisation of their disinterested positions, evidence of which can be seen in the contemporary critical assessments of exhibitions such as the Parisian Salon of 1870. However, to dismiss Nietzsche's revolutionary concept of the value of art as the expression of mere aesthetic disgust or disagreement renders Nietzsche's position reactionary and is, therefore, a misunderstanding of the author's sentiment.

Many studies are swift to label Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* as being an expression of the author's disgust for decadent aesthetics and a sycophantic adoration of Wagner.<sup>85</sup> However, increasingly, scholars are turning to Nietzsche's early work in an attempt to understand his major themes. Douglas Smith notes that Nietzsche's insightful exploration of the balance between the Dionysian and the Apollonian in the creation of classical ideals and art forms provides a valuable framework for the examination of artistic and aesthetic undertaking.<sup>86</sup> For Nietzsche, the symbiotic poles of the Apollonian and the Dionysian define the balance required in all human creative endeavour. Thus, Nietzsche's idea of true artistic expression as it is ideally understood in his contemporary context cannot be created from the Dionysian or the Apollonian alone in much the same way that the Nietzschean liberation of the self and soul from slavery cannot be attained through one of these principles without the other. The Apollonian alone cannot free the slave; it can only change their circumstances. Whilst the Dionysian provides the slave with the will to free themselves, without the Apollonian the slave lacks the means

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<sup>85</sup> Nietzsche later castigates himself for what he later considers as his juvenile adoration of Wagner in 'Attempt at Self Criticism'.

<sup>86</sup> Douglas Smith, 'Introduction', in *The Birth of Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. vii-xxxvi, p. xxxiii.

to make this will a reality.

Yet taking the popular vision of Nietzsche's work into account, the idea of becoming and balance superficially seems un-Nietzschean in nature. However, the ideas of becoming and balance in fact provide a point of contact between Nietzsche and Deleuze and Guattari and artistic production. Indeed, the way in which the Nietzschean artist moves between the Apollonian and the Dionysian is the very essence of Deleuzian becoming. The artist gains in experience and sensation and in so doing, diversifies perspective in accordance with the multiple processes of becoming. It is through the Apollonian or educated systems of language and expression that the experience of the Dionysian (from which each true artist brings forth their experience of suffering/being) finds expression. This is a process involving the first-person in a becoming which in the Apollonian sense may be defined as becoming-artist, and in the Dionysian sense is a vivid embracing of suffering and terror in becoming-animal or becoming-primal. Thus through the production of creative endeavour alone the artist is involved in multiple becomings in which he explores and communicates through the production of works. Through the creation of texts the artist creates moments of fixity that are both moving and stable, at once part of numerous processes of becoming and simultaneously a recorded or fixed exploration of the artist's experience that continues to catalyse and interact with the becomings of others.

#### **2.4.1 Becoming-Dionysian and the Artist**

The immersion of the artist in the experience of the Dionysian and the return to consciousness (and subsequent Apollonian – Dionysian oscillation) lies at the core of Becoming-Dionysian. However, in terms of realising his ideal state, Nietzsche does not see his ideal artist caught in any sort of dynamic flux between Apollo and Dionysus. Nietzsche aims for nothing less than to have his artist fuse with the Dionysian and become life itself. Nietzsche's ideal concludes that once authentic art that has enacted the explosion

of aesthetics to embrace all of reality and spanned the poles of personal experience, truths and universal being in nature must make way for a further, as yet unseen development, in which:

Der Mensch ist nicht mehr Künstler, er ist Kunstwerk geworden: die Kunstgewalt der ganzen Natur, zur höchsten Wonnebefriedigung des Ur-Einen, offenbart sich hier unter den Schauern des Rausches. Der edelste Thon, der kostbarste Marmor wird hier geknetet und behauen, der Mensch, und zu den Meisselschlägen des dionysischen Weltenkünstlers tönt der eleusinische Mysterienruf: „Ihr stürzt nieder, Millionen? Ahnest du den Schöpfer, Welt?“ — <sup>87</sup>

Whilst this may be Nietzsche's ultimate vision for the fate of the artist and the artistic project, due to the completeness of its resolution of the Apollonian – Dionysian relationship there is little evidence that this fusion may have ever taken place. However, the postulation of such a resolution of the Apollonian – Dionysian interaction does demonstrate the primary role played by the Dionysian in the Apollonian – Dionysian relationship and shows the Apollonian to be a necessary stage or chimera through which the first-person passes in order to embrace the Dionysian state with a full understanding of its nature and potential. Therefore, given the ultimate primacy of the Dionysian in the Nietzschean cosmology,<sup>88</sup> it is reasonable to conceive of the becomings of the artist as reaching toward ultimate undifferentiated being, signified by Dionysus.

Art that is brought about through Becoming-Dionysian actualises Nietzsche's ideas of creativity in that such art is neither dialectic, evolutionary

<sup>87</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 26. "Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art; the artistic force of the whole of nature, to the most intense and blissful satisfaction of the original Unity, reveals itself here in the shudder of intoxication. Here the noblest clay, the most expensive marble, man, is kneaded and hewn, and the chisel-blows of the Dionysian artist of worlds are accompanied by the sound of the Eleusinian Mysteries calling: 'Do you fall to your knees, multitudes? World, do you sense the creator? —'" (Smith, p. 23.).

<sup>88</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 36, "Apollo was unable to live without Dionysus!".

nor plural but includes a multiplicity of becomings on a number of levels, intensities and interfaces. As such, the way in which the artist becomes is as relevant (if not ideally and theoretically identical, see below) as the artistic process to the art this becoming engenders. In order fully to employ the potential of Becoming-Dionysian as a means of gaining greater insight into and understanding of creative expression, an examination of the way in which the artist engages with the Dionysian state of chaotic revelation through experience and returns to rational consciousness to use this experience must be made clear. As such, the path taken by the artist to reach the Dionysian state and the effect of the decision to actively engage with being and experiences that are not common to the wider populus must be examined. In order to demonstrate the useful application of Becoming-Dionysian as a tool, concept and idea, individual examples and case studies are essential. With the aim of rendering the multiplicity, speeds and becomings this entails with the greatest possible clarity, this thesis examines the works of three different artists using Becoming-Dionysian as a means of providing new insight into the reading of their work.

It is important to note that not all artists are identical in their desire to understand humanity, human experience and their own world. Any expressions of the Dionysian experience or explorations into the Dionysian realm bear the personal choices and contexts of the individual artist, not only in the expression of the experience but the perception of the experience itself. This notion is contra to the idea of Nietzsche, who decreed the Dionysian to be a sublime state in which the first-person undergoes a necessary un-selving in order to experience the primal source and state of human life. Instead of un-selving being brought about by the Dionysian, the role of the un-selving process of intoxication in facilitating the experience of the Dionysian state has demonstrated un-selving as a necessary precondition of the Dionysian experience. In seeing the artist involved in a series of becomings it cannot be presumed that each series of possible becomings will occur or is possible in an identical fashion in each and every case. Whereas Nietzsche regards the Dionysian with the reverence due an ecstatic state of completeness, ex-



pressions and explorations of the Dionysian can thus be demonstrated as a significant or driving power in the works of artists not usually associated with a state of ecstatic frenzy, bacchaic bloodlust and ritual zeal. Whilst a reality for some, the expectation that every artist will experience a sublime state of ecstatic vision and return to waking consciousness to decode (or over-code) the experience is rare and well explored by religious and secular scholars alike.<sup>89</sup> However, whilst Becoming-Dionysian may apply to many different forms, this thesis examines only cases where intoxication plays an explicit role in making the Becoming-Dionysian of the artist more obvious.

An examination of the textual evidence of Becoming-Dionysian across a spectrum of artists recognised for the exploration of their personal realities, vision and experience reveals the value of Nietzsche's postulation of the Apollonian – Dionysian dichotomy and the process of Becoming-Dionysian as a means of understanding the human experience of creativity and expression. Using the concept of Becoming-Dionysian, the creation of text represents the realisation of a process of exploration of the interaction between personal experience and the rational conscious processes of understanding and learning of method and technique. Seen in this way, the action of creating text may be understood as the result of interaction between the Dionysian and the Apollonian, rather than the effect of the Dionysian alone, as Nietzsche identifies action is its own right as an impossibility during immersion in the Dionysian state.<sup>90</sup> Citing the example of Hamlet, Nietzsche describes the action of the Dionysian man as being brought about not only by an experience of the Dionysian state but more importantly through the perspectival shift engendered by the return to consciousness following this experience. Immersed in his own Becoming-Dionysian and the Dionysian experience itself,

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<sup>89</sup> See: Martin Buber, *Ecstatic Confessions: The Heart of Mysticism*, ed. by Paul Mendes-Flohr, trans. by Esther Cameron (Syracuse, NY : Syracuse University Press, 1996); William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Longmans Green, 1906).

<sup>90</sup> Baudelaire makes the same point in his treatise on intoxication entitled *Paradis Artificiels*.

Hamlet/Dionysian man senses the “Kluft der Vergessenheit”<sup>91</sup> that separates reality (or the Apollonian world of appearances, morals and civilisation) from the primal experience of the Dionysian. Indeed, in Nietzsche’s opinion, acknowledging such a chasm separating the rational from the instinctual has the effect of rendering all rational action worthless to those who have intimate experience of the Dionysian. Nietzsche explains: “denn ihre Handlung kann nichts am ewigen Wesen der Dinge ändern, sie empfinden es als lächerlich oder schmachvoll, dass ihnen zugemuthet wird, die Welt, die aus den Fugen ist, wieder einzurichten”.<sup>92</sup> He then goes on to note that it is such knowledge of the vastness and horror of the Dionysian that “tödet das Handeln”<sup>93</sup> as action “gehört das Unschleiertsein”.<sup>94</sup> The overwhelming nature of the Dionysian experience reveals “die grauenhafte Wahrheit”<sup>95</sup> which in turn “überwiegt jedes zum Handeln antreibende Motiv, bei Hamlet sowohl als bei dem dionysischen Menschen”.<sup>96</sup>

However, if an experience of the Dionysian has the power to render the communicative and expressive faculties of the first-person mute with the extent of their (and by extension, human) futility in the face of the “grauenhafte Wahrheit”<sup>97</sup> of being, why does human being persist as an active, creative, curious entity? Surely the restoration of rational consciousness and reason of the Apollonian world of appearance and standard truths would necessitate the formulation of a reason or an explanation of that which has been experienced beyond or apart from rational/Apollonian consciousness? Nietzsche flatly denies that this is the case, asserting to the contrary, that rather

<sup>91</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 26, “Chasm of oblivion” (Smith, p. 46.).

<sup>92</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 53, “Their action can change nothing in the eternal essence of things, they feel that it is laughable or shameful that they are expected to repair a world that is so out of joint” (Smith, p. 46.).

<sup>93</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 53, “Kills action” (Smith, p. 46.).

<sup>94</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 53, “Belongs to the veil of illusion” (Smith, p. 46.).

<sup>95</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 53, “The horrific truth” (Smith, p. 46.).

<sup>96</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 53, “Outweighs any motive leading to action, in Hamlet as well as in the Dionysian man” (Smith, p. 46.).

<sup>97</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 53, “Horrific truth” (Smith, p. 46.).

than requiring a reason or explanation upon the return to reality all that is required is a label or categorisation of the experience within the Apollonian sphere of reference. Nietzsche insists that whilst the experience of the Dionysian is immediately greeted upon return to Apollonian consciousness “with disgust”;<sup>98</sup> such is the vehemence of this sensation that it requires no reasoning or explanation, initiating instead dismissal of the experience that acted to precipitate it. For most people, such disgust signals a level of atonement for the moral transgression that intoxication represents. For Nietzsche this disgust marks the presence of a pronounced ascetic ‘mood’.

The ascetic tendency that characterises the relationship between the position held by the representative conglomerate of rational reality, science and Christianity enacts a “Verneigung des Willens”<sup>99</sup> that the experience of the Dionysian may have initiated. In the context of the wider Nietzschean cosmology, this ‘negation of will’ is in effect a negation of life. In tying the experience of a state other than the Apollonian to a moral code or chain of socially conditioned definitions, the first person is effectively removed from (and therewith engaging in practical negation of) the raw state of life itself. Thus the “negation of will” through the immediate initiation of a sensation of disgust upon the return to consciousness may be argued to serve the purpose of asserting the moral authority of the rational Apollonian over the unknown and inexpressible Dionysian. Therefore, for most people the action of suppression or abjection of the experience in disgust is a, if not the, logical, socially conditioned moral response.

At this point, it is important to note that art that emerges from a Becoming-Dionysian process is not a mere copy of a state. Art involved in a Becoming-Dionysian is neither mimetic nor diegetic in nature. That is to say, a viewer before a work created using a Becoming-Dionysian process

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<sup>98</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, pp. 52-53. Nietzsche writes of those who return to the Apollonian having experienced the Dionysian as: “es ekelt sie zu handeln”, which literally translated means that following such a return to consciousness that: “action disgusts them”.

<sup>99</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 52, “Negation of the will” (Smith, p. 46.).

is not 'reading' the state of the artist, nor is the art before which they sit a mere replication of the experience itself in the text. Rather, such art is best understood as a space for the exploration of experiences as they interact with thought and human processes. Thus, an understanding of artistic production demonstrates the value of the dynamic concept of Becoming-Dionysian in the human sphere of creativity. Seen in this way, Becoming-Dionysian is the process by which the artist draws on both the Dionysian realm of experience and the Apolline world of learning and tradition in order to create and explore their own understandings and experiences of being in the space of art. Put succinctly, seen in completed art works, Becoming-Dionysian can be rendered visible or discernable through the way in which the artist diversifies their own perspective and uses the plane of their artistic creation to explore their own knowledge and experience of being.

Comprehending the temporary un-selving that Becoming-Dionysian requires is a vital step towards developing an understanding of the role and conditions of self through the experience of 'otherness' that Becoming-Dionysian makes possible. Through a loss of self and the experience of individuation and identity in the Dionysian experience (however temporary), for the artist, perspectival shift and diversification upon the return to consciousness and rational thought is a logical consequence of such an event. Thus, the contextual transition of the Dionysian experience to Apolline consciousness that Nietzsche describes as initiating "eine asketische, willenverneinende Stimmung"<sup>100</sup> in the ingrained moral context of civilised human life is a source of beginning (or becoming) for the artist. In this way, artists, by virtue of their greater project of Becoming-Dionysian, respond to such a situation with a curiosity that incites investigation and expression, not dismissal.

The role of an experience of the unmitigated Dionysian enabled through the influence of an intoxicant is, for the artists whose work is examined in this study, the catalyst following which the process of Becoming-Dionysian explored and expressed in their texts. As such, Nietzsche's choice of in-

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<sup>100</sup> Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Ausgabe*, III1, p. 52, "An ascetic mood which negates the will" (Smith, p. 46.).

toxication as his analogy for the Dionysian is particularly apt. Some such artists for whom this kind of experience was vitally important in initiating their own Becoming-Dionysian are Arthur Rimbaud, William Burroughs and Francis Bacon. Each of these artists worked with the experience of terror in the face of which all action is rendered impotent that Nietzsche identifies as the truth behind the sense of awe and incommunicability many artists relate to their intoxicated experiences. Becoming-Dionysian is the process and moment through which the artist engages with the experience of the intoxicated/Dionysian state and uses its possibilities and diversification of perspectives in order to explore their realities, both physical and mental using the Apollonian as a source of learning, order and discipline.

The choice of Rimbaud, Burroughs and Bacon as case studies in which to explore Becoming-Dionysian as a theoretical construct is relevant for the explication of the usefulness of Becoming-Dionysian as an approach to art that explores the human condition as a whole. Rimbaud, Burroughs and Bacon are all artists concerned with exploring and challenging the boundaries at which text, reality and human experience interact. Each of these artists sought to approach and redefine the role of these boundaries through placing new emphasis on human experience in their work. Using their own experiences of intoxication and being in the world, alongside their understanding of reality and working in degrees of isolation from defined movements or groups, Rimbaud, Burroughs and Bacon all created art through a process that can be understood using the concept of Becoming-Dionysian.

## 2.5 Conclusion

In order to demonstrate the validity of Becoming-Dionysian as a critical tool, the following three chapters are concerned with the work of three artists for whose work the critical tool of Becoming-Dionysian is a valuable means of gaining insight into their creative processes and human concerns. Each artist whose work is examined in the present study creates in a different

sphere of artistic endeavour. Arthur Rimbaud was a poet whose works have served to inspire generations of aspiring writers. American novelist William Burroughs was just one writer inspired by Rimbaud's verse, yet whilst very different in subject matter and method, Burroughs explored his world using a process that is Becoming-Dionysian in nature much as had Rimbaud before him. The third artist whose work and process is examined in this thesis is painter Francis Bacon, whose unmitigated explorations of being can be seen as graphic exemplars of the Becoming-Dionysian theory.

By employing Becoming-Dionysian as a frame to examine the work of these three artists new insights into the works and processes of each artist can be gained. Individual case studies as the means of expanding and elaborating Becoming-Dionysian as a theory, allows the possibility of showing the ways in which current critical trends may benefit from the flexibility of Becoming-Dionysian as an approach to artistic works and creative process.

At this point, it is both logical and necessary to note that not all artists can be included in a text-based analysis of their work using the theoretical device of Becoming-Dionysian. Those artists for whom such a frame of reference is useless include visual artists and painters concerned with the play of forms and their generation of surface decoration in highly wrought displays of technique. Artists and techniques who fall into such a category include Georges Seurat and Pointillism, and the technique focussed work of the Impressionists, of which the *Nymphéas (Water Lilies)* series of Claude Monet provides an excellent example. In the world of the word, one example of a writer whose work is not suited to analysis using the model of Becoming-Dionysian is the Marquis de Sade who relates a human calculation as a story at the expense of exploring and expressing an experience and its ramifications. Such writers are not concerned with the creation of personal languages, nor are they interested in bending words and forms to suit their artistic needs. Such works and their creators are focused on a task that differs vastly from the quest of the artist involved in Becoming-Dionysian for whom the creation of text is both a means and an end in the desire for exploration and knowledge of the self and the first-person experience.

## Chapter 3

# Am I Escaping? I am Explaining: Rimbaud's Necessary Revolution

The lunatic, the lover and the poet  
Are of imagination all compact:  
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,  
That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,  
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:  
The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them into shapes and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation, and a name.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.1 Introduction

For many critics, Arthur Rimbaud embodies the creative ideal of a madman/lover/poet described so vividly by Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (quoted above). Indeed, William Barrett thinks of Rimbaud as “the Nietzsche of poetry”,<sup>2</sup> and Charles Russell sees Rimbaud as characterising

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<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1, 8-18.

<sup>2</sup> William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study of Existential Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1958), p. 133.

many of the poetic roles that define the avant-garde creative tradition.<sup>3</sup> This chapter argues that both the poetry and greater artistic project of Arthur Rimbaud illustrate an intense and demonstrable textual reality of the initiation, exploration and realisation of one individual artistic project of Becoming-Dionysian. In two key letters written in 1871, Rimbaud conceived an idea of authentic artistic activity that was based on the personal experience of the artist, a concept of creativity that was directly opposed to the prevailing contemporary attitude that defined art through adherence to forms and rules of expression and content. This chapter argues that in these letters Rimbaud defines a revolution of creativity that may be understood as Becoming-Dionysian, and that evidence of the Becoming-Dionysian nature of this process may be seen in his works.

In order to create true art, Rimbaud first required that one begin a process of becoming an artist. Rimbaud's authentic artist was defined by the seeking of new and hitherto unknown experiences through all possible forms of alteration and enhancement of consciousness. In Rimbaud's opinion, it is upon the return from his voyages into the unknown spaces opened to the poet through altered states that he is able to express and explore in his work the interaction between rational consciousness and the altered experience in his work. As such, Rimbaud's creative ideal which he aims to realise in his poetry is not simply the translation of his experience, nor is it merely the product of the experience having taken place; rather it is an exploration of his own Becoming-Dionysian in the space of language and form as text.

The works of Rimbaud have long suffered from an impenetrable critical fog imposed by a proliferation of biographical facts and salacious suppositions that have, by virtue of their sensational nature, tended to overshadow the audacious innovations and impact of the works themselves.<sup>4</sup> Further-

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Russell, *Poets, Prophets and Revolutionaries: The Literary Avant-Garde from Rimbaud through Postmodernism* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> A number of texts concerning Rimbaud simultaneously examine both his work and provide commentary on the more sensational aspects of his life. See, for example: Enid Starkie, *Rimbaud* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), Graham Robb, *Rimbaud* (New York: Norton & Co., 2000).



more, despite Rimbaud's innovations and revolutionary poetics so evident in his prose poems, it is his more conventional verse that has garnered the most critical, and therewith, public attention. Indeed, in the introduction to the first translation of the works of Rimbaud for American audiences, Wallace Fowlie describes Rimbaud's work as being "among the most difficult works in French literature".<sup>5</sup> Fowlie does, however, go on to suggest that Rimbaud's more traditional verses are "still the most accessible part of his work".<sup>6</sup> By undertaking a detailed examination of the development of Rimbaud's work as it progressed toward his prose poetry using the concept of Becoming-Dionysian as a means of opening up new spaces and ideas within the texts themselves, this study moves beyond Fowlie's perception of Rimbaud's verse as the "most accessible part of his work". Moving through Rimbaud's verse poetry to his prose poetry this chapter shows Rimbaud's prose poetry and concepts of creativity as Becoming-Dionysian in nature as well as revolutionary in their personal emphasis, phenomenally innovative in their use of the spaces and ideas of language and text.

Within the Becoming-Dionysian framework of this examination, one key feature of Rimbaud's vision of creativity was the re-discovery of the importance of personal experience as the source of new poetic concepts that must then shape the form and content taken by artistic exploration. The way in which Rimbaud undertakes this task goes on to show the new becomings (specifically concerning language, the space of text and the plane of the page) brought about by his initial revolution. These subsequent becomings may be seen to illustrate Rimbaud's movement towards the realisation of that which may be understood as a Becoming-Dionysian in the creation of text.

The example of Rimbaud is of value for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the contained nature of his period of artistic activity. A teenager in 1871, in his letters Rimbaud approaches his ideal of art with a frenzy of almost Nietzschean zealotry that he systematises into a fusion of

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<sup>5</sup> Wallace Fowlie, *Rimbaud: Complete Works, Selected Letters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Fowlie, *Rimbaud: Complete Works*, p. 4.

intent, a program of derangement and a sermon on ideal of authenticity in art. This fusion amounts to a schematised project detailing the means by which such authenticity is to be achieved. Together, Rimbaud's letters of 1871 define, from a first-person perspective, the rationale of a creative revolution that is inherent in that which is here termed a Becoming-Dionysian project. However, the letters themselves are only a beginning and are perhaps best understood as a statement of intent. The full extent of Rimbaud's Becoming-Dionysian project is made apparent through the expansion of the role of Rimbaud's own experience in his poetry. Also of importance are the ways in which his technique, understanding and use of language and form may be seen to develop toward that which is here argued to represent the most successful realisation of his poetic project in the prose poem.

In order to demonstrate the way in which Rimbaud's creative methods and skill as a poet progressed towards the realisation of the aims laid out in his letters of 1871, this chapter examines the key developments in his poetic technique that made the prose poetry of the *Illuminations* and *Une Saison en Enfer* possible. Following directly from the concerns he raised with the state of modern verse in his letters, this chapter argues that Rimbaud proceeds to define a creative process that is Becoming-Dionysian in nature. However, this chapter argues that in attempting to realise the aims of such a process in his work, Rimbaud initiated two key changes in order to realise that which is here viewed as his Becoming-Dionysian. The first of these changes was his development in understanding the role and idea of language. The second major innovation was Rimbaud's new vision of the role played by the page in composing a text prior to his invention of the prose poem. Following Rimbaud's creation of a more flexible ideal of language less informed by tradition and cultural context and as a result of this separation and de-contextualisation, this chapter examines the way in which Rimbaud uses the very physicality of the page to influence the actual creation of the text. Indeed, this chapter contends that Rimbaud's use of the plane of the page as a compositional device represents an extension of his greater Becoming-Dionysian poetic project as it establishes the page (and the text) as a sanctified space between the artist

and the reader — a technique later seen in the works of Burroughs.

By exploring Rimbaud's works using the concept of Becoming-Dionysian, the aim of this chapter is to demonstrate both validity of Becoming-Dionysian as a device which aids in exploring hitherto inaccessible areas of literary possibility, and also to promote a greater understanding of the works of Rimbaud as an explorer of the human condition. This chapter argues that seeing Rimbaud as an explorer of the interface between experience, tradition and learning opens to the reader a hitherto neglected facet of his role as an artist. Returning to analyse Rimbaud's work as an explorer of his own reality, in using Becoming-Dionysian as the means of opening his work to analysis of this nature it may be suggested that this study continues on from the point at which Rimbaud left poetry and channelled his energies into life itself.

### 3.2 Les Lettres du Voyant, the Revolution of Authentic Creativity and the Initiation of the Becoming-Dionysian Process

At the time of writing his letters to Georges Izambard and Paul Demeny in May of 1871, Rimbaud was overcome with what he saw as a crisis of authenticity engulfing contemporary poetry. Indeed, it was the program of derangement advocated by Rimbaud as a response to this crisis that has led to these two letters being known as the *Lettres du Voyant*.<sup>7</sup> The force of Rimbaud's disgust for the pitiful situation in which he considered poets and poetry to languish is palpable in both of these letters. Yet, between the precocious jibes at Izambard and the lesson concerning the decline of modern poetry administered to Demeny, Rimbaud elaborates his understanding of the cause of the crippling of the poetic arts and proposes an arrogant, radical and

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<sup>7</sup> Literally translated as "The Seer Letters".

vital revolution, here understood as Becoming-Dionysian, as the necessary cure.

### 3.2.1 The Past

Before expanding his vision of a cure, Rimbaud first provides a brief poetic history in order to demonstrate the need for a revolution to stop the rot which, in Rimbaud's opinion, was strangling true creativity. In the second section of his letter to Demeny,<sup>8</sup> a section he announces grandly as "de la prose sur l'avenir de la poésie",<sup>9</sup> Rimbaud diagnoses contemporary poetry as suffering from the uninspired, overly artistic delusions of poets he dismissively labels "des versificateurs".<sup>10</sup> In order to find a poetic ideal that is not polluted by the idea of poetry as mere verse or entertainment filled with "prose rimée",<sup>11</sup> Rimbaud finds that he is forced to hark back as far as Classical Greece in order to find a creative ideal which springs from what he considers to be authentic or pure artistic intent. He writes approvingly of the "Vie harmonieuse"<sup>12</sup> inherent in the intimate relationship between life and poetry he considers to have prevailed in the Greek world: "En Grèce, ai-je dit, vers et lyres rythment l'Action".<sup>13</sup> However, as he is at pains to demonstrate to Demeny, this vital connection and synergistic relevance between art and life has been lost with the passage of time. It is the loss of this synergy that he seeks to demonstrate through the provision of a brief (but telling) chronology of poetic history. With this chronology, it may be argued that Rimbaud seeks to demonstrate his opinion that, much to his revulsion, poetry has become a game.

<sup>8</sup> The first section of this letter is composed of a brief a statement concerning the poet's intention to acquaint Demeny with his vision of "la littérature nouvelle" followed by the poem *Chant de Guerre Parisien*.

<sup>9</sup> Rimbaud, Arthur, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by A. Adam (Paris: Pléiade, 1972), pp. 249-254, p. 250. "Some prose on the future of poetry".

<sup>10</sup> Rimbaud, p. 250, "Makers of verses".

<sup>11</sup> Rimbaud, p. 250, "Rhymed prose".

<sup>12</sup> Rimbaud, p. 250, "Harmonious existence".

<sup>13</sup> Rimbaud, p. 250, "In Greece, as I have said, verse and lyre gave rhythm to action".

Beginning his chronology of the decline of poetry with the Greek ideal, Rimbaud expresses dismay at the two thousand years of so-called artistic ideals that have prevailed following the death of Classical Greek culture. Through his brief tour of the past Rimbaud shows how the once pure ideal of poetry has been corrupted through loss of the fundamental connection between creativity and life. Indeed, in Rimbaud's opinion the advent and proliferation of rhyme exemplified the way in which poetry had moved away from the harmonious rhythm of life and relevance into the sphere of complex contrivance. In Rimbaud's opinion, the proliferation of rhyme provides an excellent illustration of the odious prevalence of artifice in poetry. For, in Rimbaud's understanding, rhyme represented a belittling of language and the adoption of rhyme as the language most readily identified with the poetic idiom is a damning indication of the direction in which poetry was to head, a direction prescribed by rules and marked by mindless conformity. He laments:

Toute poésie antique aboutit à la poésie greque, Vie harmonieuse.  
— De la Grèce au mouvement romantique, — moyen âge, —  
il y a des lettrés, des versificateurs. D'Ennius à Theroldus, de  
Theroldus à Casimir Delavigne, tout est prose rimée, un jeu,  
avachissement et gloire d'innombrables générations idiotes: Racine  
est le pur, le fort, le grand. — On eût soufflé sur ses rimes,  
brouillé ses hémistiches, que le Divin Sot serait aujourd'hui aussi  
ignoré que le premier venu auteur d'Origines. — Après Racine,  
le jeu moisit. Il a duré deux mille ans!<sup>14</sup>

It is at the end of these two thousand years of affectation and artifice that Rimbaud now finds himself seated. He wryly sketches the following pastiche of his own position: "Du reste, libre aux *nouveaux!* d'exécrer les

<sup>14</sup> Rimbaud, p. 250, "All the poetry of antiquity lies in Greek poetry, — harmonious existence — from Greece to the romantic movement, — the Middle Ages — there are those who write and those who make verse. From Ennius to Theroldus, from Theroldus to Casimir Delavigne, is all rhymed prose, a game, decay and glory of innumerable generations of idiots! Racine alone is pure, strong and great. — If his rhymes had been blown apart and his hemistiches scrambled, the divine fool would be just as overlooked as any old writer of the Origins. — After Racine, the game gets mouldy. This has lasted two thousand years!"

ancêtres: on est chez soi et l'on a le temps".<sup>15</sup> However, the phantom image of the armchair critic, replete with pretentious terms of self-designation, is conjured (perhaps in reference to Demeny himself)<sup>16</sup> as the easy response to the situation. Depicting his own position using pastiche, it may be argued that Rimbaud's satirical vision of himself as an armchair critic represents the antithesis of his own point of view. Far from sitting easily in the future of poetry, looking back and idly correcting a past that has built his present, Rimbaud stays loyal to his disgust.

For Rimbaud, it is the crime of the Romantics that crowns this tyranny of artifice over authenticity. The Romantics demonstrated the situation most clearly: with the Romantics, art had finally succumbed to flagrant and carefully regulated artifice. It was the Romantics who embodied the sad state of modern 'art'. It was the Romantics: "qui prouvent si bien que la chanson est si peu souvent l'œuvre".<sup>17</sup> Much to Rimbaud's horror, following the example of the Romantics meant that it was no longer necessary to work in order to create. The proof of this integral lack of active engagement in creativity lies for Rimbaud in the artfully contrived 'chansons' of the Romantics. These were not "la pensée chantée *et comprise* du chanteur",<sup>18</sup> quite the contrary. The Romantics were so absorbed in the increasingly intricate rules of form and regulations of content that they were oblivious to the little insight that they did, Rimbaud contests accidentally, explore in their poetry. Romanticism strangled the vitality of creation through its tortuous insistence on form and tradition. Whilst amongst the Romantics Rimbaud does grant there were some that carried true creative initiative, this spark was so weighted with the burden of structure and heaviness of language as to appear fortuitous. Rimbaud's final verdict concerning the Romantics remains: "Les

<sup>15</sup> Rimbaud, p. 250, "Indeed, liberated by our own *newness*, [we are] free to criticise the ancestors as we are at home and we have the time".

<sup>16</sup> Rimbaud made the acquaintance of part-time poet Paul Demeny through Georges Izambard. Demeny was the author of an unexceptional volume of poetry entitled *Les Glaneuses* (1870) and, more importantly for Rimbaud (and most likely the reason for his receiving copies of Rimbaud's verse and ensuing correspondence), Demeny was part owner in a publishing house in Paris (See: Robb, p. 50.).

<sup>17</sup> Rimbaud, p. 250, "Who prove so often that a song is not a work".

<sup>18</sup> Rimbaud, p. 250, "A thought that is both sung *and understood* by the singer".

premiers romantiques ont été *voyants* sans trop bien s'en rendre compte".<sup>19</sup>

Citing the example of the rise to prominence of the Romantics, Rimbaud insists that the once vital human act of creativity has reached a new and utterly depressing low. Rimbaud laments that even those with the ability to express insight in their work are so blinded by the requirements of rendering poetic or 'making poetry' that they are incapable of recognising the elements of worth in their own work. Armchair critics and hobby poets (of which Demeny himself was one) cogitate on the topic of poetry from lounge chairs, armed with the benefit of hindsight and far enough away from the world of literature not to be judged themselves. Rimbaud notes with disgust that by merely following the strictures of fashion anyone who learned the rules, used the right words and followed the correct form could be a poet, writing wryly: "tout collégien qui a le moyen fait le Rolla, écrit un Rolla!".<sup>20</sup> Romanticism and the French tradition have comprehensively stamped out the vital synergy that Rimbaud saw as characterising the relationship between poetry and life in Ancient Greece. Poetry no longer gave rhythm to action as it has no connection to the being of the poet or the reality of the reader. In short, beneath such tradition, poetry was no longer authentic. It had become a sickly hybrid of artistic pretension existing in a realm of "la gaze de rideaux",<sup>21</sup> glorifying mythologies. Apparent in his criticisms is Rimbaud's opinion that one central problem in the stagnation of creativity was that in following the prescriptions of form and style the poet no longer *worked*, that is to say, he was no longer involved on an active personal level with his art. The poetry of such a poet was a confection of prescribed, dreamy images, the text of which was created according to rules for the delectation of a bourgeois public. For Rimbaud this was, quite simply, an intolerable situation.

Recognising the situation as intolerable did not bring Rimbaud closer to changing it. However, by examining the way in which tradition had estab-

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<sup>19</sup> Rimbaud, p. 253, "The first romantics were indeed seers, but without really knowing it".

<sup>20</sup> Rimbaud, p. 253, "Every college student who has the ability to write a Rolla, writes a Rolla!".

<sup>21</sup> Rimbaud, p. 253, "Gauze curtains".

lished itself as the dominant force in creativity, Rimbaud may be argued to have reached the realisation that in order to change such a situation he required a structure capable of enumerating precisely that which needed to be changed. The choice of religion as the model for such a structure may at first glance appear improbable or, at best, ironic. However, upon closer examination, Rimbaud's appropriation of religion as a guiding model for the structure of his project is not as improbable as it may appear. Indeed, given the hatred of religion he was later to explore and express in his letters and his work, Rimbaud's choice of religion as a model may not have even been fully conscious. As such, it may be argued that Rimbaud's loathing of religion concealed a measure of respect for the way in which religion achieved its aims, and this analysis conjectures that it is this respect that Rimbaud betrays with his use of terms such as 'sermon' and the evangelical tone that his letters manifest so clearly.<sup>22</sup>

For Rimbaud it was logical that such an intolerable situation required more than laments and description: it required action. However, action was needed that ventured well beyond the confines of the parameters of the romantic notion of creativity. Despite his diagnoses and the evidence presented by history, Rimbaud had shown a need for action, yet the extent and breadth of the solution required remained to be defined. In order to identify the scope of action Rimbaud uses the allegory of religion in order to demonstrate the importance and size of both the problem and the solution. Yet, in using the concept of religion to communicate his ideas, Rimbaud also reveals the nature of his own beliefs concerning the importance of poetry and language. The letter to Demeny intentionally takes the form of a sermon (Rimbaud punctuates his passionate oratory on the past and future of poetry with his own poems which he introduces as "songs" and "psalms"), usually intended to inspire action from the parishioners and delivered in the sacred space of the church. Yet, rather than adopt unthinkingly the religious model,

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<sup>22</sup> Claude Jeancolas makes a number of references to Rimbaud's adoption of a religious model and repetition (consciously or unconsciously) of Christian patterns of devotion in his ideas and sentence structures. See, for example: Claude Jeancolas, *Le Dictionnaire Rimbaud* (Paris: Éditions Balland, 1991), 'Dieu' pp. 98-99, and, 'encrapuler' pp. 107-108.



it may be argued that Rimbaud delivers his sentiments in his own hallowed space, the hitherto defiled space of language.

Given his violent antipathy to the church (as expressed in the pitiless and ironic 'Les Premières Communions'), Rimbaud's invocation of the grimy concrete reality of the religious realm seems initially to be self-deprecating, reducing his passionate insight into poetry to the level of "les divins babilages"<sup>23</sup> uttered by the village priest. However, it may be argued that the mock-sermon form the letter takes demonstrates more than the poet's blackened humour: it reveals his reverent attitude to his ideal of language and his fundamental belief that language is the space in which the Holy Communion between the poet and the poetic ideal takes place. In this way, Rimbaud's desire for action to be undertaken in order to change the status quo may be seen as an attempt to re-consecrate the space of language and arrest what he saw as the reality of creative dilapidation. Continuing such a premise, it may be argued that by virtue of its pseudo-religious form Rimbaud's letter draws an allegory between the veracity of his own beliefs and the belief based structure of the religious ideal. Indeed, Rimbaud may be argued to have formulated his idea of a sermon with the notion of an ideal church and mind. Within an ideal church, the Sunday sermon of the village priest is delivered to a receptive audience, its moral message supposedly reinforced by the morally upstanding personal example of the priest in the life of the village. Rimbaud, angered by the hypocrisy of the church, in finding the situation of poetry similarly unacceptable, is therefore forced to take action. That is to say, he is bound by what he considers the inherent 'rightness' of his beliefs to practice what it is that he preaches.

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<sup>23</sup> Rimbaud, 'Les Premières Communions', p. 60, "Divine babblings".

### 3.2.2 Necessary Change

Whilst in the past other poets had recognised the hollow nature of the emphasis on form and tradition,<sup>24</sup> in its call for action Rimbaud's letter transgressed the role of engaged and insightful literary critique. The criticisms of the past and the damning of the present offered in the letter are presented as compelling evidence in the case against tradition. Indeed, it may be argued that Rimbaud provides this history lesson as pejorative evidence with the intention of demonstrating the inescapable nature of the revolution of creativity that he envisions as the 'cure'. In its breadth, Rimbaud's 'cure' may be seen to attack the very foundations of Western creativity that are based so fundamentally on self, personal identity and the expression thereof in the context of a given tradition. So vast was Rimbaud's revolutionary scope that he includes both an idea of predetermination and a process of unselfing or loss of individuality as fundamentals of his process of necessary change.

In order to reinvent a poetry that is above the criticisms and restrictions of history, Rimbaud insists that one must step outside the tyrannical definitions that have shaped poetry and creativity in the past. So vast was Rimbaud's revolutionary scope that it began with an examination of the fundamental and much poeticised concept of personal identity, and the first-person being of *I* in the text. In stating "*Je est un autre*",<sup>25</sup> Rimbaud may be seen as emphatically declaring as extant fact the chasm he saw yawning between the defined identities delineated by the 'I' of poetry and social relations and his own amorphous network of thoughts, experiences, beliefs and sensations. As such, it may be argued that the inability of complex, fluid sensations and personal experiences to be adequately represented by the socially designated identity of 'I' causes Rimbaud to regard 'I' as a foreign entity that does not truly communicate his experience of first-person being, so alien is the defined idea of the textual 'I' to his complex and chaotic personal reality.<sup>26</sup> Within

<sup>24</sup> Baudelaire had similar views to those of Rimbaud on the decrepit state of contemporary verse.

<sup>25</sup> Rimbaud, p. 250, "*I is somebody else*".

<sup>26</sup> Karin J. Dillman, *The Subject in Rimbaud: From Self to 'Je'* (New York: Peter Lang,

Rimbaud's understanding of the traditional use of 'I' in both poetry and prose, the first-person was defined by a Romantic role within the text.<sup>27</sup> For both the reader and the author, the purpose of 'I' in such circumstances may be seen as providing an element in the finite circumstance of the text by reaching out to the reader as an extension of his or her own identity. Such purposeful finitude did not correspond with Rimbaud's own experience of first person being and, as such, the 'I' that inhabits such literature is foreign, alien and thus necessarily 'other'.

Interestingly, Rimbaud is concerned (however fleetingly) by this lack of common ground between his own experience of being in the world and the artificial "autre"<sup>28</sup> of social existence and textual convention. Yet, rather than be upset by his lack of commonality with the poetry of the past, Rimbaud asserts that he has realised the source of this difference. In Rimbaud's opinion, he differs from poets past in that he was *born* a poet. By being born a poet rather than being designated a poet through adhering to the conventions of artificial notions of poetry that lead to the poetic 'I' he so despised, Rimbaud understands himself as being apart from those poets designated as such by a fashion-led reading public. The image of his own blamelessness in bringing this difference into being is repeated in the letters to both Izambard and Demy. Rimbaud writes to Izambard: "je me suis reconnu poète. Ce n'est pas du tout ma faute",<sup>29</sup> and to Demy: "Si le cuivre s'éveille clarion, il n'y a rien de sa faute".<sup>30</sup> In so doing, Rimbaud designates (although it must be noted that he chooses the term 'recognised' as it serves to accentuate his already present religious allegory), as the source of this difference, his predetermination: that is to say, he suggests that his poethood is innate. Using the term 'poet' reminds the reader that he is not a mere maker of verses, but he is rather a poet in the true sense of the term that he invokes in the early sections of his letters, an "auteur, créateur, poète"<sup>31</sup> that in his

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1984), p. 66.

<sup>27</sup> Dillman, p. 67.

<sup>28</sup> "Other".

<sup>29</sup> Rimbaud, p. 249, "I recognise myself as a [born] poet. Its not my fault".

<sup>30</sup> Rimbaud, p. 250, "If brass wakes up a trumpet, its not its fault".

<sup>31</sup> Rimbaud, p. 251, "Author, creator, poet".

opinion the likes of which "n'a jamais existé".<sup>32</sup> Recognising himself as a poet may be seen as a means of absolving himself of any responsibility for his otherness. Whilst his predetermination is itself beyond the control of the poet, in accordance with the pseudo-religious structure of his epistles to Demeny and Izambard, the action he takes based on the recognition of his predetermination is entirely his own responsibility.

Beginning with the assassination of the fundamental concept of social and textual identity and the recognition of his own predetermination, Rimbaud proceeds to elaborate a string of further revolutionary ideas in his letters based on the idea of the poet and his responsibilities. In doing so, it may be argued that Rimbaud makes the point that recognising one's difference and designating the source of this difference as predetermination to poetry is not an end in itself. Indeed, Rimbaud sought to build on these realisations by vitalising an ideal of authentic creativity that had poetry at its core. If poetry is to give rhythm to life once more, then the poet must experience life in all of its vastness and possibility in order to bring creativity and expand life itself, to explore and express in poetry what has hitherto lain unnoticed.

Attacking the notions of identity, the self and by introducing the idea of creativity or poetry as a vocation or predeterminable state, Rimbaud defines the parameters of his creative revolution to encompass all facets of the artist's life and being. As such, Rimbaud's aim of reinventing poetic creativity in an authentic capacity does not aim to change only the outward manifestation of poetry. Indeed, Rimbaud's revolution aims for nothing less than the reinvention of the poet. In order to combat the artifice that in his opinion has hijacked poetry, Rimbaud insists on a return to the human experience as the most important primary source for creative endeavour. Indeed, it is this emphasis on the experiential humanity of the poet is the foundation of Rimbaud's revolution. Using poetry as his ideal art, language and space of literature were to become the means in and by which the exploration and expression of the human experience were to take place. Taking this experiential emphasis into account, poetry produced through a writer's adherence

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<sup>32</sup> Rimbaud, p. 251, "Never existed".

to form and fashion could not, by definition, be manipulated in any way in order to make it conform to Rimbaud's understanding of authenticity. The past, and all the definitions and traditions that perpetuated its existence in the present, had to be swept away. Rimbaud writes:

Si les vieux imbéciles n'avaient pas trouvé du moi que la signification fausse, nous n'aurions pas à balayer ces millions de squelettes qui, depuis un temps infini, ont accumulé les produits de leur intelligence borgnesse, en s'en clamant les auteurs!<sup>33</sup>

For Rimbaud, committed as he was to a new poetic ideal, there was only one solution. In the interests of creating a 'true' poetry, Rimbaud came to the realisation that the recent past would simply have to be erased. Based on the vehemence of Rimbaud's lacerating criticisms of the past and the acts that he considered to constitute the crimes of the so-called 'artists' that preceded him, this was to be a revolution that began with the artist. By beginning with the poet, Rimbaud considered that the poetry he produced would be an extension and enabled exploration of the experience of the poet undertaken as text.

### 3.2.3 Becoming-Dionysus: The Path

Recognising himself as being predetermined to poetry and the past as an encumbrance to be removed, Rimbaud proceeds to outline his revolution of creativity in his letter to Demeny. Indeed, it is in the active or prescriptive elements of Rimbaud's revolution that the creative process he defines as ideal may be seen as most obviously Becoming-Dionysian. Insisting on the importance of the artist's personal experience within the creative process,

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<sup>33</sup> Rimbaud, p. 250, "If the old imbeciles hadn't found only the false meaning of self, we would not have to sweep away the millions of skeletons that have been accumulating as a result of their one-eyed intelligences in claiming to be authors!"

Rimbaud defines a path that the artist must take in order to expand his experiences and in so doing bring the unknown into art.

Rimbaud insists that having realised the faults of the past and as the author of these letters it is his responsibility to be active in the process of bringing his sentiments to paper. Insisting on the importance of the poet's exploration of the human experience, in his letters Rimbaud goes on to prescribe the ways in which the poet is to expand his knowledge of the human experience in order to discover and explore in his poetry that which has yet to be explored in text. By insisting that the poet is to gain a thorough knowledge of himself, his soul and the gamut of human experiences, it may be argued that Rimbaud views the poet as something of an explorer of the human condition. Indeed, insisting the poet undertake such a vast exploration of being human, Rimbaud defines poetry as a space in which the interaction of the sensations and facts that combine to form human reality is explored. As such, Rimbaud's creative revolution and his emphasis on the artist, explicitly cultivating experience and life itself, may be understood as exemplifying one reality of Becoming-Dionysian.

The fundamental basis of Rimbaud's 'path' is his understanding that the task of the poet was not that of a passive conduit of expressions and experiences from world to text. Indeed, quite the contrary was true, for as Rimbaud expressed in his criticism of the Romantic movement, the poet must *work* in order to bring shape to his thoughts and control their expression. Yet, the poet is not merely the conductor of an unfolding orchestra of thoughts vying for inclusion, rather he takes up a bow and he becomes the orchestra itself. Rimbaud explains: "j'assiste à l'éclosion de ma pensée; je la regarde, je l'écoute: je lance un coup d'archet: la symphonie fait son remuement dans les profondeurs, ou vient d'un bond sur la scène".<sup>34</sup> As Rimbaud points out to Demeny, the act of thought is itself an experience. As such, the poet must come to envision the world not as a number of fixed states and products, rather, he must develop beyond such reductive materialism and

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<sup>34</sup> Rimbaud, p. 250, "I attend the blossoming of my thought, I watch it, I listen to it: I poise my bow: a symphony stirs in the depths, or makes a leap onto the stage".

see the responsibility he bears as a creator in relation to conceptual entities such as thought and language and in so doing acknowledge his own presence as a part of their process.

As such a world view represents a radical departure from conventional contemporary approaches to understanding the world, Rimbaud understands that, unlike his own predetermination, knowledge is not innate and must be acquired. Whilst he recognises his nature to be that of a poet, it is not without great suffering and learning that the ascent to his ideal of authentic poethood would be accomplished. In accordance with his revolutionary concept of the poet's own experience as the source of authentic creativity, this learning would take the form of a comprehensive program of seeking and being present within an exhaustive and disparate array of extreme sensations and first-person encounters. Yet, before this program of acts of derangement is commenced, Rimbaud insists that the poet must know in intimate detail the extent and nature of his own soul. Through his own assertion that he has recognised himself as a poet, it may be considered that Rimbaud considered this preparatory stage of self-examination within his own poetic development to be complete: "La première étude de l'homme qui veut être poète est sa propre connaissance, entière; il cherche son âme, il l'inspecte, il la tente, l'apprend. Dès qu'il la sait, il doit la cultiver".<sup>35</sup>

In positing an exhaustive self-knowledge that requires the poet to penetrate the very depths of the soul as a pre-requisite for his program, by moving beyond such knowledge it may be argued that Rimbaud sought to extend the conscious aspect of self-knowing to its fullest capacity. However, the achievement of full self-knowledge is more conventionally considered to come through the gradually accumulated progress of life. Yet, for Rimbaud, such knowledge represented only the beginning of his poetic project, and as such may be seen to demonstrate the extent and scope of the radical process of acceleration this 'cultivation' of the self and soul intended to bring about.

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<sup>35</sup> Rimbaud, p. 251, "The first study of those who wish to be poets should be a complete knowledge of the self. He searches for his soul, inspects it, tests it, learns it. When he knows his soul, he must cultivate it!"

Experiences of the civilised world of rational and social consciousness were to be, on their own, of little use in Rimbaud's search for the experiential source of poetic authenticity. Only having gained a clear and rational knowledge of himself was the poet required (or even permitted) to seek experiences beyond rational consciousness and conventional being, to augment and distort this understanding in order to bring through one's own experience new insight and new knowledge to his attention. This knowledge of the conscious mind and rational thought would be required again later in the poetic process but for now the self and soul were to be the subject of a program designed to mutilate them to the point of monstrosity. Rimbaud explains: "il s'agit de faire l'âme monstrueuse [...] Imaginez un homme s'implantant et se cultivant des verrues sur le visage".<sup>36</sup>

Whilst in some respects this project of rational derangement may appear somewhat anti-Dionysian, Rimbaud's desire for the poet to extend his experiences and knowledge beyond the boundaries of an individual delineated existence echoes Nietzsche's understanding of the aims of the bacchantes, bacchanalia and Dionysus himself in its affirmation and understanding of the important relationship between instinct and consciousness. By initiating acts intended to bring about derangement, that is to say departure from the normative modes of human civilised consciousness, Rimbaud actively involves himself in a process which draws closer to Nietzsche's affirmative ideal Dionysian state. Indeed, in requiring knowledge of both the known or conscious and the unknown or Dionysian, it may be suggested that Rimbaud is intimately involved with a project that has as its aim the exploration of life comprising both conscious and experiential aspects, a project that is designated here using the term *Becoming-Dionysian*.

The program or path upon which the poet was to embark in order wilfully to bring about such monstrous conscious distortion was designed by Rimbaud to take the poet beyond the sphere of conventional conscious knowing using the spaces of intoxication. In order to bring about the modifications to

<sup>36</sup> Rimbaud, p. 251, "The soul must be made monstrous. [...] Imagine a man who implants warts on his face and proceeds to cultivate them".



consciousness and understanding that Rimbaud required for his Becoming-Dionysian to have tangible effect, such a program of rational derangement was constructed in order to give the poet intimate experiential knowledge of the extremes of human existence and, in some cases, saturation in experiences beyond the sphere of individual human knowing. Indeed, Rimbaud makes it very clear to Izambard that such a program is in no way a recreational excursion into the realm of the senses; this is hard, undesirable, degrading and difficult work, the purpose of which is tantamount to the mutilation of his social and human being: “je m’encrapule le plus possible. [. . .] Les souffrances sont énormes, mais il faut être fort”.<sup>37</sup> Any and all means possible were to be employed in order to accelerate the poet beyond a single existence, a single life limited by experiences of and in the conscious world. By wilfully mutilating his consciousness, the poet was to see, hear and feel all facets of existence accessible and possible between life and death, and in order to do so it was necessary for the poet to be able to access the entire spectrum of derangement. Rimbaud instructs:

Je dis qu’il faut être *voyant*, se faire *voyant*.

Le Poète se fait voyant par un long, immense et raisonné *dérèglement* de tous les sens. Toutes les formes d’amour, de souffrance, de folie; il cherche lui-même, il épuise en lui tous les poisons, pour n’en garder que les quintessences. Ineffable torture où il a besoin de toute la foi, de toute la force surhumaine, où il devient entre tous le grand malade, le grand criminel, le grand maudit, — et le suprême Savant!<sup>38</sup>

For a poet who understood the importance of experience to creativity as vital, the acquisition of experience of all aspects of derangement is best un-

<sup>37</sup> Rimbaud, p. 249, “The suffering is enormous, but it is necessary to be strong”.

<sup>38</sup> Rimbaud, p. 251, “I say that it is necessary to be a *seer*, to make oneself a *seer*.”

The poet makes himself a seer through a long, immense and rational derangement of all the senses. All forms of love, of suffering, of madness; he searches himself, he exhausts on himself all poisons only to keep their quintessences. Unspeakable torture for which he needs all his faith, all of his superhuman strength, so that he may become the sickest of all, the great criminal, the accursed one – and the supreme Scholar”.

derstood as necessary research. In Rimbaud's vision, such a poet is, by virtue of his own wilful adherence to the task of experiencing all possible facets of being, to become a scholar<sup>39</sup> of life itself. Indeed, it may be argued that implicit in Rimbaud's thinking on this point is his opinion that it is within such a distended spectrum of experience that the poet will come upon something new, as yet unseen and unexplored. By enabling such discovery, the derangement serves its purpose by allowing the poet access into unexplored and unknown realms. These realms are understood as unknown in as far as they are, in Rimbaud's estimation, inaccessible to rational consciousness. Continuing on from the assertion of the poet as scholar (quoted above), Rimbaud proclaims that knowledge of the unknown is a direct result of his program of auto-mutilation undertaken with the aim of removing the reign of rational consciousness as the dominant state. Rimbaud exclaims: "Car il arrive à l'*inconnu*! Puisqu'il a cultivé son âme, déjà riche, plus qu'aucun!"<sup>40</sup>

To accumulate such wealth of experience Rimbaud's search for the unknown required knowledge of any and every state, deemed both possible and impossible. For whilst love, suffering and madness are all concepts within the comparatively accessible context of a social existence, they are intense, *lived* experiences the nature and personal experience of which is necessarily confined to the first-person. In an effort to surpass all that is known and move into the unknown, logically, knowledge of the full extent of all known human experiences is therefore necessary for the poet's program of self-derangement. Rimbaud, in first requiring the poet to know his conscious soul, hastens the search for an experience of the unknown by prescribing a program or education for the poet with the express intention of transcending consciousness and therewith affirming the primal nature of life and life's experiences as the source of authenticity and truth through his own Becoming-Dionysian.

<sup>39</sup> Whilst most comprehensibly translated in this situation with the word 'Scholar', Rimbaud's use of the term 'Savant' in this context embraces not only the learned nature of the poet it also alludes to the nature of the knowing entertained by the poet as carnal. Witness the use of 'Savant' in the phrase "Enfants déjà savants" (children precocious in vice).

<sup>40</sup> Rimbaud, p. 254, "For he arrives at *the unknown*! As he has cultivated his soul he has already become rich, richer than anyone!"

This is to say that Rimbaud expects the poet to pass beyond consciousness through any and all intoxicating means possible into a realm of pure experience unmitigated by the contamination and contexts of extant language and socialised thought. Indeed, Rimbaud uses the example of the situation of women to demonstrate the way in which liberation from the conscious norm may facilitate new insight. Rimbaud insists that by releasing women from the traditionally defined roles of servitude and strict behavioural codes, they will bring new understanding, knowledge and perspective to creativity. Rimbaud writes:

Quand sera brisé l'infini servage de la femme, quand elle vivra pour elle et par elle, l'homme, — jusqu'ici abominable, — lui ayant donné son renvoi, elle sera poète, elle aussi! La femme trouvera de l'inconnu! Ses mondes d'idées différeront-ils des nôtres? — Elle trouvera des choses étranges, insondables, repoussantes, délicieuses; nous les prendrons, nous les comprendrons.<sup>41</sup>

### 3.2.4 Intoxication

Having expounded the necessity of a rational quest to derange his consciousness, it seems logical to conclude that Rimbaud may have turned to artificial stimulants to aid him in this pursuit. In his *Dictionnaire Rimbaud*, Jeancolas quotes Rimbaud's childhood friend Ernest Delahaye who claims to have had first-hand confirmation of Rimbaud's use of hashish.<sup>42</sup> Charles

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<sup>41</sup> Rimbaud, p. 254, "When the endless servitude of woman is broken, when she lives for and by herself, man — hitherto abominable — having given her this release, she too will be a poet! Women will find the unknown! Do her worlds of ideas differ from our own? — She will find strange things, unfathomable, loathsome and delicious things; we will take them, we will understand them."

<sup>42</sup> "En novembre 1871, Ernest le retrouvera à Paris à l'hôtel des Etrangers et le trouvera étrange. «Rimbaud dormait sur une banquette. Il se réveilla à notre arrivée, se frotta les yeux en faisant la grimace, nous dit qu'il avait pris du haschish [...] Nous sortîmes tous deux; il était assez somnolent...»". Jeancolas, pp. 93-94. "In November 1871, Ernest

Russell insists that some of Rimbaud's visions are "certainly drug induced".<sup>43</sup> It is important to note that much is supposed and very little is known about Rimbaud's personal experience with intoxicants.<sup>44</sup> Insofar as Rimbaud encouraged the active pursuit of all experiences, it is highly probable that he did experience a greater number of the chemically-induced experiences than those that have been attributed to him with certainty. It is widely acknowledged that Rimbaud did have some experience with chemical stimulants; however, the extent of his experiences and the depth of his involvement with any particular substance is largely unknown. As a scholar of the relationship between writers and drugs, Marcus Boon concludes that the poisons of which Rimbaud speaks in his letter to Demeny are by "no means exclusively metaphorical".<sup>45</sup> The intoxicants with which Rimbaud definitely came into contact whilst still active as a poet were alcohol (including absinthe<sup>46</sup>), tobacco and hashish.<sup>47</sup> However, given the emphasis placed in his letters on the effort required to seek such experiences beyond consciousness, it is possible that Rimbaud simply tried and subsequently dismissed the method of voyaging beyond consciousness with the assistance of drugs in much the same way that he dismissed and parodied religion as a simple solution to a greater and infinitely more complex problem. Jad Adams provides an important insight into Rimbaud's use of intoxicants as a method of aiding his explorations of the unknown and not as an end in themselves when he insists that Rimbaud refused to use absinthe as a defence or excuse for his behaviour under its

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finds himself in Paris at the Hôtel des Etrangers and encounters Rimbaud in a strange state. "Rimbaud was sleeping on a bench. He roused himself at our arrival, rubbed his eyes and yawned, he told us that he'd taken hashish [...] We went out together; he was very sleepy."

<sup>43</sup> Russell, *Poets, Prophets and Revolutionaries*, p. 50.

<sup>44</sup> Wallace Fowlie notes perceptively that "[t]he great intoxication of Rimbaud's life was poetry". See: Fowlie, *Rimbaud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 169.

<sup>45</sup> Marcus Boon, *The Road of Excess* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 143.

<sup>46</sup> Absinthe contains wormwood the neuro-active ingredient of which is alpha-thujone. Alpha-thujone has intoxicant and narcotic properties and may produce hallucinations, convulsions and psychosis. See: Wilfred Niels Arnold, 'Absinthe', in *Scientific American*, 260: 6 (1989), 86 – 91.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics 1500-2000* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2001), p. 152.

influence. Indeed, Adams writes “[Rimbaud] did not blame absinthe for what he did”,<sup>48</sup> going on to explain that in Rimbaud’s opinion absinthe simply allowed certain elements of his being to rise to the surface and be expressed. Thus, in Adams’ opinion, absinthe was only a means for Rimbaud of allowing hitherto unseen elements of his being to break free from conscious control.

Yet, even if the extent of Rimbaud’s employment of intoxicants cannot be known with exactitude, it remains the case that his project — examined here in the terms of a Becoming-Dionysian — makes use of the kind of intoxicated experience most recognisably associated with states of chemical intoxication in order to bring hitherto concealed aspects of his experience and his being to the surface. Taking the experiential aspect of Rimbaud’s project into account, by using intoxication as both an allegory and a personal method or tool to further his Becoming-Dionysian project, it becomes clear that the state and unmitigated nature of the intoxicated experience (both notional and actual) was highly influential in Rimbaud’s project and his understanding of the role of experience as a causal agent in the creative process. For Rimbaud, immersion in that which is here termed the Dionysian was important insofar as such immersion was, in his opinion, able to remove the restrictions that prevented the unknown from being accessible to rational consciousness.

In order to exemplify Rimbaud’s understanding of the unmitigated first-person nature of experience (intoxicated and otherwise) and its role within the Becoming-Dionysian project in which this chapter argues that he was involved, the philosophical reasoning of Heidegger may be used to provide an interesting parallel. Heidegger’s concept of the accumulation of experience explored in *Unterwegs zur Sprache* asserts that experience is “*eundo assequi*”,<sup>49</sup> or, obtained along, or by undertaking a way, reflects a more considered and philosophical understanding of Rimbaud’s own position. Rimbaud’s employment of any and all means of transcending consciousness was explicitly

<sup>48</sup> Jad Adams, *Hideous Absinthe: A History of the Devil in a Bottle* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004), pp. 85-86.

<sup>49</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1976- ), 12 (1985), p. 159.

intended to enable him to reach the 'unknown', yet it may be argued that it is the experiences enabled by the undertaking of this journey that are at the core of the authenticity he seeks. Using the dynamic model of a journey elaborated by Heidegger, the Rimbaudian idea of the unknown can be seen to exist as a concept or perfect state that the poet must always seek but he will never attain or occupy. Thus, experiences are the result of this seeking yet do not in themselves allow the unknown to be rendered visible, to be known or included in the scope of the rational and consciously knowable world.

Given its inability to be apprehended by the conscious, civilised, socialised mind, Rimbaud's 'unknown' is then a term akin in mood to Nietzsche's 'Dionysian' insofar as both terms signify the existence of a state of union with that which is beyond the reaches of consciousness, yet which is integral to human existence, whilst remaining apart from rational conscious knowing. Rimbaud's voluminous and poetic 'unknown' surrounds consciousness in much the same way as Stern described Nietzsche's "hostile universe of silence"<sup>50</sup> enveloping the tiny island of human understanding, knowledge and language. When Rimbaud lauds his poet for reaching the unknown he is not claiming for that poet the accumulation of all knowledge, he is praising the willpower necessary to be beyond rational consciousness, the accomplishment that it is to have ventured beyond the shore of the human island of which Stern speaks. Rimbaud writes:

Il arrive à l'inconnu, et quand, affolé, il finirait par perdre l'intelligence de ses visions, il les a vues! Qu'il crève dans son bondissement par les choses inouïes et innommables: viendront d'autres horribles travailleurs; ils commenceront par les horizons où l'autre s'est affaissé!<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> J. P. Stern, *Nietzsche* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), p. 139.

<sup>51</sup> Rimbaud, p. 251, "He arrives at the unknown, and when, demented, he concludes by losing the intelligence of his visions, he still saw them! Let him explode leaping through unknown and unnamed things, other dreadful workers will come; they will begin their work upon the horizons where he that went before them sank".

Importantly, it may be argued that he is here predicting the death of the poet's ability to interact with extended experiences from the initial departure point of rational consciousness. Extending Stern's island metaphor to encompass Rimbaud's prophetic pronouncement, it may be argued that Rimbaud contends that the poet, unable to return to the shore of rationality, drowns. The loss of this ability to make contact with consciousness is the death of any ability as a poet or explorer. Rimbaud prophesies that after one such visionary has ceased to maintain contact with consciousness, others will come to continue the work of such a poet, departing from the point at which his poems and explorations ceased.

Emphasising the importance of the connection between unmitigated experience and rational consciousness as the source of authenticity, Rimbaud's creative revolution prescribes his ideal circumstances of that which is here understood as his Becoming-Dionysian. For in seeking the unknown beyond rational consciousness the poet undergoes experiences without the mitigation of rational thought, social context and the mediating influence of the 'I' that is 'other'. However, if the poet does not return to rational consciousness and therewith language and human/social contexts, then the intelligence — which is to say the ability of the poet to communicate and explore meaning and possibility in a social context using language — of these visions and experiences is lost. Rimbaud understands quite clearly that the very application of the term 'poet' is a label, identification with which is dependent upon this return to a social world. However, the nature of the interaction brought about by the Becoming-Dionysian process between the experience enabled through seeking the unknown and a re-examination/exploration of this experience from the sober perspective of rational consciousness is largely left unspoken within the context of Rimbaud's letters to Demeny and Izambard.

### 3.2.5 Responsibility and Education

In order to enunciate and explore the interaction that characterises and is brought about by Rimbaud's Becoming-Dionysian endeavour, it was important for Rimbaud to have an in-depth understanding of his artistic medium of choice. Having appropriated the label of poet, that is to say, one whose function it is to explore and communicate in a creative capacity using the medium of words, it is logical to conclude the interaction between the rational frame of sober consciousness and the experience the unknown takes place in the space of language. Yet, Rimbaud is emphatic that this language, that is to say, a language in which a space for Becoming-Dionysian interaction was possible, does not yet exist. Therefore, in accordance with Rimbaud's understanding of the responsibilities of authentic creativity, it is the responsibility of the poet to discover such a language, and, through his exploration of this new space, to use language anew to recreate the world.

In creating such a language, the poet takes on a huge responsibility. Rimbaud insists that in creating a language in which to explore that which is here termed his Becoming-Dionysian: "Il est chargé de l'humanité, des *animaux* même; il devra faire sentir, palper, écouter ses inventions; si ce qu'il rapporte de *là-bas* a forme, il donne forme; si c'est informe, il donne de l'informe. Trouver une langue".<sup>52</sup> Thus, in positing in the concept and reality of language such enormous possibilities and responsibility as the recreation or reinvention of the world, Rimbaud's willingness to place such a task in the hands of the poet demonstrates the vital accountability he sees as resting in and upon language itself. The poet, having worked on himself to enable a personal experience of the unknown, must now work on both his understanding of language and language itself in order to make a space in which his experiences and being may begin to find their way into the world.

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<sup>52</sup> Rimbaud, p. 252, "He is responsible for humanity, for the very *animals*; his inventions must be felt, touched, heard; if that which he brings back from *the depths* has form, he will give it form; if it is without form, he gives it no form. A language must be found".



Rimbaud's new language, both as a concept and as a new medium in which to explore, will not have the task of merely reporting that which the poet experiences, even though this seems to be the task to which Rimbaud alludes with his use of the term 'rapporte' (above). Rather, it may be suggested that Rimbaud's intention for the process of language creation is to consecrate a space in which his personal Becoming-Dionysian explored as poetry was able to extend. Thus when he describes the source and goal of such language as "de l'âme pour l'âme",<sup>53</sup> Rimbaud may be seen to signal to Demyen that this new idea and reality of language differs vastly from the mechanical means of communication to which the present system of words and ideas has bound humanity. In Rimbaud's vision, this new language will reach beyond the restrictions of description and will encompass sensations hitherto known only through experience.

In order to illustrate the radical departure from old and academic understandings of language this new language represents, Rimbaud insists on the impossibility of writing a dictionary for such a language. Rimbaud writes: "Il faut être académicien, — plus mort qu'un fossile, — pour parfaire un dictionnaire de quelque langue que ce soit".<sup>54</sup> By drawing the comparison between his revolutionary understanding of the need for a new language and the rigid state of fossilisation of the academy with its stale and enshrined knowledge, Rimbaud labours the point to Demyen that this new language must be a fluid and flexible space for life:

Cette langue sera de l'âme pour l'âme, résumant tout, parfums, sons, couleurs, de la pensée accrochant la pensée et tirant. Le poète définirait la quantité d'inconnu s'éveillant en son temps dans l'âme universelle: il donnerait plus — que la formule de sa pensée, que la notation de *sa marche au Progrès!* Énormité devenant norme, absorbée par tous, il serait vraiment *un multiplicateur de progrès!*<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Rimbaud, p. 252, "Of the soul, for the soul".

<sup>54</sup> Rimbaud, p. 252, "One would have to be an academic — deader than a fossil, — to complete a dictionary in any language at all".

<sup>55</sup> Rimbaud, p. 252, "This language will be a language of the soul, for the soul, containing

However, there resides here an uneasy paradox for Rimbaud for to live in the space of language is impossible for the poet whose task it is to experience life and not to inhabit the refined spaces of meaning and word. In the scope of the project of Becoming-Dionysian that is here attributed to Rimbaud, the creation of a language from the component ideas and shapes inherited from his ancestors (Baudelaire, Banville, Hugo to name only a few) would provide a space in which his experiences could be explored and new junctions and situations entered into and brought about. However, just as the poet had to prepare himself for the experiences that were to be explored within the space of language, language itself had to be prepared in order to accommodate the needs of the task the poet required it to fulfil. Language had to be broken apart from its constructions, connotations and contexts in order to do new things. Such deconstruction of antiquated forms and conventions was necessary in order to make language flexible again. For Rimbaud the task of the revolutionary poet was to smash language up into its component words, and in doing so, rid them of all overtones and remnants of structure and cultural context. Only once this had been achieved could the poet begin to experiment, create and explore in a space without reference, to give new forms and explore new experiences. Osmond writes of Rimbaud's new language as a "revolution" in which Rimbaud hoped to:

[L]iberate language from the set forms which structure reality in a conventional and predetermined way, and would transform it into an instrument of discovery. [...] It would change the world by breaking down habitual patterns of perception. [...] New words to create a new world.<sup>56</sup>

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all, perfumes, sounds, colours, thought grabbing thought and pulling. The poet would define the quantity of the unknown that would emerge in the universal soul during his time: he would give more — than the formulation of his thought, do more than annotate the march towards progress! Enormity will become normal, taken on by all, he [the poet] will truly be a *multiplier of progress!*".

<sup>56</sup> Nick Osmond (ed.), *Illuminations: Coloured Plates* (London: University of London Press/The Athlone Press, 1976), p. 6.

It must be noted, however, that the importance of Rimbaud's realisation of the need for a new language in which and through which to explore his Becoming-Dionysian did not immediately translate into the appearance of such in his work. The evolution or discovery of a language in which such revolutionary concepts of authenticity and poetry could be explored required substantial personal change that was outlined in the Becoming-Dionysian missives of May 1871, but which was yet to be realised in his work. Whilst it remains apparent that Rimbaud's concept of authentic poetry in his *Lettres du Voyant* showed very clearly his idea that in order to be authentic, creative endeavour must come directly from the experience of the poet, Rimbaud himself had to undergo the process he described in order to bring about the poetic revolution he envisaged. Furthermore, whilst the requisite processes of personal preparation are detailed quite clearly by Rimbaud, the way in which his program intends to allow experience to interact with rational consciousness is less clearly enunciated. Rimbaud posits language as the space in which such interaction was to take place but does not actually define language as capable of providing parameters within which an exploration of the unknown can take place. Rather, such an understanding of language is left implicit in his letters to Izambard and Demyen to be more comprehensively explored in his own poetic work using a process that is Becoming-Dionysian in nature.

### 3.3 Creating a Language

Between May 1871 and the first extended exploration of his revolutionary principles with the initiation of the *Illuminations* and *Une Saison en Enfer*, Rimbaud's poetry remained driven by the prescriptive and idealised sentiments of his letters. But as a poet, Rimbaud was as yet unable to access a space in language in which his experiences and rational consciousness were able to interact. The poetry of this period veers between that which St. Aubyn identifies as "pastiche",<sup>57</sup> and exceptional insight and originality as

<sup>57</sup> F. C. St. Aubyn, *Arthur Rimbaud*, rev. edn. (Boston: Twayne, 1988), p. 3.

Rimbaud struggles to realise both his own Becoming-Dionysian and the aims of his revolution. Poems such as 'Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs'<sup>58</sup> may be read as both a parody of the over-elaborate and highly wrought artistic vocabularies of the Parnassians, and, simultaneously, as a space in which the poet plays onomatopoeically with the sounds of the surreal botanical names in such a way that the words become the floral ornamentation of the text. The poetry of this interim period sees Rimbaud enjoying the subversion of fashion in language and form, indulging temporarily in each style common at the time, experimenting and stretching the possibilities of language and content in a variety of traditional poetic circumstances and simultaneously refining and exploring his revolutionary ideals through practice.

The scope of this whirlwind tour of practical poetic experience is vast. At times it appears the aim of such a project is to reinforce Rimbaud's opinion that poetry required a revolutionary overhaul, even if, as is clear in his *Lettres du Voyant*, no amount of renovation could suffice. It is important to note that Rimbaud did not indulge in a self-aggrandising exercise to prove his point or a simple exercise to demonstrate the practical validation of his own opinion. Through Rimbaud's practical experience of the shortcomings of both traditional and fashionable verse, his subsequent innovations and alterations to the idea and practice of poetry were of personal and practical relevance. During this interim period, his attempts to find a 'language of the soul' contributed some truly innovative (if semi-traditional) verse. Many of these poems, though recognisable in form, show interesting and revealing innovation of content, if not in style. Rimbaud's much-praised poem 'Le Bateau ivre'<sup>59</sup> represents both a significant advance in the direction indicated by his revolutionary project and serves to explore and refine Rimbaud's ideas concerning his poetic project. In 'Le Bateau ivre', Rimbaud examines a projected and metaphorical reality of his poetic project, thereby acknowledging the implicit message in his letter to Demeny, namely, that both the known and the unknown were necessary for revolutionary creativity.

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<sup>58</sup> 'That which is said to the Poet on the subject of flowers'.

<sup>59</sup> 'The Drunken Boat'

### 3.3.1 The Example of 'Le Bateau ivre'

The poetic space of 'Le Bateau ivre' is recognisable in form as a traditional poem. Yet, whilst traditional in form, 'Le Bateau ivre' may be read as an allegorical exploration of liberation from the thoughts of the past.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the theme of liberation greets the reader in the first stanza of 'Le Bateau ivre'. It is widely acknowledged that the boat whose experiences the poem explores refers to the poet himself. Using such a personal allegory as the centre of his poem, 'Le Bateau ivre' may be seen to provide an interesting point of interaction between Rimbaud's poetic work and that which is here termed his Becoming-Dionysian outlined in his *Lettres du Voyant*. Indeed, just as Rimbaud railed against the past and the necessity of its sacrifice in his epistle to Demeny, within the first eight lines of his verse the boat is freed from all such restrictions. Those traditions or 'haulers' who have hitherto guided the movement of the boat have been lost, crucified by 'savages', suffering the final indignity and fundamental humiliation of being "cloués nus aux poteaux de couleurs".<sup>61</sup> The boat, whose function it is to carry or transport, is thus stripped of its purpose and its direction. Along with its haulers, the crew and cargo are lost and the boat is released into the realm of its own desires:

Comme je descendais des Fleuves impassibles,  
Je me sentis plus guidé par les haleurs:  
Des Peaux-Rouges criards les avaient pris pour cibles,  
Les ayant cloués nus aux poteaux de couleurs.

J'étais insoucieux de tous les équipages,  
Porteur de blés flamands ou de cotons anglais.  
Quand avec mes haleurs ont fini ces tapages  
Les Fleuves m'ont laissé descendre où je voulais.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Fowlie, *Rimbaud*, p. 31.

<sup>61</sup> Rimbaud, 'Le Bateau ivre', p. 66, "Nailed naked to coloured stakes".

<sup>62</sup> Rimbaud, 'Le Bateau ivre', p. 66.

As I descended impassable rivers,

Without the restrictions of the past, the burden of cargo or the will of the crew the boat is left without conscious direction or desire.<sup>63</sup> Thus freed, the poet/boat can immerse itself without fear or constraint in the sensations and experiences of 'boatness'. This achievement of unrestricted freedom mirrors the call made by Rimbaud to Demeny for the poet to explore beyond consciousness through the abandonment of the known. Without the guidance of conscious social elements, the boat without haulers, purpose or crew is effectively inebriated, insofar as it is focused only on the experiential aspects of its being and unable to contextualise them without the guiding, conscious human element that has been swept away. Describing the boat as "drunk", Rimbaud uses the allegory of inebriation to describe the state and experience of the boat in the same way Nietzsche used intoxication to provide a comprehensible parallel to, or explanation for, the reality of the Dionysian. In both cases, the goal of such an allegory is to demonstrate the way in which consciousness is necessarily foregone in order to undergo pure, unmitigated experience.

Without haulers or crew, Rimbaud's boat moves on the currents of nature, descending the rivers out into the ocean, free to follow the currents of unregulated idea and sensation wherever they may go. Finally, the boat finds itself in the unknown vastness of the sea. It is upon reaching the sea that the poem expands into the realm of ecstatic description and vibrant synesthesia. It has often been the subject of astonished comment from critics that at the time of writing 'Le Bateau ivre' Rimbaud had not seen the sea.<sup>64</sup> However, not having had a physical and first-person experience of the sea allowed Rimbaud the liberty of truth; the sea *was* unknown to him and was therefore an honest and poetic depiction of 'l'inconnu' that he (as the

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I felt myself no longer guided by haulers!  
 Screaming redskins had taken them for targets,  
 Nailing them naked to coloured stakes./  
 I was cared not for any crew,  
 The bearer of Flemish wheat or English cotton.  
 When with my haulers this calamity ceased,  
 The rivers let me go wherever I pleased.

<sup>63</sup> St. Aubyn, p. 64.

<sup>64</sup> See: Graham Robb, *Rimbaud* (New York; London: Norton, 2000), p. 104.

poet/boat) seeks. Thus, it is by following the paths that emanate from his unbridled imagination that he reaches the unknown:

Dans les clapotements furieux des marées,  
Moi, l'autre hiver, plus sourd que les cerveaux d'enfants,  
Je courus! Et les Péninsules démarrées  
N'ont pas subi tohu-bohus plus triomphants.<sup>65</sup>

The triumph of this complete freedom is communicated in his joy at having passed "Dix nuits, sans regretter l'œil niais des falots!"<sup>66</sup> Slowly all remnants of conscious habitation (the vomit and wine of sailors) are washed away. Lost and utterly absorbed in this absolute freedom, the boat is unable to return to the shore, consciousness, duty and purpose. In a sense, then, the same end that Rimbaud had predicted for his 'voyagers into the unknown' in his letter to Demeny befalls the boat itself:

Plus douce qu'aux enfants la chair des pommes sûres,  
L'eau verte pénétra ma coque de sapin  
Et des taches de vins bleus et des vomissures  
Me lava, dispersant gouvernail et grappin.

Et dès lors, je me suis baigné dans le Poème  
De la Mer, infusé d'astres, et lactescent,  
Dévorant les azurs verts; où, flottaison blême  
Et ravie, un noyé pensif parfois descend;<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Rimbaud, 'Le Bateau ivre', p. 66.

Into the furious lashing of the tides,  
Myself, the other winter, more heedless than the minds of children  
I ran! Unmoored peninsulas  
Have not borne witness to more triumphant chaos.

<sup>66</sup> Rimbaud, 'Le Bateau ivre', p. 66, "Ten nights, without missing the foolish eye of the lighthouse".

<sup>67</sup> Rimbaud, 'Le Bateau ivre', p. 66, 67.

Sweeter than the flesh of crisp apples is to children,  
The green water seeps into my pine hull.  
And the stains of red wine and vomit,

From this point on, the stanzas roll out and around the reader just like the waves that toss the boat, dazzling with their beauty and fascinating with their innovation. The reader, often referred to using the contextual allegory of the 'child' by the poet, ogles the passing array of beauty and wonder being explored in words. Yet, it is only at the end of the verse that the poet/boat realises the value of consciousness and purpose and longs to return. However, having known freedom of this magnitude Rimbaud knows that this return will and can never be accomplished. Having known too much of that which is yet unknown to a collective social consciousness the poet must "perdre l'intelligence de ses visions",<sup>68</sup> that is to say, become so far removed from his own consciousness through immersion in the unknown that he is unable to return and give shape in words to his experiences. Rimbaud writes:

Mais, vrai, j'ai trop pleuré! Les Aubes sont navrantes.  
Toute lune est atroce et tout soleil amer:  
L'âcre amour m'a gonflé de torpeurs enivrantes.  
Ô que ma quille éclate! Ô que j'aïlle à la mer!

Si je désire une eau d'Europe, c'est la flache  
Noire et froide où vers le crépuscule embaumé  
Un enfant accroupi plein de tristesses, lâche  
Un bateau frêle comme un papillon de mai.

Je ne puis plus, baigné de vos langueurs, ô lames,  
Enlever leur sillage aux porteurs de cotons,  
Ni traverser l'orgueil des drapeaux et des flammes,  
Ni nager sous les yeux horribles des pontons.<sup>69</sup>

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Wash from me, taking with them my rudder and anchor./  
From that moment, I immersed myself in the poem,  
Of the sea, infused with stars and lactescent,  
Devouring the green azure, where pallid, floating,  
And entranced, a meditative drowned figure may sink.

<sup>68</sup> Rimbaud, p. 251, "Lose the intelligence of his visions".

<sup>69</sup> Rimbaud, 'Le Bateau ivre', p. 69.

But, true, I have cried too much! The dawns are heartbreaking,  
Every moon is excruciating and every sun bitter:  
Bitter love has swollen me with intoxicating indolence.



In his analysis of the poet's work, *Rimbaud*, Wallace Fowlie asserts that in 'Le Bateau ivre' Rimbaud is narrating the experience of his wanting to be a poet and the processes involved therewith as dictated by his *Lettres du Voyant*.<sup>70</sup> This is an insightful reading of Rimbaud's verse as it highlights the way in which Rimbaud has failed in this attempt to create the language of the soul to which he aspires. Indeed, Fowlie is correct in discerning a direct correlation between Rimbaud's own poetic project and the fantastic experience explored in this poem; however, despite the latter's poetic attempts at synesthesia to fuse experience and language in 'Le Bateau ivre', Rimbaud ultimately fails to explore his own experience of an unknown, narrating instead the extraordinary journey of an allegorical boat. In this way, 'Le Bateau ivre' remains a narrative concerning a genuine understanding of the role and fate of the poet, infused with the immediacy of sensation and imagery that was not available in the sulking and passionate idealism of his letters.<sup>71</sup> In this way, Rimbaud's voyage as a drunken boat may be seen as an exercise in insightful, poetic and beautiful allegory that highlights the importance of the return from experiential immersion to rational consciousness in order to create. Without such recourse to thought, consciousness and language, the poet is crippled by an insatiable longing to be back in his initial stages of discovery rather than venturing further into an unknown that he is unable to understand. Thus, whilst narrating the trajectory of a poet's ideal development, 'Le Bateau ivre' remains, in the final analysis, rooted in traditional modes.

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O may my keel explode! O let me go into the sea!/  
If I desire a European sea, it is the puddle  
Black and cold, where in the perfumed twilight  
A crouching child filled with sadness, releases  
A boat as fragile as a May butterfly./  
I may no longer, immersed in your languor, O waves,  
Follow in the wake of the cotton carriers,  
Nor the transverse the pride of flags and flames,  
Nor swim beneath the terrible eyes of prison ships.

<sup>70</sup> Fowlie, *Rimbaud*, p. 34.

<sup>71</sup> Perhaps it was the example of Rimbaud that Paul Valéry had in mind when he made the comment "L'idéal est une manière de bouder" (the ideal is a way of sulking).

### 3.3.2 'Voyelles': Beyond 'Le Bateau ivre'

Remaining within the discipline of identifiable poetic form, yet aiming to reach further into the maelstrom of derangement, Rimbaud's sonnet 'Voyelles' is an unambiguous attempt to render the component letters of language in colour and feeling. Using the structure of the sonnet, Rimbaud breaks down the words themselves into component vocal and aural sensations. Yet, as Chadwick notes in his comparison between Rimbaud's composition technique and creative motivation in 'Le Bateau ivre' and that identifiable in 'Voyelles', whilst such verse may explore as yet uncharted conceptual territory Rimbaud remains bound to the need for rhyme and traditional form. Chadwick writes:

'Voyelles' too, within the overall framework of the sonnet, adopts [the] technique of a succession of images with no linking thread running between them and it contains a number of adjectives which provide fairly obvious rhymes but which are far from meaningful in association with the nouns they qualify — 'mouches éclatantes', 'puanteurs cruelles' and 'ivresses pénitentes'. On one occasion Rimbaud even uses a Latin rather than a French word — 'virides' instead of 'vertes' — to provide the requisite two syllables and a feminine ending and at the same time a rhyme for 'rides'.<sup>72</sup>

Such blatant desire to conform to the demands of traditional poetry sits uneasily alongside Rimbaud's revolutionary aim to create a language of the soul. Yet, the unusual juncture of adjectives and nouns required to conform to the contemporary poetic norm did serve a dramatically important formative purpose for Rimbaud. Whilst his verses of this period overflow with voluptuous language, radical concepts and dynamic (if on occasion confusing) imagery, on the level of meaning and continuity, Rimbaud's awkward word constellations, born as they were from necessity, had the effect of communicating the poet's experiences of both uneasiness and violent enthusiasm.

<sup>72</sup> C. Chadwick, *Rimbaud* (London: Athlone Press, 1979), p. 29.

Thus, paradoxically, it may be suggested that it was the need to conform to tradition (specifically traditional structures of rhyme and metre) that lead, at least in part, to Rimbaud's discovery of the key to the hidden space of language the existence of which he had foretold in his letters, yet which he had been unable to reach at that time. Again, Chadwick perceptively notes that in both 'Le Bateau ivre' and 'Voyelles':

[Rimbaud] is no longer concerned with 'telling a story' and it may be that the endless arguments about the exact meaning of these two poems spring in a large measure from the fact that the balance between the orderly control of the intellect and the free play of the imagination had shifted toward the latter, without, however, the former being completely abandoned.<sup>73</sup>

The luxuriant piling of images and sensations on top of one another in combination with the restrictive requirements of rhyme and metre involved with the production of conventional verse allowed Rimbaud to create new — and what may have initially been inadvertent — effects in his texts. The application of adjectives to nouns based on reasons other than those of conventionally appropriate meaning and narrative possibility was an area as yet unexplored by the fashionable poets of the age. However, it may be argued that as he was still intent on creating a 'language of the soul' suitable for exploring expressing his experiences, Rimbaud was forced to extend the discovery of the value of juxtaposition and the heightened sensations such effects produced in his poems in order to find new forms that suited if not actively aided his discoveries. Indeed, it may be argued that it was Rimbaud's desire continually to contest the boundaries and forms acceptable as poetic experience and to search for new ways to revitalise poetry itself that lead directly to his exploration of prose poetry as a new form in which to challenge his abilities and discoveries.

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<sup>73</sup> Chadwick, p. 29.

### 3.4 The Prose Poem

Using Becoming-Dionysian as the structure through which Rimbaud's creative process is understood, it may be argued that the most effective exploration of that which is identified here as Rimbaud's Becoming-Dionysian takes place in his prose poetry. The poetry of the period following the *Lettres du Voyant* and prior to the undertaking of *Illuminations* and *Une Saison en Enfer* enabled Rimbaud to make remarkable discoveries that lead him to both realising the necessity for new forms and having the courage to create them. This section argues that it is in his prose poetry, begun in earnest in 1872-3 that the aims of that which is here understood as his Becoming-Dionysian can be seen to be most fully realised. Through his employment of the amorphous configuration of the prose poem, it may be argued that Rimbaud's late poetry demonstrates his concern to move beyond the restrictions of the past and by using the unstructured form of prose poetry, rather than its traditional counterpart of structured verse, to seek new spaces in which he can explore his poetic revolution.

One crucial factor in facilitating the dramatic change in style, form and content seen in Rimbaud's transition from structured verse to prose poetry was his discovery of a new space of language. As his *Lettres du Voyant* had foreseen, a new language was a necessity for the exploration of that which is as yet unknown, yet the reason behind this necessity was revealed only through Rimbaud's own attempts to write poetry that fused his own images and use of words with the traditional forms that defined the art of poetry for the young poet. In trying to bring this fusion about, Rimbaud was confronted with the inability of the traditional space left for language within the frame of poetic expression to accommodate the demands of a new language. Thus, the creation of a language of the soul required a space in which this language could take shape and such a space was not found by the poet in his odyssey through the litany of poetic forms uncovered during his experiential poetic education.

Rimbaud's poetic journey post-May 1871 had allowed him to clarify the ideas he had presented with such enthusiasm to Demeny and Izambard. However, with the benefit of his experiences of expansion and experimentation (evidence of which can be seen in 'Le Bateau ivre' and 'Voyelles'), it may be argued that Rimbaud saw that his call for a new language *per se* seemed facile. Through his experiments, it had gradually become apparent to Rimbaud that the role of language could most valuably be seen as a space in which first-person experiences and rational consciousness were able to interact. Thus, the initial idea expressed in his letter that it was the words themselves that were the building blocks from which he would create castles that would allow the unknown to be explored was exposed as simplistic. As he had elaborated in 'Le Bateau ivre' and in his letters to Izambard and Demeny, for poetry to be authentic, the conscious element of the poet was required to interact with the experiences of the first-person in the realm of the unknown. As such, whilst his initial discovery of the use of words in the poetic context when chosen according to the requirements of form and rhythm (as opposed to the more conventional motivation of meaning) were important, Rimbaud came to realise that such effects were themselves catalytic. Indeed, Rimbaud may be seen to come to the understanding that any interaction between the poles of human existence was not possible through the rearrangement of words within the confines of form alone.

This chapter argues that in his prose poetry Rimbaud develops a primarily conceptual understanding of the space of language in which such vital interaction was enabled. By separating words from their conventional contexts and regular usage, Rimbaud removed the restrictive boundaries of linguistic function hitherto understood as a necessity-based communicative tool, or, in the case of the Romantics, a defined medium for artistic pretension. Thus, in a process that had begun with the employment of words in order to fit the requirements of rhyme, words became devolved entities stripped of supporting structures. Liberated from the restrictions of grammar, convention and history, the poet was free to use a word in the same way that a painter would select a colour or a composer would select a musical note. On one basic level,

Rimbaud's new language of the soul allowed the interaction of the conscious self and the as yet unexplored experiences of first-person being by allowing conscious input in the selection of words for their meanings and experiential capacities. Such a language required words to be selected not only for their logical meaning in the context of a poem, but also for the sensation, reaction and emotion the words brought about for the reader and the author.

However, as has been demonstrated by the practical poetic experiments of Rimbaud's poetic journey through traditional poetic forms, a full exploration of such a liberated and new understanding of language necessarily finds itself in natural opposition to the rigid structures of poetic tradition. Hence, Rimbaud's choice of the prose poem as a space in which his language could be freely used appears a logical extension of that which is here termed his Becoming-Dionysian poetic project. Poets prior to Rimbaud had explored the prose poem as a creative medium: Baudelaire, for example, successfully used the form of the prose poem in his collection of work entitled *Spleen de Paris*.<sup>74</sup> Yet, it may be argued that for Rimbaud, the transition to writing prose poetry was less about the rebellion inherent in the abandonment of traditional verse form than it was about realising the space of his language of the soul. In this way, the prose poetry of the *Illuminations* and *Une Saison en Enfer* may be seen to represent the actualisation of a space of language that Rimbaud considers to be un-coded by convention. This new space is opened up by the poet for the purpose of exploring interaction between the conscious and the experiential; that is to say, a space in which his Becoming-Dionysian is enabled.

### 3.4.1 The *Illuminations*

Perhaps inspired in form by Baudelaire's collection of prose poems, Rimbaud's *Illuminations* take the form of momentarily revealed individual universes united in the being of the poet and briefly opened to the reader in the

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<sup>74</sup> Charles Baudelaire's *Spleen de Paris* was published in 1862 and consisted of a number of meditations on the life and being of the poet and the city of Paris.

blinding flash of text. Each poem extends from a single line to, at most, a page of writing. The forty-two prose poems that compose the *Illuminations* are highly visual in nature. Compared directly with Rimbaud's more traditional poetry of the preceding years the *Illuminations* appear experimental, if not radical, in their imagery, form, language and style.

Whereas Rimbaud's earlier poems were characterised by the tension between the words that created the poem and the form that identified the pattern of words on the page as poetry, it may be argued that the prose poems of the *Illuminations* are characterised by the force of the combined effect of words and structure. In the *Illuminations*, both of these elements are unified in creating a space in which the interaction between Rimbaud's experiences, conscious knowing and self can be explored. Rimbaud's desire to both bring forth that which has hitherto been unknown and give it form necessitates a language that is incisive in its intensity, yet, and perhaps because of this intensity, unsustainable for great periods of time. Indeed, it is almost as though the interaction between Rimbaud's experiences and the rational scrutiny of identity and consciousness is so volatile that prolonged voyages into such a realm of interaction must necessarily end with the loss of one's intelligence concerning the visions and their meaning — as had been foretold in both 'Le Bateau ivre' and the Lettres du Voyant.

The inability to sustain the intensity of such interaction for prolonged periods of text has two probable causes. Either the attempt to bring two separate modes of being together was practically impossible (and hence Rimbaud's reference to the "force surhumaine"<sup>75</sup> this project would require), or else, longer periods of text are simply not required to explore such violent interaction in poetry. Realistically, both of these possibilities are valid hypotheses concerning the physical shape of Rimbaud's *Illuminations*. However, the brief, vivid and hypnotic nature of each illumination seems to indicate that the appropriation of the space of language was not a task accomplished with ease as the simultaneously taut and exhausted prose of 'Départ' may be seen

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<sup>75</sup> Rimbaud, p. 251, "Superhuman strength".

to indicate — in this four-line poem Rimbaud writes:

Assez vu. La vision s'est recontré à tous les airs.  
 Assez eu. Rumeurs des villes, le soir, et au soleil, et toujours.  
 Assez connu. Les arrêts de la vie. — Ô Rumeurs et Visions!  
 Départ dans l'affection et le bruit neufs!<sup>76</sup>

One element consistent with both of the hypotheses above is Rimbaud's use of the page as a plane of interaction between the two poles of his creative and human reality. An important part of his exploration of this realm is conducted in and through language and his use of words as ideas and images. Osmond writes "Rimbaud's prose-poems combine words in unfamiliar ways, startling us into awareness of a new possible world".<sup>77</sup> Given the vast array of processes and becomings that constitute the Becoming-Dionysian undergone by Rimbaud in his search for authenticity in art, it would be an oversimplification of the complexity of his poetic project to assume that all of these processes were purely mental, that is to say, to presume that all creativity took place in mental space and was then written out as text. Imagining Rimbaud's Becoming-Dionysian to take place only in his mental space has the dismissive implication of rendering all text he produces as the completed 'product' of this process. Rather, given the complexity of the process of accessing the space of language and facilitating therein the interaction between conscious thought and the tumult of first-person experience, it is not unreasonable to consider that the page itself provided a plane upon which important interaction between these entities was enabled.

The act of writing, that is to say, the physical shape and constellation of the words as they are composed on the page, had produced unusual and disjointed effects for Rimbaud in his past experimentation with rhyme and metre. The act of translating the sound required for the completion of a

<sup>76</sup> Rimbaud, p. 129, "Seen enough. The vision met itself in all types of air. / Had enough. The buzzing of cities at night, in sunlight, and all the time. / Known enough. The stops of life. — O noises and visions! / Depart in new affection and sound".

<sup>77</sup> Osmond, p. 1.



rhythm or rhyme into a word and placing it on the page (often with little thought for suitability in terms of meaning), on occasion produced sharp changes in meaning, connotation, sensation or imagery in the verse. Thus, the words as they appeared on the page produced different meanings and pictures in the text from those considerations of rhythm and rhyme that guided the initial mental process and choice of sound. In the theatre of the prose poem, Rimbaud's revolutionary emphasis on the ability of language to actualise a creative space in which to explore the reality of his own being came to the fore. No longer bound to adhere to the conventions of tradition, the poet within the space of such liberated language produces words on paper that are themselves not only the momentary proof of interaction between consciousness and experience but themselves go on to shape the direction and perception of the very interaction that they are exploring. In this way, the act of writing itself is not viewed as the creation of a product or translation of a completed mental process undergone by the poet; rather, it may be seen as an externalised and formative element of Rimbaud's greater Becoming-Dionysian process.

Considered from the perspective of Becoming-Dionysian, it can be conjectured that the page provided Rimbaud with the opportunity to gain perspective and see new possibilities of meaning and form through the arrangement of words on its surface. Although graphology is the most usual form of evidence cited by those who wish to look beyond the printed words of Rimbaud's poetry to its physically apparent compositional origins, evidence for Rimbaud's use of the act of writing and the plane of the page as compositional tools is not solely reliant on the anecdotal nature of graphological study.<sup>78</sup> Rather than relying on graphological proof, evidence for Rimbaud's use of the page as a compositional tool may be found in the symbiosis apparent in his work between the sensation and sound of the words, the form of the poem and the language with which it is composed. As such, it may be argued that Rimbaud's early experiments with concepts that lead to his use

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<sup>78</sup> See for example: D. A. de Graaf, 'Les *Illuminations* et la Date Exacte de leur Composition: Une Nouvelle Hypothèse', in *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, Fasc. 60 (October – December 1950), 246-260.

of the page as a compositional device began with his use of rhyme and metre in poems such as 'Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs' and 'Voyelles'. In these poems, words were inserted into a pattern of rhyme and metre using criteria other than meaning. Rimbaud's use of the page as an intermediary entity between the varied elements of his Becoming-Dionysian may be seen to function in a similar way, insofar as the page provided a physical plane upon which words were placed dependant only on the demands of his Becoming-Dionysian interaction. In order to exemplify Rimbaud's use of the page as a compositional device emergent in the *Illuminations*, it is necessary to illustrate precisely how the page serves as a plane of interaction between the elements of his Becoming-Dionysian.

### 3.4.2 'Parade'

The way in which lines and images in Rimbaud's poetry may be seen to develop from passing connotations in previous lines, words and sounds abounds in the *Illuminations*. Thus, it is perhaps not without irony that Rimbaud names one of his illuminations 'Parade', as his words seem to contort and spring from one another, descriptions fuelling description in a bonfire of accelerating sensation. Characters and figures in the poem are both the words themselves as sounds and forms, but also the images these words create. Rimbaud's use of the words, sounds and meanings of "Chinois, Hottentots, bohémiens, niais, hyènes, Molochs, vieilles démentences, démons sinistres"<sup>79</sup> gives both a cast of characters to his evolving parade and an audible orientalism to his verse through the invocation of an exotic cacophony of disparate sounds. The chain of sensation created is amplified with each successive link, progressing through that which is known at least conceptually, such as "Chinois", to the shocking "démons sinistres". Each word responds to the last, out-doing its outrageousness, its seeming impossibility in the context of meaning and therewith its poetic right to the page. Rimbaud's circus of

<sup>79</sup> Rimbaud, 'Parade', p. 126, "Chinese, Hottentots, bohemians, simpletons, hyenas, Molochs, demented aged, sinister demons".

sounds, colours and meanings reads:

Ô le plus violent Paradis de la grimace enragée! Pas de comparaison avec vos Fakirs et les autres bouffonneries scéniques. Dans des costumes improvisés avec le goût du mauvais rêve ils jouent des complaints, des tragédies de malandrins et de demi-dieux spirituels comme l'histoire ou les religions ne l'ont jamais été. Chinois, Hottentots, bohémiens, niais, hyènes, Molochs, vieilles démentes, démons sinistres, ils mêlent les tours populaires, maternels, avec les poses et les tendresses bestiales. Ils interpréteraient des pièces nouvelles et des chansons «bonnes filles».<sup>80</sup>

Using of the page as a compositional tool, or, more specifically as an extension of his own space of language and interaction into the external world, is made evident in the text by the way in which Rimbaud has his words dance in maddening circles on the page.

This method of writing may be considered something of a self-reflective compositional technique. Indeed, it may be his use of such a technique that has led to Rimbaud's compositional method being described as one which employs an "extended sentence".<sup>81</sup> Such a sentence is defined by the way in which it "seems to have reached an end that is satisfying both rhythmically and logically, when suddenly a new detail, a new phrase is added".<sup>82</sup> The addition of an extra thought or detail to what seems to the reader a complete sentence is one example of Rimbaud's responsive technique of composition. Having fixed one chain of sensation to the page, Rimbaud is able to engage with all the as yet unconsidered implications and sounds of the phrase

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<sup>80</sup> Rimbaud, 'Parade', p. 126, "O the most violent paradise of the enraged grimace! No comparison with your Fakirs and other staged buffooneries. In their costumes improvised in the bad taste of a bad dream, they recite clumsy tragedies of spiritual demi-gods the likes of which religion has never seen. Chinese, Hottentots, bohemians, simpletons, hyenas, Molochs, demented aged, sinister demons mingling maternal scenes with bestial caresses and erotic poses. They interpret new works and the songs of 'good girls'".

<sup>81</sup> Susan Wirth Fusco, *Syntactic Structure in Rimbaud's Illuminations: A Stylistic Approach to the Analysis of Form in Prose Poetry*, rev. edn, Romance Monographs, 49, (University, Miss.: Romance Monographs, Inc, 1990), p. 92.

<sup>82</sup> Fusco, p. 92.

as it emerges from his conscious-experiential interaction. As such, Fusco is incorrect in assuming that the sentence has been 'extended' by the poet (although it may appear to be extended from the perspective of the reader), as Rimbaud did not compose using the specific grammatical structure of the sentence itself. In Rimbaud's case, rather than create a grammatically recognisable sentence, the episode between the navigational aids of punctuation includes both an image (or a number of images) and the poet's responses to the emergent sensations and accelerations of ideas, sounds and associations attached, or tangential, to the images and sensations already fixed on the page.

Yet, whilst the act of writing fixes a sensation to the page and thus may be argued to create a new point of departure for subsequent creative relations, processes and explorations, the interaction between the conscious and experiential elements of the poet remain the source of the creative form and content of the text. Indeed, as testimony to the role of the poet's role as the avatar of the universe explored and created in the poem, Rimbaud remarks at the conclusion of 'Parade': "J'ai seul la clef de cette parade sauvage",<sup>83</sup> indicating that the source of the interactions that create the poem is the poet himself. The content of these poetic illuminations is drawn from the interaction between conscious and as yet unconscious sensations and images, that is to say, it is derived directly from the poet himself. However, it would be wrong to presume that the content of Rimbaud's *Illuminations* was therefore the result of the search for the right words in which to *explain* this interaction and its content. Rather, as his use of the plane of the page may be seen to indicate, Rimbaud explores this interaction both implicitly and explicitly within the text by making the difficulty and paradox of Becoming-Dionysian itself a thematic concern explored in the *Illuminations* (seen below in 'Conte').

Rimbaud's use of the plane of the page as a continually reviewed point of departure that allowed him to respond and explore the contexts, ideas and sensations that form his text can be seen to bring about a physical, textual

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<sup>83</sup> Rimbaud, 'Parade', p. 126, "I alone have the key to this savage display".

parallel to his call for the “dérèglement de tous les sens”<sup>84</sup> for which he calls in his letter to Demeny. Through the appropriation of the page as what may be understood as an annexure of the personal space of the poet, Rimbaud brings about a derangement of the conventional relationship of language and the first-person. That is to say, by using the extended personal space of language as a means of bringing about disorder in his conventional interactions with, and uses of language as a social communicative tool, Rimbaud responds to, and involves with, language in a deranged capacity. In so doing, it may be argued that Rimbaud is extending the application of his revolutionary principle of derangement beyond chemical intoxication and physical change to encompass even his compositional technique.

Rimbaud’s extension of his project of derangement to include the act of writing and the relationship between language and the first-person is central to the greater interactive dynamic of that which is here understood as his Becoming-Dionysian. Indeed, both thematically and stylistically this deranged interaction emerges as a thematic concern of several of the *Illuminations*, illustrating the way in which the poet views the nature of the authenticity of his own creativity and his personal experience of the events, sensations and processes from which it is composed. Whilst this is explored in numerous poems in the collection, that chapter argues that it is in his poem ‘Conte’ that Rimbaud explores and reveals with graphic clarity one interface of his experience of the Becoming-Dionysian interaction between the conscious self of identity and rationality and the sensations and experiences of that which is yet unknown in words.

### 3.4.3 ‘Conte’

From a cursory reading of the narrative of ‘Conte’ it would appear that the poem describes the poetic paradox of the relationship between cruelty and creativity. However, in the context of that which is here understood

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<sup>84</sup> “Derangement of all the senses”.

as Rimbaud's Becoming-Dionysian, the core of the poem may be read as an allegorical exploration of the interaction between consciousness and the unmitigated Dionysian experience that takes place in the palatial space of language. Indeed, Rimbaud's account of the interaction between the Prince and the Genie in this poem develops his perspective as a poet on the interaction between consciousness and experience and the questions that such an interaction poses for the poet on a personal, human level. Rimbaud asks of his humanity: "Peut-on s'extasier dans la destruction, se rajeunir par la cruauté!"<sup>85</sup> Yet, through his understanding of his own creative process, Rimbaud realises the answer lies in the creation of the poem itself, that is to say, the rejuvenation of which Rimbaud speaks in the question *is* enabled through the extreme experience of interaction between consciousness and experience. The idea of 'rajeunissement'<sup>86</sup> as the restoration of youth is then not the sense in which Rimbaud has employed the term in this context. Here, Rimbaud uses the word to demonstrate the revitalising properties of the destruction of individual autonomy for both conscious thought and experience inherent in the creation of a work that explores their relationship and interaction. Rimbaud describes the relationship between the allegorical Prince and his counterpart the Genie as being of mortal concern, yet immortal creative possibility. He writes:

Un soir il galopait fièrement. Une Génie apparut, d'une beauté ineffable, inavouable même. De sa physionomie et de son maintien ressortait la promesse d'un amour multiple et complexe! d'un bonheur indicible, insupportable même! Le Prince et le Génie s'anéantirent probablement dans la santé essentielle. Comment n'auraient-ils pas pu en mourir? Ensemble donc ils moururent.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Rimbaud, 'Conte', p. 125, "May one find ecstasy in destruction and rejuvenation in cruelty?"

<sup>86</sup> This word is translated most comprehensibly as 'rejuvenation'; however, translated literally it refers specifically to 'making young again'.

<sup>87</sup> Rimbaud, 'Conte', p. 125, "One evening whilst galloping proudly on his horse, a Genie appeared of unspeakable, undeniable beauty. The features and demeanour of the genie held the promise of a multifaceted and complex love! a happiness that was at once indescribable and unbearable! The Prince and the Genie killed one another in the prime of life. How could they not die of it? Thus, together they died".

Yet, having postulated the annihilation of the individual, separate identities of each set of sensations and states (those of consciousness and experience) in the act of meeting one another, Rimbaud reasserts the normal appearance of progression in life and conscious identity. He continues: "Mais ce Prince décéda, dans son palais, à un âge ordinaire. Le Prince était le Génie. Le Génie était le Prince".<sup>88</sup> Indeed, in making such comment it may be argued that Rimbaud draws attention to the paradoxical relationship between his own creativity and poetic project and that which remains his continued social existence as a human being. It is to this paradox that Rimbaud refers with his example of the vital nature of that is here termed his Becoming-Dionysian and the tension that characterises the dual nature of his existence when he asserts that in his creation of text, both allegorical *and* actual animals are slaughtered. Rimbaud insists that real *and* imagined wives are killed in and as a part of the collision between identity and experience. Rimbaud writes:

Il voulait voir la vérité, l'heure du désir et de la satisfaction essentielles. Que se fût ou non une aberration de piété, il voulut. Il possédait au moins un assez large pouvoir humain.

Toutes les femmes qui l'avaient connu furent assassinées. Quel saccage du jardin de la beauté! Sous le sabre, elles le bénirent. Il n'en commanda point de nouvelles. — Les femmes réapparurent.

Il tua tous ceux qui le suivaient, après la chasse ou les libations. — Tous le suivaient.

Il s'amusa à égorger les bêtes de luxe. Il fit flamber les palais. Il se ruait sur les gens et les taillait en pièces — La Foule, les toits d'or, les belles bêtes existaient encore.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Rimbaud, 'Conte', p. 125, "But the Prince died in his palace at a ripe old age. The Prince was the Genie and the Genie was the Prince".

<sup>89</sup> Rimbaud, 'Conte', p. 125, "He [the Prince] wanted to see truth in the hour of desire and essential satisfaction. Even if such a vision was a misuse of piety. At least he possessed a huge reserve of human power. All the wives who knew him were assassinated. What pillage in the garden of beauty! Even beneath the sword they praised him. He didn't order any new wives. — The women reappeared. He killed those who followed him, after the hunt or sharing a drink with him. — They followed him still. He amused himself slitting the throats of his exotic pets. He set fire to his palaces. He lashed out at his servants,

Nevertheless, despite such carnage and chaos, the poet as a socially perceived individual named Arthur Rimbaud continues to exist in much the same way as the Prince survives the poem.

The act of rejuvenation inherent in the mutually destructive, Dionysian collision of the conscious and the experiential explored in 'Conte' is closely linked to Rimbaud's idea of writing and the creation of a new point of departure as text. The idea of rejuvenation through actions that appear cruel can be seen to bring the poet into two different relations to the idea of cruelty and to so-called 'cruel' acts themselves. On the one hand, Rimbaud endures a first-person understanding of these extreme actions, motivated by a desire for experience. On the other hand, he is recounting a paradoxical parable in which a Prince is unspeakably cruel to beings undeserving of such torture. From the initial first-person perspective of gaining experience, the acts of cruelty are necessary to the Prince actualising that which Fowlie terms his search for "greater knowledge of desire and satisfaction".<sup>90</sup> As such, these acts were chosen for their ability to bring him closer to his goal of ecstasy, destruction and rejuvenation through reaching the unknown. However, having taken place and therewith fixed as though written in space and time in the extended personal space of the page, these acts are now recounted from the separate viewpoint and identity of the poet as a self or individual. By exploiting the authorial privilege of distance from his text momentarily through the invocation of a humane, social perspective, the poet is able to relate to the multiple meanings and interpretations of such acts and, in the light of such contextual consideration, to consider them 'cruel'.

In his divination of that which he describes as an architecture of the *Illuminations*, Fowlie notes that 'Conte' "serves as an introduction to the poems on the poet".<sup>91</sup> The idea of such paradoxical parables as 'Conte' being explorations of the relationship between Rimbaud's personal poles of individual human continuity and the contrast of his violent word of personal experience

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hacking them to pieces. The court, the roofs of gold, the exotic menagerie came to life once more."

<sup>90</sup> Fowlie, *Rimbaud*, p. 155.

<sup>91</sup> Fowlie, *Rimbaud*, p. 155.



with its abrupt actions and extreme oscillation is one that reappears throughout the *Illuminations*. The fact that such themes occur more than once in the *Illuminations* may be understood as an indication of Rimbaud's personal concern with that which is here understood as his Becoming-Dionysian in and through the creation of text. As can be seen in 'Conte', Rimbaud's clarity of vision (albeit allegorically expressed) concerning his own role in authentic creativity is demonstrable in the *Illuminations* as both a theme and a structural presence. Indeed, the acts of metamorphosis and disintegration that are seen in other *Illuminations* may be argued to manifest further explorations of the theme of a personal understanding of the experience of poetry as an exploration of the interaction between the known and the unknown. Further examples of such explorations of the Becoming-Dionysian of Rimbaud's authentic creative process are to be found in his collection of poems entitled 'Vies'.

#### 3.4.4 'Vies'

In the context of Rimbaud's creation of spaces within the realm of language in which to explore this experience, 'Vies' is an important transitional poem in terms of Rimbaud's inclusion of his own self-reflective understanding in the text. In this respect, Fowlie is correct in his assumption that 'Vies' is an exploration of the different settings in which the acts of the poet's life unfold. However, with specific reference to 'Vies' Fowlie insists on a narrow and one-dimensional interpretation of Rimbaud's creative process in which the poet's creation and creativity lies in:

[T]he working of levers and pulleys, the changing of scenes, the mechanic's job of curtain raising, the electrician who can highlight a scene or darken it, the designer who can represent a forest or a night club or an Oriental harem. Everything is possible because everything is artificial.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Fowlie, *Rimbaud*, p. 162.

Unfortunately, such a mono-dimensional reading leads to an interpretation of the creative act of the poet as being little more than a manipulative task of representation, the comparatively simple task of choreographing the leaps of the imagination on the page. Taking Rimbaud's personal experiential emphasis and therewith his project of Becoming-Dionysian into account, it is more revealing and indeed more insightful to assert that for Rimbaud everything is possible because everything is real. Indeed, it may be argued that in 'Vies' (and by extension, the *Illuminations* as a whole) Rimbaud is by no means concerned with the artificial. Individual scenes, settings and words are catalysts for exploration and the very real interaction of his consciousness with his own experiences, not for self-indulgent and imagined flights of fancy the likes of which he railed against in his letters to Izambard and Demyen. As such, contrary to the interpretations of Fowlie and Robb, the exotic locations and situations explored in 'Vies' are not the artificial theatrical scenery of Rimbaud's imagination alone. Indeed, taking his Becoming-Dionysian concern with authenticity into account it may be argued that the scenes, colours and allegorical tableaux of his various 'lives' are recontextualised and reconceptualised with the dramatic intent of contrasting his perspective as a poet with his first person memories, ideas, sensations and experiences.

Given numbers rather than individual titles, this analysis argues that Rimbaud's 'Vies' are graphically explored moments in which the sensations, experience and identity of the poet's life are encapsulated. Osmond insists that alongside the allegorical lives of the poet that the segmentation of these lives are themselves metaphorical explorations of Rimbaud's own creative enterprise.<sup>93</sup> The first of these 'Vies' (referred to here as 'Vies I') explores the collision of memory and the ache of reality and identity. In this initial 'Vie', Rimbaud writes from his metaphorical exile from humanity in the wasted temples of the Holy Land. For a writer so disenchanted with the reality of the Catholic church, it is interesting to note the use of the concept and image of the Holy Land as a site for exile, both physical and spiritual,

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<sup>93</sup> Osmond, p. 104.

throughout Rimbaud's poetic oeuvre.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, it may be suggested that the vast and empty vistas of Palestine haunt Rimbaud's imagination, returning in a number of poems as a place of empty and tumultuous exile in memory and solitude. In 'Vies I', it may be argued that Rimbaud's invocation of the Holy Land as a place of solitude and agonised contemplation echoes throughout the spaces left vacant by his now abandoned religious belief. Osmond agrees that Rimbaud's Holy Land are metaphorical.<sup>95</sup> However, religion itself having been banished, the space is no longer populated by the religious figures with which the Bible litters the Holy landscape. The structures of belief, the terraces of the temple, remain but they are empty. Rimbaud remarks:

Ô les énormes avenues du pays saint, les terrasses du temple!  
Qu'a-t-on fait du brahmane qui m'expliqua les Proverbes? D'a-  
lors, de là-bas, je vois encore même les vieilles!<sup>96</sup>

Yet, if his religious belief is abandoned, what is the significance of the Holy Land to Rimbaud the apostate? Following his religious indoctrination, which sprung from a childhood of Sunday school and fierce maternal discipline,<sup>97</sup> it may be argued that for Rimbaud the Holy Land came to represent the source of something precious that was corrupted through the appropriation of divinity for the masses, the franchise of the divine into each and every grimy village. Rimbaud abandoned conventional religion because of his disgust for

<sup>94</sup> See, for example, the invocation of the terraces of Palestine in 'Enfance IV'.

<sup>95</sup> Osmond, p. 105.

<sup>96</sup> Rimbaud, 'Vies I', p. 128, "The enormous avenues of the Holy Lands, the terraces of the temple! What became of the Brahmin who explained to me the proverbs? From there I can still see the old women!"

<sup>97</sup> Rimbaud's mother Vitalie Rimbaud (née Cuif) is mercilessly described by Rimbaud's biographers as a woman devoid of all semblance of human kindness and who was incapable of showing affection (See: Robb, p. 3 – 6.). Religion provided structure and definition in Mme. Rimbaud's life. In a letter to her daughter (and Arthur Rimbaud's biographer) Isabelle, Mme. Rimbaud writes: "Ceux qu'il faut envoyer paître, ce sont ceux qui ne croyaient pas en Dieu, puisqu'ils n'ont ni cœur, ni âme, on peut les envoyer paître avec les vaches et les cochons, ce sont leurs égaux" (Rimbaud, p. 802). "Those people who should be sent packing are those who do not believe in God, these people have no heart and no soul, and such people should be sent to live with the cows and the pigs because only such beasts are their equals".

the church, however, the desire for a spiritual truth (as is made evident in his letters of May 1871) was not discarded. Thus, in abandoning religion, the Holy Land was rid of the sordid biblical muddle of characters and moralistic fables. As such the Holy Land became a haven from the reality of humanity who could not simply be cleaned or even believed away, that is to say, that for Rimbaud the Holy Land came to represent a physical allegory of the source of a truth that was perverted by the power, greed and ignorance of human being. Such a space was, like the poet himself, beyond the reach of religion and the morals of a human world. Indeed, it may be argued that for Rimbaud the space of the Holy Land represents an open-ended nothingness, a space he refers to as "mon néant".<sup>98</sup>

Certainly, Rimbaud's "néant" provided him with a refuge that mirrored his own isolation from the human masses he had sought on occasion to wish away. However, even within this symbolic cradle of emptiness the haunted paths of human spirituality remained, and his thoughts wheel above and beyond him like "[u]n envol de pigeons écarlates".<sup>99</sup> Indeed, extending Rimbaud's religious allegory further, it may be conjectured that in his own Holy Land Rimbaud becomes the shadow of Jesus himself, cast out and sentenced to death by a humanity that has no idea of his powers, his visions and their worth. Rimbaud concludes 'Vies I' with a comparison between his own "néant" of exile and the stupefaction of franchised morality and chain store beliefs that awaits the human mass from which he, in his exile, is estranged. He writes: "Qu'est mon néant, auprès de la stupeur qui vous attend?"<sup>100</sup>

However, the Holy Land of Rimbaud's interior exile, devoid of undesired human company, is not itself a space in which his Becoming-Dionysian can achieve any actualisation; rather they represent an experience that is explored in the light of his abandoned religious education and continued sense of spirituality. 'Vies I' was composed as the first of a series of poems all bearing the title 'Vies' that all, it is contended here, explore the Becoming-Dionysian

<sup>98</sup> Rimbaud, 'Vies I', p. 128, "My nothingness" or "My void".

<sup>99</sup> Rimbaud, 'Vies I', p. 128, "A flight of scarlet pigeons".

<sup>100</sup> Rimbaud, 'Vies I', p. 128, "What is my void compared with the stupor that awaits you?"

of the poet using the first-person, and thus, conduct this exploration of Rimbaud's own Becoming-Dionysian without the aid of such allegory as was employed in 'Conte'. As such, in this context it may be argued that the poem itself is the creative space in which the exploration of his experience and the parallel of exile is explored in the space of language, not the space of nothingness Rimbaud feels the empty Holy Land mirrors within him.

The second of Rimbaud's lives is related to his abilities as a creator. As with the first of the 'Vies', 'Vies II' is concerned with the comparative power of his creativity that sits in stark contrast to the pallid antecedents of humanity past. Rimbaud casts himself as a "gentilhomme d'une campagne aigre",<sup>101</sup> that is to say, his being a poet and a creator, is akin to a virgin birth from a barren mother. Indeed, Rimbaud sees himself as a dignified being from an impoverished land. However, the contrast brought into being through alluding to the comparative impossibility of his birth as a noble being in a harsh land has allowed him prodigious powers of creativity that flow from this dichotomy. The memory of a childhood he indicates as "mendiant",<sup>102</sup> the experiential apparitions of his 'apprenticeship', the escapades of an imagined misspent youth are brought forth in the manner of character witnesses in order to expound the poet that he has become. In the context of the poem, these experiences and events are presented as testimonial for the formative stages of his creative power. Rimbaud the poet has relinquished his "vieille part de gaieté divine"<sup>103</sup> in order to become "un inventeur bien autrement méritant que tous ceux qui m'ont précédé; un musicien même, qui ai trouvé quelque chose comme la clef d'amour".<sup>104</sup> Such ambition has been realised at a price, and in 'Vies II' Rimbaud echoes his letter to Demeny in predicting that he fears that he himself will, in time, "devenir un très méchant fou".<sup>105</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Rimbaud, 'Vies II', p. 128, "Gentleman from arid lands".

<sup>102</sup> Rimbaud, 'Vies II', p. 128, "Characterised by begging".

<sup>103</sup> Rimbaud, 'Vies II', p. 128, "Measure of divine happiness".

<sup>104</sup> Rimbaud, 'Vies II', p. 128, "An far more deserving inventor than those who went before me, indeed a musician who discovered something akin to the key of love".

<sup>105</sup> Rimbaud, 'Vies II', p. 128, "Become a very wretched fool".

Paradoxically for a poet engaged in a program of derangement, for Rimbaud the threat of his becoming a "méchant fou" is both something he fears and, perversely, something to which he must, in the light of his letters to Demeny and Izambard, aspire. In order to fulfil what he views as his 'poetic destiny', Rimbaud cannot allow himself to fear the loss of his conscious self nor the continuity of identity and he views such fears as signs of weakness. Indeed, for Rimbaud, it may be argued that such civilised, rational fear symbolises a human empathy yet to be transcended that would necessarily compromise his greater poetic project of experiencing the unknown. However, 'Vies II' does draw attention to the tension that exists between the conscious and the experiential as immanent states of being for the poet that are present both in life and explored in his Becoming-Dionysian as text. More so than is made apparent in 'Vies I', 'Vies II' makes the position of the poet, in light of this and other dramatic tensions, appear miraculous in the context and restrictions of the real world.

In 'Vies II', emotions are no longer natural to the poet, and as such, forced to 'try to feel emotion'<sup>106</sup> the poet is beyond humanity. In the calm void of "cette aigre campagne"<sup>107</sup> that bears a startling similarity to the arid world with the dark sky of the Ardennes from which Rimbaud, the gentleman sprang, he finds himself turning in circles in order to see the unknown whilst at the same time failing to be more accepted by the world at large. This failure to be accepted has resulted in the arrogance of his assertions of greatness and, at the same time, lead him to find yet another place of exile, this time in the countryside in which he spent his pre-Parisian youth. Again, as with the Holy Land that precede it, his arid land is empty; Rimbaud the poet, the great inventor, shadow of Jesus and the musician "qui ai trouvé quelque chose comme la clef de l'amour",<sup>108</sup> is alone.

The third of the 'Vies' depicts Rimbaud, aged twelve, imprisoned and, again, alone. Beginning with such a stark image, 'Vies III' examines the

<sup>106</sup> Rimbaud, 'Vies II', p. 128, Rimbaud writes "j'essaye de m'émouvoir", "I try to make myself feel emotion".

<sup>107</sup> Rimbaud, 'Vies II', p. 128, "This arid land".

<sup>108</sup> Rimbaud, 'Vies II', p. 128, "Who discovered something like the musical key of love".

solitary nature of the pursuit of experience and education that the poet has undergone in order to reach the state of immanence that magnifies, legitimises and necessitates his solitude. Both the experiential and more conventional sources from which Rimbaud chooses to learn and the way in which he asserts “j’ai connu le monde, j’ai illustré la comédie humaine”,<sup>109</sup> demonstrate his preference for the real and the personal over the academic sphere he criticised so strongly for its remoteness in his letter to Demyen. Rimbaud’s boast that he sought out “les femmes des anciens peintres”,<sup>110</sup> learned history “[d]ans un cellier”<sup>111</sup> and illustrated the human comedy aged twelve from the wealth of his own solitary, imprisoned, human experience, are exaggerated claims intended to reinforce the importance of personal involvement with learning and seeking information and perspective that are of such vital importance to his poetic project.

As the third and final poem in his triptych of lives, Rimbaud speaks of these achievements and first-person involvements in the past tense. Only in bringing his poem to a close does he return to the present. He writes:

J’ai brassé mon sang. Mon devoir m’est remis. Il ne faut même plus songer à cela. Je suis réelement d’outre-tombe, et pas de commissions.<sup>112</sup>

By finishing the poem with his re-emergence into the world and the seeking of new “commissions” following the completion of his project, Rimbaud may be seen to be drawing a parallel between his own experience and the more symbolic idea of emergence of the poet from the world of experience into the world of identity and rational consciousness. Yet, it would be naive of the reader to presume that the poems of ‘Vies’ represent nothing more

<sup>109</sup> Rimbaud, ‘Vies III’, p. 129, “I knew the world, I illustrated the divine comedy [of humanity]”.

<sup>110</sup> Rimbaud, ‘Vies III’, p. 129, “The wives of painters past”.

<sup>111</sup> Rimbaud, ‘Vies III’, p. 129, “In a cellar”.

<sup>112</sup> Rimbaud, ‘Vies III’, p. 129, “I have brazed my blood. I am free from my task. I must no longer think of it. I am truly from beyond the grave, and without work”.

than an allegory of the bleary return to consciousness that has so often been posited as the source of 'Matinée d'ivresse'.<sup>113</sup> 'Vies' presents a more complex exploration of the interaction between the poet, the world and the immanent states of consciousness, identity and experience. Placed at the end of 'Vies', the conclusion quoted above illustrates the solitary intensity of Rimbaud's desire for an authentic poetry. Ending this odyssey of interaction and exploration in the realm of language, Rimbaud forecasts an alternate destiny for the poet that is not foretold in his letter to Demy, namely, an escape back into reality and the world in which a commission is an occupation, not a mission.

The idea of a return to the socially defined and regulated world of sober reality as 'escape' becomes a valid option for Rimbaud in the *Illuminations* in a way that was unforeseeable for the teenage author of the idealistic *Lettres du Voyant*. As was demonstrated in the form, content, violence and conclusion of 'Vies', exploring the interaction between consciousness and experience and the maintenance of the space of language and solitude in which this interaction was to take place took its toll on Rimbaud's social, continuing, self. Discussed at the outset of the present analysis of his prose poetry, this tension is evident in the intensity of the *Illuminations* and their abrupt structure. Rimbaud's technique and emphasis on a particularly concentrated first-person involvement with the pursuit of creative authenticity was unsuited to prolonged poetic exploration. As has been noted by a number of critics, the title of the collection itself reflects Rimbaud's intention of momentarily illuminating facets of being, time, feeling and interaction and extending the possibility of the language into a more experimental, visual sphere.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Robb assumes 'Matinée d'ivresse' to present evidence of the "happy relationship" Rimbaud enjoyed with Hashish (Robb, p. 131.). This supposition is corroborated by Boon (Boon, p. 143.).

<sup>114</sup> Verlaine claimed that Rimbaud chose the title *Illuminations* intending his work to have the sub-title "coloured plates" in order to explain the meaning of illuminations, an English word, to readers of French. See: Osmond, p. 39.



Citing evidence within the poems, it may be conjectured that the passing of time initiated a reconsideration of Rimbaud's initial desire for negation of personal identity that was disguised in his letter to Demeny as the desire to prostrate his existence beneath the banner of poetry. In his letters of May 1871, Rimbaud wanted to become a *poet* at the expense of becoming Rimbaud. Certainly, the early derivative poetry of Rimbaud's pre-Parisian period reflects this view. Indeed, the initiation of the idea of escape in his poetry may be seen to signal Rimbaud's own understanding of the necessity of an end to that which is here understood under the name of Becoming-Dionysian. As such, it may be argued that the introduction of the idea of escape in Rimbaud's poetry may indicate the depth and mortal long term consequences of his Becoming-Dionysian and the role of Rimbaud's concept of authenticity as interaction between the immanent states of consciousness and experience within the space of language. However, before actualising an escape from poetry, Rimbaud was intent on pushing further into the unknown in solitude.

### 3.4.5 'Villes'

Perhaps ironically for a poet so concerned with the necessity of solitude, Rimbaud makes use of the image and idea of the city to explore further his search for the unknown. The effect of the collision between Rimbaud's learned ideas and his experiences of beauty, sensation and wonder beyond the sphere of human knowing made apparent in *Illuminations* such as 'Villes', are characteristic of the isolation required for the search for authenticity in creative endeavour. In 'Villes', the interaction between unmitigated experience and the education that shapes identity and consciousness saw the suburbs filled with the sobbing of "Les Bacchantes des banlieues"<sup>115</sup> and the moon that "brûle et hurle".<sup>116</sup> St. Aubyn considers the intense nature of these lines

<sup>115</sup> Rimbaud, 'Villes', p. 136, "Bacchantes of the suburbs".

<sup>116</sup> Rimbaud, 'Villes', p. 136, "Burns and shouts".

illustrates the "extreme concentration realised by Rimbaud",<sup>117</sup> a concentration able to be intensified to the point of extremity by virtue of his isolation. This same isolation may be seen at work in Rimbaud's invocation of Classical, mythological figures in his poetry. These figures illustrate symbolically the interaction between the conscious and the experiential in that by conjuring the presence of figures so obviously derived from the world of education it clearly shows the influence of education and the continuity of certain allegorical figures and images in Rimbaud's poetic universe. The armada of Dianas, nymphs, Pans, demons and angels that inhabit Rimbaud's poetry make obvious both the conceptual heritage of Rimbaud's cast of poetic personages populating his solitude (and Rimbaud's inability, on occasion, to see beyond the lure of the classical language of his heroes) and their role as catalysts from which further imagery, sensation and memory proceed. As such, the time-honoured mythology so apparent in Rimbaud's pantheon of gods, goddesses and demons provide a cast between and within which scenes and sensations of the poem unfold. In the varied contexts of Rimbaud's poetry, each character of Classical derivation is both statue and icon, bringing Rimbaud's past education, sensation, memory and ideal together in one evocative noun.

The comparative serenity of Classical character is juxtaposed with the cacophony of the reality of the modern world in Rimbaud's magical cities. Rimbaud has Venus "dans les cavernes des forgerons et des ermites".<sup>118</sup> In the symbolic context of the poem, it may be argued that Venus penetrates the caverns of blacksmiths and hermits in order to juxtapose the experiential aspect of Rimbaud's experience with his continued identity and education in consciousness. Venus is not a habitué of blacksmiths' workshops and hermits' caves, nor are the blacksmiths and hermits accustomed to the presence of Venus, yet the ideal of beauty incarnate enters the chaotic cacophony of the blacksmith's forge and the hermit's rambling ascetic solitude. The effect that is brought about in the poem with this event is one of tension between two

<sup>117</sup> St. Aubyn, p. 113.

<sup>118</sup> Rimbaud, 'Villes', p. 136, "In the caverns of blacksmiths and hermits".

irreconcilable poles that, nevertheless, impact on one another with delicacy and synergy, mirroring Rimbaud's understanding of the necessity of exploring the interface between the experiential and the conscious as a requisite of authentic creativity. However, in this instance, 'Villes' does not present an allegorical exploration of the act of creativity and the experience of the poet in relation to authenticity seen in 'Conte'. Rather, in the context of his Becoming-Dionysian, the passage of Venus through the caverns of the blacksmiths and hermits may be seen Rimbaud's attempt to explicate the disparate but by no means mutually exclusive poles of difference with which the poet is familiar.

Writing often under the title 'Villes', this analysis argues that Rimbaud uses the city as a theatre in which often the roles of scenery, actor and content of every play are performed by the city itself. In each of the 'Villes', Rimbaud creates a complex city full of vibrant sensations and imagery. In contrast to such overwhelming and new imagery, in some of his 'Villes' Rimbaud makes use of a poet-narrator who has the role of invoking a level of detachment from the city itself. Indeed, by creating such an isolated narrator Rimbaud may be seen to be precipitating the ironic circumstance of the poet-narrator who is supposedly the creator of such a city being ignorant of its laws. By deliberately invoking the distance between the writer and the text it may be argued that Rimbaud is passing comment on the idea of poetry as a fully-planned product of the author's imagination. By rejecting the idea that the poem represents little more than a transcribed daydream by not understanding the laws of this city, Rimbaud may be seen to be making the point that he is not the omniscient architect of this city, but rather its explorer. In the context of Rimbaud's Becoming-Dionysian, this chapter argues that the exploration of the city Rimbaud undertakes in his many 'Villes' may be understood as a physical allegory of the exploration of the interaction between consciousness and unmitigated experience. Memory, rationality and desire all play a part in the poetic assemblage of Rimbaud's 'Villes', and it is the exploration of such interaction that the poet conceived in a narrational capacity in this instance explores. Indeed, it may be argued that the city that Rimbaud explores in

his poem represents the synthesis of his memories of cities with which he is familiar and his own desires and imagination of other realms. Of such a city, Rimbaud writes:

On ne voit pas de boutiques, mais la neige de la chaussée est écrasée; quelques nababs aussi rares que les promeneurs d'un matin de dimanche à Londres, se dirigent vers une diligence de diamants. Quelques divans de velours rouge: on sert des boissons polaires dont le prix varie de huit cents à huit mille roupies. À l'idée de chercher des théâtres sur ce circus, je me réponds que les boutiques doivent contenir des drames assez sombres. Je pense qu'il y a une police. Mais la loi doit être tellement étrange, que je renonce à me faire une idée des aventuriers d'ici.<sup>119</sup>

In order to communicate the all encompassing nature of his explorations of his consciousness – experiential interaction, Rimbaud makes use of more than the juxtaposition of meaning and context to communicate the sensation of unease and tension that characterises his understanding and experience of creativity. Clearly present in 'Villes', the reader of Rimbaud's *Illuminations* is subjected to a profusion of sound, colour and texture that all cement the illuminated space of the poem as one of that may be understood as something of a hyper-reality in which the reader is both part and spectator of a greater human play. Drawing on the city as a fact common to the reader and the poet, Rimbaud extends his poetic ambition. Rather than parade his characters and images before the reader, Rimbaud also seeks to engage the reader in the reality the poet has created. As a part of this project include reader in his explorations of this heightened world, Rimbaud introduces sensory imagery that achieves its effect by extending and exaggerating reality

<sup>119</sup> Rimbaud, 'Villes', p. 138, "You don't see any shops, but the snow on the high street is crushed; a few nabobs about as rare as Sunday morning strollers in London move in the direction of a diamond carriage. A few divans of red velvet. North Pole drinks are sold at prices that range from eight hundred to eight thousand rupees. Upon considering looking for theatres in this circus, I tell myself that the shops must contain very sad dramas. I think that there is a police force; but the law here must be truly strange insofar as I give up imagining what the adventurers must be like here".

familiar to the reader using sound to drawing upon the imagination of the audience. In 'Mystique' Rimbaud writes:

Des prés de flammes bondissent jusqu'au sommet du mamelon.  
 À gauche le terreau de l'arête est piétiné par tous les homicides et  
 toutes les batailles, et tous les bruits désastreux filent leur courbe.  
 Derrière l'arête de droite la ligne des orient, des progrès.

Et tandis que la bande en haut du tableau est formée de la rumeur  
 tournante et bondissante des conques des mers et des nuits hu-  
 maines.<sup>120</sup>

In 'Mystique', the sensory richness of the opening scene has the effect of pulling the reader into the text yet, at the same time, enchanting the reader with the distant beauty that unfolds before them. It may be argued that such imagery plays the dual role of creating synergy between reader and text. However, whilst involving the reader in the reality of the scene, Rimbaud as the creator also confirms the reader as apart from the text itself. Rimbaud includes colour, texture and conceptual characterisation in the opening tableau of 'Mystique' when he writes: "Sur la pente du talus, les anges tournent leurs robes de laine dans les herbages d'acier et d'émeraude".<sup>121</sup> Yet, the seemingly transcendent and imagined beauty of the images belies the accessible humanity of the angels that is communicated by their turning movement and the invocation of the texture of wool that has the effect of conjuring up a coarseness of texture not usually associated with angels. Indeed, the turning, human movement of the angels and their robes of wool give them an air of humanity and accessibility, the experience of movement and the wearing of wool providing the reader with one moment of access to the interior of the

<sup>120</sup> Rimbaud, 'Mystique', pp. 139-140, "Fields of flame leap to the summit of the rise. On the left, the earth of the ridge is pitted by murderers and battles, and the cacophony of disaster fills their orbit. Behind the ridge to the right, the line of the east and of progress. Whilst the band, at the top of the image is formed by the whirling, leaping cry of the conch shell and the nights of man".

<sup>121</sup> Rimbaud, 'Mystique', p. 139, "On the slope of a hill, angels wheel their woollen robes in fields of emerald and steel".

poem that extends into the "prés de flammes".<sup>122</sup>

In combining the experience of that which is physically real and accessible to his reader together with the transcendent, fantastic and mythological, Rimbaud again shows the importance of synergistic interaction between elements characterised by two disparate poles as a core element of both his poetic technique and his greater artistic project. Indeed, the Becoming-Dionysian that this analysis argues may be seen in Rimbaud's work moves through a number of significant changes. Whilst in hindsight such interaction may be understood as an inexorable move towards the conclusion of Rimbaud's escape from poetry, it is interesting to note that in concluding 'Mystique', Rimbaud depicts the poet and the reader as trapped, albeit willingly, in the realm of the physical. Rimbaud writes: "La douceur fleurie des étoiles et du ciel et du reste descend en face du talus, comme un panier, — contre notre face, et fait l'abîme fleurant et bleu là-dessous."<sup>123</sup>

The dual impacts of sensation and meaning that characterise the space of language in the *Illuminations* are rendered immediately accessible to the reader through the complex appropriation of concepts and emotions as adjectives and the violent cacophony of sound and meaning that inhabits the space of the poem. The acute mood of unease that pervades 'Villes' and the sinister entrapment of the poet in 'Mystique' is due in part to the juxtaposition of sounds that aurally assault the reader. That the moon is engaged in such violent emissions of sound and fury is uncharacteristic and yet, in the midst of a suburb of sobbing classical bacchantes and the darkening seas sailed by 'orphanic navies', such an atypical state of affairs is both disturbing and at once part of the "musique inconnu"<sup>124</sup> that escapes "[Des] châteaux bâtis en os";<sup>125</sup> a haunting, quixotic melody of the interior composed of familiar earthly notes that is itself the music of the poem and the *Illuminations*

<sup>122</sup> Rimbaud, 'Mystique', p. 139, "Fields of flame".

<sup>123</sup> Rimbaud, 'Mystique', p. 140, "The gentle blossoming of the stars, the sky and of all else descends the hill face opposite like a basket — against our face and makes sweet the blue abyss below".

<sup>124</sup> Rimbaud, 'Villes', p. 136, "Unknown music".

<sup>125</sup> Rimbaud, 'Villes', p. 136, "Castles built of bones".

as a whole.

Indeed, it may be argued that in 'Matinée d'ivresse' Rimbaud exposes his idea that these collisions are themselves a beginning that the poet must then explore. Indeed, it is Rimbaud's faith in that which is here termed his Becoming-Dionysian process that remains the fundamental drive of his poetic project. This analysis argues that the importance of Becoming-Dionysian both personally and textually is brought to the fore through the blurring of distinction between both in his works. As such, Rimbaud's vision of the role of the poet having involved in such a process may be seen as the subject of his poem 'À une raison', in which he writes:

Un coup de ton doigt sur le tambour décharge tous les sons et  
commence la nouvelle harmonie.  
Un pas de toi, c'est la levée des nouveaux hommes et leur en-  
marche.  
Ta tête se détourne: le nouvel amour! Ta tête se retourne, — le  
nouvel amour!  
«Change nos lots, crible les fléaux, à commencer par le temps»,  
te chantent ces enfants. «Élève n'importe où la substance de  
nos fortunes et de nos vœux» on t'en prie.  
Arrivée de toujours, qui t'en iras partout.<sup>126</sup>

It is this vision of the poet as a leader, a visionary, an explorer and the interface of the personal and the textual, the human and the ideal, explored in flashes in *Illuminations* that is itself the defining feature of Rimbaud's longest work, *Une Saison en Enfer*. Exploring in a sustained capacity the interactions briefly illuminated in 'A une raison', this study argues that *Une Saison en Enfer* represents Rimbaud's most personal poetry. Whilst maintaining the poetic intensity of the *Illuminations*, *Une Saison en Enfer* breaks

<sup>126</sup> Rimbaud, 'À un raison', p. 130, "One tap of the drum with your finger releases all sounds and begins new harmonies. You take one step and men spring up behind you and march. Your head turns: new love! And turns back: new love! "Change our lot, defeat the plague, start with time" the children sing to you. "Raise, in any place you wish, our fortunes and our prayers" they beg. You will go everywhere because you come from everywhere."

through the abstract and often remote beauty of Rimbaud's illuminated moments and explores with great insight the reality of the poet himself, and the interface between Rimbaud as a person and Rimbaud as a creator.

### 3.4.6 *Une Saison en Enfer*

*Une Saison en Enfer* was one of the few works published by Rimbaud during his comparatively brief period of active concern with poetry. Whilst this may not at first appear significant, as many artists' works have been neglected at the time of their creation, Rimbaud chose to publish *Une Saison en Enfer* himself, perhaps supposing, among other things, that it may make his reputation as a poet.<sup>127</sup> In *Une Saison en Enfer* Rimbaud explores the double bind of his Becoming-Dionysian and the nature of the interaction between creativity and the idea of a personal universe that was fundamentally anchored within an experiential human whole. In contrast to the brief and fragmented nature of the *Illuminations*, *Une Saison en Enfer* may be seen as examining the principles of collision, interaction and isolation that characterise the *Illuminations* in new ways both technically and thematically.

Within the context of the present analysis, *Une Saison en Enfer* is presented as the most sustained and structured exploration of the interactions that characterise that which is here termed Rimbaud's Becoming-Dionysian. In *Une Saison en Enfer* Rimbaud also performs the task of analysing both his own greater poetic project and the outcomes of the choices he made to enact the project of derangement outlined in his letters in order to become

<sup>127</sup> Whilst such speculation is, naturally, exactly that, much modern Rimbaud scholarship does try to fathom why it was that *Une Saison en Enfer* was the work into which Rimbaud put the most effort toward the aim of publication. Whilst the reasoning and drive behind this push for publication is most certainly both circumstantial *and* ideological, in any examination of Rimbaud's work it is important to note that the 'special status' of publication was sought and came about only for *Une Saison en Enfer*. Rimbaud's failing to collect (or pay) for the printed copies left in the workshop of Jaques Poot in no way mitigates the importance of Rimbaud's desire to see his work published, and therewith the importance of the status given by his own drive for publication in Rimbaud's universe of gestures.



a 'voyant'. Russell comments of *Une Saison en Enfer*: "[i]t is a poem given over to bitter self-judgement, recrimination, and fitful justification".<sup>128</sup> Indeed, viewing the various perspectives Rimbaud explores in *Une Saison en Enfer*, it is not unreasonable to suggest that *Une Saison en Enfer* represents not only the most sustained but also the most far-reaching and successful exploration of his Becoming-Dionysian in text.

Being at a point of critical remove from the text, more often than not the reader approaching *Une Saison en Enfer* seems to find in this work an exploration of personal being and humanity using the collision of experience and reality through desire that formed the core of Rimbaud's expanded immanent being. However, it is important to note that the presence of a greater thematic concern does not render the work narratival in structure, nor is the space of language in which this exploration is conducted compromised in its creative integrity by the presence of an underlying or uniting theme. For as may be expected from a work which can be said to operate according to a process of Becoming-Dionysian, it may be speculated that the introduction of what appears as a 'theme' is itself a by-product of Rimbaud's motivating drive for authenticity and a reflection of his understanding of such authenticity being drawn directly from the interaction between the immanent states of experience and conscious, continuing identity in the world.

One effect of the divination of the theme of Rimbaud's own human condition in *Une Saison en Enfer* has been the way in which such a theme (perceived or actual) makes the work easier to access for a number of readers. Perhaps due to the comparative accessibility of *Une Saison en Enfer* when contrasted with the often remote *Illuminations*, the former has been the subject of much biographical dissection. One emphasis of such biographical discussion has been the effort both to date *Une Saison en Enfer* effectively and in turn render the *Illuminations* more comprehensible through a contextualisation of Rimbaud's poetic progress using *Une Saison en Enfer* as a point of reference. Enid Starkie considers *Une Saison en Enfer* to be the allegorical recapitulation of Rimbaud's greater poetic project. In light of

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<sup>128</sup> Russell, *Poets, Prophets and Revolutionaries*, p. 57.

comments that she interprets as conclusions presented at the close of *Une Saison en Enfer*, Starkie contests that Rimbaud ultimately considers his poetic project a failure.<sup>129</sup> However, such a linear and literal reading of Rimbaud's longest poem as an account of the personal practice of his 'seer' theory fails to acknowledge the Becoming-Dionysian interactions explored within the space of language as forming the core of Rimbaud's textual creativity. For as a poet involved in a Becoming-Dionysian process, Rimbaud was not restricted to a mere representation of reality as he saw and experienced it. Starkie's desire to read Rimbaud's *Saison en Enfer* as a re-presentation or retrospective consideration of the world in which he lived and the failure of his desire for authenticity to interact successfully with such a world is facile for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the myopia and tunnel vision such a position creates through its consideration of poetry as little more than a means of presenting existence in an alternative, creative and appealing way.

### 3.4.7 Structure of the Season

Concurring with Starkie and Russell, the overarching title of the poem *Une Saison en Enfer* has suggested to most scholars that Rimbaud intended this poem to be a retrospective analysis of a period of his life that was itself past. This interpretation is based on a reading of a possible architecture of the poem that is formulated around what is often perceived as Rimbaud's narrational use of the first-person in the text. In order to best read the text as a space through which Rimbaud's Becoming-Dionysian was explored, the architecture of the poem must be read as a textual exploration of the chaotic human mass from within which Rimbaud wrote. Within such a reading, there is no narrative structure imposed by the critic that takes precedence over the Becoming-Dionysian exploration that takes place in and as the text itself. Yet, the fact that Rimbaud's use of language in *Une Saison en Enfer* is not purely poetic, but rather, as has been pointed out by Mallarmé, also serves

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<sup>129</sup> Starkie, *Rimbaud*, p. 261.

as a tool of reportage, has contributed to the reader privileging the narrative and anecdotal possibilities of the text as an artefact and thus not engaging with the text as an exploration. To a limited extent, such interpretations are not without value, however, for the present analysis the privileging of such notions is understood to obscure the examination of the poem as an exploration of that which is here termed Becoming-Dionysian. The appropriation of the text as an artefact and hence the denial of the possibility of the text as an exploration is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the critical works dealing with 'Délires I; Vierge Folle' (below).

Whereas the *Illuminations* had demonstrated the unsustainable and unstable nature of Rimbaud's Becoming-Dionysian interaction, *Une Saison en Enfer* compliments this intense exploration and illumination of individual moments of being with an extended investigation into the human consequences and experiences of the poetic Becoming-Dionysian and the drive for authenticity. This is not to suggest that *Une Saison en Enfer* forms a commentary on the *Illuminations*, quite the contrary. *Une Saison en Enfer* is itself an extended, albeit somewhat fractal, exploration into the human heart of Rimbaud's poetic project and his desire to be both beyond and deep within humanity and the human experience.

Commensurate with the human dimensions of the poem, the spaces and human presence explored in *Une Saison en Enfer* exist in dramatic contrast to the conceptual and symbolic abstract figures and rooms of the *Illuminations*. Rimbaud opens his poem with an introduction that reads as though it is itself the beginning of a story. This use of the familiar technique of a structure akin to the much-used 'once upon a time' recollection has the effect of drawing the reader into the poem through the use of a first-person narrator. Such a technique works by drawing the reader into the text, creating the illusion of distance and safety in the same way that a child is led into the space of a story safe in the knowledge that its events are long past. In this instance, it may be argued that the seemingly reassuring invocation of a 'narrator' is little more than a means of involving a reader preconditioned to a narratorial presence into the experience of a text with a familiar tex-

tual device and the comforting illusion of a seemingly personal relationship. Immediately the narrator takes the reader into his confidence, confessing the things he has done and the situations in which his drive for authenticity has placed him. Rimbaud's prevalent use of the first-person pronoun may be understood as an attempt to make the reader feel both kinship with a fellow human and, at the same time, revulsion and shock at the events, emotions and situations that form the being of another human to whom they are so superficially similar. Rimbaud begins:

Jadis, si je me souviens bien, ma vie était un festin où s'ouvraient tous les cœurs, où tous les vins coulaient. Un soir, j'ai assis la Beauté sur mes genoux. — Et je l'ai trouvée amère. — Et je l'ai injuriée. Je me suis armé contre la justice. Je me suis enfui. Ô sorcières, ô misère, ô haine, c'est à vous que mon trésor a été confié!<sup>130</sup>

The use of a narrator may be seen to execute the dual tasks of making a connection between the reader and the text and simultaneously affording this reader the privacy of anonymity and distance from the situations and acts that the text explores. A similar technique was used by Baudelaire in the opening poem of *Les Fleurs du Mal* entitled 'Au Lecteur' when he writes: "Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat, / — Hypocrite lecteur, — mon semblable, — mon frère!"<sup>131</sup> However, the veneer of accessibility and familiarity created by Rimbaud's use of the narrative trope conceals the Becoming-Dionysian exploration, nature and involvement of the experiences and extremities explored in *Une Saison en Enfer* that follow such a familiar introduction. Indeed, the reader may be forgiven the delusion that they are introduced together with the writer at the very inception of recollection, and

<sup>130</sup> Rimbaud, 'Une Saison en Enfer', p. 93, "Once, if I recall correctly, my life was a banquet at which all hearts were open and all wines flowed. One evening I sat beauty on my knee — and I found her bitter — and I cursed her. I armed myself against justice. I fled. O witches, o misery, o hate, it is to you that I confide my treasures".

<sup>131</sup> Charles Baudelaire, 'Au Lecteur', in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by Y.-G. Le Dantec, ed. rev. by Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), p. 6, "You know this wretch, reader, this delicate monster, / Hypocrite reader, — my double, — my brother!"

thus they will explore together the interactions that characterise that which is here termed the Becoming-Dionysian of the author in Rimbaud's space of language. As such, given Rimbaud's reliance on writing 'in hindsight' and the feeling of 'looking back' that the use of this over-familiar narrative construction creates, Starkie's interpretation of *Une Saison en Enfer* as a retrospective analysis and confessional may, at times, appear justified.

However, such familiarity and structure quickly disappear as the initiation of situation and the presence of context dissolve into a pool of textual immanence that seeps out into Rimbaud's explorations of the myriad of incarnations of humanity. Familiarity with the reader is revealed as a ruse as the reader progresses through the text discovering a litany of Rimbaud's crimes and confirming the poet's separation from society. In order to prove that this Becoming-Dionysian derangement was a necessity, Rimbaud begins and concludes a search for antecedent revolutions, previous explorations, for mothers and fathers who would nurture his abilities. Most importantly, Rimbaud seeks a space in which he feels it would be possible to belong amongst the ranks of explorers of the Dionysian experience and the path to its acquisition. 'Mauvais Sang' sees the poet linger in the gambit of experiences the expansion of his immanent states of experience has produced, whilst at the same time underscoring the recollection of these experiences as having been themselves moments in pursuit of a greater conscious desire to know humanity in hitherto unknown and authentic ways.

### 3.4.8 History

In *Une Saison en Enfer*, Rimbaud trawls the genetic histories of the human race, trying to find in his blood an antecedent spark of revolution that would link him unequivocally to a privileged space of belonging: "Si j'avais des antécédents à un point quelconque de l'histoire de France! Mais non, rien".<sup>132</sup> Rimbaud's lack of revolutionary antecedents, or indeed antecedents

<sup>132</sup> Rimbaud, 'Mauvais Sang', p. 94, "If only I had antecedents at some point during the history of France, but no, nothing".

of any note anywhere, places him firmly in the majority of human beings whose genes are unspectacular, whose existence is marked only by their own petty achievements and whose name will rot away with their corpse after their life ends. He has inherited nothing spectacular, and thus his life will be like so many other nameless faceless sons with whom he is familiar by virtue of both his commonness and his expansion of experiences beyond those offered him in the course of his daily existence. Rimbaud explains:

Pas une famille d'Europe que je ne connaisse. – J'attends des familles comme la mienne, qui tiennent tout de la déclaration des Droits de l'homme. – J'ai connu chaque fils de famille!<sup>133</sup>

Importantly for Rimbaud, this accumulated knowledge of nothingness unwittingly collated through millions of individual lives has itself shaped not only his social status but also his very understanding of the human condition. Whilst the shaping of his (and by extension, all French people's) human condition is not classified as development *per se*, this progression through time has produced ingrained and accepted perspectives that he appropriates as titles and thus demonstrative proof of the formative power of the history of nothingness and nobodies Rimbaud includes in his tour of being. In the context of 'Mauvais Sang', for example, Rimbaud's need to humanise everything historical away from epic and all encompassing notions of grandeur sees France described ironically as: "la fille aînée de l'Eglise".<sup>134</sup> One effect of the incorporation of such human dimensions and mundane day-to-day facts in the context of 'Mauvais Sang' is to heighten the differences between the poles of the spectrum that define the interaction of the experiential with the ongoing conscious chore of identity with its facts and omnipresent labels.

In order to demonstrate the clash of worlds such interaction brings about in the human context, Rimbaud explores the religious idea of salvation as

<sup>133</sup> Rimbaud, 'Mauvais Sang', p. 94, "There is not one family with whom I am not familiar. I recognise families such as my own, families who owe everything to the declaration of the rights of man. I know every son of such families!".

<sup>134</sup> Rimbaud, 'Mauvais Sang', p. 94, "The eldest daughter of the Church".

a commodity, of God as a saviour, a solution and a panacea to the ills and sufferings of earth franchised through the recognisable outlet of a church into each and every peasant life. Following on from Rimbaud's recalibration of relationships and the introduction of more human dimensions (that saw France become 'the oldest daughter of the Church'), the intangibility of God is made explicit in order to show the greed and blatant self-interest that motivates the desire for salvation. Indeed, in Rimbaud's opinion, God has become a product that is greedily craved, a reward that bought by adherence to a domineering morality and a dreary, hard and depressing existence here in Hell on earth.

Contrasting his own personal experience of greed with both the spiritual notion of God and the franchised religious incarnation sold to peasants as 'the answer', Rimbaud exposes the contradiction of his own Becoming-Dionysian dynamic of interaction between experience and conscious knowing, pronouncing: "J'attends Dieu avec gourmandise".<sup>135</sup> Whilst acknowledging the irony of greedily awaiting the reward for an unrepentantly impious life, Rimbaud also invokes the image of himself sitting in Hell, renouncing all he had undertaken as part of his poetic project and prostrating himself before the divine. Rimbaud writes:

Sans doute la débauche est bête, le vice est bête; il faut jeter la pourriture à l'écart. Mais l'horloge ne sera pas arrivée à ne plus sonner que l'heure de la pure douleur! Vais-je être enlevé comme un enfant, pour jouer au paradis dans l'oubli de tout le malheur! Vite! est-il d'autres vies? — Le sommeil dans la richesse est impossible. La richesse a toujours été bien public. L'amour divin seul octroie les clefs de la science. Je vois que la nature n'est qu'un spectacle de bonté. Adieu chimères, idéals, erreurs.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>135</sup> Rimbaud, 'Mauvais Sang', p. 95, "I await God with greed".

<sup>136</sup> Rimbaud, 'Mauvais Sang', p. 98, "Without a doubt debauchery is stupid, vice is stupid; all that is rotten must be thrown away. Yet, the clock will bring with the hour nothing but pure pain. Will I be carried, forgetting all misfortune, like a child to paradise! Quick! Where are the other lives? — slumber in the midst of riches is impossible. Wealth has always been a public concern. Only divine love concedes the keys to science. I see that nature is nothing but a spectacle of goodness. Adieu chimeras, ideals and errors!".

Whilst the inclusion of such polarised perspectives on God and redemption may seem somewhat contradictory, one of the defining characteristics of *Une Saison en Enfer* is Rimbaud's exploration of perspectives and positions other than his own concerning that which is here termed his Becoming-Dionysian project.<sup>137</sup> Thus, it is not only gradual preconscious accumulation of names and identities that has shaped Rimbaud's world and therewith the current incarnation of human being that are present in his expansion of consciousness, it is also those people with whom he comes into contact. As laid out in his letters, such existences are vital to his poetic education, making very clear the paradox of his renouncing them (quoted above). Through his understanding of himself as embodying the current form of the nobody in history, the imagined experiences of the past and the projected experiences of his contemporaries occupy his mind. On more than one occasion Rimbaud immerses himself in the inglorious human paths of the past. He writes:

J'aurais fait, manant, le voyage de terre sainte; j'ai dans la tête des routes dans les plaines souabes, des vues de Byzance, des remparts de Solyme; le culte de Marie, l'attendrissement sur le crucifié s'éveillent en moi parmi mille féeries profanes. — Je suis assis, lépreux, sur les pots cassés et les ortis, au pied d'un mur rongé par le soleil. — Plus tard, reître, j'aurais bivaqué sous les nuits d'Allemagne.

Ah! encore: je danse le sabbat dans une rouge clarière, avec des vieilles et des enfants.<sup>138</sup>

Completing Rimbaud's *tour de force* of French historical experiences is the march into Hell. The invocation of Hell in this context is reminiscent

<sup>137</sup> See, for example, Rimbaud's exploration of Verlaine's perspective on, and experience of, their tempestuous relationship explored in 'Vierge Folle'.

<sup>138</sup> Rimbaud, 'Mauvais Sang', pp. 94-95, "As a serf I would have made the journey to the Holy Land. I have in my head the roads that cross the Swabian plains, views of Byzantium, the ramparts of Solomon, the cult of Mary, amongst other profane imaginings, I feel pity for he who was crucified. — As a leper I am seated on broken pots and nettles beneath a sun-soaked wall. — Later, as a mercenary, I would have been deployed under open German skies. Ah! Again I dance the Sabbath in a scarlet clearing amongst old women and children".



of both the idea of detention for crimes unknown (as seen in the torment of victims trapped within Kafka's judicial mazes) and a period of intense re-evaluation of one's life and actions following an unsuccessful attempt at committing suicide. Rimbaud uses the personal allegory of eternal suffering framed in the context of the religion-dominated history of France to explore the intensity of the human condition in the midst of which he finds himself. Such a position sees Rimbaud dumped from the heights of his 1871 idealism. However, that which is here identified as the essential Becoming-Dionysian tension that characterises Rimbaud's poetic endeavour, remains, as ever, the conflict between the rational incarnation of continued personal identity and the experiential sphere that Rimbaud, in an effort to achieve authenticity, put such work into developing.

### 3.4.9 Hell

This analysis argues that Rimbaud's descent into Hell frames what may be read as the opening of his own being and personal universe to the plane of the page. Descending into Hell opens a more intimate and personal element of Rimbaud's life in his poetry that sits in stark contrast to the more abstract *Illuminations*. It is in the context of Rimbaud's explorations of his own personal universe and its relationship to those of others that Mallarmé's description of Rimbaud's language as nearing or verging on that of reportage becomes apparent. However, the manner in which words stumble over one another in a collage of burning snapshots of his beleaguered idealism is more than the mere exposure of the inadequacies of a teenage poet struggling with his feelings and the inability of his talent to depict them gracefully. Indeed, this analysis argues that the juxtaposed surfeit of images and sounds represents the honest and authentic exploration of the Becoming-Dionysian chaos of his movement towards the unknown that is explored in the space of language.

J'ai avalé une fameuse gorgée de poison. — Trois fois béni soit le conseil qui m'est arrivé! — Les entrailles me brûlent. La violence de venin tord mes membres, me rend difforme, me terrasse. Je meurs de soif, j'étouffe, je ne puis crier. C'est l'enfer, l'éternelle peine! Voyez comme le feu se relève! Je brûle comme il faut. Va, démon!<sup>139</sup>

Whilst the language of 'Nuit de l'Enfer' may be referred to as verging on reportage in style, the effect produced is not one of reporting. 'Nuit de l'Enfer' fathoms the cavern of Rimbaud's hellish borstal of solitude. Rimbaud writes:

C'est bien que j'ai toujours eu: plus de foi en l'histoire, l'oubli des principes. Je m'en tairai: poètes et visionnaires seraient jaloux. Je suis mille fois le plus riche, soyons avare comme la mer<sup>140</sup>

His words and the ideals they frame rattle around the smouldering walls and return, like the curses they have become, to chastise him. On more than one occasion he returns to the wording of the letters to Demeny and Izambard, calling them out in defiance of the infernal isolation and endless introspection that he has brought upon himself. Rimbaud writes: "Un homme qui veut se mutiler est bien damné, n'est-ce pas? Je me crois en enfer, donc j'y suis".<sup>141</sup>

<sup>139</sup> Rimbaud, 'Nuit de l'Enfer', pp. 99-100, "I have swallowed a famed mouthful of poison. — Three times blessed be the plan that came upon me! — My entrails are burning. The violence of the venom wrings my limbs, deforms me, throws me to the floor. I'm dying of thirst, I'm suffocating, I can't scream. It's Hell, the eternal punishment. See how the fire rises again! I am burning as I should burn. Come demon!"

<sup>140</sup> Rimbaud, 'Nuit de l'Enfer', p. 100, "In truth, it is that which I have always had: no faith in history and the forgetting of principles. I must suppress that which I have gained: poets and visionaries will be jealous. I am rich a thousand times over, may I be as avaricious as the sea".

<sup>141</sup> Rimbaud, 'Nuit de l'Enfer', p. 100, "A man who wilfully mutilates himself is rightfully damned, no? I believe myself in Hell, therefore I am in Hell".

Yet, whilst Rimbaud's letters to Demeny and Izambard prescribed the initial path of the Becoming-Dionysian necessary for the creation of authentic poetry and which 'Le Bateau ivre' was an imagined trajectory of the path of the poet into the stratospheric unknown, it is the personal rather than the allegorical, abstract or ideal aspects of his project that are explored in *Une Saison en Enfer*. The memories of the ambition, idealism and drive articulated in his letters that initiated Rimbaud's Becoming-Dionysian project return to torment him. Indeed, the Hell of which he speaks is, in many ways, paradoxically both Sartre's Hell of 'les autres' and, simultaneously, the isolation that his poetic project has insisted that he build around himself in order to actualise the unknown. It is Rimbaud's realisation of this double-bind, a double-bind that is itself characteristic of the human condition, that sends him spiralling through his edicts and ambitions of 1871 in an effort to find a truth upon which he can rebuild his being. From this Hell, Rimbaud writes:

À chaque être, plusieurs *autres* vies me semblaient dues. Ce monsieur ne sait ce qu'il fait: il est un ange. Cette famille est une nichée de chiens. Devant plusieurs hommes, je causai tout haut avec un moment d'un de leurs autres vies. — Ainsi, j'ai aimé un porc.

Aucun des sophismes de la folie, — la folie qu'on enferme, — n'a été oubliée par moi: je pourrais les redire tous, je tiens le système.

Ma santé fut menacée. La terreur venait. Je tombais dans les sommeils de plusieurs jours, et, levé, je continuais les rêves les plus tristes. J'étais mûr pour le trépas, et par une route de dangers ma faiblesse me menait aux confins du monde et de la Cimmérie, patrie de l'ombre et des tourbillons.

Je dus voyager, distraire les enchantements assemblés sur mon cerveau. Sur la mer, que j'aimais comme si elle eût dû me laver d'une souillure, je voyais se lever la croix consolatrice.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>142</sup> Rimbaud, 'Délires II', p. 111, "It seemed to me that to each person several other lives were due. This man does not know what he's doing: he's an angel. This family is a litter of dogs. Before many men I spoke out loud with a moment of their other lives. It is thus that I loved a pig. Not one sophistry of madness — the kind of madness that gets locked up — has been forgotten by me: I could recite them all, I know the system. My

Much of Rimbaud's time in Hell is composed of scattered memories and thoughts and sensations spinning out and around the poet, words laced in between what he had considered the bastions of his being: vision, ambition and faith. Rimbaud chastises, lauds and laments every aspect of his own being (and therewith the project of Becoming-Dionysian with which he is fused) from the depth of his hellish realisation of his own confusion and uncertainty, poisoned with the kiss of human doubt.

In Hell, it may be argued that Rimbaud explores the chasm between an idealised Becoming-Dionysian poetic project and his own, inescapable, human characteristics. Indeed, even Rimbaud's idea of ascent to the unknown, which had previously seemed a possibility, is itself exposed as an essential, human characteristic that may be understood as spirituality. Following such a discovery, Rimbaud comes to the conclusion that all he has done in his letters to Demeny and Izambard is schematise and idealise from the ivory tower of his own perspective the essentially human endeavour of a spiritual quest. However, rather than consider, along with Enid Starkie and Charles Russell, that 'Nuit de l'Enfer' is Rimbaud's admission of failure as a poet and as a visionary, taking Rimbaud's Becoming-Dionysian into account, this analysis argues that Rimbaud's time in Hell is more comprehensibly viewed as the moment of realisation that he is not alone in his desire to see beyond that which is known by the collective consciousness of the society in which he lives. As such, the fragmented and seemingly hallucinogenic poetic effect present in Rimbaud's suffusion of images, murmured sentences and curses in 'Nuit de l'Enfer' may be seen to represent his discovery and exploration of the rapid falling of the splintered shards of his world, a world that had hitherto been hinged around himself and his poetic mission as its avatar.

For a poet who had placed such ideological emphasis on the search for, and attainment of, authenticity, and suffered in the path of actualising his

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health was threatened. The terror came. I fell asleep for days on end, and upon waking, continued my sad dreams. I was ripe for death, and on one path of dangers my weakness lead me to the borders of the world of Cimmeria, land of shadows and whirlwinds. I had to travel, to distract the enchantments brewing over my brain. On the sea, which I loved as if she were washing me of a stain, I saw the consoling cross rise".

Becoming-Dionysian to discover that he had in fact followed the human path and not superseded it, required a punishment of uncompromising severity. Having so despised the humanity he saw all around him, to discover that he too was engaged in similar work and had similar longings and desires must have come as a great blow to his revolutionary ambition. Rimbaud writes:

Je devrais avoir mon enfer pour la colère, mon enfer pour l'orgueil,  
— et l'enfer de la caresse; un concert d'enfers.

Je meurs de lassitude. C'est le tombeau, je m'en vais aux vers,  
horreur de l'horreur! Satan, farceur, tu veux me dissoudre avec  
tes charmes. Je réclame. Je réclame! Un coup de fourche, une  
goutte de feu.

Ah! remonter à la vie! Jeter les yeux sur nos difformités. Et ce  
poison, ce baiser mille fois maudit! Ma faiblesse, la cruauté du  
monde! Mon Dieu, pitié, cachez-moi, je me tiens trop mal! Je  
suis caché et je ne le suis pas.

C'est le feu qui se relève avec son damné.<sup>143</sup>

However, the punishment of a physical Hell could not sate the hunger for retributive action that the savage poet would require himself to undergo, having been so painfully, humiliatingly wrong. All of Rimbaud's actions, all of his thoughts, memories and experiences must be scrutinised in the new light of realisation that he is not the magus he thought he was; in trying desperately to see, be and know beyond human knowing, Rimbaud is startled by the discovery that he is, was, and will continue to be, human.

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<sup>143</sup> Rimbaud, 'Nuit de l'Enfer', p. 101-102, "I should have one Hell each for my anger and my pride, - and a Hell of caresses; a concert of Hells. I am dying of weariness. This is the grave, I will be invaded by worms, horror of horrors! Satan, jester, you are trying to melt me with your charms. I object. I object! A stab of the pitchfork, a taste of flame. To rise once more to life! Cast eyes on our deformities. And that poison, that kiss cursed me a thousand times! My frailty, the cruelty of the world! My Lord God, pity, hide me, I have behaved terribly! - I am hidden, yet I am revealed. The fire rises up with its damned".

### 3.4.10 Human, All Too Human

The discovery of his own humanity and its proximity to the writhing, bloody human mass he had sought to escape by engaging in the schematisation of a creative project of Becoming-Dionysian, awoke the pain of new experience that, upon interaction with the conscious, continuing Rimbaud of the social world, revealed hitherto unseen truths about his past actions and interactions. As Rimbaud writes in 'L'Impossible':

J'ai eu raison dans mes dédains: puisque je m'évade!  
 Je m'évade!  
 Je m'explique.<sup>144</sup>

The discovery of his own adherence to the human norm is most certainly not an indictment of Rimbaud's Becoming-Dionysian. Indeed, Rimbaud's discovery that his supposedly individual path was in reality that of all humanity may be seen to validate Nietzsche's insight into the creative process and human condition from which Becoming-Dionysian derives. One immediately recognisable effect of this discovery in his work may be seen in his attempts to explore his own behaviour from the perspective of those around him. One key and much cited example of this may be found in the first of the 'Délires' entitled 'Vierge Folle' in which Rimbaud applies this new knowledge of self to an exploration of his relationship with Verlaine.

Whilst his relationship with Verlaine may have been a subject for 'Vagabonds' in the *Illuminations*,<sup>145</sup> in *Une Saison en Enfer* Rimbaud sees his relationship with Verlaine as characterised by the illusions and frailty of both parties. In the *Illuminations*, the exploration of the interaction between the conscious and the experiential seen in 'Conte' took the form of a relationship for the purposes of explication and allegory. In *Une Saison en Enfer* the interaction between Rimbaud and Verlaine that was a relationship in the social

<sup>144</sup> Rimbaud, 'L'Impossible', p. 112, "I was right in my disdain, for I am escaping! I am escaping! I am explaining".

<sup>145</sup> See: Osmond, pp. 124-125.

world is explored as a series of multi-dimensional dynamic interactions tensioned between the states and experiences of pain, weakness, addiction and delusion. Rather than use the perspective of his own first-person in 'Vierge Folle', Rimbaud explores the interaction between himself and Verlaine using the perspective of the dithering, weak and addicted Verlaine, therewith exposing his own actions and motivations to further scrutiny by divesting himself of the same 'self' and pretensions that he once cultivated but that he now finds so repulsive. The actions and reactions that characterised Rimbaud's search for authenticity are seen through the eyes of Verlaine as monstrous and cruel, yet the older poet is incapable of wrenching himself away from the tyrannical Rimbaud who is in turn deeply immersed in his own wretched delusion of self-importance as the only source of vision and truth in the universe of creativity.

The second of the 'Délires' is written from Rimbaud's own perspective and contrasts sharply with the helpless and wallowing self-pity of Verlaine's vision of events and affairs. Again, with reference to the trope of the narrator, Rimbaud begins his own exploration of his being and the relevance of his discovery of humanity somewhat misleadingly with the opening assertion: "À moi. L'histoire d'une de mes folies".<sup>146</sup>

Rimbaud's choice of the title 'Délires' for both the explorations of his actions from Verlaine's perspective and his own investigation into his knowing and understanding of himself and his creative project shows the extent to which the discovery of his own inescapable human traits had influenced the thematic extension of his poetic Becoming-Dionysian. However, whilst influencing the expression of his process thematically the essential Becoming-Dionysian task of exploring interactions remained unchanged. Whereas the *Illuminations* had explored the moments of collision in all their senses, in *Une Saison en Enfer* Rimbaud faces the ongoing nature of his own human becoming. That is to say, in *Une Saison en Enfer* Rimbaud realises that his being is more than a chain of past and frozen moments in which the experiential and the conscious interact, rather becoming is itself the dynamic of his very being.

<sup>146</sup> Rimbaud, 'Délires II', p. 106, "Of Myself: A history of my follies".

It is Rimbaud as a human being and not as a manifestation of the label of poet, that is involved at the most basic and fundamental level with his own continual becoming and therewith Becoming-Dionysian. Indeed, ironically, his program of derangement only put this dynamic in more explicit terms. In this way, the actions and motivations of Rimbaud's 'époux infernal' were as delusional as Verlaine's continually pitiful 'vierge folle'. Both characters were embroiled in a delirium of roles and characters, a feverish dream or play from which Rimbaud is now, by virtue of his hellish, human discovery, freed.

Other than an obvious thematic presence, what is the tangible, poetic impact of such a realisation on the Becoming-Dionysian dynamic of Rimbaud's use of the space of language and exploration of his immanent world? In the first instance, following the realisation of his own humanity and his inability to escape its demands, Rimbaud's poetics are forced into an intimate examination of his own Becoming-Dionysian in the human context. In contrast to the more abstract moments of the *Illuminations*, Rimbaud's poetic self in *Une Saison en Enfer* is confronted with the realisation that the lofty aims of the poetic project itself are essentially a schematised version of the search for spirituality. Furthermore, Rimbaud comes to realise the Becoming-Dionysian of the text in the space of language is itself an extension of his own becoming, that is to say, his own personal being and experiences through and in time. The most tangible aspect of this in relation to the poem itself is in its extended structure and thematic human concerns. Evidence of the change this new concern brought about can be found not only in the more personal and intimate language of *Une Saison en Enfer*, but also in the way in which the poem is itself an extended exploration of a single multifaceted theme. Whereas the *Illuminations* can be read as dealing with single (if complex) component aspects of the human whole as individual moments with references to their tangential and aesthetic possibilities, *Une Saison en Enfer* is an exploration of the poet's first-person involvement and nature of Becoming-Dionysian and the human interaction and ramifications thereof that had remained until this time implicit in Rimbaud's work.



Following the discovery of his own humanity and its inescapable sphere of influence in and as life itself, all available evidence suggests that Rimbaud ceased to write poetry. That Rimbaud's Becoming-Dionysian in text ended abruptly is a well-known element of the Rimbaud story. Yet, in the light of the experiential emphasis of Rimbaud's Becoming-Dionysian, it can be conjectured that his personal Becoming-Dionysian extended throughout his European travels and his periods as a trader in Africa and a foreman in Cyprus. Following his discovery of the inescapable nature of his own human traits, it is possible that Rimbaud opened the parameters of his Becoming-Dionysian to encompass life itself as the medium and milieu best suited to the vast, human scope of his project of exploration. That is not to say that Starkie is correct in presuming that Rimbaud considered his poetic project to be a failure, indeed quite the contrary. Rather, Rimbaud, in opening his creative project to include himself as an artistic field and not as merely a source, his poetic project was anything but a failure, it was a beginning.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Through the application of the concept of Becoming-Dionysian to the creative endeavour of Arthur Rimbaud, this study has moved beyond the employment of biographical or syntactic devices alone as tools for approaching Rimbaud's poetry. The paradigmatic shift in context and focus provided by the concept of Becoming-Dionysian in the examination of Rimbaud's work has opened Rimbaud's prose poetry to new concerns and in so doing serves to further illustrate, and expose new facets of, the extent of his innovation and ability as a poet.

Thus, if Rimbaud's creative revolution is viewed as grounded both theoretically and practically in the ideals and processes of Becoming-Dionysian, a great deal that has hitherto remained neglected by critical scholarship is revealed to the reader. Such an examination has revealed the presence of what

has previously been examined by critics as 'themes' and encoded anecdotal subtexts are, viewed in the context of Rimbaud's Becoming-Dionysian, seen as secondary to the essential artistic concerns of the poet and his search for authenticity. The application of the Becoming-Dionysian concept to the case of Rimbaud has allowed his work to be examined as a search and exploration for both a human and an artistic ideal, not merely a curiosity to be admired or reviled.

As has been suggested at the outset of this examination, The Rimbaudian corpus is of particular interest to an examination of the concept of Becoming-Dionysian as a tool for gaining greater insight and understanding of artistic undertaking due to its personal emphasis, comparative isolation from contemporary influence, audacity, intensity and relatively compact nature. Taking these factors into account, in the case of Rimbaud it is possible to examine the entire corpus of a single artist in order to demonstrate the extent to which the concept of Becoming-Dionysian can be seen in all aspects of an artist's creative endeavour. However, a compact example such as that afforded by the case of Rimbaud is rare in the field of literary study.

The sheer intensity of the personal emphasis of Becoming-Dionysian explicit in Rimbaud's textual universe of language, sensation and idea, has allowed the reader access to the Becoming-Dionysian of the poet in a way that exposes, through the fundamental human concerns of the process and the works, the reader as themselves involved in infinite processes of becoming. Through his exuberant formulation of ideas and ideals into a prescription for change, it may be argued that Rimbaud exposed himself and his inner becoming to the elements of the world and the language that permeates it. The appropriation and understanding of this inner self and personal reality as the true source of authenticity in artistic endeavour makes the choice of Rimbaud as an exemplar of one project of Becoming-Dionysian logical. However, Rimbaud's explicit personal emphasis is not mirrored by all artists for whose work Becoming-Dionysian is a valuable means of exploration and understanding. Whilst the expansion and exploration of the personal is the core of the Becoming-Dionysian endeavour, artists such as William Burroughs have em-

ployed a more cloak-and-dagger approach to the Becoming-Dionysian that is an essential part of their artistic endeavour. In the case of Burroughs, this process lead him towards the possibilities of disguise and subversion as ways to depart from the fixity of the single moment, the body and the permanent chain of addiction.



## Chapter 4

# The Way OUT is the Way IN: William Burroughs' Brave New (naked) World

Homo sum: humani nil a me alienum puto.<sup>1</sup>

- Terence

### 4.1 Introduction

Whereas Rimbaud was concerned with the ability and role of the first-person/artist to explore the reality of being and experience using the space of language, William S. Burroughs employed a less immediately recognisable personal emphasis in his textual exploration of the spaces between physical being, social self, mental space, experience and expression. In contrast to the open nature of Rimbaud's explorations of the fields of self and consciousness, Burroughs used a personal voice composed of disguises, characters, chimeras and external, disembodied narratives to enter and explore new spaces, thoughts and experiences in his search for valid and revealing expression founded on his own human experience. Like Rimbaud before him, in

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<sup>1</sup> Terence, *Heauton Timorumeneos*, 77, "I am human: nothing human is alien to me",

order to explore this experience Burroughs was required to transcend the boundaries of accepted prose and tradition. Explaining his vision of creativity as a search or personal exploration, Burroughs writes: "Writing must always remain an *attempt*. [...] A suitable medium for me does not yet exist, unless I invent it".<sup>2</sup> This chapter argues that by using a process that is here identified as Becoming-Dionysian, Burroughs was able to invent a suitable medium for the exploration of his own experiences and reality in his work.

A fundamental element of this analysis is the position that Burroughs' experiences of addiction and intoxication initiate an important space of otherness that is vital to the exploration of his own human experience undertaken in his work. Using Becoming-Dionysian to frame this analysis of his work, this chapter argues that Burroughs actualised and made use of an experience of otherness precipitated by intoxication as a space to and from which he was able to act as a conduit between what he saw as the two realms of existence. Indeed, in the case of Burroughs, it may be argued that these realms were the Dionysian with its unrestrained urgency of primal human being, and the 'real world', which he perceived as the socially and physically constrained world of the defined individual. Indeed, in line with this contention, Burroughs speaks of withdrawal from junk as: "life suspended between two ways of being".<sup>3</sup>

Having examined the importance to Burroughs' creative process of the Dionysian space actualised by junk, this chapter then argues that Burroughs continued to make use of this space in his work. The way in which Burroughs' uses this space within his project of Becoming-Dionysian undergoes a number of significant changes. This chapter traces the development of these changes culminating in *Naked Lunch* and the schematisation of Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian technique into the cut-up. Indeed, this analysis maintains that Burroughs and Gysin's technique of the cut-up represents a means of elaborating schematically the way that Burroughs' creative process may

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<sup>2</sup> *The Letters of William Burroughs: 1945-1959*, ed. by Oliver Harris (New York: Viking, 1993), p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> William Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (London: Flamingo, 1993), p. 56.

be understood to make use of his discovery of a Dionysian space through junk.

Making use of the oscillation between the intoxicated space and the real world that is inherent in narcotic addiction, it can be conjectured that rather than being involved in a comparatively linear and goal-oriented Becoming-Dionysian, the likes of which was embodied by Rimbaud's schematised poetic project, Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian is more circular and oscillating in nature. This chapter argues that having realised a Dionysian space through junk, Burroughs went on to explore the movement between this Dionysian realm and rational consciousness. Exploring this movement, Burroughs may be understood as actively engaged in an exploration of the human condition. Indeed, Burroughs' exploration of human reality is undertaken both from a number of different perspectives. This being the case, the example of Burroughs brings a new aspect of Becoming-Dionysian to the fore, one which allows the artist to leave reality for the personal and/or disembodied and return again with a vast diversification of experience and identity on a regular, cyclical basis.

## 4.2 Beginning the Process of Becoming-Dionysian as a Writer

This section argues that Burroughs' emphasis on the actualised space of otherness apart from conscious reality lies at the heart of that which is here identified as his Becoming-Dionysian creative technique. Allen Ginsberg recognised in Burroughs "a respect for the 'irrational' or unconscious properties of the soul and disrespect for all law".<sup>4</sup> This respect for states in which rational consciousness is not the supreme power may be seen as a seminal force in Burroughs realising the creative importance of a Dionysian

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<sup>4</sup> Allen Ginsberg, 'Prose contribution to the Cuban Revolution', in *Deliberate Prose*, ed. by Bill Morgan (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 135-145, p. 137.

space in which the irrational may be said to reign over consciousness. Yet, in much the same way as Rimbaud undertook a journey towards realising his poetic ideal, Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian did not emerge fully formed in his work from the outset of his writing career. This chapter argues that Burroughs' realisation of a Becoming-Dionysian process in his work necessitated numerous discoveries. One such discovery was that of the space of otherness initiated by heroin intoxication.

Within the context of the Becoming-Dionysian that this chapter argues is central to Burroughs' writing, this chapter argues that the space of otherness into which intoxication initiated him was of seminal importance. Indeed, it is argued that it was Burroughs' initial experience of addiction and intoxication that made apparent to him as a writer the importance of personal experience. By focussing on Burroughs' work as exemplifying one reality of a Becoming-Dionysian, Burroughs' discovery of the Dionysian space of intoxication may be understood to allow him to explore with greater clarity the relationship between the liberated world of freedom and the restricted counterpart of this liberation in the physical world of the body, appearances, ethics and laws.

#### **4.2.1 Drugs and Addiction: Burroughs' Dionysian Circle**

In any study of the works of William Seward Burroughs, it would be remiss not to acknowledge at its outset Burroughs' ongoing use of narcotic drugs and the intimate and ongoing first person experience of addiction and withdrawal to which he was privy. For a great deal of his adult life, William Burroughs was a junkie. However, in undertaking a critical study of the ways in which Burroughs' work explores, illustrates and communicates a process of Becoming-Dionysian, such acknowledgement alone is not enough. It is important to examine the effects of this experience in his work through an exploration of the way in which such experience may be seen to enable, inform or prevent the actualisation of Becoming-Dionysian itself.



That Burroughs' extensive experiences with numerous drugs inform and shape the context and form of his texts is a canonical fact of Burroughs scholarship. Indeed, Carnwath and Smith write "Burroughs could not have been Burroughs without heroin".<sup>5</sup> However, it is his relationship to and with the experience of 'otherness', initiated by intoxication and subsequently addiction that precipitates his inclusion as an exemplar of the theoretical model employed here. Through his use of drugs (commonly and more specifically heroin or any member of the opiate family of narcotic analgesics that Burroughs designates with his use of the colloquial term 'junk'), it may be argued that Burroughs became fascinated with the possibilities of intoxicant agents to rid him of the contextual, social restraints of manners, laws, morals and religion.<sup>6</sup> Citing such enchantment with intoxicants as a whole, this chapter argues that the experience of intoxication releases Burroughs into a comparatively liberated Dionysian space. However, the drugs Burroughs chose to precipitate this state of liberation were highly addictive. As such, addiction and the needs of the real world and liberation into the Dionysian space provide the poles between which Burroughs shifts and provide the structure for the oscillation that characterises his Becoming-Dionysian.

#### 4.2.2 Drugs and Their Role in Actualising Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian

Using Becoming-Dionysian as a frame for this analysis of Burroughs' work, it is argued here that drugs, and the finite experience of intoxication they allowed him, served as agents to rid Burroughs of that which he considered to be the unbearable weight of control epitomised by social and physical being in the world. For Burroughs, civilised reality, designated by

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<sup>5</sup> Tom Carnwath and Ian Smith, *Heroin Century* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 115.

<sup>6</sup> As is made evident by his willingness to try all possible intoxicant agents, even to the extent of risking death searching for Yagé in South America. Burroughs' search for Yagé was detailed in what was later published under the title of *The Yage Letters*, a volume composed of an edited selection of the letters exchanged between Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg during Burroughs' South American journey.

the word as a unit of communication and the body as a biological entity, was control and control needed to be escaped.<sup>7</sup> Through the auspices of heroin, Burroughs was able to leave the social world in which his body resided and explore a fantastic new universe of free thoughts and experiences; a world that, for Burroughs, can be characterised as a Dionysian world of extremities, lusts and unchecked desires. Indeed, it may be argued that for Burroughs drugs initiated a space governed by desire and pleasure,<sup>8</sup> a Dionysian space akin to the paradise of Islamic mystic Hassan I Sabbah, a paradise in which Georgakas contends "everything is an illusion"<sup>9</sup> and as a consequence of which "everything is permitted".<sup>10</sup>

Being beyond the restrictions of the real or physical world was something that had long held an allure for Burroughs. Indeed, Burroughs himself traces his obsessive desire to access a space beyond conscious reality back to his childhood. He recalls:

Since early youth I had been searching for some secret, some key with which I could gain access to basic knowledge, to answer some of the fundamental questions. I found it difficult to define. I would follow a trail of clues. [...] The final key always eluded me, and I decided that my search was as sterile as the alchemist's search for the philosopher's stone. I decided that it was an error to think in terms of some secret key or formula... The secret is that there is no secret... But I was wrong.<sup>11</sup>

Continuing Burroughs' magical boyhood allegory it may be argued that junk was the 'secret' that made such a space beyond the moral world a real-

<sup>7</sup> William Burroughs, 'Minutes to Go', in *The Job* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1970), pp. 11-48, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> Jerry Bauer, 'Trip to Hell and Back' in *Burroughs Live: The Collected Interviews of William S. Burroughs 1960-1997* (Los Angeles; New York: Semiotext(e), 2001), pp. 505-514, p. 507.

<sup>9</sup> Dan Georgakas, 'Rapping on Revolutionary Techniques', in *Burroughs Live: The Collected Interviews of William S. Burroughs 1960-1997*, pp. 150-157, p. 157.

<sup>10</sup> Georgakas, p. 157.

<sup>11</sup> William Burroughs, 'The Conspiracy', in *The Burroughs File* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1984), pp. 39-42, p. 41.

ity. Indeed, describing the importance of Burroughs' experience with junk, Allen Ginsberg likens Burroughs' discovery of the Dionysian space created by intoxication to a new awareness of the world. In order to describe the fundamental change in Burroughs' understanding of being in the world that narcotics precipitated, Ginsberg quotes both Blake and Burroughs in an attempt to show the change he observed in Burroughs' creative perspective. Ginsberg suggests that it was through narcotics that Burroughs discovered a new reality, which, in turn, changed his whole idea of creativity and being. Ginsberg quotes: "The new world is only a new mind,' that's William's phrase. 'The eye altering alters all' is Blake's phrase".<sup>12</sup> Burroughs himself agrees with Ginsberg's understanding of the change that narcotics enabled. Echoing Ginsberg's recognition of the change his discovery of the Dionysian space of otherness brought about, Burroughs insists that he is a writer and that: "altered consciousness [...] is a writer's stock in trade".<sup>13</sup>

The downside of this new perspective brought about by the initiation of that which is here termed a Dionysian space was the fact that the narcotic analgesics Burroughs used to precipitate this alteration in state were highly addictive. Indeed, as his addiction progressed the Dionysian state into which junk initiated him became a controlling, physical necessity. Through addiction it may be argued that Burroughs was caught in the bind familiar to artists from Coleridge to Baudelaire: his physical body needed the very thing that released him from its clutches and moral mooring in the social world into a space that was free of such restrictions, and yet more reliant than ever on the physical world.

Many critics place undue emphasis on Burroughs' renouncement of junk as a means of facilitating transcendence in his introduction to *Naked Lunch*, inferring that because Burroughs came to see junk as a control mechanism or virus identical to that of the word or human biology, that junk played no useful role in his creative process. However, dismissing junk and the space

<sup>12</sup> Charles Ruas, 'In Search of Yagé', in *Burroughs Live: The Collected Interviews of William S. Burroughs 1960-1997*, pp. 23-31, p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Goldstein, 'The Beat Goes On', in *Burroughs Live: The Collected Interviews of William S. Burroughs 1960-1997*, pp. 437-445, p. 440.

of intoxication into which junk initiated Burroughs as a 'failed experiment' or a 'weakness' undermines the central role played by drug use and drug addiction in Burroughs' work. In his essay on the relationship between Burroughs and addiction entitled 'A Terminal Case', Timothy Melley describes the predicament of the addict in Burroughs' fiction as "taking junk to resist reembodiment and the problems it brings".<sup>14</sup> Yet, rather than resolve the tension between the fear of permanent embodiment in the real world and the liberation of the Dionysian state Melley sees as the only available options,<sup>15</sup> this analysis argues that Burroughs chose not to jump either way. Instead of being either embodied *or* disembodied by continuing his addiction, Burroughs chose instead to continue oscillating between both states. As such, this chapter argues that the double bind of addiction acquainted Burroughs with the oscillation that characterises that which is here identified as his Becoming-Dionysian, between his Dionysian space and the real world to which the temporary nature of his altered state, together with his addiction, always returned him. Indeed, it may be argued that it is the inescapability of the oscillation into which his addiction traps him that becomes the source of the real and human horror that is palpable in many of his texts.

The paradox of Burroughs' situation lies in the fact that long-term use of drugs as a means of temporary escape from rational reality in the long-term only serves to make this reality more pressing and more dominant through addiction. As such, it is possible to simplify Burroughs' situation by suggesting that he is embroiled in something akin to a perpetually oscillating paradox. Melley describes Burroughs' situation succinctly, writing: "while junk creates the initial problem, junk is also the antidote to it".<sup>16</sup>

Whilst this chapter argues that Burroughs' experiences of intoxication and addiction were vital to the realisation of his Becoming-Dionysian, such a positive interpretation of the use of intoxicants in the becoming process

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<sup>14</sup> Timothy Melley, 'A Terminal Case: William Burroughs and the Logic of Addiction', in *High Anxieties: Cultural Studies in Addiction* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 38-60, p. 45.

<sup>15</sup> Melley, p. 45.

<sup>16</sup> Melley, p. 45.

is refuted by Deleuze and Guattari who insist that drugs are useless in facilitating escape from the world in which the addict is unable to become.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, superficially and physically Burroughs is caught in the addiction-controlled situation Deleuze and Guattari describe; however, it is the way in which he explores the paradox of his situation that is of interest here. Whilst Melley's interpretation of what may be seen as the tragedy of Burroughs' situation is accurate, it is the perspective of this study that in realising a space of otherness to which Burroughs' must then relate, intoxicants and addiction are more enabling than they are restrictive, in the context of his Becoming-Dionysian.

This chapter maintains that the oscillation between the spaces of need and escape represents the core of Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian. Much like Rimbaud before him, Burroughs saw the role of the writer as a conduit and an explorer of the first-person human experience. However, unlike Rimbaud who saw the role of the artist as continuing past the point of intelligibility, Burroughs insisted on the importance of a continual and oscillating project of returning to intelligibility from his Dionysian space. Citing the example of *Finnegan's Wake* as an instance in which the author has gone too far into an experimental mode for the work to be of any worth as an exploration of being in the world, Burroughs writes:

I think that *Finnegan's Wake* rather represents a trap into which experimental writing can fall when it becomes purely experimental. I would go so far with any given experiment and then come back. [...] It's simply if you go too far in one direction, you can never get back, and you're out there in complete isolation.<sup>18</sup>

Insisting on the importance of moving between the real world and an experimental space Burroughs drew on his own first-person experience and

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<sup>17</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980), p. 349.

<sup>18</sup> Burroughs, 'Minutes to Go', in *The Job*, p. 46.

knowledge of the polarised tension between the civilised, sober, physical world and the liberal space of desire and unfettered human nature intoxication provides him. Indeed, rather than prevent his becoming, without such experience of intoxication and states of unselfed otherness, Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian would not have been possible. Thus, rather than preventing the actualisation of Burroughs' becoming (as the theories of Deleuze and Guattari would suggest if applied to the works of Burroughs), it may be argued that that it is precisely through his use of heroin and the cyclical experience of addiction that Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian was actualised. *Junkie* provides a very explicit description of Burroughs' discovery of the Dionysian space of otherness junk brought about.

### 4.2.3 *Junkie*: Writing Junk into the Novel

*Junkie* was the first text in which Burroughs may be seen to explore the connection between junk, intoxication and the reality of the Dionysian space into which junk initiated him. In much the same manner as Rimbaud's early poems were derivative in form, *Junkie* was written in the manner of a classic, hard-boiled detective novel. Yet, unlike Rimbaud whose initial poetry was highly wrought, artificial and romantic in nature, Burroughs focussed his novel on a world and experience with which he was intimately involved and familiar. However, rather than infuse the text with a personal presence, Burroughs creates distance from the events of the novel using a seemingly dispassionate narrator. Alan Ansen accurately describes *Junkie* as "a flat cold narrative interspersed with factual lectures".<sup>19</sup> Indeed, using this detached perspective Burroughs explores and details the intersecting worlds of the dealer and the addict and the dysphoric underworld in which need is the motivator and junk is the only currency.

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<sup>19</sup> Alan Ansen, 'Anyone Who Can Pick up a Frying Pan Owns Death', in *The Burroughs File* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1984), pp. 17-23, p. 20.

Whilst having the underworld of junk as its theme, *Junkie* also represents the beginning of Burroughs' literary technique of asserting a measure of critical distance from the events of the text. In *Junkie* Burroughs floats through the agonies of withdrawal and the rush of sated need with clinical precision. In many ways, Burroughs' distanced literary technique mirrors the way in which Burroughs the dealer metes out the dose of junk to be bought for any given sum, refusing credit and necessarily blind to the pain of need. As a novel, *Junkie* itself is unspectacular and is often neglected by Burroughs scholars in favour of his more famous and characteristic later works.<sup>20</sup> However, within the present examination of the continued experimentation and manifestation of Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian, *Junkie* may be seen as a key work as it demonstrates the importance of the artist's experience of intoxication in the initiation of the Becoming-Dionysian. Indeed, it is entirely feasible to claim that through its description of Burroughs' intoxicated experiences *Junkie* heralds the emergence of the Dionysian space in Burroughs' creative project.

In *Junkie*, Burroughs includes a stylised account of his first experience of injecting junk. That Burroughs goes as far as to include his first experience with heroin in his novel may be seen as testimony to the importance he places on the role of intoxication as initiating an alteration in his way of being. As such, it may be argued that Burroughs includes his first experience of intoxication in *Junkie* because this initial experience is vital to the actualisation of his Becoming-Dionysian insofar as it enabled him to access a space beyond that accessible to the sober world. Burroughs writes:

A few nights after meeting Roy and Herman, I used one of the syrettes, which was my first experience with junk. A syrette is like a toothpaste tube with a needle in the end. You push a pin

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<sup>20</sup> In his appearance for the defence in the trial for obscenity of *Naked Lunch*, Normal Mailer dismissed *Junkie* as "a hard-boiled sort of novel. It is a false novel. He [Burroughs] wrote it to make some money". Normal Mailer, 'Responses in "Excerpts from the Boston Trial of *Naked Lunch*"', in *Naked Lunch* (New York, Grove Press, 1966), pp. xviii-xxxiv, p. xii.

down through the needle; the pin punctures the needle; and the syrette is ready to shoot.

Morphine hits the back of the legs first, then the back of the neck, a spreading wave of relaxation slackening the muscles away from the bones so that you seem to float without outlines like lying in warm salt water. As this relaxing wave spread through my tissues, I experienced a strong feeling of fear. I had the feeling that some horrible image was just beyond the field of vision, moving, as I turned my head, so that I never quite saw it. I felt nauseous; I lay down and closed my eyes. A series of pictures passed, like watching a movie: A huge, neon lighted cocktail bar that got larger and larger until streets, traffic, and street repairs were included in it; a waitress carrying a skull on a tray; stars in the clear sky. The physical impact of the fear of death; the shutting off of breath; the stopping of blood.

I dozed off and woke with a start of fear. Next morning I vomited and felt sick until noon.

Roy called that night.<sup>21</sup>

The dissipation or 'dissolving' of the body and therewith the seemingly indelible stamp of physical presence through the auspices of junk was seminal in Burroughs' initiation of a Becoming-Dionysian process. That is to say, whilst Burroughs may have depicted and indeed experienced the act of shooting up junk as utterly normal within the parameters of the petty underworld that he inhabited and that *Junkie* explores, the effect of this experience was something that Burroughs did not and could not have expected. Interestingly, Burroughs does not dismiss this first experience using what would later become his customary derogatory phrase for junk intoxication: "going on the nod".<sup>22</sup> As explored in *Junkie*, Burroughs' initial junk experience remains entirely enclosed within his own first-person universe. The pictures and the sensations of fear experienced during this initial intoxicated state appear in the text with an aura of comparative naivety, almost as though it was with

<sup>21</sup> William Burroughs, *Junkie* (London; Paris: Olympia, 1966), pp. 18-19.

<sup>22</sup> William Burroughs, *Interzone*, ed. by James Grauerholz, (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 31.



childlike awe that he entered the state of otherness and the disembodied freedom of a different and personal world. Recounting these movie-like visions it may be argued that the space in which these visions are experienced was one in which Burroughs did not physically exist in the manner of, and with the same restrictions as, his physical incarnation in the real world.

Providing such a tangible experience of a state other than rational consciousness, the effect of the junk experience on Burroughs' creative and artistic endeavour can best be described in religious terms using the concept of epiphany. Yet, as with a great deal of Burroughs' experiences fictionalised and recounted in *Junkie*, the encounter is described in colourless shades of clinical grey prose. The effect created by Burroughs' use of such monochromatic and seemingly sterile language is one of foreboding, yet, at the same time, the reader receives a strong impression of what Burroughs depicts as the everyday nature of the act of shooting up junk and the decision to do so. Thus, ironically, whilst this experience and its effects are epiphanic in nature, the imagery associated with Burroughs' explorations of his first junk experience are akin to the wooden, colourless state he later considers junk to precipitate. Whilst the discovery of the Dionysian space that junk heralds is epiphanic in scope and importance, Burroughs later writes with distaste of the endless price of this important discovery of a new space: addiction. Burroughs writes: "As a habit takes hold, other interests lose importance to the user. Life telescopes down to junk, one fix and looking for the next".<sup>23</sup>

Having initiated the space of intoxication in *Junkie*, the reality of such a space as one apart from the world and therefore a space into which one was able to retreat was an idea that Burroughs began to explore later in *Queer*. Yet, the Dionysian space as itself an area within the text was yet to become apparent as a realm in Burroughs' writing. Before bringing the Dionysian space into the text, Burroughs chose first to deal with the effect his discovery of the Dionysian space enacted in his rational conscious incarnation. The most immediate and discernable effect of Burroughs' initiation of a Dionysian space was upon his conscious understanding of himself in a real world context.

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<sup>23</sup> Burroughs, *Junkie*, p. 35.

This chapter argues that the first change brought about by his realisation of a space of otherness discernable in Burroughs' texts was the definition of his perspective as an observer.

Whilst initially apparent in the detached prose of *Junkie*, a significant amount of Burroughs' early writing consists of diatribes or polemics against what Burroughs sees as the crime of belonging to any one of a number of groupings, of which society is just one. Indeed, following on directly from his discovery of a Dionysian space in which he was always alone, this chapter argues that Burroughs used the distance from the civilised world that the realisation of the Dionysian space allowed him to explore the social and moral real world with increasing scrutiny. For Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian, the definition of critical perspective on the world around him served to define not only Burroughs' own lack of belonging to the social whole, but also helped to identify the patterns and systems of social order that he later satirised to great effect in *Naked Lunch*.

### 4.3 Critical Distance: Burroughs as Observer

Whilst Burroughs' relationship with junk was the one that had the most immediate and long lasting effect in catalysing his process of Becoming-Dionysian, the tangible nature of the Dionysian space that junk brought into being can be seen as catalysing a chain of important events in Burroughs' stylistic development as a writer. One direct result of the actualisation of this space was the re-evaluation of his role and experiences in the socially accessible, civilised realm beyond his Dionysian space that is designated here with the term 'real world'. Following on from his discovery of a Dionysian space, it may be argued that having discovered a liberated world free from all restraint, Burroughs felt less concern for his lack of integral involvement with the real world and, as a result of this detachment, began to develop and cultivate his position as an outsider and observer. Indeed, this detached

perspective enabled by his realisation of a Dionysian space plays a significant role in the development of that which later becomes recognisable as Burroughs' literary technique.

Within the context of his Becoming-Dionysian, Burroughs' understanding of himself in the role of outsider and observer is important in so far as his self-identification and cultivation of such a role served to isolate Burroughs further from any semblance of belonging. Indeed, it may be argued that this lack of attachment makes his oscillation between the real and the Dionysian space easier by lowering the resistance to change caused by attachment of belonging to people or situations in the real world. Arguably, it is Burroughs' cultivation of the role of the outsider that allowed him access to the satirical techniques of social commentators such as Jonathon Swift, whose *A Modest Proposal* Burroughs cites as an inspiration for the social commentary aspects of *Naked Lunch*.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, it may be argued that it was through exposure to the traditions of satire and pastiche in conjunction with Burroughs' own developing 'outsider' perspective that may be seen as a formative influence on Burroughs' vision of his own work as "satire".<sup>25</sup>

In *Junkie*, *Queer* and *Naked Lunch* Burroughs writes often of his distance from society and his isolation from general human concerns. Indeed, as his Becoming-Dionysian develops it may be argued that Burroughs' understanding of himself as an observer of humanity, and not a participant in its actions and concerns, is a key element in his maintaining a detached perspective that he later comes to view as so important to the role of the writer. Indeed, the position of observer allowed Burroughs the liberty to explore human being from a perspective detached from the normal, human, real world concerns of relationships, belonging and property.

Burroughs' distance from any group or structure to which he may have been able to belong was enhanced by his continual oscillation between the

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<sup>24</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> Malcom Bradbury, *The Modern American Novel* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 191.

real world and the Dionysian space. Yet rather than lament, however fleetingly, the loss of 'belonging' to society as Rimbaud had done, Burroughs begins to analyse his separation from majoritarian codes and behaviours and to draw from this analysis a critical perspective that he later views as a source of creative and personal strength. As a direct result of his analytic tendencies, Burroughs later uses his critical distance as a basis for the didactic emphasis that appears in his work in *Queer* and continues as a theme in many subsequent novels and essays including *Naked Lunch*. The ways in which this distance appeared in his work served not only to communicate his isolation but also to begin a diagnostic process of definition of social and personal spaces that is important for his choice of themes as well as his Becoming-Dionysian as a whole.

#### 4.3.1 Developing Distance as a Tool to Provide Definition

The development of Burroughs' perspective as an outsider played an important role in his stylistic and thematic development as a writer by defining parameters between which his oscillation takes place. Burroughs' discovery of his own Dionysian space enabled by intoxication allowed him to see in tangible terms the distance between the real world and his own Dionysian space. The way in which Burroughs understood this space and made use of this distance in the context of his Becoming-Dionysian is clearly demonstrated in his development of distance and distanced perspectives and attitudes in his work.

Burroughs understood himself as an outsider. Being apart from the majorative mass was something Burroughs sees in his own case as being somehow predestined. As with his search for a magical space of otherness, Burroughs looks to his formative childhood experiences to explicate his situation as an isolated observer in adulthood. For Burroughs as both a child and an adult, belonging required compromise of his personal autonomy and was therefore

degrading to his individuality and his personal integrity. In his autobiographical introduction to *Junkie*, Burroughs describes as fundamental the inability to form the compromise that he sees being part of a group would require. He writes:

I formed a romantic attachment for another boy and we spent our Saturdays exploring old quarries riding around on bicycles and fishing in ponds and rivers. [...] I saw my friend as an ally, a partner in crime. We found an abandoned factory and broke all the windows and stole a chisel. We were caught and our fathers had to pay the damages. After this my friend "packed me in" because the relationship was endangering his standing with the group. I saw there was no compromise possible with the group, the others, and I found myself a good deal alone.<sup>26</sup>

The transition from childhood memories to adulthood realities as they appear in Burroughs' texts involved only the change in circumstances of the incidents related; there was no change in their demonstrating Burroughs' outsider status. In both childhood and as an adult Burroughs sees himself as apart from, and unacceptable to, the real world and its citizens.

In order to improve his own understanding of his outsider status within his Becoming-Dionysian into the basis for a definition of his being, Burroughs uses a number of situations within his texts to define his role as an observer who is apart from the social whole. In a text that was composed in the same period as *Junkie*, entitled *Queer*,<sup>27</sup> Burroughs takes the theme of his homosexuality as the central focus or cause of his distance from the rest of the human world. In much the same way as *Junkie* explored the world of the junk user and pusher through the experience of Burroughs as William Lee,<sup>28</sup> *Queer* saw Burroughs explore the necessary guises and routines that formed a

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<sup>26</sup> Burroughs, *Junkie*, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Whilst composed during Burroughs' *Junkie* period of the early 1950's, *Queer* remained unpublished until 1985.

<sup>28</sup> William Lee was Burroughs preferred pseudonym. *Junkie* was initially published under the name of William Lee.

social persona to obscure his homosexuality from public view. Again, as with *Junkie*, *Queer* itself is unremarkable in any sense other than the comparative candour with which it deals with the homosexuality of its author in the moral climate of the 1950's. However, in the context of the present analysis, the way in which *Queer* shows Burroughs' experience of separation from society and the acceptable social norms through his intimate knowledge of the outcast and predatory gay communities correlates directly with the experiences of the artificial underworld of the junkie.

It may be argued that the detached style of *Junkie* that is also seen later in *Queer* can be understood as an indication of the fact that Burroughs is neither a part of the underworld communities of junkies nor that of the effeminate gay club scene. The removed disdain with which Burroughs recounts the struggles and squalor of individual junkies and their habits finds a parallel in his descriptions of the predatory and overtly camp homosexual men that are the centre of what Burroughs' terms 'the queer set' in every place he visits. This disdain may be understood as evidence of Burroughs' lack of empathy and sense of a shared identity with fellow junkies, dealers or gay men. Burroughs writes of a bar regular:

Dumé belonged to a small clique of queers who made their headquarters in a beer joint on Campeche called The Green Lantern. Dumé himself was not an obvious queer, but the other Green Lantern boys were screaming fags.<sup>29</sup>

Burroughs' use of dismissive generalisations and broad outlines of all groups of people that feature in his writing communicates not only his lack of identification with such groups but serves also to separate the narrator from the context and characters that comprise his text. As with the depiction of homosexuals in *Queer*, the junkies in *Junkie* are described in outlines. Burroughs uses dismissive, descriptive terms for the junkies, seeing the addicts as pitiful as they "sit on the island benches huddled like so many vultures in

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<sup>29</sup> William Burroughs, *Queer* (New York: Viking, 1985), p. 35.

their dark suits".<sup>30</sup> In this early period of Burroughs' work, the use of such value-laden labels may be seen as establishing the existence of an unbridgeable distance between the author and the world he is narrating.

Pigeonholed in the language of his novels, Burroughs is both a fag and a junkie. However, as is made evident by his labelling junkies 'vultures', such groups are closed and identifiable crowds that do not include the narrator. Indeed, it becomes clear through a reading of both *Junkie* and *Queer* that he considers himself as William Burroughs: addict, and William Burroughs: homosexual rather than simply being a 'junkie' or 'fag' who is grouped with so many others into a behavioural standard that infers that he is without the ability to think critically about his own identity.

Burroughs fills *Junkie* with empty and dismissive value judgements based on the lack of critical capacity of his fellow human beings. Indeed, it may be argued that, in searching for a personal voice early in the development of his critical perspective, Burroughs was torn between the desire to experiment as a writer and to sell sensationalised accounts of 'junkie squalor' to readers with pre-extant judgemental perspectives to make money. Indeed, at the trial of *Naked Lunch*, Norman Mailer's comments would seem to suggest something similar, as he stated his opinion that *Junkie* was little more than a 'false' novel written to make money.<sup>31</sup> Illustrating both Mailer's perspective and articulating his own role as an observer describing the customers that came to buy their junk from the narrator in *Junkie*, Burroughs writes:

What a crew! Mooches, fags, flourflushers, stool pigeons. Bums – unwilling to work, unable to steal, always short of money, always whining for credit. In the whole lot there was not one who wouldn't wilt and spill as soon as someone belted him in the mouth and said, "where did you get it?"<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Burroughs, *Junkie*, p. 41.

<sup>31</sup> Mailer, p. xii.

<sup>32</sup> Burroughs, *Junkie*, p. 60.

Blatant value judgements aside, the absence of mutual or shared remnants or moments of identity in Burroughs' depiction and labelling of the "junkies, queers, mooches, fags [and] stoolpigeons" that populate his varied underworlds makes the author appear as something of a disembodied entity, that is to say, apart from all identifiable human elements in the text. This absence of what can be viewed as a palpable humanity is a vital element in Burroughs' development of his own personal voice, and therewith the expansion of his Becoming-Dionysian in text. Indeed, this initial disembodied perspective may be seen as an attempt on Burroughs' behalf to surpass the limits of an individual human subjectivity or self.

However, this disembodied perspective is not unserved. Indeed, it may be argued that Burroughs not only retains his own self and perspective but also seeks to define this self by invoking a disembodied and therewith quasi-objective narrator. Burroughs' use of this early critical voice that makes use of such a disembodied perspective is seen most clearly in his explorations of groups or situations with which he is intimately familiar. In *Junkie*, Burroughs' view of junkies in the grip of 'the sickness' of withdrawal is clinical in its precision. This sterility extends to the expressions used to communicate his vision of the world that supports the junkies and the suppliers who deal to and with their need. As a fellow junk user, Burroughs knows the pain that the withdrawing addict suffers. He understands the engines that drive the addict to the conclusion that he is not in fact addicted. Yet, in spite or perhaps because of this intimate knowledge of the reality of the universe of the junkie, as a disembodied textual presence Burroughs the narrator feels no empathy and merely reports what he sees. He writes:

Ike got fifteen days in the city prison – the Carmen, they call it – for vagrancy. I was short and could not pay the fine, and it was three days before I got to see him. His body had shrunk; all the bones stuck out in his face; his brown eyes were bright with pain.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Burroughs, *Junkie*, p. 125.



Whilst the technique of quasi-objective complete detachment communicated by the disembodied narrative remained a method upon which Burroughs continued to draw, he began to invoke a more personal presence in the text. This more personal presence begins to appear in *Queer* and quickly developed a didactic and diagnostic perspective. Burroughs developed the didactic and diagnostic element of his work using his status as an observer and an outsider to validate his view as somehow privileged and untainted by emotion or belonging. For Burroughs, the moral sober masses with their concern for and addiction to their own 'opiates' of work, measurable achievement and the intoxication of appearances, rule and law are just as defined by their behaviours as 'junkies' and 'queers'. The litany of conventional achievements and laws incites in Burroughs the same disgust as the rites of belonging to any other group. In *Queer*, that which may be read as Burroughs' calm textual detachment is breached by hatred as he lashes out at the moral codes to which society is addicted and that prevent him from taking advantage of some urchins who, in his opinion, would be willing to have sex with him for a measly sum. He writes:

"What can I do? Take them back to my hotel? They are willing enough. For a few Sucres..." He felt a killing hate for the stupid, ordinary, disapproving people who kept him from doing what he wanted to do. "Someday I am going to have things just as I want," he said to himself. "And if any moralising son of a bitch gives me any static, they will fish him out of the river."<sup>34</sup>

Interestingly, within such bitter criticisms of the restrictions that the moral and sober majority impose on the fulfilment of his desire, Burroughs implicitly invokes his own need for, and reliance on, the Dionysian space he was able to actualise through the auspices of junk. In his junk-induced Dionysian space he truly could have 'things just as he wanted them'. Thus, in many ways, it may be argued that Burroughs' disgust for the sober moral majority grows from his conviction that they have completed the final and

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<sup>34</sup> Burroughs, *Queer*, p. 97.

all-encompassing con that even the most committed of junkies has failed to pull off: the con of convincing themselves and the world at large that they are free from all addictions and living a morally just, right and pure existence. Drawing from his own experience as an addict, Burroughs explains the usefulness of addiction as a lens through which to view moral society, writing:

Addiction means something that causes acute physical and mental discomfort if it is withdrawn. Perhaps the closest parallel is what I might call an addiction to rightness, to being right; such an addict – and their name is legion – experiences acute discomfort if his rightness is withdrawn. Without it he is nothing, and he cannot adjust to normal metabolism – that is, the realization that rightness and wrongness are relative concepts that have meaning only relative to position or purpose. I recall a French fascist who said: ‘Je ne comprends pas ces dégénérés de la drogue comme William Burroughs.’ (I wasn’t on drugs at the time.) ‘Moi, j’ai une seule drogue, c’est l’indignation.’ C’est la pire ... it’s the worst drug of all.<sup>35</sup>

In formulating such criticism, Burroughs’ critical distance may be seen to draw nearer to the satirical social analyses of Swift, insofar as within Burroughs’ criticisms of society he is able to draw on the very sentiments used to condemn him and redirect them as criticisms of their source.

One obvious theatre in which Burroughs chooses to explore his status as someone both within and yet beyond the restrictions of social control is that of sexual desire. Within his texts, Burroughs often explores the tension between the majorative moral rule of the real world and his own Dionysiac desires, on occasion giving full and vitriolic reign to his didactic and diagnostic tendencies. In *Queer*, Burroughs’ protagonist and alter ego, William Lee, deems himself and the expression of his desire to be imprisoned by the illegal nature of his wants because of morality, the majority and the law. The conflict between the inner Dionysian space symbolised in this example by his desire and the restrictions of the socius breed frustration which

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<sup>35</sup> Burroughs, *The Job*, p. 143.

leads him to describe his situation as being like that of a prisoner caged up in the civilised prison of society. He writes of the frustration he feels as though:

[t]he limitations of his desires were like the bars of a cage, like a chain and collar, something he had learned the way an animal learns, through days and years of experiencing the snub of the chain, the unyielding bars. He had never resigned himself, and his eyes looked out through the invisible bars, watchful, alert, waiting for the keeper to forget the door, for the frayed collar, the loosened bar...suffering without despair and without consent.<sup>36</sup>

Implicit in this damnation is Burroughs' understanding of the compromise that belonging to this restrictive social space would require, a compromise of which he is not capable. Indeed, it may be argued that Burroughs' anger and frustration are made all the worse by his understanding of the social space to which he is physically condemned as being nothing but a control mechanism that he is able to escape, at least temporarily, by actualising his Dionysian space.

This chapter argues that the themes of escape and possession that Burroughs himself considered central to his work were explored more effectively through the development of a critical perspective brought about by his discovery of a Dionysian space. In his introduction to *Queer*, written some thirty years after the text itself, Burroughs relates that the novel is the result of two intertwined and ongoing preoccupations that suggest the cyclical nature of his own Becoming-Dionysian experience. These are the "accidental shooting death"<sup>37</sup> of his wife Joan and what he perceives to be "the constant threat of possession, and a constant need to escape from possession, from Control".<sup>38</sup> Burroughs insists in his introduction to *Queer* that it was his possession by what he termed an "ugly spirit"<sup>39</sup> that ended Joan's life. However, the

<sup>36</sup> Burroughs, *Queer*, p. 25.

<sup>37</sup> Burroughs, *Queer*, p. xviii.

<sup>38</sup> Burroughs, *Queer*, p. xxii.

<sup>39</sup> Burroughs, *Queer*, p. xix.

subtext of control and possession emerges in *Queer* in a much less dramatic fashion than Burroughs' excuse of 'demonic possession' that had him accidentally shoot Joan in the head. Indeed, rather than have his characters veer between possessions by 'otherworldly' demonic forces and comparative and desirable sanity, Burroughs chooses to explore the ways in which the more subtle and omnipotent forces of the socius act to manipulate and control the people within its boundaries. In so doing, Burroughs may be seen to demonstrate his opinion that realising a space of otherness such as his own Dionysian space represents the only possible form of escape.

Understanding that escape was not possible for those who *belong* allowed Burroughs to see the world as something of a zoo which he was able to leave but those who feel they belong are attached by ties that they are unable or unwilling to break and are thus trapped. Indeed, it may be the conscious realisation of this perspective that Ann Douglas recognises in affirming the role of Burroughs as an important social observer, when she notes that Burroughs is a critical insider, and "the insider is the best spy".<sup>40</sup> Confirming Douglas' assertion that he is indeed an insider of sorts, Burroughs then asserts his distance from the rest of the human universe commenting: "most people don't know what's going on around them",<sup>41</sup> thereby inferring that, by virtue of his role as an outsider, he, William Burroughs the writer, is not 'most people'. Putting his situation succinctly, Burroughs concluded: "I don't like human beings [...] Still I must live in and on human bodies".<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ann Douglas, 'Punching a Hole in the Big Lie: The Achievement of William S. Burroughs', in *Word Virus: The William Burroughs Reader*, ed. by James Grauerholz and Ira Silverberg, (London: Flamingo, 1999), xv-xxviii, p.xix.

<sup>41</sup> Conrad Knickerbocker, 'William Burroughs: An Interview: The Art of Fiction XXXVI', in *The Paris Review*, 35 (1965), 13-49, p. 26.

<sup>42</sup> William Burroughs, 'The Beginning is also the End', in *The Burroughs File* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1984), pp. 62-66, p. 62.

### 4.3.2 Exemplifying Distance in the Text

Rather than remain content with defining the nature of his own distance from some putative social whole, Burroughs sought to engage his critical perspective in new ways by constructing ideal Dionysian realms that were based on the social criticism that his new observer or outsider perspective enabled. By drawing directly on the critical perspective he had defined in his earlier writing, Burroughs created fantasies and ideal worlds that were explicitly Dionysian in nature. This chapter argues it is through the creation of such worlds in his writing that Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian may be seen to move towards exploring the oscillation that takes place between his own Dionysian space and the real world.

Many of the fantasy or ideal scenarios behind the creation of a Dionysian reality in text are derived from the flaws Burroughs' critical and outsider perspectives have allowed him to see as present in society. Clearly drawing on the critical distance from the real world Burroughs understands others to be lacking, Burroughs rails against the imprisoning social and civilised notion of self and free will, insisting:

[F]ree men don't exist on this planet at this time, because they don't exist in human bodies. By the mere fact of being in a human body you're controlled by all sorts of biologic and environmental necessities.<sup>43</sup>

One significant text in which Burroughs creates a Dionysian space within the text is in one of Burroughs' many idealised visions of the future. This essay is entitled 'Academy 23'. It is argued here that the creation of a Dionysian realm in 'Academy 23' represents an important development in Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian. Indeed, 'Academy 23' may be seen to draw directly on Burroughs' socio-critical perspective in order to diagnose a sequence of key restrictions present in the real world and then uses the space of otherness

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<sup>43</sup> Burroughs, 'Minutes to Go', in *The Job*, pp. 11-48, p. 22.

that his Dionysian realm enabled as a space into which he can retreat and explore a new vision. The creation of a world in which Burroughs' own ideal is the dominant principle is crucial to the Becoming-Dionysian dynamic that characterises his later style. As if to confirm the importance of a Dionysian space for both the creation of text and as providing an escape from the real world, Burroughs describes his writing as: "creating an imaginary — it's always imaginary — world in which I would like to live."<sup>44</sup>

In 'Academy 23' Burroughs presented his own vision of the concept of the academy that was popular in the mid to late Nineteenth Century. Exploring this idea as a frame through which to present his own ideas allowed Burroughs to experiment with the creative effects of the hitherto predominantly diagnostic, critical perspective. The aim of Burroughs' academy was the production of humans as individualised units with no connections to or with one another. All semblance of community, inter-relation and interdependence such as language and relationships, elements which for Burroughs were characteristics of the human norm, were to be eliminated in his utopian vision of an all male training facility. In Burroughs' academy, trainees would be free of their research "being monopolised by paltry intellects in the name of 'national security'",<sup>45</sup> and therewith liberated from the influence of powerful unifying notions such as belonging and nationhood that country and nationality brought about. Drawing on his own experience of the benefits of isolation to his creative process and development as an artist, the aim of Burroughs' ideal academy was space travel. He writes:

During the early days of aviation the academies established centers to train pilots, and when space travel became possible, they took over direction of the space programme. The aim of the academy space programme was not space in an aqualung trailing wires to wives and others. [...]

The astronauts were all single men, since they were trained to exist in total independence and total solitude whereas marriage

<sup>44</sup> Knickerbocker, p. 49.

<sup>45</sup> Burroughs, 'Academy 23', in *The Job*, pp. 123-192, p. 192.

conditions to dependence.

To travel in space you must learn to leave the old verbal garbage behind: God talk, priest talk, mother talk, family talk, love talk, party talk, country talk. You must learn to exist with no religion no country no allies. You must learn to see what is in front of you with no preconceptions.<sup>46</sup>

The overarching motivation of Burroughs' academy was to "bring hope to dead radio-active riot torn streets"<sup>47</sup> of what he saw as "this over-populated, mismanaged planet".<sup>48</sup> Hope of change was needed because in Burroughs' opinion, all regulating bodies such as the government, society and the law have vested interests in cohesion and community (which Burroughs saw as control mechanisms) and seek to deny the hope that Burroughs' academy aims to give the world by breaking all ties of community and belonging. Burroughs is emphatic that detachment of the type of which he has cultivated is the only hope for any mind to achieve liberation. Indeed, it may be argued that implicit in Burroughs' lauding the importance of a space of otherness lies a measure of didactic intent. Indeed, Burroughs reinforces this facet of his essay by directly addressing the audience, challenging them to see the hope offered by his vision. He writes of the bodies regulating the socius to which his readers belong: "Are they going to give you that hope? If past performance is any indication they are not going to give you anything but bullshit."<sup>49</sup>

Although Burroughs does not state as such himself, it may be argued that the emphasis he places on the need for isolation and the severing of all ties of belonging serves as a guide for Burroughs' ideal artist. To enact Burroughs' ideal, an artist must isolate himself from belonging in order to see reality as a film. Speaking on the subject of art and the necessity of the artist to fulfil the role of an outsider, Burroughs stresses the need for the

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<sup>46</sup> Burroughs, 'Academy 23', pp. 191-192.

<sup>47</sup> Burroughs, 'Academy 23', p. 192.

<sup>48</sup> Burroughs, 'Academy 23', p. 192.

<sup>49</sup> Burroughs, 'Academy 23', p. 192.

writer to observe the external world in order to fuel his process of creative oscillation; to be apart from the restrictions of self, language, religion and all society. For Burroughs, the failure to perform such fundamental observation is a major flaw in the work and process of any artist. He writes:

Most people don't see what's going on around them. That's my principal message to writers: For God's sake, keep your eyes open. Notice what's going on around you. I walk down the street with friends. I ask, "did you see him, that person who just walked by?" no, they didn't notice him.<sup>50</sup>

In this way, it may be argued that Burroughs' status as an outsider is beneficial not only for his adaptation to, and acceptance of, the Dionysian space, but this perspective also allowed him to make effective use of the real world as a plane of conversation or mutual point of intersection between individuals. Indeed, reality and the real world of the street juxtaposed with Burroughs' own experiences and identities provided a vital point of departure for his Becoming-Dionysian. Clearly drawing on his own experience as an outsider and the detached perspective this enabled, Burroughs goes as far as to put forward a definition of life as itself a text that may be sliced into at points of random intersection.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, increasing his employment of quasi-objective social criticism derived from his own personal experience but flattened into a structure removed from human concerns, Burroughs may be seen to promote the view that his own lack of attachment to the human norm facilitates a faculty of observation that is attuned to a higher level, unsullied by belonging or emotive context. However, in order to expand Burroughs had to move beyond the essay and the static representation of *Junkie* and explore the possibilities of an expanded text as an arena in which to explore the interaction between his Dionysian space and his conscious,

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<sup>50</sup> Knickerbocker, p. 26.

<sup>51</sup> Timothy Murphy, 'Exposing the Reality Film: William S. Burroughs Among the Situationists', in *Retaking the Universe: William S. Burroughs in the age of Globalization*, ed. by Davis Schneiderman and Philip Walsh (London; Sterling: Pluto, 2004), pp. 29-57, pp. 40-41.



critical and isolated self. A key text in which Burroughs chose to expand these perspectives is *Queer*.

### 4.3.3 *Queer* and the Manifestation of Distance

Whereas in *Junkie* Burroughs wrote from a detached and almost disembodied perspective, in *Queer* he moves toward exploring his own isolation and oscillation in the blank and uncoded space provided by the page. *Queer* sees Burroughs begin to explore in the text not only the existence of his Dionysian space and the real world but also the movement of oscillation between the real world and his Dionysian space. Indeed, *Queer* sees Burroughs drawing on his experiences not only of the Dionysian space and the real world but also the movement between these two poles that characterises his creative process.

One of the most apparent ways in which the reader is introduced to Burroughs' own process of oscillation is through his appropriation of themes, ideas and facts from the real world into his own Dionysian space in much the same way as can be seen in his alteration of a real world situation in 'Academy 23'. Within the parameters of the Dionysian space Burroughs then proceeds to rid the subjects he has imported of any defining context by replacing any such context with his own desires and interests. Whilst in *Queer* Burroughs does not use this technique with the same finesse apparent in *Naked Lunch* (below), it may be argued that *Queer* does show the way in which Burroughs' technique of appropriation and de-contextualisation derives from that which is here viewed as Burroughs' exploration in text of his Becoming-Dionysian project.

Whilst both *Queer* and *Junkie* draw on explicitly autobiographical experiences, as a novel *Queer* differs from *Junkie* in that Burroughs as a writer can be seen to exercise more stylistic control over the novel by creating a personal voice or presence in the text. In order to do this effectively, Burroughs used the early sections of *Queer* to clearly determine for the reader

the boundaries of the Dionysian space and the real world. Having established these boundaries, Burroughs then required new ways of using words and textual structures in order to communicate and explore the idea and experience of oscillation within the parameters of readable text.

In *Queer* Burroughs effected a synthesis of the hard-boiled narrative style of *Junkie* and an attempt to demonstrate the proximity of the Dionysian space to the real world for the artist. The central narrative of *Queer* was derived from a blurring of the lines between events that took place in his Dionysian space and events that took place in the real world. The central Allerton-Lee relationship in *Queer* is based on Burroughs' own experience of unreciprocated affection and desire.<sup>52</sup> That *Queer* as a textual plane of exploration sprang from the interaction of Burroughs' failed real world relationship and his own frustrated desires that are sated in his Dionysian space can be seen as evidence for the importance of the Becoming-Dionysian process to Burroughs' textual creativity. Indeed, in *Queer* Burroughs' text moves between 'real world' events and events and experiences that take place in his own Dionysian space in a manner that is not seen in either *Junkie* or 'Academy 23'.

The narrative of *Queer* sees Lee stalk Mexico City, driven by his unsated desire for an ongoing relationship that is built on attraction and is unmistakably sexual in nature. Yet, for some unnamed reason that derives clearly from his cultivation of the role of outsider and observer (as seen above), Lee is repulsive to almost everyone who makes his acquaintance. Within *Queer* itself, Burroughs leaves the elaboration of this instant dislike implicit. However, it may be suggested that the almost chemical aversion of people to Lee is based on Burroughs' own vision of the compromise inherent in belonging and that, as Lee does not belong, he is not accepted as a part of the 'pack'. Lee is foreign to the greater socius. Through Burroughs' constant reference to Lee's manners and "dignified old world greeting",<sup>53</sup> Lee is established as

<sup>52</sup> *Queer* is based on Burroughs' failed relationship with Lewis Marker in Mexico City.

<sup>53</sup> Burroughs, *Queer*, p. 18.

other and he is described in the text as “peculiar and undesirable”<sup>54</sup> to all those who belong to the social whole. People use a variety of excuses, all to a greater or lesser degree transparent, to escape from Lee’s presence and the ardour of Lee’s company.<sup>55</sup>

The person with whom Lee seeks to reconcile his personal desire and need for companionship is Eugene Allerton. However, it may be argued that the character of Allerton also represents something of an outsider. Lee describes Allerton as being without the fundamental ties of belonging. In Lee’s words, Allerton “disliked commitments, and had never been in love or had a close friend”.<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, Burroughs’ characterisation of Allerton includes an insightful perspective on his own stylistic technique as a writer. Having witnessed enough of Lee’s comic recounting of stories and tales, Allerton decides that, rather than being appreciated in the human capacity as a friend, in place of reciprocal communication and engagement, “Lee valued him as an audience”.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the presumption of an audience is a core aspect of Burroughs’ technique as a writer. Burroughs explains: “if I were on a desert island and knew nobody would ever see what I wrote, would I go on writing. My answer is most emphatically yes”.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, Allerton and Lee embark on an arrangement that is both sexual and financial and together they travel around South America at Lee’s expense in search of Yagé. The overtone of a financial tension between Lee as something of a ‘sugar daddy’ and Allerton as a hired prostitute exposes the relationship for what it really is: a means to the end of gratification for Lee and a means of passing the time for the monumentally indifferent Allerton.

In the face of a mutually unsatisfactory liaison and in the absence of any means of overcoming Allerton’s indifference, Lee is confronted by the distance between the real world facts of Allerton’s lack of interest in Lee either personally or sexually and the contrast this posed with Lee’s Dionysian space of

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<sup>54</sup> Burroughs, *Queer*, p. 22.

<sup>55</sup> See: Burroughs, *Queer*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>56</sup> Burroughs, *Queer*, p. 27.

<sup>57</sup> Burroughs, *Queer*, p. 27.

<sup>58</sup> Knickerbocker, p. 49.

realised desires and mutual attraction. Indeed, within the textual universe of *Queer*, it can be conjectured that, for Burroughs, Allerton's disinterest and lack of reciprocation was a shadow of his idea of reality itself, and that Lee's desire for Allerton was itself a product of Lee's desire to actualise in the 'real world' the scenarios and possibilities that took place in his Dionysian space. As this transposition was unsuccessful, Burroughs sought new ways to reach out to Allerton and, at the same time, to indulge his own Dionysian imagination. Having failed to communicate with Allerton and to rouse Allerton's interest to the extent Lee's fantasies required in order to be fulfilled, Lee must resort to other methods of bridging the gap between Allerton and his Dionysian space of realised desire. This chapter argues that in order to bridge this gap, in both the narrative of the text and in the context of his Becoming-Dionysian, Burroughs invented "the routine".

#### 4.3.4 "The Routine": Moving Between Spaces

The routine took the form of a stylistic device inserted into the narrative body of the text that allowed Burroughs to both entertain his audience and amuse himself through a comical and exaggerated digression. Beginning in the real world and using concepts, objects and subjects familiar to the reader, Burroughs gradually moves into his Dionysian space using the structure of satirical and exaggerated anecdote told with the aplomb of a great and winding epic. The routine demonstrates Burroughs' first successful stylistic attempt to both invoke explicitly the Dionysian space within the text and to explore the movement and interaction between this Dionysian space and the real world. By choosing a subject for his routine from the real world and gradually including more and more events and situations from his Dionysian space, Burroughs may be seen to use the routine to communicate to the reader his own movement of oscillation between the two spaces. In realising the routine as a device, Burroughs may be seen to make use of his critical distance and his understanding of himself as an outsider in order to use the real

world as a stage upon which he is simply a two-dimensional character reciting lines. Indeed, in his collection of essays entitled *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, Slavoj Žižek articulates an essentially Burroughsian perspective on the nature of the real world when he writes: “‘real social life’ itself [...] acquires the features of a staged fake, with our neighbours behaving in ‘real’ life like stage actors and extras”, and concluding that “the ultimate truth of the capitalist utilitarian despiritualized universe is the dematerialization of ‘real life’ itself, its reversal into a spectral show”.<sup>59</sup> However, whilst making use of the real world in the manner that Žižek describes, at the conclusion of the routine Lee is no longer recounting a fantastic story for an external audience. Having begun as an actor on the stage of the real, by the end of his monologue Burroughs is exploring the interaction between the ‘ideal’ events realised in the Dionysian space with the implications of a point of departure derived from the real world.

As realised by Lee in *Queer*, the routine appeared in the text as an improbably exaggerated anecdote told by Lee that is essentially an outrageous story intended to amuse an audience. As a stylistic device within the text, Burroughs’ invention of the routine allowed him to appropriate ideas, facts and situations in the real world and to narrate an anecdote derived from these points of departure that gradually moved from the points of departure into the radical and satirical excesses of his Dionysian space. As such, by moving between the real world and Burroughs’ fantasies and comic ideas, the routine explores both the oscillating movement that characterises his Becoming-Dionysian process and the first-person reality of his experience between the social space and his own Dionysian alternative. Derived in part from the self-aggrandising stories and behaviour of others defined by a condition or role, Burroughs appropriates the monologue technique to create his own version of the routine that acts as a bridge between the Dionysian space and the plane of reality.

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<sup>59</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 13-14.

In *Queer* the routine begins as a means by which Burroughs assumes the role of an actor who uses the social space of reality as a stage in order to get Allerton's attention. Having seen Allerton and Mary (Lee's rival for Allerton's time and attention) playing chess in the bar he frequents, Lee takes the theme of chess as a means of focussing their interest on him. Having secured their interest through the appropriation of their obvious engagement with the game of chess, Burroughs allows the routine to move further and further from the board game that had acted as his real world point of departure. However, once he has Allerton's attention, Lee gradually includes more input from his Dionysian space and less from the mutually accessible real world in which he began. Beginning his routine in the bar, Burroughs writes:

Lee had thrown down three drinks. He walked over and pulled up a chair at the table where Mary and Allerton were playing chess. "Howdy," he said. "Don't mind if I kibitz?"

Mary looked up, annoyed but smiled when she met Lee's steady, reckless gaze.

"I was reading up on chess. Arabs invented it, and I'm not surprised. Nobody can sit like an Arab. The classical Arab chess game was a sitting contest. When both contestants starved to death it was a stalemate." Lee paused and took a long drink.

"During the Baroque period of chess the practice of harrying your opponent with some annoying mannerism came into general use. Some players used dental floss, others cracked their joints or blew saliva bubbles. The method was constantly developed. In the 1917 match at Baghdad, the Arab Arachnid Khayam defeated the German master Kurt Schlemiel by humming 'I'll Be Around When You're Gone' forty-thousand times, and each time reaching his hand toward the board as if he intended to make a move. Schlemiel went into convulsions finally.

"Did you ever have the good fortune to see the Italian master Tetrizzini perform?" Lee lit Mary's cigarette. "I say 'perform' advisedly, because he was a great showman, and like all great showmen, not above charlatanism and at times downright trickery. Sometimes he used smokescreens to hide his manoeuvres

from the opposition – I mean literal smoke screens, of course. He had a corps of trained idiots who would rush in at a given signal and eat all the pieces. With defeat staring him in the face – as it often did, because actually he knew nothing of chess but the rules and he wasn't too sure of those – he would leap up yelling 'You cheap bastard! I saw you palm that queen!' and ram a broken teacup into his opponents face. In 1922 he was rid out of Prague on a rail. The next time I saw Tetrizzini was in the Upper Ubangi. A complete wreck. Peddling unlicensed condoms. That was the year of the rinderpest, when everything died, even the hyenas."

Lee paused. The routine was coming to him like dictation. He did not know what he was going to say next, but he suspected the monologue was about to get dirty. He looked at Mary. She was exchanging significant glances with Allerton. "Some sort of lover code," Lee decided. "She is telling him they have to go now." Allerton got up, saying he had to have a haircut before going to work, Mary and Allerton left. Lee was alone in the bar.<sup>60</sup>

When Mary and Allerton leave, Lee retreats entirely from the topic of chess, gradually moving further from the real world in which he began into his Dionysian space. That he continues to recount and invent the story long after those who were the object of its impressive intent have vacated their seats in the audience demonstrates the way in which Lee is detached from the human sensations of embarrassment and rejection. The routine as a means of bridging the space between his own Dionysian space and the reality of Allerton's disinterest has thus failed.

Whilst the initiation of this routine is begun in the real world Lee shares with Mary and Allerton using chess as a premise, the routine concludes in Burroughs' own personal, liberated space of desire and interest beyond the boundaries of the real human world of restricted convention. As shown in 'Academy 23', Burroughs often used real world facts in his Dionysian space. Indeed, insofar as the routine makes use of the real world facts such as chess and develops a comically exaggerated narrative around his chosen subject,

<sup>60</sup> Burroughs, *Queer*, pp. 65-66.

the routine may be seen to have developed from the diagnostic technique and idealised response evident in 'Academy 23'. However, whereas 'Academy 23' left the real world status quo that inspired his tirade implicit in his idealised vision, the routine includes the real world point of departure, and in so doing may be seen to show the movement away from the real world and towards the Dionysian space that 'Academy 23' does not. As the routine becomes increasingly involved in Burroughs' Dionysian space, more taboos are broached and the extreme elements of his social criticism emerge under the guise of humour. Burroughs continues:

The monologue continued. "I was working as an aide-de-camp under General Von Klutch. Exacting. A hard man to satisfy. I gave up trying after the first week. We had a saying around the wardroom: 'Never expose your flank to old Klutchy'. Well I couldn't take Klutchy another night, so I assembled a modest caravan and hit the trail with Abdul, the local Adonis. Ten miles of Tanhajaro, Abdul came down with the rinderpest and I had to leave him there to die. Hated to do it, but there was no other way. Lost his looks completely, you understand.

"At the headwaters of the Zambesi, I ran into an old Dutch trader. After considerable haggling I gave him a keg of paregoric for a boy, half Effendi and half Lulu. I figured the boy would get me as far as Timbuktu, maybe all the way to Dakar. But the Lulu-Effendi was showing signs of wear even before I hit Timbuktu, and I decided to trade him in on a straight Bedouin model. The crossbreeds make a good appearance, but they don't hold up. In Timbuktu I went to Cornhole Gus's Used-Slave Lot to see what he could do for me on a trade-in.

"Gus rushes out and goes into the spiel: 'Ah Sahib Lee. Allah has sent you! I have something right up your ass, I mean, alley. One owner and he was a doctor. A once-over-lightly, twice-a-week-type citizen. It's young and it's tender. In fact, it talks baby talk ... behold!'

"'You call those senile slobberings baby talk? My grandfather got clap off that one. Come again Gussie.'

"'You do not like it? A pity. Well, everyone has a taste, feller say. Now here I have a one-hundred-percent desert bred Bedouin



with a pedigree goes back to the Prophet. Dig his bearing. Such pride! Such fire!’

“A good appearance job, Gus, but not good enough. It’s an albino Mongolian idiot. Look, Gussie, you are dealing with the oldest faggot in the Upper Ubangi, so come off the peg. Reach down into your grease pit and dredge out the best-looking punk you got in this moth-eaten bazaar.’

“All right Sahib Lee, you want quality, right? Follow me, please. Here it is. What can I say? Quality speaks for itself. Now, I get a lotta cheap-type customers in here wanna see quality and then scream at the price. But you know and I know that quality runs high. As a matter of fact, and this I swear by the prophet’s prick, I lose money on this quality merchandise.’

“Uh huh. Got some hidden miles on him but he’ll do. How about a trial run?’

“Lee, for Christ sake, I don’t run a house. This joint is strictly package. No consumption on premises. I could lose my licence.’

“I don’t aim to get caught short with one of your Scotch-tape and household-cement reconditioned jobs a hundred miles from the nearest Soukh. Besides, how do I know it ain’t a Liz?’

“Sahib Lee! This is an ethical lot!’

“ I was beat that way one time in Marrakech. Citizen passed a transvestite Jew Lizzie on me as an Abyssinian prince.’

“Ha ha ha, full of funny jokes, aren’t you? How is this: stay over in town tonight and try it out. If you don’t want it in the morning, I refund every piaster. Fair enough?’

“O.K., now what can you give me on this Lulu-Effendi? Perfect condition. Just overhauled. He don’t eat much and he don’t say nothing.’<sup>61</sup>

At the conclusion of this routine, it becomes clear to the reader that Lee is exploring in graphic detail the reality of events that unfold in his own Dionysian space. Indeed, whilst Lee knows that he does not have an audience and therefore it is no longer important to keep a common ground in

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<sup>61</sup> Burroughs, *Queer*, pp. 66-69.

the story that would render it accessible to the average listener, he continues to include the real world in his outrageous scenario. Indeed, the way in which Lee comments that the routine is 'coming to him like dictation' may be seen as evidence for that which becomes his habitual retreat from the sphere of the real world into his Dionysian space. Certainly, it may be argued that by making such comment Burroughs suggests the everyday nature of the oscillation between the real world and his Dionysian space in which the principle of sale remains but the commodities traded are very different.

Burroughs uses the routine to explore the movement from the real world into his Dionysian space. The exploration of this movement in text is very important for the technical realisation of that which is here termed Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian. However, the routine does not remain in this form; rather, as with all of Burroughs' stylistic innovations, the routine is developed further to suit the challenges of his Becoming-Dionysian. In his later works, Burroughs discards technique of injecting the routine into the text through using the structure of a recounted anecdote. Indeed, through time the role of the routine within the text became less a matter of showing Burroughs' assuming the stage for the amusement of others, than the stage would spontaneously descend upon Burroughs and routines entered his texts at seemingly random junctures only to leave as suddenly as they had arrived. This latter means of exploring his Becoming-Dionysian oscillation is nowhere more apparent than in *Naked Lunch*.

#### 4.4 *Naked Lunch*

In *Naked Lunch* Burroughs extends his use of the routine as a stylistic tool beyond its deployment in *Queer* as a momentary bridge between his Dionysian space and the greater social sphere of the real world. Indeed, it may be in reference to Burroughs' use of the routine and invocation of the Dionysian space in *Naked Lunch* that Marcus Boon describes the novel as

containing passages of “raw, uncensored, Dionysian excess: funny, frightening, beyond reason”.<sup>62</sup>

Whereas in *Queer* the routine was inserted into the narrative body of an ongoing, linear story using the disguise of an anecdotal aside, this chapter argues that *Naked Lunch* is entirely devoted to further development of the Becoming-Dionysian motivations of the routine itself. Burroughs stated in regards to writing *Naked Lunch* that “the novel form is completely inadequate to express what I have to say”<sup>63</sup> and it may be argued that this realisation of the need for a new form in which to explore his Becoming-Dionysian shapes *Naked Lunch* as a text. Indeed, Burroughs’ idea of the conventional novel with a plot and a subject became obsolete for the exploration of his Becoming-Dionysian, a traditional novel with a narrative, characterisation and a story was little more than a “waste of paper”<sup>64</sup> required to transport “The People from one place to another”.<sup>65</sup> Allowing his Becoming-Dionysian to shape the *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs has no intention of using the artifice of a conventional plot to make things easier for his reader. Burroughs explains that his new work does not “spare The Reader stress of sudden space shifts and keep him Gentle”.<sup>66</sup> Using the allegory and auspices of his heroin addiction and the immediacy with which it renders the immanence of his physical need, Burroughs’ world of *Naked Lunch* is entirely reduced to the two spheres between which his routines move. As such, in *Naked Lunch* Burroughs demonstrates clearly the reality of his Becoming-Dionysian explored as text. *Naked Lunch* takes the reader graphically through the oscillations of his creative becoming, between the two spheres of the real world and the Dionysian, using the conceptual space of text as a plane of exploration and expression.

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<sup>62</sup> Marcus Boon, *The Road of Excess* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 79.

<sup>63</sup> Allen Ginsberg, ‘Recollections of Burroughs Letters’, in *Deliberate Prose*, pp. 386-390, p. 387.

<sup>64</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 172.

<sup>65</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 172.

<sup>66</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 172.

The exploration of the interaction between the spaces of the Dionysian and the real world that, this section argues, define Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian seen in *Naked Lunch* create an integrated, albeit chaotic, experience of immersion in the text for the reader. However, the position taken by this chapter in contending that Burroughs' compositional and creative technique is dynamic is by no means common to all Burroughs critics. Indeed, rather than see Burroughs' composition as dynamic or oscillating, Timothy Murphy designates Burroughs' technique as static or "mosaic"<sup>67</sup> in nature. However, Murphy's idea that *Naked Lunch* represents a mosaic fails to take into account the dynamism of Burroughs' process of exploring his own experience that, according to the present analysis, is central to his creative process. Indeed, in order to demonstrate the importance of the dynamism of Burroughs' process of relating, one need look no further than the routine and the way in which it is employed in *Naked Lunch*. In *Naked Lunch* Burroughs not only uses the routine as a stylistic device which aids the communication of oscillation and transition between spaces, but he also expands his idea of the routine in many ways to embody his Becoming-Dionysian project. One way in which this is made apparent in Burroughs' writing is through his demonstration of the proximity of the Dionysian space to the real world. Making clear the connection between these two spaces is one way in which Burroughs' increases the engagement of the reader with the text. An excellent demonstration of Burroughs' determination to include his reader in *Naked Lunch* is through what may be read as the novel's didactic purpose.

As his introduction to *Naked Lunch* makes clear, Burroughs' novel was written with a measure of didactic intent. At first glance, this didactic intent may seem tongue in cheek. However, behind the irony and sarcasm of Burroughs' images of society, there lies a powerful and problematic message for his readers. Burroughs maintains that his book is a warning about the perils of drug use and drug addiction. Writing such a foreword to *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs is, in effect, acknowledging his role as an addict lecturing the moral masses about the dangers of drugs, whilst, at the same time, show-

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<sup>67</sup> Murphy, *Wising up the Marks*, p. 71.

ing the delirious spaces of desire and excess into which drugs can initiate the user. In this way, whilst in the present context *Naked Lunch* is examined as an exploration of Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian oscillation, the subtext of hypocritical didactic intent remains as a tangible and important thread within the novel, reminding the reader of the proximity of his or her own reality to the bilateral oscillation of the author. Confronting the reader with this knowledge, Burroughs may be understood as challenging his reader to either learn the lessons of the perils of addiction from him and spare themselves the suffering he has undergone, or, for the reader too entranced by the lure of the Dionysian realm, to experience addiction for themselves.

By presuming to instruct his audience by demonstration and example, Burroughs' didactic intent seen in *Naked Lunch* may be seen as serving the dual purpose of provoking reaction from his readers and heightening the perceived authenticity of his text by drawing attention to its autobiographical nature. Throughout the novel, Burroughs states his autobiographical connection to the experience related in the text. This emphasis draws attention to the factual nature of Burroughs' subject matter and challenges his readers in a number of ways. Indeed, developing themes of control and liberation also seen in *Junkie* and *Queer*, Burroughs produces a wonderland of desire and excess that he emphasises is dependant on the withering of his physical presence in the real world. Finally, having demonstrated the physically debilitating extent of his very tangible addiction to junk, Burroughs turns on his readers in order to show the ways in which they too are addicts to a much more dangerous and invisible drug: righteousness, indignation, morality and religion.

This section argues that heightened by his didactic intent, in *Naked Lunch* Burroughs' extends the exploration of his Becoming-Dionysian beyond individual routines and isolated moments of examination into a more integrated text that examines the reality of oscillation, addiction and withdrawal as a whole. Using Burroughs' central themes of control and liberation as points of entry into *Naked Lunch*, it will be argued that Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian becomes not only more apparent, but central to the idea and

manifestation of the novel as a text and of great importance also to the writer both as a theme and as a practice.

#### 4.4.1 Welcome to the Zone

Seeking to establish at the outset of *Naked Lunch* the parameters within which his Becoming-Dionysian oscillation takes place, Burroughs uses the physical reality of drug addiction to delineate clearly to his reader the boundaries that separate the Dionysian space and the real world. Citing his own addiction (and subsequent cure) as important to the creation of the novel itself, Burroughs defines an interior – exterior polarity that this analysis argues aids the reader in better understanding his Becoming-Dionysian oscillation.

Burroughs himself explains to the reader that the body of an addict is the medium through which he absorbs the means to actualise that which is here termed a Dionysian space. That is to say, Burroughs acknowledges that the physical body of the addict must live in the real world, and whilst the addict may not be able to escape his body permanently, this same body anchored in the real world provides the means of actualising an interior space of intoxication into which escape becomes a possibility. Burroughs defines the parameters of the real world using the example of the addict's body. For the addict, the body and the physical existence it entails are only required to sustain or enable the re-gaining of the liberated Dionysian state of freedom enabled when the shot has been taken and the ravages of need dissolve into contentment and freedom. For the addict, the body is little more than the means to an end and a support for the actualisation of the Dionysian space initiated through intoxication. Burroughs writes:

The addict regards his body impersonally as an instrument to absorb the medium in which he lives, evaluates his tissue with the cold hands of a horse trader. "No use trying to hit there." Dead fish eyes flick over a ravaged vein.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 63.

Using the example of the physical body as the real world incarnation of that which Melley describes as the embodied self,<sup>69</sup> Burroughs defines the interior or Dionysian space by exclusion. The poverty of the physical body and its real world existence subsists in inverse proportion to the rich excesses of the Dionysian space that this body sustains. It is the symbiotic and cyclical relationship between the external, real world, physical requirements of the shot, junk, the works, the boys, ablutions and food and the Dionysian space that the fulfilling of these base requirements enables, that forms the core of Burroughs' real world experience of Becoming-Dionysian explored in *Naked Lunch*.

Making use of the distinction between the addicted body and the Dionysian space that it is argued this body enables, Burroughs writes in his 'Introduction' to *Naked Lunch* that the text itself was written in Tangiers during a period of heavy addiction to junk. In this introduction, Burroughs refers to *Naked Lunch* as being composed of "detailed notes on [the] sickness and delirium".<sup>70</sup> The sickness, he goes on to detail, is "drug addiction and I was an addict for fifteen years. When I say addict I mean addict to junk".<sup>71</sup> However, in saying that *Naked Lunch* was composed of "detailed notes", Burroughs implies that the novel itself was the result of a rational and sober process of piecing together the "notes from the sickness" into a novel after having undergone the "cure".<sup>72</sup> When Burroughs writes that he has "no precise memory of writing the notes which have now been published under the title *Naked Lunch*",<sup>73</sup> this does not suggest that he is distancing himself from the creation of the novel itself in the form in which it is published. Rather, such a comment may be seen to suggest that the "notes" from which the novel was subsequently composed were created in a space that he is no longer within

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<sup>69</sup> Melley, p. 45.

<sup>70</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 7.

<sup>72</sup> The cure for the 'metabolic illness of Morphine addiction' to which Burroughs refers is the Apomorphine treatment he underwent in London under the supervision of Dr. Dent. See: William Burroughs, 'Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs', in *The British Journal of Addiction*, 53.2 (1956), 119-131.

<sup>73</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 7.

and from experiences now past. Marianne DeKoven writes in her chapter on Burroughs in *Utopia Limited*, that the notes of which *Naked Lunch* is composed "do not inhabit the same universe as the *writing* of *Naked Lunch*".<sup>74</sup> As such, the composition of the novel undertaken post cure may be seen as itself defined by the Becoming-Dionysian frame that informs this study, insofar as it is from his sober yet still distant perspective that Burroughs orders and combines notes written in a state of 'otherness'. By using this process of composition, it may be argued that Burroughs conducts, from yet another perspective, a further examination of his process of Becoming-Dionysian using the experience and ideas of addiction, distance and oscillation.

Throughout *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs explicitly reminds his readers in a number of ways that he is addicted to junk. As is made apparent by his use of the body as an exemplification of the boundaries between two realms, the chain of addiction reinforces his intimate and inescapable connection to the physical and social world in which his drugs are procured, sourced and shot up. In this way, involvement in the real world directly facilitated the means of escape into a free space. Yet, the thoughts, ideas and sensations that Burroughs experienced within this liberated space were themselves derived from experiences that were part of the real world he sought to escape. Whilst *Naked Lunch* is not an explicit examination of this existential bind of addiction, need and self-determination, it may be argued that the continual return of the addict to the needle and the dropper demonstrates Burroughs' awareness of the proximity of the physical and restrictive world to his fragile and sacred space of Dionysian freedom.

Engaging with Burroughs' drug use in his 'Notes on Burroughs', Marshall McLuhan correctly understands the role of Burroughs the addict in *Naked Lunch* as being necessarily apart from the world. However, McLuhan then asserts that the addict retreats from the world to become a world unto himself, insisting: "the central theme of *Naked Lunch* is the strategy of bypassing the

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<sup>74</sup> Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 179.



new electric environment by becoming an environment oneself".<sup>75</sup> Yet, using the concept of Becoming-Dionysian as the means of framing this examination of Burroughs' work, it becomes evident that the oscillation in which both his addiction and greater project involves him necessarily prevents Burroughs from receding exclusively into a permanently insular universe — whether it be that of the real world *or* the Dionysian space. Burroughs is still a part of the real, physical world and whilst McLuhan is correct in his assertion that Burroughs "seeks to anaesthetise himself as much as possible"<sup>76</sup> against the real, the nature of anaesthesia itself is temporary. Indeed, taking into account the nature of the chemicals used to induce the state, the addict cannot retreat into his Dionysian space on a permanent basis; he is necessarily involved in a Becoming-Dionysian oscillation between the 'real world' in which he gets his fix and the Dionysian space this fix enables. However, that is not to say that *Naked Lunch* is not the story of Burroughs' successful escape from reality. In considering a dramatised version of his own plight, Burroughs reverts to his didactic capacity. Drawing attention to the vicious circle and real world implications of his own addiction, the inability to escape on a permanent basis is a point he makes in his introduction, insisting to any reader thinking of following him down the junk path: "LOOK DOWN along that junk road before you travel there and get in with the wrong mob".<sup>77</sup>

Analysed as a narrative or a "story",<sup>78</sup> *Naked Lunch* is not the story of anything: it is itself an exploration of Burroughs' own experience of oscillation that is here designated by the term Becoming-Dionysian. Put bluntly, nothing happens or can be followed through the text (like a plot) in the real world during *Naked Lunch*. Indeed, more real world action and interaction happens in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in the actual attempts at communication between Vladimir and Estragon than happens in the physical world of Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*. By drawing attention to the poles of the real

<sup>75</sup> Marshall McLuhan, 'Notes on Burroughs', in *William Burroughs at the Front: Critical Reception, 1959 – 1989*, ed. by Jennie Skerl and Robin Lydenberg (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), pp. 69–73, p. 70.

<sup>76</sup> McLuhan, p. 70.

<sup>77</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 14.

<sup>78</sup> 'Narrative', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* < <http://dictionary.oed.com> >.

world and the Dionysian space Burroughs defines in *Naked Lunch* important points of reference for both the reader and the author. Indeed, by using these poles Burroughs makes the reader aware of the emptiness and restrictions of the 'real world' in which his novel was written, characterising the physical reality of the author as an addict in Tangier, for example, as follows:

I lived in one room in the Native Quarter of Tangier. I had not taken a bath in a year nor changed my clothes or removed them except to stick a needle every hour in the fibrous grey wooden flesh of terminal addiction. I never cleaned or dusted the room, empty ampule boxes and garbage piled up to the ceiling. Light and water had been long since turned off for non-payment. I did absolutely nothing. I could look at the end of my shoe for eight hours. I was only roused to action when the hourglass of junk ran out.<sup>79</sup>

In *Naked Lunch* this need-regulated empty space is Burroughs' real world. Using the poles created by the opposition of the Dionysian and the real world, in *Naked Lunch* Burroughs demonstrates the oscillating movement characteristic of his Becoming-Dionysian by using his addiction as a frame and a structure for his text. Burroughs uses his addiction to frame his novel and define its poles of interior and exterior. The narrowed down experience of the real world and exaggerated scope of Dionysian space seen through the lens of addiction provides a tightly defined spectrum in which his Becoming-Dionysian oscillation takes place.

As is made graphically apparent by the continuing cycle of his junk addiction depicted in *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs is forced constantly to return to the physical world. However, no matter how clearly Burroughs defines the boundaries separating the real world from his Dionysian space, the two realms remain intimately connected with one another. Indeed, in a way that makes the proximity of the real world to his Dionysian space quite clear, Burroughs opens *Naked Lunch* in a scene reminiscent of the a routine that takes

<sup>79</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, pp. 9-10.

place in his Dionysian space. However, rather than simply narrate a series of extraordinary events taking place in his Dionysian space, the opening of *Naked Lunch* introduces the reader to what appears to be a hybrid space that bears significant resemblance to the real world. Burroughs launches his reader into the opening of a police chase. Yet this space is itself characteristic of Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian, insofar as the page itself becomes a plane upon which the Dionysian and real world experiences interact.

*Naked Lunch* opens with Burroughs speaking in the first-person, accosting the reader with the immediacy of his sensation: "I can feel the heat closing in, feel them out there making their moves".<sup>80</sup> The gap is immediately established between Burroughs' first-person voice and the rest of the world involved in the making of sinister 'moves'; the narrator is someone *apart* and, apparently, on the run. For those readers familiar with *Queer*, the events with which Burroughs opens *Naked Lunch* unfold in the manner and style of a routine. However, rather than make use of the fantastic, theatrical style that characterises the routine as a performance in *Queer*, Burroughs appears less as an actor assuming the stage than he does a puppet master, omitting and divulging facts to the reader at will. As such, it may seem that Burroughs does not care, as he had done in *Queer*, for the needs of an audience requiring continuity to retain their interest and to earn their admiration. Indeed, whilst it may seem that Burroughs is telling the story to and for himself, the presence of an invisible reader as omnipresent audience remains and becomes increasingly apparent as the text progresses.

Describing the scene, Burroughs uses a measure of detail, including the face and type of a man who holds the door of the subway train open for him to get in. The use of such detail suggests that real world facts, such as the turnstiles of the subway with which he is familiar, have been appropriated in order to establish a common ground between the reader and the writer in preparation for the radical departure from traditional, narrative prose that follows. Burroughs writes:

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<sup>80</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 17.

[C]rooning over my spoon and dropper I throw away at Washington Square Station, vault a turnstile and two flights down the iron stairs, catch an uptown A train . . . Young, good looking, crew cut, Ivy League, advertising exec type fruit holds the door back for me. I am evidently his idea of a character. You know the type comes on with bartenders and cab drivers, talking about right hooks and dodgers, call the counterman in Nedick's by his first name. A real asshole. And right on time this narcotics dick in a white trench coat (imagine tailing somebody in a white trench coat – trying to pass as a fag I guess) hit the platform. I can see the way he would say it holding out my outfit in his left hand, right hand on his piece: "I think you dropped something, fella"<sup>81</sup>

The fact that Burroughs brings the reader so rapidly into contact with the experience of the junkie who performs the function of the narrator and Burroughs' alter ego in the text suggests that Burroughs views the *Naked Lunch* as physical entity in the hands of the reader that acts as an interface between the reader and the writer. Indeed, it may be argued that Burroughs' understanding of the book as an interface between reader and writer may be an extension of his vision of reality as a film or a theatrical stage. Both the concepts of reality as a film and the book as itself an interface or plane employ an understanding of the book or the real world as an accessible entity that readers will then appropriate, experience and understand in their own subjective ways. This being the case, for Burroughs the physical being of the book and the words on the page produce a fact that is common to the reader who reads the words and the writer that wrote them in the same way that the game of chess was a shared fact between Allerton, Mary and Lee in *Queer*.

In the context of his Becoming-Dionysian, Burroughs' understanding of the text as a shared fact between reader and writer may be intended to catalyse a process of becoming in the reader through their initiation into the artist's cyclical creative process via the text. Indeed, it may be argued

<sup>81</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 17. It is interesting to note that Burroughs describes a similar scenario concerning a white trench coated law enforcement officer tailing junkies in *Junkie* pp. 66-67.

that by opening his own experience as an example, Burroughs' attempt at such an act of inclusion is intended to make the reader conscious of their own process of becoming. Significantly, in *Naked Lunch* Burroughs considers that all readers must undergo a process of immersion in and involvement with the text in order to relate to the shared fact of the book and the words that form it. However, Burroughs admits to the reader that "your knowledge of what is going on can only be superficial and relative".<sup>82</sup> Introducing the reader at the opening of *Naked Lunch* to a junkie, Burroughs may be seen to anticipate his readers' question: "what do I know of this yellow blighted young junky face subsisting on raw opium",<sup>83</sup> and in so doing to invite and to challenge them to read on.

Indeed, it may be reasonably argued that by attempting to involve his reader in a creative process of their own by relating to his text, Burroughs may be seen to use the textual space of *Naked Lunch* not only as a plane upon which to explore the interaction between his own Dionysian space and the real world, but also as a means of clarifying his own vision and understanding of these interactions by presuming to instruct his reader. As such, it may be argued that Burroughs uses *Naked Lunch* as a way to familiarise the reader with the Becoming-Dionysian experience that he considers to characterise the existence of the intelligent individual. Yet this introduction to a Becoming-Dionysian process is not for the purposes of familiarity alone; rather, Burroughs seeks to involve his readers in a Becoming-Dionysian experience of their own. Reading *Naked Lunch*, the reader is not required to be silent in order only to accept and not to respond or react to the text. Rather, silence is only required to acknowledge the mutual fact of the page. Certainly, Burroughs may be seen to attempt to affront and provoke the reader into engaging with their own processes of relating and becoming, by insisting that *Naked Lunch* is a "how-to book",<sup>84</sup> confronting the reader with the crimes of Robert Christie the "mass strangler of women"<sup>85</sup> and asking

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<sup>82</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 174.

<sup>83</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 174.

<sup>84</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 177.

<sup>85</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 177.

"wouldn't You?"<sup>86</sup> As such, it would seem that Burroughs requires anything but silence from his reader. He writes:

*Naked Lunch* is a blueprint, a How-To Book. . . . Black insect lusts open into vast, other planet landscapes . . . . Abstract concepts, bare as algebra, narrow down to a black turd or a pair of ageing cajones. . . .

How-To extend levels of experience by opening the door at the end of a long hall. . . . Doors that only open in *Silence*. . . . *Naked Lunch* demands Silence from The Reader. Otherwise he is taking his own pulse. . . .

Robert Christie knew The Answering Service. . . . Kill the old cunts. . . . keep pubic hairs in his locket. . . . wouldn't You?<sup>87</sup>

By directly challenging the reader to acknowledge his or her own becoming, in *Naked Lunch* Burroughs makes the transition from diagnostic critic to active didactic agent. By contesting that *Naked Lunch* is a tool of instruction, Burroughs can be seen to use the same political stance that characterised 'Academy 23'. In both 'Academy 23' and, to a greater extent in *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs drew on his process of Becoming-Dionysian as a means of involving with his audience by provoking reactions that he considers may catalyse a realisation of the becomings taking place in his readers.

Taking Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian motivation into account, the radical, new form and explicit content of *Naked Lunch* that was so derided by critics as mere sensationalism appears perhaps more logical, possible and less contrived than it may at first have seemed. Indeed, in hindsight, a radical departure from the novel form now seems inevitable in order to successfully facilitate Burroughs' desire to reach his audience and make them aware of their own becomings. By realising a form that not only communicated, but in many ways, mirrored, his own process of relating and exploring, it may be argued that, upon completion, *Naked Lunch* allowed Burroughs to see his

<sup>86</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 177.

<sup>87</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, pp. 176-177.

own creative process with greater clarity. It is with this understanding of Burroughs' creative vision as informed by his own oscillation and desire to incite a Becoming-Dionysian in others, that *Naked Lunch* can be seen with greater clarity as a vast exploration of Burroughs' creative process.

#### 4.4.2 Reading *Naked Lunch* as a Becoming-Dionysian Experiment

The symbiotic connection between the real world and the actualisation of the Dionysian space that emerges in *Naked Lunch* is brought to the attention of the reader both through the needle and via the appropriation of sensations and images from the real world to Burroughs' Dionysian space. Just as the routine intended for an audience must include at least some semblance of the real world to be comprehensible to its audience, similar 'facts' are themselves points of intersection between two states or spaces that Burroughs later comes to see explicitly in the context of the 'cut up' as beginnings from which his creative process departs.

In the real world, laws govern physical facts. In the social space, the real world is regulated by the reactions of morality and manners that dictate the appropriateness of context. In the social, public space, identity is composed for the most part of function, a point Burroughs makes in his dismissal of the 'dick in the white trench coat' and the 'stool pigeons and flourflushers', quoted above. In contrast to the facts of the real world, because the Dionysian space is actualised within the physical shell of the individual, these facts remain apparent despite the transition inherent in internalisation and are given new possibility through the actualisation of the Dionysian space and the melting away of the moral codes that define the social sphere. That is to say, a word will remain a word in the Dionysian space; however the connotations that accompany that word or concept are less rigid in the realm of the Dionysian than they are in the real world. Burroughs explains and

demonstrates the transition of a fact (using the example of the word) from its reality and use in the real world and its appropriation in his Becoming-Dionysian realm of text, writing:

The word is divided into units which be all in one piece and should so be taken, but the pieces can be had in any order being tied up back and forth, in and out fore and aft like an innaresting sex arrangement. This book spill off the page in all directions, kaleidoscope of vistas, medley of tunes and street noises, farts and riot yipes and the slamming steel shutters of commerce, screams of pain and pathos and screams plain pathetic, copulating cats and outraged squawk of the displaced bull head, prophetic mutterings of brujo in nutmeg trances snapping necks and screaming mandrakes, sigh of orgasm, heroin silent as dawn in the thirsty cells, Radio Cairo screaming like a berserk tobacco auction, and flutes of Ramadan fanning the sick junky like a gentle lush worker in the grey subway dawn feeling with delicate fingers for the green folding crackle...

This is the Revelation and Prophecy of what I can pick up without FM on my 1920 crystal set with antennae of jissom. . . . Gentle reader, we see God through our assholes in the flash bulb of orgasm. . . . Through these orifices transmute your body. . . . The way OUT is the way IN.<sup>88</sup>

Using the metaphor of the radio, Burroughs suggests that he simply receives images and sounds from the real world as one would receive a radio transmission. Once within his own Dionysian interior space, Burroughs makes the point that he is able to play with these images and concepts at will. Continuing Burroughs' radio analogy, once the transmission has left the sender and been received by a radio (in Burroughs' example, he is himself the receiver), the listener can do whatever it is he pleases with the content, he can even turn off his receiver. Nothing he says or does with the signal he receives through his radio can affect the continual transmission signal of

<sup>88</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 180.



the sender. Indeed, it may be argued that it is this direct path inside the individual and the immediate first-person nature of Dionysian space to which Burroughs refers with his example of seeing “God through our assholes in the flash bulb of orgasm”.<sup>89</sup> For Burroughs, therefore, in order to actualise a process of Becoming-Dionysian this interior or Dionysian space must be both actualised as a realm and understood as a concept. Only once this realisation has taken place can one begin looking for the ‘way out’ by involving in interaction with other beings or states, interactions which this analysis argues are for Burroughs characteristic of an authentic creative process.

The textual reality of Burroughs’ exploration of his Becoming-Dionysian in *Naked Lunch* is vivid, graphic and fast. Whilst most of the sensational aspects of *Naked Lunch* take place in his Dionysian space, this is by no means a stable or regulated environment in which the traditional rules of narrative and aim apply. Indeed, Burroughs’ Dionysian space relates at random to the real world through his internalised memories and experiences and they re-emerge in the Dionysian space of the fixed addict. Whilst Lydenberg contests that Burroughs’ seemingly random selection of images and sensations is an attempt to cover a seething force of death and decay,<sup>90</sup> within a Becoming-Dionysian process it may be argued that Burroughs’ intention is much less consciously epic than it is personal in nature.

One way in which Burroughs demonstrates the personal nature of his Dionysian space is through a technique that Dennis McDaniel terms “distorting the familiar”.<sup>91</sup> Whilst this analysis does concur with McDaniel’s designation of Burroughs’ technique as distortion, it is argued here that such distortion takes place primarily through decontextualisation. Lines of poetry, typical domestic scenes and phrases of songs long since unpopular emerge in Burroughs’ Dionysian space free of their usual contexts and moral significance in the real world. Burroughs’ experience of moving between the real world

<sup>89</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 180.

<sup>90</sup> Lydenberg, p. 15.

<sup>91</sup> Dennis McDaniel, ‘New World Ordure: Burroughs, Globalization and the Grotesque’, in *Retaking the Universe: William S. Burroughs in the Age of Globalization*, ed. by Davis Schneiderman and Philip Walsh (London; Sterling: Pluto, 2004), pp. 132–145, p. 141.

and his Dionysian space is illustrated in the greatest depth through his appropriation of real world images and concepts and his abstraction, recreation and decontextualisation of them in his own Dionysian space. The domestic scene below creates an excellent example of Burroughs' decontextualising technique. The dialogue and figures of Jim and Brad suggest the traditional interaction between an idyllic 1950s couple. In the real world, a woman would take Brad's more traditionally feminine role and the romantic meal to which they sit down would be something more akin to a traditional steak dinner. Yet, in Burroughs' Dionysian dystopia Brad is an effeminate man and it is a meal of a woman's genitals cooked in feminine hygiene products over which they gaze into one another's eyes. Examining Burroughs' alterations to the real world theme of domesticity it can be conjectured that he takes details and ideas from the real world into his Dionysian space in order to demonstrate the integral relationship between these spaces within his Becoming-Dionysian. Burroughs takes ideas from the real world and presents their outrageous opposite as being the predominant truth in his Dionysian space. Burroughs' alterations to the regular domestic idyll are crude and abrupt. Indeed, it may be argued that it is through his use of terms such as cunt and kotex alongside the disjointed abruptness of his descriptions that the reader is alerted to the fact that they have now entered Burroughs textual exploration of his Dionysian space, a space that differs from that of the social through its lack of asserted context or order. Burroughs writes:

"The Boss isn't going to like this'

"I don't know why I ever wasted my time with you, you cheap, vulgar little fairy.'

"The boys stand at the tenement window, their arms around each other, looking at the Brooklyn Bridge. A warm spring wind ruffles Jim's black curls and the fine hennaed hair of Brad.

"Well, Brad, what's for supper?'

"You just go in the other room and wait.' Playfully he shoos Jim, out of the kitchen, and puts on his apron.

“Dinner is Lucy Bradshinkel’s cunt saignant cooked in kotex papillon. The boys eat happily looking into each other’s eyes. Blood runs down their chins.”

Let the dawn blue as a flame cross the city. . . . The backyards are clean of fruit, and the ash pits give up their hooded dead. . . .

“Could you show me the way to Tipperary, Lady?”

Over the hills and far away to Blue Grass. . . . Across the bone meal of lawn to the frozen pond where suspended goldfish wait for the spring Squaw Man.

The screaming skull rolls up the back stairs to bite off the cock of erring husband taking dour advantage of his wife’s earache to do that which is inconvenient. The young landlubber dons a south-wester, beats his wife to death in the shower.<sup>92</sup>

Burroughs takes an archetype of social convention from the real world and, in placing it in his Dionysian space, strips it of conventional moral context by inserting new characters and objects into familiar roles and spaces. In the quotation above, the effect of such juxtaposition is intentionally humorous; however, the aim of such an exercise can be seen as the desire to suggest the dangerous proximity of the subversive Dionysian space to the structured and controlled ‘real world’.

Demonstrating the proximity of his Dionysian space to the real world in many ways returns this analysis of Burroughs’ process of Becoming-Dionysian to Burroughs’ own core themes of possession and control. In *Queer*, the accusation of ‘possession and control’ was aimed at the socius using Burroughs’ homosexuality as a means of revealing the implicit control mechanisms within society to punish and exclude non-majority behaviours. The treatment of possession and control as characteristic of the social space seen in *Queer* remains central to Burroughs’ understanding of these concepts. Burroughs devotes a significant amount of time to the demonstration of his understanding of the proximity of the Dionysian space to the social space of the ‘real

<sup>92</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, pp. 108-109.

world' using shared facts common to both realms as examples (such as the popular, real world concept of domesticity seen above). Indeed, Burroughs may be seen to suggest that the control and conformity that characterises the social space is, at all times, perilously close to falling apart due to the subversive desires and fantasies of individuals. Indeed, it can be suggested that for Burroughs such disintegration of the control and restraint needed to keep the real world and social space in place would necessarily come about if the events of a personal Dionysian space were enacted in the real world. However, Burroughs understands the importance of the restrictions and controls of the social and the real world for the definition of his Dionysian space. In failing to actualise his Dionysian fantasies in the real world, Burroughs may be viewed as unwilling to jeopardise his own vital process of Becoming-Dionysian and, it can be suggested, the status and perspective he considers to be subversive that is brought about by this oscillation. He explains: "You can write or yell or croon about it... paint about it... act about it... shit it out in mobiles... *So long as you don't go and do it...*".<sup>93</sup>

By exploring his Dionysian space and its relationship to and with the real world in the text, Burroughs may be seen to suggest to the world at large just how close the threat of everything breaking down into orgiastic chaos really is. One of the most potent and powerful demonstrations of this proximity is seen in Burroughs' use of sex as an accessible metaphor to show civilisation as little more than the flimsiest meniscus of control over ubiquitous and uncontrollable urges. Indeed, as Lydenberg points out, using sex as a means of demonstrating his point, Burroughs is able successfully to "make explicit, the parasitic control system operating through drugs, sex and religion."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 176

<sup>94</sup> Lydenberg, p. 129.

### 4.4.3 Sex, Drugs and Cock and Roll: The Role of Sex in Communicating Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian

As Allen Hibbard correctly asserts: "Burroughs' fiction has always been marked by strong, often graphic depictions of homosexual acts [...] which, for him, became but one more method [...] [of] asserting a self outside the boundaries of law and social norms".<sup>95</sup> In the context of the present analysis, it may be argued that, for Burroughs, sex presented a workable allegory of the Dionysian space insofar as sex was an act and sexual desire was a realm in which the restrictions of society were automatically placed behind the more immediate desire for gratification. As Burroughs made very clear in *Queer*, sex and sexual desire are personal in nature. In Burroughs' contemporary America, keeping the status quo of repression and control over the sexual persists as a central tenet of civilised and social control over the primal urges of human beings. Burroughs writes, "[t]he whole area of sex is still shrouded in mystery and ignorance. [...] Psychiatrists, substituting the word 'sick' for 'wrong', follow the old Christian line".<sup>96</sup> Taking into account the 'mysterious', primal and personal nature of sex alongside its taboo allure as a private realm of experiences and sensations, sex formed a useful, if somewhat one-dimensional, metaphor or allegory of the primal nature of Burroughs' Dionysian space. The immediate first-person character of sexual experience and acceptance of the relativity of desire and pleasure provided Burroughs with a conceptual example or allegory of his own Dionysian space that was able to be understood in first-person terms by his readers. Indeed, it can be conjectured that the fact that sex was also seen as so taboo and homosexuality so 'wrong' may only have heightened Burroughs' desire to include scenes of graphic and shocking sexual activity in his novel just to annoy and offend the people who had annoyed and offended him by preventing him from openly indulging his desires. Furthermore, by including graphic sexual

<sup>95</sup> Allen Hibbard, 'Shift Coordinate Points', in *Retaking the Universe: William S. Burroughs in the Age of Globalization*, ed. by Davis Schneiderman and Philip Walsh (London; Sterling: Pluto, 2004), pp. 13-28, p. 21.

<sup>96</sup> William Burroughs, 'Sexual conditioning', in *The Adding Machine: Collected Essays*, p. 84.

scenes in his texts, Burroughs can be seen to flout the civilised convention of repressing matters sexual in nature. Indeed, in making such scenes such a significant presence in *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs may be seen to show the difference between his Dionysian space and the systems of repression and control that characterised the real world. For Burroughs, the control of eroticism is the "most important point of control".<sup>97</sup>

As its prosecution for obscenity indicates, *Naked Lunch* views sexual acts with a pornographic lens. The explicit nature of these scenes would seem to suggest that they perform a dual role in the body of the text, functioning as both a metaphor for the violence and extravagance of the hidden desires in each individual and as a form of titillation for the author in whose desire-regulated Dionysian space they take place. The architecture of Burroughs' scenes in which sex is the focus takes on a cinematic quality. Each action appears as a tableau, a highly wrought demonstration of the depths of desire and the extent of human fantasy. Misunderstanding Burroughs' intention and reading only the superficially shocking and sensational aspect of his sexual peons, some critics suggest that through his profusion of excess and moral vacuum, Burroughs incites "imaginative collaboration in the orgy",<sup>98</sup> and that his excesses are mere "verbal masturbation".<sup>99</sup> However, the detail and clarity of his vision of the impossible excess of desire may be more usefully seen as serving to attack the foundations of control through civilised inhibition in its attention to details that are not supposed to be the concern of a civilised individual.

In *Naked Lunch* Burroughs uses a triumvirate of themes, namely sex, desire and death, to dwarf the ideas and restrictions of the civilised world with both their ubiquity and their ferocity. In the midst of such an overwhelming understanding of the unspoken challenges to the control of civilisation, Stern's vision of the human island of civilisation in the midst of a "hostile uni-

<sup>97</sup> Burroughs, 'Academy 23', p. 123.

<sup>98</sup> David Lodge, 'Objections to Burroughs', in *William Burroughs at the Front: Critical Reception, 1959 - 1989*, ed. by Jennie Skerl and Robin Lydenberg (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), pp. 75-84, p.78.

<sup>99</sup> John Willett, 'UGH...', in *Times Literary Supplement*, 14 November 1963, p. 919.

verse of silence”<sup>100</sup> emerges once again as an insightful analogy of the island of consciousness in a sea of desire. In the example below, Burroughs uses the real world taboo of sex as a point of entry into the ideas of social structure and the forbidden. That is to say, Burroughs uses sex as a nominal shared fact with ensuing connotations and surrounding prejudices, to show human beings as fundamentally Dionysian desiring entities and to demonstrate the futility of the ‘real world’ concepts of control and morality in the face of such wild and boundless Dionysian drives. Burroughs punctures this space with graphic terms such as “shit”,<sup>101</sup> and “suck each other off”,<sup>102</sup> that, in the context of his dreamy scene, serve to remind the reader of the extreme nature of reality in which this scene takes place. Psychoanalyst Ariel Arango defines the use of the graphic terms ‘cock’ and ‘cunt’ in the text as vital to a communication of the reality of a situation in a sensory capacity, writing: “[t]he terms *cock* and *cunt* reproduce with great accuracy and visual impact the corresponding organs. We see them with all their charm and splendour: their shape, size, colour, and sometimes even their odour”.<sup>103</sup> In the context of Burroughs’ exploration of his Dionysian space, the use of terms such as cock and cunt can be seen as a means by which he brings the reader into direct sensory contact with the events and facts of his own interior universe. Burroughs writes:

Hassan’s face swells, tumescent with blood. His lips turn purple. He strip off his suit of banknotes and throw it into an open vault that closes soundless.

“Freedom Hall here, folks!” he screams in his phoney Texan accent. Ten-gallon hat and cowboy boots still on, he dances the Liquefactionist Jig, ending with a grotesque can-can to the tune of *She Started a Heat Wave*.

“*Let it be! And no holes barred!!!*”

<sup>100</sup> J. P. Stern, *Nietzsche* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), p. 139.

<sup>101</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 72.

<sup>102</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 72.

<sup>103</sup> Ariel C. Arango, *Dirty Words: The Expressive Power of Taboo* (Northvale; London: Jason Aronson, 1989), p. 123.

Couples attached to baroque harnesses with artificial wings copulate in the air, screaming like magpies.

Aerialists ejaculate each other in space with one sure touch.

Equilibrists suck each other off deftly, balanced on perilous poles and chairs tilted over the void. A warm wind brings the smell of rivers and jungle from misty depths.

Boys by the hundred plummet through the roof, quivering and kicking at the end of ropes. The boys hang at different levels, some near the ceiling and others a few inches off the floor. Exquisite Balinese and Malays, Mexican Indians with fierce innocent faces and bright red gums. Negroes (teeth, fingers, toenails and pubic hair gilded) Japanese boys smooth and white as China, Titian-haired Venetian lads, Americans with blond or black curls falling across the forehead (the guests tenderly shove it back), sulky blond Pollacks with animal brown eyes, Arab and Spanish street boys, Austrian boys pink and delicate with a faint shadow of blond pubic hair, sneering German youths with bright eyes scream "Heil Hitler!" as the trap falls under them. Sollubis shit and whimper.<sup>104</sup>

Whilst these excesses are immediately recognisable as the machinations of Burroughs' mind at play in his Dionysian space, in the body of the text such scenes highlight the dual creative/destructive possibility of the Dionysian space once actualised. Having outlined its destructive potential, Burroughs continues to draw creative power from his Dionysian space. Yet, importantly, this creative power can only be actualised through the process of Becoming-Dionysian that sees him move between his Dionysian space and the real world.

Given the physical nature of sex as an act and the fantasy element of sex as an idea or series of desires, the symbiotic relationship between the real world and the Dionysian space is made very apparent through Burroughs' use of the theme of sexual desire and sexual gratification. Burroughs takes the desire ignited by images and events in the real world into his Dionysian

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<sup>104</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 72.



space that is not restricted by the laws and morality of society in order to realise his desire. Using events in the real world to precipitate events in the Dionysian space demonstrates Burroughs' reliance on interaction with the outside world to fuel his Dionysian fantasies. Indeed, Burroughs makes the point that, had he sat around and kept himself amused in the search for "his own words",<sup>105</sup> nothing would have happened to actualise his desire to create text. Because, in Burroughs' opinion, the search for his own words was little more than an endless immersion in his own imaginative space. Therefore, it may be argued that Burroughs' oscillating process of interaction defines his Becoming-Dionysian, which is the cause of his being a writer. He explains:

[T]he County Clerk sequence in *Naked Lunch* derived from contact with the County Clerk in Cold Springs, Texas. It was in fact an elaboration of his monologue, which seemed merely boring at the time, [...] In any case there wouldn't be any County Clerk if I had been sitting on my ass waiting for my 'very own words'.<sup>106</sup>

In an ironic twist of fate for a writer who insisted on total detachment and the importance of the artist as an observer, for Burroughs, remaining in one's personal universe is a dead end for any writer. He insists that it is only through interaction with the real world that the act of writing is possible. He writes:

You've all met the ad man who is going to get out of the rat race, shut himself up in a cabin, and write the Great American Novel. I always tell him, 'Don't cut your input, B.J. – you might need it.' So many times I have been stuck on a story line, can't see where it will go from here; then someone drops around and tells me about fruit-eating fish in Brazil. I got a whole chapter out of that.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>105</sup> William Burroughs, 'Les Voleurs', in *The Adding Machine*, pp. 19-21., p. 19

<sup>106</sup> Burroughs, 'Les Voleurs', p. 19.

<sup>107</sup> Burroughs, 'Les Voleurs', p. 19

Whilst this description of his writing process may seem overtly simplistic, Burroughs' emphasis on the importance of interaction for the writer reveals a vision of the importance of the process of becoming framed in terms of both the experiential reality of the writer and the creative process of the text. In *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs elaborates on the principle of interaction that characterises his Becoming-Dionysian using graphic examples to demonstrate the ways in which the interaction of ideas and thoughts can catalyse exploration in the text. Rather than remaining solely within his personal universe as McLuhan suggests is the point of his intoxication, Burroughs' dynamic process of Becoming-Dionysian contrasts the homoerotic scenario with a reminder of the presence and proximity of the real world by introducing women into the scene he is exploring. Interrupting his carefully orchestrated homoerotic fantasy Burroughs has "[a] horde of lust-mad American women rush in".<sup>108</sup> Through his demonstration of this vital interaction it can be conjectured that Burroughs uses the real world motif of women entering his Dionysian space to illustrate to the reader the premise of interaction and process of Becoming-Dionysian that *Naked Lunch* itself explores.

The women enter Burroughs' male-oriented Dionysian space with the aim of restoring heterosexual order which, in Burroughs' opinion, represents the real world 'natural way of things'. Through the juxtaposition of the all-male erotic world with the attempt of the women to restore sex to a means of reproduction rather than pure pleasure, it can be conjectured that Burroughs uses the intrusion of women as a means of demonstrating the importance of the real world to his Dionysian space both as a source of images and ideas and a defining entity in terms of establishing his own rebellious intent. In the same way that the body supports the addict's addiction, the real world provides the imagery and ideas that Burroughs takes into his Dionysian space. Understanding the relationship between Burroughs' two spaces in this way it may be argued that the intrusion of women into Burroughs' Dionysian space serves as a textual device to expose the integral relationship that his Becoming-Dionysian explores. For Burroughs, women are devious controlling

<sup>108</sup>Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 74.

devices that inhabit the waking world and, courtesy of their omnipresence and anti-sex stance, make morality inevitable and all puritanical laws enforceable.<sup>109</sup> Thus, it comes as no surprise that, for Burroughs, women were one big biological mistake.<sup>110</sup> As such, it may be argued that the intrusion of women into his fantasy shows both his conscious understanding of the relationship between the real world and the Dionysian space his *Becoming-Dionysian* explores, but also reveals his socio-critical subtext as one concerned with revealing the control mechanisms of the social world of which women are both proof and reminder. Burroughs writes:

A horde of lust-mad American women rush in. Dripping cunts from farm and dude ranch, factory, brothel, country club, penthouse and suburb, motel and yacht and cocktail bar, strip off riding clothes, ski togs, evening dresses, levis, tea gowns, print dresses, slacks, bathing suits and kimonos. They scream and yipe and howl, leap on the guests like bitch dogs in heat with rabies. They claw at the hanged boys shrieking "You fairy! You bastard! Fuck me! Fuck me! Fuck me!" The guests flee screaming, dodge among the hanged boys, overturn iron lungs.<sup>111</sup>

For Burroughs, the tyranny of the real world is that it cannot be escaped, once and for all, alive. Burroughs writes: "you cannot leave the human image in the human image. You cannot leave human form in human form".<sup>112</sup> Humanity is condemned to endless oscillation and it may be argued that the same intrusion of women into his Dionysian space heralds the return to the real world that mirrors the intrusion of pain and suffering as the junk hit wears off and the yawning need of the addicted body makes itself apparent.

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<sup>109</sup> Burroughs, *The Job*, p. 115.

<sup>110</sup> William Burroughs, 'Women: A Biological Mistake?', in *The Adding Machine*, pp. 124-126, p. 124. Burroughs also refers to women as a "basic mistake". See: *The Adding Machine*, p. 113.

<sup>111</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 74.

<sup>112</sup> William Burroughs, 'The Beginning is also the End', in *The Burroughs File* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1984), pp. 62-66, p. 64.

#### 4.4.4 The Demonstrative Microcosm: Hospital

Whilst sex both as an idea and as an act served Burroughs' purpose as not only a way to offend readers' sensibilities but also to provide an insightful allegory of the mechanisms of control present in society, Burroughs also used a routine-based scenario to demonstrate the interaction between the real world and the events in his Dionysian space. Using the idea of the hospital as his real world point of departure, Burroughs proceeds to use the same decontextualising technique that he applied to the notion of domesticity (above) in order to explore the interaction between his own fears, those of his reader and the reality of the hospital experience for the withdrawing addict. In appropriating the idea of the hospital, Burroughs can be seen to pull together a number of his thematic threads and ideas in a single example of his Becoming-Dionysian technique. Drawing on his own experience and interweaving the facts of reality, socially accepted ideas of the hospital as a place of healing and the excesses of his own Dionysian space, it is argued here that Burroughs uses the hospital scenes in *Naked Lunch* as a demonstrative microcosm of the collision between his Becoming-Dionysian and the real world that is made up of accepted ideas. Using the real world experience of the hospital, Burroughs is able to demonstrate the ways in which he has begun to appropriate the spaces of his Becoming-Dionysian to further expand his exploration of the diagnostic and didactic themes in his work.

Citing his own withdrawal from junk as the motivation for his admission into the hospital environment, Burroughs moves between the poles of his Dionysian space and the real world in something of a delirium. Just as memories and images float in and out of his Dionysian space with or without catalysing further involvement, Burroughs moves the reader with him from his Dionysian space into the pain of the real world using the concept of coming down or leaving junk as a narrational construct. Viewed within a Becoming-Dionysian frame, the state of withdrawal from junk actualised a stasis equidistant from both the Dionysian space and the real world. Whilst superficially the nightmarish state of withdrawal may appear to have more in

common with the Dionysian space than the real world, given that withdrawal itself is brought about by removing the substance to which the physical body is addicted and therefore is both physical and metaphysical, it becomes apparent that this is not the case. Perhaps in order to reveal to the reader the extent of the revelation of withdrawal, Burroughs describes the stasis it induces as “a nightmare interlude of cellular panic, life suspended between two ways of being”.<sup>113</sup>

Burroughs uses the accessible idea of the Hospital to contextualise withdrawal from junk as painful and his suffering as acute. As a socially designated place for care and treatment, the hospital also creates a setting for an exploration of his delirious and agonised oscillation between the liberated space of what is left of the drug-memory and the sordid and grotesque nature of the reality from which the drug experience was so successful at providing temporary respite. He writes:

*Disintoxication notes.* Paranoia of early withdrawal... Everything looks blue... Flesh dead, doughy, toneless.

*Withdrawal Nightmares.* A mirror-lined café. Empty... Waiting for something... A man appears in a side door... A slight, short Arab dressed in brown jelleba with grey beard and grey face... There is a pitcher of boiling acid in my hand... Seized by a convulsion of urgency, I throw it in his face...

Everyone looks like a drug addict...

Take a little walk in the hospital patio... In my absence someone has used my scissors, they are stained with some sticky red brown gick... no doubt that little bitch of a criada trimming her rag.

Horrible-looking Europeans clutter up the stairs, intercept the nurse when I need my medicine, empty piss into the basin when I am washing, occupy the toilet stall for hours on end – probably looking for a finger stall of diamonds they have stashed up their asshole...<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 56.

<sup>114</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, pp. 55-56.

The reality of the hospital, Burroughs' revulsion at the people around him and the pipe dreams of the addict waiting for the man (designated in the text as a 'withdrawal nightmare') blend seamlessly in Burroughs' new, bilaterally painful universe of suffering. Whereas in the polarised real world of clean vs. addicted there existed two comparatively delineated states of 'high' and 'in search of a fix', the world of withdrawal immerses the addict in a universe apart from the real world, yet not apart enough to enter the confines of the Dionysian space. In withdrawal, the addict is immersed in real, physical and mental pain, enough pain to remove him from his immediate circumstances, yet not enough to negate the impact of his return to the restrictions of the real world.

Inhabiting the space of withdrawal allowed Burroughs to explore and relate to a new experience of an enclosed albeit agonised space that was, for the most part, unable to be appropriated for his Becoming-Dionysian. The discovery of this experience and the rigid parameters within which it took place allowed Burroughs to reconsider and re-imagine the events of his withdrawal from junk in hospital a number of different ways. The setting of the hospital provided a rich point of departure in that it framed not only Burroughs' own vision of the medical profession but allowed readers to bring their own experiences and thoughts on everything from hygiene to surgery with them into Burroughs' horror hospital scenarios. The characters of Dr. Benway, his assistant Violet the Baboon,<sup>115</sup> and the seemingly endless incarnations of addicted and maniacal doctors, nurses, janitors and orderlies serve to illustrate the way in which the hospital and its requisite conceptual and human environs can be appropriated to provide an enclosed and distinct microcosm of Burroughs' personal vision of humanity and experience of the real world.

Intending to make the reader laugh (albeit unintentionally) at themselves and their own understanding of the importance of roles and rightness in the world, Burroughs shows the reader everything they fear about a hospital procedure and the truth behind the façades of respectability and social acceptance they would never dare to question. An excellent example of

<sup>115</sup> This is not a figure of speech; Violet really is a Baboon.

Burroughs' use of the routine as reflexive social comment and a routine for personal amusement is the operation in a toilet performed by Dr. Benway using a plumber's plunger as a heart massage device. After the fountains of spurting blood that follow Benway's ingenious toilet-plunger-administered heart massage and the (somewhat inevitable) death of the patient (to which Benway remarks "all in the day's work"<sup>116</sup>), Benway discovers that someone has cut his cocaine with saniflush and angrily sends out for some more, clean cocaine.<sup>117</sup> In a manner much less graphic and more comic and farcical than his sexual examples (above), it may be argued that by using the idea of the hospital Burroughs was able to show the reader what he most feared about the goings on behind the façade of society and therewith all the institutions that 'deserve' and receive public respect. In the real world the hospital is staffed by highly trained and qualified personnel. The degree of training of the doctors and the role of the hospital as a place of healing create a veneer of respect towards the institution. For Burroughs this respect for the hospital and the qualifications of its staff translates into a lack of desire to question the authority of the institution. This lack of desire to question protects society and civilisation itself from change. Burroughs uses the example of the hospital to make one of his most salient didactic points: society is an illusion that takes itself seriously. Through the characters of the cocaine-crazed Benway and the indifferent nurses it can be suggested that Burroughs seeks to demonstrate the prevalence of the addict as acceptable, if not usual, in all and every sphere of human being. Indeed, in 'Hospital', Burroughs may be seen to support his theory that most people don't see what's going on around them and, most certainly, most people don't question anything they're told.

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<sup>116</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 59.

<sup>117</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, pp. 58-59.

#### 4.4.5 Everyone's an Addict: Civil Myopia and the Big, Bad, Morality Con

As with Burroughs' hospital routine which used the farfetched character of Benway operating in a toilet without so much as anyone blinking an eye in amazement, Burroughs' insistence that the President of the United States of America is an addict is at once humorous and fundamental to his attempt to show what he considers to be the ubiquitous points of interaction between the real world and the addicted world of the junk addict. For Burroughs, "all desire is addiction",<sup>118</sup> and whilst Burroughs himself actualised this desire in accessing his Dionysian space, it is his opinion that the desire to be beyond the real world should be a unifying force for all addicts. Indeed, it may be argued that when Burroughs speaks of the moral majority with disgust, his disgust may be informed to a certain extent by a level of respect for the ability of the moral masses to sustain their presence in a space that, in Burroughs' opinion, is about as relevant to the real world and the human condition as his own Dionysian realm. For Burroughs, the classifications and social divisions of one addict as socially sanctioned and therewith right and one as wrong are quite simply ridiculous and serve to illustrate the omnipresent and arbitrary control mechanisms of society and civilisation at work. This being the case, by qualifying the President as an addict, Burroughs may be seen to demonstrate to the reader his vision that the entire human race is addicted; even the holiest of holy figures from Buddha<sup>119</sup> to the President is addicted to something.

For Burroughs, the difference between the President, Buddha and the junk addict on the street lies only in what he considers the ridiculous notions of social convention and social restriction that define ideas of respect and prevent revelation, relation and the demonstration of truth. In Burroughs' universe, the nakedness of the junk addict in the face of his need

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<sup>118</sup> Ihab Hassan, 'The Subtracting Machine: The work of William Burroughs', in *William Burroughs at the Front: Critical Reception, 1959 – 1989*, ed. by Jennie Skerl and Robin Lydenberg (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), pp. 53 – 68, p. 63.

<sup>119</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 97



has a redeeming honesty; as an addict to junk he has nothing, and no social convention behind which to hide. As junk initiates a high that fades as the chemical leaves the blood stream, it achieves no degree of symbiosis with its taker as another fix is required to re-enter the intoxicated space and it is therefore seen as unstable and undesirable to society. Burroughs explains socially-sanctioned addiction as a state in which the object and subject of the addiction have achieved a level of symbiosis that Burroughs explains using the metaphor of viral infection, insisting that once "the virus has achieved some level of symbiosis with the host, it is not seen as a virus".<sup>120</sup>

Using the example of the advent of religion and consciousness as the beginning of civilised addiction to control and command, Burroughs outlines his understanding of the inherent symbiosis present between the viruses of language and religion with humanity as the host. Indeed, Burroughs views the release of people from the comfortable symbiotic civilised relationship into which they have evolved as akin to the transition of vertebrates from sea to land-dwelling creatures, writing:

In the beginning was the word and the word was God. And what does that make us? Ventriloquist dummies. Time to leave the Word-God behind. 'He atrophied and fell off me like horrible old gills' a survivor reported. 'And I feel ever so much better.'<sup>121</sup>

As with both Nietzsche and Rimbaud before him, Burroughs views religion as a farce invented by the addict to create a veneer of respectability for their addiction and therewith abdicate responsibility for their own life, happiness and existence. Again, extending and exploring concerns with the control mechanisms of society raised in *Queer*, Burroughs reveals politics, sport, money and religion as all being addictions, and, what is more, ultimately no better than the more flagrant and unacceptable addiction to junk.

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<sup>120</sup> Robin Adams, 'Viral Theory', in *Burroughs Live: The Collected Interviews of William S. Burroughs 1960-1997*, pp. 464-467, p. 467.

<sup>121</sup> William Burroughs, 'On Coincidence', in *The Adding Machine*, pp. 97-103, p. 103.

It can reasonably be conjectured that by stating so clearly that religion itself is an opiate, Burroughs is in fact extending and demonstrating his desire to involve and incite the reader to interact with his thought. By suggesting that the holy figures revered by religion themselves created the religion for the purposes of sating their own addiction, Burroughs throws out a direct challenge to his readers to reassess their beliefs and the role of these beliefs in the context of addiction and control. Thus, in attempting to demonstrate to the reader the extent to which they are unknowingly embroiled in their own addiction, conned by the creator of the drug and kept alive and preventing insight by thwarting questions, it may be argued that Burroughs is hoping to catalyse a reaction or realisation that may itself lead to a greater involvement on behalf of the reader with their own existential situation. Burroughs writes:

“*Buddha?* A notorious metabolic junky... Makes his own you dig. In India, where they got no sense of time, The Man is often a month late ... ‘Now let me see, is that the second or the third monsoon? I got a meet in Ketchupore about more or less.’

“And all them junkies sitting around in the lotus posture spitting on the ground and waiting on The Man.

“So Buddha says: ‘I don’t hafta take this sound. I’ll by God metabolise my own junk.’

“Man you can’t do that. The Revcnooers will swarm all over you.’

“Over me they won’t swarm. I gotta gimmick, see? I’m a fuckin Holy Man as of right now.’

“‘Jeez, boss, what an angle.’<sup>122</sup>

Religion is yet another (and, it can be conjectured, the most effective of) Burroughs’ metaphors for legalised, institutionalised addiction. And as with all addictions, it is controlled by a body of people who profit from the addicts’ inability to get off the junk; “*Mohammed?* Are you kidding? He was dreamed up by the Mecca Chamber of Commerce. An Egyptian ad man on the skids from the sauce write the continuity”.<sup>123</sup> As “all desire is

<sup>122</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 97.

<sup>123</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 97.

addiction”<sup>124</sup> in Burroughs’ world, it may be argued that addiction is a, if not the only, human truth. In many ways, Burroughs’ satirical missive against the irony of legalised addiction (above) is remarkably similar to his angry damnation of the junk industry in the introduction to *Naked Lunch*. For Burroughs the only difference between religion, desire and heroin is that the example of junk is more graphic, more noticeable, less widespread and leaves needle marks and ulcerated craters at the points of entry of the medium. Indeed, it may be argued that for Burroughs the sole point of difference between addiction to junk and addiction to God is physical: whilst religion may leave the addict with mental scars and a pronounced lack of personal causal capacity, religion does not give the user visible weeping infected sores into which you insert the words of the ‘prophets’.

Using the metaphor of junk, junk sickness and the junk economy Burroughs makes his point that human nature is fundamentally addicted to any and everything. The importance of his Becoming-Dionysian project in this exposing this fact lies in what he deems to be the necessity of the truths the project has allowed him to expose.<sup>125</sup> Understanding Burroughs’ project as revealing some truth is in direct contrast to the dismissive conjecture of critics such as David Lodge, who considered that Burroughs’ ability to reveal important insights into being human was based on what he considered to be the fashionable idea that “the junkie’s delirium reveals truth”.<sup>126</sup> It may be argued that Burroughs’ project to explore the relationships and interactions between his Dionysian space and the real world provides access to spaces in which new perspectives and relationships are explored, considered and experienced. Acting as a conduit, observer and explorer between the Dionysian realm and the real world gave Burroughs a unique range of movement and perspective that he exploited and explored in the extended experiment of *Naked Lunch*. It is true that, as a social entity, Burroughs lived in the real

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<sup>124</sup> Hassan, ‘The Subtracting Machine: The work of William Burroughs’, p. 63.

<sup>125</sup> Exposing the ‘real world’ as consumed by its own addictions to propriety and righteousness was the theme of several of Burroughs’ later works. See: William Burroughs, ‘Day the Records Went Up’, in *Evergreen Review*, 60 (November 1968), 47-78.

<sup>126</sup> Lodge, p.78.

world and in parts of it that most people have never seen. However, due to his actualising a Dionysian space apart from the real world he was capable of taking these memories, sensations and images away from their sources and connecting them in ways that were not possible within the confines of the restricted real world and the rigid definition of a social self.

#### 4.5 The Cut-Up: A “How-To” Guide and a Becoming-Dionysian Diagram Enacted

Whilst the present examination of Burroughs' work using Becoming-Dionysian argues that junk initiated Burroughs into a Dionysian space of otherness upon which he came to rely in his creation of text, Burroughs' fascination with the creative necessity of other spaces and new perspectives did not end at the point of a needle. Whilst the texts examined in this chapter are not explicitly products of the cut-up process,<sup>127</sup> it may be argued that the cut-up<sup>128</sup> was brought into being by the schematisation of his creative process which itself explored the interaction between the space of otherness created by intoxication and his rational consciousness. Indeed, the cut-up may be valuably viewed as a schematisation or distillation of Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian, insofar as by explaining the cut-up as an act, an idea and a process Burroughs made explicit the movement between the real world and his own Dionysian space that characterised his creative practice. Schematising his Becoming-Dionysian process into a technique, Burroughs was able to demonstrate the proximity of new spaces of otherness available to the creative artist, spaces that were brought about by the simple act of decontextualising and merging previously otherwise contextualised meanings and

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<sup>127</sup> Burroughs did not schematise the cut-up until 1959-1960. See: Timothy Murphy, *Wising up the Marks*, p. 11.

<sup>128</sup> Burroughs credited the invention of the cut-up to his close friend and collaborator Brion Gysin, however, the first extended examination of the cut-up as a technique entitled *The Third Mind* lists both Gysin and Burroughs as authors.

images. It is the use of these new images and the process undertaken by the artist in relating to the sensations and ideas they create that may be seen as providing the correlation between Burroughs' own Becoming-Dionysian and the process of relation that takes place in the cut-up.

One important role played by the cut-up in this examination of Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian is the way in which the cut-up formalises the role of spaces of otherness brought about by a lack of conscious control in the creative process. Like the Becoming-Dionysian seen at work in Burroughs' novels (above), the cut-up demonstrates the importance for the creative process of realising a space of otherness. In the case of the cut-up specifically, the process is designed to reveal new facts, images and sensations within written texts to which the writer must then relate in order to create. Aptly named, the cut-up technique involved cutting sections from a newspaper, novel or advertisement (or any other word based printed material) and pasting the sections together to form new texts from the cut-out sections of writing. In a comment that may be read as relating the cut-up to his own creative process, Burroughs himself stated that the fusion of two or more unrelated texts enabled a new world through a new vision which was created using all the elements of the old one in which "the meaning of the message was left to chance".<sup>129</sup> Because the cut-up process took elements from one state and re-ordered them through their relocation in a new text, the cut-up echoes the role of Burroughs' junk-induced Dionysian space; both provide a significant realm of otherness related to, but apart from, rational reality as a whole.

Burroughs insists that his cut-ups are "scientific experiments",<sup>130</sup> asserting that such experiments reflect the "practical work of the writer [which] is a continuous experiment".<sup>131</sup> Clarifying the connection between life and the experiment of creativity in a way that may be seen to relate directly to both the cut-up as a technique and the principle of Becoming-Dionysian as

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<sup>129</sup> William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind* (London: Calder, 1979), p. 14.

<sup>130</sup> Robin Lydenberg, *Word Cultures* (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p. 53.

<sup>131</sup> Lydenberg, p. 53.

a whole, Burroughs and Gysin explain:

I can tell you nothing that you do not know. I can show you nothing that you have not seen. [...] you cannot cut up in your head any more than I can paint in my head. Whatever you do in your head bears the prerecorded pattern of your head. Cut through that pattern if you want something new.<sup>132</sup>

Understanding Gysin and Burroughs' emphasis on the need to 'cut through the patterns of your head' as a metaphor for escaping the civilised thought patterns that characterise inclusion in the social space, this chapter argues that the cutting and rearranging of the images and ideas involved in the cut-up represents a physical rendering of Burroughs' creative process of Becoming-Dionysian which is reliant on the severing of conscious control brought about by junk. That is to say, in the cut-up, the 'otherness' and random junctures of words and hitherto unconnected meanings that become apparent on the page, make use of the page in exactly the same way as Burroughs used his Dionysian space; as a liberated space beyond the physical and social world. As such, the act of dissection that the cut-up entails, is in effect, the act of separation from text and the socially determined human element of text that is context.<sup>133</sup>

Also making the correlation between the cut-up and the role of intoxicants in realising a space of otherness that is central to Burroughs' creative process, Malcolm Bradbury acknowledges the importance of the intoxicated space to Burroughs' textual experiments. Indeed, Bradbury also cites the similarity between the intoxicated space initiated by junk and the random accumulation of meanings and images produced by the cut-up, and insists that Burroughs used the cut-up and that which is here termed the Dionysian space initiated by intoxication in very much the same way. Bradbury writes:

<sup>132</sup> Burroughs and Gysin, *The Third Mind*, p. 44.

<sup>133</sup> Eric Mottram, *William Burroughs: The Algebra of Need* (London: Marion Boyars, 1977), p. 57.

[Burroughs’ work] owes much to collage and chance association depending on ‘junk’ in two senses: junk as drugs [...] and junk as cultural rubbish randomly collected. Thus, Burroughs’ work used drug-like or drug-induced states to assimilate the floating detritus and loose images of contemporary American life, which he saw with a bitter and anachronistic rage.<sup>134</sup>

As Bradbury suggests, just as that which is here termed Burroughs’ Dionysian space was actualised within the pre-existing realm of the physical world, through dissection and random rearrangement the cut-up created a new space within a pre-existing universe of text and ideas. Burroughs explains: “A page of Rimbaud cut up and rearranged will give you quite new images, Rimbaud images — real Rimbaud images — but new ones”.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, Burroughs’ chosen example reveals the intimacy of the relationship between the means and aims of his Becoming-Dionysian project and the concrete steps by and through which a space with new possibilities can be opened that mirrors the tangible role of the Dionysian space of junk for the author. Again using reality or artefacts of the real world (such as newspaper clippings and the word itself) as points of departure, it can be conjectured that the cut-up is a “revolutionary gesture”<sup>136</sup> because it is a schematisation of the elements of Burroughs’ own creative process of relation that is here understood as Becoming-Dionysian.

Expanding on the theme of practicality in defence of the cut-up as truly revolutionary, Burroughs insists that it is only through a technique such as the cut-up that reality can be successfully bypassed. Yet the escape from, and return to, reality was itself the core of Burroughs’ Becoming-Dionysian process explored in *Naked Lunch*, a process that was successfully and importantly underway well before the cut-up became a part of his textual landscape. In many ways, the theory that surrounds the cut-up can be seen as Burroughs’ own attempt to rationalise and make concrete the essentially

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<sup>134</sup> Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern American Novel*, p. 190.

<sup>135</sup> Knickerbocker, p. 25.

<sup>136</sup> Mottram, p. 57.

experiential process of Becoming-Dionysian he continued to undergo as a creator throughout his life. As such the cut-up was a practical experiment "in the sense of being something to do",<sup>137</sup> and as such presented an alternative to junk as a means of realising new spaces. Burroughs writes:

If writers are to travel in space and time and explore new areas opened by the space age, I think they must develop techniques [...] a new form of writing with time and space shifts as we see events from different view points and realise that so seen they are not literally the same events, and that the old concepts of time and reality are no longer valid.<sup>138</sup>

The act of cutting up (and Burroughs' fold-in variation of the cut-up process<sup>139</sup>) was intended to "free the text from the page"<sup>140</sup> by fracturing the meaning of a text as a whole and breaking it down into randomly derived elements. By destroying the textual context and sub-textual themes present within the text as a whole, the cut-up intended to allow a re-ordering of the words as they were randomly placed next to one-another to reveal new ideas and chains of hitherto unimagined experience and possibility. For Burroughs, the cut-up "perverts scriptural practice in the sense that the space-time of the text is distorted."<sup>141</sup> Practically seen, it was a do-it-yourself more physical version of Rimbaud's project to rid words of their contexts and meanings and to start again.<sup>142</sup> As such, and as with Burroughs' junk experiences seen in *Naked Lunch*, the idea of the cut-up was to present the author with a

<sup>137</sup> Burroughs and Gysin, *The Third Mind*, p. 31.

<sup>138</sup> William Burroughs, 'Fold-ins', in *The Third Mind*, pp. 95-101, p. 95.

<sup>139</sup> Burroughs' addition to the idea of the cut-up was called the fold-in. The fold-in was based on folding two pieces of text covered paper directly down the centre and joining them together, a technique he uses frequently in the composition of his later works such as *Place of the Dead Roads* and *Cities of the Red Night*.

<sup>140</sup> Burroughs and Gysin, *The Third Mind*, p. 20.

<sup>141</sup> Burroughs and Gysin, *The Third Mind*, p. 21.

<sup>142</sup> The desire to rid words of their settings to create something 'new' was also appropriated by the Dadaist Tristan Tzara. The history of this concept of physical separation of the word from the greater picture of communicated meaning is outlined in Anne Friedberg's essay "Cut-ups": A Synema of the Text', in *Downtown Review*, 1.1 (1979), 3-5.



revealing and new insight through the newly chaotic juxtaposition of words and ideas composed of the same elements as was his waking consciousness. However, the presentation of these cut-ups and fold-ins using the printed word of newspaper or the novels of others as art or literature was limited, as *The Third Mind* often illustrates.

Despite its limitations, it is important to remember that Burroughs' tangible and practical extension of the Becoming-Dionysian project using the cut-up as a point of inception, is a beginning. After all, as Burroughs himself is quick to point out “somebody has to *do* the cutting up.”<sup>143</sup> Indeed, Anthony Enns' essay ‘Burroughs's Writing Machines’ may be read as supporting Burroughs' point that the cut-up and fold-in present a “mosaic of information”,<sup>144</sup> to which the creative artist must then relate. As such, when David Lodge criticises the cut-up by asking “but does their composition create any significant new meaning? I think not”,<sup>145</sup> he is misunderstanding the cut-up as an idea by supposing that the new slab of text produced by the cut-and-paste technique was the end point of the process. Having done the cutting and pasting, the artist had to explore the spaces and ideas that cut-up had created. Indeed, Burroughs credits the cut-up with making explicit what he perceives to be the all-important points of intersection between ideas and possibilities. Commenting on the relevance of the cut-up as a stylistic technique or method he declares:

The points of intersection are very important. [...] In cutting up you will get a point of intersection where the new material that you have intersects with what is already there in some precise way, and then you start from there.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>143</sup> Burroughs and Gysin, *The Third Mind*, p. 8.

<sup>144</sup> Anthony Enns, ‘Burroughs's Writing Machines’, in *Retaking the Universe: William S. Burroughs in the Age of Globalization*, ed. by Davis Schneiderman and Philip Walsh (London; Sterling: Pluto, 2004), pp. 95-115, p. 105.

<sup>145</sup> David Lodge, ‘Objections to Burroughs’, in *William Burroughs at the Front: Critical Reception, 1959 – 1989*, ed. by Jennie Skerl and Robin Lydenberg (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), pp. 75-84, p. 80.

<sup>146</sup> William Burroughs, *The Job: Interviews with William Burroughs*, ed. by Daniel Odier (London: Cape, 1970), pp. 16-17.

Yet even though the cut-up provides a valuable physical analogy of the tangible processes of Burroughs' own Becoming-Dionysian, the fact remains that the end-point of the cut-up exercise is the beginning of the process of exploration characteristic of a Becoming-Dionysian journey. Whilst the cut-up may give the writer the key to access a space whose existence had hitherto never been considered, it remains for the writer to appropriate and discover the space and its relationship to the world from which he came and to begin to explore and create with the possibilities and ideas he takes with him, both into the space and back to the world in and through text. Burroughs writes:

What does any writer do but choose, edit and rearrange material at his disposal? – The fold-in method gives the writer literally infinite extension of choice – Take for example a page of Rimbaud folded into a page of St John Perse – (two poets who have much in common) – From two pages an infinite number of combinations and images are possible – The method could also lead to a collaboration between writers on an unprecedented scale to produce works that were the composite effort of any number of writers living and dead<sup>147</sup>

As such, the title of the book (*The Third Mind*)<sup>148</sup> in which such explanations appear itself explicates in many ways the use of the physical reality of a written text as a plane of conversation between the work of more than one artist. In this way, it can be conjectured that the page is intended to function as an external third mind in that it can be seen as a plane of interaction between two artists and a source of new collaborative images evolving from the page itself. Burroughs admits that he has “made and used fold-ins from Shakespeare, Rimbaud, from newspapers, magazines, conversations and

<sup>147</sup> Burroughs and Gysin, *The Third Mind*, p. 96.

<sup>148</sup> The title of Burroughs and Gysin's collaborative endeavour was derived from the following line from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* “Who is the third who walks always beside you?” (1.360) Lydenberg contests that the title *The Third Mind* was used by Burroughs and Gysin to “designate the collaborative consciousness which could be generated by the cut-up method”. Lydenberg, p. 45.

letters”, conceding that his own work is, therefore, a “composite production of many writers”.<sup>149</sup>

Burroughs went on to use the method of the cut-up and fold-in in the creation of his later novels. Yet, significantly Burroughs chose, for the most part, to write his own texts, which he then dissected. That is to say, he chose to return to the creation of text himself and to cut-up and fold-in his own universe of experiences and ideas once again.<sup>150</sup> By choosing to use his own writing to cut-up in order to create a new space to which he must then relate, Burroughs highlights a new role for the text as separate from the author. Indeed, by returning to his own material Burroughs demonstrates the validity of Nietzsche’s assertion concerning the text as having a reality, trajectory and life of its own. Burroughs’ desire to cut-up and fold-in his own writing also demonstrates the flexible boundaries of self and otherness that defined his human experience. By relating to his own texts as *other* the dissection and assemblage of which can in turn create new spaces, Burroughs not only shows the idea of self as static to be of little use to his creative process, but also such a practice may be read as affirmation of creativity as an eternal becoming. No end *can* be reached in Burroughs’ creative Becoming-Dionysian. No text is so final that it cannot be used to find new things and to explore new spaces. Burroughs continued to perform random cut-ups and fold-ins for a great deal of his creative life and cut-up material and word juxtapositions found in his scrapbooks continued to find their way into his published work.

In many ways, Burroughs’ schematisation of the project of Becoming-Dionysian using the mechanised procedure of the cut-up returned him once more to his themes of control and possession. Indeed, it can be conjectured that the dissection of the physical space of the page and the act of cutting up already existing meaning structures was so important to the cut-up

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<sup>149</sup> Burroughs and Gysin, *The Third Mind*, p. 96.

<sup>150</sup> When describing *Nova Express* to an interviewer, Burroughs explained “Joyce is in there. Shakespeare, Rimbaud, some writers that people haven’t heard about, someone named Jack Stern. There’s Kerouac. [...] Genet, of course [...] Also Kafka, Eliot, and one of my favourites is Joseph Conrad.” Knickerbocker, pp. 27-28.

because it allowed Burroughs to demonstrate the proximity of new possibilities and new perspectives from the material produced within a defined social space. Perhaps more importantly, Burroughs' schematisation of his discovery of process of Becoming-Dionysian that was the cut-up facilitated, to a certain extent, his desire to initiate others into the Becoming-Dionysian awareness he enjoyed. Whereas Rimbaud gave as an outline in his *Lettres du Voyant* a set of instructions for reaching the state of poethood, Burroughs produced a diagram and a series of actions, which, when followed, placed before the writer a page upon which new possibilities were waiting to be discovered. Burroughs writes:

Take any poet or writer you fancy. Here, say, or poems you have read over many times. The words have lost meaning and life through years of repetition. Now take the poem and type out selected passages. Fill a page with excerpts. Now cut the page. You have a new poem. As many poems as you like. As many Shakespeare Rimbaud poems as you like. [...] Poetry is a place and it is free to all to cut up Rimbaud and you are in Rimbaud's place.<sup>151</sup>

Understanding poetry and by extension literature as a space, like Rimbaud before him Burroughs may be seen as defining the role of text as a plane actualised by the writer upon which to explore his own Becoming-Dionysian interaction. In addition, through the emphasis of the cut-up on working with that which the writer is already familiar, Burroughs may also be seen as explaining the dynamic relationship between the real world and the Dionysian space seen in *Naked Lunch*. As such, seen in the concise example of the cut-up, Burroughs' understanding of his own creative process can be perceived as involving the movement of the first-person between the different spaces of the Dionysian and the real, using the plane of the page.

<sup>151</sup> Burroughs and Gysin, *The Third Mind*, p. 31.

## 4.6 Conclusion

Rather than make Burroughs' novels a more comfortable space for the reader, the usefulness of Becoming-Dionysian as a critical tool in the examination of Burroughs' texts has been its ability to show the Dionysian space of 'otherness' upon which Burroughs relied in order to create and explore the worlds and modes of being that form and inform his text. In providing the means to access these patterns, using Becoming-Dionysian allows Burroughs' creative experiment to illustrate the very human nature of the chasm between the Dionysian space of experiential immersion and the real world through his own experiences of oscillation. Throughout his life, Burroughs remained committed to the written text as an important and authentic tool for exploration, commenting indignantly to one interviewer: "[a]ll my books express what I actually believe in, or I wouldn't be writing them".<sup>152</sup> However, using Becoming-Dionysian as a frame through which to view Burroughs' work and creative process, it can be suggested that not only did Burroughs express what he actually believed in, he also explored in his writings that which he had himself experienced.

In the context of an examination of his Becoming-Dionysian relationship to and with creativity and experience, Burroughs writes: "A writer may speak through his characters or rather they speak through him. As a Hindu agent once said to me: "You may call Hassan I Sabbah to write for you. You will stay to write for Hassan I Sabbah".<sup>153</sup> Such a comment can be read as providing (albeit inadvertently) an insightful analogy of Burroughs' own experiences with the state of otherness or Dionysian space he called into being through his use of junk.

Instead of providing a succinct and compact example of a Becoming-Dionysian exploration in the manner of Rimbaud, Burroughs' work demon-

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<sup>152</sup> Jim Mcmenamin, 'The Non-Body Route', in *Burroughs Live: The Collected Interviews of William S. Burroughs 1960-1997*, pp. 670-690, p. 670.

<sup>153</sup> William Burroughs, 'Introduction to Naked Lunch, The Soft Machine, Novia Express', in *Evergreen Review*, 6, number 22 (1962), 99-102, p. 99.

strates a more rambling, oscillating and fragmented Becoming-Dionysian experiment based on the inescapable cycles of need and liberation. Burroughs' Becoming-Dionysian journey complements that of Rimbaud in its explosive and savage, almost Sadeian anti-human voracity. Burroughs uses his personal voice to assault and ridicule the world that gave him the words with which his textual universe is composed. Like the Marquis de Sade, by absenting himself from the real world that laws control, Burroughs longs to "outrage nature [...] to upset her plans"<sup>154</sup> and yet, time after time he returns to the real world realising that it can not be escaped in human form. This continued failure to escape, once and for all, alive, reminded Burroughs, as it reminded Sade before him; "this I am unable to do".<sup>155</sup> However rather than produce tirades in the manner of de Sade, Burroughs uses his situation to his advantage, exploring his oscillation between the two poles of his being so as to bring about a Becoming-Dionysian that, this chapter argues, bring his texts into being.

Unlike Rimbaud's abandonment of poetry, and rather than lament his inability to conquer nature in the void of self-pity, Burroughs continued to investigate a process of Becoming-Dionysian and to explore his role as a conduit and navigator until his death. Burroughs concludes his notebooks with a sentiment barely conceivable in the cynical and satirical spectrum of *Naked Lunch*, yet just as concerned with actualising a realm apart from the temporal concerns of reality as was the narcotic-analgesic addicted junkie: "Love? What is it? Most natural painkiller what there is. LOVE".<sup>156</sup>

Again, and as with Rimbaud before him, through his own intense involvement with his processes of Becoming-Dionysian, Burroughs demonstrates to and conjoins with the reader in their own process of becoming by creating an experiential personal universe that mirrors to a greater extent the movements undergone by the reader in the context of their own becomings. It

<sup>154</sup> Marquis de Sade, *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Writings*, trans. by Austryn Wainhouse and Richard Seaver (London: Arrow, 1990), p. 63.

<sup>155</sup> Sade, p. 63.

<sup>156</sup> William Burroughs, *Last Words*, ed. by James Grauerholz (London: Flamingo, 2000), p. 253

was the desire to have the reader actively engage with their own world and their own possibility that can be seen as being made actual throughout the demonstrative excesses of *Naked Lunch*. These forces can be seen at work again motivating the schematisation of Burroughs' in the cut-up. As such, it may be argued that Burroughs truly wants his readers to "see what is on the end of that long newspaper spoon"<sup>157</sup> and realise their relationship to and with the world in which they live.

Burroughs is not alone in his commitment to the process of Becoming-Dionysian across and including a lifetime. Echoing Burroughs' minimal involvement with Beat as a movement and Rimbaud's almost total literary isolation, English painter Francis Bacon was not part of any cohesive artistic movement and immersed himself in an exploration of being that recognised the primacy of human experience. Like Burroughs, Bacon is critically praised for using the lens of his personal experiences to look life straight in the face, and in his painting he seeks to explore, as accurately as possible, the content and experience of his nervous system; that is to say, to explore and communicate using paint what it was like to be *human*.

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<sup>157</sup> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 12.





## Chapter 5

# The Fight Between Accident and Criticism: Francis Bacon and the Image as a Tightrope

That which is static and repetitive is boring. That which dynamic and random is confusing. In between lies art.

- John Locke

### 5.1 Introduction

As has been shown in the preceding two chapters, both Burroughs and Rimbaud used a process identifiable as Becoming-Dionysian in their creative and artistic endeavour. However, the Becoming-Dionysian argued here to be at work in the works of Burroughs and Rimbaud is not limited in application only to creative processes leading to poetry and prose. Indeed, this chapter argues that twentieth century English painter Francis Bacon used a process of Becoming-Dionysian, discernable in his paintings, to explore in his work his own experience of being human.

Much like the works of Burroughs and Rimbaud in the context of their own respective genres, Bacon's art is neither representational nor abstract. Using the critical tool of Becoming-Dionysian, this chapter examines the way in which Bacon 'explores' rather than represents or depicts his own understanding of human reality as shaped by a plethora of interactions in his painting. By using the concept of Becoming-Dionysian to provide a structure through which to view Bacon's creative process, this chapter argues that Bacon's paintings can be seen as themselves a part of his own greater creative project to explore human reality using his own experiences as a basis.

Bacon's work in both the critical and popular contexts is often seen as a manifestation of "the horrific theme in visual art";<sup>1</sup> and as providing "obscenely horrific imagery of the mutilated human form".<sup>2</sup> This chapter contends that such blatant and sensational simplification of Bacon's work is a reaction to the sensory immediacy and the honesty of Bacon's exploration of the human condition. Drawing from Bacon's own understanding of human nature and the relationship between human nature and art, this chapter uses the structure provided by Becoming-Dionysian as a framework through which to analyse Bacon's painting. Using Becoming-Dionysian as the structure for this analysis allows the examination of the way in which Bacon used his own experience in his work. Indeed, by understanding Bacon's painting as itself an exemplar of a Becoming-Dionysian process, this chapter argues that both Bacon's creative motivation and his technical development and their role in Bacon's desire to "make images as accurately off my nervous system as I can"<sup>3</sup> may be understood with greater clarity.

Sam Hunter describes the personal perspective of Bacon's creative endeavour succinctly when he writes: "Bacon feels his art represents the simple,

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<sup>1</sup> This was the title of an article that considered Bacon as a proponent thereof. See: 'The Horrific Theme in Visual Art', in *The Times*, 29 May 1962, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Hunter, 'Metaphor and Meaning in Francis Bacon', in *Francis Bacon* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1989), pp. 27-38, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Bacon cited in David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987), p. 82. Unless otherwise specified within the body of the text, all citations from *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon* reproduced in this study are Bacon.

unalloyed truth of existence as he perceives it".<sup>4</sup> Bacon himself considered the key motivation behind his work to be the exploration of the reality of his own human experience. Bacon explains: "if I work as closely as possible to my own sensibility, there is a possibility that the image will have a greater reality".<sup>5</sup> Taking Bacon's use of the term 'sensibility' in the traditional philosophical designation of the term as defining the realms of emotion and perception as distinct from cognition or will, Bacon's statement may be seen to reveal the foundation of that which is here termed his Becoming-Dionysian. The essence of this focus is Bacon's belief that by adhering to his own instinctive and conscious experiences and developing his imagery and technique in order to remain as close as possible to these states and their interaction, the image he creates will invent a reality that is closer to the reality of his own being and experience in the world. As such, this chapter argues that Bacon's entire corpus may be understood as a reach toward exploring using the areas and spaces of paint and canvas, visions, realisations and experiences still to be explored in art. This being the case, Bacon's exploration of his own human experience in art demonstrates the theoretically endless or infinite Becoming-Dionysian process. Bacon explains: "I hope to go on painting until I die and, of course, if you did one absolutely perfect image, you would never do anything more".<sup>6</sup>

In a world in which a perfect likeness of appearance alone could be made, easily and cheaply by photography, the role of art, and indeed the role of realism, required new definition. Bacon critic John Russell notes that with the advent of photography and moving images, the role of observation and creation that were the vital element in painting withered and that it was Bacon's purpose as an artist to "bring that something back to life".<sup>7</sup> In order to explain his understanding of the importance of human reality to artistic and creative endeavour, Bacon needed to make explicit his own definition of the human condition. Fundamentally, Bacon understood the human experience

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<sup>4</sup> Hunter, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 107.

<sup>7</sup> Russell, p. 59.

as bipolar in nature. For Bacon, human reality consisted of an interior world of sensation and an exterior reality of physical being. That is to say that for Bacon, alongside the appearance or physical facts of objects and states there are a whole host of other, equally valid, "inner realities"<sup>8</sup> such as instinct, emotion and sensation, which are also a part of his understanding of that which constitutes human reality. Relating this assertion to his artistic endeavour, Bacon insists: "realism in art must not be confused with the simple desire to give a translation, in convincing terms, of objectively existing phenomena".<sup>9</sup> In accordance with such an understanding, this chapter argues that in his art Bacon retains a focus on the exploration of his own experience of human being as a continual and shifting flux between these 'inner' and 'outer' realities of appearance and energy. Indeed, it is the exploration of the interaction of these two realities on the canvas that this chapter argues is the defining characteristic of his Becoming-Dionysian creative process.

Using the concept of Becoming-Dionysian as a means of approaching the process involved in the creation of Bacon's paintings, the fundamental dualism Bacon identified as extant between the inner and the real world can be seen as providing the basis for the conceptual frame, content and method of his art. The synthesis of personal experience and external reality clearly seen in the work of both Burroughs and Rimbaud is also the defining feature of Bacon's painting. As such, the way in which Bacon includes both the experiential aspects of 'inner reality' alongside physical appearance through the development of a dynamic creative process in painting which had in the past chosen merely to "give a translation, in convincing terms, of objectively existing phenomena",<sup>10</sup> can be seen as substantiation for his inclusion in the present study of Becoming-Dionysian.

Rather than subscribe to the more traditional method of criticism applied to painting, namely the apprehension of the whole corpus of a particular artist, this chapter does not view Bacon's work as manifesting a series of

<sup>8</sup> Michel Leiris, *Francis Bacon: Full Face and in Profile*, trans. by John Weightman (New York: Rizzoli International, 1988), p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Bacon cited in Leiris, *Francis Bacon: Full Face and in Profile*, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Leiris, *Francis Bacon: Full Face and in Profile*, p. 13.

evolving, painted motifs. Rather, by employing Becoming-Dionysian as the framework for this analysis, this chapter argues that Bacon's work is usefully seen as the exploration of a number of interactions. The first step in the development of Bacon's exploration of his own human experience using a Becoming-Dionysian frame is his definition of realism as a genre and the application of the term realism to his work. Bacon specifically refers to his art using the term 'realism', making the point that in his painting he strives for "realism equivalent to the subject matter".<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Bacon was adamant that art do more than mirror an external phenomenon or truth. In this way, it may be conjectured that the 'realism in art' to which Bacon refers is in fact a process of exploring, rather than simply reflecting, the truth of human being played out in the arena that paint and canvas provide. Bacon defines this truth in relation to his painting as the exploration of the constantly fluctuating symbiosis between the appearance of a subject and "the energy within the appearance".<sup>12</sup>

## 5.2 The Reach Toward a Human Realism

For a painter whose work is anything but photo realistic, it may seem ironic that Bacon was insistent that his work had legitimate claim to the title of realism.<sup>13</sup> However, Bacon understood his work as "realist" in nature.<sup>14</sup> This chapter argues that, by understanding his work as manifesting the essence of realism, Bacon demonstrates the central role played by personal experience in his understanding of the 'real'. Indeed, by choosing to label his work with the title realism, Bacon may be seen to foreground the role of experience and the exploration thereof in his art. Bacon rejects the

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<sup>11</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 182.

<sup>12</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 175.

<sup>13</sup> James T. Demetron, 'Foreword', in *Francis Bacon* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1989), pp. 7-9, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Wieland Schmeid, *Francis Bacon: Commitment and Conflict* (Munich; New York, Prestel, 1996), p. 106.

idea that realism in art is intended only to reflect the appearance of the subject. Instead, Bacon strove to create an art that explored the first-person experience and knowledge of an object, not just its image. Such art was to be “a realism equivalent to the subject-matter”.<sup>15</sup>

Within the context of the greater realistic tradition in visual art, pertaining as it does to such artists as Courbet and Daumier, Bacon’s use of the term “realism” may appear misleading. Yet, Bacon’s choice of realism as a title may, in part, be attributed to his desire not to have his paintings viewed or dismissed as simply ‘abstract’ or illustrative in nature. The fact that Bacon is adamant that “realism in art must not be confused with the simple desire to give a translation, in convincing terms, of objectively existing phenomena”,<sup>16</sup> shows the level of dissatisfaction Bacon felt with the traditional, illustrative role of realistic painting. In reclaiming and reorienting the traditional artistic term ‘realism’ to fit his own less objectively based understanding of the real, Bacon may be seen to signpost the huge change he considered that illustrative realism based painting would have to undergo in order to be once again an important or relevant medium. Such revolution was particularly pertinent for Bacon insofar as traditional realism, as a school of painting, had developed to “translate in convincing terms the objective physical phenomena”<sup>17</sup> that he so strongly disavowed.

Indeed, rather than reveal Bacon’s use of the term realism as ill-informed or misapplied, it can be surmised that through his choice of the label realism to designate reality-based painting, Bacon demonstrates his commitment to the exploration of a multifaceted human reality rather than the mere appearance of any given subject. Gowing insists that Bacon brought “human drama”<sup>18</sup> to painting, taking realism “into a region of instinct and unknowing, nervous awareness, a region seemingly unknown and unknowable, which

<sup>15</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 182.

<sup>16</sup> Leiris, *Francis Bacon: Full Face and in Profile*, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> Leiris, *Francis Bacon: Full Face and in Profile*, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Lawrence Gowing, ‘Francis Bacon: The Human Presence’, in *Francis Bacon* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1989), pp. 11-26, p. 21.

was quite new to modern figurative art”.<sup>19</sup> That is to say, Bacon was concerned with an artistic reality that mirrored his own personal experience of being human and relating with and to the subject. Speaking with Sylvester, Bacon insists: “[w]hen I look at you across the table, I don’t only see you but I see a whole emanation which has to do with personality and everything else”,<sup>20</sup> and it is this emanation in conjunction with the appearance of the subject that Bacon wanted his realism to capture and explore. Leiris describes Bacon’s realism as an attempt to render “the reality of the thing, its very existence, apprehended (if this were possible) over and above its circumstantial features”.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, for Bacon, in order for art to be real, it had to include the experiential reality of the artist in equal measure to the more traditional painterly realm of physical facts and appearance. Bacon insists on the importance of the first person within the image, insisting: “realism, in its most profound expression, is always subjective”.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, for Bacon, this joint exploration of sensation and image represented his idea of accurate or true realism. Bacon described the goal of such realism as: “tentative de capturer l’apparence avec l’ensemble des sensations que cette apparence particulière suscite en moi”.<sup>23</sup> In order to explain the reality of this idea as he sees it successfully articulated in art, Bacon uses the example of Picasso’s post-cubist image *Bather and Cabin* (1928). For Bacon, Picasso’s understanding of the reality present in *Bather and Cabin* is important because:

I think that it brings in not only the external reality but it brings in the unconscious reality of turning the key in the lock, which has subjective implications, and these are what gives a poignancy to the key being inserted into the lock. I believe that realism has

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<sup>19</sup> Gowing, p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 82.

<sup>21</sup> Leiris, *Francis Bacon: Full Face and in Profile*, p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> Leiris, *Francis Bacon: Full Face and in Profile*, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> Leiris, *Francis Bacon: Full Face and in Profile*, p. 13. Bacon writes in French in the original. “An attempt to capture the appearance together with the cluster of sensations that the appearance arouses in me”

to be re-invented. It has to be continuously re-invented. In one of his letters Van Gogh speaks of the need to make changes to reality, which become lies that are truer than the literal truth. This is the only possible way the painter can bring back the intensity of the reality which he is trying to capture. I believe that reality in art is profoundly artificial and that it has to be re-created. Otherwise it will be just an illustration of something – which will be very second-hand.<sup>24</sup>

For Bacon, the mere depiction of subjects as appearance and appearance alone was illustration. Illustration represented a false and lamed, mono-dimensional approach to realism that bore no resemblance to the multifaceted reality of the human experience. In this respect, Bacon's desire for art that bore the name realism to relate to the reality of his own human experience provides an interesting parallel with the revolutionary sentiments expressed by Rimbaud on the subject of poetry in 1871. Whereas Rimbaud saw poetry as being in need of reinvention rather than painterly realism, the revolutionary sentiment of the necessity of understanding of the symbiosis of interior and exterior realities as defining the human experience remains common to both artists. Using what he considered to be the characteristic human experience of co-existing interior and exterior realities as his point of departure, Bacon sought to "reinvent"<sup>25</sup> realism based on his own experience of existence. This new realism broke from the traditional role of painting as representative or illustrative in that it did not privilege the mutually accessible facts of appearance over the seemingly hidden or non-visual content of emotion.

Put simply, in the context of the present analysis Bacon's realism was one based wholly within the Becoming-Dionysian context as it was focussed on his own experience of being human that included the reality of experience and emotion alongside that of appearance. Indeed, Bacon's realism can most usefully be seen as a realism focussed on the human experience and, as

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<sup>24</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 172.

<sup>25</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 172.



such, may be designated using the term “human realism”. Critic and friend of Bacon, Michel Leiris described Bacon’s realism in painting using the physical analogy of a reach to “grasp reality”,<sup>26</sup> indicating that the reality Bacon understood and wanted to explore in his art had a more substantial basis than appearance alone. Indeed, it is the way in which this understanding of reality as more than mere appearance that shaped Bacon’s much documented admiration of Velazquez. By his own admission, Bacon’s admiration of Velazquez’s work was based on his opinion that, as an artist, Velazquez was ‘able to record the reality’ of his subject. Indeed, in Bacon’s opinions Velazquez was able to record both the appearance and the atmosphere of the Spanish Court in which he worked.<sup>27</sup> Bacon explains:

[O]ne wants to do this thing of walking along the edge of a precipice, and in Velazquez it’s a very, very extraordinary thing that he has been able to keep it so near to what we call illustration and at the same time to so deeply unlock the greatest and deepest things that man can feel.<sup>28</sup>

Defining and structuring his creative goals using the idea of human realism as an objective provided Bacon with an ideal (if notional) model of a way and type of painting that would serve to explore both the appearance of a subject and the sensations and experience of the subject brought forth in the painter. Placing the interior reality of experience and sensation alongside appearance and fact together as the dual sources and subjects for his creative process can be seen as important structural developments in the conceptual grounding of Bacon’s Becoming-Dionysian journey. Providing an interesting link between accepted Bacon criticism and the present analysis, Lorenza Trucchi describes Bacon’s dynamic creative process and understanding of reality using Nietzsche’s Apollonian and Dionysian poles. In so doing, Trucchi may be seen to draw attention to the importance of a bi-fold understanding

<sup>26</sup> Leiris, *Francis Bacon: Full Face and in Profile*, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 28.

<sup>28</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 28.

of the human condition in Bacon's work. Trucchi writes:

If he were a true contemplative observer, Bacon would fall into the realm of the aesthetic, and his vision would distil into a new classicism of the Apollonian kind. If he were a *voyeur* only, he would be swept up by his emotions into a violent, expressionistic, Dionysiac kind of painting. But as he contemplates (the better to probe reality), so, too, is he a voyeur.<sup>29</sup>

One way in which Bacon may be seen to directly invoke the Dionysian in his painting whilst remaining contemplative and retaining control is through chance. By using chance as an element not only within his painting process but also within his greater concept of creativity Bacon may be seen to experiment with a number of different means to explore his Becoming-Dionysian on canvas.

### 5.2.1 The Importance of Chance

Mirroring Burroughs' creative concern with possession and liberation, as a painter, Bacon's relationship with chance and its impact on the creation of his images is one that can be seen as defined by the tension between the core concepts of control and chaos or chance. Indeed, Schmeid insists that: "in Bacon's view, it is impossible to overestimate the importance of chance",<sup>30</sup> commenting that Bacon "sought to leave [chance] as much leeway as possible for its intervention in the painting process".<sup>31</sup> Making note of the role played by chance in both a practical and thematic capacity, prominent art critic and contemporary Hugh Davies considers Bacon's art "deeply dualistic

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<sup>29</sup> Lorenza Trucchi, *Francis Bacon*, trans. by John Shepley (New York: Harry N. Abrahams, 1975), p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Schmeid, p. 88.

<sup>31</sup> Schmeid, p. 88.

balancing the vivid and the formal [...] exploiting the tension between figurative resemblance and the abstracting accidents of process".<sup>32</sup> For Bacon, order and precision necessarily have power over the direction of the image for it to retain its status as an exploration of the artist's reality. However, such control is important as far as it is required to shape the marks made by the irrational and the unconscious human elements to form an image, and within the context of the image it was chance that "brought authenticity [...] [to] the reality that appeared on the canvas".<sup>33</sup>

For Bacon, irrational or uncontrolled elements became manifest on the canvas when the artist relinquished conscious control over the development of the image and allowed the paint to behave in an unrestrained or undirected way. One important part of this process of bringing such elements to painting lies in making use of the natural qualities of paint and its properties, Bacon insists:

It [the image] transforms itself by the actual paint. I use very large brushes, and in the way I work I don't in fact know very often what the paint will do, and it does many things which are very much better than I could make it do.<sup>34</sup>

Examples of the movement of paint in an uncontrolled or undirected way in Bacon's completed images include splashes of paint, dribbling of excess paint down the canvas surface and smears of pigment across the face of the image (discussed below in 'People and Portraits'). Yet, for such markings to remain relevant to the communication or exploration of a realistic image, the artist must incorporate such markings into a formal structure. Discussing the importance of incorporating such uncontrolled or undirected elements that paint creates on the canvas, Bacon describes the success of painting as an art as lying within the incorporation of these marks and qualities into the

<sup>32</sup> Hugh Davies and Sally Yard, *Francis Bacon* (New York: Abbeville, 1986), p. 115.

<sup>33</sup> Schmeid, p. 102.

<sup>34</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 17.

final image. This way of painting is a method Bacon describes as enacting a “mysterious conjunction of being able to let go and yet being able to remain sufficiently apart to see where one has to stop”.<sup>35</sup>

In Bacon’s opinion, the integration of structure and chance is barely perceptible in the most successful of images. In order to explain his vision of the successful realisation of the integral relationship between image creation, chance and control, Bacon uses the example of Rembrandt’s *Self Portrait* (ca. 1659)<sup>36</sup> to elucidate his understanding of paintings as composed of random marks that reveal what Bacon considers to be the truth of fact, not just its appearance. Indeed, Bacon is enraptured by the ability of what appear on close examination or analysis as seemingly random strokes and globs of paint to explain and explore the image of the painter rather than provide a representation of the literal appearance or likeness of the artist’s face. He explains:

Well, if you think of the great Rembrandt self portrait in Aix-en-Provence, for instance, and if you analyse it, you will see that there are hardly any sockets to the eyes, that it is almost completely anti-illustrational. I think that the mystery of fact is conveyed by an image being made out of non-rational marks. And you can’t will this non-rationality of a mark. That is the reason that accident must always enter into this activity, because the moment you know what to do, you’re just making another form of illustration.<sup>37</sup>

This chapter argues that Bacon’s own belief in the creative possibilities of the Dionysian aspect of chance can be glimpsed in the emphasis his analysis of Rembrandt’s painting places on the irrational nature of the marks he perceives Rembrandt’s image to be composed and of the way in which he understands this irrationality contrives to expose and explore the ‘mystery

<sup>35</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 104.

<sup>36</sup> Whilst the authenticity of this self-portrait attributed to Rembrandt has recently been called into question, such speculation does not affect the usefulness of Bacon’s use of the portrait as a means of demonstrating his point in this instance.

<sup>37</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 58.

of fact'. Indeed, it may be argued that, for Bacon, it is the irrational that provides a direct link to the experiential truth of a painting, yet it is structure that communicates the subject as a whole.

However, in order to incorporate irrational markings within his image, Bacon would first have to bring them about. Whilst the specifics of the way in which the irrational entered his imagery are discussed below under 'method',<sup>38</sup> the role of the irrational within Bacon's conceptual understanding of painting is important since it better explains his relationship to and with chance. In a way that is strikingly similar to the methods employed by both Rimbaud and Burroughs, Bacon may be seen to seek immersion in states of otherness so as to abdicate his conscious or rational control over his actions. Immersed in states of otherness Bacon was able to experience perspectives and sensations beyond the restrictions of a single point of view and self into the tumultuous realm of Dionysian flux. Indeed, it is the experience of being liberated from a conscious self and the return to rational consciousness and the exploration of this experience that defines Bacon's Becoming-Dionysian dynamic. To explain this in terms of Bacon's example of Rembrandt, in order for the latter's marks to appear on the canvas and retain true irrationality they must be accidental. Yet, the figurative intent or content of the image derives from the skilful manipulation of such accidents. In this way it can be conjectured that one core focus of Bacon's creative process of Becoming-Dionysian lies in his contriving to bring the accidental to pass; to bring the Dionysian into being. Bacon explains: "what one requires is intelligence and awareness just to the edge, and beyond that to trust to chance and instinct".<sup>39</sup>

Importantly, in the context of the present analysis, exposing Bacon's relationship to and with chance brings his Becoming-Dionysian into sharper focus. For Bacon, it may be argued that chance was quite literally the vital aspect of methodical human endeavour. In Bacon's cosmology, chance rep-

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<sup>38</sup> See: Section 5.1.2 (below)

<sup>39</sup> John Rothenstein, 'Introduction', in *Francis Bacon* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1964), pp. 7-21, p. 12.

resented the instincts whereas will, on the other hand, represented reason and the critical faculty.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, for Bacon it was the effects of chance and accident and the abilities of the individual to deal with these effects in the creation of an image that separated good artists from those whom he considered great. Bacon explains:

In working, you are really following this kind of cloud of sensation in yourself, but you don't know what it really is. And it's called instinct. And one's instinct, whether right or wrong, fixes certain things that have happened in that activity of applying the paint to the canvas. I think an awful lot of creation is made out of, also, the self-criticism of an artist, and very often I think probably what makes one artist seem better than another is that his critical sense is more acute. It may not be that he is more gifted in any way but just that he has a better critical sense.<sup>41</sup>

As such, Bacon's attitude towards the necessary integration of chaos and structure reveals significant similarity between his own vision and understanding of chance and Nietzsche's concept of the Dionysian and the principle of *amor fati* that defines the being of the *Übermensch*. Nietzsche's Dionysian as "ein verzücktes Jasagen zum Gesamt-Charakter des Lebens",<sup>42</sup> represents the subterranean and subconscious element of human existence over which the Apollonian culture of civilisation and consciousness builds its edifice. Bacon, for his part, insists that for the 'instinct to play a role in the creation of an image, it must first subdue the will'.<sup>43</sup> Arguing for the necessary subjugation of the will, Bacon's statement may be seen to advocate a similar attitude to the Nietzschean understanding of the Dionysian, as it suggests that instinct (the Dionysian) must govern the conscious will (the Apollonian) in order for the image that truly explores his *experience* of reality to come into being.

<sup>40</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p.120.

<sup>41</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 149.

<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1964), p. 683, "The saying of an emphatic yes to life as a whole".

<sup>43</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 120.

Taking Nietzsche's model of the Apollonian – Dionysian relationship as a basis or model for his Becoming-Dionysian, Bacon may be understood as willing instinct into a controlling role over his conscious faculties. Yet, it is important to note that the artist must return to the image and use his creative faculties to shape its explorative potential. As such, Bacon is seeking only to suspend for a brief period of time the influence of the Apollonian construct of consciousness and control. Suspension and not complete negation of this control would then allow the Dionysian universe of sensation and experience to surface and allow Bacon to revert to what Nietzsche perceives as the primal, *ur*-state of man as its instrument. Bacon terms this state of primacy "exhilarated despair"<sup>44</sup> (a term Leiris recognises as "admirably Nietzschean"<sup>45</sup> in nature) and describes it as being "an absolute feeling of it's impossible to do these things, so I might as well just do anything".<sup>46</sup>

Thus, whilst Bacon may superficially seem to be caught in the paradox of 'willing an accident into being'; taking his Becoming-Dionysian into account, it appears rather that the process he employs seeks temporarily to relinquish conscious control over the shaping of an image. Indeed, it is Bacon's desire to precipitate the involvement of Dionysian, pre-conscious elements of experience and sensation in an effort to capture that which he terms "the mystery of fact".<sup>47</sup> Analysed in this way, Bacon's seemingly paradoxical desire to will an accident into being is a key element of his creative process when this latter is apprehended as a Becoming-Dionysian.

Examining the importance of chance in Bacon's painting and understanding of creativity, it may be argued that Deleuze provides significant insight into chance as both an idea and a practice that is readily applicable to Bacon's example. Writing on Nietzsche and the role of chance in the life of the will to power, Deleuze theorises a connection between chance and affirmation vital to Nietzsche's vision of Dionysus that finds a graphic mirror in Bacon's painting. Indeed, Deleuze insists that the connection between affirmation

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<sup>44</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 83

<sup>45</sup> Leiris, *Francis Bacon*, p. 19.

<sup>46</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 56.

and chance is vital to Bacon's creative process — an assertion inline with the present study's qualification of Bacon's creative process as one that indulges a Becoming-Dionysian. Deleuze writes: "Le vrai joueur fait du hazard un objet d'affirmation: il affirme les fragments, les membres du hazard".<sup>48</sup> In the context of the theoretical model of Becoming-Dionysian, the affirmation of that which Deleuze identifies as being "les membres du hazard"<sup>49</sup> lies in the act of relating to and with the sensational universe of instinct and experience and the physical veracity of the 'real world' through the act of creation. Related specifically to the example of Bacon, the affirmation of the fragments of chance can be seen as providing a philosophical allegory of Bacon's Becoming-Dionysian through the manipulation of the marks created through his instinctual handling of paint upon the return to rational consciousness and control of the image.

### 5.2.2 Understanding Method as the Precipitation and Appropriation of Chance

Bacon's precipitation of his loss of conscious control and use of the natural qualities of his medium rely on his subsequent return to mindful control of the emergent image to retain claim to the title of realism. Discussing the relationship between accidental marks and the subsequent conscious manipulation of these marks into a subject, Bacon comments: "there are all sorts of possibilities in working directly first and then afterwards bringing this thing that has happened by accident to a much further point by will".<sup>50</sup> Without the input of the conscious element of his being into the final painting, any image derived only from his undifferentiated experience of chance and sensation is only an illustration, expression or representation of a particular

<sup>48</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), p. 36, "The real player makes of chance an object of affirmation: he affirms the fragments, the elements of chance".

<sup>49</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, p. 36, "The elements of chance".

<sup>50</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 19.



moment or state. Indeed, Bacon expresses very clearly his understanding of this movement from instinct to control in the actuality of paint and painting. He explains:

I feel that anything I've ever liked at all has been the result of an accident on which I have been able to work. Because it has given me a disoriented vision of a fact that I was attempting to trap. And then I could begin to elaborate, and try to make something out of a thing which was non-illustrational.<sup>51</sup>

Given both Bacon's desire to introduce chance into the image and his emphasis on the importance of non-illustrational resonance, it may be argued that the non-illustrational marks appearing in Bacon's images result from the interaction between the medium of paint and the will of the artist to lose control over the development of an image. Indeed, as a part of Bacon's desire to "invent"<sup>52</sup> his subject on the canvas in a way that encompassed the Becoming-Dionysian goals of his human realism, it may be argued that oil paint and its physical properties assumed a new and important role in his work and creative process. Davies and Yard go as far as to suggest that, rather than being painted, Bacon's images are "coaxed and commanded from the supple medium [of paint]"<sup>53</sup> with that aid of "whatever [. . .] he can find in the studio for the application and shaping of painterly passages".<sup>54</sup> Indeed, as Bacon's technique developed, it may be argued that paint gradually became something other than the fully controlled means of facilitating representation on the canvas that it had been for painters in the past. Indeed, this analysis argues that in Bacon's mature works (works completed post-1960), paint was no longer simply a medium used by the artist to communicate a story or render an image: paint became itself a causal entity within the image.

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<sup>51</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 53.

<sup>52</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 100.

<sup>53</sup> Davies and Yard, p. 113.

<sup>54</sup> Davies and Yard, p. 113.

Whilst absent at the outset of his painting career (the application and use of paint in Bacon's first major work *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion 1944* [Plate I] is traditional in nature), Bacon's realisation of paint as a causal entity may be seen to have led him towards the important discovery of the physical aspect of the role of chance within the image. Working with paint to capture the reality of a subject, Bacon's relationship with paint developed to include and make explicit use of the inherent qualities such as sheen and viscosity of paint as a medium. Seen in the context of the development of his creative process, the involvement of paint in this way represents an important step toward his achievement of a human realism since it allows him to bring factors other than the will of the artist alone into the final image.

Referring to the qualities of the paint once applied to canvas, Bacon often refers to the ways in which the suggestive behaviours of the paint shaped the image itself. He comments: "with oil paint being so fluid, the image is changing all the time while you're working".<sup>55</sup> Bacon seeks to use paint not only through his manipulation of it as it forms a recognisable picture, but also to use this manipulation as an adjunct to the natural qualities and properties of paint to "achieve the sensation of presence, unobtainable otherwise either by copy or an intellectual transcription".<sup>56</sup> The development of this understanding of the role of paint in his work can be seen clearly in Bacon's work from the period 1960 – 1965 in which we see numerous examples of the ways in which the natural qualities of paint convey this 'the sensation of presence' in the most immediate way.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the sheer volume and thickness of paint employed in many of these works shows that by using liberal amounts of pigment and making use of the natural viscosity of paint in his images, Bacon wished to demonstrate an understanding of paint itself as a semi-independent variable element that contributes toward the chaotic immediacy and sensory impact of an image. He explains: "one end of the brush may be filled with colour and the pressing of the brush, by accident

<sup>55</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 121.

<sup>56</sup> Leiris, *Francis Bacon: Full Face and in Profile*, p. 13.

<sup>57</sup> For example, see: *Three Studies for a Portrait of Lucien Freud 1965*.

makes a mark which gives resonance to the other marks".<sup>58</sup>

In an effort to communicate his notion of paint as a causal entity in and of itself, Bacon explains that paint is the 'trap' in which the subject is caught on canvas. Understanding paint in this way, Bacon broaches the idea of paint as a semi-independent entity used by the artist as a means of capturing the subject. Bacon explains that he is able to use paint to: "set a trap with which one would be able to catch the fact at its most living point".<sup>59</sup> Referring to his medium in this way, Bacon can be seen to be demonstrating an understanding of paint as more than a medium controlled by the artist manipulated in the service of conveying an image or appearance but, rather, as a semi-autonomous causal presence acting between the artist and the subject. As if to stress the point of paint as a presence in and of itself, Sylvester comments that nothing in Bacon's paintings is "more eloquent than the paint itself".<sup>60</sup> By understanding paint as a variable causal entity within his realism, paint becomes literally that which 'is left in place of the subject'<sup>61</sup> on Bacon's designated artistic space of the canvas. That is to say, an image composed of the same appearance/experience synthesis that Bacon understood as manifest in human reality.

Yet, the paint itself was only one element of the image. In order to explore his Becoming-Dionysian, the return to conscious control challenged the painter to work with the irrational markings that this process of immersion in the Dionysian had brought forth. Working with these marks can be seen as the practical or direct incorporation of the experiential into the final image. Describing Bacon's painting process, Sam Hunter writes of Bacon:

He has always painted directly on canvas in a spontaneous and inspirational process of whipping and dragging pigment over the surface with brush or rags, or even flinging it onto the surface

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<sup>58</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 121.

<sup>59</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 54.

<sup>60</sup> David Sylvester, *Francis Bacon: The Human Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press in association with The Hayward Gallery, 1998), p. 25.

<sup>61</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 182.

from a distance, often in a kind of ecstatic frenzy. His fierce emotional investment in his work, and the desperate all-or-nothing premium he places on expressive realization, however, give way to a secondary refining process and synthesis of formal structuring.<sup>62</sup>

This chapter argues that changing way in which Bacon makes use of these marks demonstrates the development of Bacon's relationship with both his practical approach to painting and the realisation of his Becoming-Dionysian. Speaking of the act of painting, Bacon comments:

It's really a continuous question of the fight between accident and criticism. Because what I call accident may give you some mark that seems to be more real, truer to the image than another one, but it's only your critical sense that can select it.<sup>63</sup>

That is to say, in order for Bacon to create an image and explore the reality of any subject he must then manipulate and use the material his immersion in the Dionysian realm of chance has brought forth. Bacon explains:

I think that accident, which I would call luck, is one of the most important and fertile aspects of it, because, if anything works for me, I feel that it is nothing I have made myself, but something that chance has been able to give me. But it is true to say that over a great many years I have been thinking about chance and about the possibilities of using what chance can give, and I never know how much is pure chance and how much is manipulation of it.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Hunter, p. 35.

<sup>63</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>64</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 52.

Bacon describes the act of relating the conscious creative activity with the primal, accidental element that renders his work so vital using the painting of a portrait as an analogy. He explains:

[the] image is a tightrope between what is called figurative painting and abstraction. It will go right out from abstraction but will really have nothing to do with it. It's an attempt to bring the figurative thing up onto the nervous system more violently.<sup>65</sup>

However, will and mindful precipitation to temporarily abdicate conscious command of his medium are not the only means used by Bacon to achieve his aim of remove conscious control over all elements of his work. Rothenstein writes: "Bacon not only invites the participation in his work of chance, but also of instinct liberated by alcohol".<sup>66</sup> Discussing his experience of painting his famous tryptic *Three Studies for a Crucifixion 1962*,<sup>67</sup> [Plate II] Bacon describes the role of intoxicant substances such as alcohol in the creation of the painting as being 'liberating agents' employed to release his Dionysian creative energies from his conscious control. Bacon sees the result of this liberation as being the ability to use the irrational to render the image with greater truth and vitality. He explains:

FB: It was a thing that I did in about a fortnight, when I was in a bad mood of drinking, and I did it under tremendous hangovers and drink; I sometimes hardly knew what I was doing. And it's one of the only pictures that I've been able to do under drink. I think perhaps the drink helped me to be a bit freer.

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<sup>65</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 12.

<sup>66</sup> Rothenstein, p. 19.

<sup>67</sup> This painting is itself a revisitation of his first great triptych *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion 1944*. The dates of Bacon's images have been included in their italicised titles in order to avoid confusion, as many of Bacon's themes are revisited throughout his painting career and nomenclatures of several images concerning a certain subject within a theme are often identical. Dates, therefore, are vital and for the purposes of clarity are herewith included in italicised titles to avoid confusion.

DS: Have you been able to do the same in any picture that you've done since?

FB: I haven't. But I think with great effort I'm making myself freer. I mean you either have to do it through drugs or drink.

DS: Or extreme tiredness?

FB: Extreme tiredness? Possibly. Or will.

DS: The will to lose one's will?

FB: Absolutely. The will to make oneself completely free. Will is the wrong word, because in the end you could call it despair.<sup>68</sup>

Bacon's vision of the artist immersed in either the hopelessness of his situation or the intoxicated state induced by alcohol and drugs can be seen to provide concrete examples of the states of 'otherness' in which conscious control is abdicated discussed above. Through his own use of alcohol and drugs as means of initiating liberation from conscious control, Bacon appears to mirror Rimbaud's use of drugs as means of liberating his being from the restrictions of a single life and single identity. However, whereas Rimbaud sought to be completely beyond the restrictions of a single life and controlled persona through the personal expansion new experiences (drug initiated or otherwise) would enable, Bacon seeks to liberate himself often only temporarily from full conscious control of his artistic faculties. As is made evident in the example above, it may be reasonably conjectured that Bacon considered this temporary liberation from full consciousness of his intentions and actions to render him more open to the possibilities of the act and process of painting and the physical manipulation of the paint on the surface of the canvas. As his technique progresses and Bacon becomes, in his terms, 'more free', he is more capable of achieving through technique alone the liberation from conscious control that he understands his human realism to require in order

<sup>68</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 13.

to explore the truth of fact. That is to say, rather than rely on intoxicants to achieve this effect, the appropriation and incorporation of chance marks and elements into important motifs in his compositions becomes a central stylistic element of Bacon's later painterly technique.

The way in which Bacon used chance markings and accidents in his painting went through several important phases. The first of these stages is characterised by Bacon's interpretation of these markings as bases for more traditional compositions. This first stage is analysed in section 5.2 (below), and continues throughout Bacon's *Grisaille* period. The second, more experimental stage of Bacon's relationship with chance markings in the context of image making involved a more diverse use of such marks in order to communicate something beyond appearance to the viewer. This stage is less specifically defined than the first in that following an initial period of interpretation of such marks, Bacon continues to develop and experiment with non-illustrational marks in his images throughout his painting career.

### 5.2.3 Interpretation & Figurative Suggestion: *Painting 1946*

In the early years of his painting (1944 – c.1957) Bacon's use of the marks and compositional elements brought forth by chance was focussed on the interpretation of these markings that lead to figurative, subject based juxtapositions. The composition, development and execution of *Painting 1946* [Plate III] presents an excellent case in point, demonstrating clearly what can be seen as Bacon's early traditional influences,<sup>69</sup> figurative rendering and literal interpretation of the marks precipitated by the abdication of control over the image.

Setting out to paint an outdoor scene incorporating a bird and a field, the finished canvas of *Painting 1946* includes a sinister central figure, black

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<sup>69</sup> Davies and Yard, p. 17.

umbrella, raw meat and a splayed carcass background. The painting is most often referred to (even by Bacon himself) as 'looking like a butcher's shop'.<sup>70</sup> The discrepancy between the natures and contents of the image Bacon set out to paint and the painting he completed can be seen to suggest the way in which the 'series of accidents' to which he refers served to imply new forms and how by following these new leads and manipulating them accordingly, *Painting 1946* was brought into being. Bacon explains:

FB: Well, one of the pictures I did in 1946, the one that looks like a butcher's shop, came to me as an accident. I was attempting to make a bird alighting on a field. [...] but suddenly the lines that I'd drawn suggested something totally different, and out of this suggestion arose this picture. I had no intention to do this picture; I never thought of it in that way. It was like one continuous accident mounting on top of another.

DS: Did the bird alighting suggest the umbrella or what?

FB: It suddenly suggested the opening-up of a new area of feeling altogether. And then I made these things, I gradually made them. So that I don't think the bird suggested the umbrella; it suddenly suggested this whole image. And then I carried it out very quickly, in about three or four days.<sup>71</sup>

Whilst intimating that the preliminary on-canvas oil and pastel drawings<sup>72</sup> of the planned composition suggested new forms that opened up a 'new area of feeling', the composition that arose from the 'accidents' Bacon discusses was subject-based and figurative in nature.

<sup>70</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 11.

<sup>71</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 11.

<sup>72</sup> Whilst Bacon strenuously denied that he made preparatory drawings for his compositions on paper (a recent book entitled *7 Reece Mews: Francis Bacon's Studio* debunks Bacon's self-propagated myth by revealing a number of preparatory drawings and sketches made by the artist found in his studio after his death) before embarking on a canvas, he did draw and manipulate ideas in outlines and sketch format on the canvas itself prior to the application of paint seen in the final image.



Commenting on the figurative and literal interpretation of chance markings that lead to *Painting 1946* in his book entitled: *Francis Bacon: Logique de la Sensation*, Gilles Deleuze asserts that Bacon's desire to paint a bird alighting on a field was the "forme figurative intentionnelle"<sup>73</sup> with which the painting was begun. Deleuze continues explaining his understanding of Bacon's creative process using the device of the diagram, a device he insists is present in *Painting 1946*. Indeed, he identifies the area in which the diagram is to be found as: "dans la zone brouillée, plus bas, un peu à gauche".<sup>74</sup> Deleuze conceives of the role of the diagram in relation to Bacon's work as something of a transformative device. He writes: "on part d'une forme figurative, un diagramme intervient pour la brouiller, et il doit en sortir une forme d'une toute autre nature, nommée Figure".<sup>75</sup> That Deleuze considers the figure to emerge from the interaction of 'la forme figurative' and the diagram forms an insightful, if mechanistic, reading of Bacon's interactive creative process viewed here as Becoming-Dionysian in relation to the transformation of the image itself through the auspices of a single agent. In this way, the Deleuzian notion of the diagram and its relationship with Bacon's painting does lend itself to elucidation of one aspect of the physical becoming of the greater Becoming-Dionysian creative project.

Through the idea of diagram and its relationship to the figurative form that for Deleuze 'forms the germ of the painting', Bacon's relationship with chance is brought to the fore in Deleuze's mechanistic schematisation of Bacon's interactive painting. Whilst Deleuze has been quick to seize on Bacon's at times nebulous comments concerning the becoming of a painting and insert a schematised and quite rigid structure to the flux of Bacon's process, this structure does serve as an important point of reference for the present examination of Bacon's *œuvre* as an exploration of the concept of Becoming-

<sup>73</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: Logique de la Sensation*, 2 vols (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 1984), vol. I, p. 100, 'Intentional figurative form'.

<sup>74</sup> Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: Logique de la Sensation*, I, p. 100, "The scrambled zone, at the bottom of the image, a little to the left".

<sup>75</sup> Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: Logique de la Sensation*, I, p. 100, "Beginning with the figurative form, a diagram intervenes and scrambles it, and a form of a different nature emerges from the diagram, nominally the Figure".

Dionysian. Deleuze clearly identifies Bacon's work as being apart from the dominant schools of representation, abstraction, expressionism and abstract impressionism. In his analysis, this distance comes through what he sees as Bacon's concern with the medium of paint and the act of painting itself. Correctly identifying Bacon as being somehow apart from major and structured traditions, Deleuze asserts that it is Bacon's precision and dedication to painterly practice that renders his commitment to 'bringing chance back into the act of painting' so clearly discernable.<sup>76</sup> However, whilst Deleuze's notion of the diagram does indeed attempt to explain Bacon's movement from the figurative to the figure using the mechanism of the diagram, an analysis which places a Becoming-Dionysian at the heart of Bacon's creative process may more fully apprehend the full significance and importance of the chaotic as a force in Bacon's work.

Whilst Deleuze does utilise the notion of becoming in relation to Bacon in the fourth rubric of his *Logique*, his qualification of the process of becoming in Bacon's work to simply a becoming-animal may, in many respects, limit the application of Deleuze's analysis of the works. As evidence for his assertion that Bacon's becoming is indeed a becoming-animal, Deleuze seizes on Bacon's pronouncement of his identification with the meat in butcher shops. Citing Bacon's surprise to discover that he "was not there [in the butcher's shop] in place of the animal",<sup>77</sup> Deleuze supposes that Bacon has immersed himself in the animal nature of suffering to such an extent that he has achieved a deep and shared identity with the idea and actuality of animal being.<sup>78</sup> Identifying Bacon so strongly with the actuality of animal suffering, Deleuze himself seems to limit the revolutionary experiential scope of his artistic becoming by rendering it explicitly literal in its otherness. Deleuze's becoming is not "the becoming of something",<sup>79</sup> however, that is literally what his reading of Bacon's identification with the animality of a butchered

<sup>76</sup> Dana Polan, 'Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation', in *Gilles Deleuze and the Theatre of Philosophy*, ed. by Constantin V. Boundas and Dorothea Olowski (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 229–254, p. 246.

<sup>77</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 46.

<sup>78</sup> Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: Logique de la Sensation*, I, p. 100.

<sup>79</sup> Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 3.

carcass seems on one level to suggest. Whilst Bacon's comments can be seen as evidence of his personal identification with the literal animal experience, on a more fundamental level it can be suggested that these comments reveal Bacon's concern with the extreme and all-encompassing nature of life as a primal and undifferentiated force. Demetrios asserts that Bacon is not concerned with "animal as animal",<sup>80</sup> but rather Bacon's true subject is: "man as animal, [...] stripped to his bestial nature – to his real nature".<sup>81</sup> In the light of such interpretation, Bacon's comment can be seen to refer to his understanding of the frailty of civilised forms and the juxtaposition created by the interaction of this civilised meniscus with the unseen flux like depth of human being and human violence in all its many manifestations.

Taking his Becoming-Dionysian into account, that Bacon identifies with the meat in a butchers shop can be seen as less of an indication that he is concerned with the reality of animal being that culminates in slaughter than it is evidence of his primary concern with the violence of the experience and realisation of the physicality of existence. The example cited by Deleuze of Bacon encountering butchered animals displayed in a shop can be seen as precipitating such realisation. As such, Bacon's becoming may be viewed only superficially as a becoming-animal, for whilst he is indeed concerned with the primal reality of undifferentiated life, he returns to a human consciousness in order to explore in his art life as it is known to him. Bacon never completely leaves the human experience: whilst he may be able to abdicate temporarily the controlling role of consciousness, it may be argued that immersed in states of comparative liberation, Bacon is unable permanently to sever his ties to consciousness and remains connected to his inescapable human reality through terror. Thus, the greater scope of his artistic concern may be seen as more Becoming-Dionysian in nature as whilst it does seek to move away from the fixed perspective of a single person, in so doing, Bacon is unable to escape the terror precipitated by the abandonment of rigid forms and given structures and is forced to return. As can be seen in his long-term commitment to

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<sup>80</sup> Demetrios, p. 8.

<sup>81</sup> Demetrios, p. 8.

his Becoming-Dionysian exploration of human reality, Bacon's fundamental concern is the human universe. This is the vibrant and chaotic aspect of his *œuvre* to which Leiris refers with his statement: "Bacon's favourite subject is, manifestly, the living reality of human beings".<sup>82</sup> Becoming-Animal is certainly one aspect of Bacon's Becoming-Dionysian, however it is by no means the only becoming in which Bacon as an artist is engaged.

In expressing his identification with the carcasses in the butcher's shop, Bacon evokes the deep and fundamental nature of his identification with the nature of both shared human physicality and the reality of muscle and bone that transcends the delineation of species or genus. Naturally, the animal world can be seen to provide a valuable parallel and figurative source for such a vast and primal project. Indeed, Trucchi notes that Bacon is "fascinated by animals".<sup>83</sup> However, at no time does Bacon remove himself from the task of exploring the being, reality and experience of human actuality from a perspective anchored within his own human presence to which he continually returns.

### 5.3 Grisaille Period

Following on from the figurative interpretation of the marks of chance seen in *Painting 1946*, Bacon's earliest cohesive period as a painter was defined by his pictorial preoccupation with the human figure and his desire to include the experience of the subject as well as that of the artist in the final composition. This new period allowed significant experimentation in Bacon's Becoming-Dionysian in both the figurative and conceptual capacities. David Sylvester's description of the palette of black, greys and dark colours that dominate Bacon's composition in the from 1948 to 1957 leads to the application of the term "grisaille"<sup>84</sup> to Bacon's work of this period. Between 1948 and 1957,

<sup>82</sup> Leiris, *Francis Bacon: Full Face and in Profile*, p. 10.

<sup>83</sup> Trucchi, p. 4.

<sup>84</sup> David Sylvester, *Francis Bacon: The Human Body*, p. 13.

Bacon's painting demonstrates a primary concern with the figurative creation of image. Yet, over the course of the period these works also begin to explore the interaction between appearance, sensation and energy that characterises Bacon's Becoming-Dionysian.

### 5.3.1 Velazquez and Eisenstein

In much the same way that Rimbaud drew heavily on the poets and traditions of the past as a means of educating himself and Burroughs espoused the need for writers to mine the past for ideas and elucidation, in his Grisaille period Bacon drew both inspiration and definition from two major historical sources. In the period 1948 to 1957, Bacon's work demonstrates his concern with two main images. The first image is a still from Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* Odessa Steps sequence of a screaming nurse [Plate IV], and the second is Velazquez's *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*<sup>85</sup> [Plate V]. Through the exploration of both images in his work, this section argues that Bacon is able to define and explore the nature of his concerns in relation to a defined point of departure. Having learned from and explored these seminal images, Bacon eventually discards them in favour of his own characters and subjects. However, the presence of these images and the technical and conceptual lessons he learned through his involvement with both images is vital to his artistic development and can be seen to direct the course of his technical development alongside his greater project seen here as Becoming-Dionysian.

The recurrent presence of *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* and the still of the screaming nurse as pictorial elements may be seen to emanate directly from

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<sup>85</sup> Many critics have drawn attention to the fact that Bacon never saw the original canvas of Velazquez's *Portrait of Innocent X* and that his knowledge of the image was derived solely from photographic reproductions thereof. Although Bacon spent several months time in Rome where *Portrait of Innocent X* is housed in the Galleria Doria-Pamphili, he felt unable to see the original painting, commenting that he felt "a fear of seeing the reality of the Velazquez after my tampering with it, seeing this marvellous painting and thinking of the stupid things one had done with it". Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 38.

Bacon's figurative interpretation of the 'suggestive accidents' seen in *Painting 1946*. The specific models provided by Velazquez and Eisenstein are important in his artistic development and image creation that takes place in the Grisaille Period as they may be seen to provide an explicit figurative focus into which Bacon can manipulate his chance marks and splashes of paint. As a stage of his process of Becoming-Dionysian, it can be suggested that Bacon's concern with figurative and literal suggestion seen so clearly in his images of Innocent and the screaming nurse is one of definition and consolidation. Explicit and prefigured figurative focus provided a structure for Bacon's emerging concern with chance, whilst from a technical perspective, the example of Velazquez provided an important point of reference for the development of his painting technique.

Francis Bacon was a painter with little formal education and no formal artistic training. For a painter in this position, the use of fixed points of departure such as Velazquez's famous *Portrait of Pope innocent X* for his imagery and creative process was one way in which he was able to explore and learn from the traditions and techniques of acknowledged masters. Schmeid notes that: "Bacon needed resistance, especially at the beginning of his artistic career. [...] He needed canonical themes, canonical forms and masters as targets, in order to focus his own energies".<sup>86</sup> As if to corroborate Bacon's auto-didactic intention, Lucien Freud perceptively noted that Bacon's preoccupation with *Portrait of Innocent X* was "to do with the powers of Velazquez"<sup>87</sup> and not concerned with the idea or image of papacy.

Indeed, it is reasonable to assert that Bacon's technique of paint application in the Grisaille period often derives visibly from that of Velazquez. One key example of Bacon's learning from Velazquez is in his painting of cloth. In his rendering of cloth, Bacon often appears to strive for a close, if not exact, copy of the effect produced by Velazquez in his depiction of the carmine robe of Innocent. See, for example *Study After Velazquez's Portrait of Pope*

<sup>86</sup> Wieland Schmeid, *Francis Bacon: Commitment and Conflict* (Munich; New York, Prestel, 1996), p. 21.

<sup>87</sup> William Feaver, 'Beyond Feeling', in *Lucian Freud* (Sydney: Trustees of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1992), pp. 8-18, p. 17.

*Innocent X 1953* [Plate VI] in which Bacon has rendered in rich papal purple the creases and folds in Innocent's cape in an identical manner to that of Velazquez's treatment of the same. The rich colours and textures of Velazquez's *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* can be seen as important formative influences on what was to become Bacon's technique of bringing the practice of the painter and paint itself to the fore. In this way, Bacon's relationship with the Velazquez image may be seen to shape Bacon's understanding of paint as vital in facilitating the communicative power of the final image. Indeed, in his essay, *Francis Bacon: Human Presence*, Lawrence Gowing contests that the example of Bacon's relationship with Velazquez demonstrates "how the modern artist can benefit from tradition without submitting to it for a moment".<sup>88</sup>

However, given their pivotal role in his Grisaille period both as images and as devices, Bacon's choice of these two images should not be seen as either capricious or, in the case of Velazquez's *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, concerned with the technical powers of their creators alone. Both pictures feature very different aspects of the human experience and their selection by Bacon as images to explore in his own work can be seen as an important step toward the realisation of the human realism that defined the practical manifestation of Bacon's Becoming-Dionysian. Both Velazquez and Eisenstein's images provided Bacon with two extremes of the emotional spectrum: the composed and powerful portrait of a sculptural Innocent X exists in stark contrast to the agonised scream of the dying nurse in *Battleship Potemkin* as the pram carrying her charge careers out of her control.

In hindsight, Bacon is keen that his choice of the two images be dismissed by both critics and audience as irrelevant. Indeed, he is quick to assert that his use of Eisenstein's still of the screaming nurse did not "have any special psychological significance",<sup>89</sup> and that his continual return to Velazquez's *Portrait of Innocent X* was little more than a personal 'obsession',<sup>90</sup> and

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<sup>88</sup> Gowing, p. 16.

<sup>89</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 34.

<sup>90</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 37.

“very silly”.<sup>91</sup> However, the choice and use of these two images and their role in Bacon’s work of the Grisaille period can be seen to provide valuable insights into the early stages of Bacon’s advance of simultaneous technical and conceptual development. Both images have the human form as their focus and depict two very different yet equally realistic visions of human being. As such, it may be reasonably conjectured that both *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* and the still image of the screaming nurse acted as guides in technique and subject matter for Bacon’s project to invent a human realism with experience and appearance as its central themes.

As a part of that which this chapter argues are Bacon’s ongoing themes and goals of exploring the human condition and in so doing reaching toward human realism, Bacon himself defined his Grisaille period as marked by the desire to “make the best painting of the human cry”.<sup>92</sup> In hindsight, Bacon considered the period to have failed in this aim, commenting: “I was not able to do it”.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, Bacon describes his obsession with the human scream throughout the Grisaille period as ultimately “unsuccessful”.<sup>94</sup> Importantly, Bacon attributes this lack of success in exploring in paint the reality of the scream as an experience to his superficial interest in the scream as an image rather than a symptom of a whole, human experience. Seen in the conceptual framework of Becoming-Dionysian, Bacon’s attempts to paint the human cry at this time were therefore thwarted by his inability to see the experience as a whole and not just an iconic moment or picture. Bacon explains:

I wanted to paint the scream more than the horror. I think if I had really thought about what causes somebody to scream, it would have made the scream that I tried to paint more successful. Because I should in a sense have been more conscious of the horror that produced the scream. In fact they were too abstract.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 37.

<sup>92</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 34.

<sup>93</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 34.

<sup>94</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 48.

<sup>95</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 48.



However, whilst Bacon may have deemed his initial images unsuccessful, the attempt to paint the scream demonstrates his concern with the exploration in paint of a human reality. Indeed, it may be argued that Bacon's desire to invent in paint the primal human expression of pain and fear seen in the scream of Eisenstein's nurse was an attempt to explore the experience as well as the appearance of human agony using paint as a medium and painting as a space.

In what may be seen as a direct corollary of his figurative interpretation of the machinations of chance that are apparent throughout his Grisaille period, Bacon is seemingly unable to separate the pictorial image of Innocent X from his awe of the powers of Velazquez and the latter's use of paint. Thus in this early stage of Bacon's Becoming-Dionysian, the actual and historical figure of Innocent X appears in Bacon's imagery combined with the scream of the nurse.<sup>96</sup> This amalgamation can be seen as the result of his inability to remove technique from the boundaries of context. Dynamic in their execution, these paintings of screaming Popes, such as *Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X 1953*, can be seen to communicate a cacophony of clear and audible screams of terror that sits in contrast to the serenity of the papal figure. Indeed, Bacon's screaming Popes can be viewed, at least on a superficial level, as exploring in a thematic as well as a technical way the primal human experience of being (the scream of the nurse) and the socially defined boundaries of role (the figure and regalia of the papal office). Trucchi explains:

Beneath the pope is a man whom Velázquez has already probed mercilessly; Bacon probes him with even greater license and recovers all the physical and spiritual immanence of Innocent X that the majestic magnificence of mere scenery cannot dim.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>96</sup> This combination into one central figure of the image of Innocent X with Eisenstein's screaming nurse is evident in numerous examples throughout the grisaille period. See: *Study After Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X 1953*, *Pope II 1951*, *Head VI 1949*.

<sup>97</sup> Trucchi, p. 14.

Whilst Trucchi speaks specifically of Bacon's Popes, her insights may equally be applied to Bacon's screaming popes in which the scream of Eisenstein's nurse is grafted onto the figure of Velazquez's Innocent X. In these early fused images, Bacon can be seen to use the juxtaposition of both images fused as one in an attempt to precipitate a figurative study of the image of agony and terror. However, the image remains static and iconic, and whilst Trucchi may be understood as being insightful in divining Bacon's intentions for his exploration of a fusion of Innocent X and the nurse in his painting, in his early screaming popes, the immanence of which Trucchi speaks has yet to be found. Perhaps this inability to create such an effect may be understood as a result of Bacon's inability to separate image from technique. This being the case, it may be argued that Bacon related to Innocent X and the screaming nurse as icons, representative of a human reality but abstracted and apart from humanity itself.

In his combinations of the two images of Innocent X and the nurse, it can be suggested that Bacon seeks less of an accord between these two abstracted visual facts than he attempts to explore the existence and experience of the tension between the two image-based truths he appropriates as points of departure for the creation of his painting. Such tension is seen clearly in *Pope II 1951* [Plate VII]. The uneasy juxtaposition of the screaming mouth clearly derived from Eisenstein's nurse and composed figure of the pope demonstrates the way in which the combination of both figures as pictorial elements fail to be reconciled in a single dynamic figure. The scream appears grafted on to an exploration of the image of Innocent X. However, in this image Bacon does demonstrate the technical direction in which his Becoming-Dionysian is to progress through his use of paint and texture in communicating the reality of the situation in which his figure is depicted. Both the vaulted ceiling and the directed, radial nature of the brushstrokes that form the background emanate the force of the scream, yet the prism surrounding the pope and used to focus attention on the central figure appears to trap the noise and stop the scream from reaching the viewer. In this way, this image and other early fusions of Innocent X and the nurse are better

seen as an experimental explorations of technique and image creation than they are demonstrations of Bacon's later Becoming-Dionysian concerns.

This unresolved, and arguably unresolvable tension between human experience and iconic representation remains present throughout Bacon's figurative work of the Grisaille period, emerging in works that in many ways are both experimental and illustrative in nature. As the suffusion of images of Innocent X and spectacled screaming faces in his images attest, during this period Bacon is caught between learning from acknowledged models and, at the same time, mimicking illustrative qualities. Yet, rather than remain in this period and lapse into mimicry and derivation, Bacon chose to broaden his focus to include other human subjects beyond Innocent X and the screaming nurse. In opening his focus to include new subjects, Bacon was able to gain a measure of critical distance from his work based closely on Velazquez's portrait and Eisenstein's still and to invent his own human characters and human characteristics on canvas. The intermission these new compositions and figures provide may be seen to give Bacon a space in which he developed a way of exploring his own interaction with the images, and it is the way in which this interaction made its way into his painting that is so important in his Becoming-Dionysian.

### 5.3.2 Other Paintings of the Period

Whilst Bacon's many single-figure focussed compositions may be seen as yet further evidence of the influence of Velazquez's *Innocent X* and Eisenstein's nurse, almost all paintings from his Grisaille period are iconic single-figure studies.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, van Alphen notes that Bacon favoured single figure compositions because having two figures sharing the one canvas "would immediately suggest a story".<sup>99</sup> Bacon's rendering of the figure as utterly isolated

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<sup>98</sup> Notable exceptions to the human figure format are animal studies and mythological figure renderings. See for example: *Sphinx I 1953*, *Man with Dog 1953* and *Study of a Baboon 1953*.

<sup>99</sup> Ernst van Alphen, *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self* (London: Reaktion, 1992), p. 117.

and often confined within prism like structures produces an effect of pure and isolated despair that can best be likened to the atmosphere created by the solitary walking figures of sculptor Alberto Giacometti. A connection also made by Leiris who groups Bacon with Giacometti for the simple reason that in his opinion both were “figurative artist[s] of the most accurate and effective kind possible”.<sup>100</sup> However, in many ways, to compare Bacon with Giacometti and to concentrate on the apparent the apparent yet superficial brutality of focus on that which is perceived as the frozen agony of both of their figures is to belie the dynamism of Bacon’s Becoming-Dionysian to emerge in his painting in later years.

Throughout the Grisaille period, Bacon’s limited use of colour projects a sense of claustrophobia and isolation in his works. The limitation of colour in his images, in conjunction with the predominant use of dark backgrounds, focuses all attention on the central figure or subject. This focus is achieved by the negation of context and therewith any semblance of familiarity or accessibility to the figure. The dramatic effect such focus brings about can be seen clearly in paintings that are not concerned with his major Grisaille period themes of Eisenstein’s nurse or Innocent X. As such, it may be argued that departing from these themes allowed Bacon to explore new facets of pictorial human presence in his images.

Bacon’s very early study entitled *Head I 1948* [Plate VIII] provides an excellent illustration of his use of black to rid the scream (in this case, emanating from a mutated mouth) of both context and accessible human elements. However, even devoid of context mounted on a neck composed of mangled flesh, the image itself remains recognisably human. Schmeid insists that Bacon does not “mutilate the image of humanity”<sup>101</sup> in order to appear gruesome, and suggests rather that Bacon seeks only to “target [...] the viewer’s nervous system”<sup>102</sup> in the most effective way possible. The ear protruding to the left of the head and the shadow that falls onto the chest from

<sup>100</sup> Leiris, *Francis Bacon: Full Face and in Profile*, p. 9.

<sup>101</sup> Schmeid, p. 71.

<sup>102</sup> Schmeid, p. 71.

the chin have the effect of drawing the viewer into the dim world from which this agonised cry emanates. Yet, the blackness that descends from the top of the canvas gives the impression of limiting and stifling the cry so as not to let it escape from the edges of the painting. Again, using the scream as a central focus, the same effect of stifling the scream and rendering it soundless is seen in *Study for a Portrait 1949 (Man in a Blue Box)* [Plate IX] in which the screaming subject is contained within a prism in the centre of the canvas. A nebulous blue figure looks on, seemingly unaffected by the scream, appearing fascinated by the subject suspended in the prism. The scream of the man inside the box fails to breach the restriction of the prism in which it is contained due to the dramatic and effective use of blocks of dark pigment within the image. Of all of the elements in this composition, this scream and the mouth from which it comes are the most clearly rendered and, as such, may be seen to form the focus of the image. Yet, from the perspective of the viewer, the scream is soundless. The dark green background and the prism it defines serve to shield the viewer from the sound, if not the sensation, of the screaming man.

### 5.3.3 The Prism

Through his containment of the screaming man within the prism it may be argued that Bacon creates a powerful effect on the viewer as a result of the way in which the image renders so graphically the two realities of interior and exterior. In *Study for a Portrait 1949 (Man in a Blue Box)* the interior of agonised sensation is prevented from reaching the figure beyond the boundaries of the prism. As he is external to the agony of the encased subject, the watching figure can only view the fact of the imprisoned man's appearance. Davies and Yard liken the atmosphere created by the imprisonment of the central figure to an interrogation scene in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.<sup>103</sup> Davies and Yard's interpretation of Bacon's composition is highly intuitive as the presence of the blue figure that watches the

<sup>103</sup> Davies and Yard, p. 20.

contained man with interest only serves to heighten the agony and isolation of the screaming subject. Whilst apparent in his paintings of Innocent X and Eisenstein's nurse, during his Grisaille period Bacon more fully explores the distance between exterior fact and inner sensation seen in *Study for a Portrait 1949 (Man in a Blue Box)* and does so most effectively through his consistent use of sombre suited figures.

Seen clearly in *Study for a Portrait 1949 (Man in a Blue Box)*, Bacon's anonymous, pale-faced figures appear in stark compositions in which the dark space surrounding the central figure is often defined and divided using prism-like structures that serve to separate the figure from the rest of the canvas. Bacon refers to these structures (articulated by single, pale, thinly-drawn lines) as his means of framing the figure within the context of the canvas with the effect of "cutting down the scale"<sup>104</sup> of the whole image so as to show the central figurative subject with greater clarity. However, perhaps as a result of the enhanced focus that these structures bring about, these lines also serve to isolate further the figurative subject from their dark background. In a number of Bacon's Grisaille period images featuring suited central figures, the central subjects seem dwarfed by their backgrounds.

The introduction of a prism as a focus-enhancing device only serves to heighten the isolation of the figure and therewith create an atmosphere in the image of enforced and imprisoned loneliness. In a manner that may be understood to demonstrate the success of Bacon's idea of the prism as a focussing device, some critics have commented that the prismatic structures in Bacon's paintings of this period appear as 'glass boxes' around the subject not unlike the white edged glass structure in which prominent captured Nazi Adolf Eichmann was contained for his trial.<sup>105</sup> Russell even asserts that like the glass cage that surrounded Eichmann, Bacon's prisms form something of an echo chamber around a central subject, both framing them in the context of the image and locking them in an eternally isolated space.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 22-23.

<sup>105</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 22.

<sup>106</sup> Russell, p. 43.

Bacon's transparent frames and prisms focus the viewer on the human subject, yet, at the same time, separate the viewer from the subject by invoking the presence of a screen. As such, by containing the subject and isolating the figure within the image itself, these prisms prevent interaction between the subject and the audience. Perhaps noting the parallel with Eichmann's containment for trial, Schmeid notes that Bacon's prisms appear to "form a kind of glasshouse in which the figure is seated like a prisoner".<sup>107</sup> Imprisoning the subject means that whilst the viewer may see the symptoms of the sensation that torments the subject as it appears on his face or in his posture, they cannot hear the screams or sighs that may attend such trials. Deleuze concurs that the role of such structures is to isolate the subject.<sup>108</sup> However, in contrast to Deleuze's understanding of the prism as a membrane only active within the picture and pertaining only to the subject, Bacon's prisms are perhaps rather an exploration of his understanding of reality as a process in the context of which the isolated subject is not a mere pictorial event. As a part of his reach toward a human realism using a Becoming-Dionysian process, Bacon could not simply create events that appeared and came to be only within the privileged context of the canvas. As a part of his Becoming-Dionysian, Bacon's own reality was inseparable from his exploration thereof in paint. As such, through the use of prisms Bacon makes painfully clear the distance between interior and the exterior realities that he understands to be true.

Within the completed image, the prism serves to define with clarity certain key parameters. Rather than simply using a smaller canvas, the sectioning-off of the canvas into smaller areas using the prism can be seen to show the way in which Bacon sought to achieve a scale for his human realism. In many of his prism paintings Bacon creates focus by polarising spaces between the subject and the space in which it is situated. For example, the focus and clarity of the subject's face seen in the silent space of the background in *Study for a Portrait 1953* [Plate X] draws attention to the

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<sup>107</sup> Schmeid, p. 23.

<sup>108</sup> Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: Logique de la Sensation*, p. 25.

dichotomy Michel Leiris saw as characterising much of Bacon's work. Leiris describes Bacon's use of large empty spaces and comparatively small areas of detail, action and clarity as follows:

In a Bacon canvas, [...] there are incandescent parts, seething with energy in contrast to neutral parts where nothing is happening. The former, which defy rational control and are comparable to what in jazz are called "breaks", solos grafted onto the beat of the basic rhythm – i.e.: in more classical terms, frenzied or Dionysiac parts contrasting with calm, Apollonian parts – might be thought of, [...] as areas where the dice are thrown hurricane-like (where the great game is being played), the other areas being little more than the *undifferentiated neutrality of the abyss*.<sup>109</sup>

The differentiation between the clarity of small, explicitly rendered sections of a Bacon image (most usually the subject), and the space in which such detail exists (the background), is an important characteristic of both Bacon's Grisaille period developments and his greater project of exploring human being through his process of Becoming-Dionysian. Both *Study for a Portrait 1953* and *Three Studies of the Human Head 1953* [Plate XI] are excellent Grisaille period examples of the disjunction and contrast of which Leiris speaks between intricately rendered small sections of the image and greater, empty spaces that appear to frame this detail. Using the prism, Bacon was able to create two separate scales for his painting within a single image, the space beyond the prism functioning as something akin to a vacuum eternally separating the subject from the audience. In both *Study for a Portrait 1953* and *Three Studies of the Human Head 1953*, Bacon's desire to render only the flesh and distinguishing collar and tie of his subject provides an immediate focus for the viewer on the volatile human aspect of the image rather than its context or the space in which it is present. In the context of his human realism, separating the viewer from the subject gave Bacon the chance to explore the sensation and idea of separation and distance between people, a subject to which he would later return.

<sup>109</sup> Leiris, *Francis Bacon: Full Face and in Profile*, p. 10, (Italics in original).



### 5.3.4 Suited Figures

Bacon was arguably more able to explore successfully the idea and sensation of distance between people as it is known to human beings on a day to day level using his suited figures than he was using the model of Velazquez's Innocent X. For Bacon, the development of his own subjects that sat midway between Velazquez's remote classical model and the close friends and lovers that were to become the core subjects of his later work represented a paradigm shift for Bacon's Becoming-Dionysian. Rather than reinterpret Velazquez's vision and understanding of Innocent X, by creating his own figures Bacon was free to depict them in any state or context he saw fit. This represented a dramatic change of focus for Bacon, and thus it cannot be purely coincidental that these early suited figures are utterly anonymous or generic in their features and movements. The creation of anonymous figures in varied states of disintegration featured in hazy, non-descript and soundless surrounds spoke to Davies and Yard of "the private disintegration of the public image".<sup>110</sup> However, such works transcended mere subjectification and spoke eloquently of Bacon's own struggle to find a figurative vocabulary that suited his goal of a human realism.

Interestingly, many images of suited figures made in the Grisaille period do contain elements of Bacon's two main pictorial preoccupations. The papal throne appears in *Study for a Portrait 1953* and the spectre of spectacle frames on the face of the central figure appear in many of his images of 1953. Yet using the contemporary model of a suited figure, Bacon was able to concentrate on the particular violence and mortality of the situation of his subject. Most importantly, the contemporary garb and attitude presented Bacon with a subject with whom he was intimately familiar as opposed to the respectful distance maintained by the artist in relation to Innocent X and the screaming nurse. Indeed, this familiarity may be seen as pivotal in allowing Bacon to include the experience of the subject in his work. In his interviews with the artist, David Sylvester states both his opinion and that

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<sup>110</sup> Davies and Yard, p. 28.

of some other critics that in Bacon's paintings each subject seemed to be experiencing something extreme. Sylvester writes:

[P]eople seem to feel in looking at your figures that they are seen in moments of crisis, moments of acute awareness of their mortality, moments of acute awareness of their animal nature — moments of recognition of what might be called elemental truths about themselves.<sup>111</sup>

Whilst Bacon is not as explicit on the subject, nor as removed from his relationship with the underlying forces that shape his painting as Sylvester is, he tacitly agrees with this assertion.<sup>112</sup> Thus, it can be conjectured that it was only without the pre-defined subjects of Innocent X and the screaming nurse that Bacon was able to create new figures that allowed him to explore elemental truths and realisations on a more intimate level. Indeed, this chapter argues that it was only following the creation of these suited figures that Bacon was able to return to Innocent X with a new attitude that reflected the development of proximity to his subjects on an experiential level that the creation of the suited figures represent. By creating contemporary figures, Bacon was able to explore a reality closer to his own and this experience enabled him to get closer to the subject matter and involve the audience in his creations as the Grisaille period ended.

The essence of Bacon's dalliance with seemingly generic suited figures may be seen in *Study for a Portrait 1953*. Once the viewer has adjusted to the stark contrast Bacon has drawn between the flesh and the dark background before which the subject sits, the body of his subject begins to appear. Indeed, by forcing the viewer to adjust to the sombre palette of the painting, it may be argued that Bacon sneaks the body of the figure into the composition. Bacon has created this suited figure from the same dark colour with which he has rendered the background, only the direction of the brushstrokes directed to shape the suit of the sitter catch the light present in the exhibition

<sup>111</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 80.

<sup>112</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 80.

space and make the clothing visible. Rendering the flesh of the suited figure (but not his body) as separate from the dark background, Bacon may be seen to pass comment on the nature of the suit as a uniform and appearance as a mask since it effectively hides the sitter in his surroundings. Taking heed of his commentary on working life, the content of such comment can be hypothesised to include the disdain Bacon feels for what he views as the social structure that privileges the conformity of appearance over the human reality of experience. Choosing to render the flesh with a slight ghoulish luminosity and to construct the suit from the same material and shade as the background within which his figure is situated, it may be argued that Bacon succeeds in communicating the human presence within the socially derived appearance created by a suit. Dressed in the same darkness that surrounds him, both *Three Studies of the Human Head 1953*, and also in *Study for a Portrait 1953* succeed in communicating the schism between the human and the social universe of appearance in which the human being is necessarily blurred and totally alone.

### 5.3.5 The Example of *Figure with Meat 1954*

Following his interlude with suited figures, Bacon returned to the images of Innocent X and the screaming nurse to conclude the Grisaille period. However, it had become evident that in terms of his desire to “make images as accurately off my nervous system as I can”,<sup>113</sup> the borrowed icons of Innocent X and the nurse were no longer able to contain the experiential scope that characterised his Becoming-Dionysian. Indeed, Russell notes that Bacon’s growing desire to encompass the realities of chance in his work disavowed his preoccupation with famous classical models.<sup>114</sup> However, before leaving his formative Grisaille period behind, Bacon returned to the figures of Innocent X and the screaming nurse in one startling composition that signalled the end of his preoccupation with a number of themes and showed the way in which

<sup>113</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 82.

<sup>114</sup> Russell, pp. 104-105.

he would move forward as a painter. This canvas is *Figure with Meat 1954* [Plate XII]. In this image, Bacon can be seen at once to create a pronounced conclusion to the Grisaille period structures and at the same time, to show the direction in which his Becoming-Dionysian was to progress and strive to achieve a human realism.

*Figure with Meat 1954* includes the dying scream of Eisenstein's nurse, the rich colouration and texture learnt from Velazquez's *Portrait of Innocent X* as well as the figure of Innocent X himself and the hanging carcasses that figured in *Painting 1946*. Bacon even goes as far as to frame all of these elements within one of his prismatic focussing devices. Yet, rather than 'cut down the scale of the canvas to bring about focus',<sup>115</sup> in *Figure with Meat 1954* the prism is used to hold back the undifferentiated blackness that surrounds the prism and the figures within (also seen in *Study for a Portrait 1949 (Man in a Blue Box)*). In this way, the prism prevents the blackness from engulfing the compositional elements of the image. It is thus important to note that this canvas differs from those that preceded it since in the earlier paintings prism in which the prism is used to frame and isolate the central figure within the canvas, whereas in this image, the prism is not closed before reaching the viewer.

In *Study for a Portrait 1953*, Bacon can be seen to demonstrate the extent to which his experiments with suited figures and other subjects lead him to a new perspective. In exploring the situation and reality of suited figures he created, rather than the pre-defined images of Innocent and the nurse it can be argued to a greater or lesser extent that he re-presented, Bacon can be seen to include himself more fully in the process of creation. The gesture of opening the prism into the space of the viewer can be seen as an attempt by the artist to bring about the involvement of his audience in the image and its creative space. Indeed, it may be argued that opening the space of the composition into the gallery rids the image of the necessity of artificial, pre-defined focus apparent in Bacon's work with figures within

<sup>115</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, pp. 22-23.

closed prisms.<sup>116</sup> Putting the viewer into direct contact with the figurative elements of the canvas, its composition and the paint with which it is created can be seen as a vital step forward in realising his new post-Grisaille period technique. Schmeid insists that: "Bacon gives all his figures their own space, in which they are locked as in a prism".<sup>117</sup> However, in opening the prism to include the viewer, that space specific to the subject is shared with the audience. As such, it can be suggested that *Figure with Meat 1954* represents an important and dynamic shift in Bacon's practical realisation of his project of Becoming-Dionysian and his desire for a human realism. By allowing the viewer into the reality of the image and including his own sensations and experiences using paint, *Figure with Meat 1954* makes apparent the lessons Bacon has learned from masters of the past and foreshadows the direction of his concerns in the future.

By opening the image and bringing the viewer into the reality of the canvas, it may be argued that Bacon gave the paint with which the image is created, and his application thereof, equal status to the figurative and compositional elements and concerns of the image as a whole. Having included the viewer inside the boundaries of the prism whose major task was to define focus, the paint in which the figures were created becomes the primary source of interface between the artist and audience.

Evidence of Bacon's movement towards the foregrounding of paint as a compositional element abounds in *Figure with Meat 1954*. Throughout his Grisaille period, Bacon had remained for the most part within the traditional parameters of colour, composition and proportion. This, along with his choice of models from which to learn, had defined his use of paint. In *Figure with Meat 1954*, Bacon departs from his normative Grisaille period use of paint and begins not only to use more expressive techniques of application but also to use paint in new, non-narrative ways. Indeed, it may be argued that in *Figure with Meat 1954*, Bacon began to paint in a way that served to disrupt the narrative possibility in his work. The black arrow that points at once to

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<sup>116</sup> For examples of such works, see: *Study for a Portrait 1953, Study for Portrait 1949*.

<sup>117</sup> Schmeid, p. 31.

the chair upon which the central figure sits and the stark red striations that define the ribs of the carcass is one demonstration of the emerging changes in Bacon's work. The black arrow is at once both a device in the context of the figurative elements of image and an intrusion into the space inside the prism of the darkness that the structure itself keeps at bay. Whilst the arrow emerges as a pictorial element more frequently in the later work of Bacon,<sup>118</sup> in the context of the canvas *Figure with Meat 1954* the presence of the arrow shows Bacon's desire to draw attention to the reality of the paint and therewith the surface of the image. The presence of the arrow and the way in which it can be seen to create a point of contact between the figurative image and the physical paint and brushstrokes with which it is composed can be seen to foreground the duality related aspects of painting as a point of interaction between two worlds. By drawing attention to the actuality of the paint using the arrow in *Figure with Meat 1954*, it can be suggested that Bacon was pushing to the fore the tensions that had hitherto characterised his Becoming-Dionysian process in a figurative capacity.

As such, *Figure with Meat 1954* may be understood graphically to exemplify the way in which Bacon's concern with the arrested fact of Eisenstein's silent agony and the exaggerated and conscious use of paint in Velazquez's *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* had reached a new level of symbiosis. Through the exploration of this symbiosis it may be argued that Bacon's fundamental artistic concerns and his Becoming-Dionysian becomes more apparent in his work. Focussing only on its pictorial characteristics and seeing Innocent seated before a carcass, Schmeid wrongly sees *Figure with Meat 1954* as "the most gruesome of all the papal portraits".<sup>119</sup> Through what can be seen as a final visitation of Innocent X and the screaming nurse as Grisaille Period icons, *Figure with Meat 1954* signals an end to purely figurative or representative suggestion in Bacon's work that began with *Painting 1946* and heralds

<sup>118</sup> "Bacon claims that he adopted the device of the arrows from a book on golfing instruction in which the arrows indicated the direction of a drive. His intention was to neutralize the lurid context of the image, allowing it to be viewed with a detachment akin to that of medical text-books" Davies and Yard, pp. 106-107. ff. 83.

<sup>119</sup> Schmeid, p. 79.

a new period in which technique and the process of painting itself assumes a new and vital role in Bacon's Becoming-Dionysian.

### 5.3.6 The End of the Grisaille Period

Within the context of the present analysis, Bacon's emphasis on paint and the manner in which it was applied to the canvas can be seen as intimately linked to the emergence of his own input as an artist into the image. That is not to say that Bacon was merely 'depicting pictures' or representing images in the Grisaille period. Rather, the comparison between the use of paint in his early Grisaille period works and those directly following its conclusion show the breadth of transition that has taken place in Bacon's approach to paint. Following the experimentation of the Grisaille period Bacon uses paint to invent not only the image on the canvas but also to communicate and explore the sensations that surround and permeate the figure. Paint thus became an important aspect of Bacon's project to create a new reality as it provided the point of interaction between all of the elements in his creative process.

One practical manifestation of Bacon's new use of paint to explore and communicate sensation as well as appearance was his invention of non-illustrational forms in his images. The initiation of this technique was the shift to viewing the first-person reality of sensation as the initial point of interaction with the subject. Bacon explained that the reality of the new technique "works first upon sensation and then slowly leaks back into the fact".<sup>120</sup> Initially, the most apparent way in which this new emphasis was visible in his work can be seen in his more liberal handling of pigment, which translated directly to a greater emphasis on paint itself and its role in the completed image. For the purposes of a direct example, the liberal use of paint and non-illustrative form to communicate the figure of Innocent in *Study from Innocent X 1962* [Plate XIII] forms a stark contrast to the early Grisaille

<sup>120</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 56.

period studies of Innocent such as *Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X 1953*. In the 1953 canvas, Bacon is more tightly controlled in his use of pigment, staying within the traditional definition of proportions and colouration, whereas in his 1962 revisitation of the figure of Innocent X, pigment is used freely and liberally in an expanded and vibrant colour range. Moreover, physical proportions present in this later image are no longer those of traditional figure painting and even the posture of Innocent X has changed dramatically from the seated position in the Velazquez original that Bacon had repeated so often.

The consideration of paint in the context of the entire image and not subject alone brought new concerns and new possibilities to Bacon's work. In turn, these concerns initiated practical experimentation leading to what were to become Bacon's characteristic painterly techniques. However, in the late-Grisaille and early post-Grisaille period paintings, such techniques were still at the stage of experimentation. One of the possibilities this emphasis on paint itself brought into being was that of texture. Whilst Bacon had experimented early in the Grisaille period with the addition of impasto media such as ash to paint in *Head II 1949* [Plate XIV] and sand and dust in *Study for Figure IV 1956-57* [Plate XV], *Figure with Meat 1954* presented a new understanding of texture as an element within the image as a whole. The role of texture in the composition seen in *Figure with Meat 1954* may be seen as fused with the act of painting, as it acts to draw attention to the paint itself. Within this canvas, and also in *Study for Figure IV 1956-57*, Bacon uses texture as a means of heightening the presence of the paint and making evident the strokes and movements that comprise the invention of the image itself.

This textural experimentation in Bacon's work of the Grisaille and post-Grisaille periods may be viewed as evidence of Bacon's interest in extending and emphasising the possibilities of paint within the image. In the greater context of his Becoming-Dionysian, Bacon's paint-focussed experimentation can be likened in its importance and effect to the invention of the routine as a stylistic device by Burroughs and Rimbaud's discovery of the value of word



juxtapositions initially precipitated by necessity that caused him to abandon the old classical forms. For Rimbaud the sounds and rhymes created by words provided a new area in which to develop structure and form in which meaning played a secondary role. For Bacon, texture and the movement of pigment on canvas provided an area to develop images in which the subject or final image itself as a narrative tableau was not of primary importance. The use of texture and the addition of impasto media to paint provided Bacon with a new reason to pay greater attention to the role of paint in the creation of an image. Whilst in the majority of his images Bacon did not rely on designated impasto media to draw attention to the paint, his experiments with impasto and texture in paint may be understood to have provided him with new insight into the role of paint within the image beyond the simple function of depicting a subject matter. Using a variety of techniques and a vast array of materials, Bacon was able to manipulate paint in a huge number of ways to create non-illustrative marks and effects that drew attention to the paint itself. Indeed, this chapter argues that these ways of manipulating paint and seeing the canvas as a plane upon which paint acts as a causal element form the basis of his mature technique.

Works of the late Grisaille and early post-Grisaille periods such as *Figure with Meat 1954*, and *Study for Figure IV 1956-57*, show the ways in which Bacon strove for an exploration of the multifaceted nature of human reality in his work. In these images, Bacon can be seen to include not only the image of the subject, but also attempts to explore his understanding of reality, ideas and sensations as he experienced and understood them in relation to the subject. As such, these transitional paintings present interesting insight into Bacon's process of Becoming-Dionysian as it is apparent in his work. Indeed, the movement toward a human realism that combined sensation, experience and appearance can be seen to take shape in *Figure with Meat 1954* and it is developed through technical experimentation in his two studies for portraits of the life mask of William Blake made in 1955 and further still in *Study for Figure IV 1956-57*. Through the technical and conceptual lessons learnt in the Grisaille period and the years before 1960, the way in which Bacon

experimented within his Becoming-Dionysian frame of reference can be seen to develop toward an actualisation of the human realism he hoped it would achieve. As a result of this growth in technical skill and more refined version of his core concerns, Bacon moved away from more literal figurative concerns and seemingly surrealistic interpretation and use of suggestion<sup>121</sup> and went on to engage more fully with the human condition as an artist.

In this way, Bacon's comments on his 'failure' in regards to his desire to explore the Velazquez portrait of Innocent X can be seen as an admission of "the feeling that he had not succeeded in presenting his own view of the world by superimposing a classical model".<sup>122</sup> In the following years, Bacon plunged headlong in his painting into an exploration of the everyday truth of human being, finding new stages upon which to set his essential dualisms to work. It is this outward movement, the seeking of new situations and subjects through which to explore his concerns, that allows Bacon to discover new tensions and to produce paintings in which his Becoming-Dionysian becomes most apparent and his realism increasingly successful.

#### 5.4 Being in the World: Colour and Movement, a New Period of Fusion 1960-1975

Bacon's departure from the use of Innocent X as a motif and his recognition of the importance of realising his own technique and subject matter allowed him the space to distil a fully formed personal understanding of his own approach to painting. This understanding can be seen as derived in many ways from his experiences with *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* and proved decisive in directing his Becoming-Dionysian as a painter and as an artist. In one of his few written pieces concerning the act and possibilities of painting, Bacon describes the act and art of painting as being at its most

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<sup>121</sup> Schmeid, p. 94.

<sup>122</sup> Schmeid, p. 22.

brilliant when it brings about a fusing of the idea and the execution thereof. Upon being asked to contribute to an exhibition catalogue for a retrospective of the works of fellow painter Matthew Smith, Bacon took the opportunity to formulate precisely his understanding of the act and role of painting itself. On the subject of Smith (and by extension, painting as a whole), Bacon writes:

He seems to me to be one of the very few English painters since Turner and Constable to be concerned with painting, that is, with attempting to make idea and technique inseparable. Painting in this sense tends towards a complete interlocking of image and paint so that the image is the paint and vice versa. Here the brush-stroke creates the form and does not merely fill it in. Consequently, every movement of the brush on the canvas alters the shape and the implication of the image. That is why real painting is a mysterious and continuous struggle with chance — mysterious because the very substance of the paint, when used in this way, can make such a direct assault on the nervous system; continuous because the medium is so fluid and subtle that every change that is made loses what is already there in the hope of making a fresh gain. I think painting today is pure intuition and luck and taking advantage of what happens when you splash the bits down, and in this game of chance Matthew Smith seems to have the gods on his side.<sup>123</sup>

Asserting that the role of the act and practice of painting is to bring about a fusion with subject and execution thereof in the medium of paint (a state he admired so greatly in the work of Velazquez and Van Gogh), Bacon defines in 1953 a reality he was yet to bring about in his own work.<sup>124</sup> The striving for this ideal synthesis of paint, experience and subject pervades Bacon's discussion of his work and demonstrates the way in which chance is a foundation of his idea of creativity and also the degree to which his own

<sup>123</sup> Francis Bacon quoted in John Rothenstein, 'Introduction', in *Francis Bacon* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964), pp. 7-21., pp. 12-13.

<sup>124</sup> *Figure with Meat 1954* postdates Bacon's essay written for the catalogue and retrospective of Matthew Smith.

desire to bring this vision of union into existence mirrors the aims of Rimbaud's Becoming-Dionysian poetic project before him. Leiris draws attention to Bacon's fundamental Becoming-Dionysian aim when he writes: "Bacon's essential aim is not so much to produce a picture that will be an object worth looking at, as to use the canvas as a theatre of operations for the assertion of certain realities".<sup>125</sup>

Speaking of his ideal of painting, Bacon refers to both the symbiosis of paint and subject, but also to the role of chance and luck in painting. Implicitly, through his invocation of instinct or loss of conscious control, Bacon refers to the role of experience in painting as something unspoken but always present. Using the term 'instinct' has the effect of producing the connotation that the involvement of the experience of the artist in the creation of an image is something that 'comes naturally'. Yet following the development of his painting through the Grisaille and post-Grisaille periods for Bacon, this was certainly not the case. The successful inclusion of his own experience and sensations in his paintings alongside the appearance of the subject represents the core of Bacon's Becoming-Dionysian and was accomplished over time and through experimentation. Learning from the attempts to paint a complex human sensation such as the scream without considering the greater human context of pain and fear, Bacon gradually developed a more defined version of what he saw as the characteristic human dualism. Indeed, such realisation may be seen to emanate from the lesson Bacon derived from what he perceived as his Grisaille Period failure, namely that the human experience was infinitely more complex than the frozen moment of a scream. Bacon considered it was his failure to see the scream as anything more than an image or photographic still that prevented him from fully exploring its potential as a motif in the Grisaille period.<sup>126</sup> Determined to learn from the Grisaille period mistake of taking only a piece or a symptom of a greater state, and thereby not understanding the whole of the human condition in relation to his mission to explore human being, Bacon sought a new approach.

<sup>125</sup> Leiris, *Francis Bacon: Full Face and in Profile*, p. 6.

<sup>126</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 48.

### 5.4.1 Photographs & Source Materials

Interestingly, rather than discard photographs altogether following the failure of his attempts to paint only the scream using Eisenstein's photographic still as a basis, Bacon sought to redefine his relationship with photographs as a source of images and ideas. Rather than disappear from his stock of inspiration, photographs remain a staple of Bacon's source material. Therefore, Bacon's use of photographs as points of departure for his creative process is of continual interest to that which is here conceived in terms of a Becoming-Dionysian project and aim to fuse subject with its mode of exploration. Importantly for the examination of his process and project of Becoming-Dionysian, Bacon's use of photography can be seen to provide a significant insight into both Bacon's approach to the human subject as a physical fact and his use of source material as a trigger for the exploration of his subjects from memory. In his book *Francis Bacon: Commitment and Conflict*, Wieland Schmeid affirms the importance of photography as the seminal influence on Bacon's work. Schmeid writes:

If one were to identify the salient influence on Francis Bacon's work, the answer would surely have to be photography. By this, I do not mean individual photographs, but photography as a phenomenon, a practice. The sheer fact of photography's existence enabled Bacon to make paintings that directly address the real world but never have a photographic appearance.<sup>127</sup>

Citing Valéry, Bacon for his part insists that "what modern man wants [...] is the grin without the cat; the sensation [...] without the boredom of its conveyance".<sup>128</sup> Therefore it may seem ironic that his works rely on a Becoming-Dionysian that takes as points of reference photographs that are, taking the recording capacity of photography into account (and in the context of the analogy begun above), very much the 'cat without the grin'.

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<sup>127</sup> Schmeid, p. 61.

<sup>128</sup> Rothenstein, p. 21.

Yet, the recording aspect of photography and the accessible and cheap nature of photographic reproductions allowed Bacon to focus on paint as a medium without having merely to reproduce his subject. As such, photographs and the process that lead to the exactitude of reproduction of appearance “left the artist free to focus on the essence of things, instead of trying to convey their appearance”,<sup>129</sup> as Schmeid puts it.

For Bacon, the appearance and the being of his subject are the points of departure for the Becoming-Dionysian process during which the painter strives to combine both the appearance and the being of the subject in order to capture the “energy within the appearance”<sup>130</sup> and in so doing, “trap the reality of the subject matter that one has started from”.<sup>131</sup> Photography presented Bacon with a constantly accessible, portable and present image of the appearance of his subject. Revealingly, in his own terminology Bacon understands his subject as “the bait”<sup>132</sup> through whose auspices the image in paint is lured and trapped. Thus, the subject may be seen as the catalyst for the exploration of the Becoming-Dionysian that brings an image into being and that has as its focus the desire to explore the reality of a subject through the precipitation of the painting as an artificial structure from which the reality of the subject is created or invented. Bacon likens this to a somewhat carnivorous process of the artificial structure of the trap brought into being by the paint that then closes over the subject matter, leaving only the reality of its being behind.<sup>133</sup>

In a studio famously littered with photographs of all possible descriptions (and states of decomposition), it is useful to break down the photographic source material into two main groups. The first group consists of portraits and studies of his friends commissioned by the artist taken by *Vogue* photographer John Deakin, and the second grouping includes a vast selection of journalistic images, medical images, reproductions of artworks and figure

<sup>129</sup> Schmeid, p. 62.

<sup>130</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 175.

<sup>131</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 180.

<sup>132</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 180.

<sup>133</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 180.

studies by Victorian photographer Edward Muybridge.

In order to examine Bacon's process of Becoming-Dionysian, the separation of his photographic source material into two groups allows the consideration of his two main image-based concerns of the period beginning ca. 1957 and ending ca. 1980 to be developed apart from one another. Departing and returning to the photographs commissioned of Deakin, Bacon then produced portraits of people he knew well. Using the journalistic imagery, medical photographs, diagrams, sketches and the studies produced by Muybridge, Bacon chose to explore the elemental and anonymous aspects of human experience using the figure and the human body as a continual point of reference. Whilst naturally there exists some, if not indeed significant, overlap between the two general groups into which Bacon's photographic material and finished works fall, the general lines of the groupings do define the parameters of Bacon's use of source material and the way in which this material relates to the images completed. It is important to note that Bacon's sources were not entirely photographic, nor indeed even visual in nature. John Rothenstein describes the debris in Bacon's studio as made up of "bizarre contrast",<sup>134</sup> describing an outline of what could be found as follows:

Candid-camera shots of current events, mostly sinister or calamitous, the ephemera tacked to wall and littering floor, and the volumes stacked on his bedside table: Aeschylus and other Greek dramatists (in English translation), *The Golden Bough*, Pascal, Shakespeare, Montaigne, Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, and critical writing on several of those and the letters of Van Gogh. It is such writers who through re-reading have fed his imperious intelligence.<sup>135</sup>

Writings such as those of the authors mentioned above did no doubt influence, and indeed may be said to have shaped, the direction of Bacon's

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<sup>134</sup> Rothenstein, p. 18.

<sup>135</sup> Rothenstein, p. 18.

interest and concern with the human condition.<sup>136</sup> However, only in conjunction with his own experience did such writings serve to form his perception of human reality. In terms of his painting, these writings provided very little direct figurative content for his painting process.<sup>137</sup> Bacon's photographic source material, however, emerged again and again as a core basis for both figural depiction and as a source for visual reference in portraits of friends and it is this continual return to the photograph as a beginning that provides important insight into Bacon's Becoming-Dionysian creative process.

The combined influence of the photography of Muybridge and Deakin provided Bacon's painting with two continuously accessible points of reference to the reality of appearance from which to draw. The formative influence of both bodies of work can be seen with clarity in Bacon's work of the period 1965-1970. During this period Bacon's process of Becoming-Dionysian can be seen to be continue directly from the realisations of *Figure with Meat 1954* and simultaneously to expand its experimentation to include new means of realising the aim of human realism for the paint, painter and subject to perform synergistically within the context of the canvas. At the same time, Bacon used the opportunity of comparative freedom of subject and colour to explore beyond the boundaries of the traditionally defined subject and artist relationship that can be seen during his Grisaille period.

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<sup>136</sup> "Bacon has always considered that he was influenced by Eliot" Dawn Ades, 'Web of Images', in *Francis Bacon* (London: Thames & Hudson, in association with The Tate Gallery, 1985), pp. 8-23, p. 21.

<sup>137</sup> Bacon did paint, on more than one occasion, scenes inspired by the poetry of T. S. Eliot (see: *Triptych inspired by T. S. Eliot's Poem "Sweeney Agonistes" 1967*) and the dramatic works of Aeschylus (see: *Triptych Inspired by the Orestia of Aeschylus 1981*), however taking the Becoming-Dionysian nature of Bacon's creative process into account, it can be suggested that these works are less pictorial representations of the figurative narratives of each written piece than they are explorations of the experience and reality of which the works conjure for Bacon as a visual artist.



### 5.4.2 Muybridge

Throughout his career, Bacon continually referred to the work of Muybridge as a “source of inspiration”.<sup>138</sup> The initiation of Bacon’s relationship with the images taken by pioneering Victorian photographer Eadweard Muybridge<sup>139</sup> capturing the movement of people and animals is most usually dated from the study *Two Figures 1953* based on Muybridge’s series of stills observing the action and movements of wrestling men.<sup>140</sup> Bacon’s depiction of *Two Figures 1953* draws both from Muybridge’s series of images of men wrestling and his series of images of a woman lying down and covering herself with a blanket,<sup>141</sup> and as such is a powerful, if faceless, exploration of the everyday acts that comprise human experience of physical being. Yet, whilst Bacon often derived his figure compositions directly from Muybridge’s extensive studies of the human form in motion, in the context of his Becoming-Dionysian it is the way in which Bacon derives from Muybridge an understanding of the physical presence of human being in the world that is of importance to his greater artistic development. The way in which this understanding is incorporated into his painting shows the vital nature of the duality that is itself a site of conflict, the like of which has already been seen in Burroughs’ oscillation between his inner reality or Dionysian space of experience and sensation and the physical truth of the real world.

In Bacon’s opinion, Muybridge did little more than “show human movement as it actually was”,<sup>142</sup> that is to say, movement not specific to any one

<sup>138</sup> Schmeid, p. 66.

<sup>139</sup> Muybridge was born Edward James Muggeridge (1830-1904); following a serious head injury in 1860 he changed his name to Eadweard Muybridge. His major works, *The Human Figure in Motion* (1901) and *Animals in Motion* (1899), are published under the name Eadweard Muybridge.

<sup>140</sup> To a certain extent the influence of the photography of Muybridge can also be seen in Bacon’s early nude figure studies *Study from the Human Body 1949* (the male back depicted shares significant similarity with a plate of Men Wrestling, see Eadweard Muybridge *The Human Figure in Motion* (New York: Dover, 1955) plate 70) and *Study for Crouching Nude 1952*; however, as they are not based directly on Muybridge’s own compositions, their connection to his work may be coincidental.

<sup>141</sup> Muybridge, See plates 175 and 181, paying particular attention to the bed sheet arrangement as the figure alters the linen.

<sup>142</sup> Russell, p. 63.

individual and subject to an infinite array of possible medical conditions and diseases.<sup>143</sup> For a painter such as Bacon who set out to explore the human experience that was itself integral to his Becoming-Dionysian creative process, the photographs of Muybridge can be seen as visually and conceptually representative of the common truth of physical being and the varied realities of the human body. Understanding the physicality of the human form that Muybridge displays so explicitly in his photography may be seen to have aided Bacon in his attempt to abandon traditional representational modes. Indeed, the sheer anonymity of Muybridge's plethora of models allowed Bacon to revel in their pure physicality (seen clearly in *Man Shadow Boxing (.112 second)* [Plate XVI]) and thus be undeterred by the sensations of emotional attachment and familiarity that can be seen in his work derived from the photographs taken by Deakin (examined below).

Indeed, the anonymity of Muybridge's models only serves to emphasise the concrete physicality of their bodies and the motion in which they are caught. Muybridge's photographs are not intended for any artistic purpose, and Muybridge himself considered them of primarily scientific value.<sup>144</sup> The stark black and white of the photographs and the image of the human figure featured devoid of trappings or context emphasises the musculature of the model in movement. Muybridge's emphasis on movement can be seen to have greatly influenced Bacon in his desire to apply his process of Becoming-Dionysian to the dynamic element of the human condition by focussing on the human form. As such, the anonymity of Muybridge's models and his emphasis on their movement alone provides Bacon with a host of figures to study and lessons learned from these figure studies were readily applicable to his other work.

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<sup>143</sup> Muybridge devoted a whole section of his *Human and Animal Locomotion* to the recording of 'abnormal movement', chronicling the movement of amputees, patients with mental conditions and pronounced spinal curvature and a wide variety of disabilities and diseases.

<sup>144</sup> Robert Taft, 'Eadweard Muybridge and his work', in *The Human Figure in Motion* (New York: Dover, 1955), vii-xiv, p. x.

This anonymity can be seen in Bacon's work, particularly *Triptych – Studies of the Human Body 1979* [Plate XVII], in which the emphasis of all three compositions rests purely on the physical and the subjects themselves have only the suggestion of faces smeared in movement. The only visible facial element is a scream in the central panel that has the effect of communicating the carnal physicality of the subjects and the act in which they are engaged. Indeed, as an important part of Bacon's Becoming-Dionysian project to "open the valves of feeling and therefore return the onlooker to life more violently",<sup>145</sup> Muybridge's images presented Bacon with the arrested fact of human life in the form of a visual encyclopaedia. Whilst in the images of the period 1960-75 certain Muybridge-derived figure compositions are apparent (see for example the central panel from *Triptych – Studies from the Human Body 1970* [Plate XVIII]), the importance of Muybridge in the Becoming-Dionysian process for Bacon lay in the raw physicality of Muybridge's concern with the body and the truth of its movement in space. This concern with physical fact can be seen explicitly in *After Muybridge — Study of the Human Figure in Motion — Woman emptying a Bowl of Water, and Paralytic Child on All Fours 1965* [Plate XIX] in which the physical fact of the his subjects and their actions (such as the distortion of normal movement seen in the walking motion of the paralytic child in Muybridge's photograph from which Bacon's image of the child in this painting is derived [Plate XIXa]) form the subject of the image. However, Muybridge's influence can be seen in works in which the physicality of the subject is explored as an adjunct to the experiential aspect of being and movement. Works such as *Three Studies for Self Portrait 1972* [Plate XX] demonstrate the effect of Muybridge's corpus on Bacon's understanding of physical presence. In *Three Studies for Self Portrait 1972* the flesh of the artist is accentuated through the use of an extreme and emphatic shade of pink rather than a more usual tone. In the context of the image, this exaggeration has the effect of mocking the physical and the degradation of the flesh that age brings about. It can be argued that Muybridge's photographs impressed onto Bacon the importance of realising physical human life as the body itself and the fact that this body was com-

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<sup>145</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 17.

posed solely of physical facts and of a dynamic and kinetic series of actions in space and time. This realisation proved formative in Bacon's endeavour to create images that explored the violence of being in that they returned him as an artist to a vision of human reality that was unfettered by meaning and emotion. In essence, Muybridge's photographs brought into focus the brute facts of being that, in conjunction with Bacon's assorted pictures of crime scenes and medical textbooks, served to enlarge his encyclopaedia of human truths and to demonstrate "that there was more to behaviour than fine-art had hitherto taken on".<sup>146</sup>

### 5.4.3 Deakin

As his search for a human realism dictated, in order for Bacon's process of Becoming-Dionysian to be truly explorative in nature, the sensational and emotional reality of knowing and feeling had to be included in his encyclopaedia of human truths. Whilst Muybridge's photographs, alongside crime scene reports and medical textbooks provided an array of physical realities that served to illustrate the scope of real-world manifestations of physicality, Bacon commissioned a series of photographs of close friends from prominent photographer and close friend John Deakin. Whilst Bacon commissioned these photographs from Deakin to capture the physical appearance and attitude of people with whom he was familiar and close into sharper focus, he nevertheless required a high level of familiarity with the presence of the subject in order to paint his subject. Bacon explains the role of Deakin's photographs in his portraiture process as follows:

[T]he photographs are only used to make me remember their features, to revise my memory of them, as one would use a dictionary, really. I couldn't do people I didn't know very well. I wouldn't want to. It wouldn't interest me to try and do them unless I had

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<sup>146</sup> Russell, p. 68.

seen a lot of them, watched their contours, watched the way they behaved.<sup>147</sup>

As a photographer, John Deakin was, by his own admission, cruel to his sitters. In an as yet unpublished memoir, Deakin describes his creative impetus in a similar way to the way that Bacon describes his own, seeing himself as: “fatally drawn to the human race”.<sup>148</sup> For Deakin photography was a means to explore humanity itself: “what I want to do when I take a photograph”, explains Deakin, “is make a revelation about it. So my sitters turn into my victims. But I would like to add that it is only those with a daemon, however small and of whatever kind, whose faces lend themselves to being victimised at all”.<sup>149</sup> Bacon often used as inspiration photographs he had commissioned from Deakin citing the importance of their honesty in revealing not only the image of the sitter but capturing something of their reality through the inclusion of their human flaws. As elements of Bacon’s process of Becoming-Dionysian, Deakin’s photographs can be seen less as ‘points of departure’ for the painting of an illustrative or representative likeness of a friend, but rather as triggers for sensations and characteristics that are, combined, the sum of Bacon’s understanding of a person.

## 5.5 People and Portraits

Whereas the photographs of Muybridge can be seen to have influenced Bacon’s understanding of the mechanics of flesh, movement and physicality of the human being, the more personal portrait photography of Deakin provided Bacon’s process of Becoming-Dionysian with a reminder of appearances and physical truths and expressions of character of his more intimate subjects.

<sup>147</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 73-74

<sup>148</sup> Kenneth Baker, *John Deakin: Photographs*, reproduced at <[http://www.francis-bacon.cx/articles/08\\_97.html](http://www.francis-bacon.cx/articles/08_97.html)>.

<sup>149</sup> Baker, <[http://www.francis-bacon.cx/articles/08\\_97.html](http://www.francis-bacon.cx/articles/08_97.html)>

Visual reminders were important for Bacon as a portraitist as they ensured that the subject did not disappear into an expressionistic flurry of paint, but rather that the portrait explored both that which Bacon termed “the energy”<sup>150</sup> of the sitter together with their appearance. Bacon considered that using Deakin’s photographs he was able “trap” in his portraits not only the appearance of the subject, but also “the energy within the appearance”.<sup>151</sup>

Deakin’s photographs of Henrietta Moraes provide an excellent example of the way in which Bacon used Deakin’s images to aid his exploration of his Becoming-Dionysian process of image creation. The composition of *Henrietta Moraes 1966* [Plate XXI] can be seen to derive directly from Deakin’s photograph of Henrietta Moraes found in Bacon’s studio [Plate XXIa]. However, whilst the pictorial focus of the image is recognisable as Deakin’s Moraes, the physicality of the figure within the composition may be seen to derive directly from Bacon’s study of Muybridge insofar as the figure of Moraes is explored as a real physical entity rather than a flat photographic appearance. Deakin’s photograph may be successful in capturing something of Moraes’ uninhibited attitude towards the naked body<sup>152</sup> (Moraes is photographed reclining naked on a bed), and yet Bacon’s portrait explores a sensuality and physical presence that is absent in the photograph from which his composition is apparently derived. In Bacon’s portrait, Moraes gains a physical intensity that differs in its presentation to the sensuality explored in Bacon’s portraits of George Dyer and John Edwards with whose bodies he was intimately familiar. Moraes is explored more as an enigma and as a presence than as a human subject *per se*. In *Henrietta Moraes 1966*, she exists as a dynamic interaction of curves, without the definition of muscle, bone or structure so characteristic of Bacon’s male nudes. This lack of definition may be attributable at least in part to Bacon’s lack of intimate familiarity with the female body and, as such, his portraits of female nudes are dynamic

<sup>150</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 175.

<sup>151</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 175.

<sup>152</sup> In her memoir of London in the 1950s and 1960s, Emma Tennant ascribes Moraes’ ‘liberal attitude’ to her drug taking and alcoholism. Emma Tennant, *Girlitude: A Memoir of the 50s and 60s* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 176.

explorations of the energy of the subject alongside their appearance alone, unmitigated by any desire or intimate physical knowing on the part of the artist. Indeed, in this way Bacon's portraits of Moraes (and, to a lesser extent those of Isabel Rawsthorn and Muriel Belcher) may be seen as the most academically accessible manifestations of his Becoming-Dionysian creative process insofar as it is possible to trace their provenance through the work of Deakin and Muybridge alongside Bacon's own account of his creative vision of capturing the energy within the appearance of his subject.

Bacon's portraiture was painted in two standardised sizes, each size defining a format of portrait. Bacon's larger canvases (78" by 54") were used to paint full length portraits. The smaller canvases (14" by 12") were used to paint heads. The reduced size of the smaller canvases allowed Bacon to concentrate on exploring the face and head of his subject without the greater context or distraction of a body or a pose present in his full body studies and portraits. In order to have photographic images that corresponded to the change in scale and perspective required by this smaller scale portraiture, Bacon commissioned Deakin to capture close-up likenesses of his friends in characteristic poses.<sup>153</sup> It is in working from these photographs and with frequent contact with the sitter (though not in the traditional artist – subject sitting relationship) that Bacon's small portraits, better known as 'heads', were created.

This being the case, Bacon's 'heads' may be seen to provide an excellent demonstration of the value of Becoming-Dionysian as a conceptual tool in facilitating an understanding of the portrait as Bacon's use of painting as a plane on which to explore the interface between appearance and energy. Indeed, in both formats Bacon's portraits are revered by critics for their ability to "speak for natures revealed in their elemental state",<sup>154</sup> and to offer their subjects to viewers "stripped of the contrivance of self-conscious

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<sup>153</sup> The photographs by Deakin of Dyer and Rawsthorne in the appendix are excellent examples of this point.

<sup>154</sup> Russell, p. 139. Discussions of Bacon's portraits as showing or revealing sitters in their 'elemental' state are common across critical literature on Bacon's work. See for example: Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 80.

posing".<sup>155</sup> In the context of the present argument, such praise must surely be read as a validation of a measure of achievement attained by Bacon's reach for a human realism.

As outlined in his idea of human realism, for Bacon, in order for a portrait to have any claim to the title of realism, the subject must be explored in both its appearance *and* metaphysical, personal aspects of being. This is to say, in painting a portrait Bacon strives for a tightly focussed human realism in an attempt to explore both the realistic appearance of the subject *and* the energy that lies beneath this appearance. In an effort to find a process familiar to others with which to compare the process of Becoming-Dionysian that brings his portraits into being, Bacon turns to the act of recollection to provide a parallel able to communicate the essence of his Becoming-Dionysian creative process clearly demonstrated in his portraiture. Upon being asked if "the process of painting is almost like the process of recalling",<sup>156</sup> Bacon replies that this is indeed what he is saying, adding "I think the methods by which this is done are so artificial that the model before you, in my case, inhibits the artificiality by which this thing can be brought back".<sup>157</sup>

Bacon is insistent that whilst he does not paint 'literal likenesses'<sup>158</sup> of his subjects, "there is no point in doing a portrait of somebody if you're not going to make it look like him".<sup>159</sup> Yet, in seeming contrast to this commitment to making a portrait 'look like' its subject, Bacon's own portraits are brought about by a painting process that aims to 'deform' the sitter on the canvas.<sup>160</sup> These deformations are part of his project to make his pictures "more and more artificial",<sup>161</sup> and in doing so, to realistically create the 'being' of the subject in paint. Bacon explains: "the more artificial you can make it, the greater chance you've got of its looking real".<sup>162</sup> In the context

<sup>155</sup> Davies and Yard, p. 55.

<sup>156</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 40.

<sup>157</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 40.

<sup>158</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 146.

<sup>159</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 146.

<sup>160</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 146.

<sup>161</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 146.

<sup>162</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 148.



of his Becoming-Dionysian, Bacon's desire to 'deform' his subjects can be seen as his own interpretation of the changes required to be undergone by appearance in order to capture the likeness of the sitter in his entirety, that is to say, as a human being and not merely as an image.

In order to explain the paradox of needing to maintain some level of likeness yet at the same time "deform people into appearance"<sup>163</sup> as he sees and understands them, Bacon cites the example of two portraits he painted of Michel Leiris. Both titled *Study for a Portrait (Michel Leiris)* the first of these portraits was executed in 1976 [Plate XXII] and the second in 1978 [Plate XXIII]. Whilst neither of Bacon's portraits create anything akin to what could be seen as a literal likeness of Leiris, for both Bacon and Sylvester these portraits do achieve their aim of bringing the appearance and presence of Leiris into sharp and poignant focus.<sup>164</sup> Bacon explains:

I think that, of those two paintings of Michel Leiris, the one that I did which is less literally like him is in fact more poignantly like him. What is curious about that particular one of Michel is that it does look more like him and yet, if you think about Michel's head, it's rather globular, in fact, and this is long and narrow. So that one doesn't know what makes one thing seem more real than another. I really wanted to make these portraits of Michel look like him: there's no point in doing a portrait of somebody if you're not going to make it look like him. But, being rather long and thin, that head in fact has nothing to do with what Michel's head is really like, and yet it looks more like him.<sup>165</sup>

In creating a portrait, Bacon then sacrifices a purely literal likeness in order to produce an image that explores his own understanding of Leiris' being and presence. That is to say, using Bacon's own terminology, he uses

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<sup>163</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 146.

<sup>164</sup> For the purposes of illustrating Bacon's point, a photograph of Michel Leiris is included as Plate XXIIIa.

<sup>165</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 146.

only the elements of literal likeness that he requires in order to trap the appearance of his subject along with his 'energy'. In this way, the portrait may be seen to embody the "tightrope between figurative painting and abstraction"<sup>166</sup> insofar as Bacon struggles to explore both the appearance and the 'energy' of his subject in a single image that retains legitimate claim to the title of realism as he himself defines it.

As Bacon is adamant that his portraits capture and explore more than physical likeness, it may seem ironic that Bacon paints in solitude and without the presence of a sitting model — a technique that remains traditional for many artists who paint, draw or sculpt from life. Again, Sylvester's analogy of recalling as a means of explaining that which is here termed Bacon's Becoming-Dionysian is apt in this instance as it allows some insight into the act of relating to the synthesis of emotion and appearance that takes place in memory and its relationship to Bacon's Becoming-Dionysian. In much the same way that recalling an event may be seen as creating an artificial reconstruction of something past subject to alteration by emotion or hindsight, by using paint Bacon's Becoming-Dionysian is unable to be achieved in a portrait without the aid of such pure artifice. Indeed, Bacon admits to wanting his paintings to look both 'real and artificial',<sup>167</sup> insisting on the seemingly paradoxical usefulness of artificiality in the context of making a painting 'more real'. Through artifice, Bacon feels that he is able to return the image, sensation and presence of the subject to the viewer in a new way. Citing the example the painting of a wave breaking on the shore, Bacon explains:

Only if I can take it far enough away from being another picture, if I can elevate, as it were, the shore and the wave — almost cut it out as a fragment and elevate it within the whole picture so that it looks so artificial and yet so much more real than if it were a painting of the sea breaking on the shore.<sup>168</sup>

<sup>166</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 12.

<sup>167</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 148.

<sup>168</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 148.

Bacon applies a similar principle to the exploration of his human subjects. Using his experience of painting a breaking wave as a practical means of explicating the process by which artificiality heightens the reality of the image, Bacon describes his desire to “remake the wave and a piece of the beach in a very artificial structure”.<sup>169</sup> Indeed, Bacon insists that the importance of such a structure is to heighten the reality of the final image. Bacon explains: “no matter how artificial it is, will be like a wave breaking on a sea shore”.<sup>170</sup> Within the context of a portrait in which the space for such artificial structure is necessarily limited, it may be argued that the canvas itself provides an artificial structure upon which the subject is remade and presented to an audience. In this context, the necessity for artificiality of which Bacon speaks can be seen as a reference to the act and concept of painting itself as creating a reality synthesising physical and metaphysical aspects of being using paint. The paint becomes the material in which the life of the subject or scene is captured and communicated to an audience, yet the paint is not a substitute for the appearance or ‘energy’ of the subject itself. Indeed, it may be argued that the painting produced as a result of Bacon’s appropriation of artificiality to increase the correspondence between the reality of the artist’s view of the subject and the subject itself is not a direct copy of the recollection or a translation into a physical medium of an experience. Rather, the painting itself may be usefully understood as the exploration in paint of the conversion of a number of factors within the boundaries of the defined structure of the canvas.

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<sup>169</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 148.

<sup>170</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 148.

Working on unprimed canvas that is light to medium brown in colour,<sup>171</sup> throughout his career Bacon often left the canvas linen exposed in his finished compositions.<sup>172</sup> Whilst this as a technique can be seen to date from Bacon's earliest works, in his later large canvases, the decision to leave the canvas exposed may be argued to serve the purpose of heightening the role of paint as a medium between the artist and the *prima materia* of the canvas, since it asserts the role of the canvas as a structure upon which the subject is *made*. Most often in his larger format canvases, Bacon uses exposed areas of canvas to present items that appear as incontestable physical facts or structures necessary to the composition. In *Study of a Nude with Figure in a Mirror* 1969 [Plate XXV], the canvas is left bare in the shape of the structure upon which the nude is supported. Similar use of exposed canvas to suggest the artefacts of physical reality can be seen in *Three Studies of Isabel Rawsthorne* 1967 [Plate XXVI], in which the raw canvas is lightly scored with white paint to suggest a wall. This technique is seen again in *Triptych Inspired by T. S. Eliot's Poem "Sweeney Agonistes"* 1967 [Plate XXVII] in which the physical facts of structure (the bed in panels one and three, and the wall leading away from the central bloody image in the second panel) are indicated by the revealing of the canvas beneath. In *Triptych- Studies of the Human Body* 1979, Bacon again uses raw canvas to underline the pure physical fact of the structures upon which his figures are supported and explored as syntheses of appearance and metaphysical elements apprehended and experienced by the artist.

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<sup>171</sup> Famously, Bacon worked on the unprimed reverse of pre-primed canvas. Whilst his discovery of the suitability of this surface for his painting was initially accidental and born of financial necessity (having painted on the primed side of a canvas and unable to afford another, Bacon painted on its reverse), Bacon persisted in using the un-primed side of the material. Following his discovery, all canvases were stretched with the unprimed side facing the painter. See: Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 195. Plate XXIV is a photograph of Bacon's studio at the time of his death clearly showing the unused canvases (against the wall) stretched with the primed side facing the timber frame and the un-primed or raw canvas ready to receive the paint.

<sup>172</sup> Schmeid, p. 102. For examples of the early use of bare canvas in Bacon's work see: *Study for Portrait* 1949 (*Man in a Blue Box*), *Study of a Figure in a Landscape* 1951, and *Sphinx I* 1953.

The use of exposed canvas in *Studies of George Dyer and Isabel Rawsthorne 1970* [Plate XXVIII] can be seen to heighten the role of the paint as the medium in which the explorations of Dyer and Rawsthorne are undertaken as facts.<sup>173</sup> By using blank canvas to imply the physical structures present in the composition, Bacon may be seen to draw attention to his Becoming-Dionysian as specifically *created* or artificial since by doing so he emphasises that the paint *invents* rather than records the image. In such a context, the use of blank, or lightly painted areas of canvas (such as hair), can be seen as a means to indicate that the image created by the paint is itself little more than an appearance, a moment, movement or expression that was apparent only to the painter in a space that is between physical reality and the 'inner reality' of experience. Clothes and other details such as hair are usually signalled or alluded to in Bacon's small portraits using blank canvas, or, in the case of hair, predominantly blank canvas with a few simple brushstrokes to indicate hair as a moving and impermanent shape or constant of appearance. Revealing the canvas as the surface beneath the paint in these small portraits can be seen as a way to both highlight the role of paint and indeed the image itself as being between the physical truth of 'reality' of which it is itself as a physical fact, and a way to understand and present experience of the artist exploring the reality of his subject in paint.

Focussing on the flesh of the subjects has the effect of heightening the emphasis on the artist's attempt to capture the subject alone and without context. In *Studies of George Dyer and Isabel Rawsthorne 1970*, only the flesh of his subjects is rendered in detail using paint (along with a typical flat acrylic background in both portraits provided for definition of the central figure). Whilst, as is typical for Bacon, the hair of both Rawsthorne and Dyer is suggested with dark, directional strokes through which raw canvas remains visible giving the effect of depth, the clothing of both subjects is only sketched in and large areas of blank canvas remain visible. Dyer's trademark collar, apparent in so many of Bacon's images of his partner, is made with a few

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<sup>173</sup> Deakin's portraits of Dyer and Rawsthorne are included as Plates XXVIIIa and XXVIIIb respectively.

strokes of paint. Dyer's jacket is suggested in shadow in much the same way as has been the dark material of the clothing of Rawsthorne, yet in both images the rawness of the canvas has been deliberately left visible at the bottom of the frame. The technique of leaving the canvas raw in the place of what may be seen as extraneous physical detail (such as clothing) is also found in *Three Studies of George Dyer (on light ground) 1964* [Plate XXIX]. By deliberately leaving the canvas without pigment it may be argued that Bacon not only highlights the nature of the images as artificial and transient, but also focuses attention on the intensity of the relationship between the painter and the subject.

Painting only the flesh of his subjects in detail affirms that it was the synthesis of being and appearance that was of interest to the painter manifest first and foremost through the physical presence of the subject themselves. By not rendering or exploring in paint the clothing of his subjects but merely suggesting their presence and using a flat and smooth background to create a stark contrast with the figures themselves, Bacon necessarily foregrounds his concern with inventing or capturing the *human* truth of the being of his subjects. Indeed, by making evident the lack of concern with garments (and therewith illustrative recording), Bacon may be seen to bring to the fore his own causal presence in the images. By choosing to omit all context for the figures, including in the image only that which Gowing terms the "human drama"<sup>174</sup> of the subject's reality as a human being, Bacon may be seen to demonstrate the depth of his essential human concern.

The lack of illustrative literal likeness in his portraiture, together with Bacon's own emphasis on the necessary structure of artificiality, may be seen to precipitate a greater emphasis on the role of paint within the image. However, as the role of paint within his images continues to diversify, Bacon defines an increasing conceptual and compositional role for canvas in his works that may be seen to flow directly from his understanding of the importance of artifice in capturing and communicating the reality of a subject. As his *Becoming-Dionysian* began to play more of a central role, canvas

<sup>174</sup> Gowing, p. 21.

began to appear in a defined and interesting context in Bacon's work. The emergent role created for canvas drew attention to Bacon's creative process and concept of art as a space of exploration which in turn may be seen to bring the exploration of his Becoming-Dionysian to the fore in a new way.

Insofar as each of Bacon's paintings may be viewed as explorations of interactions and interfaces and is not the result of a spontaneous or naturally occurring phenomenon taking place upon a specially stretched and formatted canvas, it may be argued that such an exploration is clearly artificial. Bacon's practice of painting portraits without the traditional *in situ* sitter – artist relationship is an excellent illustration of his understanding of the necessity of abstraction within the context of making the reality of his subject using paint. Indeed, on the subject of live models or sitters, Bacon insists that their presence would compromise the necessary artificiality of the image and prevent him from exploring the fact of his sitters with clarity. Bacon explains:

They inhibit me. They inhibit me because, if I like them, I don't want to practice before them the injury that I do to them in my work. I would rather practice the injury in private by which I can record the fact of them more clearly.<sup>175</sup>

Using the framework that Becoming-Dionysian provides, it may be argued that Bacon's desire to be alone during the painting process allowed him to invent the reality and being of his sitters in paint without the distraction of their reaction. The reality of Bacon's isolation allows the creative process of Becoming-Dionysian to explore the gestures and expressions of a sitter simultaneously with the emotion of the artist concerning their presence in his universe. As such, live sitters may indeed have been counterproductive to Bacon's Becoming-Dionysian and the invention of the human reality of his subject in paint.

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<sup>175</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 41.

Whilst being accessible as explorations of people known to the artist, Bacon's portraits also capture movement and expression through their use of a number of perspectives in the one face or image and the smudges and smears of the paint which attempt to capture something more than likeness. Indeed, Leiris may be referring to both Bacon's portraiture and his more narrative imagery when he writes that Bacon's images are "strictly realistic, but non-anecdotal",<sup>176</sup> insisting that his images are "more in the nature of flash photographs comparable to Joycean epiphanies [...] raised to the level of disturbing presences".<sup>177</sup> In an attempt to reach his ideal of a human realism using a process of Becoming-Dionysian, the invention of a reality on canvas demands that the experiential truth of atmosphere be explored to release the image from anecdotal illustration. In order to explore and communicate the atmosphere or experience of a reality Bacon invents using paint, as an artist Bacon makes use of non-illustrational markings. These marks are often brought about by seemingly random smearing movements made with rags or paint thrown at the canvas may later be manipulated using a brush to conform to Bacon's understanding of the atmosphere of a given reality he has chosen to explore.

David Sylvester comments that Bacon's smears of pigment have the effect of communicating a meaning of disintegration; however, he goes on to insist that: "what these meanings involve conveys itself before there has been time to become aware of meanings".<sup>178</sup> Viewing the use of non-illustrational markings in the context of portraiture commentators and critics often interpret Bacon's splashes of pigment and other non-representational marks within the image as attempts to render subjects unattractive or freakish, accusations to which Bacon replied "I terribly don't want to make freaks",<sup>179</sup> insisting that his use of paint was intended to make people look as "attractive as they really are".<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Leiris, p. 14.

<sup>177</sup> Leiris, p. 14.

<sup>178</sup> Sylvester, *Francis Bacon: The Human Body*, p. 25.

<sup>179</sup> Russell, p. 99.

<sup>180</sup> Russell, p. 99.



Bacon repeatedly uses non-representational or 'atmospheric' markings to great effect in his finished images. The lashes of white paint that lash across both versions I and II of Bacon's *Study for Bullfight No. 1 1969* [Plate XXX] and *Second Version of Study for Bullfight No.1 1969* [Plate XXXI] accentuate the sensation of both the violence of the scene and the frenzied movement of the bull trapped in the ring. Bacon's manipulation of the thick white pigment across the surface of the canvas acts in conjunction with the blurred features of the matador to remove the image from the realm of illustration and to communicate the reality of the bullfight experience. Indeed, the anxious muscular tension of the bull and swift movement of the matador may be seen to be rendered more immediate as sensations through Bacon's use of white paint in a blatantly non-illustrational way. Whilst the sense of movement is conveyed to the viewer by the figurative content of the image and the subject of the images are clearly identifiable in appearance, the role of the white paint seems utterly ambiguous in any narrative or illustrational context. Yet, the white lashes of pigment are integral to the exploration and communication of the energy of the atmosphere in which bull and matador locked together in a fight to the death.

In much the same way as Bacon reveals the raw canvas to remind the viewer of the reality of the painting as somehow ephemeral and fleeting, by placing such marks in the context of his image it may be suggested that Bacon is reclaiming painting as both a notional space and medium in which the exploration of being human is the core of its endeavour. As such, a Bacon image does not, as Russell notes, "tell you a story through a long diatribe in the brain"; rather, the image presents a complete fact in and of itself.<sup>181</sup> Confronted with a Bacon canvas, the viewer does not penetrate the being of the paint and canvas as entities other than accepting implicitly their existence as fact. Rather, in seeing the painting the viewer is confronted by the sensation of having reality returned to an audience stripped of protective screens and contextualising devices. Such devices are often deemed by critics to be little more than extraneous facts, facts that in the context of the image Andrew

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<sup>181</sup> Russell, p. 121.

Forge describes succinctly as “*mise en scène*”.<sup>182</sup> For Forge, the inclusion of such contextualising devices would only serve to protect the viewer from the truth of the image presented. Instead, with such scenery removed, “[n]othing cushions us from the painful interiorised discovery of likeness”.<sup>183</sup> Returning again to the example of Bacon’s portraiture, movement, face and being are presented as one, the layers of artifice and convention that context and traditional structure provide are simply not present and the interplay between the evident artifice of paint and canvas and the juxtaposition of this blatant contrivance with the sensation of subject and being explored in the image itself serves to assault the viewer with what Bacon terms “the brutality of fact”.<sup>184</sup>

As such, engaging in a Becoming-Dionysian that aims to reach toward the unconscious and actualising ‘inner reality’ as a causal element in his creative process, Bacon’s exploration of human reality can be seen to “tell us more truthfully than any conventional portrait what it is like to be a human being”.<sup>185</sup> In describing the Becoming-Dionysian ideal toward which he strives in relation to his subjects, Bacon describes his aim as an artist as follows:

I would like my pictures to look as if a human being had passed between them, like a snail, leaving a trail of the human presence and memory trace of past events, as the snail leaves its slime. I think that the whole process of this sort of elliptical form is dependent on the execution of detail and how shapes are remade or put slightly out of focus to bring in their memory traces.<sup>186</sup>

In this way, Bacon’s desire to invent the human form can be seen as the realisation of the influences of both Deakin and Muybridge in a process of

<sup>182</sup> Andrew Forge, ‘About Bacon’, in *Francis Bacon* (London: Thames & Hudson, in association with The Tate Gallery, 1985), 24-31, p. 30.

<sup>183</sup> Forge, p. 30.

<sup>184</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews*, p. 182.

<sup>185</sup> Russell, p. 132.

<sup>186</sup> Francis Bacon, in *The New Decade: 22 European Painters and Sculptors*, ed. by Andrew Ritchie (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1955) p. 63.

Becoming-Dionysian that had as its aim the invention of subjects in their brutal, naked, entirety as human beings. As such, it is possible to argue that by creating a human realism, a part of which was positing the artist as a causal reality in the being of the painting through Becoming-Dionysian, Bacon can be seen to have achieved a 'reinvention of the relationship between painter and subject' that Russell insists "has to be done every two or three generations".<sup>187</sup>

## 5.6 Conclusion

In summing up their own examination of Bacon's works, Davies and Yard conclude that "Bacon's paintings are, in the end, about what we do in the space that we are allowed".<sup>188</sup> In making such a comment, Davies and Yard may be seen to affirm the success of Bacon's project to create a human realism that matches his subject matter in vitality and energy through his use of a creative process that is here identified as Becoming-Dionysian in nature. Art, for Bacon, is "an obsession with life",<sup>189</sup> and in order to best explore his own obsession, Bacon sought to create art that was "equal to his subject matter". Indeed, John Rothenstein goes as far as to assert that Bacon's work, process and engagement with life itself "may well portend the revival of an art that makes no claim to be self-sufficient but seeks instead to communicate truths presumed to transcend it".<sup>190</sup>

The broader, more human emphasis that the use of Becoming-Dionysian has allowed to come to the fore in this exploration of Bacon's work has revealed the extent to which his 'obsession with life' and human experience influenced his development of a human realism. As such, it can be suggested that in much the same way as Burroughs and Rimbaud before him, it was

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<sup>187</sup> Russell, p. 116.

<sup>188</sup> Davies and Yard, p. 102.

<sup>189</sup> Trucchi, p. 1.

<sup>190</sup> Rothenstein, p. 21.

necessary for Bacon to work in isolation from the discipline of an art movement to bring this realism to fruition.<sup>191</sup> Indeed, it may be argued that the desire to be apart from normative modes of art concerned only with either expression of the emotions or the illustration of appearances brought experience and appearance together in his work. Using the frame that Becoming-Dionysian provides for an analysis of his work, these experiential aspects of existence are revealed as vitally important in fuelling Bacon's desire for a human realism that was able to explore, and not merely express, Bacon's own human experience.

Most importantly, through the areas of his work that are opened up through the use of Becoming-Dionysian as a tool, Bacon's art may be better understood as a genuine attempt to reach beyond the restrictions of tradition in order to explore the reality of being human using his own experience as a point of departure. In providing an alternative approach to Bacon's work that has previously been afforded sensationalist labels such as 'freakish' and 'horrific', the present study hopes to foster an understanding of Bacon's work as a reach towards an exploration of the reality of the human experience and the truth of human being in the world.

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<sup>191</sup> Trucchi, p. 1.

NOTE:

The following images have been removed to comply with copyright rules. They are included in the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

**Plate I Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for Figures at the  
Base of a Crucifixion 1944***

Oil and Pastel on hardboard, triptych, each panel 97 × 74

**Plate II Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for a Crucifixion* 1962**

Oil on Canvas, triptych, each panel 198 × 145

Plate III Francis Bacon, *Painting 1946*

Oil and Tempura on canvas, 198 × 132



Plate IV Sergei Eisenstein, photographic still from  
*The Battleship Potempkin* 1925  
Photographic film still

Plate V Diego Velasquez, *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*  
Oil on canvas, 141 × 119

Plate VI Francis Bacon, *Study after Velasquez's Portrait of  
Pope Innocent X 1953*  
Oil on canvas, 153 × 118

**Plate VII Francis Bacon, *Pope II* 1951**

Oil on canvas 198 × 137

**Plate VIII Francis Bacon, *Head I 1948***  
Oil and tempura on canvas, 103 × 75

Plate IX Francis Bacon, *Study for a Portrait 1949*  
(*Man in a Blue Box*)  
Oil on canvas, 147.5 × 131.

Plate X Francis Bacon, *Study for a Portrait 1953*

Oil on canvas, 198 × 137

**Plate XI Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for the Human Head* 1953**

Oil on canvas, triptych, each panel 61 × 51



Plate XII Francis Bacon, *Figure with Meat* 1954  
Oil on canvas, 129 × 122

Plate XIII Francis Bacon, *Study from Innocent X* 1962  
Oil on canvas, 198 × 145

**Plate XIV Francis Bacon, *Head II* 1949**

Oil on canvas, 80.5 × 65

Plate XV Francis Bacon, *Study for Figure IV 1956-57*  
Oil on canvas, 152.5 × 116

Plate XVI Eadweard Muybridge, *Man Shadow*  
*Boxing (.112 second)*  
Photographic plate, first published 1887

Plate XVII Francis Bacon, *Triptych – Studies of the  
Human Body 1979*

Oil on canvas, triptych, each panel 198 × 147.5

Plate XVIII Francis Bacon, *Triptych – Studies of the  
Human Body 1970*

Oil on canvas, each panel 198 × 147.5

Plate XIX Francis Bacon, *After Muybridge – Study of the  
Human Figure in Motion – Woman emptying a Bowl of Water,  
and Paralytic Child on All Fours 1965*

Oil on canvas, 198 × 147.5



Plate XIXa Eadweard Muybridge, *Paralytic Child*  
*Walking on All-Fours*

Photographic plate, first published 1887

**Plate XX Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for a Self-Portrait* 1972**

Oil on canvas, triptych, each panel 35.5 × 30.5

Plate XXI Francis Bacon, *Henrietta Moraes 1966*

Oil on canvas, 152 × 132

Plate XXIa John Deakin, *Photograph of Moraes*  
Photographic print

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Plate XXII Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait*

(Michel Leiris) 1976

Oil on canvas, 35.5 × 30.5

Plate XXIII Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait*  
(*Michel Leiris*) 1978  
Oil on canvas, 35.5 × 30.5

**Plate XXIIIa Photograph of Michel Leiris**  
Photographic print

**Plate XXIV Photograph of studio interior  
with unprimed canvas evident**  
Photographic print



Plate XXV Francis Bacon, *Study of a Nude with Figure  
in a Mirror 1969*

Oil on canvas, 198 × 147.5

Plate XXVI Francis Bacon, *Three Studies of  
Isabel Rawsthorn 1967*  
Oil on canvas, 119 × 152.5

Plate XXVII Francis Bacon, *Triptych Inspired by T. S. Eliot's*

*Poem 'Sweeny Agonistes' 1967*

Oil on canvas, triptych, each panel 198 × 147.5

Plate XXVIII Francis Bacon, *Studies of George Dyer and  
Isabel Rawsthorn 1970*

Oil on Canvas, diptych, each panel 35.5 × 30.5

**Plate XXVIIIa John Deakin, Photograph of Dyer**  
Photographic print

**Plate XXVIIIb John Deakin, Photograph of Rawsthorn**  
Photographic print

Plate XXIX Francis Bacon, *Three Studies of George Dyer*  
(*on Light Ground*) 1964

Oil on canvas, triptych, each panel 35.5 × 30.5

Plate XXX Francis Bacon, *Study for Bullfight No. I 1969*  
Oil on canvas, 198 × 147.5



Plate XXXI Francis Bacon, *Second Version of Study for Bullfight*

*No. 1 1969*

Oil on canvas, 198 × 147.5

# Chapter 6

## Thesis Conclusion

By beginning with Nietzsche's comprehensive introduction to art as the essential metaphysical activity of man in *Birth of Tragedy*, this thesis seeks to address creativity as an exploration of human being, or, perhaps better said, being human. Nietzsche's notion of a total aesthetics necessitating engagement with life on the part of the artist functions synergistically with Deleuze and Guattari's schematisation of this engagement in their idea of becoming. Using a theory created from an application of Nietzsche's principle taken further by Deleuze and Guattari's schematisation of becoming as an endless practice, Becoming-Dionysian does not separate the artist from the art this artist creates. Indeed, using Becoming-Dionysian as a frame for examining creative endeavour, works of art may be valuably understood as spaces consecrated to the exploration of the artist, his/her experiences and understanding, as a human being.

The work of Rimbaud present this study with a complete example of a Becoming-Dionysian project contained within a period of less than a decade. Rimbaud's *Lettres du Voyant* impart his thought concerning creativity and the importance of intoxication to his creative process in a way that renders explicit the vital experiential connection between the experience of the artist and the art such an artist creates. Indeed, using these letters to exemplify Rimbaud's perspective on the importance of the experience of the artist in

the creation of his work, Chapter Three shows the ways in which Rimbaud's creative project of making himself a seer may usefully be seen as Becoming-Dionysian in nature.

In contrast to Rimbaud's tightly focussed poetic project, Burroughs explores a process of oscillation across a lifetime of writing. Drawing on the oscillation exemplified by Burroughs' addiction to heroin and his movement between intoxicated and sober states as a model for his Becoming-Dionysian, Chapter Four examines Burroughs' use of his experience of these two states in his work. Applying Becoming-Dionysian to the works of Burroughs has enabled Burroughs' creative process of exploring his own oscillation between the Dionysian space of intoxication and the real world to be seen with greater clarity. By tracing the development of Burroughs' early experiments in writing through to *Naked Lunch* Chapter Four is able to present Burroughs' notion of the cut-up as a schematisation of his greater project of Becoming-Dionysian.

Using Becoming-Dionysian to frame an exploration of the works of Francis Bacon expands further the possible application of the theory this thesis creates. Moving beyond the sphere of the word, Chapter Five examines the importance of Bacon's pronouncement of his art as realistic in order to understand his painting as an exploration of his subject, rather than simply recording an impression of its appearance. Indeed, using Becoming-Dionysian as the structure of this investigation, Chapter Five examines the techniques and effects Bacon used in order to bring this realism into being. One of these techniques is Bacon's use of chance in much the same way as an intoxicant, as a means of initiating a Dionysian realm. It is both Bacon's aim of creating art that is equivalent to its subject matter and the methods he uses to realise this aim in his art that demonstrate a process that is Becoming-Dionysian in nature.

Through the exploration of the works of Rimbaud, Burroughs and Bacon using the concept of Becoming-Dionysian as a critical tool, it may be suggested that new insight into the process of creativity demonstrable in the

works of all three artists is facilitated. This insight into the process of creating art that draws from both the experiential, undifferentiated Dionysian immediacy of first-person being and the more sedate and considered world of acknowledged facts and social structures can be seen to render visible the process by which the artistic work was brought into being. As such, it can be conjectured that the use of the tool Becoming-Dionysian in the examination of the works of Burroughs, Bacon and Rimbaud has served to render more accessible and bring into sharper focus the personal human emphasis of each artist.

In rendering explicit the process that each artist can be seen to have precipitated in order to examine his own human experience, it can be suggested that the importance of Becoming-Dionysian as a critical tool lies in its ability to open new areas of artists' works and concerns that have been neglected under previous critical models and structures. The classical critical models that have hitherto been seen as dominant have analysed and understood artistic endeavour as either mimetic or diegetic, and as such tended to view art as either reproducing, or copying the natural world or constructing a narrative in order to represent a set of events, real or imagined, by the artist. Becoming-Dionysian differs from these models in that using Becoming-Dionysian as a critical tool for the examination of an artists' work allows for the process through which the art is created to be brought to the fore. Thus, rather than viewing each work as only the product of that which is most commonly termed 'the creative process', using Becoming-Dionysian as a critical tool each work is not viewed as the conclusion of a particular creative process. Rather, each finished work is seen as a moment in the process of realising the aims of Becoming-Dionysian itself.

The importance of intoxication to this study is primarily to render explicit the movement between the realms of the Dionysian and the Apollonian that Becoming-Dionysian argues characterises some manifestations of human creativity. Carnwath and Smith are quite correct when they write: "[h]eroin never created a great artist, but great artists can make use of their heroin

experience to create art”.<sup>1</sup> The role of intoxicants in this study is to demonstrate the tangible fact of a Dionysian space and the means by which such a space may be entered. Intoxication makes the movement between a Dionysian or intoxicated space and its sober, Apollonian counterpart both graphic and accessible as an idea, a reality and a concept. As such, using intoxication as a concept or point of entry into this vision of the creative process of exploration does not preclude the application of Becoming-Dionysian to the work of artists not involved with drugs or intoxicants of any description.

Stepping back from the realm of criticism of creative work, one effect of Becoming-Dionysian as a means of approaching the concept of creativity is to reaffirm the importance of the artist and the human experience of this artist as central to the creative process. As such, Becoming-Dionysian may be understood as a Humanist theory because it focuses on the individual and the reality of creative possibility as enacted by a human agent. However, whilst essentially Humanist in its outlook, Becoming-Dionysian does acknowledge the presence of controlling, Apollonian structures that play important roles in the lives of most people. Indeed, acknowledging these formative structures is an essential element of defining and demonstrating the necessity of the dynamic movement that characterises Becoming-Dionysian as a process. In a number of ways Becoming-Dionysian may be seen as symptomatic of the emerging interdisciplinarity of the New Humanities insofar as the theory aims to use a number of theoretical approaches to restore the author to a central role whilst not harking back to the idea so clearly dismembered by post-structuralism that the author and conscious intentionality are one and the same. Indeed, the genesis and applications of Becoming-Dionysian as a theory demonstrate the ways in which the anti-humanistic theories of Althusser, Lacan and Lévi-Strauss have been incorporated into the modern concept of humanism in which environmental influences co-exist with the more traditional view of human autonomy. Using the idea of the artist to foreground the new notion of the embodied artistic creator in the world after Foucault’s answer to Barthes’ “The Death of the Author” pronounced the end of the

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Carnwath and Ian Smith, *Heroin Century* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 115.

authorial presence, Becoming-Dionysian presents the author/artist as open to a number of influences and not solely guided and defined by intention. As such, in the developing tradition of the New Humanities,<sup>2</sup> Becoming-Dionysian presents a new understanding of the author as a more porous presence between the machinations of chance and unconscious movement and the definition of intention, rationality and structure. Perhaps, then, it is possible to argue that Becoming-Dionysian represents a potentially modified or renovated Humanism in which experience, exploration and possibility are all characteristic of a movement beyond, and yet returning to the structures of control, regulation and consciousness that are fundamental elements of most social, human life.

Understanding intoxication as exemplifying only one manifestation of a Becoming-Dionysian process, Rimbaud, Burroughs and Bacon are by no means the only artists to whose work the concept of Becoming-Dionysian may be usefully applied. The work of other artists equally involved with an exploration of their own reality of being human is also well suited for examination using the concept of Becoming-Dionysian. Visual artists such as Frieda Kahlo and Judy Chicago, writers such as Virginia Woolf, Henry Miller, Emily Dickinson, Charles Baudelaire, Vladimir Nabokov and Jorge Luis Borges may all be seen as involved in creative processes that are Becoming-Dionysian in nature. In more modern media, Dennis Potter's masterpiece *The Singing Detective* has his hero Philip Marlow realise a process of Becoming-Dionysian that is recognisably similar in its oscillation to that of William Burroughs' narrator in *Naked Lunch*. Becoming-Dionysian represents a theoretical frame for understanding the genesis of creativity that springs from human reality, fluctuating as it does between the known and the unknown, the real and the imagined, in a chain of everlasting presents.

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<sup>2</sup> Meaghan Morris, 'Humanities for Taxpayers: Some Problems', in *New Literary History*, 36 (2005) 111-119.



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