

Course: Introduction to Semiology

Field of Study: Philology (also as elective course for students from other fields of study)

Form of classes and number of hours: lecture 15 h

Number of ECTS credits: 1

Learning outcomes:

Student:

- knows the relationship of semiology with other humanistic disciplines, especially with linguistics,
- has basic knowledge of the main paradigms of semiology,
- knows the structure and functions of signs, character codes and communication,
- analyses the cultural message (literary, philosophical, colloquial discourse) identifying and correctly interpreting the syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and communicative functions,
- can interpret cultural and social phenomena (art, colloquial and political discourse) in the perspective of sign systems and their permutations,
- is aware of the cultural importance of sign systems.

Evaluation methods of learning outcomes:

Discussion and preparation of a short essay

Subject matter of the classes:

1. Semiology – definition, genesis, cognitive specificity.
2. Sign and symbol functions.
3. Ideal types and their application in the humanities and social sciences.
4. Symbolic hermeneutics of culture on the example of selected aspects of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy.
5. Selected problems of name logic.
6. Selected problems of propositional logic.

Bibliography

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Andrew Robinson, *Roland Barthes and Semiotics*, <https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/in-theory-barthes-1/>

Robert M. Seiler, *Semiology/Semiotics*, <https://people.ucalgary.ca/~rseiler/semiolog.htm>

Symbolic hermeneutics of culture on the example of selected aspects of the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (Beauty and Ugliness. Appearance and Truth. Apollo and Dionysus) – an outline with tasks

1. Etymology of the word symbol

The Greek word σύμβολον (sýmbolon) meant a small object of clay, bone, wood, or metal that was split in half when concluding an agreement, such as a plate or ring. The halves were the hallmark of two people who had a bond – friendship, kinship, interests, duties, feelings. The verb συμβάλλω (symbállō) meant ‘I gather’ or ‘I compare, put together, combine’.

2. Distinguishing a symbol from a sign – Edmund Leach

- Signs belong to the same communication context.
- Symbols belong to different communication contexts.
- They establish a relationship between sense representation, concept (meaning) and object (see the Ogden-Richards triangle)
- Due to the similarity to the object, there are: arbitrary symbols (no similarity), e.g. water is a symbol of the unconscious, fire of transformation and iconicity (there is a planned similarity), e.g. map, road sign – information about the route.

Task no. 1. There are symbols related to the main religions below (Fig. 1). Assign each of the symbols to a specific religion and give a brief description of the meaning.



Figure 1.

3. Description of symbols

| Aspect | Characteristic |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Visual (material) | It has a structure based on basic (archetypal) graphic and spatial systems |
| Structural | It combines opposing elements (e.g., mountains, life-death) in a dynamic relationship (the so-called contradictory potential and dynamics) |
| Semantic | It implies a holistic meaning, presents the sense of reality in its basic dimension |
| Syntactic | It enters into a relationship with other symbolic forms, creating a symbolic universe |
| Existential | It presents the meaning of human life (and death) |
| Emotional | It is related to the depth of experience, evokes clearly visible emotions, e.g. anger, joy, anxiety, fear. |
| Imaginative | It initiates the activity of the imagination, it somehow spontaneously merges with other representations. |
| Narrative | It is related to the story, the narrative scheme encoding its basic meaning: e.g. the cross in Christianity with the evangelical description of the Passion of Christ |
| Discursive | It is one of the basic components of discourse in the sphere of organising meaning, understanding life and the world |
| Interpretative | It is open to synthesis with new units of sense, it allows for a 'new' reading of oneself and the changing reality |
| Socio-institutional | It is associated with social practices (with the functioning of institutions), guaranteeing their continuity, as well as the institutional identity of the individual and group |
| Normative-imperative | It marks the difference between good and evil and obliges to specific actions, coding specific patterns of behaviour |
| Transformational | It allows the meaning to be modified, enriched and reinterpreted |

4. Concepts and symbols – comments

Concepts are general, they are clear in terms of content and follow the laws of logic. The relationship between the content and the scope is as follows: the larger the scope is, the poorer their content is. For example, the concept of man has a greater scope than the concept of a man and the concept of a man has a greater scope than the concept of a man living in Nysa. A man living in Nysa has more features than a man in general, a human or a living being. Concepts enable the description, analysis and transformation of reality.

Symbols, in turn, connect the general aspect with the specific aspect. Unlike the concepts, they go beyond the principle of non-contradiction, i.e. they combine mutually exclusive features, e.g. life and death, humanity and divinity. Contrary to notions, they bind a person with reality and at the same time enable it to be understood as a whole.

Symbols play a special role in the religious sphere, linking the visible with the invisible, man with the sacred, in art and philosophy. They are also present in politics and economy (e.g. logos, advertisements).

5. Scheme of symbolic dynamism and semantic synthesis (semiosis) based on F. Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*

1. Symbols allow to organise reality into opposing pairs of opposites: dark-light, evil-good, life-death. Doric Apollo and Orgiastic Dionysus are such opposing and mutually repulsive symbolic forms (Fig. 2).

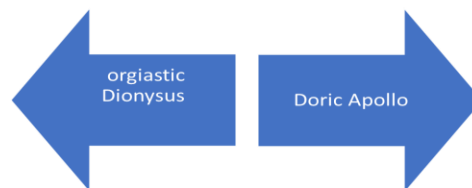


Figure 2.

2. Opposing symbols enter into a relationship that leads to a meaning-narrative interference (Fig. 3).

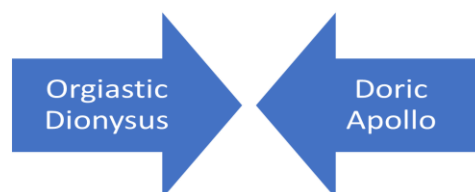


Figure 3.

3. As a result, they constitute a synthetic figure that unites opposing features. In the discussed case it is the figure of a tragic hero, combining opposites – power and fall, like Oedipus and Prometheus (Fig. 4).

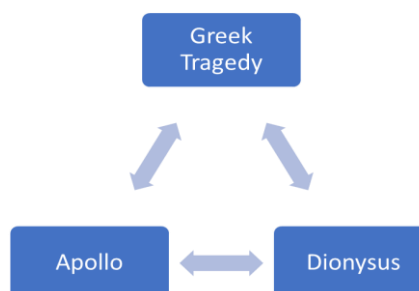


Figure 4.

6. Hermeneutics – genesis, contexts

Hermeneutics (from the Greek ἐρμηνεύειν – to explain, interpret; from Hermes as the messenger of the gods) – the art of interpreting literary texts, initiated in ancient Greece.

Initially, hermeneutics was the interpretation of sacred texts (biblical hermeneutics, theological hermeneutics). Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was the first to postulate that all texts should be encompassed by hermeneutic exegesis. Umberto Eco calls St. Augustine of Hippo, who allegedly recommends comparing Bible translations.

Hermeneutics serves the art of understanding and interpreting cultural products such as language, text, word. Hermeneutics in Martin Heidegger and Hans Georg Gadamer became the link between philosophy and the understanding of existence, the main component of the ontological structure of understanding as such. Hermeneutics also functions in cultural anthropology. Hermeneutics is the art of understanding and self-understanding through the interpretation of cultural products.

7. Nietzsche's hermeneutic method

1. Identification of the antinomies of the present day.
2. Transfer them to the point of genesis, describing their genealogy.
3. Treating ancient culture as a model for contemporary culture.
4. Accepting that the perfect type of culture is the unity of opposing symbolic forms – Dionysus and Apollo (Greek tragedy).
5. Describing the destructive element (Socrates) responsible for the decomposition of Greek tragedy, the birth of rationalism and the emergence of contemporary antinomies.
6. Modification of contemporary culture, transforming a theoretical man into a tragic man by revitalising the myth (the Apollonian, Dionysian-Apollonian, pre-Christian Germanic myth about a suffering hero – in *The Birth of Tragedy* this is the myth that forms the basis of Wagner's tetralogy *The Ring of the Nibelungen*) and music (Dionysian element, Beethoven and Wagner). Immanuel Kant's criticism leads to self-limitation of Socratism (recognition of the limits of science, cognitive optimism) and a turn to tragic wisdom.
7. Reversing the process of regressive transformation of culture into progressive one, through steps 'backwards' towards pagan sources of culture.

Model of synthetic symbolism in Greek culture (Fig. 5)

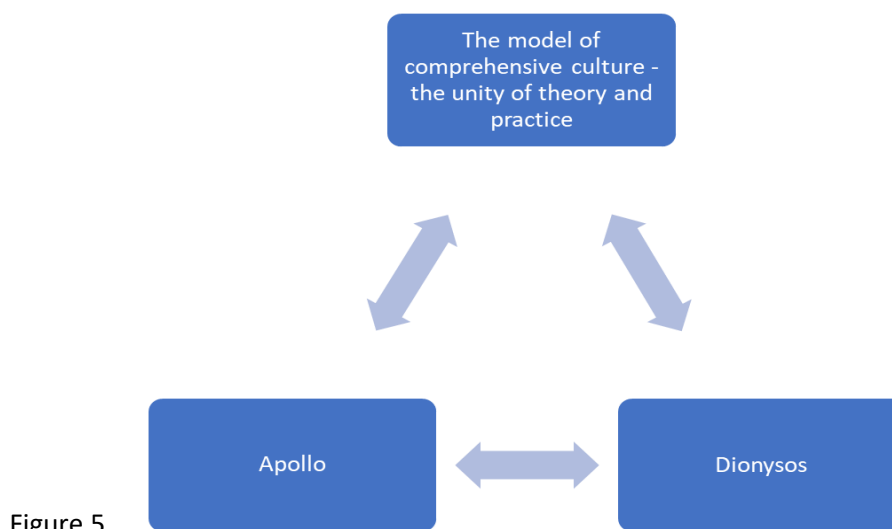


Figure 5.

Diagram of the breaking of the symbolic unity of Apollo and Dionysus by Socrates, Euripides (the primacy of science over wisdom, concept over symbol, parts over whole) (Fig. 6).

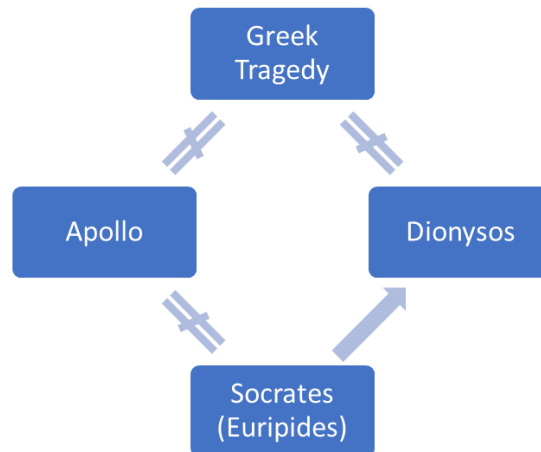


Figure 6.

Diagram of the transformation of Socratism into 19th-century pessimism and nihilism (Fig. 7).

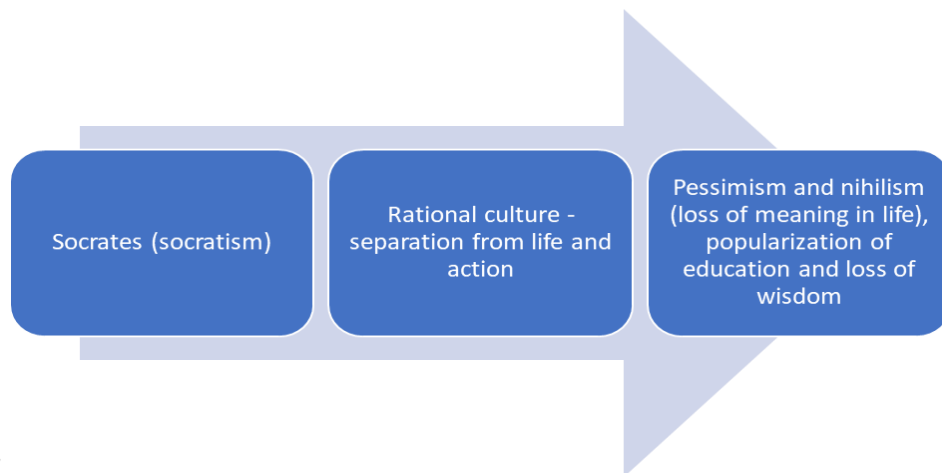


Figure 7.

The process of development and decline of Greek culture (Fig. 8).

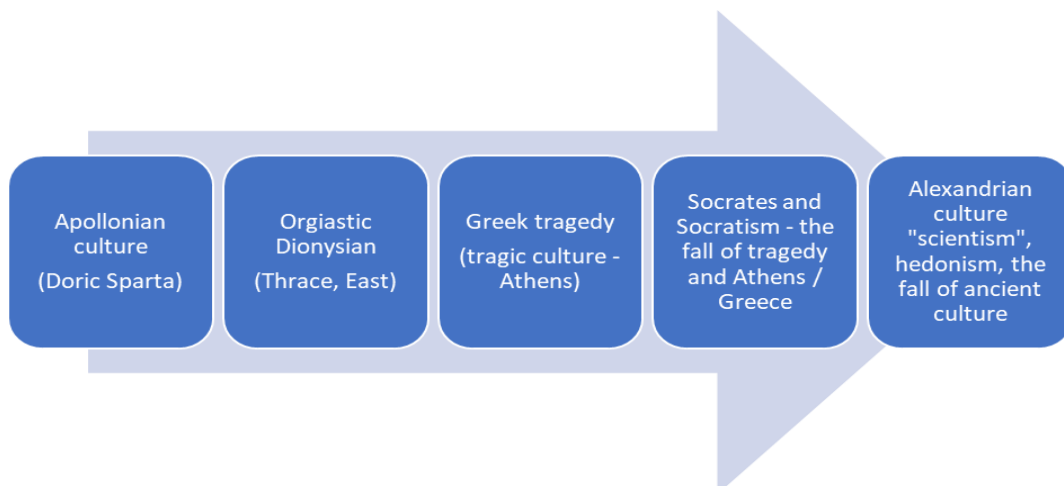


Figure 8.

Nietzsche's project of revitalising contemporary culture by introducing the myth of the suffering hero (Fig. 9-10).

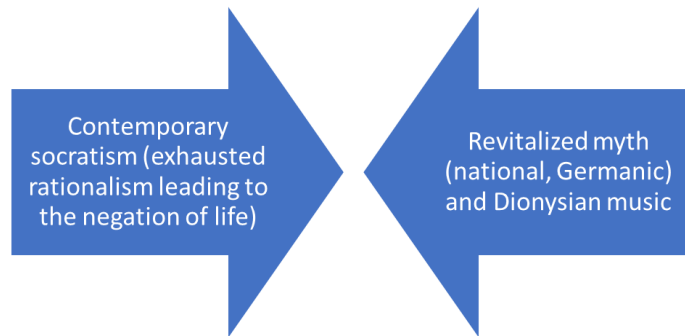


Figure 9.

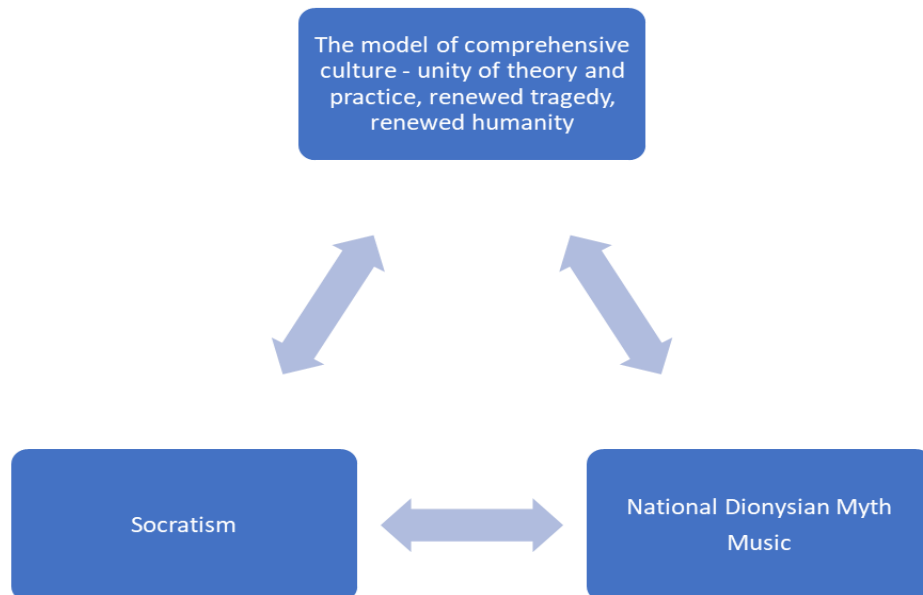


Figure 10.

8. Life, ugliness and a work of art

For Nietzsche, life is the unity of suffering and joy, birth and dying, it is the power (will), a creative and destructive excess that appears through the disturbance of principium individuationis (harmony, order, measure). The interpretation of the world should be based on its basic – obliterated by rationalism (cognitive optimism) and Christianity (salvation) – experience as the unity of opposites, the ontic primacy of negative states, i.e. destruction, ugliness, disharmony, and suffering. Art plays a special role in making this experience present or presenting it. Aesthetic values communicate the energy of life – lower or increase the will to live (will to power)

Art transforms life:

- a) by negating and humiliating it (Christian art, decadent);
- b) by creating an illusion of beauty (Apollonian art);
- c) through its affirmation (Dionysian art).

Ugliness as a positive (acute) aesthetic value is characterised (based on the concept of Mieczysław Wallis, 'Gentle and impressive aesthetic values') as:

- a) heterogeneity of the aesthetic experience,
- b) dynamic experience combining the negative aspect and the positive aspect: horror, unpleasantness, a sense of littleness, terror, disgust and intoxication, excitement, ecstasy (pleasure comes from overcoming the initial pain, 'a good fortune drawn even from pain' – Nietzsche),
- c) intensity of impact: they dazzle, amaze, surprise, overwhelm, shock, terrify,
- d) dynamics, disharmony, exaggeration, contrasts, sudden transitions, conflicts, opacity, openness, perspective shortcuts, heterogeneous texture, sweeping,
- e) damaged, worn-out bodies, old age, suffering, disease, characteristic and expressive ugliness,
- f) nature wild, violent, untamed: swollen rivers, high mountains, forests, storms, raging seas
- g) types of acute values: sublime, heroism, monumentality, majesty, tragedy, expressive ugliness, characteristic ugliness, characteristic, weirdness, macabre, horror, grotesque, comedy,
- h) the works of art are dominated by themes related to intense and drastic experiences, the introduction of pathos and disharmony to calm themes.

Task no. 2. On the basis of Rafael's 'Transfiguration' and selected paintings by Van Gogh, Rubens, Witkacy, please indicate the way of presenting impressive values and their connection with ugliness.

Task no. 3. Please read the chapter 'Apollonian and Dionysian' from the book titled 'On Beauty. History of a Western Idea' (Eco, Umberto ed. (2004), On Beauty. History of a Western Idea. Transl. A. McEwen. London: Secher&Warburg, pp. 53-58). Characterise the difference between Apollonian Beauty and Dionisiac Beauty.

9. Beauty and ugliness in the context of life and aesthetics (after Friedrich Nietzsche)

| Ugliness with negative aesthetic value | Beauty (Apollonian Beauty) | Ugliness with a positive aesthetic value (Dionysian Beauty) |
|--|---|---|
| Lack | Moderation | Excess |
| Disharmony based on scarcity | Harmony | Disharmony based on excess |
| Weakness | Calm, Tranquility | Power |
| Life decay | Unreality | Excess life |
| Weakening of the will to live | Suspension of the will to live | Strengthening the will to live |
| Negation of life | Affirmation of what is beautiful, the beauty of divine beings | Affirmation of life in its entirety |
| Nihilistic art | Apollonian Art | Dionysian art |

10. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900): inspirations, work, basic ideas

- Classical philology (chthonic and Olympic deities),
- Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) (the world is on the one hand a 'blind' will, and on the other a rational representation; blind will, materialising in an individual existence, causes recurrent suffering),
- Richard Wagner (1813-1883) as an artist and art theorist (restoring a tragedy based on a national myth).

Selected works by Nietzsche:

- *The Birth of Tragedy*,
- *Beyond Good and Evil*,
- *Thus Will Zarathustra Say*,
- *The Will to Power* (edited by Nietzsche's sister, Elizabeth).

Diagnosis of contemporary culture: technical, social and scientific progress initiated by rationalist philosophy leads to the collapse of culture (art), to shaping a one-sided man (scientist, businessman, artist), to hedonism, nihilism (loss of the meaning of life) and to the 'death of God' (the disappearance of the sacred): 'Now place an abstract man beside this type of mythical culture [Greek culture in the tragic period – T. D.], without guidance from myth, abstract education, abstract morality, abstract law, the abstract state; consider the rule-less wandering of artistic fantasy, unbridled by the indigenous myth; think of culture which has no secure and sacred place of origin and which is condemned to exhaust every possibility and to seek merge of nourishment from all other cultures; that is the present, the result of Socratism's determination to destroy myth. Now mythless man stands there, surrounded by every past there has ever been, eternally hungry, scraping and digging in a search for roots, even if he has to dig to them for the most distant antiquities' (Friedrich, Nietzsche (2007), *The Birth of Tragedy*. Transl. Ronald Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 108-109).

Task no. 4. Please complete the above information about F. Nietzsche and his concept, and answer the questions below on the basis of: Nietzsche (The School of Life) – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHWbZmg2hzU>

How can you become a superman?

Why is Nietzsche criticising Christianity?

According to Nietzsche, what values does Christianity reject?

Why does Nietzsche reject alcohol (drugs)?

What cultural phenomena distinguish the nineteenth century?

11. The genesis of tragedy as a model of shaping a holistic culture

Two types of altered states of (aesthetic) consciousness:

1. Apollonian dream – the world appears as order, beauty, harmony, and man sees gods as perfect individuals (affirmation of existence in appearances – the mythology of Olympic deities).
2. Dionysian intoxication – the world appears as one of pleasure and suffering, and man becomes a 'suffering' deity (negation of individual existence, 'wisdom of Silenus' – death is the gate leading beyond suffering).

Apollo – son of Zeus and Leto in Greek mythology. He was born on the island of Delos. He was the twin brother of Artemis. Considered as the god of beauty, light, life, death, plague, music, fortune-telling, truth, law, order, patron of art and poetry, guide of muses (god of inspiration, healing and curing, archery, bachelor and fortune-teller) in Delphi, from where he sent his inspiration. The walls surrounding the house of Apollo also surrounded the site of the famous Delphi oracle.

Dionysus – in Greek mythology, the god of fertility, wild nature, vine and wine, representing his intoxicating and beneficial influence. He was son of Zeus and the mortal Semele. Dionysia Festivals were held in honor of Dionysus, his worship was performed by bacchantes who organised ecstatic mysteries. Great Dionysia Festival were urban, spring ceremonies, with performances of men's and boys' choirs, which gave rise to tragedy and comedy in Greek theater. Little Dionysia Festival was celebrated in the countryside at the end of December, when the vessels with young wine were opened. Dionysus was deity of fertility, guilt, ecstasy, transformation, death, unity of life and death.

Task no. 5. Please listen to the recording and prepare a short note

Student Philosopher: Nietzsche, Apollo & Dionysus, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldj0RX3CqXA>

Task No. 6. Please indicate the myth about the mortality of Dionysus.

According to Nietzsche altered states of consciousness are the basis for artistic creativity:

1. The Apollonian dream artist overcomes the 'darkness' and suffering of the chthonic world, building the world of appearances (he sets the truth through fiction).
2. The Dionysian artist expresses the essence of the world and the contradictions that organise it (joy and suffering), starting with the 'musical mood' (overflowing with contradiction, anxiety and joy). The Dionysian artist becomes a medium of 'will', the Absolute (articulates the pain of existence – Archiloch's lyrics).

Aesthetic delight takes place when the essence is in harmony with the phenomenon, when the truth appears in artistic fiction ('Yes, sir!').

Apollonian art serves man, taming life through appearances.

Dionysian art serves the Absolute (will), which 'shines through' in it and sees itself. The 'Dionysian genius' is the 'eye' of the will, without it, it would be 'blind'. In it, man affirms the 'core' of life – rising and dying.

The Dionysian genius becomes 'someone else's', transforms his ordinary identity of a 'citizen', 'specific person' into a satire, companion of Dionysus, who watches the suffering of the deity himself, and at the same time transforms himself into a divine being, creative in union with life. In tragedy as a Dionysian-Apollonian art, opposing symbolic forms, ugliness and beauty, power and meanness are combined in sublime (Fig. 11).

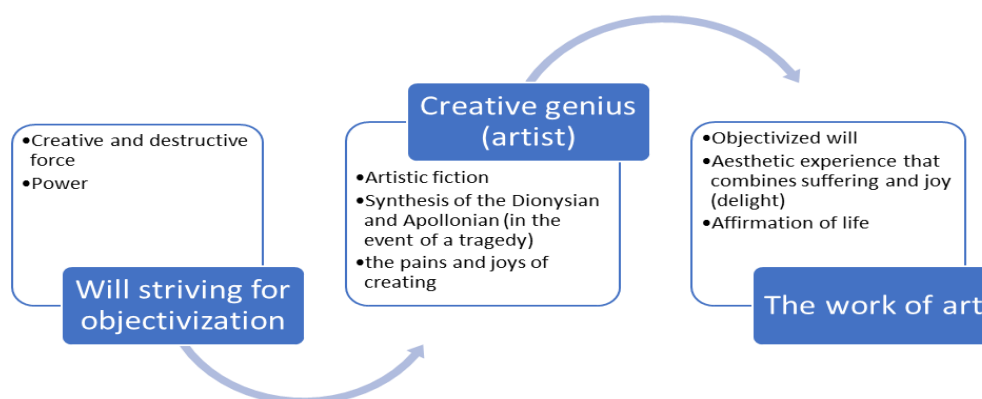


Figure 11. The creative process according to F. Nietzsche – the creator as a medium of will (will to power)

12. Features of tragedy:

- Existence and man are dissonance, contradiction, disharmony.
- Destruction, suffering, collapse of an individual (community) of special value.
- “Destruction of what is beautiful and beautiful doom” (H. Elzenberg)
- A negative state (destruction) does not result from the natural course of things (old age, disease), but happens suddenly and unexpectedly.
- Destruction is irrevocable and often deliberately unintentional, related to a conflict of values.
- Man meets with what overwhelms him (fate), and at the same time maintains his dignity in the face of suffering/loss (he is faced with fate).
- Synthesis of experiences of an opposite nature: horror (terror) and compassion (Aristotle).
- ‘Tragic optimism’ – acceptance of existence in its most impoverished form (Viktor Frankl). Suffering enriches a person, shapes his life wisdom, the ability to cope with failures.
- The tragic hero is, according to Nietzsche, ‘the mask of Dionysus’ (Prometheus, Oedipus), an individual ‘wandering, striving and suffering’, recreating the ‘torn apart’ existence of Dionysus, the ‘suffering god’. The most outstanding man is doomed to the greatest suffering, he recreates the fate of the deity himself: the wisdom of Oedipus cannot make it possible to know the beginning of existence (therefore he becomes a patricide and incester), the creative genius of Prometheus (he made a man out of clay and challenged Zeus) necessarily leads to defeat (Prometheus fails in the confrontation with Zeus). The tragedy, then, results from the fact that the ignorance that corresponds to it is intertwined with knowledge, and the power of powerlessness with power. If you want one, you must also want another. In tragedy, the two sides of existence in the extreme form merge.
- In tragedy, man belongs to a power that surpasses him (fate, destiny), and at the same time accepts its action. According to Nietzsche, the experience of tragedy is associated with aesthetic delight, with the affirmation of the world order – with the manifestation of a general rule in an individual case.
- Tragedy raises the frightening absurdity of existence (everything must be destroyed, nothingness permeates human existence and destroys everything) to the rank of making the divine power, joy and affirmation present in man.

Task no. 7. What is the tragedy of Oedipus, Prometheus, Antigone, Creon, Othello, Macbeth and Lord Jim?

13. Summary

Nietzsche sees symbolism as a tool for the interpretation and transformation of culture. The symbolic form is the basic structure of understanding the world and human self-understanding, which is realised through the interpretation of suffering. In it, the meaning of life, death and suffering is objectified. The reference to symbolic forms related to ancient culture (Dionysus, Apollo, Socrates) is initially intended to redefine the Germanic myth (in the spirit of Richard Wagner’s work as a restorer of tragedy), then extend the scope of decadence to Christianity (*Dionysus against the Crucified*). The philosopher treats the symbolism Dionysian as (1) a tool for a comparative interpretation of contemporary culture (the greatness of the Greeks – the fall of contemporaries), (2) creation of vision of an alternative culture to emphasizing Christianity (superman), (3) transformation of the fall (nihilism) into the source of the new world. Initially, Dionysian symbolism

(showing the creative fullness of life) plays a transformative role in rationalist culture (Socratism) by filling its gaps. In the next stage of creativity, rationalism and Christianity are treated as components of an anti-Dionysian, hostile to life, cultural formation. It can be seen that the symbol in question becomes inclusive to what is Apollonian (Dionysus becomes Apollo) and exclusive to Platonism and Christianity (it connects with anti-Christian symbolic forms – paganism, Renaissance, Islam, the figure of Antichrist, the figure of Zarathustra, superman, eternal return, the same). The steps in the symbolic analysis method are as follows:

- 1) the opposition between Apollo and Dionysus (emphasizing the opposite aspects, mutually exclusive),
- 2) transformation and synthesis – Delphic Apollo and Delphic Dionysus (weakening the opposition and creating a common content area),
- 3) opposition decomposing the synthesis (Socrates and tragedy),
- 4) an opposition that reconstitutes synthesis, in which the opposing elements turn towards each other (Socratism, national myth and music, aware of their limitations),
- 5) a renewed synthesis, this time protected by Socratism, which is aware of its limits.

List of relations between symbolic forms

| Apollo | Orgiastic Dionysus | Tragic Dionysus | Socratism – platonism, Christianity, modern rationalism |
|-------------------------|--|---|--|
| Beauty | Ugliness (horror) | Sublimity | Perfect beauty |
| Fancy | Disgust and urge | Unpleasantness and pleasure | Happiness (eudaimonic ethics), 'theoretical optimism') |
| Perfection | Imperfection | Heroism | Caring for the soul, life passivity, 'Practical optimism' |
| Eternity | Unity of Life and Death (Zagreus) | Affirmation of the eternal game of becoming | Contrasting the becoming (living) world with the ideal world |
| Culture | Nature | Satire as a combination of nature and culture, culture reconciled with nature | Scientist, theoretician (person separated from life) |
| Calmness (self-control) | Drunkenness (explosiveness, delight and suffering, horror) | Aesthetic ecstasy | Self-control by renouncing power |
| Awareness | Losing yourself | Heroic awareness | Critical distance |
| Moderation | Excess | A tragic hero | Non-tragic hero (ascetic) |
| Order | Chaos | Affirmation of the becoming world | World negation |
| Stability | Dynamism | Eternal return and indestructibility of life | Transformation of action and surrounding reality |

Introduction to Semiology

| | | | |
|-----------------------|--|---|--|
| Seeing (dream vision) | Ecstasy, merging with the unity of pleasure and pain | A tragic vision (choir, audience), | Knowing the concept, seeing the idea, separating from the suffering hero |
| Distance | Closeness | Compassion for the suffering hero, watching a tragic hero | 'Cyclops' – analysis that freezes the object, the distance |
| Guise | Truth | Tragic fiction | De-aestheticising fiction and subordinating it to morality and logic |
| Logic | Dissonance (contradiction) | The world as a unity of opposites | Logic, Socratic dialectics as the elimination of contradictions |
| Myth | A non-discursive experience | Symbolically articulated 'tragic view' | 'Theoretical View' |

Task no. 8.

Identify and characterise the symbolic forms that prevail in the religious and political spheres as well as in everyday life in your country.

Lecturer:

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