

Interpretation

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- 223 *Lewis Fallis* The Political Significance of Friendship in Plato's *Lysis*
- 253 *J. A. Colen & Anthony Vecchio* The First Walgreen Lectures by Leo Strauss (1949)
- 355 *Edward J. Erler & Ken Masugi* **An Exchange**
Schaefer contra Political Philosophy
- 375 *David Lewis Schaefer* Unretired: A Reply to "Schaefer contra Political Philosophy"
- 385 *Borys M. Kowalsky & Joseph Phelan* **Review Essay**
Nietzsche and Modernist Art, Part I: The Value of *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Artists of the New Weimar*
- 401 *Kevin J. Burns* **Book Reviews**
"From Reflection and Choice": *The Political Philosophy of the Federalist Papers and the Ratification Debate*, edited by Will R. Jordan
- 407 *Steven Forde* *Thucydides on the Outbreak of War: Character and Contest* by S. N. Jaffe
- 413 *Jerome C. Foss* *Good Things Out of Nazareth: The Uncollected Letters of Flannery O'Connor and Friends*, edited by Benjamin B. Alexander
- 419 *Steven H. Frankel* *Power and Progress: Joseph Ibn Kaspi and the Meaning of History* by Alexander Green
- 425 *Thomas Powers* *Multiculturalism in Canada: Constructing a Model Multi-culture with Multicultural Values* by Hugh Donald Forbes
- 431 *Aaron Zubia* *Taking Comedy Seriously: Stand-Up's Dissident Potential in Mass Culture* by Jennalee Donian

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Review Essay

Sebastian Schütze, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Artists of the New Weimar*. With a foreword by Marc Mayer and an essay, “New World Nietzsche: A History of Becoming,” by Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen. Ottawa: 5 Continents Editions–National Gallery of Canada, 2019, 119 pp., CDN\$34.00.

Nietzsche and Modernist Art, Part I: The Value of *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Artists of the New Weimar**

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INTRODUCTION

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Nietzsche was a cultural supernova: the impact of his works has been nothing short of cataclysmic. Or to adapt Plato’s cave metaphor, Nietzsche is one of the most important architects of the cave in which we moderns and postmoderns live. Thus, the search for an adequate understanding of how his philosophy has shaped Western culture must figure largely in our endeavor to illuminate that cave. Equally important, in examining the myriad ways in which Western culture has remade itself in response to his philosophy, we begin to understand and appreciate

*We would like to acknowledge our large debt of gratitude to Patrick Malcolmson for his numerous thought-provoking remarks on earlier drafts of the essay.

important things in or about the philosophy itself which would otherwise be lost on us. Briefly put, we stand to learn as much about Nietzsche's philosophy as we do about ourselves from such an inquiry. This point is as true of studies in the visual arts as it is of studies in philosophy, the social sciences, literature, and music from his day on. All inquiries of this type have a place in contemporary liberal education.

One of the highlights of the spring-summer 2019 season in the world of the visual arts was the publication of the catalog¹ accompanying the *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Artists of the New Weimar* exhibition in the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa). A major premise of the catalog, which it seeks to vindicate through an exploration of the Nietzsche-modernist art nexus, is that "the rise and fall of the New Weimar represents an extraordinary chapter both in the history of modernity and in the history of the ideas at the junction of philosophy and art" (35, emphasis added). At the turn of the twentieth century, Nietzsche became a rallying cry and a cult figure for artists, writers, and critics throughout the German-speaking world; the combined efforts of his sister, Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche, and Count Harry Graf Kessler in fostering a growing, dynamic cult of Nietzsche based in the city of Weimar were a factor, no less potent for being hitherto little known, in this development. At the same time, a major but also little-known battle in the war for artistic modernism was fought in Weimar, where Kessler was the director of the local arts and crafts museum (Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe). As we argue in the first part of the present essay, the catalog sheds new and vitally important light on both developments—no mean achievement—although the connection between the burgeoning cult of Nietzsche at "the New Weimar" and the latter's promotion of a Nietzsche-inspired aesthetic modernism is too often assumed rather than explicitly and cogently argued by the catalog.

The *New Weimar* catalog is, moreover, an excellent jumping-off point for further reflection on scholarship, to date, of the larger question of Nietzsche's influence on modernist art. One of the chief deficiencies or limitations of that scholarship is its failure thus far to clarify and establish the nature and

¹ *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Artists of the New Weimar* (Ottawa: 5 Continents Editions–National Gallery of Canada, 2019). This work will, with a few exceptions, be cited in-text by page and abbreviated as the *New Weimar* catalog or, more simply, *New Weimar*. Our discussion approaches and engages with the catalog as an independent work of scholarship in the general area of the visual arts. It is because the catalog breaks new ground regarding the connection between Nietzsche's philosophy and modernism in the visual arts—which remains a fertile field of inquiry—that we believe it merits close scholarly scrutiny. This is not to detract in any way from the value of the exhibition, which, though relatively modest in its number of items on display, was highly illuminating.

magnitude of Nietzsche's philosophical influence on modernist art. The catalog too is not altogether free of those limitations, notwithstanding that we have much to learn from it.

The foregoing problem and a possible solution to it occupy most of Part II of the present essay (to be published in the next issue of *Interpretation*). At the heart of this discussion is an extensive, detailed analysis of the influence of Nietzschean philosophical ideas on certain works of art by the famous early modernist artist Edvard Munch that incorporates but goes well beyond the commentary and insights contained in the catalog. The hope is that that analysis can serve as a model for the kind of thorough, in-depth historical and philosophical analyses which would fill the pages of any adequate account of the Nietzsche-modernist art nexus.

In short, we applaud and strive to emulate the catalog's dedication to illuminating the interface between philosophy and art, especially as instantiated in the interface between Nietzsche's philosophy and modernist art. Gaining clarity about that interface is a key element in the improvement of both our cultural self-knowledge and our understanding of Nietzsche. The ultimate aim of the present essay as a whole is to advance that part of our liberal education.

"THE NEW WEIMAR" PROJECT

The primary objective of the catalog is to shed light on the project, spearheaded by Count Harry Graf Kessler, in collaboration with Nietzsche's sister Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche, and assisted by the Belgian artist and architect Henry Van de Velde, among others, of creating a full-blown Nietzschean cultural center in Weimar.

Why Weimar? After Nietzsche had fallen hopelessly mentally ill, his sister took responsibility for his care and at the same time sought complete control over the shaping of his cultural legacy. In keeping with the latter aim, she established a Nietzsche Archive in Naumburg in 1894. Yet only a few years later, in 1897, she successfully contrived the relocation of the archive, together with her ailing brother, to the Villa Siberblick in Weimar. She was assisted financially in this endeavor by Meta von Salis, who, happily for her, was an ardent and wealthy admirer of Nietzsche. The choice of Weimar was dictated by Förster-Nietzsche's ambitious desire of "inscribing [Nietzsche] into the myth of the classical Weimar of Goethe, Schiller and Herder" (12). For this

purpose it was, she reckoned, necessary to “establish the [Nietzsche Archive] as a complement and successor to the Goethe-Schiller Archive” already there.²

One of Förster-Nietzsche’s chief collaborators in promoting a cult of Nietzsche among artists, writers, and critics in Germany was Count Harry Graf Kessler. Given his vision of and practical centrality to “the New Weimar” project as a whole, a more detailed account of his background and early life is in order here.

Harry Kessler (1868–1937) was born in Paris into a prosperous German banking family. He was educated there, as well as in Germany (Hamburg) and England (Oxford).³ His family spent summers in various German spas where Emperor Wilhelm I and Chancellor Otto Van Bismarck also vacationed. The emperor looked so favorably on the family, especially the fetching Mrs. Kessler, that he ennobled them. Familiarity with the emperor, Bismarck, and their entourages provided the young Kessler with a front-row seat to the world of great political power and, especially in the case of Bismarck, a model for a diplomatic career in the foreign service.⁴ Yet it was Kessler’s encounter with Nietzsche’s writings that had the more profound effect on him. In his 1935 autobiography, *Völker und Vaterländer*, Kessler writes that it was Nietzsche rather than Bismarck who gave his intended career its mature “meaning and content.” An early reading of *Beyond Good and Evil*, with its praise of the “Good European,” led him to reject Bismarck’s realpolitik and nationalism.⁵

While Kessler’s admiration for Nietzsche’s work continued throughout his life, it was in the 1890s that we see it influencing his turn from politics towards art and culture, or rather his conflation of these domains. He noted in his memoir that for the youth of his generation, Nietzsche’s philosophy was taken as a moral imperative. What was needed was “to be something new, to mean something new, to represent new values.” While serving in the army, Kessler led Nietzschean reading groups for young officers.⁶

² Laird M. Easton, “The Rise and Fall of the ‘Third Weimar’: Harry Graf Kessler and the Aesthetic State in Wilhelmian Germany, 1902–1906,” *Central European History* 29, no. 4 (2001): 499. In a comment on an earlier draft of our essay, Patrick Malcolmson reminds us that Förster-Nietzsche’s ambition departed dramatically from Nietzsche’s own thought, which was highly critical of German *Kultur* and hence of German nationalism.

³ With some exceptions indicated along the way, the information about Kessler provided here is drawn from *New Weimar*.

⁴ Theodore Fiedler, “Weimar contra Berlin: Harry Graf Kessler and the Politics of Modernism,” *Studies in the History of Art* 53 (1996): 107.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 107–9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

In 1893 Kessler worked as a law clerk in Berlin while preparing for his diplomatic exams. His mind seems to have been with the avant-garde literary and artistic circle that met in the cafe Zum Schwarzen Ferkel (“At the black piglet”), where, on any given night, one could find the playwright August Strindberg, the painter Edvard Munch, the novelist Stanisław Przybyszewski, the cultural historian Georg Brandes, and the art historian and critic Julius Meier-Graefe—all arguing over the meaning of *Zarathustra* and other Nietzschean writings.⁷

Kessler first met Förster-Nietzsche in 1895, in Naumburg, and for nearly two decades the two strong personalities collaborated (albeit not without considerable tension) in the shaping of Nietzsche’s legacy. Kessler visited the Nietzsche Archive for the first time in 1897, two years after its transfer to Weimar. A few years later, with Kessler having taken up residence in Weimar, the project of creating what came to be known as the New Weimar got underway.

The New Weimar project was animated by the conviction of Kessler and his fellow collaborators that Nietzsche was the most important philosopher of the era. In his writings Nietzsche proclaims that God is dead and that science and Christian probity had killed him, in the process also destroying all the old values which had turned on His existence. Kessler et al. appear to have accepted this thesis.⁸ In their view, amply borne out by various Nietzschean texts, Nietzsche had diagnosed with unsurpassed clarity and depth the resulting onset of a morally and spiritually debilitating nihilism; and he had grasped the cultural desiderata of the times, such as the need for new heroes, myths, and values. They also read him as having divined that the philosopher of the future will be an artist and a legislator.⁹ Here too there was corroborating textual evidence from Nietzsche’s works. In the third of his *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche sought to “inspire the cultural creators and geniuses of the future.”¹⁰ In *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche argues that “the philosophers’ task is to be ‘lawgivers as to the measure, stamp and weight of things’...and to provide their contemporaries with a new ‘picture of life’...; and it is precisely by establishing these new values and by erecting this ‘new image of man’...that

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See Harry Graf Kessler, *Journey to the Abyss: The Diaries of Harry Graf Kessler 1880–1918*, ed. and trans. Laird M. Easton (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 102, 112–13, 151, 188, 191, 209–10, 234, 247, 249–50, 278–79, 290, 297–99, 303, 309.

⁹ See *ibid.*, 102, 147, 185, 186, 188, 191, 234, 239, 290, 297–99, 304, 317–18, 327, 362, 379; and Easton, “Rise and Fall,” 500, 507, 508, 514.

¹⁰ Shilo Brooks, *Nietzsche’s Culture War: The Unity of the “Untimely Meditations”* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 19.

a philosopher ‘educates’ others.”¹¹ Nietzsche further signals therein the need to recast philosophy as a creative, poetic activity. Lastly, Kessler and company believed one could glean from Nietzsche’s philosophical writings, such as *Zarathustra* and *Ecce Homo*, the principles of an aesthetic for the future.¹²

The hope of Kessler et al. was that the center, with its location in Weimar, would promote, in a sustained, organized fashion, the dissemination of Nietzsche’s philosophy and the growth of a modern, Nietzschean culture, making it a major source of inspiration and guidance for artists from all parts of Germany as well as other parts of Europe and the world.

To be sure, this was not the beginning of interest in Nietzsche’s philosophy on the part of visual artists. That interest had already been picking up for at least a few years. Intellectuals such as Brandes, Strindberg, Przybyszewski, Rudolf Steiner, and others seem to have played an important role in popularizing Nietzsche’s ideas and disseminating them among artists. Nevertheless, what was originally an inchoate and diffuse interest in Nietzsche on the part of artists could begin to evolve into a bona fide Nietzschean movement only if it was provided with an institutional base linked to a set of clearly articulated cultural objectives. One potential extension or appendage of such an institutional base was the cultural platform provided by the new journal *Pan*.

Pan was established in 1895 by the members of the Black Piglet circle, with Meier-Graefe as its first editor. The journal was devoted to contemporary developments in literature and the visual arts. The ambitious intention of the editors, according to the catalog, was “to revolutionize modern life through a radical reform of literature, art and design” (84). With its title and with the artistic motif of the pagan satyr adorning its frontispiece, the journal “proposed the figure as the mythic forerunner of modern art.”¹³ *Pan* soon became, in the words of Kessler’s biographer, “the seminal journal of aesthetic modernism” in fin-de-siècle Berlin.¹⁴ Initially Kessler played a limited supporting role. But when the financial backers of the journal lost faith in Meier-Graefe as editor, they offered the role to Kessler. Although he declined that position, he took a place on the editorial board, and soon became the literary editor.

¹¹ Daniel Breazeale, editor’s introduction to *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xvii. Breazeale is quoting from *Schopenhauer as Educator*.

¹² See, for instance, *New Weimar*, 13, 19–20, 21, 24–25, 29.

¹³ Patricia G. Berman, “The Invention of History: Julius Meier-Graefe, German Modernism, and the Genealogy of Genius,” *Studies in the History of Art* 53 (1996): 93.

¹⁴ Easton, *Diaries of Kessler*, 119.

Nietzsche was viewed by the editors as one of the journal's two "founding fathers." The painter Arnold Böcklin, one of the very few contemporary artists that the philosopher recognized as a kindred spirit, was the other. Nietzsche figured prominently in the journal's pages from the start. Kessler's early connection with Förster-Nietzsche led to an agreement to release several unpublished texts for the journal. Accompanying these texts was artwork by Max Klinger, Hans Thoma, Ernest Moritz Geyger, Carl Stoeving, and Hans Olde, depicting the philosopher or giving plastic expression to themes from his writings. One of the finest attributes of the *New Weimar* catalog is its inclusion of significant pages from the journal featuring those texts and works of art (84–87). Regrettably, *Pan* did not last beyond 1900, but Kessler's collaboration with Nietzsche's sister, which his involvement with the journal occasioned, played a crucial role in his coming to see Weimar as a potential center for cultural renewal.¹⁵

As becomes clear from the catalog, the New Weimar too was intended to meet the aforementioned institutional need. The city of Weimar, the Enlightenment capital of Germany, would be "renewed" for the twentieth century by providing a location for a Nietzsche-inspired cultural center, replete with temple, stadium (capable of seating fifty thousand people!), a monumental Nietzsche memorial, Nietzsche iconographia transfiguring the "ailing philosopher [into] the heroic prophet of modernity," and so on.¹⁶

As such it could, historian Steven Aschheim suggests, conceivably do for Nietzsche what Bayreuth was already doing for Wagner—give birth to a sustained, steadily burgeoning cult of Nietzsche.¹⁷ Wagner needed Bayreuth because he needed an institution in which skilled transmitters could be trained to continue his cultural task. So too in the case of Nietzsche. If done properly and on a sufficiently grand scale, the New Weimar could serve as a counterweight to Bayreuth, eventually even replacing Wagner with Nietzsche in the role of renovator of German culture. Concomitantly, Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche's role in promoting this development could result in her own

¹⁵ Fiedler, "Weimar contra Berlin," 110–11.

¹⁶ See *New Weimar*, 11, 25–28, 35, and *passim*.

¹⁷ Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890–1990* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 46. In this respect as well, the architects of the New Weimar would be following Nietzsche's lead. As Brooks points out, in the philosopher's untimely meditation *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, the city Bayreuth is cast as the home of a cultural institution led by a genius who through his art can reshape ancient myths and create new ones that can redeem the modern soul (*Nietzsche's Culture War*, 229).

renown eclipsing that of Cosima Wagner, who had been performing the same service for her beloved husband Richard.

It was the aristocratic connoisseur Harry Kessler, together with Henry Van de Velde and others, who strove to make such a vision of the New Weimar a living, flourishing reality. They refurbished the Nietzsche Archive after its relocation from Naumburg to Weimar; they published and disseminated beautifully adorned luxury editions of some of Nietzsche's works, such as *Zarathustra* and *Ecce Homo*; they drew up plans and designs for the temple, stadium, and Nietzsche memorial; they invited artists from all over to come to Weimar to share in the creation of a cult of Nietzsche, for instance, by making portraits and sculptures of the man and works of art with themes inspired by his writings. And the list goes on.

Along the way Kessler also launched a series of exhibitions of French, English, and German avant-garde artists. On the evidence of these exhibitions, Kessler clearly favored French artists of the Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and Nabi schools, including Manet, Monet, Renoir, Gauguin, Cézanne, Seurat, Bonnard, Vuillard, Rodin, and Maillol, among others—all arguably progenitors or exemplars of a kind of modernism in the visual arts which he may have deemed essentially conformable to a Nietzschean aesthetic for the future.¹⁸ In order to better promote German modernists such as Max Klinger, Kessler prudently also showed more conservative painters such as Hans Olde, Max Liebermann, Theodor Hagen, Wilhelm Trübner,

¹⁸ "In the avant-garde painting of Nietzsche's lifetime, the first forays were being made into the deliberate break with mimesis, the break with the faithful representation of observable reality, through the projects of the Impressionism of Claude Monet and the Post-Impressionism of Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin. Such developments align with Nietzsche's own rejection of material, enduring objects that appear to populate the world and seek a more mysterious, Dionysian realization" (F. Ulfers and M. D. Cohen, "Nietzsche and the Future of Art," *Hyperion* 2, no. 4 [2007]: 6). In our view, Ulfers and Cohen's formulation of the connection between Nietzsche's thought and the artwork of these French artists merits serious consideration. That Kessler might have concurred with Ulfers and Cohen's "alignment" point, at the very least, can be gleaned from his *Diaries*, 157–58, 160, 188, 239, 266, 278, 285, 296, 297–99, 317–18, 327, 362, 376, 379; and from Easton, "Rise and Fall," 496, 504–8, 510, 512, 513–14, 515–16, and passim; as well as Laird M. Easton, *The Red Count: The Life and Times of Harry Kessler* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), the first four parts, especially 43–44, 76, 83–86, 88–93, 101–15, 117–26, 126–28, 131, 133–39, 148–49, 155–56, 161, 164–65, 185–90. To explain briefly, what the aforementioned tendencies of visual art (and still others that Kessler also favored, such as the Nabis) had in common was their newness, their repudiation of academicism and an outdated mimetic, rationalistic naturalism—which repudiation Kessler seems to have considered necessary on essentially Nietzschean historical- or cultural-relativist grounds. For that reason they could all be seen—and we surmise that Kessler saw them—as exemplifying or prefiguring a Nietzschean modernist aesthetic for the future, even if the artists involved did not always, or in some cases ever (e.g., Maurice Denis), see their own artwork that way. (For Denis's disparaging view of Nietzsche, see Easton, *Red Count*, 164–65.)

and Wilhelm Leibl.¹⁹ He furthermore exhibited artwork by Henry Van der Velde, who had been commissioned to renovate the Nietzsche Archive, and who became the director of the city's design school; and by the Norwegian Edvard Munch, who painted and sketched Kessler as a sleek and slim flaneur in several works (including one shown in the catalog), and produced several portraits of Nietzsche, one of them iconic. As Sebastian Schütze, the catalog's main author, points out, both artists were highly enamored of Nietzsche's philosophy (19–20, 32–34).

Unfortunately, the New Weimar project failed.²⁰ The reasons for this are instructive. In 1904 and then in 1906 Kessler organized two exhibitions of Rodin's artwork at the arts and crafts museum in Weimar, of which he was the director. The 1904 exhibition, featuring "sixteen statues, thirty-three 'movement and silhouette studies,' and fifty photographs of Rodin's work,"²¹ was a success. But the second exhibition, which displayed Rodin's erotic drawings of female nudes, caused such a scandal that Kessler was forced to resign his position as the museum's director. The (mostly French) modernist art and design that Kessler and Van der Velde had been curating had powerful opponents at the Weimar court and more broadly within the conservative German art establishment. The 1906 Rodin exhibition was exactly the kind of controversial show that enabled Kessler's enemies to push for his resignation (17). Despite his continuing commitment to the broader project, Kessler's loss of the directorship seriously weakened his leadership role. His fall from grace, in turn, greatly diminished the New Weimar's prospects of success.

The most ambitious parts of the project, such as the temple and stadium, never got beyond the design stage. This was due in large part to the ideological incompatibility between Förster-Nietzsche, on one hand, and Kessler, Van de Velde, and their like-minded compatriots, on the other: Förster-Nietzsche inclined towards a "simplistic, politicized, nationalistic reading" of her brother's philosophy,²² whereas Kessler and company perceived in him

¹⁹ Easton, *Red Count*, 103.

²⁰ *New Weimar*, 25, 35. We say "unfortunately," because, had it survived and flourished along the comparatively far nobler lines envisaged by Kessler and his like-minded compatriots, it might have continued to curb, if not completely quash, Förster-Nietzsche's calamitous ambitions for Nietzsche's legacy.

²¹ Easton, *Red Count*, 148.

²² Less charitable and (judging by what so many other Nietzsche commentators have said about her) closer to the mark is Safranski's statement that Förster-Nietzsche "hoped to mold Nietzsche into a German chauvinist, racist, and militarist, and was successful in conveying this image to a substantial cross section of the public" (Rudolf Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, trans. Shelley

the heroic prophet of a new, higher, more cosmopolitan humanity and herald of aesthetic modernism.

Ultimately, however, it was the onset of the Great War that brought the entire, already faltering project to a crashing halt.

THE CATALOG AND THE NIETZSCHEAN INFLUENCE ON THE ARTISTS OF THE NEW WEIMAR

One of the chief virtues of the catalog is that, unlike many scholarly works, it attempts, with some success, to spell out in concrete detail the influence of certain Nietzschean ideas on various works of modern art. At the very least, the catalog gives us to understand that such works can be profitably viewed as interpretations of, even “commentaries” on, Nietzschean philosophical themes, in some cases on a par with those found in literary, musical, and scholarly works and as such often equally if not more illuminating.²³ We limit ourselves here to what the catalog has to say about the Nietzschean aspects of works of art by Hofmann, Geyger, Klinger, Van de Velde, Bonnard, and Rodin, leaving Edvard Munch for the second part of this essay, since a more detailed and in-depth account of the last is deserving of a study on its own.

To assist understanding of discussions of various works of art offered throughout the present essay, we urge the reader to consult images of them readily available on the Internet, using the information we supply about their titles and artists’ names.

Ludwig Von Hofmann, a major Symbolist and Jugendstil painter and cofounder of *Pan*, served as professor of painting in the New Weimar and emerged as one of its central cultural figures. He and Kessler were fascinated with the incipient movement of avant-garde dance, as exemplified by the dance of Loie Fuller, self-declared Nietzschean Isadora Duncan, and Ruth St.

Frisch [New York: Norton, 2002], 318). As Schütze puts it (35), the “simplistic, politicized, nationalistic reading” to which she had made her brother’s philosophy “accessible...would greatly influence [its] later reception and fatal corruption in fascist Italy as much as in Nazi Germany.” That point, too, is understated: it is common knowledge that Förster-Nietzsche herself played an active role in the Nazi and fascist “corruption” of Nietzsche’s legacy.

²³ The interpretive power of works of visual art on literary themes will be more adequately illustrated in Kowalsky’s detailed examination of certain works by Munch in the second part of the present essay. For an example from an earlier century, consider Rembrandt’s paintings on biblical stories, in particular how illuminating they are regarding the human meaning of the stories, and how poignantly expressive of the emotions evoked in those stories, such as care, compassion, love, and humanity. For an excellent discussion, see Howard B. White, *Antiquity Forgot: Essays on Shakespeare, Bacon, and Rembrandt* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978).

Denis. (Fuller, an American expatriate based in Paris in the 1890s, became a European sensation with her ecstatic dancing using exotic lighting and large swirling capes. One of her most famous works, *Fire Dance*, was inspired by “The Ride of Valkyries” from Wagner’s *Die Walküre*.) Kessler commissioned Hofmann to produce a series of lithographs entitled *Tänze (Dances)*. Hofmann’s painting *Flammentanz (Flame Dance)*, shown in the catalog (53), depicts five bare-breasted female dancers outfitted with billowing dresses and capes specifically inspired by Fuller’s *Fire Dance*. Its “almost pointillist style” is designed to “emulate” the lightening effects of Fuller’s performances, while the “energetic yellow and orange lines...seem to emanate from the ecstatically moving dancers.” As the catalog suggests, the painting gives visual expression to the celebration of dance as an ecstatic, Dionysian art in Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, which is later echoed in his *Zarathustra* (52).

In 1905 Max Klinger was invited by the editors of *Pan* to create a visual image corresponding to the text of Nietzsche’s as-yet-unpublished fable *Der Riese (The Giant)*, for publication in the second issue of the magazine. When Klinger declined the invitation, the task fell to Ernst Moritz Geyger, an artist enamored of Nietzsche but chiefly known for his naturalistic bronze sculptures of animals (13, 88).

The etching Geyger came up with actually incorporates the text of the fable. As the catalog points out (88), the substance of the text’s allegorical meaning is Nietzsche’s view of the basic tension between the very few great individuals and the vast majority of people, who are, figuratively speaking, small. The latter, represented in the fable as dwarves, feel threatened by and resentful of the mental and physical superiority of the former (symbolized by the giant against whom they are plotting). Completely blind to the utter futility of their efforts, they will do anything it takes to diminish or destroy those few great ones. The visual imagery surrounding the text vividly expresses its literal meaning (thereby reinforcing its allegorical meaning). The giant is visualized as an enormous, beautiful, classically shaped man with wings, striking a heroic pose in the nude, and holding a pen and a clump of sheets, “on the top of which he has designed the constellation of Saturn, the planet of melancholy genius.” The dwarves, whom the giant towers over and is most likely blissfully unaware of, are depicted as ugly puny animals (“dressed in black professorial robes”) scurrying around the plinth on which he is standing and plotting his takedown. The giant here turns out to be Nietzsche himself, with the dwarves signifying the academics in the universities at the time who sought to completely discredit his ideas and destroy his writings.

Max Klinger is the most famous German artist in this group. As Schütze states (28), he was “one of the most acclaimed German artists of the time, and also highly esteemed at the Weimar court,” and the Austrian writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal “described him in 1895 as ‘the most original artist that Germany is privileged to possess.’” Kessler and company were thus very fortunate to have him play a major part in the New Weimar project, although he never plumped for any of the appointments offered him in Weimar (31). He produced a number of Nietzschean works of art, one of which was commissioned by Kessler for the Nietzsche Archive (31). It was to be a herm of Nietzsche done in Parian marble (30). In addition to that one, Klinger ended up producing a bronze herm, now housed in the National Gallery in Ottawa (104). In Schütze’s view (104), the image of Nietzsche in the former tends more towards idealization in a classical vein, whereas the style of the bronze is a blend of naturalism and modern expressiveness though still with a strong admixture of idealism. More important is what they have in common. Both are monumental works, portraying Nietzsche in a grand, heroic mode, in stark contrast to the frail, sickly, and utterly helpless state of the man in the final years of his life. Taken together with the busts and the drawing based on G. A. Schultze’s famous 1882 photograph, which Klinger produced as part of the planning process for them, the two herms show the “progressive abstraction from physiognomic likeness toward heroic idealization” that Nietzsche’s image underwent in Klinger’s hands (102; cf. 98, 100, 104). And with them Klinger put an indelible stamp on the New Weimar’s iconography of Nietzsche as the suffering “promethean thinker” and “heroic prophet of modernity” (27, 25), which has decisively shaped artistic images of the philosopher-poet ever since (104).

According to *New Weimar*, it was largely owing to the widely acknowledged greatness of Klinger’s *Beethoven* that Kessler awarded him a commission to create a “cult-image” of Nietzsche for the Nietzsche Archive (96). Completed in 1902, *Beethoven* is a massive monumental sculpture, made of marble, jasper, ivory, and bronze, that depicts the composer “seated on a bronze throne, his body bent forward in thought,” reminding us of Rodin’s *Thinker* (28). Clinging to a rock at the larger-than-life composer’s feet is a formidable-looking eagle, its posture one of caring deference towards him. Although the eagle can be interpreted as an allusion to “Phidias’ statue of Zeus at Olympia,” says Schütze (29), “for many contemporaries he would naturally transform into the faithful attendant of Zarathustra’s solitude.”²⁴ They see in Klinger’s *Beethoven*

²⁴ In the first and tenth sections of the Prologue to *Zarathustra*, Zarathustra gives the earliest indications of how close he is to his eagle and serpent, and what they mean to him as models of pride and

a Zarathustra-like figure, a genius of the highest order. To underscore the point, Schütze cites contemporary art historian Paul Kühn's description of the statue as an "embodiment of the superhuman" and "the most glorious, joyful, artistic affirmation of Nietzsche's Zarathustrian worship" (29).

In addition to his other functions at the New Weimar, Van de Velde was assigned the task of designing the ornamentation for expensive but beautiful "collector's" editions of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, *Ecco Homo*, and *Dionysian Dithyrambs* put out by various boutique publishers (for instance, Insel Verlag) over the ensuing years (22–25). As Schütze sees it, Van de Velde succeeded in inventing an appropriate, Nietzschean style of ornamentation for each of these works. Thus, in the case of *Zarathustra*, Schütze says:

Van de Velde's symmetrical abstract ornaments adorn the cover, double frontispiece and title page, as well as the opening parts of the four parts of the book. Particularly imposing is the vital energy of the double frontispiece, which creates, for the reader, a sort of festive, triumphant entrance gate to Zarathustra's formidable prophecies. The text was set in [Georges] Lemmen's typeface and is adorned with small chapter dividers and interspersed spacers printed in gold which rhythmicize the densely printed text blocks and accentuate the aphoristic tone of Zarathustra's speech. Nietzsche's prophecies are presented in a decisively modern fashion. (70; cf. 23)

What Schütze seems to be remarking on here is the various ways in which the style of ornamentation Van de Velde chose for *Zarathustra* reflects the essential themes of the work—such as Nietzsche's vitalistic doctrine of the will to power, and his joyful life- and earth-affirming prophecy of the advent of the *Übermensch*—as well as the philosopher's grand, aphoristic, but also musical manner of expressing them. This, together with Schütze's similarly thought-provoking remarks about the ornamental styles adopted for the other two writings, could form the basis of an exceptionally rich and insightful treatment of the subject.

Reflecting his growing interest in various strands of Post-Impressionist art, Kessler purchased *Mirror in the Green Room*, by one of his favorite French painters, the Nabi master Pierre Bonnard. In this close-up of a bathroom interior, we are shown a standing female nude with her clothed maid as seen reflected in a mirror. The mirrored reflection becomes a picture within a picture that evokes the metaphor of a painting as a mirror to the outside world.

wisdom, respectively. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1954), 121, 137.

The stance of the nude is a classical echo of the Medici Venus. The combination reflects the artist's "search for a new classicism" (54)—one which, precisely for that reason, Kessler might have regarded as exemplifying a Nietzschean modernist aesthetic, even if such was not the artist's intention.²⁵

Auguste Rodin rejected academic standards and drew inspirations from antique and Renaissance masters. In his first important work destined for the Paris Salon, he created a life-sized male nude statue that reflected his study of Michelangelo's *Dying Slave*. When first exhibited in Belgium, under the title *The Vanquished*, or *The Wounded Soldier*, the work caused controversy because of its stubborn abandonment of academic conventions, excessive realism, and studied ambiguity—all qualities which were to become key ingredients of an authentic modernist work. When exhibited in Paris, Rodin changed the title to *The Age of Bronze* (1875–76) to emphasize the positive idea of man's awakening to a new epoch. By the time Kessler exhibited it at the arts and crafts museum in Weimar in 1904, it was acclaimed as the sculptor's masterpiece, and multiple versions in plaster, marble, and bronze were produced and eagerly sought by museums throughout Europe. Thanks to the financial intervention of Grand Duchess Caroline, it was purchased for the museum. The work came to be seen as the announcement of "the advent of a new age and of a new type of man" (56). As such it was admirably suited to serving as a "symbol of the New Weimar," with its Nietzschean modernist aesthetic vision and sense of cultural mission as Kessler understood these matters.

ASSESSING NEW WEIMAR

There seem to be at least two different narratives or lines of argument running through the catalog.

First, as we have seen, *New Weimar* seeks to bring to light key factors in the transformation of Nietzsche into a cult figure among European artists, such as the variety and vigor of his sister's and Kessler's efforts bent to that end; the publication of *Pan*; the luxury editions of several of Nietzsche's

²⁵ Nietzsche, in his earlier as well as later writings, evinces a preference for the classical style in the visual arts. Note, for instance, the high praise he bestows on Raphael's *Transfiguration* in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and then his still higher estimation of Michelangelo in a later work, as Paul Barolsky points out in *Michelangelo's Nose: A Myth and Its Maker* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), 152–53. On the other hand, that Bonnard himself would have resisted any sort of association of his artwork with Nietzsche's philosophy might plausibly be inferred from Meredith Hindley, "Nietzsche Is Dead," *Humanities* 33, no. 4 (2012), <https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2012/julyaugust/feature/nietzsche-dead>. Apparently Bonnard refused Kessler's request for his support of the Nietzsche memorial project in Weimar, although, as he explained to Kessler, his refusal was based on his "[opposition] not to [Nietzsche's] ideas, but to his person."

writings; the remodeling of the Nietzsche Archive; and the production of sculptures, prints, and paintings by artists associated with Kessler or the New Weimar, which heroize or monumentalize Nietzsche or give visual expression to his main philosophical ideas.

We also learn from the catalog how Kessler, with little if any support from Förster-Nietzsche, but aided by Van der Velde and the latter's connections with French dealers and artists, was simultaneously waging a battle for aesthetic modernism through his exhibitions of the artwork of Manet, Monet, Renoir, Gauguin, Cézanne, Seurat, Bonnard, Vuillard, Rodin, Maillol, and others.

A problem arises here. The catalog does not make clear the relation between those two narratives. That relation could have been clarified by showing the influence of Nietzsche's philosophy on the Bonnard painting and Rodin and Maillol sculptures included in the catalog, exactly as is done with the artwork of Munch and the German artists also featured therein. For then both narratives could have been made to fit comfortably in a larger argument supporting *New Weimar's* bold, sweeping claim that Nietzsche was the philosopher of modernism. Yet the catalog makes no such attempt. Nor does it argue for any direct Nietzschean influence on the artwork of Monet or Bonnard or Rodin or even Maillol. We are left wondering about the presence of the second narrative and inclusion of some works by those French artists in the catalog. Why, indeed, should they be given any attention whatsoever, if the catalog's avowed chief purpose is to shed light on the Nietzschean aspects of modernism, rather than on Kessler's various contributions to the rise of aesthetic modernism, some of which are not obviously related to Nietzsche's philosophy? At any rate, *New Weimar* does not seek explicitly and unequivocally to establish those artists' connections to a Nietzschean modernist aesthetic, even if only as viewed through a Kesslerian lens.²⁶ We, naturally, have tried to fill this lacuna by suggesting some possible connections along the way, but these are tentative or hypothetical at best.

The foregoing lack of a clear focus and sense of direction is further evident in *New Weimar's* inclusion of an essay by Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen about the influence of Ralph Waldo Emerson's thought on Nietzsche's philosophy as well as the latter's reception in America. Although intrinsically

²⁶ At best the catalog hints at some such possible connection: "In 1903 Kessler opened his series of exhibitions at the *Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe* tactically with a monographic show on [Max Klinger], including the first bronze bust of Nietzsche—a strategic choice meant to prepare the grounds for the more controversial exhibitions, mostly dedicated to French art, to follow" (*New Weimar*, 31).

interesting and worth reading, the essay bears no relation to the main subject of the catalog. The space occupied by it should instead have been devoted to an exploration of the New Weimar's role in quickening and channeling the influence of key Nietzschean themes and ideas on modernist artistic trends in Europe, especially Germany—a topic barely touched on in the catalog (see 14). Here German Expressionism springs to mind, which the art of Edvard Munch (itself profoundly shaped by Nietzsche, as is argued at length in the second part of the present essay) is widely believed to have decisively influenced.²⁷ At all events, such an exploration could have greatly strengthened the catalog's case for the centrality of Nietzsche's philosophy to modernist art.

Notwithstanding its limitations, the *New Weimar* catalog constitutes a signal accomplishment in the life of modern Western culture as a whole and the history of modern art in particular. It brings to our attention an important but hitherto largely neglected chapter in the unfolding, rich story of Nietzsche's cultural influence, especially in the domain of the visual arts. It also provides valuable clues to a deeper, more concrete understanding of how that influence was transmitted to the visual arts in other parts of Germany and Europe, and of the consolidation, for better or worse, of Nietzsche's enduring cultural legacy.

POSTSCRIPT

In the second part of the present essay, Kowalsky homes in on another, still graver weakness of the catalog only hinted at in the foregoing critical remarks: the weakness of its case for the centrality of Nietzsche's philosophy to modernist art. Since this deficiency is one that the catalog shares with the scholarly writing on Nietzsche's relation to modernist art produced to date, it is examined in conjunction with a brief examination of that larger scholarship. Thought is also given to how that deficiency may be made good. The core of this latter discussion is an extended analysis of a number of Edvard Munch's works of art, with a focus on their Nietzschean aspects.

²⁷ See, for instance, Jill Lloyd and Reinhold Heller, eds., *Munch and Expressionism* (New York: Prestel, 2016).