



## Critical review

*Repetita juvant!* A reply to Gwilym EadesPaul Kingsbury<sup>a,\*</sup>, John Paul Jones III<sup>b</sup><sup>a</sup> Department of Geography, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6, Canada<sup>b</sup> School of Geography and Development, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721, United States

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## ABSTRACT

We reply to Gwilym Eades's (2010) criticisms by emphasizing the dangers of predestined readings and restating three key points that we made in our previous article (Kingsbury and Jones, 2009): first, that Apollo and Dionysus are mutually affirming rather than oppositional; second, that Walter Benjamin provides valuable theoretical resources to consider the uncertainties and possibilities of technology; and third, that one cannot simply read politics off technology.

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"Because I still like him, I can foresee the impatience of the bad reader: this is the way I name or accuse the fearful reader, the reader in a hurry to be determined, decided upon deciding (in order to annul, in other words to bring back to oneself, one has to wish to know in advance what to expect, one wishes to expect what has happened, one wishes to expect (oneself)). Now it is bad, and I know no other definition of the bad, it is bad to predestinate one's reading, it is bad to foretell. It is bad, reader, no longer to like retracing one's steps." (Derrida, 1987, p. 4)

## 1. Introduction

The Greek god Apollo is often associated with the mastery of harmony, restraint, and healing. It was surprising, then, to read in Gwilym Eades's "Apollonian appreciation" (2010) a critique studded with so many acerbic and prickly words, including "misleading", "flawed", "irresponsible", "shallow", "divisive", and "wanton". While this could be interpreted as a symptom – as when an author is caught enjoying the very thing that they admonish (i.e. our overfriendly dalliances with the Dionysian) – this reply addresses something that is far more rudimentary. From a Nietzschean perspective, the problem with noisy critiques such as Eades's is that they are "incapable of thinking subtle things" (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 143). This is not to say that our article (Kingsbury and Jones, 2009) is especially subtle, but that Eades's predestined reading (see Derrida, above) has caused him to overlook both its basic and more nuanced arguments.

Eades's chief criticism is that our article is logically flawed because it misrepresents Nietzsche's work (especially the relationship between the Apollonian and the Dionysian) and because it mistakenly finds an affinity between Nietzsche and Walter Benjamin. As a result of these conceptual misdemeanors, Eades alleges that we blind ourselves to "the whole picture" (p. 671) of Google Earth, as well as glorify abjection and intoxication. While journal commentaries frequently demand that the initial author(s) elaborate on claims, explicate theoretical understandings, and provide more empirical data, Eades's commentary requires that we confine ourselves to arguably the most elementary and banal response of all: restating what was already written. Hence our reply: *Repetita juvant!* (repetition helps!).

## 2. Apollo and Dionysus

Eades's main charge is that we overlook the "holism" (p. 670) of the Apollonian and Dionysian "whole" (p. 670). Yet our article frequently asserts that the "dynamic duo" (p. 505) of Apollo and Dionysus are mutually affirming rather than oppositional. In the space of five sentences, for example, we write: "Nietzsche aims to reaffirm the turbulent, subjective, and sensual elements of aesthetic experience alongside elements of unity and intelligibility" (p. 504, emphasis in original); "the fusion of Apollonian restraint and Dionysian abandonment" (p. 504, emphasis added); and "to live a truly meaningful life, one must aspire to combine both Apollonian and Dionysian principles" (p. 504, emphasis added), which are "broad, mutually affirmative categories" (p. 504, emphasis added).

Eades asserts that we "offer no support for the implicit claim that Apollo was more subject to binary logic than Dionysus" (p. 670). Our article, however, describes how both categories are "broad, mutually affirmative categories" (p. 504), which cannot

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [kingsbury@sfu.edu](mailto:kingsbury@sfu.edu) (P. Kingsbury).

be reduced to a single essence, whether “binary logic” (Eades, 2010, p. 670) or “bacchanalian” (ibid. p. 670). Specifically, we align the Apollonian with determination, order, control, calculation, dreams, serenity, mastery, ordered boundaries, self-conscious contemplation, measurement, observation, verification, sobriety, rationality, sincerity, and the plastic art of sculpture. And, we align the Dionysian with uncertainty, love, paranoia, frenzy, jubilation, dissolution, intoxication, giddiness, excess, disorder, sensuousness, ecstasy, fertility, excitement, immanence, and the non-plastic art of music. The point here is that our article does not claim that Dionysus should replace Apollo. Rather, we advocate a unification of the Apollonian and the Dionysian much like

“Nietzsche’s reading of Greek tragedy, wherein the rigid criticality of Apollonian determinations – either surveillance or resistance – is counterpoised to the un-tethered openness of Dionysian uncertainty. In short, we read both dread and hope as a dialectical pairing within a precoded Apollonian worldview, while posing in a Dionysian alternative a minor political theory (Katz, 1996) that is never foreclosed but is, rather, vigilant to the immanence of technology-in-use” (p. 503).

The keyword here is “counterpoised.” Our article rebalances the predominant mode of interpreting Geospatial Technologies (GSTs) such as Google Earth by bringing Dionysus onto the stage. Nowhere do we show Apollo the red card in order to send him packing. To do so would be naïve, reductive, and, frankly, un-Nietzschean. Instead, our paper re-thinks the

“available political positions existing within critical approaches to GSTs...[offering] a domination-resistance dialectic that is capable of encircling Google Earth and bringing it into the Apollonian fold. Here we aimed to augment this perspective – to keep Google Earth spinning, so to speak – through Benjamin’s Dionysian approach” (p. 511).

The keyword here is “augment.” We do not advocate replacing, jettisoning, or substituting an Apollonian approach for a Dionysian approach. For example, in our discussion of the “the sublime beauty of Google Earth” (p. 509), we offer “a large dose of the Dionysian and a pinch of the Apollonian”. The relationship between Apollo and Dionysus, then, is all about proportion rather than substitution. Our article keeps both Apollo *and* Dionysus in play as our response to

“recent works that have already and will doubtless continue to read Google Earth as an Apollonian entity composed of control, order, and calculation, as well as to those who have celebrated its utility in democratizing mapping practices. Again, it is not so much that these choices are ‘wrong’, but that they are limiting, two parts of a sobering, recursive yin and yang that elides the extent to which Google Earth is also a Dionysian entity” (p. 503).

Eades contends that we offer a shallow treatment of the Apollonian and the Dionysian because we only focus on one text: *The Birth of Tragedy* (1999). We focus on this text because it is the only one in Nietzsche’s entire corpus where he theorizes in-depth and at length the dynamic pairing of Apollo and Dionysus. While Nietzsche draws on Apollo and Dionysus in his other works, Dionysus soon eclipses (and arguably replaces) Apollo in terms of importance. Notably, in the two texts (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2003) and *Beyond Good and Evil* (2002)) that Eades’s suggests we should have consulted, Apollo is only mentioned once (in a footnote). In addition, far from being “a truly anarchic spirit” (Eades, 2010, p. 671), we believe Nietzsche’s work rallies against the “will to a system” (Nietzsche, 2005 [1889], p. 159) not by anarchistic means, but by carefully attending to the intensities of creativity, nuance, and subtlety (see Kingsbury, 2003, 2010).

### 3. Walter Benjamin

And what are we to make of Eades’s suggestion that Benjamin’s “tragic... status... increases his academic cachet” (2010, p. 670)? Should Benjamin therefore be off limits? To the contrary, we used Benjamin because his work offers an “open-ended, practice-based approach to epistemological and political shifts accompanying the rise of a new, ground-breaking technology [such as Google Earth]” (2009, p. 503). Drawing on Benjamin’s theorizations of the indeterminacy of technology and social pleasure is not the same as “seeking some element of anarchy in Benjamin” (p. 671). Readers themselves may judge for themselves the relevancy of Benjamin to our argument by reflecting on the epigraph that opens our paper – his well-known pointer toward the uncertainties and possibilities of technology:

“Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling.” (Benjamin, 1969a, p. 236).

What is more, Eades’s notion that Benjamin is burdened by a “Marxist heritage ... in somewhat dogmatically anti-capitalist ideas” (p. 671) seems to us to be misguided. A careful reading of Benjamin’s essay, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations* (cited by Eades) demonstrates the extent to which Benjamin rejects many forms of dogma (Marxist or otherwise).

### 4. Reality and responsibility

Eades’s third criticism is that our “Google goggles” (p. 671) (who’s being playful now?) “cloud [our] vision of the whole ‘Google’ picture” (p. 671). In pursuing this totalizing mode of argumentation, Eades is curiously close to the very crude ideology critiques that he decries. The maneuver underpins his criticism that we confuse what “the thought of Nietzsche is” (p. 670) and “what...[we] think it ought to be” (p. ibid.). Yet, as every good Nietzschean knows, the distinction between “is” and “ought” not only claims a privileged position of reading, or access to a truth, it also prevents the free-play of the world and text.

Underlying much of Eades’s complaints is a simplistic politics that accuses us of “glorify[ing] abjection” (p. 671). But in fact, we state repeatedly (including in our discussion of Darfur) that one cannot simply read politics off technology. Our multiple reading in that context was exemplary of what we write elsewhere in the article:

“the Dionysian involves a politics that is in use, immanent to the sites of practice such as interfacing with the computer screen (i.e., not scaled or made ‘political’ in advance), and assumption-less about the type of user or her subject position; nor is she necessarily sober, rational, or sensible. The Dionysian is a politics of the artist, anarchist, hacker – a position that might seem ‘apolitical’ at first glance, at least from the Apollonian elevated point of view. Even the sympathetic might see it as ‘wasted’ or ‘for nothing’. But the Dionysian is also the place where new ways of political and ethical thinking emerge and where new epistemes are concocted and erupt (p. 509, emphasis added).”

New ways of thinking about ethical and political matters do not and cannot mean the “wanton rejection of rationality [that] tighten those shackles more strongly around our wrists and ankles” (Eades, 2010, p. 671). To be sure, our article states the dangers of excessive rationalization, wherein “Apollonian elements can topologically flip over into Dionysian confusion and anxiety” (Kingsbury and Jones, 2009, p. 509; Horkheimer and Adorno, 1991).

Finally, Eades suggests that we would do well to “honestly” (p. 671) draw “from previous cartographic critiques” (p. 671). And yet, our paper cites more than half of the same authors he suggests. If Eades is concerned with our lack of scholarly integrity, then we can only assume that we have fallen foul of *his* regulative distinction between a textual “is” and “ought.”

## 5. Concluding remarks

Our article is part of a much wider project that seeks to examine how enjoyment (both Dionysian and Apollonian) is not simply a psychological or somatic indulgence, but rather a thought-practice that can be thoroughly political, ethical, and beautiful (Kingsbury 2005, 2010; Kingsbury and Jones, forthcoming; Naraghi and Kingsbury, forthcoming; Proudfoot, forthcoming). And, we should add, educational. On this last point, we would like to assure Eades that we have successfully used our text in several graduate and undergraduate classes. No one was hurt, no one overdosed on drugs, and no one committed suicide as a result of their reading. (Perhaps in Derrida's terms, students have less to retrace; i.e., they are not as predestined.) So we restate: Walter Benjamin's Dionysian adventures are about a joyous, playful, and dynamic interpretation of Google Earth in the world. We believe this is a trip is worth taking, especially if it inadvertently shows how bad readings can lead to bad trips.

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