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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Nietzsche and the Fate of Art by Philip Pothen

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contemplation. In short, man is a rational animal. This assumption extends naturally to his aesthetics. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle takes an intellectualist approach to tragedy. Character is understood in terms of thought and thought in terms of the arguments offered. Spectacle is not even necessary; the play could just be read. Dissanayake would probably see Aristotle as one of those responsible for an overemphasis on analysis in Western society. Yet analysis does play an important role in the making and appreciation of the arts. Our greatest works of art, for example, the *Brothers Karamazov* (which Dissanayake herself recognizes as of the highest quality), require equal concern for emotion and intellect. The analysis of such works by good critics often helps us to appreciate them better. Although arts that stress the communal and the rhythmic are of value (one of Dissanayake's rare examples from contemporary art is "Vulcano" [1995], an art project designed by Giuseppe Gabellone in which the artist asked collaborators to carry out their work of constructing a volcano from wood and clay in total silence), they may not have the deep and enduring interest of works that draw on the intellect as well. Dissanayake recognizes that we live in a complex society, yet she sometimes fails to realize that we need art that meets our needs, which may be different from those of our primeval ancestors. Similarly, her criticism of Western culture as a whole seems inconsistent with her emphasis on adaptation. The development of a competitive spirit and a sense of personal identity may be especially adaptive to our own world. Still, she is probably right that much of the neuroses in our society is the result of ignoring our evolutionary roots. In the end, some sort of compromise is needed between the tendencies represented respectively by Aristotle and Dissanayake.

We often talk about the value of interdisciplinary work but we seldom truly honor it. It is particularly good to get a long view of the arts, one that covers the entire span of human evolution as we know it, instead of just focusing on recent developments; and one that takes into consideration the human experience as a whole and not just adult making and appreciation. Dissanayake provides us with all of that. Furthermore, it would be interesting now to see her theory developed in direct competition with contemporary philosophical theories of art.

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POTHEN, PHILIP. *Nietzsche and the Fate of Art*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002, 235 pp., \$79.95 cloth, \$29.95, paper.

It is a critical commonplace that Nietzsche's thought manifests a strong commitment to the value of art. Indeed, it is often said that Nietzsche subscribes to some form of "aestheticism": it has, for instance, been claimed that, for Nietzsche, art provides not only the highest form of human experience but also the evaluative criteria in reference to which we should assess persons, actions, and the world. Thus understood, it is with reference to aesthetic value that Nietzsche conducts his famous reevaluation of values; that is, his assessment of the value of our "moral" values. And while some authors have noted an ambivalence in Nietzsche's attitude toward art—in particular, in the works of his so-called positivist period of 1878 to 1881—the belief that art occupies a crucially important and privileged position in his thought has attained the status of near-orthodoxy.

The major premise of the book under review is that this general consensus is mistaken. Rather, the author, Philip Pothen, claims that Nietzsche's works are marked by a "deep suspicion and at times hostility . . . towards art and the artist" (p. 1). Pothen acknowledges the well-attested passion for art that Nietzsche displayed in his life, but insists that this must be distinguished from his philosophical objections to art as characterized by illusion and underpinned by a dissatisfaction with a reality born of psychological weakness. Yet the book ignores the apparent tension that this distinction generates, electing as its central aim to explore only Nietzsche's theoretical opposition to art and, in particular, to identify the philosophical arguments and positions upon which it is founded.

Pothen's largely expository study begins with an examination of Nietzsche's first published work, *The Birth of Tragedy*—the text that is standardly taken as the *ne plus ultra* of Nietzsche's "valorization of art" (p. 8). This work, it is generally agreed, gives an account of the origins, and possible rebirth, of Attic tragedy in terms of the dual aesthetic principles of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Pothen offers criticisms (not convincing to my mind) of this view, claiming that a close reading of *The Birth of Tragedy* in tandem with the unpublished *Nachlass* material of the period suggests that Nietzsche associates the Apollonian with "a problematic, perhaps even fatal Socratic notion of 'clarity' and reason" (p. 8). Even if we grant this claim, however, it is unclear how this is supposed to discredit the standard aestheticist reading of *The Birth of Tragedy*. According to this view, art achieves its highest significance when the Apollonian and the Dionysian form a synthesis in which the Dionysian predominates; but such a position is clearly compatible with the idea that Nietzsche was hostile to the Apollonian in isolation from the Dionysian. Pothen's remarks on this matter do perhaps point to a need to reevaluate Nietzsche's attitude

toward the purely Apollonian; but they fail to advance Pothén's wider claims in respect of the inadequacies of the standard reading of *The Birth of Tragedy*, or his primary thesis concerning Nietzsche's supposed hostility to art in general.

By contrast, Chapter 2 offers an illuminating account of the development of Nietzsche's thoughts on genius, particularly in the texts of 1877 to 1881. Pothén attributes to Nietzsche a naturalistic account of genius that is chiefly motivated by a desire to revalue the basic assumption of theorists from Kant to Wagner that the genius is of a different *type* than other merely talented artists. In this connection, Pothén considers Nietzsche's attempts to naturalize the "metaphysical vocabulary" (p. 47) that surrounds the concept of genius. For example, the notion of "inspiration" as the cause of great art is said to be an idea "which artists have a vested interest in perpetuating" (p. 47), but that in fact conceals the more prosaic "organizational" and rational procedures that give rise to artworks. Now while it cannot be denied that Nietzsche seeks to repudiate the otherworldly conception of genius in favor of a naturalistic account, Pothén overstates his case when he claims that, according to Nietzsche, the genius is not of a fundamentally different order from other human beings. For it is one of Nietzsche's most important and consistent claims that the artistic genius is an instance of what he calls the "higher" individual. Certainly, this notion is explicated in naturalistic terms—specifically, in terms of the psychophysical make-up of the individual—rather than terms involving metaphysical notions. But it remains clear that the artist possessed of genius, for Nietzsche, is to be sharply delineated from the mass of humanity.

Later on, Pothén claims that Nietzsche's "most urgent charge against the artwork in general" (p. 53) is that it denies the reality of becoming or change by positing fixed and stable "ideas." As such, Nietzsche views art as preventing both the artist and the "recipients of art" (p. 53) from viewing reality without the comforts and consolations of metaphysical fictions. But in making this claim, Pothén overlooks the fact that Nietzsche often praises art precisely because of its capacity "to impose upon becoming the character of being"—an ability that he describes as "the supreme will to power" (*The Will to Power*, p. 617). Such art, Nietzsche claims, can proceed from "gratitude and love" (*The Will to Power*, p. 846), and is hence an affirmative art of "apotheosis" (*ibid.*) rather than escapism or flight from reality. In addition, Pothén conflates a distinction Nietzsche draws between art that exhibits a desire for "being" and art that seeks to embrace becoming. Nietzsche gives this latter kind of art the term "Dionysian" and its paradigm is provided by tragedy, which conveys "the eternal joy of becoming" (*Ecce Homo*, V, 3). Far

from depicting the artist as incapable of facing reality unadorned, Nietzsche's account of the psychology of the tragic artist revolves around the idea that the tragic artist is capable of confronting "the hard, gruesome, malevolent and problematic aspects of existence" (*The Birth of Tragedy*, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," p. 1). Thus Nietzsche writes:

The *profundity of the tragic artist* lies in this, that his aesthetic instinct surveys the more remote consequences, that he does not halt shortsightedly at what is closest at hand, that he affirms the *large-scale economy* which justifies the *terrifying, the evil, the questionable*—and more than merely justifies them. (*The Will to Power*, p. 852)

In the face of this passage and numerous others like it, it is difficult to see how Pothén can claim that Nietzsche associates art and artists *in general* with illusion, and that this motivates his "consistent rejection of the artist" (p. 176). To the contrary, the "supreme affirmation" of the tragic artist is based on an apprehension of reality that is "strictly confirmed and maintained by truth and knowledge" (*Ecce Homo*, V, 2); and far from rejecting this mode of awareness, Nietzsche places it at the very center of his concerns: "affirmation of life in its strangest and sternest problems . . . that is what I called Dionysian. . . . In this sense I have the right to understand myself as the first tragic philosopher" (*ibid.*).

One of the most interesting discussions in the book examines Nietzsche's largely neglected ideas concerning what he calls "monological art"—that is, art for no one but the artist. Pothén interprets this notion as offering us a kind of evaluative criterion: great art is that which eschews both the audience and its approbation in favor of "solitude," "forgetting," and "inner strength" (p. 74). Ultimately, Pothén argues that the concept of a monological work of art is unrealizable, if not incoherent, since "the very notion of the work implies an element, at least, of publicness, as well as, therefore, a fundamental acknowledgement of otherness" (p. 96). But this latter claim, upon which Pothén's rejection of monological art rests, is merely asserted rather than deduced. Indeed, it is unclear how one would argue for such a thesis, since there is no *prima facie* incoherence in the notion of a work of art that is intended for no one. Moreover, Pothén passes over some of the more pressing philosophical questions that arise in relation to this notion of monological art. How, for example, is such a principle of valuation to be applied; and how are genuinely monological works of art to be identified? These are questions to which neither Pothén nor Nietzsche supply satisfactory answers.

In addition to these issues, the book contains a challenging and rewarding discussion of the will to power and its relation to art. In particular, Pothén

fruitfully examines Heidegger's reading of "The Will to Power as Art," and its implication concerning the specificity of the artwork by making it reducible to the physiology with which it is said to be identical. Additionally, Pothén offers an account of Nietzsche's critique of Kantian disinterestedness and judgments of taste; and in the final chapter he considers the texts of the final year of Nietzsche's sane life, in which he mounts his most sustained attack on Wagner and "art in the age of decadence" (p. 10).

Overall, Pothén's book fails to establish its central thesis, but in doing so it offers many thought-provoking and insightful discussions of themes in Nietzsche's aesthetics that are largely ignored in the literature.

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ZAK, ALBIN J. III. *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records*. University of California Press, 2001, xvii + 259 pp., \$48.00 cloth, \$18.95 paper.

Although recorded music has been with us for well over a hundred years, the field of music aesthetics has remained nearly silent concerning the ubiquity of recorded music. Yet interesting issues do arise. They arise not simply because so much music is recorded, but because so much music is conceived of, created as, and disseminated as recorded music. Albin J. Zak III argues that informed listeners understand that the resulting recordings (or "tracks" as Zak prefers) moot all reference to "musical reality" existing apart from the recordings themselves. The implicit goal of *The Poetics of Rock* is to position us to appreciate the richness of these sonic texts. The central chapters of the book do an excellent job in marshaling evidence appropriate to that aim. Despite its title, the book is less about rock music (undefined by Zak, but seemingly encompassing virtually all of popular music since Elvis Presley) than phonography, a topic identified some fifteen years ago by Evan Eisenberg. Each step of the argument is illustrated by examples of rock music, most of them well known to those who would identify themselves as rock-music fans. I realize that some readers of this journal are interested in the aesthetics of music but not in anything having to do with rock music or popular music. For such readers, I will note that the first three chapters provide what is most important in Zak's argument. If nothing else, those chapters suggest that ears attuned to recorded popular music often possess an astounding refinement of taste when it comes to sonic textures, and such ears are attuned to real properties in the music when that music is understood as "material form" (p. 46).

The book's plan is straightforward, with three distinct parts. Chapters 1 and 2 constitute the first part, an extended overview of the issues. The basic idea is that tracks are "musical works wrought in sound" (p. xiii). Created by recordists, working musicians who share a specific mode of musicianship, tracks are musical works without being Platonic universals. Akin to Aristotle's substantial forms, they require material embodiment. Chapters 3 through 6 develop the thesis that rock records are sonic texts in which every nuance of sound plays a role in the music's identity and meaning. Although Theodor Adorno is never mentioned by name, this second part might be approached as a critique of Adorno's opinion that popular music consists of the dregs of musical history. The third part consists of Chapter 7, a concluding essay that does not draw upon the previous argument so much as it offers Zak's reflections on standard questions about audience reception and work interpretation. Despite my sympathies with the overall project, I have strong reservations about Chapter 7.

The book's title, *The Poetics of Rock*, suggests some debt to Aristotle. But Zak, a musicologist, is not drawing on Aristotle. He is alluding to writings on musical composition in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, where a title that included "poetics" indicated that any focus on craft was balanced by discussions of aesthetics and rhetoric. A crude summary of the idea would be that complexity of craft goes hand in hand with complexity of artistic gesture. But then it is incumbent upon the listener to understand what sort of craft is on display. Where Aristotle's *Poetics* argues that the power of Greek tragedy derives from six elements, with plot as its soul, Zak wants us to recognize the degree to which rock music makes a song and its performance a mere layer among other "compositional layers" in the finished rock track (p. 25). Just as it is a category mistake to treat Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* as a play emphasizing character development, it is a mistake to approach most rock recordings as formal constructs whose essences are independent of their material embodiments. Instead, rock tracks are complex in their specificity as material constructions. Our knowledge that "every nuance" of sound is subject to manipulation (p. 23) contributes to the track's subsequent reception and interpretation. But appreciating their materiality requires seeing recorded tracks as collaborative enterprises in which the contributions of engineers and producers are as significant as those of songwriters and performers.

Those who recall Monroe C. Beardsley's approach to aesthetics as meta-criticism will see that Zak adopts a similar strategy. As with Beardsley's account of musical works as auditory designs with phenomenally objective features, Zak likewise offers an analysis in which local qualities produce regional