Book Reviews

ALL IN ALL (MORE OR LESS): RHETORICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN LITERATURE, THOUGHT, AND EXPERIENCE. By Walter Jost. UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025. 649 pp.

This is the longest book in literary criticism that I have encountered. It is also clearly the most informative as well as one of the best argued. Jost's scope exploring philosophical and literary scholarly resources is simply wondrous. I think I have learned more from his footnotes alone than I have from any other single book in literary criticism, especially because I keep running into references that I should have read or now plan to read. These footnotes combined with the main text offer an elaborate education, especially for literary critics who are amateurs interested in philosophy.

I made this judgment on my first reading of the book. Reading it again for this review I realized how much I admire the content and structure of the argumentative work this learning allows and supports. Jost's book is devoted to exemplifying how the academy and even an interested general population might come to appreciate the critical tasks that his rhetorical approach to reading can perform. Three interrelated projects shape the argument. First, there is a pervasive concern to defend a pluralism that he sees as intrinsic to the discipline of rhetoric because rhetoric is more interested in how arguments and works of art are developed and situated in the world rather than in establishing definitive truth claims. Second, Jost has to locate areas for analysis that will justify his claims for a workable alternative or, he might say but not quite believe, "companion" to traditional philosophical ambitions. His strategy is to follow closely the stance of the later Wittgenstein in philosophy and Richard McKeon in rhetorical theory. That stance can be treated as a Heideggerian refusal to honor traditional philosophy as responsible for accurate descriptions of what it poses as objects of attention because this way of proceeding separates beings from Being. But Wittgenstein differs radically from Heidegger's effort to establish an alternative ontology that stresses Being rather than beings. Jost emphasizes a later Wittgenstein who resists the skeptical threats inherent in the picture of minds accurately describing facts in the world because there is not a general need to secure the relation between mind and world: for Wittgenstein world is always already included in the practice of tracing the workings of a society's linguistic frameworks. Then it is wiser to focus, as Jost does, on how we come to know the conditions of activity involved in our ways of formulating descriptions. What Wittgenstein called "philosophical grammar" comes to the fore as the vital principle establishing the multiple worlds by which language establishes conditions of engagement in the situations it makes articulate. It follows that rhetorical analysis devoted to use of language is the best way of analyzing such productions. And pluralism affords the richest way to appreciate the multiple ways language use is woven into how we experience the world. Ultimately a sophisticated rhetoric becomes our guide for analyzing what goes into Wittgenstein's "seeing as" interacting with Heidegger's "hermeneutic as. The range of operations "seeing as" performs in practical life then stands out from efforts to build arguments based on describing "seeing that." Jost combines later Wittgenstein's concern for exemplary "perspicuous representations" with Heidegger's dense analysis of particular ways of making Being "ready-to-hand." Finally, Jost makes a case for aligning rhetoric's interest in everyday language with a specific literary tradition that he calls "low modernism" (a concept best uncapitalized) which is devoted to how concerns for this kind of linguistic framework can explore, test, and produce values for the practical and reflective lives we share.

This complex argument is developed over a long Preamble and then in three sections each with several chapters. Part One of the book is entitled "The Disconcordance" (Jost's neologism attempt-

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ing to capture the paradoxical nature of rhetoric treated philosophically and philosophy treated rhetorically). Its three chapters focus on the pluralism made possible by what Richard Rorty popularized as "the linguistic turn" both in philosophy and across the humanities. Part Two is named "Of Our," whose three chapters outline the structures by which rhetorical criticism fosters frameworks for appreciating plural approaches to texts. And Part Three, "Language Games" is devoted to the ways literary criticism can be shaped by this conceptual background. This section offers brilliant analyses of a play turned into a powerful movie, of the novel *Ethan Frome*, and of two poems by Elizabeth Bishop shaped into a fascinating dialogue on despair.

The book opens brilliantly with concrete examples of the roles rhetorical analysis can play—first on a sonnet by Keats and then by adapting Aristotelian categories of general rhetorical analysis to pluralist ways of handling "situations" (a crucial term Jost borrows from Dewey). Based on treating these examples as situations, Jost postulates a sense of reality as an immense set of "ongoing events" with each sponsoring a possible plurality of readings. His critique of the analytic tradition in philosophy leads him to construct a model of experience which develops an emphasis on multiple ways of valuing how situations elicit expressive activity. It is noteworthy how this concern for values elaborates an important dimension of Stanley Cavell's emphasizing the threat of skepticism as inevitable when one tries to align structures produced by the mind with properties of a world without mind. Cavell can acknowledge skepticism about knowledge and about values without embracing it because of Wittgenstein's stress on what we do in the world rather than how we describe it. Values then are based not on objective facts but on the concerns basic to giving full responses to experiences:

> On this view it is chiefly Humean skepticism behind the attack on [both] Cartesian and empiricist philosophy, and all the more on rhetoric and common-sense ingredients in the everyday and ordinary. … Cavell's point is that a philosophic awareness generated from out of the everyday and ordinary … undertakes repair by dissolving the confusion *within an even larger and deeper awareness of the everyday* and ordinary scenes and ordinary practices in which we use language. (46)

Rhetoric becomes "an adaptive means of positioning oneself with regard to the world as flux" (47). Rhetoric traces "seeing as" and so provides an alternative to the way Philosophy thinks it can trace seeing.

After the Preamble, the following three chapters comprising Part One, "The Disconcordance," define what this positioning involves by discussing several philosophical arguments. The first two chapters in this section offer an engaging effort to position Jost between McKeon's student Richard Rorty and Robert Brandom's "inferential semantics" in the service of a "normative pragmatics" (137ff). The key here is Jost's use of John Dewey's concept of "situation" developed in his late work because it allows for a dynamic account of what language can do in forming the perceived into an experience. And literature then complicates what is present in these situations by cultivating acts of "seeing as" which can exemplify possible attitudes made articulate in these situations. Then Chapter Four, the concluding chapter of Part One, demands a review be more elaborate because it concentrates on how aspect seeing provides an alternative to any mode of thinking that stresses the priority of discreet perceptions as foundational. Wittgenstein makes fundamental not the stuff of sensuous experience but the constitutive power of aspect seeing. Our basic encounter is not with the world but with our ways of making sense of the world, so that being blind to how aspects work makes for a highly limited response to situations:

> Our language can be regarded as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, of houses with extensions from various periods, and all this surrounded by a multitude of suburbs with straight and regular streets and uniform houses. (PI 18, Jost 171)

Jost relies on this activity of analogical "seeing as" in order to call into question Robert Brandom's effort to develop from such a view of language inferences within our activities that call for rational follow-up. Brandom grants that Wittgenstein's emphasis on the historical variability of language

games makes it impossible to base philosophical accounts on the empirical structures we try to impose. But it is still possible, Brandom argues, to develop an account based on a rational analysis of the functions language serves in human life. Jost, on the other hand, challenges the logical status of such inferences because each depends not so much on description as on selecting from language games and so has no independent authority. There is an "infinitely large" (172) variety of language functions dear to later Wittgenstein, without the possibility of establishing an adequate concept of language as an entity. "Downtown" is not specifiable within any theory seeking to provide an abstract structure based on "the giving and asking for reasons" because there is no strict boundary between it and the suburbs. So philosophical reflection can only find ways of adapting to and appreciating the possible functions people find for its ways of framing the world. "Seeing as" does not depend on anything but aspects produced by human interests. Norms are usually not the equivalent of rules because "seeing as" affords constant possibilities for fresh ways of "doubling" situations and introducing concerns about values that need not be rational: "The idea is that likeness is not present to the viewer in the way in which a face is present; likeness is rather a seeing the face as something. Seeing as is not part of perception" (186). And our responses to how we see as often have nothing to do with propositions because of the variety of qualities and values at stake in how we project situations: "Brandom loses any purchase on "who we are" because … such molecular atomism strips the human self of its self-mediation through others" (214).

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, comprising Part Two ("Of Our"), build on this picture of the need for rhetorical analysis by demonstrating how rhetorical inquiry focuses on the agency of speaking and writing in ways that cultivate dynamic comparisons while deepening our understanding both of individual works and comparisons among related works. This quotation from McKeon states Jost's basic thesis in these chapters:

> In this orientation [of philosophy] to *modes* of action and statement, many of the old dichotomies of being and becoming, of reality and appearance, of objective and subjective, become *dynamic functional relations* rather than antinomical obstructions, (237)

Accordingly, Jost's main goal is to test possible matrices that encourage this relational thinking capable of generating "invention in the critical judgment of texts" (378). First there is Aristotle's four causes material, efficient, formal, and final—then modifications by other thinkers like Richard McKeon, climaxing in the very important seventh chapter with William Watson's redoing of McKeon's categories. (At times the matrices become so complicated that they require very small print.)

I think to appreciate fully the appeal of rhetoric and the attraction of pluralism one needs to be aware of his interest in the matrix of "Archic Variables" provided by William Watson as a general framework for pluralistic rhetorical analysis (378):

Archic Variables.

[Four Variables]	PERSPECTIVE	INTERPRETATION	METHOD	PRINCIPLE
[Four possible values for each variable]				
SOPHISTIC	Personal	Existential	Agonistic	Creative
DEMOCRITEAN	Objective	Substrative	Logistic	Elemental
PLATONIC	Diaphanic	Noumenal	Dialectic	Comprehensive
ARISTOTELIAN	Disciplinary	Essential	Problematic	Reflexive

— from Walter Watson, "Archic Analysis," *ArchM*, 151.

After providing a literary and philosophical example of how one can adapt these categories to various texts, Jost turns in his last section to four chapters dealing with literary matters. Here he provides an insightful and very powerful critical voice, in part because his analyses hue closely to the texts and essentially ignore his matrix, although a better reader than I will probably find it in the background. Jost's focus in on "ordinary language criticism" in order to align his critical sensibility with the focus by low modernism on everyday life and quasi-melodramatic ways of addressing that life. On that topic he is very persuasive, although I will argue later that his contrast with high Modernism becomes problematic by even imagining that topic can be handled by one definition. (Where is his pluralism when it counts?) The first of these chapters, mostly on the film of *Twelve Angry Men*, provides a superb account of the relation between rhetoric concerned with everyday language use focused on by low modernism and emotional features that fuel Stanley Cavell's melodramatic approaches to such lives. The drama here resides primarily in contrasts among ways of characterizing the situation of the crime in terms of how the world can be viewed. While several of the group are captured by "a materialist world picture," Henry Fonda proves a masterful low modernist rhetorician: Fonda "has the ability … to construct mental models, competing scenarios, alternative, possibilities, "intermediate cases" (PI 122). He asks characters to imagine things "another way" or pursue alternative possibilities. He exemplifies the film's commitment to invent "intermediate cases" putting "extreme views into relief, recalling facts and working out their implications (447) so as to activate concerns for "mood," "attunement," and acknowledgment."

The chapter on a novel concentrates on Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome*, stressing how the novel in effect moves from low modernist melodrama to low modernist tragedy because of failures to imagine workable ways of "seeing as" that might redirect the novel's path toward disaster. Jost's ambition is to think the novel in terms of the relation among how the narrator and characters construct the world in terms that involve larger categories like "skepticism, the melodramatic, and literary modernism high and low. Jost's primary figure is the range of effects and implications (or ways of "seeing as") produced by what he identifies as a range of "gap-metaphors" (473 ff). Here Jost responds to and elaborates Wharton's statement "I had the sense that the deeper meaning of the story was in the gaps" (473):

> Grammatically, then, a gap involves a "di-vision between its relata, some sort of "opening" or "break … And rhetorically, "gaps" can be received, conceived, responded to, and otherwise treated in quite various ways. … Gaps can be seized upon, pried open, held open in suspense, entered into, even dwelled in, but also refused, dismissed, closed up or closed down, or closed in on. (473)

Gaps are a marvelous figure for his purposes because rhetoric is fundamentally the study of how gaps appear in our discourses forcing us to find ways of "seeing as" that manage to fill them provisionally or alter the imaginative landscape. In Wharton's novel thinking as if there were a world of gaps offers a frightening, intimate glimpse of Ethan's situation and the fate that situation produces: "we imaginatively move, not among the furniture of the place, but through its felt absence—there in the empty in between."

One more quotation is necessary here when Jost gives the fullest interpretation of the title's relation to rhetorical situations involving grappling with gaps: "I wish only to *identify*, speaking all in all and only more or less, how the author redefines 'low modernist materials' to form a whole, and what 'justification' of it might look like here" (478). Low modernism is not so arrogant as to close the gaps by imposing structural devices claiming distinctive imaginative powers where all in all might be made visible. Low modernism must be content with "more or less" because it recognizes how essence lies in grammatical performance rather than in discoveries involving claims to penetrate deeper levels of being. Low modernism tries to see in ways that acknowledge gaps, with the task of form not to bridge or seal gaps so much as to recognize their intransigence and compose attitudes that cope with that intransigence (see 480ff). One learns to deploy terms like "if" that open "*up* a space of possibility that may or may not be fulfilled, an opening for thought, action, and so on" (483). Art

becomes a means for "minding the gaps" so that we can attune ourselves to "larger contexts for understanding" (484) "the whole of things (488). If we adopt such attitudes, we can attune ourselves to "the resonant "nothing" that resides in the 'all' of Wharton's novel.

Jost's chapters on the Bishop poems "Crusoe in England" and "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" offer what I think of as a brilliant contrast between a poetic rhetoric dominated by coping with despair and an alternative rhetorical strategy oriented to producing and inspiring a level of attunement to the causes of that despair. This alternative requires offering an example of the kind of thinking a religious attitude can inspire. Jost neatly summarizes the first situation in his conclusion to the penultimate chapter focused on Crusoe:

> Crusoe's thoughtfulness shares passing characteristics with the Romantic epiphany, with modern skepticism… But the pose that BC best exemplifies we might better call "circumspective," that is, a being-on-the-alert for how everyday and ordinary matters can be reanimated and realized, ranging from "home" as dulling routine to "home" as the field of experiments in which contrary forces get re-balanced in an ever-changing environment. (539)

This rebalancing takes place by recognizing that the separation of one aspect of the poem from other conditions of experience it renders was primarily a result of our failing to see any pattern among other elements in the poem. The simplicity of this error then "leads … away from the … revelatory epiphanic … Moment … and toward the gradual dawning of sense and pattern," and away from high Modernism's focus on sense perception" (540). Instead "Crusoe" seeks "a far more rhetorical-ethical [and impersonal] *phronesis* or practical wisdom based on bringing back "'words from their metaphysical to their everyday uses." Such uses "involve seeing "things in terms of ("as") a form of life in language grounded in action" (542). Jost's critical goal here is to stress thinking as a part of the ordinary life to which Bishop's poetry is drawn: "inferring, imagining, comparing, discriminating, supposing, judging, arguing, describing" (501). Angus Fletcher's formulation of this thinking provides a clear counter to high Modernist claims to intellectual superiority: "Noetics names the field and the precise activity occurring when the poet introduces thought as a discriminable dimension of the form and the meaning of the poem" (*Colors of the Mind* 3). We might notice for example the quality of second-order thinking involved in having the first several stanzas of "Crusoe" alternate between description with no personal speaker and organization in terms of concerns focused in the "I," only to generate by the end a fusion of these perspectives. Thinking cannot change the fact that Crusoe feels still stuck on an island where despair is inescapable, but it might convince us that the poem manages to guide us in accepting even despair as a form of practical wisdom.

"2,000 Illustrations" is an earlier poem but one that Jost brilliantly shows provides an alternative attitude within everyday life involving the handling of impulses to despair. To capture some of the power achieved by this effort, I need to begin with Jost's discussion of the importance of representative cases or articulation that earns the status of becoming exemplary (553 ff). Exemplification is the basic way in which low modernism (and I think every work of art) makes claims on audiences to adapt to the world what they read in privacy. The thinking embedded in such exemplification does not rely on arguments. Rather the poem calls attention to how emotional-intellectual complexes can be made memorable so that they become features within our repertory for aspect seeing. "2,000 Illustrations" builds an example of how a poet can produce a process of thinking about thinking that has significant consequences for how we are positioned to appreciate the affective power of religious language. The key here is attending to multiple levels of aspect adjustment contained within a sharp distinction between two overall ways of connecting aspects—one "discriminative" and the other "assimilative" (567). The former is concerned with keeping situations distinct; the latter with relating everything to a "single central vision" (567). One attitude in the poem keeps distinct each element of travel evoked by the illustrations; the other basic attitude concerns making good on the Biblical allusions that suggest one plausible method for treating these parts as metonyms for life regarded as a whole (570).

The first relational mode is sequential, comprised by gathering a series of relations characterized primarily by their place in a catalogue organized only by addition. These relations defined by "and" are fundamentally "paratactic," as is appropriate for a series of visits to a variety of places (571ff) with no effort to develop a second order mode of thinking capable of drawing out interrelations among them. On that level there is only sum of "Over 2,000.) But it is equally possible to produce a way of "seeing as" that establishes an assimilative mode enabling the weak paratactic links to become aspects of a whole where "and" gives way to the "of" embodying synthesis. Second order thinking becomes a matter of reflecting on relations between parts and ways of synthesizing them. Here I think Jost gives a practical context (suited to low modernism) to Heidegger's distinction between Aristotle's concern to characterize the nature of specific beings and his own concern for Being as presence inviting our dwelling? In order to keep the context practical Jost sees synthesis in the poem achieved by relating four features to one another: 1) the speaker's own sense of the normative; 2) a sense of the interpersonal figured in phrases like "our travels" that provide an opening to think of shared values; 3) the family resemblance qualities of terms like "sad" and "still" and "solemn" that depend on context and "are analogically related to each other in persuasion or appreciation"; and, finally, 4) the construction of an entire situation in a way that Wittgenstein characterized as calling attention to *the whole environment of the event of"* the speaking (576–77). Jost argues that the relations among these features warrants borrowing from Angus Fletcher the concept of middle voice evoked by some poetic structures. Here poetic thinking achieves what Bonnie Costello calls a state of the "impersonal personal" (580) where there is a combined reference to the subject's affective life embedded in the objective environment, inseparable from a sense of how that objective environment directs the subject's appreciation (577).

This level of speculation is necessary if we are fully to appreciate the relation between the complaint near the end of the poem, "Everything connected only by "and" and "and," with the question "Why couldn't we have seen/ this old Nativity while we were at it?" Fully to see this painting, would further elaborate the synthetic mode of seeing as basic to the final lines of this poem. And that must be why the poem promises a new way of looking that could have "looked and looked our infant sight away." This is Incarnation rendered for rhetorical purposes as the instrument that provides a sense of meaning for and quality of being capable of replacing a series of "ands" by a vision of "seeing as" that in effect provides truly adult seeing. Then he specifies the rhetorical rather than theological role to which this seeing can be put by engaging a complaint by Langdon Hammer, one of our best critics attentive to low modernist values. For Hammer the poem is limited by the fact that belief is necessary to see the Incarnation as Incarnation. Jost's reply goes a long way towards establishing the value of rhetorical pluralism with this remark:

> One doesn't *need* specific beliefs, much less … "Christian" beliefs to experience the Incarnation as the experience of the divine in the human. Christian beliefs derive from that originating experience (or from ones like it—the experience does not derive directly from fixed beliefs. …A more grammatically and rhetorically adequate gloss on the *possibilities* the speaker expresses will, in my view, run like this: *Why couldn't* I have … seen-–to have somewhere "encountered," "entered into," … "experienced"—the divine *in* the human, the human as divine? (586–7)

One can "see as" in a way that fulfills this example of how religious ways of seeing can enhance secular understanding of what we might think as a means of resisting despair. Analogical approaches to the theology of Incarnation can enact our capacities "to acknowledge our discordance with ourselves and with the world, and to understand that … [such] talk resounds with our rhetorical desire to communicate with, to listen for, and speak to the divine" (597).

So concludes this journey from the smallest operators in ordinary speech to the most capacious acts of the imagination. Rhetorical criticism can help expressive activity provide for everyday life not just a location for grammatical practices but also the site where our dissatisfactions with that life can find analogical resources for supplementing it with grand possibilities for seeing as. Now even

though I am immensely grateful for this unfolding of an intricate and very useful framework for thinking about literature and philosophy, I must give substance to my two sources of dissatisfaction with Jost's arguments. The first is quite general and impossible for me to formulate philosophically. I can though align with Brandom's sense that we need not just grammar, but a form of rationality related to how we deploy the powers grammar makes available. In contrast, I am quite sure of my second criticism: while Jost makes a major contribution to modernist studies by elaborating and applying brilliantly the concept of "low modernism," it is unfortunate that he is not as careful with his discussion of High Modernism. In his role as rhetorical critic he should have been more careful to acknowledge that there are many high Modernisms: The poetry of Eliot, Pound, Moore, Loy, and yes Stevens, is very different from the novels of Conrad and Joyce and later Pynchon, which are in turn very different from the range of high Modernist commitments in music and visual art. Oddly the last sentence I quote from Jost on Bishop's low modernism indicates the central feature of poetic High Modernism by writers beginning careers before WW I—the sense that the everyday is simply not sufficient for expressing the needs and powers of inner life, so one has to attach one's work to modes of constructive seeing as from the past and from a range of disciplines like making paintings.

Jost is convincing on the limitations of imperious claims for rationality. But despite all his attention to Brandom, he seems not to see that in some respects pluralism requires something like rational decision-making, just as the cult of many selves in one person requires ways of taking responsibility for that person as a comprehensive decision maker. There are many occasions where pluralism becomes an evasion of responsibility that can only be resisted by defining oneself as this particular locus of sensibility and commitment. It will not do to treat subjectivity as simply a variety of fragments exchanged and easily replaced on different occasions. Another way to put this criticism is to look at how Jost defines "dialectical" in essentially Aristotelian terms: Dialectical method is 'self-transcending,' that is, its beginning is tested in relation to the truth of the whole" (379). But for Hegel the whole keeps changing within history because of the way that the individual takes responsibility for itself. I love Hegel's figure of the work of culture as a process of continually balancing the equation of "I" = "I." The subject on the left side of the equation tries to be adequate to how the forces of history try to place it, thereby creating a new equation transforming how history will present new challenges. The "I" here is not an entity but primarily a force defined by taking responsibility.

On high Modernism there are at least three problems. First, Wallace Stevens is not a materialist. From correspondence with Jost I think I understand his point of view: Stevens is not interested in the "linguistic turn" so in the twentieth century he must be an empiricist and hence a materialist. And if one needs to label a poet with a philosophical position, some of the poems in *Harmonium"* at least are certainly close to materialism. But Stevens abiding concern for the imagination and the emphasis in prose and in poetry late in his career on value as the marriage of mind and matter suggests a philosophical position closer to an idealism wanting an anchor in matter. Whatever the label, readers of Stevens must allow for the active self-orienting imagination as a basic value-establishing role in experience. Second, as I have already stated, there is no one high Modernism and most versions of it are completely rejected by postmodernism so there is very little alliance, at least with the High Modernism that concerns me. Here Jost falls victim to the tendency in rhetorical versions of pluralist thinking to rely on general categories within which dialectical relations are formed, even when dealing with such particular practices as we find in the writing of literary texts. Finally, poetic high Modernism between the world wars is not fundamentally ironic nor tormented by skepticism making for uneasy self-consciousness. This Modernism wants alternatives to everyday life—not as escapes from the real but as the awakening of powers in the writers' audiences to how investing in imagination and the forms it makes concrete can enrich their appreciation of situations and their commitments. Low modernism seeks objectivity and impersonality based on the relation to the real solicited by the work. High Modernism in both poetry and visual art during the interwar period seeks objectivity and transpersonality by the work form does to supplement the real with objects

existing only within the activities of imagination. Then the high Modernist thinks the imaginative projection must be tested by the capacity of the constructed state to serve as example—a mode of expression superbly handled by Jost especially when he talks about art as producing its own objectivity. In general what matters most in these Modernist examples is the ways by which the content provides possibilities for action or for "seeing as" in the real world. My high Modernism in poetry stresses how the example enriches what Hegel called "inner sensuousness" by correlating formal complexities with affective intensities in worlds we have to work to make real.

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GADAMER ON ART AND AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE: RETHINKING HERMENEUTICAL AESTHETICS TODAY. By Stefano Marino and Elena Romagnoli (Eds.). New York: State University of New York Press, 2025. 208 pp.

This ambitious volume takes Gadamer's aesthetics out of historical quarantine, arguing that his notion of art as play, presentation (*Darstellung*), and symbol remains a fertile site for contemporary debate. Marino and Romagnoli explicitly reject readings that cast Gadamer as an "anti-modern" conservator (p. 7); they situate this book in a recent revival of Gadamerian scholarship (noting, for example, renewed interest in Banksy street art and free jazz in Nielsen 2023) (p. 7). In doing so they implicitly contrast hermeneutical aesthetics with both analytic aesthetics and poststructuralist/postmodern approaches. Whereas analytic aestheticians often isolate aesthetic qualities or formal properties, the contributors here emphasize the lifeworldly, communal, and performative dimensions of art. Similarly, unlike post-structuralist critics who might deny any stable "essence" or meaning in an artwork, these essays reaffirm that Gadamer treats genuine artworks as revealing enduring truth: for example, Grondin underlines Gadamer's claim that the artwork's presentation can convey "the most real presentation" of things, indeed adding to Being (a *Seinszuwachs*) and unveiling the "essence" of its subject (p. 20). The volume thus stakes out a continental hermeneutic position and generally eschews direct dialogue with analytic or radical deconstructive schools. This alignment is implicit rather than polemically defended (no chapter, for instance, explicitly critiques analytic "disinterestedness" or addresses Derrida or Lacan); instead the book assumes that Gadamer's emphasis on dialogue, history, and tradition provides a viable counterpoint to the "détournement" of postmodernism and the reductionism of scientistic approaches. As the editors proclaim, this "critical confrontation" with Gadamer's texts aims to show that his hermeneutics can meet "the role of art in the present age" with "stimulating and penetrating insights" (p. 7).

Jean Grondin's first chapter, "Gadamer's Understanding of Art as Presentation," is a meticulous exegesis of the Darstellungconcept in *Truth and Method* and related texts. Grondin argues that for Gadamer an artwork is fundamentally a presentation of something – a presentation that is not merely aesthetic but ontologically revelatory. He writes that Gadamer insists the artwork "is always the presentation of something or some reality… it presents something that is never merely aesthetic" (Grondin 20). Through close readings of passages from *Truth and Method*, Grondin shows how Gadamer believes true artworks make us "sigh, 'indeed, that's the way it is' – so ist es!," as if "revealing to us, as if for the first time, the essence of things" (Grondin 20). In this account, even caricature or photography can have a revelatory power: a striking photograph can capture a person's essence, whereas a poor likeness prompts our emphatic "no, that's not you" – a judgment that implicitly affirms the artwork's failure to grasp reality. In effect, Grondin highlights Gadamer's contention that art makes an epistemic truth-claim: "the presentation of an artwork always succeeds in revealing the

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