

But there is no systematic attempt to synthesize Gadamer with, say, analytic virtue ethics, phenomenology (beyond the Gadamerian style), or cognitive science of art.

The volume keeps faith with continental hermeneutics. Its contributors also mostly preserve historical accuracy: they ground their arguments in the chronology of Gadamer's oeuvre (intro mentions post-*Truth and Method* writings, e.g.,) and rarely risk anachronism. When they do apply Gadamer to "today," it is more by analogy than by empirical testing.

In conclusion, *Gadamer on Art and Aesthetic Experience* is a substantial and mostly faithful collection of reflections that admirably digs into Gadamer's texts. It succeeds in showing that Gadamer's hermeneutical aesthetics is not a dead letter: across these chapters one sees how his ideas might illuminate questions of play, community, language, and even trauma in art. The book's strengths lie in its erudition and passion – each essay demonstrates deep learning and often genuine insight (as in the eloquent treatment of Celan or the provocative performative thesis). Yet its critical thrust is uneven. At times, as in Bertram's and Risser's essays, one encounters real philosophical challenge; at others, one mostly observes Gadamer's philosophy in refined exposition. A reader might finish this volume admiring Gadamer's richness but still wondering how to adjudicate the differences among these contributors or how to apply hermeneutics outside the Western canon. The methodology remains largely exegetical, and the engagement with competing traditions is limited. Overall, the volume is a valuable resource for anyone wanting to see Gadamer brought to bear on aesthetics, but it leaves several questions open – notably, how Gadamer's hermeneutics confronts the critiques of Habermas, the deconstructive emphasis on language, or the pluralism of world art. In short, it is an expert-level contribution that deepens our appreciation of Gadamer's aesthetic vision, but it also reveals the challenges of keeping that vision fluid and responsive to an increasingly complex art world. The essays often celebrate Gadamer's philosophy, yet it is up to future work to push the inquiry beyond Gadamer's horizon, addressing the volume's blind spots and testing its claims against the uncharted frontiers of contemporary art.

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TRANSCENDING POSTMODERNISM: PERFORMATISM 2.0. By Raoul Eshelman. London: Routledge, 2025. 228 pp.

Raoul Eshelman's *Transcending Postmodernism: Performatism 2.0* develops and extends his previous theory of performatism, first set out in *Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism* (2008). The book argues that since the mid-1990s, postmodernism's ironic, skeptical, and fragmented tendencies have been replaced by a new aesthetic coercion model of structured transcendence and centralized subjectivity. In contrast to other post-postmodernist models like metamodernism, which oscillates between irony and sincerity, Eshelman states that performatism forces viewers into experiences of belief, sacralization, and ethical commitment through formal apparatuses and not ideological coercion.

The book is organized into five chapters, from the historical roots of performatism, its approach to time, ethics, subjectivity, and universality. Eshelman shows how performatist aesthetics arise in contemporary literature and film through the analysis of films like *Inception*, *The Imitation Game*, *Tár*, and *The Lowland*. His thesis is based on performatism's formal practice of transcendence, replacing postmodernist indeterminacy with imposed meaning.

Eshelman begins by hypothesizing performatism as a genuine historical break with postmodernism. He regrets the skepticism of scholars in recognizing this break, asserting that "there is no established

discourse, no broad field of agreement about what to disagree on" (p. vi). In contrast to postmodernism, which feeds on an epistemological uncertainty foundation, performatism constructs an artificial but plausible aesthetic totality through a process that Eshelman refers to as double framing. He goes on: "Performatist texts often work by creating narrative tautologies or double frames that trap readers in an ineffable logic peculiar to the text at hand; this ineffability creates an involuntarily experienced effect of transcendence" (p. 11).

This notion of structured transcendence ensures that the audience is enclosed within the frame, making belief in its aesthetic world temporarily inescapable. Eshelman further elaborates on how double framing functions: "Through double framing performatist texts open up a transcendent perspective of some kind (this can involve an aesthetically mediated experience of love, beauty or belief in something higher and barely describable). This stands in direct opposition to the postmodern practice of ironically disillusioning us about the prospect of any kind of transcendent transformation" (p. 11).

One of the key advances of *Transcending Postmodernism* is Eshelman's treatment of temporality. He borrows the psychological concept of chunking to describe how performatist texts chunk time into discrete, self-contained chunks that maintain a higher-order coherence. Unlike postmodern fiction, which breaks time down into endless deferral, chunking imposes a unity of a higher order: "The main device used in stylizing performatist time is what I would like to call chunking. Chunking is a term borrowed from cognitive psychology that refers to either goal-oriented or perceptual ways of bundling information. A chunk may be defined as 'a collection of elements having strong associations with one another, but weak associations with elements within other chunks'" (p. 58).

Eshelman employs this concept to Christopher Nolan's *Inception*, which handles time as divisible into separate but sharply demarcated layers instead of diffusing into postmodern blurriness: "In *Inception*, for example, there are five temporal levels that range from a fictional real time on through three dream levels down to a subconscious, infinitely existing state that the film calls Limbo" (p. 65).

Eshelman argues that this specific framing forces the viewer to embrace the film's ontological structure rather than allowing them to deconstruct it as a mere arbitrary construction.

Eshelman's criticism of performatist ethics is a welcome addition to the discussion. He argues that performatist stories avoid postmodern victimization and uncertainty, and instead have characters working within an already established ethical matrix. In opposition to this, he quotes postmodern ethics, whose concern is with "victimary appeals to promote what Alain Badiou calls 'rights to non-Evil'" (p. viii).

His analysis of *The Imitation Game* illustrates this shift. Rather than depicting Alan Turing solely as a victim of oppression, Eshelman argues that the film frames him as a transcendent genius, whose cognitive singularity is emphasized over his suffering: "Rather than stressing his status as a victim, it suggests that his sexual otherness was something separated and whole and essential to his ingenuity" (p. 131).

This reading diverges from postmodernist analyses which focus on systemic oppression, rather placing Turing in a position of reverence of agency in contrast to deconstruction.

Among the essential breakthroughs of this book is Eshelman's performatist subjectivity theory based on archetypal images of the fool and the genius. Unlike postmodernism's decentered subject, these archetypes are epistemically unavailable, i.e., they are not possible to understand within the customary discourses. He argues: "In performatism, geniuses are the flip side of fools. They are separated from conventional social discourse by virtue of a special gift of some kind (the fool is separated too but has no visible gift, which interestingly enough can also be interpreted as a marker of transcendence). Because of this, geniuses appear as bearers of transcendence—transcendence being marked here as elsewhere in performatism by the formal impossibility of understanding characters in terms of prevailing social discourse." (p. 127–128).

His analysis of *Tár* is structured in this manner to target Lydia Tár, whom he portrays as a near-genius, but not a genius: "As a stock figure, Tár is a near-genius rather than a true one... she is not shown to have the complete separation, originality, or divinely inspired aura that is normally as-

cribed to geniuses... In contrast to 'true' fictional geniuses, who have trouble communicating or interacting with others due to their separated status, Tár is not only expert at articulating her own views... but also at manipulating others and successfully playing orchestra politics" (p. 153).

Eshelman argues that Tár's agency persists even as her social validity erodes, thus highlighting performatism's tendency to prefer subjects of structural significance to those which are fractured.

Overall, the book is a systematic and ambitious effort to understand the aesthetic and ideological shifts characterizing the post-postmodern cultural landscape. The appeal to performatism as an epochal discontinuity forcefully resists the habitual hegemony of postmodernist skepticism, proposing a coherent model through which we understand the ways belief, transcendence, and moral commitment become aestheticized. His analysis of temporality, subjectivity, and institutional transcendence is a powerful counterthrust to postmodernism's skepticism, delineating the ways in which modern narratives work through formal constraints to create a sense of imposed meaning.

However, the book's insistence on performatism as an all-encompassing paradigm could unintentionally diminish the continued relevance of other theoretical paradigms. While Eshelman provides a strong argument against postmodernism, his conceptual strategy fails to more substantively engage hybrid strategies such as metamodernism, which appropriates shards of irony along with attempting sincerity and emotional depth. The book's focus on author control and aesthetic tension also raises the question of how performatism crosses over with the more participatory logic of web media, in which narrative authority is distributed.

As an important contribution to post-postmodern theory, the book is extremely valuable; its statements, however, require empirical and theoretical investigation. Future research must explore the crossover points of performatism with emerging media modalities, including interactive narrative, game studies, and algorithmic cultural production. Comparative analysis with non-Western literary traditions can be applied to extrapolate the value of performatist theory beyond its largely Euro-American horizon. By closing such gaps, researchers can further articulate the new dynamics of the relationship between aesthetic form, faith, and transcendence in contemporary culture.

All of this notwithstanding, *Transcending Postmodernism* is a worthy addition to recent literary and cultural theory. Eshelman's characterization of performatism as an aesthetic, ethical, and historical paradigm is a compelling substitute for the postmodernist nihilism, and it offers a coherent system for understanding new narrative and philosophical tendencies in the 21st century.

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KANT AND LITERARY STUDIES. By Claudia Brodsky (Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025. 346 pp.

Kant's critical project is a milestone in philosophical thought and movement, one that has shaped philosophy, thought and intellectual movement for generations of academic scholars. While interdisciplinary currents have been common in the Kantian discipline, especially those resulting from literary endeavours, seldom do we come across a body of collective work such as Brodsky's *Kant and Literary Studies* which in place of merely using philosophy as a source for justifying literary insights and/or vice versa, carves instead into the cold and rigid footing of critique to recover frozen literary elements without which the secure foundation of Kantian philosophy would not have been as stable as we know it today.¹ Following the precision of Brodsky's editorial vision, the text has been divided into three parts.