

*Artistic Truth: Aesthetics, Discourse, and Imaginative Disclosure.* By LAMBERT ZUIDERVAART. Cambridge U.P. 2004. 294 pp. £45.00 (hbk).

LAMBERT Zuidervaat's *Artistic Truth* is an ingenious effort to replace empiricist philistinism with Continental depth. Art's importance is at stake in this book, but it is conceived of in terms of art's truth.

From the very outset, Zuidervaat stretches the limits of the notions of 'art' and 'truth'. He is thereby in the good company of contemporary art, which, by often lacking iterability tends to render any straightforward comparison with propositional truths unilluminating. The audience's acts of interpretation are as essential for the appreciation of these works as are their original manipulation by the artists. The need for a different approach, one rooted in our appreciative experiences, is thus Zuidervaat's starting point, even though his interests are, strictly speaking, more metaphysical. His project makes use of Continental theories of Heidegger, Gadamer, Adorno, and Habermas, as well as a plethora of Anglo-American thinkers. One finds no mention, however, of Levinas or Ricoeur, or Wollheim, Scruton, Currie, Levinson, Walton, or Lamarque and Olsen, who have all recently contributed to the debate on art's cognitive merits.

Zuidervaat begins with Monroe Beardsley's argument that since truth involves the correspondence of propositions to reality and works of art are not propositions (nor do they entail them), they cannot really be held true or false. Of course, Beardsley's empiricist

correspondence theory is not the only viable account of truth, and Zuidervaart chooses to discuss Albert Hofstadter's 'existential affirmation' of artistic truth, which insists 'that the higher bearers of truth, including artworks, are 'spiritual' and not propositional.' According to Hofstadter, artistic truth involves a 'mutual conformity between intellect and thing' (p. 205). And Herman Rapaport's 'postmetaphysical deconstruction' is said to show how notions of truth such as Beardsley's or Hofstadter's assume that the set goal is the following: to align human existence with cosmic order, an ideal that is to be 'deconstructed'.

In contrast with Zuidervaart, I find Beardsley's critique (though not the correspondence theory) rather convincing. A work's merits are inconsequential agentially or cognitively, and this makes 'truth' inapplicable to art. That, in turn, does not mean that art is unimportant, but, rather, that we should approach it in a manner different from more straightforwardly truth-evaluable reports. Hofstadter seems to reduce all talk of artistic truth to that of perceptual truth, which is plainly misleading. Rapaport's 'deconstruction' works only against Romanticist or religious illusions of real contact with the 'really' real. Whilst I agree with the gist of Zuidervaart's effort to understand art's particular importance, I am critical of his higher hopes of finding something like artistic truth, even though he suggests we should not think of 'truth-about' or 'truth-to', but of 'truth with respect to' (p. 212). In my view, this is of little or no help.

Discussing Kant's aesthetics, Zuidervaart argues how aesthetic specificity pertains to 'cultural orientation' and 'art talk'. Applying insights from Gadamer, Zuidervaart argues that the aesthetic can be identified as an interface between work and play, entertainment and instruction, and expression and communication: the intersubjective exploration, interpretation, and presentation of aesthetic signs, or: 'imagination'. Whatever role truth plays here, it is not in its traditional sense of propositional assertion, which is a mere

derivative of a person's being-in-the-world. Zuidervaart rereads Heidegger's account of truth as a 'life-giving disclosure of society' (p. 9), and connects that to principles of solidarity and justice. Yet it is one thing to argue that questions of truth are championed by questions about being in the world, which is a thesis, found also in Wittgenstein, that is well worth rehearsing—but another to reduce the concept of truth to it.

When Zuidervaart writes that '[o]ne way out of the impasse [of having to reconcile the way things disclose themselves to us with how we present them] is to recognize principles according to which human self-expression, orientation, and discovering can be more or less true' (p. 96), we are referred to 'resourcefulness', 'solidarity', and 'justice'. But is that not one remove too far away from how works *confront* us? Why overlook the psychology of this confrontation, and understand it as 'an ontological state of essential openness' (p. 97)?

Zuidervaart understands Heidegger's classical paper 'The Origin of the Work of Art' in terms of his metaphysical and epistemological theories, thus shielding off an important insight in Heidegger's aesthetic theory, namely that artistic merit is to do with what the artist does in his work, and the individual style thereof. Zuidervaart speaks of aesthetic validity in this context, not of aesthetic success, but should he not have spoken of art's success instead of our judgement's validity? Should that particularly crucial bullet not be bitten in a book on artistic truth?

In subsequent chapters, discussing the (Anglo-American) debate between *emotivism* (I. A. Richards) and *positivism* (Theodore Meyer Greene), Nelson Goodman's and Nicholas Wolterstorff's views, arguments are rehearsed that remind one of the discussion of Hofstadter's and Rapaport's positions. If the chapters in this book had been more argument-oriented than author-oriented, these discussions could have been combined, and would undoubtedly have gained momentum.

In the concluding chapter, Zuidervaart summarizes some aspects of what has been

gained by crossing the borders between philosophical traditions. He re-identifies his enemy, namely the propositional account of truth that treats correspondence as its sole standard. One may ask whether it would not have been more interesting to address less atomistically inclined coherence theories of truth.

Overall, this dense book gives one the impression of being a collection of discussions presented in no particular order. Zuidervaart

does provide one with insights and interesting criticisms of the authors he discusses, but I am rather disappointed in the manner in which he treats the issue of art's importance as that of artistic truth, and in his tendency towards metaphysics away from the singularity of works of art.

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