between the thought of Derrida, Rorty, Habermas, and Foucault. Refreshingly, the tone at the closure of the book is that of self-admitted failure, something such a short book on such deep and complex contemporary thinkers is bound to do on such a large topic as 'philosophy and freedom.'

The book is not a good reference work for those looking for more perspicacious interpretations of the thinkers, Rorty in particular. However, and this should not be overlooked, it does, in treating thinkers concerning which the commentaries could fill rooms, offer the reader with a fresh interpretation. It encourages new approaches to thinking of the relation between philosophy and freedom, particularly regarding the role of imagination in freedom. It is the kind of book that encourages one to rethink one's interpretations, if not change them drastically.


Cavell has said "Philosophy is in some ways the last place in the American landscape that you would look in order to write. Yet, in a sense, to write your own words, to write your own inner voice, is philosophy. But the discipline most opposed to writing, and to life, is analytic philosophy" (Giovanna Borradori, The American Philosopher, 1994, p. 126). These are savory words, ones that critique the professionalization of philosophy, and that nod to the autobiographical nature of philosophy, but also claim that both philosophy and autobiography are intelligible primarily in terms of writing. So Cavell continues: "To oppose writing: I interpreted that as an opposition to the human voice, which is where I come into philosophy. This is what my first essays are about—the suppression of the human voice in academic analytic philosophy" (ibid., 126–7).

Timothy Gould’s book, appearing nearly thirty years after Cavell published his first work—Must We Mean What We Say (Cambridge, 1969)—attempts to assess what has become of Cavell’s voice in philosophy, and in particular how that voice has come to embody a distinctive method of philosophy. Gould’s work thus
aims to track how the liberation of the human voice is not just an objective for philosophy, but is the project of philosophy itself. This at least becomes the method of Cavell's philosophical writing.

If Cavell began to write as a way of sounding his philosophical voice, Gould writes to defend Cavell's sounding as methodological. It is precisely the unfamiliarity many readers feel when listening to Cavell's prose that leads them to consider his work ineluctably personal. For some reason, this strikes many critics as unphilosophical, or as a philosophical liability. It is unclear whether an anxiety over writing philosophy comes from risking the expression of one's voice, or from confessing that it is a human voice.

Unlike Stephen Mulhall's expansive and ambitious Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary (Oxford, 1994), Gould's attention is narrowed to the implications of the potentially instructive relationship between writing the human voice and constituting a philosophical method (in that process). In this respect, and in contrast with Mulhall's book, Gould tries to do more with less. Despite the benefits of his concentrated attention, however, it is difficult not to read Hearing Things as a reduction of Cavell's work to the question of voice. For instance, one might see, as Cavell himself seems to, that voice is a point of departure into an invigorated philosophy made relevant to the everyday, and not as the preoccupying feature of a philosophical methodology. And even with Gould's fastidious taxonomy of voice, he neglects attending to the metaphorical significance of this almost overt category mistake. In what sense can we say that a text has a voice? What kind of aurality should we ascribe to the written, and does a negative (or nonmetaphorical) ascription contribute to the suppression of voice in philosophy?

Gould provides a substantive primer to his thesis, which occupies nearly a quarter of the book. This "Prelude" also serves as a review of much important secondary literature on Cavell, ordinary language philosophy, and theories of reading and writing.

The second chapter—"Voices"—(the place where a treatment of metaphor is most desperately needed) aims to clarify the difference between "style" and "voice," to distinguish what it means for philosophy to have it voiced in ordinary language, and
to consider the correlation between the self and its textual expression.

The third chapter—"Criteria and Crisis"—finds Gould trying to explain why Cavell’s writing has often exceeded the boundaries of academic philosophy as part of his response to skepticism. The range of Cavell’s subjects (from Wittgenstein to Shakespeare, Freud to film, and Emerson to opera) are taken as evidence of a philosophical risk to both challenge and reconceive the criteria for what counts as philosophical discourse.

In the penultimate chapter—"The Model of Reading"—Gould sets out to explain what he understands to be Cavell’s innovative philosophical method, a method that involves what are called “reversals” (148). Recovering and subsequently achieving one’s voice requires more than just writing (or just reading); rather, the writer and the written are framed as intertextual. We are to consider what it means to convert “the condition of reading into the condition of being read” (153).

The final chapter—"Reading and Its Reversals"—quite fortunately, spends some time deciphering the novel terminology and suggestive theses of the previous chapter. Of special concern is the way in which texts read the reader, and how writing about texts (caring for them) is a method of reading them. This reversal “transfigures” both text and context, the author and the authored (190).

Gould’s Appendix, which may have better served as a Preface, is an eight-page overview of Cavell’s philosophy “addressed to an audience with little or no prior knowledge of Cavell’s writing” (207). This addendum would be out of place if Gould were not the author of two similar summaries in A Companion to Aesthetics (Oxford, 1992), and Encyclopedia of Aesthetics (Oxford, 1998).

After the Notes, one page is devoted to a listing of Cavell’s monographs; another page adduces a selected secondary biography. A well-crafted Index follows, and concludes the book.

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