DECONSTRUCTION, POSTMODERNISM AND PHILOSOPHY: HABERMAS ON DERRIDA

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I.

In this essay I propose to contest some of the arguments that Habermas brings against Derrida in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*.[1] It seems to me that he has misread Derrida's work, and done so moreover in a way that fits in all too readily with commonplace ideas about deconstruction as a species of latter-day Nietzschean irrationalism, one that rejects the whole legacy of post-Kantian enlightened thought. In short, Habermas goes along with the widely-held view that deconstruction is a matter of collapsing all genre-distinctions, especially those between philosophy and literature, reason and rhetoric, language in its constative and performative aspects. This is all the more unfortunate since Habermas's book (which I shall henceforth refer to as *PDM*) is by far the most important contribution to date in the ongoing quarrel between French post-structuralism and that tradition of *Ideologiekritik* which Habermas has carried on from Adorno and earlier members of the Frankfurt School. So I will be criticizing *PDM* from a standpoint which might appear squarely opposed to Habermas 's critical project. That this is not at all my intention that in fact I concur with most of what Habemas has to say will I hope become clear in the course of this article. His book makes out a very strong case for re-examining the character and historical antecedents of postmodernism, and for seeing it not on its own professed terms as a radical challenge to the outworn enlightenment paradigm, but rather as the upshot of a widespread failure to think through the problems bequeathed by that tradition. Where Habermas goes wrong, I shall argue, is in failing to acknowledge the crucial respects in which Derrida has distanced his own thinking from a generalized "postmodern" or post-structuralist discourse.

More specifically, Habermas misreads Derrida in much the same way that literary critics (and apostles of American neo-pragmatism) have so far received his work: that is to say, as a handy pretext for dispensing with the effort of conceptual critique and declaring an end to the "modernist" epoch of enlightened secular reason. I have no quarrel with Habermas's claim that the "post-" in postmodernism is a delusive prefix, disguising the fact that theorists like Foucault, Lyotard and Baudrillard are still caught up in problems that have plagued the discourse of philosophy at least since the parting of ways after Kant. He is right to point out how their work recapitulates the quarrels that emerged between those various thinkers (left and right-wing Hegelians, objective and subjective idealists) who attempted and failed to overcome the antinomies of Kantian critical reason. One need only look to Lyotard's recent writings on philosophy, politics and the

„idea of history" to remark this resurgence of Kantian themes (albeit deployed to very different ends) in the discourse of postmodern thought.[2] And the same applies to Foucault's genealogy of power/knowledge, as Habermas brings out very clearly when he traces its various intellectual antecedents in the line of counter-enlightenment philosophies running from Nietzsche to Bataille. In each case, he argues, thought has suffered the disabling effects of an irrationalist doctrine that can only take hold through a form of self-willed amnesia, a compulsive repetition of similar episodes in the previous (post-Kantian) history of ideas. *PDM* is in this sense an exercise of large-scale rational reconstruction, an essentially therapeutic exercise whose aim is to provide a more adequate understanding of those episodes, and thus to recall the present-day human sciences to a knowledge of their own formative prehistory.

All this will of course be familiar enough to any reader moderately versed in Habermas's work over the past two decades. Where these lectures break new ground is in specifying more exactly the terms of his quarrel with French post-structuralism, deconstruction and other such forms of as Habermas would have it militant latter-day unreason. To some extent the ground had already been prepared by debates on and around his work in journals like *Praxis* and *New German Critique*. One could summarize the issues very briefly as follows. To his opponents it has seemed that Habermas's thinking belongs squarely within the enlightenment tradition of oppressive, monological reason. That is to say, he has sought a means of reinstating the Kantian foundationalist project the belief in transcendental arguments, truth-claims, critique of consensual values and so forth at a time when that project has at last been shown up as a mere historical dead-end, a discourse premised on false ideas of theoretical mastery and power. In support of this argument they point to such instances as the reading of Freud that Habermas offers in *Knowledge and Human Interests,* a reading that interprets psychoanalysis as a therapy designed to overcome the blocks and distortions of repressed desire by bringing them out into the light of a conscious, rational self-understanding.[3] To this they respond by drawing on Lacan's very different account of the "talking cure", namely his insistence that language is *always and everywhere* marked by the symptoms of unconscious desire, so that any attempt to escape or transcend this condition is deluded at best, and at worst a technique of manipulative reason in the service of a harsh and repressive social order.[4]

These opposing viewpoints can each claim a warrant in Freud's notoriously cryptic statement: "where id was, there shall ego be". For Habermas, on the one hand, this sentence should be read as signalling an alignment of interests between psychoanalysis and the wider project of enlightened or emancipatory thought. For the Lacanians, conversely, it enforces the message that the ego is always a plaything of unconscious desire, and that therefore any version of ego-psychology (to which doctrine, in their view, Habermas subscribes) is necessarily a hopeless and misguided endeavour. On their reading the sentence should be paraphrased: "wherever reason thinks to explain the unconscious and its effects, there most surely those effects will resurface to disrupt such a project from the outset". In this case there would seem little to choose between Habermas's talk of "transcendental pragmatics", "ideal speech-situations" etc., and those previous modes of foundationist thought (the Cartesian *cogito,* the Kantian transcendental subject or Husserl's

phenomenological reduction) whose claims — or so it is argued — have now been totally discredited. The fact that he has been at some pains to distance himself from that tradition apparently counts for nothing in terms of the current polemical exchange. So these thinkers bring two main charges against Habermas: firstly that he attempts the impossible (since reason is in no position to legislate over effects that exceed its powers of comprehension), and secondly that his project is politically retrograde (since it clings to a form of enlightenment thinking whose covert aim is to repress or to marginalize everything that falls outside its privileged domain). And their criticisms will no doubt find ample confirmation now that Habermas has offered his response in the form of these recent lectures. He will still be treated as a last-ditch defender of the strong foundationalist argument, despite the very clear signals that Habermas — no less than his opponents — wants to find a basis for the conduct of rational enquiry that will not have recourse to anything resembling a Kantian epistemological paradigm.

It seems to me that Habermas goes wrong about Derrida mainly because he takes it for granted that deconstruction is one offshoot — a "philosophical" offshoot — of this wider postmodernist or counter-enlightenment drift. In what follows I shall point to some crucial respects in which Derrida's work not only fails to fit this description but also mounts a resistance to it on terms that Habermas ought to acknowledge, given his own intellectual commitments. In fact I shall argue that deconstruction, properly understood, belongs within that same "philosophical discourse of modernity" that Habermas sets out to defend against its present-day detractors. But it may be useful to preface that discussion with a brief account of the very different readings of Derrida's work that have now gained currency among literary theorists and philosophers. This will help to explain some of the blind-spots in Habermas's critique, based as it is on a partial reading which tends to privilege just one of these rival accounts.

II

Commentators on deconstruction are divided very roughly into two main camps: those (like Rodolphe Gasché) who read Derrida's work as a radical continuation of certain Kantian themes,[5] and those (like Richard Rorty) who praise Derrida for having put such deluded "enlightenment" notions behind him and arrived at a postmodern-pragmatist stance relieved of all surplus metaphysical baggage.[6] Nevertheless they are agreed in thinking that we can't make sense of Derrida without some knowledge of the relevant intellectual prehistory. Where they differ is on the question whether those debates are still of real interest — "philosophical" interest — or whether (as Rorty would have it) they have failed to come up with any workable answers, and should therefore be regarded as failed candidates for Philosophy Honours and awarded nothing more than a Pass Degree in English, Liberal Studies or Comp. Lit.

On Rorty's view we can still put together an instructive *story* about the way that thinkers from Descartes and Kant on down have so misconceived their own enterprise as to think they were offering genuine solutions to a range of distinctively "philosophical" problems. But we will be wrong — simply repeating their mistake — if we try to give this story an upbeat conclusion or a Whiggish meta-narrative

drift suggesting that we have *now,* after so many errors, started to get things right. The story is just that, a handy little pragmatist narrative, and the most it can do is stop us from believing in all those grandiose philosophical ideas. For Gasché, on the contrary, Derrida is still very much a philosopher, if by this we understand one whose work is both committed to an ongoing critical dialogue with previous thinkers (notably, in this case, Kant, Hegel and Husserl), and centrally concerned with issues in the realm of truth, knowledge and representation. This dialogue may take an unfamiliar or disconcerting form, as when Derrida questions the categorical bases of Kantian argument and sets out to demonstrate what Gasché calls the ‘,conditions of impossibility“ that mark the limits of all philosophical enquiry. But even so his work remains squarely within that tradition of epistemological critique which alone makes it possible to raise such questions against the more accommodating pragmatist line espoused by thinkers like Rorty. These different readings of Derrida are also, inseparably, different readings of the whole philosophical history that has led up to where we are now. And in Hegel's case likewise there is a conflict of interpretations between those (again including Rorty) who would accept a kind of “naturalized” Hegelianism, a story of philosophy that includes all the major episodes but dispenses with the vantage-point of reason or truth, and those who reject this compromise solution and regard the dialectic as something more than a species of edifying narrative.

One could make the same point about all those philosophers whose work has come in for revisionist readings as a consequence of the currently widespread scepticism as regards truth-claims and foundationalist arguments of whatever kind. On the one hand it has led to a new intellectual division of labour, a situation where thinkers like Rorty feel more at home in humanities or literature departments, while the “real” (analytical) philosophers tend to close ranks and leave the teaching of Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida etc. to their colleagues with less exacting standards of argument. On the other, it has persuaded literary theorists that philosophy has no good claim to monopolize the texts of its own tradition, since the current guardians seem overly zealous to protect their canon from any form of unauthorized reading (which is to say, any reading that treats it on rhetorical, hermeneutic or “literary” terms). And so it has come about that “theory” now denominates an area (not so much a “discipline”) which straddles the activities of philosophy and literary criticism, taking charge of those figures (the Hegel-Nietzsche-Derrida line) who lend themselves to just such a non-canonical approach. But even within this camp one finds disagreements (as between Rorty and Gasché) concerning the extent to which philosophy may yet be conserved as a discipline with its own distinct mode of conceptual or analytic rigour. Thus ‘theory’ is construed as post-philosophical *either* in the sense that it dissolves philosophy into a textual, rhetorical or narrative genre with no distinctive truth-claims whatsoever (the Rorty argument), *or* in the sense (following Gasché) that it presses certain Kantian antinomies to the point where they demand a form of analysis undreamt of in the mainstream tradition. Both sides have an interest in claiming Kant since he stands at precisely the cardinal point where their histories will henceforth diverge. On the one hand there is the line that leads from Kant, via Hegel to the various speculative systems and projects that make up the ‘continental’ heritage. On the other it is clear that Kant provides the basis for most of those debates about

language, logic and truth that have occupied the analytic schools.

One reason why *PDM* seems blind to certain aspects of Derrida's work is that it more or less identifies deconstruction with the Rortyan-postmodern-pragmatist reading, and thus tends to perpetuate the view of it as a species of literary-critical activity, an attempt to colonize philosophy by levelling the genre-distinction between these disciplines. Now of course this corresponds to one major premise of Derrida's thought: namely, his insistence that philosophy is indeed a certain "kind of writing", a discourse which none the less strives to cover its own rhetorical tracks by aspiring to an order of pure, unmediated, self-present truth. Thus a deconstructive reading will typically fasten upon those moments in the philosophic text where some cardinal concept turns out to rest on a latent or sublimated metaphor, or where the logic of an argument is subtly undone by its reliance on covert rhetorical devices. Or again, it will show how some seemingly marginal detail of the text some aspect ignored (not without reason) by the mainstream exponents in fact plays a crucial but problematic role in the entire structure of argument.[7] One result of such readings is undoubtedly to challenge the commonplace assumption that philosophy has to do with concepts, truth-claims, logical arguments, "clear and distinct ideas" etc, while literary criticism deals with language only in its rhetorical, poetic or non-truth-functional aspects. What Derrida has achieved on this view at least is a striking reversal of the age-old prejudice that elevates philosophy over rhetoric, or right reason over the dissimulating arts of language.

This is the reading of Derrida's work that Habermas offers in his „Excursus on Levelling the Genre-Distinction between Philosophy and Literature" *(PDM,* pp. 185-210). That is to say, he takes it as read that Derrida is out to reduce all texts to an undifferentiated "freeplay" of signification where the old disciplinary borderlines will at last break down, and where philosophy will thus take its place as just one "kind of writing" among others, with no special claim to validity or truth. More specifically, Derrida makes a full-scale program of ignoring those different kinds of language-use that have separated out in the modern (post-Kantian) discourse of enlightened reason. He has privileged just one of these uses (language in its poetic, rhetorical or 'world-disclosive' aspect) and failed to see how the others demand a quite different mode of understanding. Thus, according to Habermas,

> [t]he rhetorical element occurs *in its pure form* only in the self-referentiality of the poetic expression, that is, in the language of fiction specialized for world-disclosure. Even the normal language of everyday life is ineradicably rhetorical; but within the matrix of different linguistic functions, the rhetorical elements recede here. . . The same holds true of the specialized languages of science and technology, law and morality, economics, political science, etc. They, too, live off the illuminating power of metaphorical tropes; but the rhetorical elements, which are by no means expunged, are tamed, as it were, and enlisted for special purposes of problem-solving *(PDM* p. 209).

It is the main fault of Derrida's work, as Habermas reads it, that he has failed to observe these essential distinctions and thus over-generalized the poetic (rhetorical) aspect of language to a point where it commands the whole field of communicative action. The result is to deprive thinking of that critical force which depends on a proper separation of realms, and which has come about historically — so Habermas contends —through the increasing specialization of

language in its threefold social aspect. By extending rhetoric so far beyond its own legitimate domain Derrida has not only collapsed the "genre-distinction" between philosophy and literature but also annulled the emancipating promise that resides in the poetic (or "world-disclosive") function of language. For this promise is likewise dependent on the existence of a "polar tension", a sense of what specifically differentiates literature from "everyday" communicative language on the one hand, and those specialized problem-solving languages on the other. Derrida, says Habermas, "holistically levels these complicated relationships in order to equate philosophy with literature and criticism. He fails to recognize the special status that both philosophy and literary criticism, each in its own way, assume as mediators between expert cultures and the everyday world" (*PDM,* p. 207).

Now I think that these criticisms apply not so much to what Derrida has written as to what has been written about him by various (mostly American) commentators. Or more accurately — on the principle "no smoke without fire" — they find some warrant in certain of his texts, but can then be made to stick only through a very partial reading, one that sets out quite deliberately to level the distinction between philosophy and literature. The favoured texts for this purpose would include Derrida's response to John Searle on the topic of speech-act theory;[8] the closing paragraph of 'Structure, Sign and Play', with its apocalyptic overtones and Nietzschean end-of-philosophy rhetoric;[9] and more recently the "Envois" section of *La Carte Postale,* where Derrida goes about as far as possible toward undermining the truth-claims of logocentric reason by recasting them in fictive or mock-epistolary form.[10] One could then go back to Derrida's earliest published work — his Introduction to Husserl's essay "The Origin of Geometry" — and cite the well-known passage where he appears to encounter a moment of choice between "philosophy" and "literature", or the quest for some pure, univocal, self-present meaning (Husserl) as opposed to the prospect of a liberating "freeplay" of the signifier glimpsed in such writings as Joyce's *Finnegans Wake.*[11] In so far as he has confronted this choice — so the argument goes — Derrida has come out firmly on the side of a literary approach to the texts of philosophy, one that pays minimal regard to their truth-claims or structures of logical argument, and which thus frees itself to treat them as purely rhetorical constructs on a level with poems, novels, postcards or any other kind of writing.

So it might seem that Habermas's arguments are fully warranted by the „levelling" or undifferentiating character of Derrida's generalized rhetoric. What drops out of sight is the complex and highly-evolved relationship between 1) everyday communicative language, 2) the mediating discourses of philosophy and criticism, and 3) the various forms of „expert" or specialized enquiry (‚art, literature, science, morality') which would otherwise tend to float free in a conceptual universe of their own creating. Criticism can only perform this essential task so long as it maintains a due sense of its own distinctive role *vis-à-vis* those other disciplines. Where philosophy occupies the middle ground between 'ordinary language' and specialized questions of ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, theory of science etc., criticism stands in much the same relation to everyday language on the one hand and artistic or literary innovation on the other. And it is also imperative that criticism and philosophy should not become mixed up one with another and thus produce the kind of hybrid discourse that Habermas thinks so damaging in Derrida's work.

The point is best made by quoting him at length, since this is the passage where the charge is pressed home with maximum force.

> Literary criticism and philosophy.. are both faced with tasks that are paradoxical in similar ways. They are supposed to feed the contents of expert cultures, in which knowledge is accumulated under one aspect of validity at a time, into an everyday practice in which all linguistic functions are intermeshed. And yet [they] are supposed to accomplish this task of mediation with means of expression taken from languages specialized in questions of taste or of truth. They can only resolve this paradox by rhetorically expanding and enriching their special languages... [Thus] literary criticism and philosophy have a family resemblance to literature and to this extent to one another as well in their rhetorical achievements. But their family relationship stops right there, for in each of these enterprises the tools of rhetoric are subordinated to the discipline of a *distinct* form of argumentation. (*PDM,* pp. 209-10)

What is presented here is a qualified version of Kant‘s doctrine of the faculties. It is qualified mainly by Habermas ‚s wish to avoid any hint of a Kantian foundationalist legacy by reasoning in terms of the different languages — “everyday”, ‘,expert“, ‘,specialized“ etc. — which between them mark out the range of communicative options. He can thus maintain a critical attitude toward Derrida’s “levelling” of genre-distinctions without having to argue that philosophy has access to some privileged realm of a priori concepts or uniquely self-validating truth-claims. We can afford to give up that outworn tradition, he argues, just so long as we grasp that *language* itself is oriented toward a better understanding of those blocks, aporias, misprisions and so forth which get in the way of our (everyday or specialized) communicative acts.[12] But on Derrida’s account — so Habermas believes — this process could never make a start, let alone achieve the levels of complexity and sophistication required by the various present-day arts and sciences.

This follows from Derrida‘s extreme form of contextualist doctrine, that is, his argument — enounced in the debate with John Searle — that 1) meaning is entirely a product of the various contexts in which signs play a part; 2) that such contexts can in principle be multiplied beyond any possible enumerative grasp; and 3) that therefore meaning is strictly undecidable in any given case. But we are simply not obliged to accept this conclusion if — as Habermas suggests — we drop the idea of an open-ended general “context” and recognise the various *specific* normative dimensions that exist within the range of communicative action. For Derrida, in short,

> linguistically mediated processes within the world are embedded in a *world-constituting* context that prejudices everything; they are fatalistically delivered up to the unmanageable happening of text-production, overwhelmed by the poetic-creative transformation of a background designated by archewriting, and condemned to be provincial *(PDM,* p. 204).

„Provincial“, one supposes, in the sense that it seeks to reduce all language to a single paradigm, and thereby annexes every form of communicative action to the province of poetic or literary language. Thus Habermas cites Roman Jakobson and the Prague Structuralists by way of insisting that the poetic function be defined more specifically, i.e. in terms of those features (like self-reflexivity or lack of

informative content) that set it apart from other uses of language. Where Derrida has gone wrong (he argues) is in failing to perceive the constitutive difference between speech-acts engaged in the normative activities of problem-solving, theorizing, giving information etc., and speech-acts that are not so engaged, and can therefore be construed as fictive, non-serious, parodic or whatever. Otherwise Derrida would not have been misled into extending the poetic function so far beyond its proper reach, or discounting those normative constraints upon language that save it from the infinitized "freeplay" of an open-ended contextualist account. The frailty of the genre distinction between philosophy and literature is evidenced in the practice of deconstruction: in the end, *all* distinctions are submerged in one comprehensive, all-embracing context of texts — Derrida talks in a hypnotizing manner about a "universal text'". (*PDM,* p. 190) The result of this confusion is to give language up to the effects of an infinite regress (or "unlimited semiosis") which excludes all possibility of rational understanding.

III

The first point to note about Habermas 's critique of Derrida is that it more or less restates John Searle's basic claims with regard to the supposedly self-evident distinction between "serious" and other (deviant) kinds of speech-act.[13] That is, it assumes that Searle has both commonsense and reason on his side of the argument, while Derrida is content to make "literary" play with certain marginal or merely rhetorical aspects of Austin's text. In which case Searle would be the serious, the faithful or properly authorized exponent of Austin's ideas, while Derrida would stand to Austin in much the same relation as the sophists to Socrates: a gadfly rhetorician merely anxious to display his own ingenuity and wit, and lacking any regard for wisdom or truth. But this ignores several important points about the three-sided debate between Austin, Derrida and Searle. It fails to register the extent to which Austin invites and solicits a deconstructive reading by himself putting up all manner of resistance to the project of a generalized speech-act theory. I have written at length on this topic elsewhere — as have a number of other commentators, including Jonathan Culler and Shoshana Felman — so there is no need to rehearse the details over again here.[14] Sufficient to say that Austin, like Derrida, shows a fondness for marginal or problematic cases, speech-acts which cannot be securely assigned to this or that typecast category. Thus he often comes up with supposedly deviant instances which then turn out to be typical of the kind, or to indicate features that necessarily pertain to all possible varieties of speech-act. Or again, he will illustrate a point with some odd piece of anecdotal evidence, only to find that it creates real problems for his classificatory system.

What is distinctive about Austin's approach — aligning it with Derrida as against Searle — is this readiness to let language have its way with him and not give in to the systematizing drive for method and clear-cut theory.[15] Partly it is a matter of the "Oxford" ethos, the attitude of quizzical detachment mixed with a passion for linguistic detail that Derrida encountered on his trip to Oxford (narrated in *La Carte Postale*). But we would be wrong to see this as a downright rejection of philosophical "seriousness", an opting-out in favour of stylistic "freeplay" or the possible worlds of his own fictive devizing. Certainly Derrida goes a long way

toward deconstructing the terms of this old opposition. Thus *La Carte Postale* takes up a great variety of philosophic themes, among them the relationship of Plato and Socrates, the Heideggerian questioning of Western metaphysics, the status of truth-claims in the discourse of Freudian psychoanalysis, and the way that all these topics return to haunt the seemingly detached, almost clinical idiom of Oxford linguistic philosophy. But it does so by way of a fictional *mise-en-scene,* a correspondence carried on by post-card, and specifically through a series of fragmentary love-letters inscribed on numerous copies of a card that Derrida discovered in the Bodleian Library. This card reproduces an apocryphal scene which apparently has Plato dictating his thoughts to Socrates and Socrates obediently writing them down at Plato's behest. It thus stages a comic reversal of the age-old scholarly assumption: namely, that Socrates was the thinker who *wrote nothing* whose wisdom prevented him from entrusting his thoughts to the perilous medium of writing while Plato, his disciple, gave in to this bad necessity in order to preserve Socrates' teaching for the benefit of later generations. So one can see why this postcard so fascinated Derrida. What it offered was a kind of zany confirmation of his own thesis (in *Of Grammatology* and elsewhere) that writing is the "exile", the "wandering outcast" of Western logocentric tradition, the repressed term whose disruptive effects are none the less everywhere manifest in the texts of that same tradition.[16]

So *La Carte Postale* is undoubtedly a work of "literature" in so far as it exploits the full range of fictive possibilities opened up by this scandalous reversal of roles between Socrates and Plato. From here it goes on to develop various other counterfactual, extravagant or apocryphal themes, along with a running debate among the scholars as to the authenticity or otherwise of Plato's letters, a "correspondence" (by postcard, what else?) between Heidegger and Freud, a quizzical commentary on Ryle, Austin and the Oxford tradition of linguistic philosophy, and a whole series of anachronistic swerves and redoublings which enable Derrida to play havoc with accredited notions of history and truth. His point in all this is to show how philosophy has excluded certain kinds of writing letters, apocrypha, "unauthorized" genres of whatever sort while allowing them a place on the margins of discourse from which they continue to exert a fascination and a power to complicate received ideas. And there is something of this even in the Oxford tradition for all its analytical "seriousness" when thinkers like Austin cite (or invent) their various speech-act examples, and then find their arguments beginning to get out of hand. "I adore these theorizations, so very 'Oxford' in character, their extraordinary and necessary subtlety as well as their imperturbable naivety, 'psychoanalytically speaking'; they will always be confident in the law of quotation marks." [17] Derrida's reference here is to the problem of naming, and more specifically the difference between *using* and *mentioning* a name, as theorized by Russell and Ryle among others. But where this distinction serves analytical philosophers as a technique for avoiding trouble for resolving the kinds of paradox that emerge when the two linguistic functions are confused its appeal for Derrida has more to do with the undecidability of names in general, their tendency to migrate across the borderlines of authorized genre, history etc., and thus to create all manner of intriguing fictive scenarios.[18] "Psychoanalytically speaking", it is by no means certain that philosophy can control these potential aberrations of language, or lay down rules for the proper conduct of logical debate.

Thus Derrida cites a „very good book“ by one such analytical thinker, a book which advises us not to be misled by the seeming identity of names-as-used and names as merely cited, mentioned or placed between quotation-marks. To which Derrida responds by asking: what kind of *de jure* regulation can back up this confident policing operation, designed to cure language of its bad propensity for conjuring up phantom nominal presences? The "law of quotation-marks" could achieve this purpose only on condition that language be treated as *already having attained* what Habermas describes as an „ideal speech-situation“, that is, a transparency of meaning and intent that would admit no impediment to the wished-for meeting of minds. But this condition is impossible so Derrida implies for reasons that return us to Freud, Lacan and the arguments of French (post-structuralist) psychoanalysis. That is to say, it ignores the effects of a "structural unconscious" that forever divides the speaking self ("subject of enunciation") from the self spoken about ("subject of the enounced"). Thus:

> [t]he author of the book of which I am speaking, himself, not his name (therefore he would pardon me for not naming him) is himself reserved as concerns the very interesting 'position of Quine' ('a word-between-quotation-marks is the proper name of the word which figures between the quotation marks and an occurrence of the word-between-the-quotation-marks, the latter including the former as a part' and it is true that this logic of inclusion perhaps is not very satisfying in order to account for the 'simultaneously', but small matter here), and making an allusion to a 'forgetting', his word, a forgetting 'evidently facilitated by the resemblance that there is between a word and the name of this word formed by its being placed between quotation marks', he concludes, I quote, 'But one must not let oneself be abused by this resemblance, and confuse the two names. . .'. Okay, promise, we won't any more. Not on purpose anyway. Unless we forget, but we will not forget on purpose, it's just that they resemble each other so much. ..[19]

This passage is typical *of La Carte Postale* in the way that it picks up numerous themes, cross-references, cryptic allusions and so forth, among them the "correspondence" between philosophy and psychoanalysis (or Socrates and Freud), staged as a kind of running encounter where reason confronts its own "structural unconscious" in the form of a promiscuously generalized writing that circulates without origin or proper addressee. Hence the link that Derrida perceives between philosophy as a "serious", responsible discourse and the postal service (in its "grand epoch") as a smoothly-functioning system of exchange which ensures that letters arrive on time and at the right destination. But there is always the residue of mail that hasn't been correctly addressed, that bounces back and forth between various recipients and ends up in the dead-letter office. Or again, those items that arrive out of the blue with some intimate yet wholly undeciperable message, and thus give rise to all manner of pleasing conjecture. So it comes about that "the guardians of tradition, the professors, academics, and librarians, the doctors and authors of theses are terribly curious about correspondences..., about private or public correspondences (a distinction without pertinence in this case, whence the post card, half private half public, neither the one nor the other, and which does not await the post card *stricto sensu* in order to define the law of the genre, of all genres.. „).[20]

It is on this level that the „Envois“ can be read as relating to the essays on Freud and Lacan that make up the remainder of *La Carte Postale*. For here also

Derrida is concerned with the status of a certain theoretical enterprise (psychoanalysis) which attempts to secure itself on the basis of an authorized truth passed down from founder to disciple, but which runs into all manner of speculative detours and swerves from origin. In each case there is a strong *proprietary* interest at work, a tendency to anathematize those various distortions, misreadings or perversions of the Freudian text that would compromise its original (authentic) meaning. In Freud himself, this takes the form of an obsessive desire to keep psychoanalysis "in the family", to save it from the egregious falsehoods put about by his erstwhile colleagues and disciples.[21] With Lacan, it produces an allegorical reading of Poe's story "The Purloined Letter", treated as a virtual *mise-en-scene* of the dialogue between analyst and patient, a dialogue whose meaning can never be fully brought to light, caught up as it is in the shuttling exchange of transference and counter-transference, but which none the less points to an ultimate truth identified with the "letter" of the Freudian text.[22] In both instances, so Derrida argues, this desire takes the form of a putative master-discourse that attempts to put a frame around the various episodes, case-histories, speculative ventures, correspondences and so forth that make up the proper, self-authorized legacy of Freud's life and work. But these projects cannot reckon with the undecidability of all such narrative frames, or the way that events from "outside" the frame whether textual events, as in Poe's short story, or episodes from the life, as in Freud's troubled correspondence with Fliess may always return to complicate the record beyond all hope of a straightforward, truth-telling account. Here again, it proves impossible for thinking to master the effects of a generalized writing (or "structural unconscious"), some of whose canniest adepts like Freud and Lacan may yet be caught out by its uncanny power to disrupt their projects at source.

Now it might well seem from what I have written so far that Habermas is absolutely right about Derrida, since *La Carte Postale* is a "literary" text which exploits various philosophical themes merely as a springboard for its own extravagant purposes. This is certainly the reading that most appeals to a postmodern pragmatist like Rorty, one for whom philosophy is in any case a dead or dying enterprise, best treated (as Derrida apparently treats it here) with a fine disregard for the protocols of truth and an eye to its fictive potential or entertainment-value. Thus if Rorty has problems with the "early" Derrida too serious by half, too argumentative, too much inclined to take a term like *différance* and give it the status of a privileged anti-concept these problems disappear with *La Carte Postale,* where philosophy receives its final come-uppance at the hands of literature. But Rorty's reading is open to challenge, as indeed is Habermas's assumption (in *PDM*) that Rorty has read Derrida aright, and therefore that the two of them must be saying much the same kind of thing. What this ignores is the extent to which a text like *La Carte Postale* continues to engage with philosophical problems which don't simply disappear when approached from a fictive, apocryphal or "literary" standpoint. After all, philosophers in the mainstream tradition from Plato to Austin have often had recourse to invented case-histories, parables, counter-factual scenarios and so forth, in order to make some critical point about our language or commonplace habits of thought. Hence one of the problems that Derrida remarks in connection with Austin's procedure: namely, his exclusion of "deviant" or "parasitical" speech-acts (e.g. those merely cited, placed between quotation-marks,

uttered in jest, on the stage, in a novel, etc) as not meriting serious philosophical attention. For it is surely the case 1) that *all* speech-acts must perform, cite or rehearse some existing formulaic convention (since otherwise they would carry no recognized force); 2), that this creates a real problem for Austin's distinction between 'serious' and 'non-serious' cases; and 3) that the majority of Austin's own examples are speech-acts contrived specifically for the purpose of illustrating speech-act theory. Once again, the "law of quotation-marks" turns out to have effects far beyond those allowed for on the standard, unproblematical account. My point is that Habermas mistakes the character of deconstruction when he treats it as having simply *given up* the kinds of argument specific to philosophy, and opted instead for the pleasures of a free-wheeling "literary" style. It is true that Derrida's writings can be roughly divided as Rorty suggests into two categories. On the one hand there are texts (like the essays collected in *Margins of Philosophy*) that argue their way through a rigorous and consequential treatment of the various blind-spots, aporias or antinomies that characterize the discourse of philosophic reason. On the other there are pieces (like the "Envois" section of *La Carte Postale* or Derrida's prolix and riddling response to John Searle) where undoubtedly he is making maximum use of "literary" devices in order to provoke or to disconcert the more self-assured guardians of that mainstream tradition. But we would be wrong to suppose as Rorty does that Derrida has gone over from the one kind of writing to the other, renouncing "philosophy" and its self-deluded claims for the sake of a henceforth uninhibited devotion to "literature". This ignores the extent to which "Envois" and "Limited Inc" (the rejoinder to Searle) continue to work within the same problematics of writing, language and representation that Derrida addresses more explicitly elsewhere. And it also fails to recognise the distinct kinship between deconstruction and those passages of offbeat, speculative musing in Austin's text ("so very "Oxford' in character, their extraordinary and necessary subtlety, as well as their imperturbable naivety, psychoanalytically speaking") which Derrida singles out for attention in *La Carte Postale*.

IV

There are, I think, several reasons for Habermas's inability to grasp the philosophical pertinence of Derrida's work. One is the fact that he (Habermas) clearly doesn't have much concern for the finer points of style, writing as he does in a manner that surpasses even Hegel in its heavyweight abstractions, its relentless piling-up of clause upon clause, and the sense it conveys that strenuous thinking is somehow incompatible with "literary" arts and graces. One can therefore understand why he (like Searle) might regard Derrida's stylistic innovations with a somewhat jaundiced eye. But the antipathy goes much deeper than that, as can be seen from those passages in *PDM* where Habermas sets out his reasons for opposing any attempt to level the genre-distinction between philosophy and literature. Again, I shall need to quote at some length since — at risk of labouring the point — Habermas's style doesn't exactly lend itself to concise summary statement.

> Derrida and Rorty are mistaken about the unique status of discourses differentiated from ordinary communication and tailored to a single validity dimension (truth or

> normative lightness), or to a single complex of problems (questions of truth or justice). In modern societies, the spheres of science, morality, and law have crystallized around these forms of argumentation. The corresponding cultural systems of action administer *problem-solving capacities* in a way similar to that in which the enterprises of art and literature administer *capacities for world-disclosure*. Because Derrida over-generalizes this one linguistic function namely, the poetic he can no longer see the complex relationship of the ordinary practice of normal speech to the two extra-ordinary spheres, differentiated, as it were, in opposite directions. The polar tension between world-disclosure and problem-solving is held together within the functional matrix of ordinary language; but art and literature on the one side, and science, morality, and law on the other, are specialized for experiences and modes of knowledge that can be shaped and worked out within the compass of *one* linguistic function and *one* dimension of validity at a time. (*PDM,* p. 207)

It is clear from this passage that Habermas is still working within a broadly Kantian architectonic, a doctrine of the faculties that insists on maintaining the distinction between pure reason, practical reason and aesthetic judgment. In this respect his arguments in *PDM* are continuous with the project set forth in an early work like *Knowledge and Human Interests,* despite what is presented as a crucial shift of emphasis, from an overtly Kantian ("epistemological" or "foundationalist") approach to one that takes its bearings from speech-act theory, pragmatics and the study of communicative action. The continuity can be seen clearly enough in Habermas's way of separating out those uses of language „specialized" for the purposes of problem-solving, argument or rational critique. It is likewise evident in the distinction that Habermas maintains between ',ordinary" and "extraordinary" language-games, or those that have their place in"normal speech" and those that belong more properly to art, literature and the "world-disclosive" function of aesthetic understanding. Here we have the nub of Habermas 's case against Derrida: the charge that he has effectively *disenfranchised* critical reason by allowing this promiscuous confusion of realms within and between the various linguistic orientations.

What this argument cannot countenance is any suggestion that one and the same text might possess both literary value (on account of its fictive, metaphorical or stylistic attributes) and philosophic cogency (by virtue of its power to criticize normative truth-claims). Thus Habermas would need to reject as non-philosophical not only a text like La Carte Postale, but also those numerous borderline cases among them Plato, Augustine, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Austin, Borges, Calvino where fiction and philosophy are closely intertwined. And if the list were then extended to philosophers who had once in a while made use of fictive devices or analogies, then it would also include Aristotle, Kant, Husserl, Frege, Quine, Searle and just about every thinker in the Western tradition. So Habermas is pretty much out on a limb when he seeks to demarcate the types and conditions of language according to their various specialized roles. And this applies even more to his argument that literary criticism at least as that discipline has developed since the eighteenth century should also be regarded as a language apart from those texts that constitute its subject-domain. Thus:

> it [criticism] has responded to the increasing autonomy of linguistic works of art by means of a discourse specialized for questions of taste. In it, the claims with which literary texts appear are submitted to examination claims to 'artistic truth',

> aesthetic harmony, exemplary validity, innovative force, and authenticity. In this respect, aesthetic criticism is similar to argumentative forms specialized for propositional truth and the Tightness of norms, that is, to theoretical and practical discourse. It is, however, not merely an esoteric component of expert culture but, beyond this, has the job of mediating between expert culture and everyday world (*PDM,* p. 207)

This last sentence might appear to qualify Habermas's rigid demarcation of realms by allowing that criticism (like philosophy) must have contact with "ordinary language", at least to the extent of being understood by persons outside the "expert culture" specifically devoted to such questions. But the passage makes it clear that Habermas conceives this alignment of interests as basically a two-term relationship, holding between "ordinary language" on the one hand and aesthetics and literary theory on the other. That is to say, he excludes the possibility that this semi-specialized or mediating discourse might also respond to stylistic innovations in literary language, of the kind most strikingly exemplified in Derrida's texts. For Habermas, such developments have exactly the opposite effect. As literature becomes more "autonomous" more preoccupied with matters of style, form and technique so criticism has to insist more firmly on the distance that separates its own language ("specialized for questions of taste") from the language of poetry or fiction. For otherwise so Habermas implies criticism will be in no position to claim a knowledge of the text that the text itself has not already made explicit. Only in so far as it maintains this stance can criticism adjudicate in those questions of "aesthetic harmony, exemplary validity, innovative force, and authenticity" which constitute its own proper sphere of understanding. And in order to do so it will need to be aligned not so much with "literature" as with "philosophy", since it is here that such normative validity-claims are most thoroughly tried and tested.

I have already perhaps said enough to indicate just how remote these arguments are from Derrida's practice of a "philosophical criticism" (for want of any better term) that deliberately mixes the genres of literature and theory. But we should not be misled into thinking that he has thereby renounced philosophy and given himself up to a mode of "extraordinary" language that severs all links between itself and critical reason on the one hand, or itself and the interests of communal understanding on the other. What Habermas fails to recognise is the extent to which so-called "ordinary" language is in fact shot through with metaphors, non-usages, chance collocations, Freudian parapraxes and other such "accidental" features that cannot be reduced to any normative account. Henry Staten makes the point well when he describes how Wittgenstein, like Derrida, develops a style that is "radically errant", one which effectively "unlids all the accidence concealed by 'normal' uses of words in order to show how many different routes it would be possible to take from any given point in the discourse."[23] Staten is here arguing specifically against those mainstream readings of Wittgenstein which fasten on his talk of "language-games" and "forms of life", and use it as a warrant for confining authentic, serious or meaningful discourse to the range of usages sanctioned within some existing cultural community. On the contrary, says Staten: Wittgenstein is just as much concerned as Derrida with the radical "accidence" of language, the way that it can open up unlooked-for possibilities of meaning precisely through the

absence of such binding communal constraints. And the same applies to Derrida and Austin if their texts are read with sufficient regard to these innovative byways of language, routes which "we had simply not thought of because we were bemused by normality".[24]

Staten argues a convincing case for Derrida as one who has pushed the project of post-Kantian critical reason to the point of acknowledging its covert involvement in a general problematics of language, writing and representation. This is why his book pays careful attention to Derrida's reading of Husserl, and more specifically to those passages where the claims of transcendental phenomenology are subject to a certain dislocating pressure brought about by the effects of linguistic *différance*. It is here, Staten writes, that Derrida most decisively "wrests the concept of meaning away from the moment of intuition in order to attach it *essentially* to the moment of signification". Thus language (or writing, in Derrida's extended sense of the term) cannot be confined to its traditional role as a mere vehicle for thoughts and intuitions that would otherwise exist in a state of ideal self-presence or intelligibility. Rather, it is the signifying structure of language that system of differential marks and traces "without positive terms" that constitutes the very possibility of meaning, and thus creates all manner of problems for Husserl's philosophical enterprise.[25] But again we should be wrong to see in this encounter a straightforward instance of philosophy's undoing at the hands of literature, writing or rhetoric. As Staten says,

> [w]hat is both original and problematic about Derrida's own project is that it does *not* pursue Joyce's path, but remains faithful to the problematic of that ‚univocity' that Derrida sees as underlying Joyce's equivocity, while yet opening out the univocal language in which he works, the language of philosophy, to that spread of meaning Joyce explored.[26]

It is precisely this possibility that Habermas excludes when he takes it that Derrida's levelling of the genre-distinction between philosophy and literature deprives thinking of its critical force and thus betrays the very project of enlightened thought.

One could offer many instances from Derrida's work that would count strongly against this reading. Thus his essay on Foucault ("Cogito and the History of Madness")[27] makes exactly the point that Habermas is making when he asks what kind of *argumentative* force could possibly attach to Foucault's critical genealogies. More specifically: what is the status of a discourse that reduces all truths to the level of an undifferentiated power-knowledge; that denounces reason as merely an agency of ever-increasing surveillance and control; and that claims not only to speak on behalf of that madness which reason has constructed as its outcast other, but moreover to speak the very language of madness from a standpoint beyond any rational accountability?[28] For Habermas, this serves to demonstrate the sheer dead-end that thought runs into when it follows the line of reactive counter-enlightenment rhetoric that leads from Nietzsche to Bataille, Foucault and other such present-day apostles of unreason. It also goes to show how much they have in common with that one-sided view of modernity and its discontents adopted by an earlier generation of Frankfurt theorists (notably Adorno and Horkheimer in their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*). For them, as for Foucault, „modernity" is more or less synonymous with the advance of an instrumental reason that subjugates

everything nature, social existence, art, philosophy, language to its own homogenizing drive. Thus "Foucault so levels down the complexity of societal modernization that the disturbing paradoxes of this process cannot even become apparent to him" (*PDM,* p. 291). And he can do so only by ignoring the crucial distinction between instrumental reason as developed in the service of scientific mastery and power and those other forms of reason (communicative, critical or emancipatory) which point a way beyond this deadlocked condition.

Derrida is arguing to similar effect when he remarks on the strictly *impossible* nature of Foucault's undertaking and the fact that any such discourse on madness will necessarily have resort to a different order of language, logic and validity-claims. Thus:

> if discourse and philosophical communication (that is, language itself) are to have an intelligible meaning, that is to say, if they are to conform to their essence and vocation as discourse, they must simultaneously in fact and in principle escape madness. They must carry normality within themselves... By its essence, the sentence is normal ... whatever the health or madness of him who propounds it, or whom it passes through, on whom, in whom it is articulated. In its most impoverished syntax, logos is reason and, indeed, a historical reason.[29]

Where this differs from Habermas 's reading is in its argument that Foucault has *not* in fact achieved what he thinks to achieve, i.e. a decisive break with the protocols of reason and truth. Since no such break is possible since every sentence of Foucault's text betrays an opposite compulsion at work Derrida can acknowledge the critical force of his writing *despite and against* its avowed purpose. "Crisis of reason, finally, access to reason and attack of reason. For what Michel Foucault teaches us to think is that there are crises of reason in strange complicity with what the world calls crises of madness."[30] For Habermas, conversely, Foucault exemplifies that levelling of the difference between reason and unreason which heralds the "postmodern condition" and the ultimate betrayal of enlightenment values. In short, Habermas takes Foucault at his word as having left behind all the rational criteria, normative truth-claims, standards of validity etc. which constitute the "philosophical discourse of modernity". And this despite his clear recognition elsewhere that "Foucault only gains this basis [that is, the explanatory matrix of power-knowledge] by not thinking genealogically when it comes to his *own* genealogical historiography and by rendering unrecognizable the derivation of this transcendental-historicist concept of power" (*PDM,* p. 269). For ultimately Habermas cannot conceive that Foucault's project, deriving as it does from the Nietzschean counter-enlightenment lineage, might yet possess a power of demystifying insight that works against its own professed aims and interests.

Derrida can allow for this ambivalence in Foucault's work because (unlike Habermas) he doesn't draw a firm, juridical line between reason and rhetoric, philosophy and literature, the discourse of enlightened critique and the capacity of language (even "extraordinary" language) to reflect on the inbuilt limits and aporias of that same discourse. But it is simply not the case, as Habermas asserts, that Derrida has thereby abandoned the ground of post-Kantian critical thought, or gone along with that "drastic levelling of [the] architectonic of reason that results from the Nietzsche-inspired reading of Kant" (*PDM,* p. 305). On the contrary:

several of his recent essays are concerned with questions in precisely this sphere. They include Derrida's writings on the modern university and its division of intellectual labour, especially as this relates to Kant's doctrine of the faculties and their role *vis-à-vis* the cardinal distinction between "pure" and "applied" forms of knowledge.[31] Here as in Habermas, philosophy is assigned to its proper place as the discipline that legislates in questions of validity and truth, while the other, more practical or research-oriented disciplines have their separate domains marked out according to their own specific ends and interests. Certainly Derrida calls this system into question, remarking on the various conflicts, aporias or boundary-disputes that arise within and between the faculties. Moreover, he does so by way of a rhetorical reading that suspends the privileged truth-claims of philosophy and asks more specifically what *interests* are served by this policing of the various faculty limits. But there is no question of simply revoking the Kantian paradigm and declaring a break with that entire heritage of enlightened critical thought. In fact Derrida repeatedly insists on the need to keep faith with this "vigil" of enlightenment, a vigil whose term is not ended (as "postmodern" thinkers would have it) on account of these constitutive blind-spots in its own project. Those who profess to deconstruct Kant's doctrine of the faculties "need not set themselves up in opposition to the principle of reason, nor need they give way to 'irrationalism'".[32] While questioning the modern university-system and its forms of self-authorized knowledge, they can nevertheless assume, "along with its memory and tradition, the imperatives of professional rigor and competence".

V

Perhaps the most interesting text in this regard is Derrick's essay „Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy".[33] The title is borrowed almost verbatim from Kant, who used it for a piece of philosophical polemics against those who saw fit to reject the dictates of enlightened reason, and who relied in stead on their own unaided intuition as to questions of truth and falsehood or right and wrong. Kant has nothing but scorn for these enthusiasts, these adepts of the „inner light", imagining as they do that one can bypass the critical tribunal of the faculties and arrive at truth without benefit of reasoned debate. And of course their presumption has religious and political overtones, laying claim to a freedom of individual conscience that goes far beyond Kant's prescription for the exercise of citizenly virtues in a liberal-democratic state. In short, this text bears a close resemblance to Habermas's critique of Derrida, especially those passages where he locates the origins of deconstruction in a 'subject-centred' pre-enlightenment discourse which in turn goes back to the "mysticism of being", and which thus provides a starting point for Heidegger and Derrida alike. "If this suspicion is not utterly false, Derrida returns to the historical locale where mysticism once turned into enlightenment." (*PDM,* p. 184). On this reading, deconstruction is the upshot of a fateful swerve in the history of thought, a path wrongly chosen at precisely the point where philosophy might have set out on the high road of rational self-understanding.

Thus Habermas takes Derrida to task just as Kant once chastized the fake illuminati and apostles of unreason for rejecting that alternative, far preferable course that led *through and beyond* Kant and Hegel to the theory of communicative

action. In short, Derrida's deconstructive reading of Heidegger „does not escape the aporetic structure of a truth-occurrence eviscerated of all truth-as-validity" (PDM, p. 167). And again:

> unabashedly, and in the style of *Ursprungsphilosophie,* Derrida falls back on this *Urschrift* [viz, *archi-écriture*] which leaves its traces anonymously, without any subject... As Schelling once did in speculating about the timeless temporalizing internesting of the past, present and future ages of the world, so Derrida clings to the dizzying thought of a past that has never been present... He too [like Heidegger] degrades politics and contemporary history to the status of the ontic and the foreground, so as to romp all the more freely... in the sphere of the ontological and archewriting (pp. 179-81).

This passage tends to confirm the impression that Habermas has based his arguments on a very partial knowledge of Derrida's work. It is a reading that conspicuously fails to take account of his more recent texts on the "principle of reason", the politics of representation and the role of the modern university-system as a site where Kant's doctrine of the faculties is both reproduced and subjected to forms of destabilizing pressure and critique. But the point can be made more specifically with reference to Derrida's essay "Of an Apocalyptic Tone", and the way that it rehearses not only Kant's quarrel with the mystagogues but also at least by implication the issue between Habermas and Derrida.

For it is simply not the case (or *not simply* the case) that Derrida here "deconstructs" the pretensions of enlightenment discourse in order to gain a hearing for those sophists, rhetoricians or purveyors of an occult wisdom whose extravagant teachings Kant holds up to ridicule in the parliament of plain-prose reason. Thus when Derrida offers his own free paraphrase of Kant's case against the mystagogues it could easily be taken for a passage from one of Habermas's chapters on Derrida in *PDM.*"This cryptopolitics is also a cryptopoetics, a poetic perversion of philosophy." (AT, p. 14) And again: „this leap toward the imminence of a vision without concept, this impatience turned toward the most crypted secret sets free a poetico-metaphorical overabundance" (p. 12). For Kant, „all philosophy is indeed prosaic", since it is only by submitting to the democratic rule of reason to the various "faculties" duly assembled in parliament, along with all their delegated powers and provisions that thinking can avoid the manifest dangers of a direct appeal to individual conscience or naked, self-advocating will. Hobbes is a warning presence in the background here, as he is in those passages where Habermas reproaches Foucault for abandoning the ground of enlightened critique, as evolved through the various forms and procedures of civil-administrative reason. What is most to be feared is a wholesale levelling of the faculties which would deprive reason of its moderating role and thereby reduce history, philosophy and politics to a mere force-field of contending interests or rhetorical strategies. And according to Habermas deconstruction is complicit in this process, since it over-extends the province of rhetoric to the point of annulling reason itself, along with all those crucial distinctions that emerged in the sphere of socio-political debate.

Again, these are arguments that Derrida rehearses and the term seems just right in this context when he speaks up for Kant and the values of enlightenment, as against the purveyors of a false knowledge vouchsafed by mere intuition. Thus

the mystagogues "scoff at work, the concept, schooling… To what is given they believe they have access effortlessly, gracefully, intuitively or through genius, outside of school" (AT, p. 9). Where these characters offend most gravely is in "playing the overload", in "raising the tone" of philosophy (or pseudo-philosophy) to such a pitch that it rejects all rational obligations, all the rules of civilized exchange among equals that make up an emergent and developing public sphere. In so doing they seek "to hoist themselves above their colleagues or fellows and wrong them in their inalienable right to freedom and equality regarding everything touching on reason alone" (AT, p. 11). And the signs of this attitude are there to be read in the various forms of *rhetorical* overreaching hyperbole, multiplied metaphor, prosopopeia, apostrophe and other such tropes whose effect is to disrupt the parliament of faculties by giving voice to a language that respects none of its agreed-upon rules and protocols. As Derrida writes, again paraphrasing Kant: "they do not distinguish between pure speculative reason and pure practical reason; they believe they *know* what is solely *thinkable* and reach through feeling alone the universal laws of practical reason" (p. 12). Hence their resort to an „apocalyptic tone" that takes effect through its sheerly *performative* power, its use of an oracular, "inspired" or prophetic style of speech where the truth-claims of reason (or of language in its constative aspect) have no part to play.

Now it is clear that Derrida is not unambiguously taking Kant's side in this attack on the pretensions of any philosophy that thinks to place itself above or outside the jurisdiction of plain-prose reason. For one thing, his essay is itself shot through with apocalyptic figures and devices, among them various mystical injunctions from Jewish and Christian source-texts. To this extent Derrida is asking us to see that the ethos of Kantian civilized reason has sharp juridical limits; that it has only been able to impose its rule through a constant policing of the border-lines between reason and rhetoric, concept and metaphor, "genuine" philosophy and a discourse that lays false claim to that title. But we should be wrong to conclude that the essay comes out squarely *against* Kant, or that Derrida's use of an apocalyptic tone signals yet another "postmodern" break with the discourse of enlightened reason. What sustains this project, he writes, is the "desire for vigilance, for the lucid vigil, for elucidation, for critique and truth" (AT, p. 22). Of course it may be said that Derrida is here not speaking "in his own voice"; that this essay is a kind of ventriloquist performance, mixing all manner of citations, intertextual allusions, contrapuntal ironies and so forth, so that anyone who instances this or that passage as evidence for their own preferred reading is surely missing the point. But this objection is itself wide of the mark in so far as it ignores the distinctly Kantian form of Derrida's argument, namely, his questioning of enlightenment values and truth-claims through a debate whose terms are inescapably set by that same Kantian tribunal. That is to say, Derrida is asking what might be the *conditions of possibility* for the exercise of a critical reason that thinks to keep itself pure by excluding or denouncing all other forms of discourse.

To regard this essay as a mere assemblage of „literary" tricks and devices is to make the same error that Habermas makes when he criticizes Derrida for supposedly levelling the genre-distinction between philosophy and literature. It involves the kind of typecast binary thinking that refuses to see how a "literary" text or one which exploits a wide range of stylistic resources might yet possess

sufficient *argumentative* force to unsettle such deep-laid assumptions. Derrida belongs very much with those philosophers (Wittgenstein and Austin among them) who resist this habit of compartmentalized thinking. He wants to keep open the two-way flow between so-called "ordinary" language and the various extra-ordinary styles, idioms, metaphorical usages, "expert" registers and so forth, which help to defamiliarize our commonplace beliefs. But he also sees unlike Habermas or Searle that "ordinary language" is a gross misnomer, since there is no possibility of laying down rules (or extracting a generalized speech-act theory) that would separate normal from deviant instances. It is the idea that such rules *ought* to be available and that philosophy is the discipline specialized (as Habermas would say) for the purpose of producing them that actually prevents philosophy from perceiving how manifold, inventive and remarkable are the varieties of "ordinary" language. The result of such thinking is to isolate philosophy in a realm of meta-linguistic theory and principle where it can have no contact with those energizing sources.

Derrida's point to put it very simply is that philosophy is indeed a "kind of writing", but a kind which (contrary to Rorty's understanding) cannot be collapsed into a generalized notion of rhetoric or intertextuality. It is unfortunate that Habermas takes his bearings in *PDM* from a widespread but none the less fallacious idea of how deconstruction relates to other symptoms of the so-called "postmodern condition". What Derrida gives us to read is *not* philosophy's undoing at the hands of literature but a literature that meets the challenge of philosophy in every aspect of its argument, form and style.

NOTES

1. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: twelve lectures,* trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, 1987). Hereafter cited in the text as *PDM.*
2. See for instance Jean-François Lyotard, "The Sign of History", in Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington & Robert Young (eds.), *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History* (Cambridge, 1987), 162-80.
3. Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests,* trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (London, 1972).
4. For a useful account of these differences, see Rainer Nägele, „Freud, Habermas and the Dialectic of Enlightenment: on real and ideal discourses", *New German Critique,* XXII (1981), 41-62.
5. See Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the philosophy of reflection* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986).
6. Richard Rorty, 'Philosophy as a Kind of Writing', in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis, 1982), 89-109. See also Rorty, ‚Deconstruction and Circumvention', *Critical Inquiry,* XI (1984), 1-23.
7. See especially Jacques Derrida, *Margins Of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1982).
8. Derrida, "Limited Inc. abc", *Glyph,* II (1977), 162-254.
9. Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", in *Writing and Difference,* trans. Alan Bass (London, 1978), 278-293.
10. Derrida, *The Post Card: from Socrates to Freud and beyond,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1987). I have slightly modified Bass's translation in some of the passages cited.
11. Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": an introduction,* trans. John P. Leavey (Pittsburgh, 1978).
12. In this connection see especially Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society,* trans. Thomas McCarthy (London, 1979).
13. John Searle, "Reiterating the Differences", *Glyph,* I (1977), 198-208.
14. See Norris, *Derrida* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), 172-93; also Jonathan Culler, „Convention

and Meaning: Derrida and Austin". *New Literary History.* XIII (1981). 15-30 and Shoshana Felman, *The Literary Speech-Act: Don Juan with J.L. Austin, or seduction in two languages* trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY, 1983)

15. See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (London. 1962) and *Philosophical Papers* (London, 1961), especially the essay "A Plea for Excuses". 123-52
16. Derrida, *Of Grammatology.* trans. Gayatri C. Spivak (Baltimore. 1976).
17. Derrida, *The Post Card,* 98.
18. On this topic see also Derrida, *Signsponge.* trans. Richard Rand (New York, 1984).
19. Derrida, *The Post Card,* 99.
20. Derrida, *The Post Card,* 62.
21. Derrida, „To Speculate — on Freud'", in *The Post Card* 257-409.
22. Jacques Lacan, „Seminar on ‚The Purloined Letter'", trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, *Yale French Studies,* No. 48 (1972), 38-72. Derrida's essay, Le Facteur de la Verite, appears in *The Post Card,* 411-96.
23. Henry Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (Lincoln & London, 1984), 75.
24. Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida,* 75.
25. See Derrida, *"Speech and Phenomena" and other essays on Husserl's theory of signs,* trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, III., 1973).
26. Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida,* 48.
27. Derrida, „Cogito and the History of Madness", in *Writing and Difference,* 31-63.
28. Michel Foucault. *Madness and Civilization; a history of insanity in the age of reason,* trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1965). Foucault responded to Derrida's essay in his appendix to the second edition of *Folie et Deraison* (Paris, 1972), 583-603.
29. Derrida, „Cogito and the History of Madness," 53-4.
30. Derrida, „Cogito and the History of Madness", 63.
31. See for instance Derrida, „The Principle of Reason: the university in the eyes of its pupils", *Diacritics,* XIX (1983), 3-20.
32. Derrida, „The Principle of Reason: the university in the eyes of its pupils", 17.
33. Derrida, „Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy", trans. John P. Leavey, *The Oxford Literary Review,* VI, No. 2 (1984). 3-37. Hereafter cited in the text as AT.