

persist and harden around the world, conflict and even nuclear war becomes inevitable, which in the upshot will pry the shaken survivors from their murderous bigotry. Did not the suffering in two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century lead to the vision of the United Nations? As argued above, the advance toward global unity follows an irresistible and often exceedingly cruel long-run logic. By offering greater control over reality, all-inclusive rational analysis as ventured by global history properly pursued may reduce the punishment for stubborn ignorance and ease humanity's adaptation to the global epoch.

In that new epoch all familiar ways of thinking and acting are inadequate, including the arrogant contemporary faith in the human ability to control the future with the help of machines. What counts is not technology nor economic prowess, but the arts of peaceful human cooperation without which no human enterprise can thrive. And those arts include viewing human events in proper perspective. Global perspectives have a salubrious humbling effect. They reduce the individual to a tiny human atom lost among billions of other human beings and reveal how little, in a world grown too big for comprehension, that human mite really understands. Yet at the same time that human atom is also enlarged as never before by the new opportunities to encompass the whole of human existence. Global perspectives open up vistas of heightened human perfection, in the service of God, as Ranke put it, or, in secular terminology, advancing to new triumphs the human potential in all its dimensions and sensibilities.

Up then, historians, in honor of Leopold von Ranke, and in his spirit, give global history a try!

THEODOR H. VON LAUF

*Clark University*

THE PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE OF MODERNITY. Twelve Lectures. By Jürgen Habermas. Translated by Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987. Pp. xx, 430.

If, as the critics of Jürgen Habermas's alleged "transcendental narcissism"<sup>1</sup> frequently emphasize, "we" are inevitably situated in particular contexts, lacking a universal "God's eye view," then it is compellingly important to identify "our" location in the world as precisely as possible. Once "we" try to do so, however, an inevitable paradox emerges. For it is the curious fate of modern Western men and women (if that is the "we" involved) that our specific cultural context is one in which it is the norm to make universal claims about truth, reason, the human condition, and so on. For better or worse, we cannot fully shake the habit of

1. Coined by Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*; the term was first used to characterize Habermas's position by David Couzens Hoy in "Taking History Seriously: Foucault, Gadamer, Habermas," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 34 (Winter, 1979).

trying to see beyond our narrow horizons. Thus, even Western exponents of cultural relativism find themselves committed to a universalist credo: *all* cultures are context-specific and have no underlying commonality.

There are several possible responses to this apparent dilemma. First, we can truculently validate the transcendental, universal pretensions of our tradition and try to repress the recognition that they are historically contingent. The late Leo Strauss and his followers are examples of this approach. For them, ideas have no meaningful relation to either their context of generation or their context of reception; historicism is the enemy of truth. Second, we can abandon, either ruefully or not, all universal claims and reduce them entirely to expressions of their defining contexts. A leading contemporary exponent of this strategy is Stanley Fish, who defends the all-determining power of "interpretative communities." His radical contextualism reduces all norms of interpretation to the practices of such groups, however they are constituted. Or third, we can try to remain within the tensions of the "modern" dilemma and embrace them as our own. Rather than escape into pure transcendentalism or a no less pure immanentism, we can pursue the still emancipatory potential in a modernity at odds with itself.

Despite the cartoon version of Habermas often painted by his critics, it is precisely this third option that he has chosen to follow. Rather than seek a vantage point entirely outside of our own ambivalent discourse, he doggedly remains within it, defending an "uncompleted project of modernity,"<sup>2</sup> in part because it promises never to "complete itself" in either a totally transcendental or a totally immanent direction. His widely discussed defense of the Enlightenment is thus best understood as a plea for the maintenance of its dialectical tensions, rather than for their overcoming in a perfectly Enlightened form of life. In his latest major effort to clarify the stakes of that struggle, twelve lectures presented to often skeptical audiences in France and America, Habermas warns against believing we can will ourselves into a "post" position beyond the modern age.

Even on methodological grounds I do not believe that we can distance occidental rationalism, under the hard gaze of a fictive ethnology of the present, into an object of neutral contemplation and simply leap out of the discourse of modernity. So I would like to follow a more trivial path, taking up the ordinary perspective of a participant who is recalling the course of the argument in its rough features. (59)

The perspective of Jürgen Habermas, as anyone who has spent time with his voluminous *oeuvre* can readily attest, is anything but ordinary. Nor is the "philosophical discourse of modernity" he so trenchantly reconstructs a one-dimensional simplification. In fact, it is on a level of sufficient intricacy that Habermas might better have written of the "discourses of modernity." For rather than reduce the story he tells to one coherent narrative line, he weaves together several subplots with considerable dramatic effect. Although the result is enough of a grand narrative to incur the wrath of *soi-disant* postmodernists certain that

2 This is the German title of a widely discussed essay published in English as "Modernity versus Postmodernity," *New German Critique* 22 (Winter, 1981).

the time for such totalizing stories is over, it is open-ended and without any certain resolution. As such, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* must be read as part of an ongoing theoretical polemic rather than a sovereign glance back at a tale that has come to an end, it is a work aimed at nothing less than defining the current terms of our cultural situation wresting control from those who have defined it as postmodern. Both in form and content, it seeks to provide incontrovertible evidence that the modern project is by no means exhausted.

## I

Habermas's goal in this work is to complement the reconstruction of the social development of modernity he has attempted elsewhere, most notably in his massive *Theory of Communicative Action*,<sup>3</sup> with a comparable analysis of its discursive counterpart. As a result, he makes little attempt here to spell out the history of modernization in systemic or structural terms, assuming instead that the reader will have access to his earlier efforts. Nor does he seek to extend the concept of discourse in the fashion of, say, Foucault to include anonymous cultural matrices, which subtend higher-level reflections on philosophical themes. Instead he provides us with a brilliant reading of the master thinkers of the tradition (all of whom turn out to be men, which may account for the unfortunate absence of any gender dimension in his story).

Habermas begins that story by drawing on Reinhard Koselleck's and Hans Blumenberg's insights into the altered temporal consciousness that coalesced during the eighteenth century. Recognizing that it could no longer measure itself against a lamented past, realizing that the novelty of the future was already an experience of the present, the modern age became supremely self-regarding, finding its legitimacy, its normativity only in itself. Such a self-grounding proved enormously liberating, but no less anxiety-producing. For along with the sense of subjective freedom from external constraints went a strong need for self-reassurance now that a meaningful cultural whole could no longer be assumed as a given.

According to Habermas, it was Hegel who first registered the intensity of that need and sought to use philosophy to answer it (although Habermas neglects to consider him, Rousseau might have been an even earlier example). Unlike Kant, who remained content with the differentiations of modern life into the relatively autonomous spheres of cognition, morality and art, Hegel sought to overcome what he perceived as the fractures or diremptions (as the translator renders *Entzweungen*) in the meaningful whole. But paradoxically, he chose to cure the illness of modernity by means of its putative cause: the newly unleashed principle of subjectivity. "The hand that inflicts the wound," he famously claimed, "is also the hand which heals it."<sup>4</sup> The subject could function for Hegel in this way be-

3 Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt, 1981).

4 Hegel, *The Logic of Hegel*, transl. William Wallace (Oxford, 1892), 57.

cause it contained several embedded meanings, which Habermas summarizes as individualism, the right to criticism, the autonomy of action, and idealist philosophy itself. The last of these meant that philosophy was speculative and reflective, a mirror in which self could recognize itself in otherness. Through the reappropriation of alienated subjectivity, the identity of the fractured totality could be assured.

The dominant discourse of modernity thus privileges subjectivity, both as a cause of its ills and as their putative cure. The remedy, however, created new problems, for in order to make self-reflective, speculative subjectivity an antidote to the diremptions of modernity, Hegel had to define it as rational and assign it a grandiose power to comprehend the whole. "But as absolute knowledge," Habermas points out,

reason assumes a form so overwhelming that it not only solves the initial problem of a self-reassurance of modernity, but it solves it *too well*. The question about the genuine self-understanding of modernity gets lost in reason's ironic laughter. For reason has now taken over the place of fate and knows that every event of essential significance has *already* been decided. (42)

Before Hegel arrived at his solution to the crisis of modernity, he briefly considered – and from Habermas's perspective, too quickly rejected – an alternative approach. In his early writings, which speculated on the classical Greek and primitive Christian experiences of positive ethical communities, Hegel explored a more promising alternative to subjective self-appropriation: the restoration of an intersubjective life-world out of which subjects were themselves initially constituted. But according to Habermas, he prematurely abandoned this solution because he thought it was impossible to return to historically surpassed forms of life. Intersubjectivity, rather than inflated subjectivity, remained, however, still possible as the source of a counter-discourse of modernity, which was never fully forgotten.

With Hegel's immediate successors in the story Habermas narrates, it remained, to be sure, only latent. His right-wing followers embraced "the primacy of the *higher-level subjectivity of the state*" rather than the "*higher-level intersubjectivity of an uncoerced formation of will* within a communication community existing under the constraints toward cooperation" (40). The Hegelian Right's "emphatic institutionalism," to use the term Habermas borrows from Dieter Henrich, has its echoes in the work of such twentieth-century neoconservatives as Joachim Ritter and Hans Freyer. Although they can no longer rely on a simpleminded deification of the state, they seek to defuse the explosive implications of cultural modernity by investing their hopes in the restoration of traditions through the authority of the *Geisteswissenschaften* combined with a faith in technocracy. The result is still to privilege alleged higher-level subjective rationality above the intersubjective life-world.

Hegel's left-wing successors, most notably Marx, turned to what Habermas calls (without crediting the term's origin in Gramsci) "the philosophy of praxis." Here the realm of civil society rather than the state was the alleged locus of redemp-

tion Although the young Marx, like the early Hegel, considered the option of building a new communicative community through intersubjective reason, he remained too beholden to the philosophy of the subject to follow this path. Instead, he turned to self-creation through labor, which Habermas calls "the production paradigm." His twentieth-century descendants, such as Agnes Heller, Gyorgy Markus, and Cornelius Castoriadis may have sought to improve his analysis of praxis — Habermas devotes two extended excursions to their work — but they fail to get beyond its basic problem: "Praxis philosophy does not afford the means for thinking dead labor as mediatized and *paralyzed intersubjectivity*. It remains a variant of the philosophy of the subject that locates reason in the purposive rationality of the acting subject instead of in the reflection of the knowing subject" (65).<sup>5</sup> In addition, it posits as teleological goals the complete dedifferentiation of the modern world, the reconciliation of man and nature, and the "remembering" of a divided macro-subject — all of which fail to acknowledge the positive implications of the articulation of modern life into relatively distinct spheres. Remaining under the sway of a bloated concept of Reason, which posits the identity of subject and object in a grand totalization, the philosophy of praxis thus helped clear the ground for later thinkers whose valid wariness about such a concept misled them into abandoning reason *tout court*.

Habermas's leading example of this later "turning point," as he puts it, in the discourse of modernity is Nietzsche, who provided the impetus for the postmodernists who are the real targets of his book. Whereas the German Idealists and their materialist heirs never considered subjective freedom, for all its disruptive effects, anything but a progressive moment in the "learning process" of the species, Nietzsche turned radically against it. Leaping entirely out of the dialectic of enlightenment, he reduced its concept of reason solely to its instrumental variant and rejected its critical force. In Habermas's play on Hegel's metaphor of reason as the rose in the cross of the present, "he removed the dialectical thorn from the critique of a reason centered in the subject and shriveled into purposive rationality; and he related to reason as a whole the way the Young Hegelians did to its sublimations. Reason is *nothing else* than power, than the will to power, which it so radiantly conceals" (56).

Not satisfied with merely unmasking Reason as an effect of power, Nietzsche, as Habermas reads him, also sought solace in a restoration of mythic thought. Rather than lamenting a lost wholeness, however, he radicalized the future-oriented temporal consciousness of modernity and sought a solution in a yet-to-be-realized, aesthetically defined utopia, which he initially saw prefigured in Wagner's music. Borrowing Manfred Frank's term, Habermas sees Nietzsche's Dionysus as a redemptive "*god who is coming*" (91). The mature Nietzsche may have attempted to substitute "life" for "art" as his God term, but ultimately his philosophy remained one of aesthetic redemption based on the healing power

5 Habermas's account of Marx is not new in this book and has already caused considerable controversy. For a representative defense of Marx's concept of labor, see Paul Thomas, "The Language of Real Life: Jürgen Habermas and the Distortion of Karl Marx," *Discourse* 1 (1979), 59–81.

of illusions. Substituting individual taste, “the Yes and No of the palate,”<sup>6</sup> for critical reason, he thus underestimated the rationalization of the aesthetic sphere itself during the modernization process. As a result, “he cannot legitimate the criteria of aesthetic judgment that he holds on to because he transposes aesthetic experience into the archaic, because he does not recognize as a moment of reason the critical capacity for assessing value that was sharpened through dealing with modern art” (96).

According to Habermas, Nietzsche’s radical critique inspired two different paths to the current postmodern discourse. His skeptical debunking of subject-centered reason as an effect of power culminated in the anthropological, psychological, and historical writings of Georges Bataille, Jacques Lacan, and Michel Foucault. His search for the mythic “other” of that reason beyond the subject gave rise to the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida. All of these thinkers ostensibly break with the consciousness philosophy of the discourse of modernity in its classical form, but, so Habermas hopes to demonstrate, they only turn its assumptions on their heads.

Before developing this surprising claim—which in fact is the gravamen of his argument against poststructuralism in general—Habermas pauses with two thinkers, whose role in the narrative he spins out is particularly delicate, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. Although he has previously expressed his nuanced disagreements with his mentors in the Frankfurt school, Habermas spells them out nowhere as explicitly as in his chapter on “The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment.” Focusing on their masterwork of the mid-1940s, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, he challenges their bleak portrayal of a reason that has been reduced to its most dominating technological version. Although acknowledging their ambivalence toward Nietzsche, whose wholesale repudiation of Hegel’s method of determinate negation they could not share, he nonetheless claims that their work “owes more to Nietzsche than just the strategy of ideology critique turned against itself. Indeed, what is unexplained throughout is their certain lack of concern dealing with the (to put it in the form of a slogan) achievements of Occidental Rationality” (121). But unlike Nietzsche, Horkheimer and Adorno remained fundamentally uneasy about the performative contradiction entailed by a totalizing critique of reason, which nonetheless refused to call itself irrationalist. That is, they criticized certain variants of rationality, but never reason *tout court*. Even their valorization of a mimetic relation to nature never turned into a defense of the “other” of reason, nor did they seek to remythologize power. Thus, for all of their similarities to the post-Nietzschean critics of subjective rationality, they never fully lost their ties, however attenuated, to the Enlightenment.<sup>7</sup>

6 Quoted twice by Habermas (96 and 123) from *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (New York, 1966), 341.

7 For more of Habermas’s thoughts on his relations with the older members of the Frankfurt School, see the interviews collected as *Habermas: Autonomy and Solidarity*, ed. Peter Dews (London, 1986). There is now a small cottage industry comparing the Frankfurt School’s Critical Theory and

Nietzsche's other twentieth-century heirs have had fewer scruples about embracing an explicitly counter-Enlightenment program, according to Habermas. For them, reason is what he calls "exclusive," that is, reduced to subjective instrumentality and counterposed to everything outside of its alleged boundaries. In different ways, the latter-day Nietzscheans have attempted to rescue that putative alterity. Heidegger began by restoring philosophy to the position it had occupied before the Young Hegelians had reduced it to a reflection of material reality. But the philosophy he restored bore little resemblance to the subject-centered, consciousness philosophy that came to dominate Western thought with Descartes. Rejecting the transcendental foundationalism of this tradition, which could be traced as far back as Socrates, Heidegger sought a deeper level on which truth might be found, that of a Being prior to the split between subject and object. Being served Heidegger in the same way Dionysus did Nietzsche—as the other of a vilified reason, as a truth which could never be validated by discursive argumentation. Truth for Heidegger was understood instead as an occurrence, as the appearance of Being before *Dasein*.

For Habermas, the implication of Heidegger's response to the dilemmas of modernity are nothing less than disastrous. By equating truth with an occurrence passively awaited rather than validity claims actively contested, Heidegger hypostatized "the luminous force of world-disclosing language" (154), language moreover which is always conceived in the constative rather than performative mode. Thus, despite his celebrated consideration of *Mitsein* (co-being), which seemed to introduce an intersubjective dimension into his description of *Dasein*, his analysis was always based on the same egological relation between subject and object that characterized traditional consciousness philosophy.<sup>8</sup> According to Habermas,

Ontology with a transcendental twist is guilty of the same mistake that it attributes to classical epistemology. Whether one gives primacy to the Being-question or to the knowledge-question, in either case, the cognitive relation to the world and fact-stating discourse—theory and propositional truth—hold a monopoly as to what is genuinely human and in need of clarification. This ontological/epistemological primacy of entities as what is knowable levels off the complexity of relations to the world sedimented in the multiplicity of illocutionary forces proper to natural languages, in favor of *one* privileged relation to the objective world. (151)

If there is an illocutionary dimension to Heidegger's thought, Habermas argues, it is frighteningly authoritarian—the urging of resigned acceptance of fate, which helps explain Heidegger's notorious and never genuinely repudiated political al-

poststructuralism. For an insightful recent example, see Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration: Post-structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London, 1987).

8 For an account of Heidegger that stresses the intersubjective rather than the egological dimension of his description of *Dasein*, see Fred R. Dallmayr, *Twilight of Subjectivity: Contributions to a Post-individualist Theory of Politics* (Amherst, Mass., 1981). Dallmayr does not, however, address the issue of Heidegger's preference for constative over performative modes of language.

legiance.<sup>9</sup> His early language of resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) supported a vacuous decisionism; his later defense of letting-be (*Gelassenheit*) implied a no less empty subjugation to an external authority. In both cases, Heidegger failed to offer a viable solution to the subject-centered foundationalism that his thought merely turned on its head.

Derrida's reworking of Heidegger's motifs, filtered through the grid of post-Saussurean structuralist linguistics and imbued with a Jewish sensitivity to the dangers of mythic regression to the archaic, seems to Habermas less politically nefarious. But he finds it no less problematic as a response to the dialectic of enlightenment. Although Derrida jettisons Heidegger's mystifying gestures of profundity and with them his recourse to ontotheological super-foundationalism, he nonetheless shares certain of his failings. Like Heidegger, Derrida fills the place of the forbidden subject with something allegedly more primary: in his case "archewriting" and its traces, which repeat the pathos of the always absent Dionysian God.<sup>10</sup> Like Heidegger, his hostility to communicative rationality means he "does not escape the aporetic structure of a truth-occurrence eviscerated of all truth-as-validity" (167). And finally, like Heidegger, he minimizes the value of the ontic realm of mundane history in favor of an allegedly prior realm, even if conceptualized in non-essentialist, non-positive terms. Although his version of that realm is ultimately more anarchistic and subversive than Heidegger's authoritarian alternative—perhaps because of his debt to Jewish hermeneutic traditions—it is nonetheless posited as beyond intersubjective discursive validity-testing. Thus, despite all its claims to the contrary, Habermas concludes that deconstruction ultimately remains in thrall to a philosophy of the subject, whose problematic it merely inverts. For in trying to get back "before" the subject, it can only find a linguistically defined, absent infrastructural prime mover that functions in precisely the same way.

For Habermas, Derrida is also typical of the post-Nietzschean turn in the discourse of modernity because of his tacit privileging of aesthetic over cognitive

9 Habermas has several powerful pages on Heidegger's politics in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (155–160), which appeared before the recent furor unleashed by Victor Farias's controversial book, *Heidegger et le nazisme*. In an introduction to the German translation of that book, soon to appear in *Critical Inquiry* in English, he goes even further into the complicated relations between Heidegger's politics and his ideas.

10 For a more sympathetic account of the "infrastructures" of deconstruction, see Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986). He tries to distinguish them from a foundation, origin, or ground, arguing that "since it is in the very nature of a ground to be in excess of what it accounts for, the infrastructure—the difference between the ground and what is grounded—cannot be understood simply as a ground. Not for these same reasons are the infrastructures deep, as opposed to surface, structures, there is nothing *profound* about them. [an infrastructure] is, on the contrary, a nonfundamental structure, or an abyssal structure, to the extent that it is without a bottom" (155). Peter Dews makes the shrewd point that despite appearances, such a position nonetheless reproduces a philosophy of origins. "Certainly, [Derrida] challenges the idea that *différance* or the trace could be considered as an origin, but *only* insofar as he considers the concept of origin, in its philosophical function, to be inseparable from that of presence" (*Logics of Disintegration*, 25).



or ethical experience. The clearest manifestation of this inclination appears in what Habermas calls his "leveling the genre distinction between philosophy and literature," a theme to which he devotes a lengthy excursus. Unlike these critics of poststructuralism who try to extract a series of straightforward philosophical propositions from the hybrid mode of expression in which they are embedded - and are invariably chastised by its defenders for having missed the importance of style<sup>11</sup> - Habermas shows that he is aware of the stakes involved when philosophy's literary dimension is underlined. But he warns against what he so often finds objectionable in all postmodernist modes of thought: absolute differentiation.<sup>12</sup> By subsuming all genre distinctions under one all-embracing notion of textuality, deconstruction is able to highlight the rhetorical workings of "philosophical" texts and probe the theoretical implications of "literary" ones. But in so doing it too quickly effaces the historically generated distinctions between philosophical and literary modes of discourse.

These are ultimately grounded, Habermas contends, in a more basic distinction between "normal" and "parasitic" modes of language use, a contrast he borrows from the speech act theory of J. L. Austin and John Searle. The former is given priority because it is based on the assumption in everyday interaction, often to be sure counterfactual, that the participants in communicative exchanges presuppose identical meanings when they use the same words.<sup>13</sup> Although deconstruction is surely right to claim that such an ideal is merely regulative rather than descriptive, as the stubbornly catachrestic or polysemic character of words works to thwart perfect communication, it fails to register the vital function of such counterfactuals. According to Habermas, Derrida's contention in his widely remarked polemic with Searle,<sup>14</sup> that the iterability of speech acts in different

11 See, for example, Paul Bove's searing critique of Charles Taylor's reading of Foucault, in Bove's introduction to Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. and ed. Sean Hand (Minneapolis, 1988). Habermas himself shows impatience with this strategy in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, where he writes, "Such discourses unsettle the institutionalized standards of fallibility: they always allow for a final word, even when the argument is already lost: that the opponent has misunderstood the meaning of the language game and has committed a category mistake in the sorts of responses he has been making" (337).

12 For an account of the importance of this issue in Habermas, see Martin Jay, "Habermas and Postmodernism," in *Fin-de-siècle Socialism and Other Essays* (New York, 1988).

13 The terms "normal" and "parasitic" raise certain questions about the vantage point of the analysis. From one that stresses performative or illocutionary linguistic interaction, the hierarchy is persuasive. But if the constative or locutionary dimensions of sign systems are emphasized instead, then the arbitrary, catachrestic quality of words can be seen as the basis of all language. Perhaps the solution is to regard both dimensions as equiprimordial and avoid claiming one gives us the essence of language.

Another way of framing Habermas's argument, however, is to point to the assumptions underlying telling the truth and lying. According to Peter Dews, there is a fundamental asymmetry between truth and falsehood which "consists in the fact that, if a statement considered true at any given time is a statement whose claim to truth has been accepted or validated, a lie is not in the same way a statement whose claim to falsehood has been endorsed: but rather one which raises an unjustified claim to truth." There must therefore be a convention that the primary function of language is to tell the truth" (*Logos of Disintegration*, 235).

14 John R. Searle, "Reiterating the Differences," *Glyph* 1 (1977), 198-208; Jacques Derrida, "Limited Inc. abc," *Glyph* 2 (1978), 162-254.

contexts proves their fictional rather than literal status, is unconvincing. For “only the actually performed speech act is *effective as action*, the promise mentioned or reported in a quote depends grammatically upon this. A setting that deprives it of its illocutionary force constitutes the bridge between quotation and fictional representation” (195–196). By over-generalizing the rhetorical function of language, its “world-disclosing” poetic power, by over-emphasizing writing with its absent author and unknown reader as antidote to phonocentrism, Derrida thus simplifies the complexity of linguistic practices, which have become distinct in the differentiation of spheres that is the positive side of the diremptions of modernity. For Habermas, his “*aestheticizing of language, which is purchased with the twofold denial of the proper senses of normal and poetic discourse*, also explains Derrida’s insensitivity towards the tension-filled polarity between the poetic-world-disclosive function of language and its prosaic, innerworldly functions” (205, italics in original). The latter are often directed towards problem-solving through testing validity claims, a process that tames rhetorical polysemy and transcends the horizons of the given contexts of the individual speakers involved. Or more precisely, it forges a common context based on what Alvin Gouldner used to call a “culture of critical discourse.” For all its stress on *différance* and non-identity, deconstruction thus holistically gives pride of place to rhetoric over logic, leveling genre distinctions that, if not watertight, are not infinitely permeable either.

While the lineage that leads from Nietzsche through Heidegger to Derrida criticizes Western metaphysics and seeks a functional equivalent of an absent God, the one that goes through Bataille to Foucault focuses more on anthropological and historical questions. Rather than merely debunking the cognitive pretensions of the Western tradition, it turns its withering gaze on its ethical ones as well. Accepting Nietzsche’s genealogical demolition of good and evil, Bataille and Foucault make moral judgments an expression of something deeper (even if they self-consciously eschew metaphors of superficiality and depth).

In Bataille’s case, it is the realm of excess, heterogeneity, waste, and sacred violence in a “general” rather than “restricted” economy, which he saw exemplified by the potlatch ceremonies of North American Indians. His celebration of “sovereignty” as the unbounded subject in touch with sacral power provided, Habermas contends, only a romantic protest against what in the Marxist tradition would be called reification. Because of his hostility to communicative as well as other forms of rationality, Bataille was unable to provide a standard to distinguish between fascist and socialist versions of the breakthrough of sovereign heterogeneity. And like Nietzsche, he failed to transcend the aporia of a totalizing critique of reason.

If sovereignty and its source, the sacred, are related to the world of purposive-rational action in an absolutely heterogeneous fashion, if the subject and reason are constituted only by excluding all kinds of sacred power, if the other of reason is more than just the irrational or the unknown — namely, the *incommensurable*, which cannot be touched by reason except at the cost of an explosion of the rational subject — then there is no possibility of theory that reaches beyond the horizon of what is accessible to reason and thema-

tizes, let alone analyzes, the interaction of reason with a transcendent source of power Bataille sensed this dilemma but did not resolve it (235–236)

His recourse to erotically transgressive language with its non-discursive shock value meant that he could only escape this dilemma by retreating into the silence of mystical experience, the silence that follows the shattering of the communicative subject

Foucault's early work on madness, so Habermas contends, duplicated Bataille's impotent romanticization of the "other" of reason, but he soon grew wary of so positive a vision of redemption. In its place, Foucault put an essentially Nietzschean notion of power, which served as the covert transcendental ground of his thought, despite his attempt to avoid foundationalism of any kind. As such, it functioned like the concept of "life" for *Lebensphilosophie*, an affinity made even clearer when Foucault praised "bodies and pleasures" as the alternative to a discursively constructed notion of "sexuality" in his last works. Reducing the will to truth to the will to power, Foucault sought to unmask the human sciences—which Habermas notes he anachronistically equated with their most positive variants—as little more than tools in an endless struggle of domination and resistance. But in so doing, he neglected to explore his own genealogical roots, assuming instead the role of the "happy positivist" unable to criticize what he merely described. And, according to Habermas, "to the extent that it retreats into the reflectionless objectivity of a non-participatory, ascetic description of kaleidoscopically changing practices of power, genealogical historiography emerges from its cocoon as precisely the *presentistic, relativistic, cryptonormative* illusory science that it does not want to be" (275–276)

By stressing only the disciplinary implications of the Enlightenment, Foucault, so Habermas charges, failed to grasp its paradoxical dialectic, thus making the same mistake as deconstruction with its leveling of the genre distinction between literature and philosophy. Both make it impossible to conceptualize the "other" of subject-centered rationality as communicative interaction. Although deeply sensitive to the aporias of the dominant discourse of modernity, Nietzsche's heirs thus remain skeptical towards the alternative presented in its always latent counterdiscourse, for them intersubjectivity is merely an effect of subjectivity.

Taking that alternative seriously, Habermas contends, would not mean the idealist resurrection of a pure, transcendental reason outside of the messy realities of everyday life, ideal and real speech communities *always* remain intertwined, some noise *always* intervenes to interrupt the smooth functioning of the communicative process. Nor would his alternative signify the restoration of a comprehensive, absolutist concept of reason correctly rejected as having totalitarian potential by the opponents of Hegel and his praxis philosophy progeny. Instead, it is based on a more modest pluralization of types of rationality, which recognizes that the tradition of Western subject-centered logocentrism should be considered "not as an excess but as a deficit of rationality" (310).<sup>15</sup>

15 Habermas's careful rejection of totalizing concepts of comprehensive reason should put an end to interpretations of his work that claim the opposite. See, for example, Jean-François Lyotard,

It is for this reason that Habermas contends that contemporary social pathologies cannot be reduced to any one master contradiction, like class conflict, whose resolution would result in a new normative totality. Instead, the real areas of conflict exist at the boundaries between what he calls social systems with their steering mechanisms (money, the market, bureaucratic coordination, and so on) and the — at least in part — communicatively rationalized life-world (which might produce a full-fledged “public sphere” or remain on the “private” level of voluntary associations, professional organizations, and so on). Systems theorists like Niklas Luhmann, an old interlocutor to whom Habermas devotes the final chapter of *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, thus go astray when they factor out the latter realm entirely and embrace a methodological antihumanism. In so doing, they merely reverse the mistake praxis philosophers (or Marxist Humanists as they are also known) commit when they seek a utopian dedifferentiation of system and life-world through the resurrection of an undivided macro-subject. Instead, it is really the never-ending negotiation between the differentiated realms of the modern world, and between those realms and the life-world out of which they arise, that should be understood as the arena of whatever emancipatory (but never fully redemptive) practice may be granted to us.

## II

Such, in inevitably truncated and schematic form, is the general direction of Habermas’s grand narrative of the discourse(s) of modernity. Although it does not quite conclude in Hegelian fashion with the triumphant assumption that his own universal pragmatics is the culmination of the story, it rivals Hegel’s attempt to provide a magisterial overview from a vantage point paradoxically *within* the scene it surveys. Like any such strong reading, it is bound to raise many questions about the justice of its individual interpretations, especially when the figures involved are so notoriously difficult to summarize. Inevitably, Heideggerians will question the rigor of Habermas’s grasp of their hero’s ideas, deconstructionists will bridle at his attempted synopsis of their leader’s unparaphrasable thought, Foucaultians will balk at his failure to acknowledge that somewhere in his corpus Foucault took back half the arguments Habermas attributes to him, and so on. But whatever the merits of these objections, no one can fail to be impressed by the extraordinary effort Habermas has made to read, assimilate, and render coherent a vast body of material so foreign to his own intellectual inclinations. In very few cases can it be said that his poststructuralist critics have accorded him the same sustained consideration.

Of the many possible ripostes that will doubtless be made against Habermas’s reading of the dominant discourse of modernity after its Nietzschean turn, perhaps the most vigorous will concern his contention that it is marked by a hyper-

---

*The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, transl. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, foreword by Fredric Jameson (Minneapolis, 1984), 72.

trophy of the aesthetic.<sup>16</sup> For precisely what constitutes “the aesthetic” is now a bone of a very vigorous contention. As a result, its relation to the hegemonic and counterdiscourses of modernity is by no means self-evident. Thus, for example, one of the deconstructionists’ favorite targets is what Paul de Man liked to call the “aesthetic ideology.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy have criticized the “literary absolute” they see bequeathed to the modern world by German Romanticism’s aesthetic theories.<sup>18</sup> And conversely, a recent commentator on Habermas, David Ingram, has contended that it is precisely to aesthetic rationality that Habermas himself looks to mediate (but not sublate) the differentiated spheres of the modern world.<sup>19</sup>

To make sense of this jumble of claims, it is necessary to specify how the term “aesthetic” is being used in each case. Although a review essay does not provide sufficient space to accomplish such a task, let me attempt a schematic beginning. First, the deconstructionist critique of art as an ideology is directed at several time-honored assumptions concerning aesthetic value. In *The Truth in Painting*,<sup>20</sup> a work Habermas does not cite, Derrida seeks to undermine the traditional belief in the integrity of the work of art, variously expressed in organic, idealist, and formalist notions of self-referentiality and self-sufficiency. Playing with the uncertain distinction between the *ergon* (work) and *parergon* (its frame), he argues that each can be shown to be the necessary and inevitable supplement of the other. As a result, the boundary between artwork and its non-aesthetic context, between internal and external space, cannot hold. Reading Kant’s third Critique against the grain, he claims that it calls into question what it is often assumed to support: the notion of aesthetic closure based on autotelic purposiveness without purpose. Insofar as the institution of art is based on this false sense of the integrity and self-sufficiency of the individual work, it too cannot be seen as an autonomous realm unsullied by cognitive, ethical, or other claims. Art for art’s sake is thus a variant of what can plausibly be called an “aesthetic ideology.”

It was Schiller perhaps more than Kant who was responsible for the misleading hypertrophy of the aesthetic, according to de Man.<sup>21</sup> What makes it particularly dangerous as an ideology, he suggests, is its easy translation into a political pro-

16 It should be acknowledged that he is by no means the first to stress the aesthetic in this way. See, for example, Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley, 1985). He uses the word “to refer not to the condition of being enclosed within the limited territory of the aesthetic, but rather to an attempt to expand the aesthetic to embrace the whole of reality” (3). Habermas’s use is similar.

17 The title of a forthcoming collection of his essays to be published by the University of Minnesota Press.

18 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, transl. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany, NY, 1988).

19 David Ingram, *Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason* (New Haven, 1987).

20 Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, transl. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago 1987).

21 See de Man’s short discussion of Schiller in his “Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist’s *Über das Marionettentheater*,” in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York, 1984) and his lecture “Schiller and Kant,” to be published in *The Aesthetic Ideology*.

gram, that of the aesthetic state, which would transform life into an organic work of art. Thus, in his essay on Kleist's *Marionettentheater*, a work which has often been read as a model of a Schillerian aesthetic utopia,<sup>22</sup> he darkly warns that "the point is not that the dance fails and that Schiller's idyllic description of a graceful but confined freedom is aberrant. Aesthetic education by no means fails, it succeeds all too well, to the point of hiding the violence it makes possible."<sup>23</sup> Raising the stakes even higher, he concludes his lecture on "Kant and Schiller" with an ominous quotation from Joseph Goebbels' novel *Michael*, which he claims is a plausible "misreading" of Schiller, not unlike the latter's of Kant.<sup>24</sup>

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy are no less suspicious of the current apotheosis of "literature," which they trace back to the aesthetic theories of the Jena Romantics. Criticizing the Romantic belief in art as surrogate religion, the fragment as anticipation of organic wholeness, the artist as self-producing genius, and the critic as totalizer of the work, they damn "the literary absolute" as an expression of what they call "eidaesthetics" which "gathers, concentrates, and brings to a climax the metaphysics of the *Idea*, of the *Idea's* self-knowledge in its auto-manifestation."<sup>25</sup> Only what they call "romantic equivocity," the failure to realize the dream of the completed literary work, undercuts this "hyperbolic" self-aggrandizement.

It is because of this deconstructionist hostility to the aesthetic ideology of wholeness, self-sufficiency, formal closure, and so forth that the poststructuralist literary critic David Carroll entitles his recent book on Foucault, Lyotard, and Derrida *Paraesthetics*.<sup>26</sup> The term, he explains, means that rather than privileging art over philosophy, rhetoric over logic, self-referentiality over reference to the "real world," these thinkers play one term off against the other in an unending confrontation without harmonic reconciliation. "Today," he writes, "it seems to me just as urgent to say, and in a way that is anything but anti-Nietzschean, that there is just as great a danger of our perishing of art as of truth, and that it is this double danger that confronts critical theory and art after Nietzsche."<sup>27</sup> In short, art for art's sake (the total separation of art from "life") is as problematic as life subsumed totally under the category of art (Schiller's aesthetic state), what is needed instead is a creative exchange between art and politics, art and theory, art and ethics, and so on.

In the light of this paraesthetic critique of the "aesthetic ideology," it may seem problematic to claim, as we have seen Habermas do, that the dominant discourse

22 See, for example, M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York, 1971), 221.

23 De Man, "Aesthetic Formalization in Kleist," 289.

24 For another critical discussion of the political implications of Schiller informed by deconstructionist assumptions, see David Lloyd, "Arnold, Ferguson, Schiller: Aesthetic Culture and the Politics of Aesthetics," *Cultural Critique* 2 (Winter, 1985-1986), 137-169.

25 Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 53.

26 David Carroll, *Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida* (New York, 1987).

27 *Ibid.*, 11.

of modernity since the Nietzschean turn gives primacy to the poetic, world-disclosing function of language and thus wrongly elevates one of the differentiated spheres of modernity, the aesthetic, to a privileged position. If, however we attribute another sense to the "aesthetic" than that expressed in the ideology decried by deconstruction, then perhaps Habermas's claim is less implausible. Here, it may be more useful to look not so much at Schiller as the founding father (although, as we will see shortly, Habermas reads him in a manner different from de Man) as at another figure from the great age of German Idealism, Schelling. Schelling, to be sure, is often remembered as a philosopher of identity who challenged Fichte's subjectivist version of that philosophy in favor of an objectivist alternative, based on a kind of naturalist pantheism. But he was also the author of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), in which he claimed that aesthetic intuition and the development of a new collective mythology was the answer to the diremptions of modernity.

Habermas includes a brief discussion of Schelling in his chapter on Nietzsche in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. He notes that although Romantics like Friedrich Schlegel discarded the residual philosophical apparatus in Schelling, in his work too, "Reason could no longer take possession of itself in its own medium of self-reflection, it could only rediscover itself in the prior medium of art" (90). The full implications of this shift for the post-Nietzschean discourse of modernity are drawn by Habermas's supporter Peter Dews in his suggestive discussion of Derrida and German Idealism.<sup>28</sup> According to Dews, Schelling's resistance to subjective idealism meant a hostility to privileging either end of the polar opposition subject/object. Instead, he sought a more fundamental identity underlying them, but an identity that could only be construed as perpetually absent. Derrida, for all his distaste of identity theory, reproduces Schelling's solution.

for, in Derrida's work, *différance* cannot be defined through its oppositional relation to identity, since it is considered to be the "nonoriginary origin" of presence and identity, and as such cannot be *dependent* upon them for its determination. But, if *différance* does not stand in opposition to presence and identity, then neither can it differ from them. However, if it were to be maintained that *différance* differs from identity then by this very token it can *not* differ absolutely, since all determinate differences are internal to *différance*. Absolute difference, in other words, which is what Derrida must understand by a *différance* which is the "possibility of conceptuality," and thus of determination, necessarily collapses into absolute identity.<sup>29</sup>

If Dews is correct, then Habermas's charge of aestheticism may be valid after all. For although the post-Nietzschean discourse of modernity may not be aesthetic in the Schillerian sense of an ideology of beautiful form as the model for a holistic way of life, its weakness for what might be called the ecstatic dedifferentiation of boundaries as an antidote to diremption—a telos of most poststructuralist thought, which is perhaps most explicit in Bataille's sacred community

28 Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, 19f.

29 *Ibid.*, 26–27.

of expenditure—suggests that it might in another one. Rather than an aesthetic of the beautiful, it supports what might be called a paraesthetic of the sublime

Habermas has, in fact, been accused by Lyotard of supporting the beautiful over the sublime, which he sees as a mark of Habermas's modernism rather than postmodernism.<sup>30</sup> Another way of expressing this charge is to claim that Habermas, despite his hostility to the totalizing pretensions of the aesthetic, nonetheless is himself hostage to a harmonizing notion of art, which allows him to posit it as a way to overcome the diremptions of modernity. In Lyotard's words, "what Habermas requires from the arts and the experiences they provide is, in short, to bridge the gap between cognitive, ethical and political discourses, thus opening a way to a unity of experience."<sup>31</sup> In short, Habermas is an example of the "aesthetic ideology" poststructuralism so dislikes.

The plausibility of such an accusation cannot be decided without a sustained examination of Habermas's scattered writings on aesthetic issues, a task I have attempted elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> Rather than cover the same ground now, I want only to explore what *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* adds to our understanding of his position. The answer lies in Habermas's treatment of Schiller, which is very different from de Man's. In an extended excursus on the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind*, Habermas reads Schiller's aesthetic utopia as far less totalizing than Schelling's (or Hegel's philosophical alternative). Whereas they sought absolute identity, he more modestly held onto the Kantian notion of judgment which retained its links to the political idea of common sense, a form of communicative rationality. Schiller's aesthetic version of the counterdiscourse of modernity thus meant that he is wrongly understood as an anticipator of those who want to collapse life and art (producing either the fascist nightmare of Goebbels, which de Man sees lurking in Schiller's "misreading" of Kant, or its leftist counterpart). For Habermas, Schiller's aesthetic utopia is "not aimed at an aestheticization of living conditions, but at revolutionizing the conditions of mutual understanding. Over against the dissolution of art into life—which the Surrealists later programatically called for, and the Dadaists and their descendants tried provocatively to achieve—Schiller clings to the autonomy of pure appearance" (49). Because aesthetic appearance is understood as such, it does not hide the violence de Man darkly warned was contained in the "aesthetic ideology": "For Schiller an aestheticization of the life-world is legitimate only in the sense that art operates as a catalyst, as a form of communication, as a medium within which separated moments are rejoined into an uncoerced totality" (50).<sup>33</sup>

30 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 79

31 *Ibid.*, 72

32 Martin Jay, "Habermas and Modernism," in *Habermas and Modernity*, ed. Richard J. Bernstein (Cambridge, Mass., 1985) with Habermas's reply as "Questions and Counterquestions," 199–203. See also my subsequent essay "Habermas and Postmodernism," in Martin Jay, *Fin-de-siècle Socialism and Other Essays* (New York, 1988).

33 Here Habermas's language does appear to suggest his acceptance of the aesthetic ideology of wholeness and completion. But what should not be forgotten is his emphasis on the perpetually



Whether or not Habermas's benign version of Schiller is more persuasive than de Man's sinister alternative is not for us to decide now. What is more crucial to note is its function in the development of his own argument. For if aesthetic experience is not to be understood monologically in terms of creating or appreciating an organic unity, but at least partly in terms of an intersubjectively adjudicated judgment about the work, then art can serve neither as the surrogate of a subject-centered, comprehensive rationality (which is one way to interpret the beautiful) nor as its "other" (which is closer to the sublime). Instead, it can function as the medium through which a welter of hitherto unavailable human impulses, desires, anxieties, hopes, enter into the public realm, where they can be discursively analyzed.<sup>34</sup> This is what Habermas means when he contends that the decentering and unbounding of subjectivity in aesthetic experience

indicates an increased sensitivity to what remains unassimilated in the interpretative achievements of pragmatic, epistemic and moral mastery of the demands and challenges of everyday situations, it effects an openness to the expurgated elements of the unconscious, the fantastic and the mad, the material and the bodily—thus to everything in our speechless contact with reality which is so fleeting, so contingent, so immediate, so individualized simultaneously so far and so near that it escapes our normal categorical grasp.<sup>35</sup>

The specifically modern experience of art expresses, moreover, the very tension that Habermas sees characteristic of the dialectic of enlightenment. For we can now recognize that works of art are both contextually grounded—emerging in a specific culture and received differently in new contexts—and somehow able to transcend their origins and moments of reception, thus resonating aesthetically for many peoples and in many eras. It is a special achievement of modern aesthetic rationalization, we might say, to accept both aspects of art without trying to force them into a unified whole. The unsublatable dialectic of primitive art

---

counterfactual status of the totalization, which paradoxically brings him close to the appreciation of "romantic equivocality" we have noted in Lacoue Labarthe and Nancy.

34 In a thoughtful essay on Habermas's understanding of literature "Communicative Competence and Normative Force," *New German Critique* 35 (Spring/Summer 1985), Jonathan Culler asks "But if literature is indeed communicative action, it is not evident that literary discourse entails the inevitable presuppositions Habermas ascribes to this mode. Must the reader of literature necessarily presume that the speaker has the intention of communicating a true proposition or propositional content whose existential presuppositions are satisfied? Is the reader in fact compelled to assume that the speaker must want to express his intentions truthfully so that the hearer can believe [his] utterance and trust him? Do we necessarily presume a speaker—or is not this presumption a move in a particular set of language games?" (138). Culler is surely right to pose these questions about literature (or any other art genre), but they are less compelling when put to literary *critical* discourse. Here it makes sense to introduce communicative rationality standards, which is why Habermas can talk of aesthetic rationalization in terms of the ongoing tradition of judging art. Moreover, if we then take seriously the deconstructionist injunction to blur the boundary between literature and literary criticism, but reverse the implication its devotees usually draw from it (that theoretical language is always rhetorical and therefore never transparent) we can see that what we call "literature" may well contain a moment of communicative rationality itself. It is to be sure, never reducible to just that, which is why Habermas is anxious to maintain the genre distinction that deconstruction seems to want to efface, *pace* David Carroll, largely in favor of its literary pole.

35 Habermas, "Questions and Counterquestions," 201.

in modernist discourse is an excellent example, so James Clifford has recently shown.<sup>36</sup> The “primitive” work came to be seen simultaneously as an artifact in a larger cultural whole, for which it could serve as a synecdochal representation, and as an example of pure form, which transcends its functional origins and achieves transhistorical aesthetic status. Although there is often a struggle to conceptualize the work in one or the other of these two modes, it is precisely by accepting the creative tension between them that we achieve a new level of understanding, an example of what Habermas calls the “learning process” of modernity.

Although much more could be said about the implications of the controversy over aesthetics, let me finish by making one final point. If, as noted above, “our” situation is marked by an unresolvable tension between acknowledging our immanence in our specific context and our irradicably internalized imperative to transcend its limitations, then it is misleading to reduce the aesthetic discourse of modernity to the beautiful and counterpose it to a postmodern sublime. It is even less correct to read Habermas as a transcendental narcissist yearning for a utopia of perfect communicative transparency without the impediments of rhetoric, materiality, and so on. Instead, as *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* clearly indicates, he sees us living in a world of enabling as well as disabling diremptions, of differentiations, social as well as cultural, that ought not to be undone either in the name of a discredited subject-centered rationality or in that of its inverse, the ecstatic community of subjectless heterogeneity and infinite *différance*. For as Habermas brilliantly demonstrates, if the former can be the stimulus to a coercively totalizing politics, the latter is the subtle complement of the systems-theoretical imperatives which seem to govern our world of uncontrolled industrial development, military expansion, and technological domination. “Modern Europe,” he concludes

has created the spiritual presuppositions and the material foundations for a world in which this mentality has taken the place of reason. That is the real heart of the critique of reason since Nietzsche. Who else but Europe could draw from *its own* traditions the insight, the energy, the courage of vision — everything that would be necessary to strip from the (no longer metaphysical, but metabiological) premises of a blind compulsion to system maintenance and system expansion their power to shape our mentality (367).

For those critics of Habermas’s alleged Eurocentrism, such passages will seem like a confirmation of all their worst nightmares. And indeed, there may well be reason to wonder why *only* the West has the traditions to remedy the problem. But if we consider Habermas’s appeal as a call to “us” to remain within the dialectic of enlightenment and not seek answers outside it, either in temporal terms (postmodernism) or in spatial terms (the non-West), then his apparent Eurocentrism may seem less offensive.

Ironically, what is so often criticized in Habermas is his universalizing impulse, which is seen as characteristic of European cultural imperialism. This creates

<sup>36</sup> James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass. 1988), chapter 9.

the paradoxical demand that Habermas should neither reflect his European roots, nor try to be universal, which amounts to saying that he should decontextualize himself and assume the impossible position of his concrete "other." If, however, we recognize that when Habermas talks of Europe's own traditions, he non-chauvinistically means *both* its transcendentalizing and its immanentizing impulses, *both* its communicative rationalist traditions and its subject-centered rationality, *both* its differentiated spheres of exoteric expertise and its life-world of exoteric interaction, then the full complexity of his seemingly provincial appeal can be appreciated. Rather than reading his position as an arrogant expression of Western superiority, it may be better to see it as a call to other cultures to reflect on their own indigenous versions of the dialectic whose narrative he so powerfully reconstructs in his own backyard. For the hand that inflicts the wound must indeed be the hand that heals it.

MARGIN JAY

*University of California,  
Berkeley*

FESTIVALS AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION By Mona Ozouf Translated by Alan Sheridan Cambridge and London Harvard University Press, 1988 Pp xviii, 378

I

Mona Ozouf's historical analysis of the ritual celebrations of the French Revolution is a book abounding in data and reflection. The data are documents on the establishment and management of the *fêtes* (the French *fête* can be translated by "feastday," a special celebration day on the Catholic liturgical calendar, or "festival," which has a more secular connotation), and the secondary historical literature, from Michelet to the present day. Ozouf's point of departure is sociological and psychological theory, a few ideas out of Durkheim and Freud, but she quickly settles into widely varying analyses of the meaning of individual festivals and of festival in the abstract. Her ultimate goal is to account for the "transfer of sacrality" from the religious feastdays of the Old Regime to the new festivals, from the religion of the prerevolutionary past to the biological, social, and civic life of the revolutionary government—all of which is a history-of-religions problem.

The first five chapters of the book are an inquiry into the history of the festivals as they were put together by their organizers and subsequently interpreted. Then Ozouf signals a change with the last sentence of chapter five: "From now on let us speak not [of] the festivals but of the festival of the French Revolution" (125). We are expected to enter the realm of theories and metatheory in the remaining chapters, which deal with the themes of "Space," "Time," "Pedagogy," "Popular Life," and, of course, "Transfer of Sacrality." This is a division more by emphasis and author's intention than in fact, because the first section of the