
Deconstruction's Delirium

ETHICS IN ERRANT

By its very tone, the mixing of voices, genres, and codes, and the breakdown [le détraquement] of destinations, apocalyptic discourse can also dismantle the dominant contract or condordat. It is a challenge to the established admissibility of messages and to the enforcement or the maintenance of order [la police] of the destination, in short to the postal regulations [la police postale] or to the monopoly of the posts. Conversely, we could even say that every discourse or every tonal disorder, everything that untunes and becomes inadmissible in general collocation, everything that is no longer identifiable starting from established codes, from both sides of one front, will necessarily pass for or be considered mystagogic, obscurantistic, and apocalyptic. It will be made to pass for such.

Derrida, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy"

Jacques Derrida's "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted In Philosophy" was presented at the end of the 1980 Cerisy-la-Salle conference, which took as its beginning, its point of departure, his work on the end(s) of man: "*Les fins de l'homme: à partir du travail de Jacques Derrida.*"¹ In the paper, Derrida speaks "of (with) an apocalyptic tone in philosophy" (1982b, 63). He speaks of eschatological foretellings of the end of

this or that: of the subject, of consciousness, of history, of philosophy, of the West, of literature, of psychoanalysis, of painting, of phallogocentrism, of religion, of morals, of the earth. He speaks, then, of the corpses that the Derrida of postmodernism has been made to inherit, deconstruction having been characterized, especially in North America, as a radically apocalyptic gesture, “the absolute revelation of language as the unsayable (*as language for which there is nothing to reveal*)” (Spanos 1987, 284). It is in the name of ethics, and of no less than global survival, that philosophers have called for an end to deconstruction, its necessary death. Deconstruction, says Richard Kearney, “must be compelled to recognize *ethical limits*”:

Deconstruction too has its limits and must be made to acknowledge them . . . we must insist on the possibility, in the wake of deconstruction, of affirming some notion of a properly *human* imagination . . . we cannot shrink from such a task of reinterpretation. For to do so is to risk being submerged in a corrosive rhetoric of apocalyptic pessimism, a cultural nihilism which not only encourages feelings of paralysis and impotence but also points, in the longer term, to the possible demise of humanity itself. (1987, 42)

The wake of deconstruction (“The watch [*La veillée*] over the death or the end of philosophy, the vigil [*la veille*] by the corpse of philosophy” [1982b, 77–78]), the philosopher’s fear of impotence (“there are those who adorn themselves with this new tone in philosophy, who emasculate and make a corpse of, empty [*cadavérisent*] reason” [76]): these are not just a recent (hi)story, or so Derrida suggests in his Cerisy presentation. Derrida’s paper is his reading of a dated, yet contemporary, apocalyptic text, Immanuel Kant’s “Of an Overlordly Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy” (*Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie* (1796); French translation L. Guillermit (1975), *D’un ton grand seigneur adopté naguère en philosophie*),² in which Kant attacks “mystagogues” (*mystagogen*), that is, poets, pietists, mystics, visionaries, all representatives of the “old” metaphysics, whose confusion of the voice of the oracle with the voice of moral reason threatens philosophy’s death.³ Then as now, such pronouncements of the end are, for Derrida, indicative of certain ends—“symptomatic of certain political and institutional interests” (1984a, 124)—which call for deconstruction. And such deconstruction of ends seems to be Derrida’s end in “Of an Apocalyptic Tone,” where he concerns

himself not so much with the content as with the *timbre* of an eschatological pitch (F *timbre*: the sonorous quality of a musical instrument or voice; earlier, a kind of bell, a ball struck by a hammer [used in OF to render the L *tympanum*]; also in OF, a crest impressed on a legal document, whence to a postmark, a stamp). Where do they want to come to, he asks, and to what end, those who declare the imminence of the end of this or that? The question can be phrased as one of destiny (F *destin*, *destinée*: destiny, fate, end) or dispatch (F *envoi*: sending [thing sent]; dispatch, missive, letter; homonymous with *en voix*: in tone, in voice), of who is sending the textual *envoi* and to what destination (F *destination*: destination, intention, object, end) or what address (F *destinataire*: addressee, receiver, recipient; consignee, payee). To deconstruct a text, for Derrida, is to ask of it these questions of the *post*: “Who is writing? To whom? And to send, to destine, to dispatch what? To what address?” (1987b, 5).⁴

On the one hand, I will suggest in what follows that Derrida's deconstructive reading of “Of an Overlordly Tone” attempts the unveiling (G *apokalupsis*: uncovering, disclosure) of a series of conceptual oppositions through which Kant positions a rational, masculine person-subject as both the sender and receiver of ethics, thus as the limit (closure) of the philosophical text. In this first gesture, *apokalupto* is especially “to uncover the ear” of Kant's moral philosophy, “the distinct, differentiated, articulated organ that produces the effect of proximity, of absolute properness” (“Tympan” in 1982a, xvii), and that establishes moral philosophy as phonocentric. Derrida's reading does not end there, however, as an accomplished unmasking or dismantling (“destruction”) of this philosophy's binary hierarchical scheme, for on the other hand, deconstruction's apocalypse also reveals that Kant's text is folded inside-out “I would say like a glove” (1982b, 76). In a second gesture, simultaneous with the first, Derrida's reading re-marks this site of the fold, opening “Of an Overlordly Tone” to its difference from itself, finding inside the essay the very elements of mystagogy that Kant banishes to the outside of his text. This interfolded structure confounds what we might have thought were the (internal and external) boundaries of Kant's essay, and it lays bare the scene of writing that rational philosophy so resolutely conceals. The self-identity of addressor and addressee is no longer certain, for through this second gesture of deconstruction, Kant's text becomes apocalyptic (*apocalypse*: spurious and enigmatic literature, revealing mysteries of visions and dreams; composite; sensuous; pseudonymous). Deconstruction's responsibility, Derrida suggests, is to this apocalyptic autograph.

Apocalypse

Kant's "Of an Overlordly Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy" is a twenty-page lampoon which indicts mystagogues for changing or rupturing philosophy's uniform pitch. Mystagogues proffer supernatural or intuitive knowledge as a supplement or surrogate of rational faith, Kant claims, and this failure to distinguish between the voice of moral reason and the voice of the oracle occasions what he terms a *Verstimmung* (G *Verstimmung*: discord, disorder, upset; *Verstimmen*: to put out of tune), an untuning of philosophy. Derrida suggests that an implicit homogeneous/heterogeneous binary informs this condemnation of mystagogues who pose as philosophers. "Isn't the dream or the ideal of philosophic discourse, of philosophical address [*allocution*], and of the writing supposed to represent that address, isn't it to make the tonal difference inaudible—and with it a whole desire, affect, or scene that works (over) the concept as contraband?," Derrida asks. "Through what is called neutrality of tone, philosophical discourse must also guarantee the neutrality or at least the imperturbable serenity that should accompany the relation to the true and the universal" (1982b, 66). For Kant, the mystagogic tone marks a deviation from the norm of philosophical address, Derrida says: "the tonal difference does not pass for the essentially philosophic" (67).

But Kant is not concerned in his essay with the pure phenomenon of tonality, Derrida suggests, so much as with a manner or mannerism of taking on airs, "the grand air of those pretentious people who elevate their voice" (70) or who "place themselves out of the common" (69), the presumption of the mystagogic impostors. Kant does not "indict the pitch or loftiness of the overlordly tone when it is just, natural, or legitimate" (70), then, but only "takes aim at raising the tone when an upstart [*parvenu*] authorizes himself in this by giving himself airs and by erecting usurped signs of social membership" (70). His homogeneous/heterogeneous binary functions as a high/low dichotomy, and as with every such dichotomy, "we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand" (1981b, 41). The mystagogues must be excluded from philosophy's site.

Derrida's reading of Kant's "Of an Overlordly Tone" uncovers a whole series of binary oppositional pairs that work this way to privilege philosophy as an order of homogeneity and meaning and to banish "mystagogy" to philosophy's outside. Central among these binaries is the hierarchy philosophy/poetry: "Kant does not doubt this: the new preach-

ers need to pervert philosophy into poetry in order to give themselves grand airs, to occupy through simulacrum and mimicry the place of the great, to usurp thus a power of symbolic essence" (1982b, 77). For Kant, says Derrida, the mystagogues "replace the evidences and proofs with "'analogies,'" "'versimilitudes'" ("Analogien, Wahrscheinlichkeiten"). . . . These are their words. Kant cites them and calls us to witness: you see, they are not true philosophers; they resort to poetic schemas" (75). It is the contamination of philosophical reason that Kant so vociferously resists, railing against the use of the figure "emasculatation of reason" in Schlosser's 1795 translation into German of the *Letters* of Plato, ruling the figure inadmissible because, as Derrida says, "it takes the place of proof" (76), and insisting throughout "Of an Overlordly Tone" on the absolute distinction "between metaphor and concept, literary mystagogy and true philosophy" (76).

What is put at risk by the mystagogue's confusion of *logos* and *mythos* is the boundary between intelligibility and sense. Here Derrida points to "the extreme subtlety" of Kant's objection to the mystagogues: "they believe they know what is solely thinkable and reach through feeling alone the universal laws of practical reason" (72). Kant knows, however, that the voice of practical reason has nothing to do with vision or touch, that, as Derrida writes:

it describes nothing; it says nothing of the describable [*de descriptible*]; it dictates, prescribes, orders. Kant also names it in Latin: *dictamen rationis*. . . . [I]t resounds in every man, for every man has in him the idea of duty . . . orders him to sacrifice his drives, to resist seductions, to forego his desires. And the voice promises me nothing in return; it assures me of no compensation. It is sublime in this; it orders, mandates, demands, commands without giving anything in exchange. . . . That is the *true* mystery—Kant also calls it *Geheimnis* . . . but it is no longer the false mystery of the mystagogues. It is the mystery at once domestic, intimate, and transcendent, the *Geheimnis* of practical reason, the sublimity of moral law and moral voice. The mystagogues fail to recognize that *Geheimnis*; they confuse it with a mystery of vision and contact, whereas moral law never gives itself to be seen or touched. (72–73)

Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology* (12) that logocentrism assumes an "absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning." And in Kant's account of

the moral law as a voice that resounds in every man, that "strikes in him in a rather percussive and repercussive way" (1982b, 72), and that is "more auditory, more audible than the mystagogic oracle still contaminated with feeling, illumination, or intuitive vision, contact and mystical tact ('ein . . . mystischer Takt,' Kant says)" (73), Derrida finds this same essential link to the *phone*. For Kant, Derrida says, the *Geheimnis* of moral reason is "more in tune with the essence of the voice that hears/understands itself but neither touches nor sees itself" (73) than is the false mystery of the mystagogues, and "in its very transcendence the moral voice is nearer, and thus more auto-affective, more autonomous" (73) than is the mystagogic oracle.⁵ Kant's moral law passes through the voice: gives itself to be heard from within, then speaks through the mouth of the moral philosopher. Mouth to ear, the moral law derives from and is thought to depend on "full presence or full speech," to use Derrida's words from "Economimesis" (18). In that essay, he suggests that Kant's *Anthropology* privileges hearing among the five senses, and that the third *Critique* discovers in hearing a sort of *universal tongue*: "Between the concept and the system of hearing-oneself-speak, between the intelligible and speech, the link is privileged. One must use the term hearing-oneself-speak [*le s'entendre-parler*] because this structure is auto-affective; in it the mouth and the ear cannot be dissociated" (19).

The mystagogues, then, might be likened to the deaf of Kant's *Anthropology*, for they lack access to the *logos* itself, and like the deaf who resort to lip reading or mechanical prosthesis, they cannot dissociate intelligibility from sense.⁶ Hence, the delirium that results from the mystagogue's overlordly tone. Derrida points out that "*Verstimmen*, which Guillermit translates not without reason by *délirer*, to be delirious, is first of all to put out of tune [*désaccorder*], when we speak of a stringed instrument [*instrument à cordes*], or yet, for example, a voice. This is currently said of a piano. Less strictly this signifies to derange, to put out of order, to jumble" (1982b, 72). And the *Verstimmung* of which Kant speaks, he says, is indeed a matter of *disorder*—of philosophy's history, filiation, origin. For the instant the mystagogues come on the scene, "the name philosophy loses its signification or its original reference" (68), an event which Kant seems to locate near the beginning of philosophy, if not in the figure of its first father. Kant is given a "devilish job" with Plato, Derrida observes, for although his authentic writings make him the father of rational philosophy, his *Letters*, just translated into German by Schlosser, make him the father of delirium, and Kant thus faces the difficulty of "distinguishing between the good Plato

and the bad Plato, the true and the false, his authentic writings and his more or less reliable or apocryphal ones" (73). Kant must divide Plato so that mystagogy does not usurp philosophy's original grounding in rational evidences and proofs.

Not only the rational foundation of philosophy, however, but also its fundamental principle of social equality is at issue for Kant in this division of the good Plato from the bad Plato. What is intolerable to Kant in the letter-writer Plato, Derrida suggests, "is aristocratic esotericism—Kant cites that Letter recommending not divulging secrets to the crowd—a cryptophilness added to a mystical interpretation of mathematics. . . . And this mathematizing mysticism, this idolatry of figures and numbers always goes hand in hand with phenomena of sect, cryptopolitics, indeed superstitious theophany that Kant opposes to rational theology" (74). As with the bad Plato, so with the mystagogues, their esoteric visions and their penchant for private cults. Derrida: "The mystagogues claim to possess as it were in private the privilege of a mysterious secret. . . . They never transmit the secret to others in the current language, only by initiation or inspiration. The mystagogue is *philosophus per initiationem* or *per inspirationem*" (69). Mystagogy implies secrecy, and so threatens philosophy's coveted principle of the equality of rational selves: "The tone leaps and is raised higher when the voice of the oracle takes you aside, speaks to you in a private code, and whispers secrets to you in uncovering your ear for you, jumbling, covering, or parasitizing the voice of reason that speaks equally in each and maintains the same language for all" (72).

For all of these reasons among others, Kant must separate philosophy from mystagogy. "Philosophy has always insisted upon this: thinking its other. Its other: that which limits it, and from which it derives its essence, its definition, its production" (Derrida 1982a, x). And if, as Derrida says, the vehicle by which this separation has always been effected is the contract or concordat which philosophy offers to its outside ("if it has constituted itself according to this purposive *entente* with its outside, if it has always intended to hear itself speak, in the same language, of itself and of something else" [xii]), we should not be surprised that Kant's "Of an Overlordly Tone" concludes by proposing a contract or concordat with the mystagogues. For Derrida, the terms of this contract are utterly important, more important "than the whole combinative strategy" (1982b, 78) between the two parties. What, according to Kant's contract, "can deeply bind the two adversary parties and procure for

them a neutral ground of reconciliation for yet speaking together about the suitable tone?" (78), he asks. What does the contract propose that the two parties exclude as philosophy's inadmissible *other*? "What is the *inadmissible*?" (78) becomes, for Derrida, the fundamental question to ask of Kant. What is the *inadmissible* of modern moral philosophy? The proposed social contract is the one part of Kant's "Of an Overlordly Tone" which Derrida quotes at length:

But what is the good of all this conflict between two parties that at bottom share the same good intention: to make men wise and honest? It is noise about nothing, a discord founded on a misunderstanding, which calls less for reconciliation than for reciprocal explanation in order to conclude an accord, an accord that makes a still more profound harmony for the future.

The veiled goddess before which we on both sides bend our knees is the moral law in us in its invulnerable majesty. We certainly perceive its voice, and we understand very clearly its commandments. But in hearing it we doubt whether it comes from man and whether it originates from the all-powerfulness of his very own reason, or whether it emanates from some other being, whose nature is unknown to man and who speaks to him through his own proper reason. At bottom we would perhaps do better to exempt ourselves entirely from this research, for it is simply speculative, and what (objectively) devolves upon us to do remains the same, let one find it on one or the other principle. The only difference is that the didactic procedure of leading the moral law in us back to distinct concepts according to a logical method is alone properly *philosophical*, whereas the procedure consisting in personifying this law and in making of the reason that morally commands a veiled Isis (even when we attribute no other properties to it than those the first method discovers in it) is an *esthetic* manner of representing (*eine ästhetische Vorstellungsart*) exactly the same object. It is indeed permitted to rely on this manner, since one has already started by leading the principles back to their pure state, in order to give life to this idea thanks to a sensible, though only analogical, presentation (*Darstellung*), but not without always running some risk of falling into an exalted vision, which is the death of all philosophy. (79–80)

Kant asks the mystagogues "to get rid of the veiled goddess before which they both tend to kneel . . . no longer to personify the moral law or the voice that incarnates it," Derrida writes, "above all not under the 'esthetic,' sensible, and beautiful form of this veiled Isis" (79). Such exclusion "will be the condition for understanding/hearing the moral law itself, the unconditioned, and for understanding/hearing ourselves. In other words, and this is a trenchant motif for thought of the law and the ethical today, Kant calls for placing the law above and beyond, not the person, but personification and the body" (79), the body of (as) woman. Isis* is the *inadmissible* of Kant's moral philosophy, according to a social contract which places the law above the body (*mind/body*), and which represents materiality, the body, as woman (*man/woman*).

Female sexuality, femininity: The name Isis, Greek form of the Egyptian hieroglyph "throne," signifies motherhood, creation of the King. Isis, celebrated goddess of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, gives birth, perhaps once as an independent Mother Goddess (Kant, in the *Critique of Judgement* [179], refers to her as "Mother Nature"). From antiquity, she is called by many names—Astarte, Hera, Selene, Demeter, Aphrodite—suggesting her universal motherhood (Derrida 1982b, 79: "the universal principle of feminity"). Isis, the prototype of woman.

The veil of feminine secrecy: Isis, called "the Mother in Magic," gives birth to mystagogy. In the Graeco-Roman world, her cult takes the form of a mystery religion presided over by priests and involving initiatory rites, festive banquets, the interpretation of dreams, and other cultic rituals which are kept to the rule of secrecy (Kant [1790] 1978, 179: "veil before her face").

Emasculation of the logos: Not all versions of the Isis-Osiris myth portray her as the slayer-castrater of her husband (Derrida 1982b, 79: "murderess of Osiris all of whose pieces she later recovers, except for the phallus"). In Plutarch's account, for instance, Set (Seth) assassinates, then dismembers, his brother Osiris, but even here, there is an emasculation of sorts, since in the absence of Osiris, Isis conceives and gives birth to Horus. Barbara Walker (455), following S. G. F. Brandon and E. O. James, summarizes the Isis-Osiris legend as follows:

Isis swallowed Osiris the savior and brought him back to life. He was reincarnated as the child Horus, or else as the ithyphallic moon-god, Min, or Menu, "He who impregnates his mother." He was annually torn to pieces and reassembled except for his lost penis. Isis made him a new penis of clay, then gave it—and him—new life by invoking her own holy names as life-giver and death-giver: "Behold, I have found thee lying there. Weary is the great one . . . O Osiris, live, stand up thou unfortunate one that liest there! I am Isis. I am Nephthys."

For Kant, then, *Verstimmung* signifies not only the displacement of philosophy's (rational, paternal) origin but also, as Derrida puts it, "the derailment . . . the disorder or the delirium of the destination (*Bestimmung*)" (84), and in calling for the exclusion of Isis, Kant is thus attempting to insure philosophy's proper addressee or end, "the unity of destination, the self-identity of some addressee [*destinataire*] or sender [*destinateur*]" (84). "The tone's pitch is tied to tension," Derrida suggests: "it has a bond to the bond, to the bond's more or less tight tension" (69). The word tone (G *tōnos*, L *tonus*, F *ton*) "first signified the tight ligament [*le ligament tendu*], the cord, rope when it is woven or braided, the cable, the strap," he reminds us, and as such it is "the privileged figure of everything that is subject to stricture" (69), of every taut reference that bonds sender to receiver, sign to thing. "*Tonion* is the ligament as band and surgical bandage" (69), he adds, suggesting that the apocalyptic tone which bands (F *bänder*: to stretch, to bond, to enshroud; also, to get an erection) the corpse of this or that might always proceed from the same (father's) place of emission, might always be postmarked to the same address (F *ton*: tone; also the second person singular masculine possessive adjective). Kant's apocalyptic tone wants "to come or arrive at itself," Derrida concludes, "to seduce in order to lead to itself" (84), to lead back to the person, the philosophical author, as patriarchal subject-origin of moral truth, a subject who constitutes himself, and his philosophy, by means of a separation from, and suppression of, his other as object-outside (*subject/object, self/other, person/nonperson*).

Autography

From a man who offers personal details only grudgingly ("Ah, you want me to tell you things like 'I-was-born-in-El-Biar-in-the-suburbs-of-Algiers-in-a-petit-bourgeois-Jewish-family-which-was-assimilated-but . . .'" [1988a, 74]), this statement: "everything that I write, one quickly sees, is terribly autobiographical" (Finas et al. 1973, 309). Why *terribly* (F *terrible*: dreadful, frightening, awful, catastrophic; exceedingly, excessively, very greatly)? Claude Lévesque asks Derrida this question in the "Roundtable on Autobiography" published in *The Ear of the Other*, suggesting that the adverb in this case signifies excess and extreme, implies that "one has overstepped the mark (of discourse and of knowledge) . . . that there has been a crossing at the limit" (Derrida 1985b, 72). Derrida's reply to Lévesque refers to "one of the scenes of the *double bind* in *Glas*,"

the scene of the signature, "where one loses what one wins and wins what one loses" (77). One of those terribly autobiographical texts, *Glas* disarticulates Derrida's proper name: "By a stroke of his autobiographical D, he would change semination into dis-semination, sowing into scattering. . . . The debris of d-words is scattered all over the pages" (Spivak 1977, 23–24). At work in this play with his name, says Derrida, is the desire to lose it, a desire which cannot be fulfilled, for "[b]y disseminating or losing my own name, I make it more and more intrusive; I occupy the whole site, and as a result my name gains more ground. The more I lose, the more I gain by conceiving my proper name as the common noun, '*derrière le rideau*,' and so on" (1985b, 76–77). The more Derrida inserts his name into the body of the text, the more he *erects* it into a monument, a phallic colossus, but in this process he also loses the identity or ownership of his name, lets it become a part of the text, so that "[t]he erection-tomb falls" (1984c, 56). "The *seing* falls (to the tomb[stone])" (1986a, 2).

As Derrida emphasizes in "Signature Event Context," this *double bind* or *double band* of the signature belongs to the very structure of the proper name, indeed to the structure of every sign which, though it may be intended to re-present, to make present, always entails absence and lack. For instance, "[a] written sign is proffered in the absence of the receiver," he says, meaning not only that "at the moment when I am writing, the receiver may be absent from my field of present perception" but more importantly that "[i]n order for my 'written communication' to retain its function as writing, i.e., its readability, it must remain readable despite the absolute disappearance of any receiver, determined in general" (1988c, 7). Moreover, "[w]hat holds for the receiver holds, also, for the same reasons, for the sender or the producer" (8), whose future absence or death will not, in principle, hinder the readability of the writing, any more than will the loss of the immediate context of the sign's production, "what its alleged author-scriptor consciously intended to say at the moment he wrote it" (9). For writing to be writing, in other words, it must be *apocalyptic*: it cannot be tied to the presence of an identifiable subject who in a given context produced it ("it leaps [*saute*] from one place of emission to the other" (1982b, 87), and it cannot be predestined to such and such a person ("it goes from one destination, one name, and one tone to the other" [87]). The apocalypse, for Derrida, is "the structure of every scene of writing" (87), though this scene may be "dissembled under the desire for light, well hidden (*eukalyptus*, as is said of the tree whose calycine limb remains closed after flowering), well hidden under the avowed desire for revelation" (83). Gayatri Spivak notes:

When a man writes, he is in a structure that needs his absence as its necessary condition (writing is defined as that which can necessarily be read in the writer's absence), and entails his pluralization. . . . Writers resist this troubling necessity and desire to record the living act of a sole self—an auto-bio-graphy. Whatever the argument of a document, the marks and staging of this resistance are its "scene of writing." When a person reads, the scene of writing is usually ignored and the argument is taken as the product of a self with a proper name. Writers and readers are thus accomplices in the ignoring of this scene of writing. The accounts given of texts are informed by this complicity. (Spivak 1984, 19–20)

Derrida's terribly autobiographical texts foreground the apocalypse of writing as drama, or so he indicates in his Cerisy presentation when he says of *Glas*, for instance, that its "columns are constantly shaken by apocalyptic agitations and laughs on the subject of the apocalypse" and that in a certain moment it "mixes the remains of genres and of John, the one of the Gospel, of the Apocalypse, and of Genet" (1982b, 90); and when he refers similarly to *La Carte postale*, "where the allusions increase to the Apocalypse and to its arithmosophy, where everything speculates on the figures and notably seven, the 'written seven,' the angels, 'my angel,' the messengers and the postmen [*facteurs*], prediction, the announcement of the news, the holocaustic 'burning,' and all phenomena of *Verstimmung*, of the changing of tone, of the mixing of genres, of *destinerrance*, if I can say that, or of *clandestination*, so many signs of more or less bastard apocalyptic filiation" (91). Exhibited in these texts is the double bind (*da: fort*) not only of Derrida's signature (like a post card, "neither legible nor illegible, open and radically unintelligible" [1987b, 79]), but also of the signatures of Freud, Lacan, Hegel, Jean Genet, and John of Patmos, signer of the biblical Apocalypse.⁷ What Derrida (1988c, 7) terms the "logic of iterability" (*iter*, f. *Sk itara*: other) bears on every autograph. And it is the point of his "second gesture" of deconstruction to lay bare this iterability in Kant's "Of an Overlordly Tone."

Among other things, then, Derrida's reading of the essay exposes "a spectrography of the tone and of the changing of tone" (1982b, 93) which marks a gap in relation to the philosophic norm which Kant erects. That the essay is a lampoon, for instance, suggests in itself a deviation from philosophy's atonal norm. Even as he faults the mystagogues for departing from philosophy's uniform tone, Kant lampoons his adversaries, his com-

ments "marked with the tone he gives himself . . . with his satiric or polemical verve" (67). Kant "overwhelms with his sarcasm" (67) the mystagogue's mixing and changing of tone, deviating himself from the tonal neutrality, the uniformity and objectivity, that he claims for philosophical address. "Naturally, even when he fights like this, Kant declares that he does not like warfare" Derrida writes (78); even as he "takes aim" (70) at the changing of tone; even as he "fires off his dart" and "multiplies his sarcastic remarks" (75). By his very tone, Kant places himself on both sides of the battle at once, shows that he cannot maintain the philosophical opposition same/different. Wandering over the border philosophy/mystagogy, his tone "constrains the signature desire" (Derrida 1986c, 20), the desire or drive for the mastery of philosophy. ("To deconstruct a text is to disclose how it functions as desire, as a search for presence and fulfilment which is interminably deferred" [1984a, 126].)

Neither can Kant maintain the separation he imposes between concept and poético-metaphorical trope. Derrida plays with numerous instances in Kant's essay where myth parasitizes philosophy, and where metaphor displaces the bond between the name philosophy and its rational referent. For instance, the bond between philosophy and clarity (revelation, the sun) is at issue, Derrida suggests, in Kant's chiding of the mystagogues for saying that we can have only a presentiment, a trace, of the sun, for giving us "only a theatrical sun (*Theatersonne*)," only "a chandelier in sum [*un lustre en somme*]" (1982b, 75). And if the mystagogic *Theatersonne* stands between philosophy and its revelation, so does the veil of Isis, which they would make thin but not raise. "[T]hin to what point" is Kant's question; Derrida observes, "[p]robably not thin enough" (75). Kant does not escape the sun, the veil, nor even the figure "emasculat[i]on of reason," Derrida points out. Kant's indictment of the figure exemplifies what it rejects:

And Kant immediately turns the argument inside out, I would say like a glove: "whereas, nevertheless," he says, "precisely in these *a priori* principles does practical reason find an exact sentiment that it never otherwise had a presentiment of, and indeed rather by the empirical that is falsely attributed to it (this very fact is what makes it improper for a universal legislation) is it emasculated and paralyzed (*entmannt und gelähmt*)." (76)

Derrida's reading foregrounds the alterity of this scene, where images of the veil of Isis, of castration, of the raising of the veil ("To raise the veil

of Isis here is *aufheben* (“‘*da er den Schleier der Isis nicht aufheben kann*’”)” (75)), of the sun, and of apocalyptic unveiling, are carried along “in the same tropic movement” (1982a, 218). An apocalyptic movement, which occasions for Derrida a revelation of sorts: that Kant’s essay marks the catastrophe (G *katastrophe*: an overturning, a sudden turn; a violent change in the order of things; G *tropos*: turn, turning, figure of speech; in Gregorian music, a short cadence at the close of a melody; *tropology*: speaking by tropes; also, a moral discourse, an interpretation of scripture relating to morals; G *strophe*: a repetition; a counter-turn; a musical metre) of philosophy’s “familiar” tone. For “[t]he mystagogues make a scene, that is what interests Kant,” says Derrida. “But at what moment do the mystagogues come on stage and at times go into a trance? At what moment do they begin to create the mysterious?” (68). Kant is unable to locate for philosophy a simple origin uncorrupted by materiality and myth. “The double bind again of filiation” (73): Kant finds only a Plato who is different from himself; the father of philosophy as both mystagogue and *Aufklärer*; the ancient interdependence of literature and philosophy.⁸

The double bind of filiation. The impossibility of origin, of an original plenitude or proximity between *logos* and voice, is the undoing of Kant’s phonocentrism, of the hierarchy he establishes between speech and writing, between intelligibility and sense. “Why did I feel inclined, at this moment of my reading of an overlordly tone, to add this document to the dossier (if I can say that) of *La Carte postale*?,” Derrida asks. “Or

*An autobiographical incident recorded in *The Post Card*: Derrida is in the Bodleian library in Oxford with Jonathan and Cynthia Culler, who lead him to a table where, laid out under glass among hundreds of displayed reproductions, is a post card bearing a duplication of the Matthew Paris painting of Socrates and Plato. Socrates, seated at a desk, appears to be writing; Plato stands behind him. Derrida refers to the post card as “my small library apocalypse” (11). Viewing it, he says, occasions a “revelatory catastrophe” (12). For if, as we have all believed, Socrates did not write, came before Plato who wrote more or less at his diction, then there is between this couple “an order of generations, an irreversible sequence of inheritance” (20). Speech before writing, and with that the entire order of western metaphysics: “Now, my post card, this morning when I am raving about it or delivering it [*quand je la délire ou la délivre*] in the state of jealousy that has always terrified me, my post card naively overturns everything. In any event, it allegorizes the catastrophic unknown of the order. Finally one begins no longer to understand what to come [*venir*], to come before, to come after, to foresee [*prévenir*], to come back [*revenir*] all mean” (21).

yet to arrange it in what is called *dossier* therein, between the word and the thing, the word *dossier* packed with all the backs [*dos*] with which the note and the syllable punctuate the 'Envois' on each page, at Socrates's back and on the back of the postcard, with all the words in *do* and with the back [*dossier*] of the chair, of the partition between Socrates and Plato?" (73). *Kant is writing*. He writes his account of the moral law as a voice uncontaminated by sense, and thus must avail himself of the same sort of mechanical prosthesis that relegates both the deaf and the mystagogues to an otherness outside of philosophy. A necessary connection exists between ethics (voice, reason) and writing ("The one in the other, the one in front of the other, the one after the other, the one behind the other" [1987b, 19]), and as with Plato so with Kant, writing betrays an "essential drift" (1988c, 8).

And as with Kant, so with Derrida, the essential alterity of writing is a matter of the veil. Over against mystagogy's emasculation of the *logos* and its veiling of reason, Kant calls for "philosophy's finally open and unveiled future" (1982b, 78). But his drive for the mastery of philosophy goes unfulfilled, at least in Derrida's reading (translation, citation, iteration) of "Of an Overlordly Tone" which, by listening for tonal deviations, transforms and regenerates the text. The virginal intactness of Kant's *logos/mythos*, intelligible/sensible, male/female, inside/outside boundaries is not preserved, as the father of philosophy gives birth to mystagogy, to an "aleatory errance" (95) which marks the catastrophe of his apocalyptic unveiling. Deconstruction folds mystagogy into philosophy, and so reinscribes the philosopher's autograph as a graphic of the hymen or veil (*hymen* F > G > L > *suere*, to seam, sew > Sk *syman*, ligature, band: membranous fold; goddess of marriage [Demeter-Isis]; veil of the goddess's temple; Calliope: "she of the beautiful voice").

Apostrophe

Why should "ethicists" concern themselves with deconstruction "given the urgency of 'the rest of the world' " (Spivak 1884, 20)?⁹ For by the Enlightenment standards of today's dominant moral philosophy, deconstruction is mystagogy, a postmodern *Verstimmung* which displays in its corpus all the traits of the non-philosophical. That deconstruction inscribes *différance* does not, for one thing, "appear to be a very good tone in philosophy and so marks already a gap in relation to the norm of

philosophical discourse" (1982b, 66). Deconstruction also deviates from the norm of uniformity in that it addresses the non-philosophical, perverts philosophy into poetry, intermixes literary and philosophical texts.¹⁰ But its moral failure ("irresponsibility") is said to be more serious yet, for those who denounce deconstruction "suspect those they call 'deconstructionists' of forming a sect, a brotherhood, an esoteric corporation, or more vulgarly, a clique, a gang, or (I quote) a 'mafia'" (1989a, 18). What is deemed intolerable in Derrida, the sender of post cards, is the same esotericism that Kant detects in the letter-writer Plato, the same cryptopolitics that collapses rationality "into unintelligibility, pseudo-questions, pseudo-arguments, and *mystery-mongering*" and that "turns philosophy into a cult of personality with the 'new' French philosophers as the priest class exclusively entitled to interpret the obscure and oracular utterances" (Howey 1985, 91, italics mine).¹¹ Then as now: "*Mystagogein* is indeed this: to lead, initiate into the mystery; that is the mystagogue's or the initiatory priest's function. This *agogic* function of the leader of men, *il Duce*, the *Führer*, the *leader* places him above the crowd he manipulates through the intermediary of a small number of initiates gathered into a sect with a 'crypted' language, a band, a clique or a small party with its ritualized practices" (1982b, 69).¹²

Derrida's deconstructive reading of Kant's "Of aAn Overlordly Tone" suggests that this either/or dichotomy philosophy/mystagogy belongs to an entire hierarchical, oppositional apparatus which sends out a text as destined to return to its self. As the apocalyptic unveiling of this apocalyptic apparatus, deconstruction may mark a "critical moment" akin to the "Kantian caesura in the time [*temps*, beat, tempo] of philosophy" (1982b, 66). Deconstruction may signal a crisis concerning "the very concept of crisis or of critique" (1992c, 6). *On the one hand*, then, we might ask, as Emmanuel Levinas does, whether Derrida's work cuts "into the development of Western thinking with a line of demarcation similar to that of Kantianism, which separated dogmatic philosophy from critical philosophy" (Levinas 1991, 3). We might ask whether deconstruction indicates that we are "again at the end of a naïveté, of an unsuspected dogmatism which slumbered at the base of that which we took for critical spirit" (3). But deconstruction's end is not the end of ethics or moral philosophy, for *on the other hand*, and as distinct "from a simple progressive demystification in the style of the *Lumières*" (1982b, 90), deconstruction comes on the scene as "an apocalypse without apocalypse, an apocalypse without vision, without truth, without revelation" (94). Its dispatches, as

apocalyptic, are "without message and without destination, without sender or decidable addressee, without last judgment, without any other eschatology than the tone of the 'Come'" (94).

This "Come" is an apostrophe that resounds through several of Derrida's texts.¹³ In "Of an Apocalyptic Tone," the apostrophe cites back to the "Come" which echoes in the Johannine Apocalypse each time the Lamb opens one of the seven seals, again in Chapters 17 and 21, and in a chorus of final repetitions which occur at "the end of ends" (1982b, 92), at the moment of the (double bind of the) signature, when John receives from the angelic messenger the order not to seal his text. The Johannine "Come" does not come from John. For although John is the writer, he is not the author of the biblical Apocalypse. When John speaks, Derrida points out, he speaks by citing another, he speaks by citing Jesus. Or rather, when John writes, he "appears to transcribe what he says by recounting that he cites Jesus the moment Jesus dictates to him to write" (85). John does not write as a determinable sender, that is, but rather as one who responds: "'write, *grapson*.' . . . Write and send, dictates the voice come from behind, in the back of John" (85–86). And even before this narrative scene, there occurs in the Apocalypse what Derrida calls "a kind of title or name tag [*médaille*] come from one knows not where" (86) which indicates that John receives his dictation through the medium of an angelic messenger, thus that the apocalyptic dispatch is bound to yet another voice. With each repetition of "Come," the dispatches and messengers increase so that, as Derrida puts it, there is "an interlacing of voices" in the dictated or addressed writing: "so many sendings, *envois*, so many voices, and this puts so many people on the telephone line" (86–87).

The text called the Apocalypse is also apocalyptic.¹⁴ Derrida takes the Johannine apostrophe, he says, as "an explicit reference" (90) of the apocalyptic structure of language, "that is, of the divisible dispatch [*envoi*] for which there is no self-presentation nor assured destination" (87). For in his reading, the biblical "Come" comes from an other, "as if it [*ça*] began by responding" (92), and so is not an authorial summons. It "does not address itself" (94):

Come from the other already as a response and a citation without past present, "Come" supports no metalinguistic citation. . . . "Come" no more lets itself be stopped and examined [*arraisonner*] by an onto-theo-eschatology than by a logic of the event. . . . "Come" marks in itself, in oneself, neither a desire nor an order, neither a prayer nor a request [*demande*]. . . . That

"Come," I do not know what *it is*. . . . "Come" cannot come from a voice or at least not from a tone signifying "I" or "self," a so-and-so (male or female) in my "determination." . . . It is a drift [*une dérive*] underivable from the identity of a determination. "Come" is *only* derivable, absolutely derivable, but only from the other. . . . "Come" is apocalyptic. (93–94)

As similarly derivable, "only derivable, absolutely derivable," the "Come" which breaks into Derrida's writing does not come from Derrida. "Come," he says in his Cerisy paper, we cannot not deconstruct. "In light of today," we might say in the interests of survival, "[w]e cannot and we must not—this is a law and a destiny—forgo the *Aufklärung*" (1982b, 82). Each time philosophy takes on an apocalyptic tone, we cannot not ask ourselves: *Who is writing? To whom? And to send, to destine, to dispatch what? To what address?* This is a call to deconstruction, but it is not Derrida's call. The apocalyptic structure of language summons with the apostrophe, "Come." It is what Derrida refers to elsewhere (1992a) as the "deconstructible structure" itself to which deconstruction responds. While it can be said then, that *read deconstructively*, Kant's essay is not either philosophy or mystagogy but "a *différentielle* contamination between the two" (1992a, 38), a deconstructive reading does not give Kant's text this *différentielle* or deconstructible structure. Derrida does not move something from the outside to the inside of Kant's essay. The mystagogy which Kant casts outside is inside his text, which spoils the inside/outside dichotomy. The other to which deconstruction responds is already there in the same.¹⁵

Derrida suggests that we have a duty to respond to the "Come" which precedes and calls every reader and writer. We are answerable to an other that leaves its trace in a text. This means that we have a duty not to partake in the apocalypticism of today's *postal police* which, in the interests of "ruses, traps, trickeries, seductions, the engines of war and of pleasure, all the interests of the apocalyptic tone today" (1982b, 87), reduces or gears down the text's voices and tones so as to ensure its return to an authorial self. Above all, we have a duty not to reduce *responsibility* to the concept of duty or debt that regulates justice in the social contract and that equates ethics with "*rectitude* of address," what arrives as directly as possible at "the place of essential decision" (1992a, 17). We have a duty not to reduce responsibility to the form of a pro-positional response. It is "*our duty above all* not to, approach in a direct, frontal *projective*, that

is, thetic or thematic way" (1992c, 11). And this recourse to the language of duty, our "duty above all not to," when it is our "duty above all not to" reduce to duty or debt, need not imply a "shortcoming," Derrida suggests. The shortcoming occurs when we cover over the way language of duty falls short. "Nothing could seem more violent or naive than to call for more frontality, more thesis or more thematization, to suppose that one can find a standard here" (11).

How then to conclude? We could say that deconstruction does not give us an ethics, an address of rectitude. And that to speak of an ethics of deconstruction, as Simon Critchley does, is not to claim that "an ethics can be derived from deconstruction," that an ethics has its origin or foundation in the deconstructing subject or self (Critchley 1992, 2; Bernasconi 1987). Derrida does not *come before us* as an authorial subject, and the "Come" is not his call. But we could also say that while deconstruction presents no new morality, it is not an amorality or an immorality, and it is not indifferent to questions of justice.¹⁶ While perhaps "seeming" not to "address" these questions, Derrida "has done nothing but address [them], if only *obliquely*, unable to do so directly" (1992a, 10). The *elliptical* address is made necessary by the deconstructible structure to which deconstruction responds. Moreover for Derrida, as for Lyotard in the following chapter: "one cannot speak *directly* about justice, thematize or objectivize justice, say 'this is just' and even less 'I am just,' without immediately betraying justice" (10). Justice is an impossible yet-to-come (*à venir*) (27). And as such, justice is the possibility of deconstruction (15), the infinite demand to which—with its "no, it's not that, it's not so simple" (1989a, 19)—deconstruction responds.

In the meantime, *let us wait and see* (the refrain, an apostrophe perhaps, is repeated in Derrida's "Passions").¹⁷ For at least as long as justice, "as the experience of absolute alterity" (1992a, 27), remains *something unrepresentable*, deconstruction will find its motivation in responding to the apostrophe, "Come," the "always unsatisfied appeal, beyond the given determinations of what we call, in determined contexts, justice, the possibility of justice" (21). And in responding, deconstruction will continue to go astray. As Derrida puts it in his Cerisy paper, "the coming is always to come" (1982b, 85).