

## ***Philosophical Excursus I***

### ***Seriousness, play, and fame (on Rorty's Derrida)***

1.

Reading numerous readings of Jacques Derrida made by Richard Rorty during the period of the last twenty years or so, one can get the impression that Rorty admires French deconstructionist without reservations, presenting him as an example of a new way of practising philosophy – a way which is private, idiosyncratic and publicly uncommitted, which is original, but publicly useless, which, finally, leads to individual autonomy. A way leading to self-creation, getting out of the influence and power of one's precursors by way of a para-Oedipal struggle of a son with a father (which is the motive of "strong poets" from Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*). Derrida in Rorty would be supposed to break with Heidegger in the way Heidegger tried to overcome Nietzsche, and Nietzsche struggled with Plato. And just like Nietzsche wished to be a new figure of a philosopher who "philosophizes with a hammer", but in Heidegger's reading turned out to be merely "the last metaphysician" and "inverted Platonic", similarly Heidegger in the eyes of Derrida is not – despite the former's assurance and unshakeable self-confidence – the first post-metaphysical thinker, but precisely the "last metaphysician", the last figure from the "ontotheological tradition" being destroyed or from the tradition of the "metaphysics of presence" (to use descriptions by both of them). Derrida overcomes Heidegger, Rorty reminds us, when he is trying to be the first post-metaphysical philosopher e.g. when he says that "there will be no unique name, even if it were the name of Being" ("Differance"), about which, incidentally, he already spoke as a broader project in a volume of interviews entitled *Positions*, telling his interviewer that he is attempting to locate in Heidegger's texts "the signs of belonging to metaphysics".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Differance" in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago:

But philosophical search for fame – and hence immortality – leads to an infinite number of recontextualizations and redescriptions, to new readings fighting with old ones, and the characters of philosophical stories being told are philosophers who are closer and closer to us. And just like Jacques Derrida was not willing to leave Heidegger in peace until he overcame him (although he is still struggling with him), putting himself in a new light<sup>2</sup>, similarly Richard Rorty relentlessly bites in his own way Derrida's philosophizing (let us remind here: "pragmatism bites other philosophies but not social problems as such"<sup>3</sup>). Let us look at relations between Rorty and Derrida in the following way: what repeats itself here might be the motive revealing itself in an already referred to sequence Plato-Nietzsche-Heidegger-Derrida, the motive that consists in linking a given (precursor) philosopher to earlier figures from a given sequence, like Derrida attempted to link Heidegger to a closing chapter of Western metaphysics. So, according to my (rather strong, I would say) reading of Rorty presented in this chapter, Derrida would be useful for Rorty's purposes if he could be linked to his predecessors, leaving room for a "strong misreader", Rorty himself, to stay out of the sequence.

Thus I would like to have a look at Rorty in the present text (designed to be a strong reading) as a philosophically self-creating individual, a philosopher who is looking for his own philosophical autonomy by means of new, strong misreadings of texts of other philosophers, in that particular case, suggested and discussed here – texts of Jacques Derrida. Let us say it at the very beginning, to avoid any misunderstandings: it is not Derrida that is at stake in Rorty's writings, nor is it exclusively his philosophy, deconstruction is just a medium for a self-creating thought of Rorty, its reader (one could also say – what is important to me is what I will do with deconstruction for my own purposes). Perhaps I am turning that Derridean-Rortyan, one-sided so far and marginal for some,

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University of Chicago Press, 1982), trans. by Alan Bass, p. 27; *Positions* (London: Athlone Press, 1987), trans. by Alan Bass, p. 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> Recently in *Of Spirit. Heidegger and the Question* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989), trans. by G. Bennington and R. Bowlby.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Rorty, "Feminism and Pragmatism" (Tanner Lecture, 1990, typescript), p. 13.

controversy, into some additional key to make Rorty's work still more accessible to readers who admire him and his readings of philosophy designed to help to coin his own neopragmatism as much as I do. But let us note that the fundamental accusation that appears in polemics with and criticisms of Rorty is that of misinterpretation, an intentionally "wrong" (to use that favorite word) reading of philosophers of the present and the past: it is a common thread among the whole host of critics, no matter whether the accusation is supposed to pertain to Rorty's readings of Derrida and Davidson, or Kant, Hegel and the whole German idealism, Plato, the whole American analytic philosophy, or Dewey.<sup>4</sup> One could say that it is the fundamental principle of criticizing Rorty, the main thread in polemics launched against him – perhaps quite a natural reaction of contemporary philosophers to putting into practice by Rorty of the (horrifying to them, God knows why, and admirable to me) idea that "the most that an original figure can hope to do is to recontextualize his or her predecessors", as he says in "Introduction" to the second volume of his *Philosophical Papers*.<sup>5</sup> It is a Bloomian motive from his conception of Romantic poetry; it is not accidentally that Rorty is equally fascinated with a "liberal ironist", an "ironist" par

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Frank Farrell from *Subjectivity, Realism, and Postmodernism – the Recovery of the World* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994) who already in opening sentences of his book says that Rorty "gets Davidson wrong"; see also J.F. Rosenberg who says that the picture of edifying philosophy from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is "irresponsible and grounded in misreadings both of the epistemology of science and of episodes in the history of philosophy, especially the contribution of Kant" ("Philosophy's Self-Image", *Analyse & Kritik* 1/88, p. 114), Alisdair MacIntyre who negates the reading of analytic philosophy from the same book in "Philosophy and Its History" (ibidem, p. 102), Richard Bernstein who writes about a "caricature of the history of philosophy" in which readings of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida and Freud are not so much "strong", but rather "ruthlessly violent", as they remove from their work the public side (in both his texts about Rorty from *The New Constellation*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), Alexander Nehamas from the fascinating collective volume *Lire Rorty. Le pragmatisme et ses conséquences* (Paris: éclat, 1992) etc., etc. Rorty's "misreadings", his intentionally "wrong" readings (an object of my admiration in this text) are of primary importance as points to be attacked by his critics.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 2.

excellence, and a "strong poet" in his *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.

Let us repeat once again: Derrida in our reading of Rorty is used for Rorty's philosophical self-creation. Let us remind two remarks which show Rorty's attitude to philosophy in general and to Derrida in particular:

Derrida did not say what he thinks of my attempt to read him as Proust is read. It is quite possible, even probable, that he detests me ... . But just like in the case of Freud, I am using Derrida's writings as grain for my own mill [*comme du blé pour mon propre moulin*] – I am taking from them what interests me, and leaving aside what seems to me to be uninteresting

in his reply to Jacques Bouveresse<sup>6</sup>, or in his polemics with Umberto Eco when he says:

Having read Eco, or having read Derrida, will often give you something interesting to say about a text which you could not otherwise have said ... A reading may be so exciting and convincing that one has the illusion that one now sees what a certain text is *really* about. But what excites and convinces is a function of the needs and purposes of those who are being excited and convinced<sup>7</sup>.

For the purposes of our reading of Rorty's relations to Derrida here there is one question that comes to mind immediately: what may be a common denominator for Heidegger and Derrida, so that they could be *both* distinguished from – and surpassed by – Rorty himself? Obviously, "metaphysical aura" of Derrida – his "light, constructive, bad" side (as opposed to "dark, destructive, good"),

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Rorty, "Réponse à Jacques Bouveresse" in *Lire Rorty. Le pragmatisme et ses conséquences* (Paris: éclat, 1992), pp. 155-56.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Rorty, "Pragmatist's Progress" in U. Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), pp. 105-6.

as Rorty speaks of it – shown exemplarily on Derrida's clinging to "différance" which is "older than Being" etc. – is one way, a way which is not so effective in the analysis of his later writings and not so spectacular, though. The choice on Rorty's part must be radical – and what comes in handy here is one of the most important ideas (at least as we can see it) that has been taking shape from the time of the publication of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, namely the idea that philosophy should not be "taken (too much) seriously".<sup>8</sup>

The dichotomy in question is simple in its application – metaphysicians believe in transformative power of philosophy, in transformations made with the help of philosophy and owing to its power, while ironists lose faith in seriousness of their discipline (just like they lose faith in stability and unchangeability of their final vocabularies). In political and social matters they do not take philosophy seriously. It is a very *serious* conviction which, nevertheless, harmonizes with a general character of postmodern culture associated strictly with the exhaustion of attractiveness of a cultural project of Enlightenment in which, and only in which, it seems, let us add, philosophy really mattered; it had to be taken seriously (in different metaphors that passage from modernity to postmodernity is described by Zygmunt Bauman: "legislators" must give way to "interpreters"<sup>9</sup>).

So Rorty divides the work of Derrida (his hero? his textual victim?) into two periods, as he puts it, "into an earlier, more professorial period and a later period in which his writing becomes more eccentric, personal and original"<sup>10</sup> (which, incidentally, seems to be one of his constant "methods", or at least, considering

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<sup>8</sup> The beginning of the idea can be seen already in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* – where Rorty says that "redescribing ourselves is the most important thing we can do" (PMN, p. 359) and in the essay on Derrida from *Consequences of Pragmatism* entitled "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing", then in some reviews, e.g. of Victor Farias's book on Heidegger ("Taking Philosophy Seriously", *New Republic*, April 11, 1988) or of Christopher Norris's book on Derrida ("Philosophy as a Literary Tradition", *The New Leader*, 71, October 1988), and finally in CIS.

<sup>9</sup> See Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters. On Modernity, Post-Modernity and Intellectuals* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), especially chapters "The fall of the legislator" and "The rise of the interpreter" (pp. 110-148)

<sup>10</sup> Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 123.

his explicit "methodophobia", one of his procedures). Dividing Derrida's writings into two periods, Rorty gains what otherwise is difficult to be gained: *early Derrida* is "too serious" (as he *takes philosophy seriously*, to use the title of Rorty's review of V. Farias's infamous book on Heidegger), because he treats philosophy and the tradition of "metaphysics of presence" as something that requires the most serious and the most pressing hierarchical, binary oppositions, the curse of Western metaphysics since Plato – permeating the whole culture, determining its future fate, determining the "destiny of the West". Early Derrida shares in Rorty's view Heidegger's faith that the fate of the West depends on the fate of philosophy – thus "metaphysics of presence" must be overcome, binary oppositions must be deconstructed, our culture must be freed from metaphysical burden that Heidegger was still supposed to carry. So the cultural role of deconstruction would be extremely important, as metaphysics "permeates everything" (as Christopher Norris wants to believe), is present everywhere (just like Foucauldian Power which "penetrates everything", being capillary by its very nature). Early Derrida allies with Heidegger owing to their belief in *seriousness of the task in hand* (i.e. of philosophy), the conviction of its cultural significance, its mission, be it even (anti)-philosophical and (post)-metaphysical one. Obviously, that belief on the part of Derrida was not constant and never took as strong a shape as in the sixties.

Later Derrida – following Rorty's "periodization" – becomes a "private writer", a philosopher who "privatizes his philosophical thinking", who produces "private fantasies" which have neither a "moral", nor any "public (pedagogic or political) use".<sup>11</sup> To put it in a nutshell: "All that connects him with the philosophical tradition is that past philosophers are the topics of his most vivid fantasies".<sup>12</sup> Derrida in such an account is a master of self-creation – more and more resembling Proust and less and less Nietzsche (among self-creators themselves), creating idiosyncratic texts that evade any discipline-fixed studies, extending the bounds of possibilities of philosophy with his "Envois" from *La carte postale* (1980) in the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 125, 125, 125.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 126.

same way in which Proust extended the possibility of the novel in his *Remembrance of Things Past*. While reading Derrida - the later Derrida, let us remember, but not recent one, that is to say, Derrida since Paul de Man's "affair", when he has become more and more a "moralist"<sup>13</sup> - we should not expect any results of reflection, any concrete conclusions, as Derrida in Rorty's view is not willing to play any already known linguistic game, and especially not such in which one distinguishes between fantasy and argumentation, philosophy and literature or serious writing and playful writing.<sup>14</sup> So we read him, Rorty tells us - but actually we have no idea whatsoever what to do with the text we read, which criteria apply to it. As Derrida wrote on one of his Oxford postcards: "no public generalities, merely private idiosyncrasies". The later Derrida, let us bear in mind all the time: necessary for Rorty "his" Derrida, is a fantastic writer with unprecedented acquaintance with philosophy, literature, psychoanalysis, who aims at turning systematic projects of overcoming one's philosophical predecessors in an argumentative way into a "private joke" (for,

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<sup>13</sup> Let us listen to Derrida about deconstruction in connection with "Paul de Man's Affair": "Why do people overlook the fact that the exercise of (theoretical and ethico-political) responsibility prescribes that nothing be a priori exempted from the deconstructive questions? Because, in my view, deconstruction consists in nothing less than putting this responsibility to work, especially when it analyzes traditional or dogmatic axioms concerning the concept of responsibility. Why do people pretend not to see that deconstruction is anything but a nihilism or a skepticism?" ("Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War" in *Responses. On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism*, ed. Werner Hamacher et al., Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1989, p. 162). Such Derrida is also the author of "The Principle of Reason" (*Diacritics*, Fall 1983), "The Laws of Reflection: Nelson Mandela, in Admiration" (in *For Nelson Mandela*, eds. J. Derrida, M. Tlili, New York: Seaver Books, 1987), or of an important part of *Du Droit à la philosophie*, especially the first section, "Who Is Afraid of Philosophy?" (Paris: Galilée, 1990, pp. 111-278), but, also, or perhaps first of all, of a recent book on Heidegger, *Of Spirit*, already referred to, somehow a response to - though published earlier than - V. Farias's book. It is in *Of Spirit* that Derrida indirectly responds to widespread (especially in the press) accusations of being apolitical and fascist - in accordance with Habermas' view expressed in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* that he is a "genuine disciple who critically took his master's teachings", which, in the context of a later "de Man question" and "Heidegger affair", sounded really ominously.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 133.

as Rorty says elsewhere, "philosophers as original and important as Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida are forging new ways of speaking, not making surprising philosophical discoveries about old ones. As a result, they are not likely to be good at argumentation"<sup>15</sup>). Finally, Derrida is a "comic writer" who produces texts full of puns, word plays and multilinguistic, multicultural allusions.

## 2.

Rorty performs his recontextualization of Derrida *in both directions at the same time* (one goes toward too "serious" Derrida, the other toward too "playful", and hence insignificant, one). "Deconstruction and Circumvention" from the book *Essays of Heidegger and Others* is a text which unambiguously attempts to reduce Derrida to Heidegger, which takes away from the former the right to claim to manage to have "overcome" Heidegger, which analyzes a "serious" side of Derrida. The chapter from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, "From Ironist Theory to Private Allusions: Derrida", on the other hand, discusses the opposite side of the later Derrida, his "playful" side; both texts has their satellite, accompanying texts and reviews, supporting the argumentation/the rhetoric in one or in the other direction of reading him. Anyway, the aim of both strategies might be the following: no matter what Derrida writes and wrote, *either* his philosophizing is "metaphysically" serious (and hence indistinguishable from Heideggerian one, which Rorty tries to show in "Deconstruction and Circumvention"), *or* it is "playful" to a previously unheard of extreme, devoid of any public or cultural significance except for allusions recognized by a small group of philosophers. So Rorty in the reading presented by us here *strikes Derrida in all his embodiments* (embodiments, let us hasten to add, chosen for him by Rorty himself) – both when he treats metaphysics with seriousness of Heidegger, as well as when he is mocking philosophy and its totalizing intentions, approaching Proust (which Rorty admires in his *Contingency, Irony, and*

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Rorty, "Deconstruction and Circumvention" in PP 2, p. 93.

*Solidarity*, but revealing, at the same time, no significance of it except private one). There is no way out for Derrida in our reading of Rorty, let us conclude – Rortyan dichotomies of metaphysicians/ironists, private/public, self-creation/solidarity hold him tight in their traps and make him useful for Rorty's neopragmatism, and still more, for Rorty himself, as we are going to present it here. Hence comes the title of the chapter: "Seriousness, play, and fame".

To sum up, Rorty locates Derrida in his criticisms and in his apologies in such a way that whatever Derrida wrote will either be regarded as reiterated, derivative and bringing nothing new in philosophy with the exception of what has already been said (and additionally too "serious" for our postmodern times), or as fantastic and private, so totally insignificant in culture, at least in the short run.<sup>16</sup>

Dividing Derrida into the early and the later one, Rorty can apply both strategies of reading him at the same time. The result of these endeavors may be only one, at least from our perspective presented here: no matter which period of Derrida's philosophizing he discusses, Rorty always wins the game, he always turns out to be better in the eyes of his readers (not necessarily in the eyes of Derrida's readers), each time he shows himself in more favorable light. As irony allows him to face problems from two opposite sides at the same time, and from both of them Rorty can withdraw<sup>17</sup>, Derrida chosen as an aim and object of all these descriptive and

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<sup>16</sup> The distinction in the short run/in the long run seems to me to be one of the most important distinctions in Rorty's neopragmatism, although not too theoretical and rarely applied by him. Let us listen to Rorty from the text on "academic freedom": "We pragmatists say that every difference must make a difference to practice. Yet we think it important to argue that the Western Rationalistic Tradition, as Searle defines it, is *wrong*. We insist on trying to develop another, better tradition. So how can we, without dishonesty, say that philosophical controversies do not matter that much? We pragmatists can make our position consistent, I think, by saying that *although they do not matter in the short run, they may well matter in the long run*" (Does Academic Freedom Have Philosophical Presuppositions?", *Academe*, vol. 80. no 6, 1994, p.58). That is a very pragmatic distinction indeed, and it is worth being reminded in all discussions of "profits from philosophy".

<sup>17</sup> See David Hall's excellent book (the most brilliant about Rorty ever written) *Richard Rorty. Prophet and Poet of the New Pragmatism* (New York: SUNY Press, 1994), especially the chapter "Irony's Master, Irony's Slave".

recontextualizing procedures is practically unable to defend himself (on the terrain chosen by Rorty and within dichotomies suggested by him).<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Rorty does not disclose his position, which is to say, he reveals his two different faces in different texts, without claiming that it is just that, currently revealed, that is his own face, his own position. Let us think about it for a moment: if Rorty says that Derrida shares with Heidegger the "seriousness" of a metaphysician and "serious" treatment of philosophy, then one might expect him (Rorty) to be a supporter of Nietzschean lightness of an equilibrist, frivolity of a philosophical jester and mocker of the metaphysical tradition. But it is not so that is the case; while Rorty shows Derrida from *La carte postale* as an example and model of self-creation, he does not favor himself in his own writings a carefree, allusive, and private kind of philosophizing. While Derrida is an "ironist", the hero of Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* is a "liberal ironist" (that is to say, "someone devoted to social justice who nevertheless takes her own devotion to this cause as merely contingent"<sup>19</sup>), and he takes away from Derrida a liberal component – just like from Michel Foucault, incidentally – immediately, turning him into a paradigm of a private writer. How is it possible that Rorty chooses such an attitude which allows him to distance himself from Derrida, as, considering two choices shown here, in one case he obviously is not as "serious" as the pair "Derrida/Heidegger", and in the other case he is not as private and as socially irresponsible as self-creating Derrida from *La carte postale*? There must be some mystery here. Rorty owing to his rhetoric is very strong, but that is just persuasive strength rather than argumentative one (which he is not looking for). A possible solution to the apparent mystery – as for many other Rortyan ambiguities – seems to lie in a still

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<sup>18</sup> Obviously, Derrida defends himself perfectly against Rorty "on his own grounds" and in different texts, especially recent ones, ethical and political, about Apartheid, university, authority or in his book about "specters of Marx" which appeared after so many years since first introductory remarks about Marx in *Positions* (see Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>19</sup> Richard Rorty, "Habermas, Derrida, and the Functions of Philosophy", the text to appear in *Revue internationale de philosophie*, typescript, p. 1.

dubious private/public split, the split for self-creation on the one hand and solidarity on the other.

Rorty locates other philosophers on a private/public chessboard suggested by him, ascribing to them strictly determined roles: Proust, Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida are private, whereas Mill, Marx, Dewey or Habermas are public. The question is the following: *where in these dichotomies – and in these choices – is Rorty himself?*<sup>20</sup> Rorty's answer is as simple as that – nobody has to choose what kind of writer or philosopher he or she wants to be, nobody has to favor the private or the public option in philosophy or in writing. Let us remind his strong conviction:

*There is no reason to think we have to choose between Dewey and Derrida, between public problem-solving and private struggles for autonomy. The two activities can co-exist peacefully. There is no reason why philosophy should have to choose between them, nor any need to assign one some sort of epistemic priority over the other.*<sup>21</sup>

So: both styles of practising philosophy may "peacefully co-exist" and do not require any choice on our part. There is only a question whether Rorty himself, an unshaken supporter of such a lack of decision and suspension of choice, does not make such a choice for himself without ever admitting it for rhetorical reasons? He seems to me to be making such a choice all the time: he seems to be interested in the public side of philosophy in *his own* philosophizing, whereas all praises, analyses, theoretizations etc. of private philosophy pertain to *other philosophers*. I do not know any text by Rorty that would be merely private, idiosyncratic and fantastic, that would be connected only with his obsessions individually associated with philosophical obsessions in the way he praises in Derrida. Rorty does not engage in such kind of

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Rorty, "Habermas, Derrida, and the Functions of Philosophy", the text to appear in *Revue internationale de philosophie*, typescript, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Rorty, "Habermas, Derrida, and the Functions of Philosophy", p. 13 – emphasis mine.

philosophical self-creation himself<sup>22</sup>, for some reasons it seems to him, a "disciple of Dewey", as he likes to say, impossible.<sup>23</sup> Thus he is writing about philosophical self-creation – of *others*: of Derrida (this "comic writer", this "private writer") or of Foucault (this "knight of autonomy"). He admires others, being himself unable or unwilling to indulge in such philosophical practices. There appears a question about the aim of such practices, a delicate question, in order not to get into forbidden terrain of sociology of knowledge or just psychology of a writer.

### 3.

For a long time I had thought that Rortyan readings of Derrida and Foucault are extremely important also due to their impartiality and disinterestedness. Today I suppose both thinkers seem to be very close to Rorty in certain fundamental presuppositions. *They seem to be so close to Rorty that he has to distinguish himself from them in a radical manner*, in order not to become one of already numerous Continental "postmodernists". Therefore a (pragmatic) caricature (not to use it as disapprovingly as Richard Bernstein in *The New Constellations* does it), at least to a certain extent, becomes necessary for Rorty's own identity. What is needed is a distance from which to see a picture of a larger whole: the private/public dichotomy provides Rorty with such a possibility. It takes place at the cost of serious inconsistency that results from rhetorical and persuasive character of the whole (real or imaginary, intentional or accidental, conscious or not fully realized) undertaking: Rorty requires that others should not make a choice between the private and the public in their philosophizing, while making himself such a choice and confirming it in his texts all the

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<sup>22</sup> And that is the conclusion I came to in a text read during the "Rorty conference" held in Torun, Poland, in 1992. See my text "On Some Rorty's Evolution" and Rorty's "Response to Marek Kwiek" in proceedings of the conference published in English in *Ruch filozoficzny*, vol. L, no 2, 1993.

<sup>23</sup> Let me add that David Hall in the book referred above is of the same view, expressed almost in the same way I expressed it in Torun: "I assume that Rorty's advice to Derrida, that he continuous his pursuit of private perfection by following the path of creative idiosyncrasy, to be advice that Rorty, with some inner qualms perhaps, would himself like to follow" (Hall, op. cit, p. 234).

time, standing firmly on the *public* side of his own philosophizing and praising merely private philosophizing of others (but denouncing it elsewhere simultaneously, although theoretically giving an equal status to it). Such an appraisal may be a widely used (public) accusation. For although Rorty writes that there is no need to choose between two possibilities, both discourses are equally legitimate in today's "ironic" culture, nevertheless from behind those texts someone seems to be hinting to us, giving us a wink, someone standing above philosophical "fantasies" and "dreams" of the French on a firm ground of a self-assured pragmatic choice...

Let us pay attention to one of the consequences of it: if the reading of French philosophical postmodernists as private writers ("knights of autonomy", "masters of self-creation" etc.) becomes widespread, Rorty with his anti-foundationalism and anti-Philosophical attitude will be almost alone on the battleground with Philosophy with a capital "P" – to use the opposition from his *Consequences of Pragmatism* – as the rest of claimants to distinctions, after the won battle, which will surely take place, we hope, will be fooled, "circumvented". The title of the essay: "Deconstruction and Circumvention" would show such a state of affairs – deconstruction becomes circumvented, Rortyan circumvention replaces, leaves behind, Derridean deconstruction, Deconstructor becomes circumvented, reduced either to one of many thinkers (our "serious" version), or to frivolous and insignificant one (our "playful" version). Let us remind the second version from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*:

He [Derrida] simply drops theory ... in favor of fantasizing about those predecessors, playing with them, giving free rein to the trains of associations they produce. *There is no moral to these fantasies, nor any public* (pedagogic or political) use to be made of them.<sup>24</sup>

We have already said briefly how the picture of Derrida in such a "private" version looks like, let us show now in contrast his too

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 125 – emphasis mine.

"serious" picture that emerges from Rorty's writings, a picture of a Heideggerian who is too much concerned with the role of philosophy and the "metaphysics of presence" in our culture. That is extremely important as an example of the two strategies in his almost twenty-years-long struggles with Derrida – the strategies in struggles for fame, for immortality, as we want to read them here.<sup>25</sup> About how important immortality for a "strong poet" (Bloom) and a "strong philosopher" (Rorty) is, none of their readers has to be convinced – obviously immortality not only in being preserved in works (that *non omnis moriar*). Let us remind here the fear that nobody in the future "will find anything distinctive in them", the horror that the author, the philosopher, "has spent [his] life shoving about already coined pieces", that he will be merely a "copy or a replica" of his predecessors.<sup>26</sup> The fear of death in Rortyan-Bloomian account is the fear of failed self-creation, and "poets" (in a wide sense of "those who make things new") rebel against death stronger than others. Thus the way to immortality is supposed to lead through fight with one's predecessors for freeing oneself from under their influence, for describing them in one's own vocabulary, for using them for one's own purposes (*comme du blé pour mon propre moulin...*, let us remind) - with the help of redescription of the canon of books that held a reader-philosopher spellbound, and that still hold him in their power. "Each new theorist accuses his predecessors of having been metaphysicians in disguise", Rorty will say. Immortality may be reached by means of a redescription of philosophers of the past and of the present – overcoming them in order to be "equal" to them rather than to become their "epigone".<sup>27</sup> And although Rorty is writing the following about Heidegger, nevertheless let us risk in the context of present considerations to apply the thought to him: Heidegger was bothered by "his own, particular, private indebtedness to particular past philosophers, his own fear that their vocabularies might have enslaved him, his terror that he would never succeed

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<sup>25</sup> The theme of immortality (as one of "life strategies") was reminded to me by Zygmunt Bauman's discussions from his beautiful *Mortality, Immortality, and Other Life Strategies* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 101, p. 103.

in creating himself".<sup>28</sup> I am inclined to suppose that this bother, this fear and this terror, if they were actually experienced by Heidegger, may have been to an equal degree experienced by Rorty himself whose conception of philosophy is strongly shadowed by Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*, in which the struggle of a son with his father(s) assumes para-Oedipal dimensions. In Bloom, the only feeling of guilt that really matters comes from the feeling of indebtedness to one's intellectual predecessors, therefore one creates his predecessors himself so that the mighty dead could return only "in our colours, and speaking in our voices". Otherwise, "if they return wholly in their strength, then the triumph is theirs" – what belongs to us, let us add, is only failure.<sup>29</sup>

Let us remind at the moment one sentence from Rorty's text on Habermas and Derrida which did not find its way to, although at first was supposed to be there, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*:

I see Jacques Derrida as *the most intriguing and ingenious* of contemporary philosophers, and Jürgen Habermas as *the most socially useful* – the one who does the most for social democratic politics.<sup>30</sup>

Thus we get here ingenious Derrida and useful Habermas. Let us ask where Rorty himself would like to stand, which side to favor in the – created and applied by himself – private/public opposition? Perhaps it is so, let us speculate a bit, that Rorty would like to be both ingenious and useful, useful in his ingenuity and ingenious in

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<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 110.

<sup>29</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973), p. 114. Let us content ourselves here with just one Rorty-Bloom analogy: in Bloom's view, "strong poets make poetic history by misreading one another" (p. 5), perhaps it might be possible to say by paraphrasing that "strong philosophers make history of philosophy by misreading one another". The example of Rorty and Derrida is quite telling and convincing, but similarly would be the case with Rorty's Davidson, Dewey or Foucault. For a strong philosopher ("strong textualist" once, in *Consequences of Pragmatism*) just misreads everyone that matters to him...

<sup>30</sup> Richard Rorty, "Habermas, Derrida, and the Functions of Philosophy", p. 1 – emphasis mine.

his usefulness? Once again, let us stress, other philosophers are either such or such, either only useful (and then dull), or only ingenious (and then useless). The distinction must be clearly maintained, so that philosophers of self-creation and philosophers of solidarity could be distinguished from Rorty himself and so that he could – formally – be out of the choice and out of the distinction: over and above Derrida and Habermas. Furthermore, Rorty says that Derrida's and Habermas' philosophizing "complement" rather than "oppose" each other.<sup>31</sup> The obstacle in treating philosophies of Derrida and Habermas as complementary rather than opposed may be in Rorty's view the fact that

*they appear to disagree over the nature and function of philosophy. Such a disagreement, it is easy to think, must be profound. On my view, however, "the nature and function of philosophy" is a pseudo-topic, as much so as "the nature and task of the novel".*<sup>32</sup>

Let us comment briefly on the above quotation: it is not important that both protagonists think they are on the opposite extremes of philosophical choices (it is worthwhile to see Habermas' criticism from *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, especially from the chapter on genre distinctions between philosophy and literature<sup>33</sup> – as well as Derrida's criticism from "Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War" of such kind of practising polemical philosophy<sup>34</sup>, it is

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<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 11 – emphasis mine.

<sup>33</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), "Excursus on Levelling the Genre Distinction Between Philosophy and Literature", pp. 185-209.

<sup>34</sup> Derrida answers to Habermas' "argumentation" from *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (based primarily on Jonathan Culler's reconstruction) e.g. in the above text on "Paul de Man's War" from *Responses: On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism*. The main accusation is a brutal lack of respect for elementary rules of discussion, such as, for instance, lack of any references to Derrida texts whatsoever ("non-reading" and "non-argumentation"). Derrida, clearly upset, answers to the accusation of performative contradiction: "Is there a more serious, flagrant, significant 'performative contradiction' than the one that

unimportant that they see in different ways the function of philosophy. What they have different views about does not actually exist – so the very point of disagreement disappears – so they are complementary, as they are not opposed to each other, *quod erat demonstratum*. "It is easy to think" that the difference between them is profound, that the disagreement between them must be serious, maybe even irreparable – but that is not the case, Rorty tells us in the above quoted passage. Let us note another point: the "function" of philosophy is quite different from the "nature" of philosophy, which Rorty knows perfectly well, tracing and denouncing himself essentialism in all its forms (struggling with the Platonic paradigm of philosophizing in which the fundamental distinction is between appearance and reality, the duality of the "real world" and "fable", to use Nietzsche's words), whether that would be "humanity" or "human nature" with a common core<sup>35</sup>, or "reason" as the "essence" of humanity, or "method" and "rational argumentation" as the "essence of philosophy". Rorty would not be able to link Habermas and Derrida if he were writing about the "function" of philosophy which, at least for the latter, is individual and contingent rather than e.g. determined by culture. Writing about the "nature and function" of philosophy, however, gives birth to a new quality – Habermas and Derrida see different "natures" of philosophy and think that they differ from each other, but they are wrong, Rorty will tell us rhetorically, because, as is known, philosophy does not possess its "nature"... Philosophy is a contingent and undetermined being, is a pigeonhole for the needs of librarians and their databases, as well as rigid university divisions, nobody can claim to know what philosophy will be like in hundred years' time, when we will be no longer interested in

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consists in claiming to refute in the name of reason but without citing the least proof and first of all *without even reading or quoting the other?*" (ibidem, p. 163). While that text locates Habermas in a wider "moralistic" movement that wants to use "Heidegger's affair" and "de Man's affair" to show that "deconstruction is Fascist", the Foreword to Derrida's *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988, pp. 156-58) focuses mainly on breaking the requirements of discussion on the part of Habermas. In both cases there appear the following question: who is afraid of deconstruction and why?

<sup>35</sup> See e.g. Richard Rorty's "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality".

those "perennial, eternal problems of philosophy" from the opening sentence from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

Let us note the result of such a shift – Derrida becomes similar to Habermas, they seem to complement each other; they only appear to differ as they – unreasonably – believe in some "nature" of philosophy in which Rorty as a mature pragmatist no longer does and can believe. And once again, he stands as their critic *above* them, the criticized, distancing himself from them by means of – existing in Derrida's case, I suppose – conviction of non-essential character of philosophy on his part. Rorty thus "overcomes" both of them, showing delicately their philosophical naiveté which in the case of Derrida is rather not legitimate. But that is precisely the strategy to Derrida on the part of Rorty that I am discussing here in this text: Derrida is not different from Habermas, just like he is not different from Heidegger, or he is so playful that one hardly knows what one should read him for... Habermas and Derrida in such an account – in one of numerous Rortyan approximations – are philosophers who unnecessarily choose the side of philosophy, thinking that it possesses some "nature". Thus on the one hand we get "Habermas' public sort of philosophy", on the other "Derrida's privatized sort of philosophy", as Rorty says, and if we consider Rorty's and Habermas' respective views of Derrida, that would be, respectively, "opening new, private possibilities" and "extending the bounds of possibility"<sup>36</sup> on the part of the former, and "public danger" and "threat to democracy" in the view of the latter.<sup>37</sup> What is Rorty's

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<sup>36</sup> Richard Rorty, "Habermas, Derrida and the Functions of Philosophy", p. 5; CIS, p. 137.

<sup>37</sup> Even if it were indirectly, then it is surely by way of analogy with "Young Conservatives" already spoken of in this context in "The Incomplete Project of Modernity" – with Carl Schmitt or Gottfried Benn. In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* Derrida turns out to be e.g. an "anarchist" (p. 182). The most serious accusation against postmodernists is connected with an ambivalent attitude to the distinction between philosophy and literature – they in Habermas' view place literary criticism higher than science – without applying standards of the latter – on the level of creative activity (p. 192). At the same time they abandon the potential contained in negation – Derrida "allows the capacity of problem-solving to disappear behind world-disclosing capacity of language" (p. 205), and therefore he is not able to provide a meaningful analysis of society. Postmodernists are stuck in "philosophy of subjectivity", without seeing the need

position in that controversy, if it is indeed a controversy? Is he above – behind – the choice, formally he does not have to choose any of the sides, considering the very opposition as artificially imposed on those who practice philosophy. That is the only kind of rhetoric that gives him the chance to distance himself from – once again, only formally, not in a real, tacit choice that he actually seems to make – an important discussion about the place of philosophy in postmodern culture and about the role played by a philosopher in it.

Rorty seems to dislike such questions. In an extremely interesting conversation with Giovanna Borradori (from a telling volume of interviews *The American Philosopher*), to the last question: "Then, what is philosophy. A testimony to the survival of a community of readers of philosophical texts?" (we must admit, sounding due to its formulation "what is...?" terribly metaphysical), Rorty gives a simple answer: *I don't think one should ask that question.*<sup>38</sup> If one does not put that question, then one can say that there is no need to choose between Mill and Marx – and Derrida and Kierkegaard, that such a need derives from a metaphysical need of the "purity of heart", willing one thing with the exclusion of all the others. And that is the question that could satisfy the *reader of philosophy* (analogously to the reader of the novel), who could read today the formers, tomorrow the latters, and the day after tomorrow return once again to self-creators, just like in that old Marxian utopia of, roughly, fishing and making shoes in the morning and reading philosophical treatises in the evening. However, there is a question whether such an answer can satisfy a *philosopher*, the one who writes philosophy (to use for a moment that slippery distinction)? As we wrote above, it does not satisfy in practice even Rorty himself, although in theory he supports it strongly. Is it possible to practice philosophy without asking oneself the question who one wants to be, even if it were the question with answers restricted to two extremes of the whole spectrum of

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of "philosophy of intersubjectivity" (to which Habermas' book is just a destructive appendix) – they choose the road of "total criticism of reason" that does not allow to distinguish them from Nietzsche, Heidegger and Adorno. So they are "dead end" of the contemporary philosophy..

<sup>38</sup> Giovanna Borradori, *The American Philosopher* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 117.

possibilities: a private and a public philosopher. How to be both of them at the same time and, on the other hand, evade such a choice? Rorty does not provide an answer to such doubts - we are inclined to see that point as a blind spot in his thinking. How to treat self-creation and solidarity as complementary rather than opposed to each other? How to treat them not as opposed but – as just different? The questions appearing here are the same: each of them, Habermas, and Derrida (and Foucault, let us add), at some point of their development, had to choose (and two of them are still choosing) from a two-poled either-or. Each of them had to choose while philosophizing rather than before it, as such a choice does not exist before one starts to practice philosophy. How is it possible that there is no reason to choose between "Dewey [that is, also, Habermas] and Derrida", how one is supposed to know the meaning of one's work, the meaning of one's (philosophical) existence? According to Rorty - in theory only, let us bear it in mind all the time – one would have to be once a private philosopher, once a public one, some Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, a philosopher of two – "peacefully co-existing" – faces. How is one to confront such double-facedness if even Rorty – in the practice of his philosophizing – chooses for himself just one, traditional face of a "public" philosopher who merely writes about *other* private philosophers? I think that is one of Rorty's rhetorical traps that serves him quite pragmatic purposes – to distance himself from and "overcome" his biggest co-claimants to fame in future books of history of philosophy (or – postphilosophy)... I am not presenting here a logical sequence of arguments from which the above temporary conclusion would spring because in the case of a philosopher-ironist it is impossible, I am merely giving some suggestion that might throw additional light to complicated relations between Rorty's neopragmatism and Continental philosophy.

#### 4.

Let us turn now to Derrida in his other account that can be found in Rorty's writings. Derrida in Rorty's "playful" and "literary" account, running from the text from 1977 entitled "Derrida on Language, Being, and Abnormal Philosophy" (in which Rorty locates him on the side of "abnormal philosophy" – referring to

Kuhn's intuitions – that "requires only genius"<sup>39</sup>), through "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing" (1978), to *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, to show just a few milestones on that road, turns out to be a writer who has "a sense of humor". Rorty says: "Indeed, his essays sometimes appear to be complicated jokes".<sup>40</sup> Christopher Norris, a famous and radical English exponent of Derrida's philosophy, and Richard Rorty, are two opposite poles of possible readings of him (the pole of Norris is, at the same time, interestingly enough, on the side opposite to *both* Habermas' and Rorty's), for Norris Derrida is a radical, transcendental, rigorous philosopher who provides philosophy with the possibility of active participation in politics (who may "give us weapons", as Rorty says about him in one of polemics<sup>41</sup>), while for Rorty Derrida is "a writer of genius who has taken philosophy for his theme".<sup>42</sup> Norris fights with Rortyan annexation of Derrida to neopragmatism and with taking away from Derrida political significance by Rorty in almost all his recent numerous books. Rorty is the number one enemy of deconstruction according to him, perhaps more serious than enemies from the analytic movement (such as John Searle in the USA or Jacques Bouveresse in France) or the hermeneutic one (such as Manfred Frank in Germany), because he admires his hero, although for reasons unacceptable to Norris. Remembering about ambivalence of such praises and about the context of "circumvention" of the "master" of deconstruction analyzed in that essay, let us listen to still another Rorty's remark on Derrida:

I cannot draw out any philosophical doctrines or morals from Derrida's work. *I simply admire his skill at writing and at reading, as I do that in a great literary critic.*<sup>43</sup>

Instead of "rigor" that Norris sees in Derrida<sup>44</sup>, Rorty sees in him a "writer about philosophy", a kind of "postphilosophical

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<sup>39</sup> Richard Rorty, "Derrida on Language, Being and Abnormal Philosophy", *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 77 (1977), p. 679.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Rorty, "Philosophy as a Literary Tradition", p. 20, p. 20.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Rorty, "Is Derrida a Transcendental Philosopher?" in PP 2, p. 120.

<sup>42</sup> Richard Rorty, "Philosophy as a Literary Tradition", p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Rorty, "Philosophy as a Literary Tradition", p. 20 – emphasis mine.

<sup>44</sup> See e.g. Christopher Norris, *Derrida* (London: Fontana) 1987.

commentator" rather than a contributor to it.<sup>45</sup> Although he feels that he has learned a lot about writers that matter to him, it is difficult to know what truths he has been taught, Rorty adds. And although the whole essay is entitled "Philosophy as a Literary Tradition" and is a review of Norris' *Derrida*, and although Rorty states in it clearly that he sees philosophy as "one more literary tradition", nevertheless in a wider context, that of coining his attitude to Derrida and that of the picture of Derrida presented to the American public, his words of admiration have somehow to be seen in the light of their pragmatic profits. Rorty's remark on a "sense of humor" may lead us still further towards the novel and away from philosophy if we recall the role played by those thoughtless, never laughing, Rabelaisian "agelasts" in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* whom Kundera revived in his *Art of the Novel*. (Incidentally, to lead that thread a little further, and to open long parentheses, the whole conception of the novel from Kundera's latest book, *Les Testaments trahis*, is contained in "humor" that belongs to the novel. Humor is an invention linked to the birth of the novel in Cervantes; the novel cannot be taken seriously and, at the same time, *rien n'est plus difficile que de faire comprendre l'humour*<sup>46</sup>, it is precisely humor rather than e.g. moral or aesthetic beauty that can testify to belonging of a given novel to the history of the novel, that is to its lasting value. Those who do not laugh – they pass judgements, pass judgements in advance and without comprehension, they pass moral judgements in a sphere in which moral judgement should be suspended. The fundamental thought of Kundera in this respect is the following: the novel is – let us recall *The Art of the Novel* – "an imaginary paradise of individuals", here, in *Les Testaments trahis*, Kundera adds that it is *le territoire où le jugement morale est suspendu*. And those who want blood of Salman Rushdie who did not attack Islam – who just *wrote a novel*, do not understand that suspension of moral judgement). The Derridean humor helps Rorty perfectly to link Derrida to literature.

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<sup>45</sup> Richard Rorty, "Philosophy as a Literary Tradition", p. 20.

<sup>46</sup> Milan Kundera, *Les Testaments trahis* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), p. 17.

Rorty hints about his strategies towards Derrida when he says that the latter "is torn between the *negative theologian's* urge to find a new pantheon ... and the *comic writer's* urge to make something once held sacred look funny. In his later work, it seems to me, he is less torn. He is content simply to have fun rather than to feel haunted".<sup>47</sup> Derrida thus has at his disposal the role of a negative theologian who is stuck in Heideggerian problematics of looking for "elementary words", or that of a comic. Obviously, these possibilities does not necessarily have to be highest compliments paid to his originality. They nevertheless do answer pragmatic need of their author.

Thus Derrida would have two faces imposed by Rorty in his highly convincing redescriptions: the dark, nostalgic, serious, "German", Heideggerian, when he says that one cannot escape the "metaphysics of presence", that the task to deconstruct binary oppositions in our culture is helplessly difficult, and the other face, light, Dionysian, funny, playful, "French", when Derrida reminds himself of his calling for a comic, a genius of writing. Rorty has a strong opinion when Derrida *is at his best*: he is at his best not when he offers us a kind of reading (against deconstructionists and generally against seeing deconstruction as a "method!"), but when he offers us a kind of writing – comic writing that does not assume that the "discourse of philosophy" would be something more than a "joke".<sup>48</sup> Derrida "at his best" realizes that a good way of making philosophical discourse enigmatic (of which he wrote in *Of Grammatology* as a task) – is to treat is as a joke. That is Derrida's answer as Rorty sees it.

In the most serious so far, as it seems, vivisection of philosophical views of Derrida made in "Deconstruction and Circumvention", Rorty distinguishes two senses of "deconstruction": a philosophical project of the French philosopher and the method of reading texts. He is obviously interested in the former as he is struggling with Derrida himself rather than with users of his philosophy in theories from deconstructive schools of

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<sup>47</sup> Richard Rorty, "Two Meanings of Logocentrism: A Reply to Norris", PP 2, p. 117 – emphasis mine.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem, p. 117.

reading. Let us remind first several points that Rorty deals in that text with. These points – in our reading of Rorty-Derrida relations presented here – are intended to link Derrida closely to Heidegger and to separate them both from Rorty himself, to his advantage. Here is thus a "serious" picture of Derrida, his other criticized side. First, Heidegger's "magic words" do not differ in their role from those of *différance* or *trace* in Derrida's philosophy:

The fact that language is a play of differences ... gives us no reason to think that words like *différance* and *trace* can do to, or for, philosophy what Heidegger failed to accomplish with his own magic words – *Sein*, *Ereignis*, and so forth.<sup>49</sup>

Second – and perhaps most important in the light of ideas of "not taking philosophy seriously" – the claim that "ontotheological" tradition has permeated science, literature and politics, common according to Rorty to both Heidegger and Derrida, is a "self-deceptive attempt to magnify the importance of an academic specialty", that is to say, of philosophy. Third, Derrida importance lies in "pursuing a certain academic specialty ... the re-reading of the texts of Western philosophy which was begun by Nietzsche and continued by Heidegger". Finally, fourth, the problem of Heidegger and Derrida how to "overcome" or flee from the ontotheological tradition is "esoteric" and "artificial" – "it has to be replaced with a lot of little pragmatic questions about which bits of that tradition might be used for some current purpose".<sup>50</sup> Let us sum up these several sentences of key importance for the understanding of Rorty's strategies towards Derrida: Derrida is linked to Heidegger by "word magic" (which Rorty also mentions in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*<sup>51</sup>), excessive attachment to philosophy as some super-discipline (and thus – knowing *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* – perhaps even some foundationalism that runs from Kantian elevation of epistemology),

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<sup>49</sup> Richard Rorty, "Deconstruction and Circumvention", p. 87.

<sup>50</sup> All citations from "Deconstruction and Circumvention", p. 87.

<sup>51</sup> All citations from "Deconstruction and Circumvention", p. 87.

re-reading of philosophical texts, and "esoteric" and "artificial" problem of escaping from metaphysics. Needless to say, all the above *distinguishes Rorty from both Derrida and Heidegger*.

The picture of Derrida is thus in that ("serious") version quite gloomy, and it becomes more comprehensible only in the context of Derrida's struggles with Heidegger: who will be the first "post-metaphysical" thinker, and who will be just the "last metaphysician". It might turn out that in fact the first post-metaphysician is Rorty the ironist who suggests that we should get rid of metaphysics as we are treating binary oppositions: "by pointing out that the oppositions are there, and then *not taking them very seriously*".<sup>52</sup> It is only such an attitude to the metaphysical tradition and to its articulation in the form of the "discourse of Western philosophy" that may entitle one to hold the title of the first post-metaphysician. So the first thinker fully freed from Platonism, from the destiny of the West, from the distinction between appearance and reality, to express the thought in different vocabularies – from such a perspective – is Rorty, at least such a view would be the most advantageous to him. Both Heidegger's "ontological difference" and his very concept of "Being" are metaphysical, the early Derrida's belief in word magic, in new elementary words, is also metaphysical. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida are trying to overthrow Platonism, the most important duality between the real world and the world of appearances, as, in Heidegger's words from "The End of Philosophy", "all metaphysics, including its opponent, positivism, speaks the language of Plato".<sup>53</sup> But that is achieved only by Rorty himself who his antiessentialism and antiplatonism expresses strongly both in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, as well as in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Rorty's antiplatonic and antiessentialistic disbelief that one could ever get to know "how things *really* are", what a given philosophical or literary text *really* says, the resistance to "objectivity" and preference for "solidarity" etc., etc. – that is the fullest breaking with metaphysics that

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<sup>52</sup> Richard Rorty, "Deconstruction and Circumvention", p. 103 – emphasis mine.

<sup>53</sup> Martin Heidegger quoted in R. Rorty, "Deconstruction" (typescript), p. 4.

philosophers from a sequence of predecessors and ancestors strengthened by Rorty have always dreamed of. An antiplatonian and a post-metaphysician cannot speak of the "destiny of the West" or of the "historical and spiritual mission of the German *Volk*" (as Heidegger did in his *Rektoratsrede*), nor can he say that *différance* is "older than Being", and the most urgent task in culture is to "deconstruct metaphysics" (Derrida) – he can only say that neither "philosophy" nor "metaphysics" are central to our ironic culture. It is not from them that evil comes in our world, nor is it from them, perhaps, that the good will come. Rorty's answer is simple: Derrida considers metaphysics to be very important (just like Heidegger), whereas it is just "a genre which had a distinguished career and an important historical function but which now survives largely in the form of self-parody".<sup>54</sup>

But that is not yet the end of the story of two Derridas that appear in Rorty's writings. Finally, we would like to note how strongly Rorty's thinking in that concrete, Derridean game, seems to be inspired by Bloomian thinking of surpassing one's predecessors, struggling with them, in order to reach fame. In his reply to remarks of Henry Staten<sup>55</sup>, Rorty, defending his picture of Derrida, says the following:

People who invent brilliant new metaphors may sincerely deny that this is what they are doing ... Your own theory about your own activity may not cohere very well with *your successors' description of what you accomplished*.<sup>56</sup>

The answer pertains to Derrida, and Rorty (let us speculate once again) already unambiguously seems to locate himself as his successor, at least in questions discussed here. Derrida does not discover a new genre of philosophizing – "he just uses some words

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<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, p. 105.

<sup>55</sup> Henry Staten, "Rorty's Circumvention of Derrida", *Critical Inquiry*, Winter 1986.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Rorty, "Nominalism in a Nutshell", *Critical Inquiry*, Winter 1986, p. 464 – emphasis mine.

in new ways".<sup>57</sup> And then saying that Staten bashes him for being more cunning, ungenerous and harsher toward Derrida than he had imagined himself to be, Rorty remarks disarmingly: "He may have a point, but it is hard for me to tell". That is – he prefers not to talk about it, fully relying on the redescrptions (be they even strong ones) of others. I would like my reading based on some textual analysis and some speculation presented in this essay on the subject of "seriousness, play, and fame" to be seen as a gloss to that magic answer. In the course of human history, all great men, and philosophers have not been an exception here, have struggled for immortality. One of best ways of achieving it is to be a strong reader of other strong readers, a strong poet for strong poets or a strong philosopher for strong philosophers. Richard Rorty in his philosophy is one of the greatest of them, and undoubtedly the most conscious of that strategy today. No wonder he is admired all over the world – his strategies produce a new, modest and singular "history of philosophy" that is fascinating, living, controversial and peculiarly personal...

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<sup>57</sup> Ibidem p. 465.

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**Marek Kwiek**

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Thought**

 **Wydawnictwo  
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