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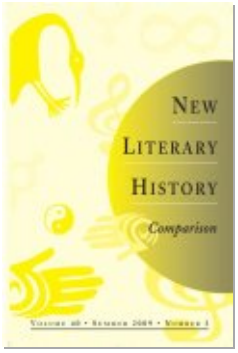

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Toril Moi

> The capacity for understanding is the same as the capacity for misunderstanding.
>
> —Stanley Cavell

Introduction

I moved to the United States in August 1989. Before I had unpacked my boxes, Ralph Cohen invited me to give a talk at the brand new Commonwealth Center for Literary and Cultural Change. Quick off the mark, passionately interested in new people and new ideas, with an unmatched knowledge of what everybody in the world was working on, Ralph was the ideal director of the Center. But he was not alone: Libby Cohen's passion and enthusiasm were as vital to the Center's generous atmosphere as Ralph's intellectual open-mindedness. I am grateful to them for inviting me back so often. Their kindness and hospitality made me feel more at home in the United States.

My first talk at the Center was about feminism and the cultural sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, which Ralph published in *New Literary History*.[1] When the journal arrived in the mail, I discovered that my essay was placed right after Cora Diamond's "Knowing Tornadoes and Other Things," a discussion of the feminist claim that "women have distinctive modes of knowledge."[2] Her paper was a revelation: here was an immensely powerful way of thinking about questions that really mattered to me. Where did this voice, this *style* come from? From Ludwig Wittgenstein, it appeared: I clearly had much to learn.

In the early 1990s, I was already disenchanted with the increasingly predictable and dogmatic arguments generated by the newly hegemonic poststructuralist theory. My interest in Bourdieu and in the decidedly nonpoststructuralist Simone de Beauvoir was a symptom of

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that disenchantment.[3] Yet neither Bourdieu nor Beauvoir were theorists of language; only Wittgenstein held out the promise of a serious alternative to the poststructuralist vision. I spent the rest of the 1990s immersing myself in the Wittgensteinian tradition, and trying to put it to use in feminist theory and in literary criticism.[4] The present essay, written to mark the end of Ralph's editorship of *New Literary History*, can be read as an account of the intellectual journey inspired in part by his editorial vision.

In my early attempts to educate myself in Wittgensteinian thought, I came across the 1988 issue of *New Literary History* devoted to "Wittgenstein and Literary Theory" (vol. 19, no. 2). By devoting an issue to the relationship between deconstruction and Wittgenstein at such an early date, Ralph demonstrated his usual prescience, as well as his conviction that theory and philosophy are fundamental parts of literary scholarship. The issue focused on Jacques Derrida and Wittgenstein. In 1988, ordinary language philosophy was not yet a significant term, and the name Stanley Cavell was barely mentioned.[5] Today, Cavell's towering importance must be acknowledged. As I use the term, "ordinary language philosophy" means the philosophical tradition after Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin as established and extended in Cavell's work.[6] Poststructuralism is harder to define.[7] I use the term about theories and philosophies that build on Ferdinand de Saussure's vision of language, alone or in combination with continental philosophy. Structuralism, poststructuralism, and deconstruction are names for different strands of this post-Saussurean tradition. "Theory" or "French theory" are other names for the same phenomenon. Thinkers within each tradition are quite different from one another, yet not in ways that make it difficult to decide which tradition to place them in.

A generation ago poststructuralism was a firebrand stirring up the humanities. Today, most humanities scholars outside philosophy departments have been trained in some form of poststructuralism. The poststructuralist understanding of language, meaning, and interpretation has become the unspoken doxa of the humanities. It is no coincidence that almost all the books on Cavell that have appeared since 1989 have been written by philosophers and not by literary critics.[8]

This situation makes the concerns of ordinary language philosophy hard to grasp. Over the years I have found that attempts to discuss ordinary language philosophy often fail because my post-Saussurean interlocutors and I begin with startlingly different assumptions about fundamental issues—assumptions which we never formulate explicitly, but which produce conversations that only reveal that we are speaking completely at cross purposes. Adherents of ordinary language philosophy

often feel that their positions are being sorely misunderstood, and that they are powerless to convey quickly and coherently exactly why they feel misunderstood. The result is frustration on both sides, and, on the side of the ordinary language philosopher, an abiding despair of ever being heard. The aim of this essay is to explain why these situations arise and lay the ground for more meaningful discussions of ordinary language philosophy.

This essay makes two fundamental arguments: (1) Poststructuralism and ordinary language philosophy are different paradigms, in Thomas Kuhn's sense of the word. I share the misgivings of those who feel that Kuhn is not well-suited to explain anything at all in the humanities. But, as I shall show, in the case of Cavell there are unusually solid reasons to turn to Kuhn. (2) Attempts to squeeze ordinary language philosophy into the poststructuralist paradigm will always fail. When ordinary language philosophy is read through the lens of poststructuralism, misunderstandings are inevitable.

To make other visions available, it is necessary to loosen the grip of the poststructuralist picture of language. The Wittgensteinian method for doing this is to (re)describe it, so as to make it available for inspection and discussion. The next step is to compare the poststructuralist picture to that of ordinary language philosophy. Wittgenstein's most famous use of "picture" comes in §115 of *Philosophical Investigations*: "A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably."[9] But the Wittgensteinian "picture" does not only mean something like a "mistaken set of assumptions" or a "confining frame." It means the way we see something, and particularly the way we think things fit together. (Wittgenstein often writes as if the example he has in mind is an engineer's drawings of machinery.) Such pictures may be enabling or disabling; a picture that works in one situation may not in another. In this sense, a picture is something like the condition of possibility of a project. The same picture can give rise to different intellectual positions. Whether I affirm, deny, or deconstruct a picture, I am still in the grip of that picture, since no alternative has been proposed.[10]

To solve a problem, the ordinary language philosopher will attempt to reach a clear view of the picture that gives rise to it (PI §122). This is usually done by looking closely at the way the problem is formulated. This is the *work* of ordinary language philosophy. An ordinary language analysis consists in the careful examination of specific examples, and therefore has to include extensive quotation. This essay could have focused on any one of a number of different examples. Derrida and Judith Butler assume that Austin's "force" can be taken in Friedrich

Nietzsche's sense of the word. Ewa Ziarek thinks that Cavell's "forms of life" means the same thing as "discursive communities." Gordon Bearn takes for granted that arguments based on Derrida's notion of "marks" will have purchase on Cavell's and Austin's understanding of meaning. Each claim is interestingly revealing of the misreadings that arise when one projects the poststructuralist picture onto ordinary language philosophy, and each claim could have been the topic of an essay in its own right.[11]

In the end, however, I chose to work on the two traditions' different understanding of *concepts* because it goes straight to the heart of their most fundamental assumptions about what the task of philosophy is. In his magnificent defense of Austin against Derrida, Cavell briefly raises the question of concepts. As far as I know, the subject has not been discussed elsewhere.[12] Before investigating their differences, however, I shall begin by acknowledging the two traditions' similiarities in vocabulary and interests. Then I shall explain why I nevertheless think that Kuhn's notions of paradigms and paradigm shifts provide the best framework for understanding their relationship.

So Close Yet So Distant: Different Pictures, Different Paradigms

Poststructuralism and ordinary language philosophy are at once remarkably close and remarkably distant. They have much in common: both reject foundationalism and metaphysics, both think of philosophy as writing, not as problem solving, both are interested in performances and performatives, and in the relationship between philosophy and literature, both have welcomed psychoanalysis—and this is just the beginning of a long list. Nobody has brought out the closeness and the distance more eloquently than Cavell himself in his response to Derrida's "Signature Event Context":

> Since Derrida sees ordinary language as an "effect" . . . of a general writing, which is its possibility, and since Wittgenstein sees metaphysics as an effect of ordinary language, needing its words but denying their shared criteria, it should not surprise us that each pivotal concept at issue between Derrida and Austin—presence, writing, voice, word, sign, language, context, intention, force, communication, concept, performance, signature; not to mention, of course, consequent ideas of philosophy, of the ordinary, of analysis, of the end of philosophy, of work, of fun—is turned by their differences. I know of no position from which to *settle* this systematic turning.[13]

The concepts listed by Cavell figure in both traditions: they are the same, yet they are given different weight, placed in different contexts, given different work to do. The "systematic turning" that Cavell speaks of makes it particularly hard to figure out the relationship between the traditions. It is certainly not one of straightforward opposition, for it is simply not the case that what the one asserts, the other denies.[14] Local agreement is not to be trusted either, for it often masks deep divergence.[15]

Cavell reports that he read "Signature Event Context" "with disheartenment." Derrida, he felt, was "denying the event of ordinary language philosophy, . . . seeing it as, after all, a continuation of the old questions, the old answers" (CP 58). For Cavell, the event of ordinary language philosophy was a revolution; for Derrida, it was just more of the same.[16] The sense of frustration in Cavell's 1994 essay is palpable, and maybe all the more so since he had been there before, back in the 1960s, when he was trying to convey the procedures of ordinary language philosophy to analytic philosophers. At the time he noted the "misunderstanding and bitterness" between positivists and philosophers proceeding from ordinary language: "The philosopher who proceeds from everyday language stares back helplessly, asking, 'Don't you feel the difference? Listen, you *must* see it.' Surely, both know what the other knows, and each thinks the other is perverse, or irrelevant, or worse."[17]

If we transfer Cavell's sense that "both know what the other knows" to the encounter between poststructuralism and ordinary language philosophy, the difference that emerges is not one of superior or inferior knowledge, but rather, of different *ways of seeing* the same thing. But if we see it differently, are we then seeing the same thing? Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit comes to mind, and so does Kuhn's "paradigm shift," a concept built in part on the example of the duck-rabbit. Kuhn's description of what happens when practitioners of competing paradigms try to communicate with one another fits the case perfectly: "The proponents of competing paradigms practice their trades in different worlds. . . . Practicing in different worlds, the two groups of scientists see different things when they look from the same point in the same direction. . . . That is why a law that cannot even be demonstrated to one group of scientists may occasionally seem intuitively obvious to another."[18]

It is no coincidence that Kuhn's account catches so well Cavell's sense of the difficulty and frustration arising in the encounter between ordinary language philosophy and the analytic tradition. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is deeply Wittgensteinian, not to say Cavellian in spirit and argumentation. In the 1950s, when Kuhn was writing his classic book, he and Cavell were "at times almost in possession of something you might call an intellectual community," Cavell writes.[19] Kuhn for his part calls

Cavell his "creative sounding board," and "the only person with whom I have ever been able to explore my ideas in incomplete sentences."[20]

Poststructuralism and ordinary language philosophy can be pictured as two different ways of seeing, as two different paradigms, each with their own practitioners. This explains why their terms can be so similar, yet so different: in some ways, which I shall try to bring out in this paper, they genuinely are incommensurable. I don't mean to say that the humanities develop in the same way as the natural sciences. In the natural sciences, one paradigm eventually replaces another, becoming the new unquestioned ground for "normal science." In the humanities, there is no such evolution. As long as they have practitioners, different paradigms will remain competing schools. This creates the variety and riches of perspectives that is the very hallmark of the humanities.

Kuhn's "paradigm" is particularly useful when it comes to explaining what it takes to move from one paradigm to the other. Can readers immersed in one even hope to make sense of the world view of another? Kuhn writes: "[B]efore they can hope to communicate fully, one group or the other must experience the conversion that we have been calling a paradigm shift. Just because it is a transition between incommensurables, the transition between competing paradigms cannot be made a step at a time, forced by logic and neutral experience. Like the gestalt switch [the switch from seeing the duck to seeing the rabbit] it must occur all at once (though not necessarily in an instant) or not at all."[21] In a similar spirit, Cavell writes that it may take a conversion experience for Wittgenstein to be received in philosophy: "*Philosophical Investigations*, like the major modernist works of the past century at least, is logically speaking, esoteric. That is, such works seek to split their audience into insiders and outsiders, . . . hence [they] demand for their sincere reception the shock of conversion."[22]

Will this essay convince anyone to read Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell differently? Well, if they were ready to do so anyway, it might help. But conversion experiences cannot be forced.[23] We can't *will* ourselves to see the rabbit if we are stuck with the duck: the other aspect *dawns* on us, Wittgenstein notes (PI 2:166). This applies in reverse, too: once one has experienced the "shock of conversion," one can't just will oneself to go back.

Derrida's "Rigorous and Scientific" Concepts

Derrida's first words in "Signature Event Context" strike me as melodramatic, for they are too insistent, too absolute: "Is it certain that to

the word *communication* corresponds a concept that is unique, univocal, rigorously controllable, and transmittable: in a word, communicable? Thus in accordance with a strange figure of discourse, one must first of all ask oneself whether or not the word or signifier 'communication' communicates a determinate content, an identifiable meaning, or a describable value."[24] Some might see humor or irony in this language, but even if they are right, Derrida is deadly serious about the philosophical point he is making.

Cavell finds Derrida's opening lines philosophically bizarre: "How many things are wrong with that remark?" (CP 100), he asks, quoting Austin.[25] Derrida's question ("Is it certain that…") implies that someone has been saying that it *is* certain. Yet that someone was not Austin: "It is a problem for me to understand how Derrida imagines Austin to be captured in the questions," Cavell writes (CP 100). "Austin must take the opening question of 'Signature Event Context' as a certain instance of what he calls 'a quite unreal question'" (CP 112). An unreal question is a "question that *has* no answer."[26] The only philosophically reputable way to deal with an unanswerable question, Austin notes, is "not to get bamboozled into asking it at all."[27]

Apparently, then, the immediate response of ordinary language philosophy to Derrida's question is to imply that it is meaningless, and to say straight out that he would be better off never asking it in the first place. A Derridean will find this as baffling and unphilosophical as Cavell finds Derrida's opening lines. I shall now try to explain why Cavell (and Austin and Wittgenstein) react as they do to Derrida's question or, in other words, why it is impossible for an ordinary language philosopher to enter into a conversation on the terms it offers.

Derrida begins "Signature Event Context" twice. In the first sentence he asks whether we can be certain that concepts "correspond" to words. Here Derrida, like Saussure, uses *word* to mean "signifier," and *concept* to mean "signified."[28] The question is whether we can be certain that one signifier has only one rigorously controllable signified attached to it. In other words: can we be sure that a given word (in this case "communication") has only one, strictly defined meaning? It is hard for me to conceive that anyone would answer "yes!" to this. Surely Derrida can't be serious?[29]

Serious or not, Derrida's whole argument takes off from an extreme demand for "univocal" meaning. The implication is that if words don't have one, "unified" and "rigorously controllable" meaning, then they either don't have any meaning at all, or become so "polysemic" that we can never tell what they mean (SEC 1). How then is it possible to understand words at all? The usual explanation, which Derrida invokes, is that *context* can "massively reduc[e]" the ambiguities of words (SEC 2).[30]

This gets us to the principal subject and second beginning of "Signature Event Context": "But are the conditions [*les réquisits*] of a context ever absolutely determinable? This is, fundamentally, the most general question that I shall endeavor to elaborate. Is there a rigorous and scientific concept of context? . . . Stating it in the most summary manner possible, I shall try to demonstrate why a context is never absolutely determinable, or rather, why its determination can never be entirely certain or saturated. This structural non-saturation would . . . mark the theoretical inadequacy *of the current concept of context* [...]" (SEC 2–3). Again, we are confronted with a demand for *absolute* determination and *total* certainty. Yet the terms of the argument have changed. In this passage, "concept" no longer means "signified," but rather a "rigorously scientific" term, of the kind required to ground a theory. Derrida is getting ready to show that because it is impossible to give a context an "absolutely determinable" definition, there can be no "rigorous and scientific" concept of context. According to Derrida, if he is right, context cannot be a serious subject for philosophy, and Austin's whole understanding of speech acts falls flat.

The two beginnings have a parallel structure: both set up a demand for absolute certainty and rigor, and both build towards the conclusion that such certainty, such rigor, cannot be had. Yet Derrida's arguments concerning concepts in the sense of "signifieds" and concepts in the sense of "scientifically rigorous terms" are quite different. In the first case, the absence of "unique, univocal" signifieds leads to the idea that meaning is plural and multiple, which Derrida develops (here and elsewhere) through concepts such as *différance*, trace, mark, and others. In the second, the lack of a rigorously scientific concept of context leads to an attempt to provide a *new* concept that actually *is* "rigorous and scientific," namely *iterability*.

What does Derrida want from concepts? Since there is no evidence that he ever read, let alone responded to, Cavell's defense of Austin, we must look for an explanation in his response to John Searle's critique of "Signature Event Context."[31] Here I must stress that Searle's critique of Derrida is quite alien to ordinary language philosophy, and I shall not discuss it at all in this essay.[32] Yet Searle raises a question about concepts that ordinary language philosophers also find relevant when he accuses Derrida of believing that "unless a distinction can be made rigorous and precise it isn't really a distinction at all."[33] Derrida reacts with fury: "Among all the accusations that shocked me coming from his pen, and which I will not even try to enumerate, why is it that this one is without a doubt the most stupefying, the most unbelievable? And, I must confess, also the most incomprehensible to me" (A 123).

Is Derrida furious because Searle has failed to realize that he is not interested in establishing rigorous concepts, but in deconstructing them? Not at all. He is shocked because he can't fathom how *anyone* could possibly take such a notion of concepts to be a *problem*. For Derrida, "rigorous and precise" distinctions are the very foundation of philosophy: "What philosopher ever since there were philosophers, what logician ever since there were logicians, what theoretician ever renounced this axiom: in the order of concepts (for we are speaking of concepts and not of the colors of clouds or the taste of certain chewing gums), when a distinction cannot be rigorous or precise, it is not a distinction at all" (A 123).

Ordinary language philosophers will react with dismay, or even rage, to Derrida's casual exclusion of color and taste, and clouds and chewing gum, from the field of philosophy (the "order of concepts"), for they will hear in his words contempt for the ordinary and the everyday, for the very things that they value most. For an ordinary language philosopher, the taste of Canary wine, and the difficulty of pointing to the color blue, occupy a happy and honored place among the concerns of philosophy, as do impertinent questions ("Do you dress that way voluntarily?") and stories about shooting donkeys by accident or by mistake.[34] That Derrida so casually, and with such condescension, excludes such things from philosophy dramatizes the radical difference between the two traditions' understanding of the task of philosophy.

What is at stake in Derrida's commitment to "rigorous and scientific" concepts? Everything, I am tempted to say. Rigorous concepts are required for deconstruction to get off the ground. A characteristic deconstructive analysis begins by showing that a key conceptual opposition breaks down under pressure, usually because it has to exclude features that actually are central to its operation. The deconstruction brings out the incoherence, or self-contradiction, of the original concepts, and shows that they are, in fact, "incapable of describing or accounting for anything whatsoever" (A 126).

One example is Derrida's famous deconstruction, in *Of Grammatology*, of Saussure's distinction between writing and speech. In the *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure privileges speech over writing.[35] Saussure's attempt at defining language in a way that excludes writing is easily deconstructed by Derrida, who shows that the repressed returns to destroy the coherence of Saussure's notion of speech. Derrida concludes that speech was always a form of writing; writing itself is the repressed origin of language.

The new concept of writing, however, is not the same as the old one. Derrida calls it *archi-écriture*, or "arche-writing."[36] "Arche-writing" is not

writing at all, but rather something like the condition of all language, whether written or spoken. For my argument, however, it doesn't matter what "arche-writing" is; what matters is its structural function as a concept capable of generating (subsuming under itself) *both* speech and writing, both the traditional concept and the exception that destroyed it. Derrida continues to call the new concept "writing" because it "essentially communicates with the vulgar [*vulgaire*] concept of writing."[37] (In Derrida's derogatory use of "vulgar" for "ordinary," I see another sign of his attitude towards the ordinary.[38])

After deconstruction comes construction. New concepts, like "arche-writing," must be found to replace the old: "Instead of excluding 'marginal' or 'parasitical' cases, what must be recognized is how a structure called normal or ideal can render possible or necessary all these phenomena, all these 'accidents.' And to accomplish this task, other concepts must be formed, the habitual logical space transformed (others will say, deformed), etc." (A 127). For Derrida, then, a concept is a "structure called normal or ideal," and his project is to produce them. This gives rise to the long series of Derridean concepts: *différance*, mark, supplement, iterability, trace, pharmakon, hymen, parergon, and many others.[39] These all function like "arche-writing," in that they all occupy a higher level of generality than the concepts they replace.

A Derridean concept also has to account for all possible *future* mishaps: "Inasmuch as it does not integrate the *possibility* of borderline cases, the *essential* possibility of those cases called 'marginal,' of accidents, anomalies, contaminations, parasitism, inasmuch as it does not account for how, *in* the ideal concept of a structure said to be 'normal,' 'standard,' etc. (for example, that of the promise), such a divergence is *possible*, it may be said that the formation of a general theory or of an ideal concept remains insufficient, weak, or empirical" (A 118). There are Husserlian overtones here: concepts and the theories based on them belong in the realm of the ideal; the rest is merely empirical, and as such has no philosophical interest. In his understanding of concepts Derrida is, as he stresses in his reply to Searle, a perfectly traditional philosopher. To find a radical critique of the traditional notion of concepts, it is necessary to turn to Wittgenstein.

Derrida's view of concepts explains why he accuses Austin of having failed to "ponder" the fact that "a possibility—a possible risk—is *always* possible, and is in some sense a necessary possibility" (SEC 15). For ordinary language philosophers, this is an almost incomprehensible critique of Austin, who constantly stresses that the performative (or any other speech act) may "misfire," be "infelicitous," or in some other way go wrong. Cavell rightly complains that Derrida fails to acknowledge that

Austin "affirms in every sentence" precisely what Derrida criticizes him for denying, namely that "failure is an essential risk of the operations under consideration" (CP 85; SEC 15).

Since Austin so fully and freely acknowledges this, as Martin Stone points out, Derrida's requirement can't just be that Austin should *say* that failures will always happen. What then is Derrida asking Austin to do? Stone answers: "What is needed . . . beyond Austin's acknowledgement of the possibility of accidents, is an *account* of this possibility. 'Anomalies' . . . must be represented as not anomalous at all, as falling, rather, under an integrating 'law.'"[40] The Derridean philosopher Simon Glendinning reaches the same conclusion: Derrida, he writes, "wishes to stress that 'impurity' is an irreducible structural or 'original' feature of *all* locutionary acts, and so it is not conceived, as it is for Austin, as something that just typically comes to pass."[41] Derrida requires concepts that build an account of possible mishaps into their very being: any other form of acknowledgement of mishaps and accidents simply will not suffice. There really is no point in trying, like Glendinning, to hold ordinary language philosophers to this requirement, since they see it as a misguided demand (an "unanswerable question"), first, for something language neither can nor should deliver, namely *absolutely* rigorous concepts (I shall return to this in my discussion of Wittgenstein), and, second, for an attempt to provide *a general account of meaning as such.*

The second point requires clarification. Why does Derrida's understanding of concepts, and the critique of Austin based on it, amount to a demand for a general account of meaning as such? To answer, we must first return to Austin, who constantly reminds us that the meaning of an utterance depends on who says what to whom under what circumstances. ("What we should say when, what words we should use in what situation."[42]) For Austin, there can be no higher order account of meaning than a precise accounting for (a "recounting," Cavell might say) the specific words used in a specific situation. This is why Austin does not just say, but also shows by example, that the same words often mean something different in new situations—that a phrase that works in one case may "misfire," come off all wrong, in another. But Austin's case by case acknowledgement of mishaps is exactly what Derrida objects to. His critique of Austin parallels the logical positivists' critique of Wittgenstein's talk about *countless* language-games, and his refusal to account for language in general (PI §65).

Derrida's alternative to Austin's procedures is precisely to propose a general account of how words come to mean anything at all regardless of any specific context. This is what the concept of *iterability* is supposed to provide: "For, ultimately, isn't it true that what Austin excludes as anomaly,

exception, 'non-serious' *citation* . . . is the determined modification of a general citationality—or rather, a general iterability—without which there would not even be a 'successful' performative?" (SEC 17). Thus, on an extraordinarily high level of generality, *iterability* is supposed to account for the way any specific utterance, past, present, and future, gets meaning. Derrida speaks, quite seriously, of a "*general* iterability which constitutes a violation of the allegedly rigorous purity of *every* event of discourse or *every* speech act" (SEC 18; my emphases). To an ordinary language philosopher, however, "iterability" as Derrida defines it here is an attempt to totalize all possible, past, present, and future speech acts in one concept. Since the task is plainly impossible, such a concept can't mean anything at all; it is a perfect example of language "on holiday" (*PI*, §38), language that does no work, that is, language that means nothing. This is what Cavell has in mind when he warns that "it *makes no sense* at all to give a general explanation for the generality of language."[43] It is hard to imagine a greater clash between philosophical visions.

This difference cannot be bridged, for it arises from the respective traditions' most fundamental understanding of meaning: for the post-Saussurean Derrida, meaning is an effect of a *system*; for the Wittgensteinian Cavell, it is *use*. (This is no more than shorthand notation, but it will have to do in this context.)[44] A system can in principle be accounted for by a general theory; use—understood as the countless ways in which human beings use, have used, and will use language every day—cannot.

Both traditions agree that mishaps, mistakes, misunderstandings, and accidents will arise in human communication. Deconstruction draws the skeptical conclusion, namely that this means that we can *never* really be sure that we know what a word or sentence means. Ordinary language philosophers respond by pointing out that we are often quite sure about meaning, and that even severe mistakes, misunderstandings, and plain puzzlement don't change our usual understanding of the relevant concepts. ("The sign-post is in order—if, under normal circumstances, it fulfils its purpose" [PI §87].) This kind of reasoning, however, holds no sway over the deconstructionist, who is convinced that such local or individual experiences of certainty amount to a kind of empiricist forgetting of the structural conditions of meaning as such. Since the ordinary language philosopher is convinced that there can be no such thing as the "structural conditions of meaning as such" (and thus no such thing as "iterability"), further conversation becomes impossible.

As we have seen, Derrida refers to concepts, including his deconstructive ones, as "ideal." "Classical theory," he writes, engages in "necessary idealizations" (A 118). Derrida's deconstructive concepts at once enact and deconstruct such ideality.[45] Here, for example, is Derrida's account of

the powers of "iterability": "[T]he concept of iterability itself, like all the concepts that form or deform themselves in its wake, is an ideal concept, to be sure, but also the concept that marks the essential and ideal limit of all pure idealization, the ideal concept of the limit of all idealization, and not the concept of nonideality (since it is also the concept of the possibility of ideality) . . . [Iterability] entails the necessity of thinking *at once* both the rule and the event, concept and singularity" (A 119). All strong theoretical concepts, including the deconstructive concepts Derrida develops in order to construct a "different 'logic', a different 'general theory'" (A 117), are idealizations.

For Derrida, an "ideal concept" is a "rigorous concept" (A 128). As we shall now see, this—the idea that philosophical concepts must have a special ideality, a particularly "rigorous and scientific" precision—is exactly the picture of concepts that Wittgenstein challenges.

"Back to the Rough Ground!" Wittgenstein

Like Husserl and Derrida, Wittgenstein uses the word "ideal" about "rigorous and scientific" concepts (SEC 3). But for Wittgenstein, this is criticism, not praise. The quest for absolutely rigorous concepts is a hopeless enterprise, caused by our fatal commitment to the ideal: "We are dazzled by the ideal and therefore fail to see the actual use of the word 'game' clearly" (PI §100).

Wittgenstein also describes the "ideal" as "the purest crystal" (PI §97). The quest for "crystalline purity" (PI §107 and §108) will lead to nothing but clownish pratfalls: "We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!" (PI §107). Why does Wittgenstein think that we can't walk, can't think, can't do anything useful at all, if we succumb to the temptation to look for absolutely rigorous concepts? To find an answer, we must turn to his critique of Gottlob Frege, who famously claims that philosophical concepts must be absolutely sharply defined: "[T]he concept must have a sharp boundary. . . . [A] concept that is not sharply defined is wrongly termed a concept."[46] The parallel to Derrida's "when a distinction cannot be rigorous or precise, it is not a distinction at all" is striking (A 123).[47]

To convey why he thinks that Frege's demand for sharp concepts is disastrous for philosophy, Wittgenstein uses the example of the word "game." He begins by pointing out that sometimes blurred concepts work just fine:

> One might say that the concept "game" is a concept with blurred edges.—"But is a blurred concept a concept at all?"—Is an indistinct photograph a picture of a person at all? Is it even always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture by a sharp one? Isn't the indistinct one often exactly what we need?
>
> Frege compares a concept to an area and says that an area with vague boundaries cannot be called an area at all. This presumably means that we cannot do anything with it.—But is it senseless to say: "Stand roughly there"? (PI §71)

Here we may be tempted to conclude that although rough concepts work just fine in many situations, sharp ones will always work even better. Wittgenstein is at pains to stress that this is not the case. Often the blurred concept is exactly what we want: "If someone were to draw a sharp boundary I could not acknowledge it as the one that I too always wanted to draw, or had drawn in my mind. For I did not want to draw one at all. His concept can then be said to be not the same as mine, but akin to it" (PI §76).

In many cases then, it is useless to spend time and energy trying to produce a sharp concept. To avoid meaningless work, we need to understand the situation we are dealing with. If I want to take a picture of you in front of the Eiffel Tower, surely "stand roughly there" is all I need to say. I could get out the satellite navigation system and geocode your position, but unless there is some reason why I must take a picture of you on an exact spot defined by longitude and latitude, it would be pointless to go to so much trouble.

Wittgenstein, who trained as an engineer, is not *against* precise concepts and *for* rough ones. It takes extremely precise concepts to solve mathematical problems, for example. But such concepts are neither superior to nor "more philosophical" than ordinary ones. Extremely precise technical languages such as infinitesimal calculus are simply "new boroughs" of the "ancient city" of language (PI §18). Just as a city has different neighborhoods, language has many regions. Any field of human practice—car mechanics, botany, bull-fighting, haute couture—develops the specialized concepts it needs, and they all belong to ordinary language.[48]

For Derrida, concepts are specialist philosophical tools (rigorous, pure, absolutely determinable); for Wittgenstein, concepts are ordinary words doing ordinary work. The difference between the precise concepts of a car mechanic and the ideal concepts of a philosopher is that the car mechanic's concepts are not "on holiday" (PI §38). A concept that works is a concept that does what it should, namely mean something. By contrast, a concept that is "like an engine idling" no longer means anything at all (PI §132). We can't *do* anything with it: "On the one hand it is clear that every sentence in our language 'is in order as it is.'

That is to say, we are not striving after an ideal, as if our ordinary vague sentences had not yet got a quite unexceptionable sense, and a perfect language awaited construction by us.—On the other hand it seems clear that where there is sense there must be perfect order.—So there must be perfect order even in the vaguest sentence" (PI §98).

In §98 there are a number of claims. Most important is the idea that the quest for rigorous concepts reveals the belief that ordinary language *lacks* something that only philosophy can supply. Against this, Wittgenstein insists that ordinary language is in "order as it is." This means that *philosophy* has no business trying to "fix" or "improve" ordinary language, for ordinary language already provides us with all the distinctions we need to express ourselves as well and as precisely as human beings can ever hope to do.[49] Wittgenstein, in short, is trying to get us to respect the powers of discrimination and expression of ordinary language. This is why a Wittgensteinian can find no common ground with a Derridean, or anyone else who shares the view that ordinary language must be left behind for philosophy to begin.

In *Philosophical Investigations* there are two kinds of philosophy: the kind that leads us away from the ordinary, and the kind that leads us back to it. The former is what Wittgenstein calls metaphysics; the latter is "what *we* do." Metaphysics requires therapy (see PI §133); the task of the kind of philosophy that "we do" is to clear up the confusions produced by philosophy. "What *we* do" is to "bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use" (PI §116). This can be done by reminding us of something we already know, namely, how we use words in the "language which is its original home" (PI §116).

But isn't there a different sense in which ordinary language cannot possibly be "in order as it is"? Isn't ordinary language the medium in which dominant ideology is expressed? Isn't a defense of ordinary language also a defense of common sense, which many theorists take to be inherently conservative? Wittgenstein is obviously not defending every single utterance ever made or ever to be made in ordinary language: how could he be? Calls for uprising and revolution are also made in ordinary language. By considering language as a *use*, as a *practice*, as an *act*, he places the burden of responsibility on *us*: you are responsible for your words, I for mine. If my words are fascist, or racist, you may oppose me. But our fight will take place in ordinary language. Drawing on §241 in *Philosophical Investigations*, Sandra Laugier puts this succinctly: "We agree in language, not in what we say."[50]

Here it seems justified to ask whether *everything* is ordinary language. What is *not* ordinary?[51] The opposite of the ordinary is the metaphysical. Metaphysics arises when we give in to the "tendency to sublime the

logic of our language" (PI §38). To sublime a demand for precision (for example) is to strip off the specific reasons we had for wanting precision in the first place, so that we are left with a *general* demand for a "state of complete exactness" (PI §91). In *Sense and Sensibilia*, Austin provides a fine account of the madness this provokes. All we can ever do, he notes, is to determine whether a concept is precise enough *for a particular purpose*: "[T]here is no terminus to the business of making ever finer divisions and discriminations, [for] what is precise (enough) for some purposes will be much too rough and crude for others. A description, for example, can no more be absolutely, finally, and ultimately *precise* than it can be absolutely *full* or *complete*."[52] To ask a question in general, without bearing in mind the reasons we have for asking it, is the beginning of the process of "subliming" our words.

Ordinary language, however, gives us no protection against skepticism, or indeed against metaphysics. The picture that holds us captive *lies in our language*, Wittgenstein writes (PI §115): this means not just that the language of metaphysics holds us captive, but, far more disturbingly, that there is something about ordinary language itself—and about us—that will always make it possible for us to turn away from the ordinary.[53] If Derrida sees ordinary language as an "effect" of a general writing (SEC 19), Cavell sees metaphysics as an effect of ordinary language (see CP 63). But the questions that arise here—questions of criteria, skepticism, attunement, acknowledgement, responsibility, ethics—lie beyond the scope of this essay.

Returning to the Ordinary: From Concepts to Examples

In the previous section I quoted the beginning of Wittgenstein's §71. To see what he proposes instead of "rigorously scientific" concepts, we must read the rest of the paragraph:

> But is it senseless to say: "Stand roughly there"? Suppose that I were standing with someone in a city square and said that. As I say it I do not draw any kind of boundary, but perhaps point with my hand—as if I were indicating a particular *spot*. And this is just how one might explain to someone what a game is. One gives examples and intends them to be taken in a particular way.—I do not, however, mean by this that he is supposed to see in those examples that common thing which I—for some reason—was unable to express; but that he is now to *employ* those examples in a particular way. Here giving examples is not an *indirect* means of explaining—in default of a better. For any general definition may be misunderstood too. The point is that *this* is how we play the game. (I mean the language-game with the word "game.") (PI §71)

To my knowledge, the only deconstructionist to comment on §71 is the distinguished Derrida scholar Geoffrey Bennington, who concludes that Wittgenstein must mean that the "actual nature of concepts [is] constitutively to be blurred."[54] That this is a severe misreading cannot be in doubt. It is interesting here because it shows what goes wrong when Derrida's understanding of concepts is applied to Wittgenstein. Bennington reasons as follows: since Wittgenstein freely admits that misunderstandings will arise, he must want to integrate this insight into a new general ("structural") account of concepts, which can only be that they are blurred. This makes it look as if Wittgenstein's blurred boundaries occupy the same conceptual ground as Frege's sharp boundaries. But this is not the case.

In §71 Wittgenstein moves from blurred concepts, to "stand roughly there," to examples. The turn to examples is particularly puzzling to Bennington. If concepts can have blurred boundaries, and therefore must be established through examples, and if we are not supposed to look for what the examples have in common (Bennington thinks this must mean look for their essence), then what makes words mean anything at all? Bennington's picture of concepts forces him to turn to mysticism: the answer must be, he writes, that for Wittgenstein the "identity of any concept is not to be secured definitionally at all, but by a process of exemplification which, insofar as it does not function in view of an essence (of which the examples would be examples), necessarily implies an irreducible *this*."[55] This leads him to formulate a general theory of Wittgenstein's "mystical unnamable 'this,'" which includes the claim that Wittgenstein takes all language games to have a "nucleus of opacity and inexplicability."[56] This outlandish idea follows logically from the assumption that Wittgenstein must agree that the task of philosophy is to produce "ideal concepts."

Bennington's Derridean starting point makes him blind to Wittgenstein's own explanation of why he moves from concepts to examples. In §71, Wittgenstein's "Here giving examples is not an *indirect* means of explaining—in default of better" means that examples *are* the explanation. Examples neither *represent* nor *hide* essences; they *teach* (*show*, *instruct*) us how to *use* words: examples *teach* us *how to go on*: Wittgenstein is reminding us what we do when we learn to speak. Knowing how to go on, how to use words in ever new contexts is what Cavell calls *projecting* a word.[57] By turning from concepts to examples, Wittgenstein opens up a vast new field of inquiry: an investigation of what it is to learn a word. That investigation will show that we "learn language and learn the world *together*, that they become elaborated and distorted together, and in the same places."[58]

However precise our concepts may be, they will still need to be taught, and learned. Cavell points out that every time we use a word in a new situation (every time we "project" a word), every time we show some creativity in our use of language, we will need to explain what we mean:

> [O]nce we see . . . that concepts do not usually have, and do not need "rigid limits," [and once we see that] a new application of a word or a concept will still have to be *made out*, *explained*, in the particular case . . . and see, finally that I *know* no more about the application of a word or concept than the explanations I can give, so that no universal or definition would, as it were, *represent* my knowledge (cf. §73)—once we see all this, the idea of a universal no longer has its *obvious* appeal, it no longer carries a sense of explaining something profound.[59]

Concepts are not superior to examples; concepts *require* examples.

Wittgenstein's shift from concepts to examples leads us away from metaphysics and back to the ordinary and the everyday. It makes him ask how we grow into a life in language, and what it means to live in a world of language. Much of *Philosophical Investigations* is about learning, finding out, wanting to find out, knowing how to do something, knowing how to go on.[60] It is no coincidence that Wittgenstein begins by quoting Augustine's account of how *he* learned to speak. As Cavell has shown in many different ways, scenes of instruction, education, teaching, and learning lie at the very heart of ordinary language philosophy, for it is by understanding what happens in such circumstances that we will discover how we become creatures of language in the first place.[61]

This is where the real adventure of ordinary language philosophy begins: the story it has to tell about how "we talk and act," and about how "[i]n 'learning language' [we] learn not merely what the names of things are, but what a name is; not merely what the form of expression is for expressing a wish, but what expressing a wish is; not merely what the word for 'father' is, but what a father is; not merely what the word for 'love' is, but what love is."[62] Because ordinary language philosophy pictures the connection between world and word as one of growing into a world, into a form of life; because it investigates the many ways that words are "world-bound" (CP 116 and 118), it sees no gap between the order of language and the order of history, between language and other kinds of human practices.

Because it grasps language not as a system, but as human practice, ordinary language philosophy cannot think about language without immediately also thinking about the other, about the human body and the human mind, about existence, morality, and politics. It immerses us in a world of learning and teaching, of understanding and misunderstanding, madness and skepticism, isolation and solidarity, in short, in the

ordinary and everyday world in which we all live. This world is the world of language: "we learn language and learn the world *together*."[63]

"Practicing Their Trades in Different Worlds"

Here we have reached bedrock (see, by way of comparison, PI §217). From within the post-Saussurean tradition, the idea of the intertwinement of language and the world is simply unavailable. Nothing is more fundamental to the post-Saussurean tradition than the idea that there is an unbridgeable gap between words and world. This picture builds on Saussure's distinction between speech (*langage*) and language (*langue*). To Saussure, speech is too "many-sided and heterogeneous" to be the object of one science; language by contrast is a "self-contained whole and a principle of classification."[64] For linguists, Saussure's purely formal definition of language as a self-contained system of signs turned out to be exceptionally productive. But Saussure never dreamt of building a philosophy of language, to base a vision of the relationship (or lack of it) between language and the world on this definition. This is why *Course in General Linguistics* never once raises the question of reference: for Saussure, this was simply not a question for linguistics.

In a short essay entitled "Husserl and Wittgenstein," Paul Ricoeur spells out with unusual clarity the consequences of importing Saussure's understanding of language as a self-contained system into philosophy. Ricoeur criticizes Wittgenstein for "situat[ing] himself immediately in this world of everyday experience, in which language is a form of activity like eating, drinking, and sleeping," and praises Saussure's concept of the sign precisely because it removes us from the everyday: "[The] constitution of the sign as sign presupposes the break with life, activity, and nature which Husserl has symbolized in the reduction and which is represented in each sign by its emptiness, or its negative relation to reality."[65] (By the "act of reduction," Ricoeur means the effort to define phenomena as pure essences of consciousness, strictly separated from the empirical world.) To do philosophy is to retreat from the empirical world, to engage in that "attitude of reflection and of speculation [for which] the life world figures simply as an origination of sense."[66] For Ricoeur, language "does not belong to life," and neither does philosophy.[67]

Ricoeur's essay registers in exemplary fashion how Saussure's picture of language can be mobilized to justify two beliefs: that words have no connection to the world, and that in order to do philosophy we have to turn our back on the everyday and ordinary. For me, the greatest achievement of ordinary language philosophy is precisely that it gets *away* from

the idea of language as negation, that it shows us instead that language is the very condition of possibility of lived experience; turning towards ordinary language, we turn towards the world, and towards others.

Toril Moi

NOTES

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1 Toril Moi, "Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture," *New Literary History* 22, no. 4 (1991): 1017–1049.

2 Cora Diamond, "Knowing Tornadoes and Other Things," *New Literary History* 22, no. 4 (1991): 1004–1015.

3 Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); 2nd ed. Oxford Univ. Press, 2008.

4 See Toril Moi, *What Is a Woman? And Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), and Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006).

5 *NLH* 19, no. 2 (1988) has two minor references to Cavell: Austin E. Quigley, "Wittgenstein's Philosophizing and Literary Theorizing" (213), and Anthony J. Cascardi, "The Grammar of Telling" (411). Peter Hughes, "Painting the Ghost: Wittgenstein, Shakespeare, and Textual Representation," has an an epigraph by Cavell, yet never mentions his readings of Shakespeare (371). Cascardi's and Quigley's essays are reprinted in Kenneth Dauber and Walter Jost, eds., *Ordinary Language Criticism: Literary Thinking after Cavell after Wittgenstein* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2003).

6 Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein does not belong to this tradition. Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982). For Cavell's disagreement with Kripke see Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism: The Carus Lecutres, 1988* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990), 64–100.

7 For the difficulty involved in finding a unifying name for this tradition, see Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982), 22–30.

8 The first book on Cavell, Michael Fischer, *Stanley Cavell and Literary Skepticism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989), was written by a literary critic. The first collection of essays on him was jointly edited by a philosopher and a literary critic: Richard Fleming and Michael Payne, eds., *The Senses of Stanley Cavell* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1989). In 1993, Fleming published *The State of Philosophy: An Invitation to a Reading in Three Parts of Stanley Cavell's The Claim of Reason* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1993), the first and best introduction to *The Claim of Reason*. In the 1990s and 2000s the stream of books on Cavell has been steadily increasing, yet they continue to be written by philosophers. Here are some of the most important, in chronological order: Stephen Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994); Stephen Mulhall, ed. *The Cavell Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996); Timothy Gould, *Hearing Things: Voice and Method in the Writing of Stanley Cavell* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press,

1998); Espen Hammer, *Stanley Cavell: Skepticism, Subjectivity and the Ordinary* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002); Richard Eldridge, ed., *Stanley Cavell* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003); Richard Fleming, *First Word Philosophy: Wittgenstein-Austin-Cavell. Writings on Ordinary Language Philosophy* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 2004); Alice Crary and Sanford Shieh, eds., *Reading Cavell* (New York: Routledge, 2006). For anyone interested in the "New Wittgenstein" and in Wittgenstein and literature, I recommend Alice Crary and Rupert Read, eds., *The New Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 2000) and John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer, eds., *The Literary Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 2004). There is also a rich literature on Cavell and film, which I shall not go into here.

9 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations: The German Text, with a Revised English Translation, Third Edition*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), §115.

10 For an overview of various uses of "picture" in Wittgenstein, see Gordon Baker, "A Vision of Philosophy," in *Wittgenstein's Method: Neglected Aspects*, ed. Katherine J. Morris (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 179–204.

11 Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1988), 1–23; Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997); Ewa Płonowska Ziarek, "Stanley Cavell and the Economy of Skepticism," in *The Rhetoric of Failure: Deconstruction of Skepticism, Reinvention of Modernism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 25–69; Gordon C. F. Bearn, "Sounding Serious: Cavell and Derrida," *Representations* 63 (1998): 65–92.

12 There is a brief reference to ideals and philosophical concepts in Simon Glendinning, "Preface: Arguing with Derrida," *Ratio* 13, no. 4 (2000): 305.

13 Stanley Cavell, "Counter-Philosophy and the Pawn of Voice," in *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1994), 63 (hereafter cited in text as CP).

14 For the claim that the two traditions are binary opposites, see Kenneth Dauber and Walter Jost, eds., *Ordinary Language Criticism: Literary Thinking After Cavell After Wittgenstein* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2003), xvi–xx.

15 To gain a sense of the complexity involved in getting clear on the relationship between the two traditions, see Cavell on Derrida in Cavell, "Counter-Philosophy," 53–127; on de Man in "The Politics of Interpretation (Politics as Opposed to What?)," in *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), 27–59; and on Levinas in "What is the Scandal of Skepticism?" in *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2005), 132–54. See also the indispensable essays by Timothy Gould, "The Unhappy Performative," in *Performativity and Performance: Essays from the English Institute*, ed. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York: Routledge, 1995), 17–44, and Martin Stone, "Wittgenstein on Deconstruction," in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 83–117. For a general overview of Cavell's engagement with poststructuralism, see chapter 6 in Espen Hammer, *Stanley Cavell: Skepticism, Subjectivity, and the Ordinary* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

16 "Event" comes from Cavell, "Counter-Philosophy," 58; Cavell writes of "Wittgenstein's and Austin's sense of their revolutionary tasks" in the foreword to *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969), xxxix.

17 Stanley Cavell, "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy," in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969), 90.

18 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996), 150.

19 Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* xxiii.

20 Kuhn, *Structure*, xiii.

21 Kuhn, *Structure*, 150.
22 Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), xx.
23 See Kuhn, *Structure*, 151.
24 Derrida, "Signature Event Context," 1 (hereafter cited in text as SEC).
25 See J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, reconstructed from the manuscript notes by G. J. Warnock (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), 41n.
26 Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, 142.
27 Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, 142.
28 See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 67.
29 Here Cavell hears the "drone of the unserious" (Cavell, "Counter-Philosophy," 100).
30 Another explanation is that the author's or the speaker's *intention* limits the field of meaning, but this is a question I shall not discuss in this paper.
31 Derrida must have been aware of Cavell's essay. In 2000, *Ratio* published a special issue called *Arguing with Derrida* collecting the papers from a conference held in Reading (UK) in 1999 where both Derrida and the Cavell scholar Stephen Mulhall were present. Glendinning writes that "an important part of its background [was] Derrida's controversial engagements with the 'ordinary language philosophy' of J. L. Austin." Simon Glendinning, "Preface: Arguing with Derrida," *Ratio* 13, no. 4 (2000): 299n.
32 John R. Searle, "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida," *Glyph* 2 (1977): 198–208. Searle's review of Jonathan Culler's *On Deconstruction* ("The Word Turned Upside Down," *The New York Review of Books*, 27 October, 1983, 74–79) provoked Derrida's "Afterword" to *Limited Inc.* (111–60).
33 Searle, "The Word Turned Upside Down," 78. The phrase is quoted in Derrida, "Afterword," 115, 123 (hereafter cited in text as A).
34 Wittgenstein wonders whether we can point to the color blue in *PI*, §33; Cavell asks about our dress sense in "Must We Mean What We Say?" *Must We Mean*, 9; and Austin discusses donkeys in "A Plea for Excuses," in *Philosophical Papers*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), 185n.
35 See Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 31–32.
36 Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967), 83; Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press; corrected edition 1998), 56.
37 Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 83; Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 56.
38 Commenting on this point, one Derridean unhesitatingly repeats the word "vulgar" four times on the same page. See Arthur Bradly, *Derrida's "Of Grammatology"* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 2008), 68.
39 These concepts are explicitly mentioned by Derrida in "Afterword," 117, 117n, 127, 155.
40 Stone, "Wittgenstein on Deconstruction," 91.
41 Simon Glendinning, "Inheriting 'Philosophy': The Case of Austin and Derrida Revisited," *Ratio* 13, no. 4 (2000): 329.
42 Austin, "A Plea for Excuses," 182.
43 Cavell, *Claim*, 188. Also quoted in "Counter-Philosophy," 70.
44 In PI §43, Wittgenstein stresses that the idea that the meaning of a word (the answer to the question "What does this word mean?") is "its use in the language" is true for a "*large* class of cases," but not for all cases. At the same time, the idea of use is interwoven with the idea of language games, the idea that to speak is always a practice deeply enmeshed with other practices.

45 The young Derrida was deeply fascinated by Edmund Husserl's theory of the "ideality" of words and concepts, to the point that his first dissertation proposal was on the "ideality of the literary object." For an account of early Husserlian influences on Derrida, see Joshua Kates, "A Transcendental Sense of Death? Derrida and the Philosophy of Language," *MLN* 120, no. 5 (2005): 1017.

46 Gottlob Frege, "Grundgesetze der Arithmetik," vol. 2, §56; in *The Frege Reader*, ed. Michael Beaney (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 259.

47 That Wittgenstein's critique of logical positivism also can be used as a critique of deconstruction points to what Hammer has called the "latent positivism" of the deconstructive tradition (Hammer, *Stanley Cavell*, 152).

48 For a discussion of the relationship between ordinary and mathematical language, see Cavell, "The Argument of the Ordinary," 90–91.

49 It is symptomatic of the poststructuralist attitude towards the ordinary that a formidable deconstructionist like Geoffrey Bennington gets this exactly the wrong way round. According to Bennington, Wittgenstein thinks that *philosophy* should set itself up as a "hygienic intervention" into ordinary language, and that the "philosopher has a therapeutic or hygienic role in clearing up the misunderstandings fostered by ordinary language." Geoffrey Bennington, *Frontiers: Kant, Hegel, Frege, Wittgenstein* (2003), 381 and 392n. Available as a PDF file (ISBN 0-9754996-0-2) at http://bennington.zsoft.co.uk. Download 14 April 2009.

50 Laugier's formulation, in an informal talk to a meeting of the "Ordinary Language Working Group" at Duke University, Saturday March 1, 2008.

51 Derrida once said that "there is only ordinary language—philosophy too is 'ordinary language.' But, since there is no opposed term here, since 'there is only ordinary language,' this concept is empty." He also spoke of Austin's irony as "an 'ordinary language' which can always be supplanted by an extraordinary use." I have difficulty understanding this opposition, let alone how it applies to Austin. But this will have to be left for another discussion. Jacques Derrida, "Derrida's Response to Mulhall," *Ratio* 13, no. 4 (2000): 415, 416, 417.

52 Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, 127–28. Austin would not dream of asking for an exhaustive description of the "total context" of every speech act, yet this is precisely what Derrida accuses him of doing. Austin uses the phrase "total context" in J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975), 148. Derrida takes this to mean "exhaustively definable context" ("Signature Event Context," 15). Cavell shows that Austin "seeks no systematic account, either of context or of its oblivion" ("Counter-Philosophy," 113).

53 To understand what that something is, it would be necessary to explain Cavell's account of Wittgensteinian criteria in *Claim* (3–125). The best essay on the topic is Steven G. Affeldt, "The Ground of Mutuality: Criteria, Judgment, and Intelligibility in Stephen Mulhall and Stanley Cavell," *European Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (1998): 1–31. See also Stephen Mulhall, "The Givenness of Grammar: A Reply to Steven Affeldt," *European Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (1998): 32–44.

54 Bennington, *Frontiers*, 386–87.

55 Bennington, *Frontiers*, 387.

56 Bennington, *Frontiers*, 450, 428.

57 See Cavell, "Excursus on Wittgenstein's Vision of Language," in *Claim*, 180–190.

58 Cavell, "Must We Mean What We Say?" 19.

59 Cavell, "Excursus," 187–88.

60 This was also a major emphasis in Richard Fleming's seminars on *Philosophical Investigations* organized by the Ordinary Language Working Group at Duke University in 2008–09.

61 In addition to the marvelous account of a child learning language in "Excursus," see also "Notes and Afterthoughts on the Opening of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*," in Cavell, *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 125–86, and Cavell, "The Argument of the Ordinary," 64–100.

62 The first quote is from Richard Fleming, "Ordinary Language Philosophy," in *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*, 2nd ed., ed. Michael Payne and Jessica Rae Butto (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, forthcoming); The second is from Cavell, *Claim*, 177–78. See also the discussion of learning what an "umiak" means or what an "umiak" is in Cavell, "Must We Mean What We Say?" 19–20.

63 Cavell, "Must We Mean What We Say?" 19.

64 Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 9.

65 Paul Ricoeur, "Husserl and Wittgenstein," in *Phenomenology and existentialism* ed. Edward N. Lee and Maurice Mandelbaum (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), 216.

66 Ricoeur, "Husserl and Wittgenstein," 217.

67 Ricoeur, "Husserl and Wittgenstein," 217.