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THE POLITICS OF JEAN-FRANÇOIS LYOTARD

Jean-François Lyotard is widely considered to be the father of postmodernism and his ideas have influenced research and debate across many fields. This edited collection of essays is the first sociological assessment of his work. It brings together leading sociologists representing a wide range of interdisciplinary interests to tackle many of the questions currently being asked about this controversial figure. Lyotard's ideas about culture and ethics raise important questions but it is less clear whether he provides tenable solutions.

Contributors include Barry Smart, John O'Neill and Victor J.Seidler, with subjects ranging from Lyotard's writings on justice and politics of difference, to those on feminism, youth and Judaism, with one chapter devoted to his early writings. *The Politics of Jean-François Lyotard* is a significant addition to the material currently available on this highly influential figure and will therefore be essential reading for academics and researchers in the fields of philosophy, sociology and cultural studies.

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INTRODUCTION

Judging Lyotard

Chris Rojek and Bryan S. Turner

In *Science as a Vocation,* a speech delivered at Munich University in 1918, Max Weber quoted Tolstoy approvingly:

> Science is meaningless, because it gives no answer to our question, the only question important for us: 'what shall we do and how shall we live?'
>
> (Weber in Gerth and Mills 1948:143)

Among sociologists Weber's speech is now remembered as a heroic statement. Despite acknowledging the effects of rationalization and intellectualization in debasing human understanding, and the unintended negative consequences of scientific endeavour, he insists that science offers the best hope of 'self-clarification' and 'knowledge of interrelated facts' (Weber in Gerth and Mills 1948:152).

Weber delivered his words in the midst of a German tragedy. The country had lost the First World War to the Allies. The Versailles treaty was about to cripple the German economy and aggravate the culture of xenophobia that would spawn Hitler and the National Socialist movement. Weber's fears that science would be unable to provide objective solutions to the human dilemma of how we should best live together were to prove only too prescient. Yet the most durable element from Weber's speech is the moral necessity to struggle for understanding through scientific activity.

It is a point of view which is ultimately founded upon the rational belief that human beings can reach agreements. Weber's men and women meet each other half way, make concessions and agree to differ about particulars in order to serve a wider purpose. In this respect it is a benign view of human relations because it holds that contrary values and beliefs are not inimical. Weber's men and women agree to live together even if they differ in fundamental respects.

Compared with Weber, Lyotard appears to inhabit a different moral and social universe. His work has risen to prominence at a moment when science and politics have never promised more. In 1996, a team of Edinburgh scientists gave the

world 'Dolly', the first cloned sheep. Bio-technology is now sophisticated enough for authors, who are not science fiction writers, to speak seriously of the dawning of the age of cyborgs, replicants and the indefinite expansion of human life. In the field of information technology, the Internet signals the death of the book and offers an electronic galaxy to researchers, writers and advertisers. In geo-political relations, market capitalism appears to have outpaced every form of communist alternative except the highly labour intensive Chinese system.

In Weber's world, the successful bourgeois paterfamilias imagined that the world revolved around him, his wife and their children. In Lyotard's world, neither centring, identity or the concept of class are taken for granted. Yet whereas the Weberian position logically implies giving science its due in improving living standards and human conditions, Lyotard's (1984:25–31) argument is that science is a language game and that scientists acquire status not by discovering the truth, but by adeptly practising the performance principles cherished by the scientific elite. The task of postmodern science, he (1984:53–60) continues, is to expose incongruity and challenge the legitimacy of performative principles. Here, at last, there is an echo of Weber's analysis. Lyotard sees the postmodern scientist as a heroic figure. However, whereas Weber believed that science is ennobling because, however slowly and haltingly, it constructs a more accurate view of the world, Lyotard maintains that the duty of the postmodern scientist is to reveal the sham of scientific rhetoric and confront the 'undecidability' of things.

This is a radically destabilizing philosophy. In the last decade and a half, it appears to have answered a large need among writers and researchers to claim that the postwar world is falling apart. The thesis of postmodernism, for which Lyotard is most widely known, predicts the end of modernity and the beginning of postmodernity. It is not an original thesis. As early as 1959, C.Wright Mills declared:

> We are reaching the ending of what is called The Modern Age. Just as Antiquity was followed by several centuries of Oriental ascendancy, which Westerners provincially call the Dark Age, so now The Modern Age is being succeeded by a postmodern period.
>
> (1959:184)

Wright Mills argued that postmodernity is the result of the disintegration of the two major political ideologies of the modern period: liberalism and socialism. He equated this collapse with general social disorientation since it is no longer possible to adhere to the belief that history is driven by an engine of progress. Like Lyotard, Wright Mills (1959:184) rejects the notion that science is 'an unmixed good'. His argument is neo-Weberian. He diagnoses the 'malaise' of the present as a result of the uncontrolled effects of bureaucracy. The over-rationalization of bureaucratic organization separates means from ends and isolates decision-makers from colleagues, clients and consumers.

Wright Mills (1959:190–3) abhors the image of 'man' as an 'automaton' or 'cheerful robot'. His solution is to enlarge political responsibility by expanding education and consolidating democracy.

It can be argued that Lyotard agrees with Wright Mills's proposition that postmodernity is characterized by 'general social disorientation' and also with the attack on over-rationalization and bureaucracy. However, he has less time for the solution sketched by Wright Mills. For essentially it is a political solution requiring the enlargement of the concept of active citizenship. For Lyotard:

> It is quite clear that today a rational politics is no longer possible. I mean by that the project of a science of politics must be abandoned. Politics is not a matter of science. Then, the only tenable position, as far as I am concerned, is one that I would call 'a politics of judgement,' a sort of 'critique' of political judgement. In other words, a politics that would admit that its realm is that of opinions… *I am for, I am against, yes, no*. Assent granted or denied. I think that it is this sort of judgement that is put into play by any political judgement.
> (1985:81–2; emphasis in the original)

Lyotard blends the issues of politics and values in order to make a more telling point. Of course, he realizes that, even under fascism, politics is a matter of opinions and hence values. The judgement that he wishes to make of postmodernity, is that science, objectivity and progress can no longer act as a basis for consensus. The logic behind this proposition is threefold. First, the reflexive condition of postmodernity requires that individuals must recognize that their judgements may be wrong. Second, they may be the only ones to hold the opinion that informs their judgement. Third, they may change their minds about the judgements which they make. Postmodernity, argues Lyotard (1985:16) requires individuals to embrace an attitude of 'paganism' in which they recognize that there are no criteria to support judgements and that judgements are therefore, a matter of 'feelings'. We will return to this point later in the Introduction. Lyotard's view of postmodernity holds that values and beliefs are incommensurate. Given that values and beliefs are products of phrase regimes and genres of discourse, the prospect for rational agreement and rational co-operation is minimal. Some commentators may take the view that Lyotard goes too far in proposing the chronic incapacity of individuals to reach agreements in postmodernity (Rorty 1985, Burger 1992). If paganism is the best attitude to the challenges of postmodernity it is hard to see the practical basis of Lyotard's insistence on 'judgement' as an ethical imperative. Despite Lyotard's anti-authoritarianism and defence of the 'little narrative', his philosophy is vulnerable to the charge of latent amorality. His defence of paganism is ultimately elitist, because it assumes an intimate familiarity with Kantian philosophy. On pragmatic grounds Lyotard's philosophy of paganism and judging 'without criteria' is a non-starter in contemporary culture.

According to Rorty (1989:88) not all judgements can be shown to be vulnerable to 'the linguistic turn'. For example, the capacity to feel pain is something that we all share. Turner (in Chapter 2 and 1993) argues that the frailty of the human body and the precariousness of the human world are universal conditions. They constitute a material and universal base upon which a viable moral order can be situated. Implicit here is the idea that the emphasis on difference and otherness in postmodernist and postcolonial thought has exaggerated separateness and difference in the human condition. In a sense this emphasis has reinforced orthodox market lore that individuals exist in a state of atomization and mutual competition. Lyotard's work reinforces identity politics because its defence of paganism provides a cogent rationale for separating and maintaining integrity over compromise. This provides the analyst with the strong duty of unravelling decisions based in fiat and positional authority. Lyotard's philosophy is intimately subversive, because it refuses to allow that any of the ordinary categories that we use to orientate ourselves and negotiate life with others can be taken on trust. We have to rethink constantly our responses to situations from first principles.

Sociologists do not feel at home with this demanding logic. The Enlightenment roots of the discipline mean that sociologists continue to take the question of social reconstruction seriously. In spite of the serious blows dealt to Marxism and feminism with the turn to 'new right' values in the 1980s, part of the stock-in-trade of sociologists is to debate regularly questions of social improvement and transcendence. The anti-Enlightenment rhetoric of postmodernism is seen by many sociologists as juvenile. It misunderstands the debt and the interdependence between contemporary social and philosophical criticism and the Enlightenment revolution. Thus, Gitlin writes:

> Those postmodernists who propose to discard the Enlightenment as an excrescence of male, imperialist, racist, Western ideology are blind to their own situation. For all their insistence that ideas belong to particular historical moments, they take for granted the historical ground they walk on. They fail, or refuse, to recognize that their preoccupation with multiculturalism, identities, perspectives, incommensurable world views, and so forth would be unimaginable were it not for the widespread acceptance of Enlightenment principles: the worth of all individuals, their right to dignity, and to a social order that satisfies it.
>
> (1995:214)

Gitlin (1995) makes a powerful rebuttal of deconstructionist philosophy. He condemns the 'play of difference' because it commits everyone to the margins. By the same token, it obscures what we have in common and negatively prejudges our commitment to social reconstruction. Gitlin's argument is in the mould of Wright Mills's. It is a rousing, energizing call to arms. Faced with the abyss of postmodern multi-perspectivism and endlessly dissolving

meanings, he urges us to rediscover our common ties and take affirmative action to improve social conditions.

What this downplays is the limited success which the same call to arms has had since the days of Wright Mills. It is precisely the failed postwar attempts to equalize conditions through welfare reform and social engineering that gives cogency to Lyotard's postmodern philosophy. For Lyotard, the flaw in social reconstructionist philosophy and strategy is that it falsely minimizes the effect of heterogeneous regimens/genres of discourse and power in rendering personal and social outlooks incommensurate. His antipathy to reconstructionism is expressed in a passage from the *The Differend* where he articulates the principle that

> wrong results from the fact that the rules of the genre of discourse by which one judges are not those of the judged genre or genres of discourse.
>
> (1983:70)

Read literally, this suggests that students should never take the word of their lecturers on trust; that criminals should never accept the judgements of the courts; and that, in general, positional authority is always suspect, because it is always delivered in the panoply of incommensurate genres of discourse. Applied literally, this would, of course, make social life, as we have grown accustomed to know it, impossible.

Sociologists may feel inclined to be happy that this kind of logic exists in the minds of *avant garde* philosophers, rather than the 'real world'. Except it is nothing but this logic at work in the real world that rouses Gitlin to arms. His (1995:7–36) account of the culture wars in Oakland, California over the adoption of school textbooks is an example. Every seven years or so, the state decides on textbook adoption for schoolchildren. To be adopted by Californian schools, proposed textbooks have to pass through several state sponsored filters of vetting. The texts must comply with a 'framework' laid down by the state board of education. The books must pass through the hurdle of several public hearings before being supported by the state's curriculum commission, and then certified by the board itself. Upon certification the books are referred to local school boards for more open hearings. *Prima facie* it is a model of Weberian rational-legal-bureaucratic jurisdiction.

In 1990 a new kindergarten-through-eighth-grade history-social science textbook series published by Houghton Mifflin was submitted to the process for certification. The way that Gitlin tells it, the occasion provided a field day for the play of incommensurate standpoints. Christian fundamentalists objected to the 'politically correct' version of American history presented in the books which portrayed white Europeans as 'colonizers' and 'conquistadors'. On the left, a group calling itself Communities United Against Racism in Education (CURE) attacked the books for 'unidimensional', 'ethnocentric', 'supremacist' thinking. Gitlin sees the books as trapped in a Catch-22 situation. He writes:

> CURE pointed to some genuine instances of establishment bias… They did find occasional passages in the books that could reasonably be read as subtle or not-so-subtle disparagements of foreign and minority cultures… But CURE and other critics did themselves no favours by interspersing valid criticisms among scores of indiscriminate ones…. They were so eager to find ethnocentrism in these texts that they seemed to quarrel with the notion that there was or is a dominant American culture. They objected to the profusion of American flags in the texts' pages…. When the books singled out minorities' customs, CURE saw disapproval; when the books didn't single them out, they saw neglect. They saw cultural bias against Cambodia when the second-grade book mentioned that a Cambodian child living in Boston plays in the snow when he couldn't have done since it 'never snows there'. They again cried bias when the second-grade book traced an African-American family back one generation less than a family of German descent, and chastized the book, written for seven-year olds, when it failed to discuss details of sharecropping.
>
> (1995:9–10)

Gitlin's example clearly illustrates how incommensurate regimens and genres clash. Despite extensive lobbying from teachers who argued that the Houghton Mifflin series was not racist, the Oakland school board voted against adopting the books for grades four to seven. For kindergarten through third grade and for the eighth grade, they chose different books. At sixth grade they voted for a much older book from Scholastic Press which many teachers argued was clearly inferior to the Houghton Mifflin alternative.

The example confirms Lyotard's argument that genres and regimens are incommensurate. But it is not necessary to follow Lyotard and regard this state of affairs fatalistically. The social and cultural dynamics which produced the clash of incommensurate genres and regimens of discourse can be rationally explained. By examining the situated character of the educationalists, publishing companies and protest groups, an understanding of the pattern of actions is possible. Moreover, the construction of a knowledge base to deal more effectively with these issues in the future follows from this examination.

A good case can be made that social scientists are habitually employed in these processes. That is, one important purpose of the social sciences is to clarify patterns of situated behaviour. In this sense, social science is unequivocally part of what Habermas (1962) calls the 'public sphere'. By the 'public sphere', Habermas means an arena of rational discourse and influence which is independent of government and big business. The public sphere is accessible to the citizenry and is the space in which public opinion is formed. Habermas argues that the public sphere provides an axis of defence against manipulation and propaganda. He traces it to the emergence of capitalism in eighteenth-century Britain. It was at this time that the rising bourgeois class wrested a degree of independence from the clergy and the court. Their wealth produced new public spaces of critical thought–coffee houses, novels, art and socio-political tracts. The demand for

'free speech' produced the movement for a free press, and parliamentary reform. By the mid-nineteenth century the public sphere was constituted with the features of open debate, open reportage, critical scrutiny and public accountability.

For Habermas, the gains won by the bourgeois class produced a qualitative improvement in the openness and accountability of public life. At the same time, in some respects, they led to what he calls the 'refeudalization' of life. The two examples which receive most prominence in his account are the new self interests developed by the capitalist state and the distorting effect upon public awareness associated with the new system of mass communications.

A widespread criticism of Habermas's argument is that these corruptions of public information and awareness invalidate the concept of the public sphere. The power of public discourse to act as a tribunal of government and corporate capitalism is weakened if the data that it employs in the processes of debate and decision-making are cooked to suit state and corporate interests. This is a significant criticism. In recent years leading public figures, such as Richard Nixon, Robert Maxwell, Jonathan Aitken and Lady Porter, have all been found guilty of misleading the public in order to achieve their narrow self interests. Misdemeanours and manipulation are routine features of public life. This reinforces Lyotard's (1985:81) argument that 'today a rational politics is no longer admissible'. It is the basis for his summons to paganism. Yet, let it be noted that his definition of paganism is a clear provocation to social science. Lyotard writes:

> a name, neither better or worse than others, for the denomination of a situation in which one judges without criteria. And one judges not only in matters of truth, but also in matters of beauty (of aesthetic efficacy) and in matters of justice, that is, of politics and ethics, and all without criteria.
>
> (1993:16)

Since a good deal of what social scientists do is geared to finding defensible objective criteria for judging social life, Lyotard's words seem calculated to make many of them see red. In fairness to Lyotard's argument, it is important to recognize that his concept of a lack of criteria operates at five different levels.[1] First, it means that prescriptives cannot follow from descriptives because these phrase regimens situate the subject differently as addressee and addresser respectively. Second, it reinforces the Kantian demarcation of the realm of understanding in the third Critique. That is, criteria belong to the realm of understanding whereas justice, community and so forth, belong to the realm of Ideas and reason. The realms are incommensurate and Kantian philosophy holds that collapsing them inevitably leads to serious errors of judgement. Third, it places responsibility upon artists to experiment with the rules of order and draw out potentials which are currently held in abeyance. Fourth, it signifies that the future cannot be anticipated and that time always produces unanticipated consequences in the addresser's position. Fifth, it delegitimates ruling systems as the arbiter of reality. To take two examples, the rules of the

colonial legal system are unable to capture the nuances involved in the Aborigines' relation to land and forensic discussion of paedophilia is unable to render the genuine violence of the condition.

This may be excellent philosophy, but it is passing strange as an adequate sociology of authority and judgement. Lyotard wants to place everything in the present tense, conditional mode. He wants us to query our face-to-face encounters in order to resist performative culture. We must strive to locate our speech acts in the phrase regimens and discourse to which they are attached.

Sociologists have been here before. Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodology sought to uncover the methods and social competence that 'members' employ in making and remaking our shared sense of social reality. A good deal of the motivation behind ethnomethodology was polemical. Garfinkel and his associates wanted to oppose the deterministic accounts of human behaviour found in structuralist sociology and to reclaim the human actor as a knowledgeable, competent agent. They argued that structuralist approaches failed to recognize the 'rational accomplishments' of individuals in making everyday life.

A polemical motive is also surely present in Lyotard's exposition of the *différend* and paganism. Lyotard is reacting to the collapse of Marxism. The end of 'presently existing socialism' as a tangible alternative to capitalism has revived philosophical interest in phenomenology. Lyotard's work is an example of this, and so is the writing of Deleuze, Guattari, Derrida, Kristeva, Cixous and Levinas. But as with the earlier efflorescence of phenomenology in the work of Husserl, Heidegger, Schutz, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and Bachelard, between the 1910s and the 1950s, this work has a marked tendency towards introspection. In particular, questions of materialism tend to be overshadowed by issues relating to affects and sentiments. Lyotard's emphasis on 'feelings', 'svelteness', 'touch', and 'libido' is symptomatic of this. It is the flank of his work that sociologists find least appealing. For, despite his continued antipathy to capitalist rule, it provides no basis for achieving collective transcendence.

The contributors to this volume all see themselves primarily as sociologists. While all have an interest in philosophy, they approach Lyotard from a sociological standpoint and they use sociological methods to make sense of him and engage critically with his arguments. In *The Differend* Lyotard declares, somewhat grandly, 'the time has come to philosophize' (1983:xiii). For our part, we believe that it is now time to 'sociologize'. We hope that the book will make philosophical and sociological knowledge less incommensurable. Before we turn to paganism, let us turn to debate.

NOTE

1 Thanks to Neal Curtis of Nottingham Trent University for pointing out these levels to us.

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1

LYOTARD AND THE DECLINE OF 'SOCIETY'

Chris Rojek

In reading Lyotard I am often reminded of the plays of Samuel Beckett. Both writers are profoundly interested in the metaphysics of communication; both mistrust organized politics while retaining an insistence on the need to judge what they see around them; and both retain a fierce optimism. We must go on. We can go on. We will go on. The work of each writer insistently calls into question the meaning of the personal pronoun 'we'. Beckett disrupts it by demonstrating the falsity of the shared meaning that we assume underlies speech and writing. His characters are solipsists speaking into their own hats, their own taperecorders, with their heads buried up to the neck in sand, never sure if anyone is listening or if anyone cares. For his part, Lyotard (1984a) repudiates 'master narratives' and 'totalizing' discourse. Yet he still comes down on the side of persistence and involvement as opposed, for example, to disinvolvement or suicide. He (1984a:65–6) rejects Habermas's commitment to emancipation on the grounds that it presupposes the possibility of using communication to achieve universal consensus. 'It is clear', writes Lyotard 'that language games are heteromorphous, subject to heterogeneous sets of pragmatic rules' (1984a:65). The infinite diversity of human communication cannot be reduced to universal pragmatic rules of conduct. Indeed, one can sum up Lyotard's main message by saying that he believes that contemporary culture consists of heterogeneous regimens/genres which complicate agreements. It is our lack of awareness or sensitivity to heterogeneous rules that is the root cause of violence and exclusion. Lyotard believes that we have reached a point of exhaustion with the allembracing humanist solutions proposed by the Enlightenment. No one today accepts Comte's neat equation of 'order through progress'. Comte looked forward to the creation of the monotheistic positivist society in which science acts as the authoritative arbiter of human affairs. Against this, Lyotard scorns the 'performative principles' of the scientific enterprise and urges us to embrace polytheism. His political philosophy boils down to a form of radical pluralism in which the imperative

is to guarantee the 'narrative space' to allow individual difference and the play of the *différend* to flourish. There is no promise of unity in this analysis; and no hint of transcendence. It may be futile to hope for binding life agreements based around universal categories. Even so, it is vital to defend the capacity for self-expression, the determination to survive, the commitment to keep the channels of communication in postmodern society open and the interest in developing the silences of centralized, authoritarian thought.

'Totality' and 'communication' in Lyotard

Lyotard's radical pluralism bluntly implies abandoning the concept of totality. This reflects a more general trend in the study of human life which is embodied in the concept of poststructuralism. It ill behoves us to apply a generic term to cover a variety of thinkers as militantly heterogeneous as Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Guattari, Levinas, Virillio, Baudrillard, and Lyotard. The only thing that outwardly unites the arguments of these writers is a belief in the necessity of difference. All the same, it is proper to claim a common chronology for the public recognition of these writers as scourges of structuralism. In intellectual circles they are the spearhead of the post-1968 reaction to the apparent failure of Marxism to achieve working class revolution in France. To the extent that they are part of the same moment their thought shares in common an evident mistrust of universalistic categories.

This moment carried deep implications for sociology, as we are only just starting to realize. Indeed, it hardly stretches the point to submit that the rise of culture and difference as crucial explanatory concepts in analysing human life coincided with the decline in the concept of 'society'. Lyotard (1984b:6) dates this crisis to the mid-twentieth century when confidence in reason as a universal category and 'totalizing unity' evaporated. Actually, as Frisby and Sayer (1986) make clear, the crisis in the concept of 'society' as an explanatory tool in the analysis of human life long predates the middle of the twentieth century. 'Since 1918', they write '…though sociology may acknowledge, and study, social problems, society as such is no longer seen as a problem; indeed society as such is rarely glimpsed at all' (1986:121). The timing is significant. It coincided with the end of the First World War which was undoubtedly the first catastrophe of nation-centred models of society in the twentieth century. It is also only a year after the death of Emile Durkheim, who in the *fin de siècle* and the first decades of the new century, was the chief exponent of the proposition that society is *sui generis,* and is the subject matter of sociology. After 1918 the focus of sociology shifts from analysing society as the paramount 'social fact'. Instead, the focus in sociological activity moves to social 'interactions', 'representations' of human life and 'the intentional conscious orientations of individual actors'. The impressionist, phenomenological and Weberian traditions created influential and viable types of sociology in which the concept of 'society' has no significant part to play. Sociology, conclude Frisby and Sayer, can get by perfectly well without 'society'. Yet as we shall see, it does not follow from this that it has no place for the concept of totality.

This suggests that Lyotard's position is not as original or momentous as some of his admirers avow (Bennington 1988; Sim 1996). But of course Lyotard is claiming much more than the end of 'society' as a meaningful category in human explanation. His work suggests that human communication can no longer be trusted to clarify the human condition. There is no escape from the 'opacity of language'. 'Language', he writes, 'is not an "instrument of communication," it is a highly complex archipelago formed of domains of phrases, phrases from such different regimes that one cannot translate a phrase, from one regime (a descriptive, for example) into a phrase from another' (1993:27–8). The ineffable has come to play a central part in our notion of the complexity of communication. Habermas (1979) regards language as the primary resource for clarifying and improving the human condition by producing consensus politics. Lyotard rejects this position. Instead, his view of language is that meaning and experience cannot be translated or ultimately pinned down. Hence, it is futile for Habermas to yearn for controlling and improving human affairs because no criteria of judgement exist. Lyotard speaks positively of the state of acting and judging 'without criteria'. He (1985:16) calls this state 'paganism'. He regards it as a condition which fosters genuine critical thought since it is not grounded in foundational presuppositions or theses. Paganism enables the individual to respond to events as they happen, without preconceptions or worries about the 'correctness' of responses.

There is a strong note of liberation in Lyotard's writing about paganism. Indeed his emphasis on pluralism, scepticism about totality, critique of cultural monotheism and doubts about universalism, are consistent with Humean liberalism. It is also present in his discussion of the *différend*. In a condition in which no criteria obtain, it follows that there is a sense of freedom in recognizing that disputants have no recourse to systems of finite arbitration that will produce rules of judgement. The legitimacy of one side is not affirmed by the attribution of a lack of legitimacy to the other side. To recognize, first, that there are different points of view; and second, that different views are often incommensurable, is to recognize a kind of freedom from what might be termed 'the gladiatorial paradigm' which is all too evident in academic and political debate. By the 'gladiatorial paradigm' I mean an approach to argumentation which insists that the truth of one position is only confirmed by the annihilation of all competing positions. For example, the argument that market society is superior to planned society often involves the assumption that positive moral and economic values thrive in market forms while defective moral and economic values fructify in planned forms. It is an either/or argument which raises the stock of one system by defining the stock of the system against which it competes as bankrupt. Similar forms of argumentation can be found in conservatism, radical feminism, exchanges between the races, status groups, political parties and classes. The principle of the unutterable nature of human meaning precludes notions of decisive debate resulting in simple solutions.

Although he does not use the term, Lyotard clearly regards the gladiatorial paradigm to be contemptible. He associates it with the domination of the 'macro' over the 'micro', crudity over complexity and might over virtue. At the same time, his work is so self-consciously set against the value of 'totalizing concepts' that it leads him into absurdities. For example, having decided that there are no criteria for judging under paganism, he refuses to abandon judgement as a necessary part of human affairs. Rather lamely he (1985:6) concludes that, 'I judge. But if I am asked by what criteria do I judge, I will have no answer to give.' Increasingly, in his later writings, he advocates a sense of 'touch' or 'svelteness' as the only rationale to support the judgements that one makes. This is ultimately an appeal to aesthetics which, in psychological terms, Weber (1973) identified as the typical mark of an intellectual who had suffered a crisis of confidence in religious belief. Following Kant, Lyotard means touch to refer to the reception of sensible data. The singularity of these data prevents the individual from supplying a rule or concept to subsume them. Instead the individual is left with a sense of something that cannot yet be phrased. Lyotard's treatment of touch derives from Kantian philosophy. One problem with extending it to general culture is that touch, in the colloquial sense, is compatible with a variety of unsavoury applications. Racial intolerance, the abuse of women and homophobia, to name but a few examples, can all be 'supported' on the basis that they express a sense of 'touch' or 'svelteness'. They remain abhorrent because the sense of 'touch' which animates them is abhorrent.

We know that Martin Luther King and the American civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s were right to oppose white supremacy. And we know that this was not a question of 'svelteness', but measurable criteria of black lives maimed by the shackles of white racism. In short, our judgements are based on shared procedures of argument, common approaches to evidence and acceptance of humane values. Because Lyotard is popularized as a major cultural thinker, many problems ensue from applying his arguments which have been developed at the level of philosophy to everyday life (Sim 1996). The problem is not helped by Lyotard's insistence that his central arguments have a general application. His ideas on the *différend,* postmodernity, incommensurability, judgement and paganism have all been presented as clarifying issues in contemporary culture. But not all of his readers carry the philosophical baggage of a training in classical philosophy with them. Popularizing Lyotard is therefore often dangerous.

To be fair, Lyotard's (1990) splendid rebuttal of the revisionist historians who affirm that the Nazi concentration camps were a myth shows him to be repelled by reactionary manoeuvres. The same repulsion is evident in his denunciation of phallocracy. Lyotard writes:

> Women are discovering something that could cause the greatest revolution in the West, something that (masculine) domination has never ceased to

> stifle: there is no signifier; or else, the class above all classes is just one among many; or again, we Westerners must rework our space-time and all our logic on the basis of non-centralism, non-finality, non-truth.
>
> (1989:118)

In these, and many other passages, Lyotard provides proof of his repugnance for the logic of the right. Yet the fact remains that the philosophical approach that he has fashioned is compatible with those holding questionable values such as women are inferior to men, whites are superior to non-whites, and that gay and lesbian practice represents a 'perversion' of God's law. In other words, there is a yawning gap between Lyotard's personal philosophical judgements and his insistence that no valid criteria for judgement exist under paganism. A sympathetic reading of Lyotard may contend that his commitment to judge 'without criteria' is simply a slogan. But if that is the case, the slogan does more to confuse than to clarify. The explanation for this apparent inconsistency lies in Lyotard's break with Marxism.

Lyotard and Marxism

Lyotard was never a naive *afficionado* of Marxism. In 1958 he was already complaining of 'a certain kind of patronizing Marxism' (1993:199). This was in the context of maintaining that the question of Algerian nationalism could not be neatly reconciled with Marxist categories. In retrospect, many of his contributions to *Socialisme ou barbarie* in the 1950s and 1960s smack of an insistence on 'individuality' and 'difference' which now seem out of joint with the revolutionary 'scientific' view of the times. In *Peregrinations* (1988:63) he condemned the failure of the left to attack and reject the 'perversions' which had occurred in Eastern Europe under Stalinism. Even so, until the early 1960s Lyotard clearly believed in the central tenets of Marxist theory and actively worked to promote the working class transformation of society. As with Baudrillard, and many other left wing French intellectuals, the decisive break lies in the revolutionary *événements* of 1968. 'Never work!' declared the slogans of 1968, and for a moment Paris seemed to be the spark to the tinder box that would explode capitalist domination in Western Europe. But the capitulation of the French working class to the offer of higher wages and, by extension, the rule of consumer culture, devalued the promise of 'fundamental and irreversible' change contained in the Marxist programme for the transition to communism. Added to this loss of faith in proletarian class action was a sense of profound disillusion with the leaders of the working class and affiliated bourgeois student leaders and their 'gestures' towards revolution. May 1968 seemed to confirm the criticism that the 'Soviet road' to communism was not a ghastly deviation. Instead, there was something intrinsically wrong with the Marxist analysis of class society.

Lyotard's transparent bitterness about the failure of the Marxist project is only comprehensible with reference to the avid dreams of completeness that it inspired in him and others of his generation. Marxism was supported as having discovered the fundamental laws of motion that governed capitalist society. While other political and artistic programmes of intervening in society were patently laden with values, Marxism offered the 'objectivity' of science. May 1968 provided a practical test for the tenets of Marxist theory and practice. For many of Lyotard's generation, it failed the test. The revolutionary moment was not seized; the festivities and carnivalesque atmosphere generated by the student and worker sit-ins evaporated; and the rule of commodity culture was eventually, and all too swiftly, restored.

Lyotard fell in with a reaction against Marxist thought which was also pursued by Felix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault. The poststructuralist reaction sought to develop new accounts of how power operates and can be subverted. Poststructuralism reconceptualized power as working decisively at a molecular level. The idea of a single contradiction in the economic system was dismissed. Instead, poststructuralists emphasized the diversity and mobility of power relations. The 1968 revolutionary fervour which assumed that the power struggles in the factory would carry over into the university, city halls, offices, schools, amusement arcades, sports grounds and the shopping malls was summarily discarded. What Lyotard later dubbed the 'archipelago' of power relations was adopted as the first line of resistance against the juggernaut of structuralist theorizing. Insistence upon the tangible, the small and the concrete became ascendant. To understand why requires an account of the dovetailing of intellectual traditions that became 'obvious' after May 1968.

Structuralism had its roots in a linguistic theory which denied a correspondence between words and things. Experience and meaning were theorized as effects of pre-existing structures. For example, in the work of Saussure, meaning is analysed as the consequence of the interplay between binary terms in the linguistic system as opposed to a 'real world' which exists independently of language. This compromised the voluntarism of the human subject. Classical political economy had perceived the human subject as an independent agent imposing volition upon the world. Structuralism reformulated the concept of the human subject as constituted through language. The idea of 'getting beyond' the system of signs through revolutionary action was dealt a fatal blow in this strain of argument. Instead, theory and research were turned to the question of the play of signs through which the subject is constituted.

For all that, structuralism, which initially captivated the post-68 Lyotard, was open to serious reservations. Most prominently, by appealing to the significance of pre-existing social and linguistic categories it was unable to explain or predict change. Lyotard must have relished the paradox: structuralism was able to explain why the revolutionary 'moment' of 1968 was bound to pass, but it failed utterly to anticipate the train of events leading

to revolutionary destabilization. For Lyotard, and others of his generation, the missing link was supplied through the rediscovery of Nietzsche. Nietzsche's preoccupation with movement, becoming, difference, chance, chaos and the irrational seemed to shed contrasting and penetrating light upon the failures of May 1968. Nietzsche's own epistemology and language theory provided a powerful attack on Truth and Beauty, and hence on the validity of grand narratives. Most obviously it represented an alternative to the certainties that Marxism had expressed in championing class solidarity and universal truth. Although still embedded in the Marxist tradition, Lyotard was unwilling to go back to a Hegelian view of human progress. Instead, the scepticism that the structuralism of Saussure displayed to the proposition of correspondence between language and meaning, and Nietszche's raid against universal categories, suggested a way out. But choosing to take this route imposed certain consequences upon the development of Lyotard's thought. Stuart Hall's (1996:132) remark, that Lyotard's subsequent espousal of postmodernism has 'gone right through the sound barrier' is understandable. In *The Postmodern Condition* Lyotard acknowledges 'gaming' as the principal activity of the postmodern science. He writes:

> It must be clear that it is our business not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented…. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience…. Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witness to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences.
>
> (1984a:81–2)

The results of this 'war' are the acknowledgement of the *différend,* paganism and the perpetuation of 'svelteness' as a method of dealing with the recognition of difference in the pursuit of human affairs.

But what practical value can be extracted from this analysis? The *différend* brokers no compromise and can function as the excuse for a variety of obnoxious doctrines from the abuse of women to race hatred; paganism rejects criteria but retains the 'imperative' of judging, so that moral and economic issues are presumably discussed exclusively in aesthetic codes; and svelteness is little more than the dramaturgical rendering of aesthetics in everyday life.

The inference must be that Lyotard's reaction against Marxist theory is an over-reaction. The failure of the Paris spring 1968 and the deformations of the 'Soviet road' constitute the basis for a blanket rejection of Marxism. In mid-life Lyotard seems to elect to purge himself of the revolutionary sentiments of his youth. Yet it is also clear that he retains a keen sensitivity to the iniquities of capitalist society. In no sense is it fair to claim that he swaps the red flag of Marxism for the blue carpet slippers of conservatism. On the contrary, his

defence of difference and celebration of the individual is conceived as a project which 'out-radicalizes' Marxist theory. For it sets out to confound Marxism by exposing the concepts of 'collectivity', 'totality' and 'science' as mere rhetorical devices. Furthermore, it reinforces this line of criticism by alluding to the twentieth century trail of destruction and human misery that 'system-based' thinking –whether it be expressed in the form of nations, races or classes–has left in its wake. Above all, Lyotard wants to be able to talk openly about justice.

Performativity and the recrudescence of the irrational

Behind much of Lyotard's espousal of ambiguity, heterogeneity and the need to widen 'narrative space', is the belief that rational thought and planning have reached the end of the road. Yet he is also conscious of the dangers involved in turning towards irrationalism. At one point, he itemizes the advantages of rational, 'performative' judgement:

1 It excludes adherence to 'metaphysical' principles.
2 It constructs a sense of secular totality through the notion of binding rules that govern inter-personal conduct.
3 It supplies pragmatic criteria for assessing the value of behaviour by, for example, appeals to the production of proof, the transmission of learning and apprenticeship to determinate hierarchies of power.

(1984a:62–3)

Lyotard (1984a:63) describes the organization associated with rational order as 'terrorist'. That is, a system in which diversity and initiative are silenced for the sake of performative unity. 'Performativity' is an important concept in the later writings of Lyotard. By it he means a system of organization in which the value of conduct and worth of a system are judged by quantifiable external goals. A sharply familiar example to British academics is the Academic Research Exercise which was first conducted in 1992. This requires the research rating of departments to be judged on the basis of self-selecting reports by academic members of the department which identify their four best publications in a designated time span. For the social sciences, the time span is four years. Subject panels composed of representatives of the discipline then meet to evaluate the research returns they receive from each institution. Their rating recommendations eventually determine the research funds allocated to the department from central government in the period up to the next research exercise. Many academics complain that the Research Exercise cannot cope with 'deep research' which may take several years to come to fruition. There is also a widespread feeling that the qualitative character of much social science research renders it inappropriate for quantitative evaluation. While the composition of the panel allows for a range of opinions from representatives of different paradigms,

it reaches spurious quantitative judgements about the quality of individual research outputs. From the standpoint of Lyotard's analysis, the Research Exercise leads to the publication of 'quick-fix' papers which will provide four publications for the individual and thus satisfy the performance criteria of the exercise. It diverts members of the research community from the task of fully engaging with research problems through deep research which may take many years to produce publishable findings.

His own examples of the irrationality of performative systems refer to science, higher education and welfare. To take the case of science first, Lyotard (1984a: 25–31; 44–7) analyses the development and exchange of scientific knowledge as a language game. The specialization of scientific discourse has cut it off from the rest of society so that it can function as a self-referential performative system. That is, scientific conduct is judged by scientists and what counts as legitimate scientific knowledge is determined by the principles of verification and falsification constructed and managed by scientists. Despite science's ideology of constantly pushing back the boundaries of knowledge, the institution rests on quite narrow and introspective criteria of judgement. 'One is a scientist,' writes Lyotard, 'if one can produce verifiable or falsifiable statements about referents accessible to the experts' (1984a:25). The implication of this is severe. Where the experts fail to recognize or legitimate referents, scientific activity chooses not to enter. Lyotard's central objection is that this way of proceeding is compatible with authoritarianism in science since it reproduces self-defining and self-managing performative criteria as the condition of scientific knowledge.

Turning now to the example of higher education, Lyotard (1984a:47–52) argues that higher education is managed on the criterion of the optimal contribution that the system can deliver to achieve the best performativity of the social system. Practically speaking this involves transmitting organized stocks of established knowledge to students. The function of higher education is to supply the system with individuals who have the capacity to pragmatically fill the roles available in the job sector. The changing character of requirements in the labour market with the spread of computerization and new information networks has implications for the role of the university. In Lyotard's (1984a:49) words it puts pressure on universities to move from *'en bloc'* systems of training to *'à la carte'* menus of education. Instead of confining the experience of higher education to three or four years, typically in the immediate post-school period, higher education must adopt the pedagogic model of 'learning throughout the lifecycle'. The growth of post-graduate diplomas, MAs and MPhils is a response to the demand of graduates to improve their skills and chances of promotion. Lyotard's discussion emphasizes the functionalist character of higher education and its subordination to market requirements. There is no longer a place for the 'democratic' university which applies no entrance requirements, little cost to the student and curricula which are not bound by the requirements of industry and the state. Lyotard speculates that the logical consequence of the modern university system is to replace the traditional teacher with 'machines linking traditional memory banks (libraries, etc.) and

computer banks to intelligent terminals placed at the students' disposal' (1984a:50). Yet functional, performative criteria of higher education do not necessarily deliver the optimal service to the social system. Competitive advantage is not simply a matter of reproducing organized stocks of knowledge and information to provide pragmatic competence to students. Indeed, Lyotard avows that,

> the best performativity cannot consist in obtaining additional information in this way. It comes rather from arranging the data in a new way, which is what constitutes a 'move' properly speaking. This new arrangement is usually achieved by connecting together series of data that were previously held to be independent.
>
> (1984a:51–2)

Lyotard uses the traditional term 'imagination' to denote the capacity to achieve the novel rearrangement of data. Moreover, he is at pains to ensure that the point is not lost on readers that reproductive systems of higher education are not efficient in expanding the capacity for imagination.

The third example is welfare. Lyotard (1984a:62–3) argues that welfare rights do not follow from need, but from what is deemed to contribute to the optimal performance of the system. Satisfying the needs of those in hardship does not optimize system performance since it involves the increase in expenditures. This would transform the system into being driven by the requirements of weakness as opposed to strength. For Lyotard the result is a travesty:

> The system seems to be a vanguard machine dragging humanity after it, dehumanizing it in order to rehumanize it at a different level of normative capacity.
>
> (1984a:63)

The conclusion which Lyotard draws from these three examples is that the application of principles of rational performativity entails the recrudescence of irrationality. This is why he places so much emphasis in his concept of 'postmodern science' upon the search for instabilities, undecidables, *'fracta',* paradoxes and the unknown. He wants to dislodge the power of performative knowledge and organization in the conduct of everyday life. He wants to explode the notion of rational, binding order to which we all belong.

Considered soberly there is very little that is genuinely innovative in this analysis. From Weber (1973) we learnt that purely rational organizations have irrational consequences which contribute to a feeling of being trapped and imprisoned in daily life. The unintended consequences of the 'iron cage' of rational bureaucracy were to produce a social system which was full of paradox and contradiction. Similarly, long before the Second World War, Wittgenstein

demonstrated the significance of 'language games' in maintaining power relations. Moreover, in relatively recent and well-known social science publications, Kuhn (1970) has provided a model of the aetiology of scientific revolutions, and Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) an account of the defects of reproduction in the performance of education systems which mirror many of Lyotard's arguments. The logic of Lyotard's position is to reject these contributions on the grounds that they replicate notions of totality and practices of unitary conceptual formation. For he presents his own work as a break with totality. Yet it cannot have escaped the reader that Lyotard's application of 'performativity' assumes that it operates as a totalizing concept. His discussions of how performative criteria operate in science, higher education and welfare assume the performance of a universal function. Thus, he (1984a:63) speaks of the 'arrogance' of social planners and managers who identify themselves with 'the social system'. For Lyotard, of course, this identification is evidence of irrationality, since he believes that totality is merely an ideological construct. The planners and managers who justify their actions by reference to 'the social system' are therefore obeying a false god. The appeal to totality functions as an excuse for riding roughshod over the interests and needs of concrete individuals in concrete relationships with each other.

Society and totality

However, there is a palpable tension in rejecting totality as an ideological concept and attributing real effects to it in everyday life. Ideologies are not conjured out of thin air. They resonate with people because they provide a compelling set of metaphors for explaining influences in ordinary experience. For example, patriarchy fulfils this function for feminists by revealing the unequal balance of power between the sexes; class does the same thing for people who note the effects of material and cultural inequality upon experience and practice. To claim that patriarchy and class are now dead does not eliminate the experience of structured inequalities between the sexes, and those who own capital and those who do not. The experience of inequality arises from ordinary life practices. There is little to be gained by discarding 'patriarchy' and 'class' as meaningful concepts in the orientation of everyday life, and much to lose. The diffusion of the macrolevel into a disintegrating cosmos of micro-politics leads to analytical paralysis. To some extent the evident pain and anguish on the left since 1968, and the collapse of a 'meaningful East European alternative' to capitalism in the late 1980s, confirm this picture of paralysis. The left gives the impression of having lost its way and of no longer knowing where it should go. However, it does not follow that the disintegration of class-based socialism has brought about the end of radical politics based on the concept of collective actors. The gay and lesbian movements, the green movement, and the anti-nuclear movement, to mention but a few of the most important life politics movements of recent years, have all created narrative

spaces in which oppositional life politics is articulated and practised. In addition, all of these groups operate with the broad concept of 'the market' or 'corporate capitalism' as the totality in which they are situated. Lyotard's insistence on the loss of 'master narratives' fails to account for the prominent development of life politics in the last thirty years. Yet his rediscovery of the body and libido which he expressed in the course of a coruscating attack on Marxist totality (1993 originally published in 1974), can reasonably be cited as anticipating the turn toward life politics. Following Bataille (1991, 1993), Lyotard presents the main problems facing human beings in terms of excess as opposed to scarcity. Animate life is defined by an excess of energy and refuses to be constrained or ruled by false conceptual barriers. Like Bataille, Lyotard seems to conceive of energy as the paramount reality of existence, but he endows this with a radical Nietzschean sense of nihilism. For Lyotard, energy does not elicit a conjoining influence in human life. It cannot support durable sentiments of solidarity or unity. As he puts it:

> There are only encounters, walls, secret thresholds, open grounds, empty skies in which each encounter flees from itself, overflows itself, is forgotten– or is repeated, ceasing then to be an encounter. The latter does not return, does not reproduce itself.
>
> (1993:36)

While he acknowledges that 'there are labyrinths of continuity' just as there are 'labyrinths of interruption' (1993:38), the balance of his discussion is tipped heavily in favour of the latter. Indeed after 1968, it is very hard to find any evidence of 'labyrinths of continuity' in Lyotard's discussion of the socio-political universe. Instead he finds himself more and more of the opinion that any kind of totality is an illusion.

Yet even sociologists who have contributed the most powerful arguments against analysing society as a totality, *sui generis,* retain the notion of a totality of aggregate, reciprocal relationships (Weber 1973; Simmel 1978). Weber (1973: 91–5), drawing on the distinction made by Ferdinand Tonnies between *gemeinschaft* (community) and *gesellschaft* (association) forms of relationship, separates 'communalized' from 'aggregated' relations. By communalized forms, Weber means types of association which are based on a sense of solidarity. Most commonly this sense arises through traditional or emotional attachments. The most obvious example is the family relationship which most of us recognize to be a primary relation automatically expressing solidarity. Other examples mentioned by Weber (1973:92) are spiritual brotherhood, erotic relationships, relations of personal loyalties and relations based on the comradeship of a military unit. Aggregated forms of relationship are typically motivated by rational value judgements or expediency. As examples Weber (1973:91) mentions the expedient nature of encounters on the stock exchange,

voluntary unions based upon the pursuit of self interest and attachments to ideological causes and movements.

For his part, Simmel is guarded about providing any incentive for regarding society as an 'object' which 'determines' personal behaviour. However, he insists upon a notion of totality which is represented by the real interactions of individuals. In Simmel's sociology, society is

> only the name of the sum of these interactions…. It is therefore not a unified, fixed concept, but rather a gradual one…according to the greater number and cohesion of the existing interaction that exist between the given persons. (1890:13)

The work of both Weber and Simmel provides for the gradations of mobility/stasis and commensurate/incommensurate relations encapsulated in Lyotard's key twin concepts of paganism and the *différend*. Moreover, their work retains a commitment to the observation and analysis of concrete interrelations between people without promoting the abstractionism feared by Lyotard. They offer approaches to the micro-level which do not involve the macro-level monumentality which is rightly scorned by Lyotard. Yet Lyotard refrains from referring to them. Instead he prefers to limit his sally against 'totalizing theory' to the case of Marxism.

Conclusion

In his magisterial survey of the concept of totality in Western Marxism, Jay concludes that the poststructuralist rejection of totality is unjustified. He points (1984:537) to the example of nuclear catastrophe as a 'total' threat to collective existence. Jay cites Adorno in support of his claim that poststructuralism has a decadent strain in its perspective on life. Adorno writes:

> In a world of brutal and oppressed life, decadence becomes the refuge of a potentially better life by renouncing its allegiance to this one and to its culture, its crudeness and its sublimity…. What can oppose the decline of the west is not a resurrected culture but the utopia that is silently contained in the image of its decline. (1967:72)

The collapse of Marxism was the decisive factor in the development of Lyotard's postmodernism. However, the disintegration of the universalistic categories of repression and liberation identified by Marx is not a pretext for abandoning the concept of totality. On the contrary, it is relatively easy to think of total structures which retain a penetrating influence in the conduct of everyday life: the market, the division of labour, the family, language, the urban-industrial milieux, the law and morality. It is not necessary to maintain

that these structures impose a standardized code of behaviour over populations or point to universalistic categories. The nature of the codes, and the density and velocity of movement in populations in urban-industrial society, allow for latitude in interpretation and habitual acts of transgression (Stallybrass and White 1986). Indeed transgression is integral to the concept of totality since totality involves objectification at the level of inter-personal consciousness in order to be a meaningful concept. By objectifying the family, the division of labour, the law and other totalizing structures we identify their limits and the barriers which they constitute to free, unfettered activity.

Habermas (1987) argues that communication, conceived of as a cultural universal, presupposes that rational agreements can be reached in cases where transgression leads to open dissent between parties. In contrast, Lyotard argues that paganism and the fact of the *différend* negates the possibility of consensus. This is why he presents postmodern science as thriving on dissent. Postmodern science forces consensus theorists to walk on the razor's edge of their own diabolic rationalism. Yet the *différend* also carries with it the tacit proviso that parties agree that their competing arguments are incommensurate. Otherwise Lyotard's position would logically reinvoke the Hobbesian image of human life as a war of all against all. Lyotard may find Habermas's 'ideal speech act' to be utterly implausible but his work nevertheless suggests that we conform to codes of civility which prevent disagreements errupting into chronic violence.

It is not surprising that his perspective falls back upon universal concepts and totalizing assumptions. The state of paganism is sociologically invalid. That is, no known collective form of human association has practised 'judging without criteria'. A world of judgement without criteria might be conceived, for example, in the drug-absorbed world of the Beat Generation writers, described by William Burroughs (1962) amongst others. But one suspects that even in the Beat world aesthetic judgement was alive and well. Even the Dadaists and surrealists of the inter-war years used the criteria of unconscious drives and subconscious wishes to legitimate their unorthodox behaviour. Everyday life is an under-theorized total category of existence. However, no individual is blind to its routines, its predictability and its monotony. Lyotard's concepts of paganism and the *différend* over-dramatize everyday life encounters. When we catch our bus or train into work, buy our coffee in the coffee-shop, pay our bills and attend staff meetings, it is perhaps the monotony of our routines that seems most apparent. Indeed, in reading Lyotard closely one is struck by the marginality of forms of behaviour and crises of inter-personal conduct which Lyotard identifies as 'trend-setting' or 'typical'. Statistically speaking it is quite uncommon to experience views which are utterly incommensurate with our own. For most people, most of the time, working agreements *are* made on the basis of give and take; the limits of our own perspectives and the perspectives *are* recognized; things get done. While romantic love is held to be ineffable, romantic love affairs take place. Even Lyotard writes books which are copy-edited, translated, printed, located in a warehouse,

advertised, distributed and sold throughout the world. All of the people jointly involved in this work act through agreement and aim to realize a profit on sale. Were they to subscribe to paganism and to obey the *différend* Lyotard's thought would remain unknown, because it could never be translated, published and purchased.

Notwithstanding this, it remains true that extreme arguments can serve a useful purpose in crystallizing thought. Lyotard is 'good to think with' because he rarely flinches from following through the logic of his argument. He draws out moral dilemmas which other thinkers are content to leave as background assumptions. This is why his writing is typically interpreted as being confrontational. He does not avoid the sometimes morally and politically unacceptable implications of his analysis. His position is once more very similar to Nietzsche's attack on the totalizing nature of the Prussian bureaucracy which attempted to impose regimentation and unity on German cultures. Whatever misgivings one might assign to his social thought, a lack of courage is not among them.

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2

FORGETFULNESS AND FRAILTY

Otherness and rights in contemporary social theory

Bryan S. Turner

Introduction

In this chapter, I employ the postmodernist writings of Lyotard and Rorty as the pretext for a discussion of the moral basis of a universalistic doctrine of human rights. Universalism is an unpopular approach to social theory; it is often associated with claims about the privileged status of Western thought, or it is associated with patriarchal fantasies of dominance. In any event, universalism as a basis for epistemology and political philosophy is seen to be problematic and difficult to defend. However, the kind of universalism which I wish to propose as a basis for rights may turn out to be highly compatible both with the de-regulated version of ethics embraced by Bauman in *Postmodern Ethics* (1993) and *Life in Fragments* (1995), and with the ironist, postmodern liberalism of Rorty in 'Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism' (Rorty 1991a). I am sympathetic to Lyotard's postmodernism but there are obviously powerful criticisms of Lyotard's work. For example, his account of language and politics is not entirely convincing, for reasons outlined by Rorty (1985). Lyotard's turn from politics to art and aesthetics is typical of postmodern pessimism which seeks emancipation in art not politics (Burger 1992).

Taking the theme of amnesia, I consider the importance of forgetfulness as a condition for the exercise of arbitrary or absolute power. Forgetting makes the arbitrary exercise of power opaque to conscience and moral concern, because the presence of the victim is systematically denied by virtue of being simply absent. Cruelty is, for Rorty, the most serious crime, and cruelty, for example in the form of torture, is a denial of the humanity of the victim, involving a forgetfulness about the human status of victims. Following Heidegger on forgetfulness versus concern for otherness, we can detect a postmodern ethical stance in the idea of care for marginal or powerless groups, and concern for difference and otherness. Such an investigation reveals interesting and important parallels and convergencies

between Heidegger, Lyotard and Rorty. These authors seek a grounding for concern, not in the universal characteristics of human nature, but in the practical requirements for active care and affective sympathy. While such an approach has considerable merit, I argue, via a sociology of the body, that human frailty provides the basis for a universalistic ethic of concern which goes beyond the apparent complacency of Rorty's pragmatism. In his defence of Western liberalism, Rorty comes close to a Leibnizian view that we (male bourgeois Westerners) live in the best of all possible worlds (White 1991:93). The notion that the frailty of the body provides a foundation for rights is in fact highly compatible with Heidegger's account of the vulnerability of human beings as beings who are bound to death through the inexorable passage of time. Heidegger's views on the 'thrownness' of being, as a state which is permanently precarious, provide an account of human frailty which is highly compatible with an emphasis on human frailty as a starting point for an analysis of rights. In this chapter, I treat human rights as protective social mechanisms which address issues of human vulnerability and frailty.

One of the perennial problems of modern political philosophy has been, therefore, to identify a basis, however minimalist, for some universalistic discussion of justice in relation to separate and particular social groups and communities. The core of this problem is to reconcile the aspiration for political equality with the stubborn fact of social differences (in terms of class, gender and age). Individualistic doctrines of equality of opportunity have been challenged by feminism and postmodernism for their blindness to difference (Williams 1995). However, if we regard justice, following Rawls's famous formulation (Rawls 1971) as a question about fairness (for example in the distribution of resources between unequal communities), then there has to be some foundation of a universalistic character in order for such discussions about justice to take place. As we will see, some commitment to universalism, typically as a residual category, is embraced by theorists who want to adopt a resolutely anti-foundationalist or contextualist position. Postmodern relativist epistemologies are often combined with the search for a common basis for politics and morality.

While social scientists cannot do with a universalistic perspective on rights, there is also the suspicion that they cannot do without it. Of course, the problem of relativism in the sociology of knowledge has been a prominent issue in social theory during the last century, partly as a consequence of the development of the sociology of knowledge from the perspective of Mannheim (Turner 1991). The idea then that beliefs have an 'existential basis' is hardly new, but in recent decades the notion of universalism has been under attack from feminist theory, postmodernism and 'subaltern studies' as part of the more general decolonization of theory. The irony is that globalization, which involves cultural standardization through tourist commercialization, has also involved a localized defence of cultural differences; and hence globalism appears to foster postmodernism as a synthetic, differentiated culture (Turner 1995). Sociology itself has been profoundly challenged by the struggle between global and local knowledge. Why should the 'dead white fathers' set the agenda of the sociology curriculum indefinitely? There

is now a widespread view that the traditional canon of classical sociology is in disarray and that the universalistic thrust of traditional sociology is difficult to sustain or defend in its conventional guise (Seidman 1994).

In an earlier period the relativistic thrust of sociology of knowledge had been challenged and rejected by the Frankfurt School, because critical theory wanted to do more than merely describe ideology as simply a perspective on the world. The ambition of critical theory was to go beyond traditional forms of theory and the relativism of the sociology of knowledge to produce critical insights into the exploitation and alienation of capitalist society. The goal of critical theory was to combine theory and practice in order to avoid the apparent neutrality and factual limitations of traditional sociology of knowledge, at least as it was practised by Mannheim. In the work of Habermas (1981), there is the quest for a communicative basis to belief and knowledge which will overcome the limitations of the relativism of sociology. In contemporary social theory, the battle lines have consequently been drawn between the critical legacy of Adorno and Horkheimer in the work of Habermas on communicative theory, and the postmodernists and feminists who have embraced a more particularistic or deconstructed approach to reason and truth.

Although there is an overt conflict between critical theory and postmodernism, few can be entirely satisfied with particularism and contextualism as orientations to problems of justice and equality. One conventional criticism of postmodernism has been that postmodern theory does not lend itself to any particular political theory or perspective on contemporary society, and therefore it is rather difficult to move from the contextualism of postmodern epistemology to genuine political commitment and action (Habermas 1988). In this chapter I want to challenge this conventional view. Generally speaking, most postmodern contextualists in practice want to adopt a political theory of society especially one which embraces some notion of justice as a central concept of political discourse. While equality as a principle is not easily reconciled with a postmodern emphasis on difference, justice as a concept has become part of the vocabulary of postmodernism (Lyotard and Thebaud 1985). In this chapter I follow the work of Stephen White who has in *Political Theory and Postmodernism* (1991) and *The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas* (1988) attempted to tease out the (often implicit) political theory of contemporary postmodernism as a willingness to listen to difference rather than to command equality. White has examined the work of such writers as Derrida, Lyotard, Walzer and Rorty as exponents of postmodern political theory. In White's view these various theories all attempt to come to terms with the problem of justice, while also taking on board a whole legacy of postmodern thinking about contextualism. Walzer's *Spheres of Justice: A defence of pluralism and equality* (1983) has been particularly influential in contemporary views of justice. Lyotard and Walzer share a common hostility to the metanarratives of modernism (Lyotard 1984). Lyotard claims that the metanarratives of dominance in modernity will be eroded by 'thousands of uncomfortable little stories' (Lyotard 1989:127). Because modernity requires a systematic storage system (a grand memory), Lyotard's

political theory advocates forgetfulness as a strategy. In art, this stance requires a pathos of forgetfulness against the bourgeois museum. This argument provides us with one example of Lyotard's conversion of politics into art.

While I have elsewhere stressed the relationship between traditional liberal political theory and the contemporary postmodern emphasis on heterogeneity (Turner 1990), White notes that there are two new dimensions to the pluralist approach to justice in postmodern theory. First, postmodern pluralism unlike traditional liberal thought rejects the emphasis on the sovereign individual and individualism, and postmodern pluralism is thought to be more sensitive to the social and political dimensions of private and public goods. Second, because postmodernism is particularly influenced by language theory, it tends to regard the question of justice, not of doing political acts leading to just outcomes, but of 'listening', that is listening to the differences and heterogeneity of the social world. Postmodern politics involves attentive listening, especially to inarticulate minority groups (Williams 1995:82). Lyotard is therefore strongly committed to the promotion of a notion of justice that is more sensitive to questions of otherness and difference. While Lyotard's study of 'the jews' (Lyotard 1990) was stimulated by the Heidegger Affair, Lyotard takes Jewishness as a symbol or metaphor for otherness generally. It provides an occasion to develop a more general view of the processes of exclusion, forgetting and destruction.

Postmodern political theory therefore tends to be anti-individualist, sensitive to communal differences and open to alternative views of political and social reality. It is for this reason that writers like Walzer are often associated with the communitarian defence of liberalism (Cladis 1992). Although Walzer promotes and celebrates the idea of moral pluralism and cultural diversity, he nevertheless believes that the political community is based upon a shared understanding of common values and sensibilities. In a similar fashion, Rorty is concerned to discover a common solidarity which will underpin and shape contemporary societies (Rorty 1989). Again, Rorty attempts to discover solidarity within a new sensibility, driven by an openness to literature, poetry and art. It is a solidarity based upon a common aesthetic experience of great literature, especially the novels of Dickens and Kundera from whom we can learn a sensitivity to suffering. Reading Dickens on the mundane nature of human misery makes an attitude of forgetfulness unlikely or at least difficult to sustain.

While new postmodern pluralism differs from strong-minded liberalism in terms of this emphasis on communitarianism, perhaps the major division between traditional liberalism and postmodern thought is around rationality, in particular around what Weber (1978:24) referred to as actions which are instrumentally rationalism *(Zweckrational)*. Weber's sociology of action attempted to identify an ethic of responsibility whereby social and political action involved a compromise between alternative courses of action. The ethic of responsibility forced reasonable men to make practical decisions about appropriate means to ends. Weber's sociology as a whole was based upon an ethic of world mastery whereby, through the Protestant Ethic, human beings were driven to the need to control themselves

in their environment in a context of uncertainty and risk. This ethic of responsibility was Weber's transformation of the idea of the will to power in Nietzsche. Within Weberian sociology, power and knowledge were combined to produce an ethic of world control, self mastery and sovereignty in which the men of calling would subordinate reality to their own needs. Nietzsche's will to power therefore resulted in a sociology of callings and vocations in Weber's view of heroic instrumental reason (Stauth and Turner 1988). Postmodernism explicitly rejects this form of ethical orientation by stressing instead an openness for difference and otherness, namely as an ethic of care and concern.

If Weber's sociology is based upon a responsibility to act, postmodern morality is based upon a responsibility to listen to otherness and to care for difference. This particular ethical view within postmodernism is not only based upon a rejection of the ethic of responsibility and its underlying commitment to a doctrine of world mastery, but the postmodern ethic of concern also flows from its particular view of language and the postmodern commitment to the idea that the world is ultimately humanly constructed. World mastery is rejected not only because it is incompatible with a concern for otherness, but also because the foundational view of reality which lies behind instrumental reason and technology is rejected in favour of anti-foundationalism, contextualism and constructionism. Thus 'following Nietzsche, the poststructuralists would say that all the normality within a world is ultimately sustained by nothing more than fictions whose fictionality has been forgotten. This forgetting has the effect of denying the otherness that is spawned by *any* human construct' (White 1991:26). For Nietzsche, the heroic values of Western civilisation–the soul, man, truth, and beauty–were only metaphors pulled together and constructed by a will to know and a will to power. By recognizing the fictions behind such moral constructs, postmodernism delegitimizes the responsibility to act in favour of a more passive orientation towards accepting existence in a mode of care and concern

In this chapter I want to trace these arguments about power and forgetfulness through the work of Heidegger, Lyotard and Rorty. While I am thoroughly sympathetic to their approach, I conclude this chapter with a brief defence of foundationalism through an argument which is concerned to understand the frailty of the human body. This argument provides me therefore with the twin themes of this chapter, namely the interrelatedness between the frailty of the human body and the forgetfulness of power.

Heidegger and the forgetfulness of being

Heidegger's philosophy attempted to criticize and overcome the Cartesian dualism of the mind and the body. In order to transcend the metaphysics of dualism, Heidegger sought a new interpretation of being through the development of the concept of Dasein, or Being-There (Heidegger 1962). The problem of Western philosophy, for Heidegger, was its forgetfulness of the nature of being under the obscurity of abstract philosophical speculation. Heidegger's philosophy attempted

to overcome the abstract notion of being in conventional philosophy by focusing instead on the everyday world of being and practice which is characterized by a taken-for-granted understanding of being. In particular, Heidegger attempted to set being within the confines of time, within which the life-course provides the necessary context for being. A human being has therefore to be understood within the context of time, as the temporal development or unfolding of the life-course or career.

Heidegger's language is often complicated but behind this discussion of Dasein there are three basic elements. First, Dasein is thought to be 'thrown' into the world where it becomes identified with specific cultural and historical practices. Dasein finds itself in a world which is always and already produced; this thrownness is its facticity. Second, this agency of Dasein is seen to be discursive in that it is located within a world which already possesses a public language and a public meaning. Third, Dasein involves understanding, that is, Dasein finds itself expressed in terms of vocations, social organizations, practices, relations and lifestyles. The importance of these three aspects of Dasein is that being is always goal directed, that is oriented towards the future. Dasein involves some form of project by which this future orientation is expressed. In more theological terms, being is always a 'being unto death' (Guignon 1993). This centrality of time and destiny in Heidegger's philosophy also underlines the profound sense of vulnerability which characterizes the notion of a human being bound to death. 'The human individual is thrown back upon *his own* self by a sense of *total powerlessness and vulnerability* in the face of an ultimate threat' (Hoffman 1993:199).

In contemporary interpretations of Heidegger, there has been a particular interest in Heidegger's relationship to theology and in particular to the mysticism of Meister Eckhart (Caputo 1978). This mystical tradition in Western theology offered Heidegger an alternative approach to Cartesian individualism and subjectivism as a framework for understanding being. In attempting to write about being, Heidegger often employs metaphors about forests, pathways and clearings. Being is always open to social influences and events; it is not a self-sufficient individual entity. The influence of mystical thought is particularly prominent in Heidegger's notion of being as thrownness, namely the transcendence of being. Western metaphysics has forgotten this thrownness and facticity of being. This forgetfulness is particularly in evidence in the nature of modern individualism which conceals and obscures the important role of shared social practices in our understanding of the self. The forgetfulness of individualism attempts to convince us that social reality is merely the artificial aggregate of individual isolated actions rather than an expression of collective social practices. The role and objective of Heidegger's radical philosophy was to expose and undermine this concealment or forgetfulness of the authentic nature of being. His philosophy was therefore critical not only of modern individualism but also of modern technology which for Heidegger was a form of alienation standing between Dasein and communal reality.

Heidegger's analysis of concern for otherness and his rejection of dualistic interpretations of mind and body has been profoundly influential in the growth of twentieth-century philosophy including postmodern philosophy. His critique of the concealment of Dasein by the metaphysics of conventional philosophy has been a major challenge to traditional philosophical analyses of existence. Given the prominence of the notion of forgetfulness in Heidegger's work, the deep irony of Heidegger's career was his commitment to National Socialism and his 'forgetfulness' about that commitment. While the later Heidegger embraced a secularized and demythologized theology, his early work was significantly influenced by southern German Catholic teaching. In 1909 for example, Heidegger entered a Jesuit novitiate in Feldkirch in Austria with the intention of joining the priesthood. Heidegger left the Jesuits because of poor health and studied theology at the University of Freiburg between 1909 and 1913. In 1933 he joined the National Socialist Party, supporting Hitler's withdrawal of Germany from the League of Nations. In his famous lecture of 1933 on 'the self assertion of the German university', Heidegger committed the German university system to the 'spiritual revolution' of national socialism. Heidegger never withdrew his support from the National Socialists and in the famous interview with *Der Spiegel* ('only a God can save us') this life-long commitment to the goals of National Socialism was evident. The controversy surrounding Heidegger and Nazism has given rise to a profound debate particularly in France which has been led by Farias (1989), Derrida (1989) and Bourdieu (1991). The essence of the debate centres on whether Heidegger's commitment to National Socialism was a necessary consequence of his philosophy or merely a contingent feature of his thought (Wolin 1993). For Derrida, Heidegger's relationship to National Socialism obscures a more fundamental commitment to a spiritual revolution in modern culture. By contrast, Wolin believes that there is a necessary relationship between Heidegger's thought and his commitment to National Socialism which cannot be obscured or forgotten. The problematic relationship between Heidegger and National Socialism was further intensified by the publication in the late 1980s of accusations against de Man, who was revealed to be a war-time collaborator with the Nazi occupation following the invasion of Belgium. De Man was one of the leading deconstructionist academics in modern literary studies and therefore the association of both Heidegger and de Man with National Socialism proved to be a deep embarrassment for intellectuals like Derrida.

It is within this context of politicized debate that we need both to evaluate and appreciate Lyotard's sensitive *Heidegger and 'the jews'* (1990). Lyotard seeks to avoid both a dishonest apologetic for Heidegger and a sweeping condemnation of his thought as a whole. Ultimately Lyotard condemns Heidegger for the fact that his philosophy was insufficiently radical in its turning away from Western ethnocentrism and Western modes of legitimacy. Heidegger's thought ultimately closes off, indeed protects us from facing up to and addressing the horror of Auschwitz. For Lyotard, Heidegger associates Dasein too closely with the volk, with the coming into history of a particular people. The volk who are responsible

for the guardianship of being are in Heidegger's thought still Christian, Western and indeed German people. Why did Heidegger's thought and his analysis of Dasein remain so committed to and determined by a particular people?

> It is clearly because Heidegger's thought remains bound to the theme of 'place' and of 'beginning', even after the turning.... Thus one cannot say that Heidegger's thought 'leaves open' the question of his silence on the Holocaust. It seals it, hermetically. This silence *is* this nonquestion, this closure and foreclosure, the 'forgetting' that thought is without beginning and unfounded, that it does not have to 'give place' to being, but is owed to a nameless law.
>
> (Lyotard 1990:94)

Thus Lyotard's reflection on Heidegger provides a context within which Lyotard develops his own view of otherness, politics and language.

Lyotard and universal history

Lyotard along with other French Marxist radicals associated with the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie* became profoundly alienated from and disillusioned by Communism in the post-war period following a number of major political disasters in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland. The events of May 1968 were therefore a turning point in the history of western Marxism whereby radical intellectuals became disassociated from organized politics. Lyotard's political peregrinations (Lyotard 1988) led him from organized Marxism into a philosophy of politics grounded in a particular view of language. This alienation from general Marxist politics was expressed in Lyotard's critical views on the possibility of universal history versus cultural difference (Lyotard 1985). This distrust for universal politics was the background to his now famous definition of postmodernism as a scepticism towards metanarratives and his commitment to the little stories which shake the dominant edifice through endless fractures (Lyotard 1984). While Lyotard has been hostile to the state of organized politics, he has nevertheless attempted to establish a viable political philosophy through a theory of language. Lyotard's views on language and politics are explored in this volume by Barry Smart. Rather than reiterating Smart's commentary on Lyotard, I shall turn briefly to Lyotard's Amnesty lecture within which he attempts to outline a linguistic approach to human rights discourse

Lyotard begins his approach to the theory of human rights through the dialogic characteristics of speech (Lyotard 1993). As Lyotard notes in the pragmatic function of language, every sentence is addressed or destined to someone or something, namely linguistic interaction is made up of a series of questions and answers. In grammatical terms this is represented by the relationship between I and you. One can move from these simple observations to a relatively sophisticated political philosophy. For example, 'by its association with the recursiveness and

translatability of human language, it cannot help but bind all human speakers into a speech community. From this effective "de facto" power, there arises what I shall term an effect of right' (Lyotard, 1993:140). This capacity to speak to others is a basic human right and perhaps the most basic of human rights. This right is typically suppressed by silence. This leads Lyotard into an interesting observation about amnesty and silence, namely that

> Amnesty International knows them better than anyone. Its vocation is modest but decisive. It is in *minimal*. *Amnestos* means he who is forgotten. Amnesty does not demand that the judgement be revised or that the convicted man be rehabilitated. It simply asks that the institution that has condemned to silence forget this decree and restore the victim to the community of speakers. (Lyotard, 1993:141).

Absolute power is thus the power to forget and to silence interlocution by an arbitrary act. By contrast, civilization is the capacity to listen and to learn, to be open to otherness. Respect for the other is thus a fundamental foundation of civilization as such. A civilized society requires a process of learning how to share dialogue, of attentiveness to the speech of others.

Rights, relativism and Rorty

Lyotard's views on language and society, which borrowed heavily from Wittgenstein, would be perfectly compatible with mainstream sociology. The notion of the dialogic nature of speech would be axiomatic for sociology. It is interesting that sociologists have contributed little to recent debates about justice and difference. The discourse of human rights has been in the late twentieth century fundamental to global political change, but sociology has had relatively little to say in recent years about the nature of human rights (Turner 1993). The relativistic impulse of mainstream sociology has made sociologists sceptical about the universalistic relevance of the notion of 'the human'. In addition there is a long standing antipathy to the idea of rights which derives primarily from Marx's criticism of the idea of liberal rights as merely a facet of bourgeois ideology. Furthermore, Weber's sociology of law took a radical and critical turn by rejecting any foundationalist notion of rights as a general claim about justice. Weber was surprisingly class reductionist in his treatment of legal rights and obligations. In contemporary theory, feminist theorists like Pateman (1988) have been hostile to the traditional claims of legal theory with respect to rights discourse. It is possible to argue, however, that while the debate about rights in sociology has been largely absent, there has been a significant interest in the analysis of citizenship which follows from the collapse of the postwar consensus regarding Keynesian policies with respect to social security and welfare. It is perhaps curious in this context that there has been little interaction between the philosophical discussion of rights and the sociological analysis of citizenship. Sociologists appear to be able to

understand the debate about citizenship because, following the work of Marshall (1977) they can grasp the institutional structure of civil, political and social rights in terms of the jury system, parliamentary democracy and the welfare state.

Generally speaking, classical sociology expressed no significant interest in the development of a theory of rights. In more recent years this lack of interest has been complicated by the intervention of postmodern theories of otherness and justice. As we have seen, critics of postmodern theory have typically claimed that, because of its radical inclination towards relativism and its lack of serious ethical vision, postmodern theory cannot provide any genuine guidance for political belief or more significantly for political action. Postmodern theorists provide an ironic and paradoxical reflection upon the political reality of our times which leads to radical philosophical doubt and scepticism towards political commitment rather than any unidimensional political engagement. This note of uncertainty and frustration with postmodern theory is evident in a variety of contemporary publications for example in Gellner's *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (1992). In this academic context it is important to consider the work of Rorty, who has been closely associated with postmodern philosophical discussion but also with a variety of attempts to develop a distinctive and clear political viewpoint on questions relating to solidarity, commitment and political development.

While modernist critics have often rejected postmodernism as a serious political position, Shute and Hurley's *On Human Rights* (1993) is important because it contains articles by both Lyotard and Rorty presenting arguments on the question of human rights from the position of postmodernism. Lyotard's identification with postmodernism is overt and definitive. Rorty has become associated with postmodern theory because he denies that any philosophical or ideological position can have any ultimate authority or justification. We live in a world of competing stories where no particular narrative has general consent or force. For Rorty, belief in the validity of a position or the justification of a perspective is a matter of ongoing argumentation from different vantage points and perspectives. The result is that our beliefs about the world and social reality are necessarily ad hoc, contingent, provisional and local. It is this persistent denial that there could be any unitary justification for belief which has earnt Rorty the title 'a postmodern philosopher'. The crucial essay in this regard is 'Private Irony and Liberal Hope' (Rorty 1989). However Rorty derives his position, not from mainstream postmodern thought (such as Baudrillard, Bauman and Lyotard), but rather from the pragmatism of the American philosophers Dewey and Peirce. Rorty's theories about democracy, philosophy and solidarity are derived consequently more from the work of American pragmatists than from European forms of postmodern theory. However, Rorty is clearly influenced by the radical work of Nietzsche and Heidegger which is illustrated in his article 'Self-Creation and Affiliation' (Rorty 1989). On this broad basis, Rorty makes a basic distinction between metaphysicians who believe that an ultimate or general justification for belief of a unified form is possible and ironists who believe that no such general justification is either possible or desirable. Rorty is critical of the whole legacy of the Plato-

Kant tradition with its emphasis on aestheticism, rationalism, individualism and certainty.

Rorty's view of professional philosophy tends to annoy the conventional academic community because his writing, which is typically both witty and ironic, is specifically directed against the pretentions of professional philosophers. For Rorty the classical project of philosophy, associated with Plato and Enlightenment thinkers like Kant, is fundamentally and irretrievably flawed and 'truths' about our social reality are better derived from the inspiration of literature, poetry and art rather than from the professional world of trained philosophers. Rorty's approach to contemporary social theory involves therefore a sustained critique of the whole legacy of Western philosophy from Plato to Kant, at least that legacy which believed that there was a single account of reality which could be authoritative across different cultures and social groups. Rorty combines this critical attitude towards professional philosophy with a sympathy for contemporary feminist social thought. Rorty believes, along with feminist theorists, that the Western account of reason and rationality is significantly dominated by a gender perspective which is partial and biased rather than neutral and universal. Feminists have been particularly concerned with the role of emotions and symbolism in analytical thought and Rorty draws upon this critical attitude in developing his own theory of rights. In his recent work on rights, Rorty identifies himself with the empiricism of Hume against the rationalist and universalistic tradition of Kant and Hegel. The down-to-earth common sense tradition of Scottish philosophy appears to have some similarity with Rorty's often rather home-spun approach to philosophizing. Certainly in his treatment of Hume, Rorty has been influenced by the feminist theories of Baier, particularly in her analysis of Hume's moral philosophy in her *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections of Hume's Treatise* (1991). Whereas Kant attempted to regard moral judgements as a branch of rational inquiry and treated aesthetic appreciation of beauty as a disinterested neutral judgement, Hume gave a central place to sentiment and affect in moral debate and aesthetic inquiry. Critical social thought, following Nietzsche's rejection of the Kantian approach to aesthetics, has argued that aesthetic judgement is essentially bound up with an emotional orientation to reality and cannot be divorced from sentiment. It is partly for this reason that there has been in recent years a particular interest in the notion of the sublime and in Burke's analysis of the sublime in relation to judgements about beauty. Insofar as Rorty derives considerable intellectual stimulation from Nietzsche, we may assume that he is solidly within this anti-Kantian paradigm.

What then does Rorty have to say about rights? Rorty begins his philosophical account of rights by rejecting all foundationalist attempts to argue that human rights can be derived from some general or universal characteristic of human beings such as, for example, their rationality. For Rorty, any attempt to identify or discover some essential feature of human beings is, philosophically speaking, a waste of time. He is indeed completely contemptuous of all such approaches to rights from a foundationalist standpoint. For Rorty, the recent horrors of ethnic

cleansing in what was previously Yugoslavia make any attempt to discover some rational foundation to human behaviour totally pointless. Similarly the extinction of the European Jewish community in the Holocaust makes any attempt to find a moral or rational foundation to human behaviour, whereby we could appeal to the reasonableness of human beings to live together in harmony and peace, a moral offence. Rorty argues that we should stop asking why we differ from animals and merely say that 'we can feel for each other to a much greater extent than they can' (Rorty 1993:122). Following from this rejection of foundationalism, there are two major features to Rorty's account of rights. As we have already noticed, he starts by putting considerable emphasis on the importance of sympathy and affective attachment to other human beings. It is the sentimental attachment of human beings through emotion and everyday companionship that provides the possibility for an argument about rights rather than some abstract claim about rationality. Human beings are primarily sentimental creatures not rational philosophers. The next stage of his argument is the most significant, namely that we should attempt to improve the world through various forms of sentimental education. It is for this reason that the tradition of Rousseau in educational theory is particularly significant for Rorty. It is through a system of education which would make people identify with other human beings rather than dismissing them as not truly human, that we have an opportunity of identifying an appropriate framework within which to discuss rights at all. Rorty's optimistic belief is that we can make the world a better place by training our children into sympathy and concern for other human beings as themselves sentimental creatures rather than rational actors. It is here of course that Rorty's dependence on the legacy of Dewey's pragmatism is particularly obvious. Rather than bother with debates about rational foundations to morality we should simply get on with the business of trying to improve society through educational mechanisms. It is the classics of literature which are crucial to sentimental education not the vain arid pursuits of rationalist philosophers. We can raise and enhance intersubjective sentiment through exposing children and young people to the great traditions of literature and drama, wherein genuine moral dilemmas are explored systematically and sympathetically. The tragedy of Bosnia is more likely to be resolved by training children into a sympathetic appreciation of other people's problems and tragedies rather than instructing children in the tradition of classical rationalist philosophy. The issue behind human rights is to get human beings to recognize other human beings as creatures worthy of our concern and care.

In this chapter I want to suggest, possibly immodestly, that Rorty's argument has an interesting, if fortuitous, relationship to the case for an outline for a theory of human rights which I developed in *Sociology* (Turner 1994). While I am sympathetic to Rorty's argument, I want to present a case against relativism. Arguments about cultural relativism can be and have been manipulated and abused by authoritarian governments to justify various forms of state violence under the banner of cultural authenticity and difference. It is all too easy to justify abuses against children and women on the one hand or devastation of the

natural environment on the other, by an appeal to local cultural difference and diversity. Philosophical and sociological arguments against relativism are therefore an important part of the political programme to protect and defend human rights traditions in the public arena. There is therefore a strong argument in favour of at least a general theory of human rights, even if it is difficult to sustain the idea of universal rights. My argument is briefly that the frailty of the human body provides at least one place for starting an account of a foundation for human rights discourse. Because of this frailty and the precarious nature of social reality, human beings require the protective security of general human rights. I recognize of course that not all rights assume this form of protective security but a large element of human rights legal tradition is to provide some general security for human beings. The notion of the frailty of the human body, namely our disposition towards disease, disability and death, can be derived from a sociology of the body influenced by writers such as Gehlen and Berger. I also believe that this notion of frailty can be supported by various feminist views of the importance of caring and nurturing. One might also note here that Rorty has a particular sympathy for the work of Heidegger and, of course, much of Heidegger's moral philosophy was based upon an interest in the idea of concern and caring (Rorty 1991b). The question of human vulnerability of course is particularly prominent in the area of debates about torture and political brutality, an issue dealt with supremely well in *The Body in Pain* (Scarry 1985).

In addition to the human body being fragile and frail, I have argued that we live in a social environment which is essentially precarious and this precariousness is an inevitable consequence of the nature of power and its investment in the state. This argument is a variation on the theme in social contract theory derived from the work of Hobbes. Powerful institutions such as the state, which are set up according to social contract theory to protect the interests of rational actors can of course function to terrorize and dominate civil society. While strong states may protect society from civil wars, they can, for that very reason, be a danger to the very existence of citizens. By precariousness I also mean that institutions which are rationally designed to serve certain specific purposes may evolve in ways which contradict these original charters. Social life is essentially contingent and risky; individuals, even when they collect together for concerted action, cannot necessarily protect themselves against the vagaries of social reality.

While social theorists might grant that social reality is precarious, the argument that human beings are universally frail may appear to be controversial and contentious. There are a number of problems here. If human beings are frail by definition, then frailty is variable and my argument could easily be converted into a Darwinistic theory of the survival of the fittest. Those that are least frail may combine to dominate and subordinate the vulnerable and fragile. The disposition of the strong to support and protect the weak must be based consequently upon some collectively shared sympathy or empathy for human beings in their collective frailty and weakness. Like Rorty, I tend to derive a theory of human rights from certain aspects of feminist theory, from a critical

view of the limitations of utilitarian accounts of reason and from an interest in notions of sympathy, sentiment and emotionality. Insofar as the strong protect the weak, it is through a recognition of likeness which is itself a product of affective attachment and sentiment. In my 'Outline of a Theory of Human Rights' (Turner 1994a), I argued that people will want their rights to be recognized because they see in the plight of other human beings their own (potential) unhappiness and misery. Because individual ageing is an inevitable biological process, we can all anticipate, in principle, our own vulnerability and frailty. More importantly, sympathy is crucial in deciding to whom our moral concern might be directed. Sympathy, I argue, derives from the fundamental experiences of reciprocity in everyday life, particularly from the relationship between mother and child. However if my argument is to prevail I need a more elaborate notion of human frailty. For example, the argument could be made more sophisticated by developing a distinction between pain and suffering. Human beings can suffer without an experience of pain and conversely they can have an experience of pain without suffering. Suffering is essentially a situation where the self is threatened or destroyed from outside, for example through humiliation. We can suffer the loss of a loved one without physical pain whereas toothache may give us extreme physical pain without a sense of loss of self or the humiliation of self. While suffering is variable, pain might be regarded as universal. This is closely related to a position adopted by Rorty in his essay on 'Private Irony and Liberal Hope' (Rorty 1989) where he argues that:

> the idea that we have an overriding obligation to diminish cruelty, to make human beings equal in respect of their liability to suffering, seems to take for granted that there is something within human beings which deserves respect and protection quite independently of the language they speak. It suggests that a non-linguistic ability, the ability to feel pain is what is important, and the differences in the vocabulary are much less important.
>
> (Rorty 1989:88)

While I accept Rorty's argument, I believe that this can provide a universalistic foundation for human rights. In short, it is possible to argue that frailty is a universal condition of the human species because pain is a fundamental experience of all organic life. While Rorty may be able to argue that suffering is local and variable, the concept of the frailty of the human body could be defended through concepts of human pain. It would as a consequence be possible to adopt all of Rorty's philosophical arguments about irony, cultural variation, the absence of authoritative justification and so forth, while also adhering to a universalistic view of human nature and human embodiment as the underlying criterion of humanity and this is the foundation of any social theory of human rights. One could therefore embrace postmodern irony while also advocating a universalistic notion of human rights as a protective screen to limit the vagaries and contingencies of embodiment and social relations. Metaphysicians and ironists could both happily

come to the agreement that there is a universalistic foundation to the discourse of human rights without too much intellectual discomfort. From a sociological point of view, however, Rorty's notion of frailty needs to be supplemented by an idea of the precariousness of all human institutionalization. Some recent studies of the historical development of rational policy formation prior to the Holocaust would provide some additional evidence about institutional precariousness (Bauman 1989).

Conclusion: rights of bodies

Postmodern social theory offers an important alternative to rationalist accounts of communication and politics. In particular, the criticisms of metanarratives which have followed from Lyotard's provocative attacks on universal history have had an influential impact on debates around the work of Habermas. Criticisms of Habermas's rationalist account of communication have raised questions about the authoritarian implications of Habermas's understanding of communicative consensus. Can minority opinion, especially of inarticulate groups, be incorporated in a general communicative consensus? What is the role of affect, symbolism, particularistic solidarities, fragmented opinion, irrational attachment or the subconscious in Habermas's defence of the role of Enlightened reason in the formation of public opinion? More importantly, do we want a uniform consensus in a social world which is characterized by cultural divergence, difference and diversity? Postmodern theory by contrast claims to be more attuned to local diversity, social difference, particularistic claims and minority opinion.

In this discussion of postmodern theory, I have rejected the conventional claim that postmodernism lacks any serious commitment to the development of a political programme. This criticism is obviously false. Lyotard and Rorty obviously have a clear view of a political theory and embrace an ethical position. Following in the legacy of Heidegger, they have adopted a moral position which gives prominence to questions of care for others and concern for difference. They are overtly critical of the stigmatization and isolation of minority groups, whom Lyotard refers to in general as 'the jews'. Rorty has embraced the idea that cruelty is the most significant failing of humanity. I have attempted to refer to this ethical position in terms of its critique of forgetfulness.

While postmodernism does engage in political debate, it is evidently clear that this political position lacks any significant detail. We can reasonably argue that postmodern theory does not have any clear programme by which its aims of listening to difference could be easily achieved or implemented. In this sense, it is entirely programmatic. Rorty's recommendations that we should encourage our children to read the novels of Dickens are admirable but limited and probably complacent. For Rorty, the welfare of the African-American population of the United States may be appalling, but it is the best they can probably expect in modern societies. We should not forget their plight, and we should be well informed about their condition by watching documentaries and serious newspapers, but

there is little that can be done for them. Similarly Lyotard's assumption that the 'little stories' will represent a challenge to the metanarratives of domination is optimistic, but also naive. Despite the tidal criticisms of positivistic science by alternative philosophies of scientific knowledge, in practice modern science has remained untouched and aloof to such forceful objections. Regardless of the radical criticisms of the medical profession by medical sociologists, the medical model is still dominant in medical practice.

Much of the force of postmodern criticism remains a romantic outburst against bureaucracy. Foucault's condemnations of disciplinary regimes and Lyotard's rejection of the normalization of everyday life by modernist discourses are primarily anarchist objections to routinization and rationalization: they are protests against the Weberian iron cage of bureaucracy. As a liberal of course, Weber was also appalled by the normalization of society by instrumental rationalism, but he regarded the romanticism of his own day, in the shape of Stefan George's symbolist poetry, as a totally inadequate response to the challenge of bureaucratic control. Weber's brand of strong liberalism may be equally inadequate to the modern world (Turner 1994b), but not all brands of liberalism have to be individualistic legitimations of market society. While postmodernism is held to be different from liberalism, we should not forget that it was J.S.Mill who rejected the narrow utilitarianism of his father and abandoned the naive reductionism of Bentham, who had claimed that 'pushpin is as good as poetry'. In his personal crisis with rationalistic utilitarianism, Mill turned to poetry and the love of a woman for care and consolation. Some branches of liberalism are sensitive to otherness and difference. The real dividing line, however, between Lyotard and Mill is that the latter had developed a plausible political programme around liberty, tolerance, sensitivity to female political participation, and cultural difference. Postmodernism will have to go beyond mere openness to minority cultures to produce a viable politics for postmodernity.

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3

THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE AND THE PROBLEM OF JUSTICE

Barry Smart

Introduction

What is justice in a world of difference(s)? Towards the close of his report on the condition of knowledge presented to the Conseil des Universités of the government of Quebec, a text which is perhaps best known for its introduction of a controversial notion of a 'postmodern condition' into contemporary social analysis, Lyotard remarks that '[c]onsensus has become an outmoded and suspect value. But justice as a value is neither outmoded nor suspect. We must thus arrive at an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus' (1986[1979]:66), or for that matter, if we follow Lyotard, linked to truth, since he also argues that prescriptions cannot be derived from descriptions, and that a politics of justice is not to be equated with a politics of truth (Readings 1991). In a subsequent work, *Just Gaming* (1985), Lyotard engages in a dialogue which offers a series of philosophical reflections on the idea of justice, the problem, if not impossibility, of consensus and the endlessness of politics and difference. Lyotard remarks that 'it is no longer a matter…of reflecting upon what is just or unjust against the horizon of a social totality, but, on the contrary, against the horizon of a multiplicity or of a diversity' (Lyotard and Thebaud, 1985:87). In short, given the identification of a politics of difference as a distinctive, if not defining, feature of contemporary social life (Young 1990; Taylor 1992) a radical reconsideration of the idea of justice has become inescapable.

The transformation of modernity

The context in which Lyotard reflects on the idea of justice is that of a modernity transformed by 'the predominance of technoscience…that is, the massive subordination of cognitive statements to the finality of the best possible performance' (1992:18). The discrediting of legitimation through grand narratives and the *de facto* process of legitimation through performativity constitute signs of

what is termed 'the defaillancy of modernity' and represent key features of a condition of knowledge designated as postmodern. The aim of generating a single set of criteria which will hold in all times and all places seems, to say the least, a remote and far from desirable prospect, and the construction of a single language game to which all others may be subordinated is no more convincing. The loss of such hopes, such goals, simply shows 'that one of the less important sideshows of Western civilization–metaphysics–is in the process of closing down' (Rorty 1991: 218).

Lyotard is particularly concerned with the implications of the displacement of traditional forms of knowledge, based on revelation, by 'the pragmatics of scientific knowledge', requiring proof, and especially with the way in which the production of proof has fallen increasingly under the sway of performativity. The goal now, Lyotard argues, is 'no longer truth, but…the best possible input/ output equation…the only credible goal is power' (1986:46). The funding of scientific and technological research has as its objective not the pursuit of truth but the elaboration and enhancement of power. Scientific knowledge, as Marx (1973) anticipated, has become a force of production, 'a moment in the circulation of capital' (Lyotard 1986:45). But whereas Marx's critical analysis may be read as mirroring capital by according political hegemony to the economic genre, Lyotard's narrative, especially in *The Differend,* is directed towards an opening up of the question of the linkage between 'the multiplicity of genres, the diversity of ends', to an opening up, that is, of the question of the political, a question that has no finality.

In his discussion of transformations in the condition of knowledge in *The Postmodern Condition* Lyotard follows 'the line of Kantian thought, and also, to a very large extent, that of Wittgensteinian thought' (1988b:278). A Wittgensteinian notion of language games is particularly prominent throughout the text. Each language game has its own specific rules and there is said to be no common measure between different games. In brief, it is argued that there is an incommensurability between denotative, prescriptive and technical games. However, decision-makers attempt to order and manage the different language games constitutive of our sociality through performativity criteria and procedures which assume, claim, or attempt to impose commensurability on heterogeneous elements. And in so far as performativity 'increases the ability to produce proof, it also increases the ability to be right'; likewise 'the probability that an order would be pronounced just, was said to increase with its chances of being implemented, which would in turn increase with the performance capability of the prescriber' (Lyotard 1986:46). It is in this way, through 'context control' or appearing to master reality, that performativity effects a form of legitimation:

> since 'reality' is what provides the evidence used as proof in scientific argumentation, and also provides prescriptions and promises of a juridical, ethical, and political nature with results, one can master all of these games by mastering 'reality'. That is precisely what technology can do. By reinforcing

> technology, one 'reinforces' reality, and one's chances of being just and right increase accordingly.
>
> (Lyotard 1986:47)

But if this assumption has become part of modern folklore, achieving mastery over reality has proven to be much more elusive, the consequences of attempts have proven unpredictable and uneven. The modern quest to reinforce or redesign reality has continually been met by unintended consequences, something less than a complete correspondence between programmes, practices and their effects.

Notwithstanding such qualifications to the modern project it is efficiency or the optimization of system performance which increasingly has been offered as legitimation in 'matters of social justice and scientific truth alike' (Lyotard 1986: xxiv). However, the logic of 'maximum performance' is not simply inconsistent with developments in social and economic life, as Lyotard readily acknowledges, it has also contributed to, if it is not primarily responsible for, the perception and experience of contradictions and inconsistencies, as well as an increasing accumulation of risks and hazards (Beck 1992). If an appreciation of the inconsistencies and contradictions which seem to be intrinsic to modern forms of knowledge has led to incredulity towards grand narratives and the associated prospect and/or promise of a resolution of difficulties, are we destined to exist in perpetual disenchantment? That does not seem to be Lyotard's view, for he argues that 'the postmodern condition is as much a stranger to disenchantment as it is to the blind positivity of delegitimation' (1986:xxiv). But if the postmodern condition is not to be equated with perpetual disenchantment it clearly has contributed to a re-opening of the question of the social bond. In so far as postmodern knowledge has produced an 'incredulity toward metanarratives', refined 'our sensitivity to differences', and reinforced 'our ability to tolerate the incommensurable' (Lyotard 1986:xxiv–xxv), the grounds of the social bond, its legitimacy, have become more problematic. As Bauman remarks,

> It is not at all clear how the cause of morality, goodness, justice can be seriously promoted in a world which has seemingly come to terms with its own groundlessness.
>
> (1994:16)

In such a 'groundless' world, a world of differences, what is to be made of justice?

The problem of justice

What is justice? In an age marked by the realization that the promised end of modernity, 'emancipation for humanity as a whole', is made unrealizable by the accelerating proliferation of modern forms of life and their costly consequences, how are we to think of justice and to conduct ourselves justly? In an era of increasing political fragmentation and diversity in which new values and new

social movements have (re-)emerged, can there be any place for theories of justice laying claim to universal validity (White 1987/88)? Although ideas of justice, which 'serve as guiding principles for the norms and rules of a great number of institutions', may vary between different societies Heller and Feher argue that justice remains bound up with moral virtue, with 'general principles of comparison and ranking' (1988:121). Where rules and norms are considered to be beyond question, or unproblematic, then the conception of justice is identified as *static,* where rules and norms are held to be in question, or subject to challenge, Heller and Feher argue 'our conception of justice is a *dynamic* one' (1988:123). While static justice is held to be universal, it being argued that no society can exist without it, precisely what constitutes the content of justice for different social communities may, and frequently does, vary considerably. Dynamic justice in contrast is not universal, although it is argued to be common in modern Western societies, where the norms and rules of justice are almost permanently in question.

But on what basis are the norms and rules of (dynamic) justice called into question and considered unjust, or less just, than alternatives? Is there any alternative to a nominalistic or relativistic stance? Heller and Feher appear to suggest that there might be, that there are 'ultimate yardsticks' for distinguishing between the just and the unjust in the modern world, for the emergence of the latter has 'been accompanied by the universalization of two values' (1988:124), namely 'freedom' and 'life'. But this does not put an end to the problem of justice, on the contrary, for as the authors subsequently acknowledge, the value of freedom may be universally invoked in relation to political justice and life-chances may frequently be invoked, particularly in the modern West, in relation to social justice, but what is accepted as just may still vary between nations, cultures and ways of life. The value of freedom and to a lesser degree the value of life may appear to have been universalized but appearances are deceptive, cultures and lifestyles remain different and 'the same norm which may be just in one country, in the context of a particular way of life, could still be unjust in another country with different traditions and cultures' (Heller and Feher 1988:126). Furthermore, given the identification of cultural differences in relation to justice, not to mention evidence of the increasing incidence of value conflicts, it is necessary to ask whether it is appropriate to talk of the values of freedom and life as 'ultimate yardsticks'. Claims for political justice, in terms of freedom, and social justice, in terms of the distribution of life-chances, appear to be subject to conflict precisely because there are no ultimate yardsticks to which a final appeal can be made. Ironically the concluding comment that 'a completely just society is undesirable because "complete social and political justice" would only be possible where no one could any longer claim that "this norm or rule is unjust"' (Heller and Feher 1988:131) effectively constitutes an acknowledgement of the absence of absolute or ultimate yardsticks for determining the nature of justice. Justice is always, indeed has always, to be in question, to be open to question.

It is precisely this problem of the (necessarily) contested (contestable) character of justice which Lyotard begins to address in his dialogue with Jean-Loup Thebaud

in *Just Gaming* (1985) and continues to explore in his book *The Differend* (1988a). It is worth adding that in contrast to the attempt by Heller and Feher to articulate the principles of justice Lyotard comments that '[n]o one can say what the being of justice is' (Lyotard and Thebaud 1985:66). However, before turning to a detailed discussion of Lyotard's sustained reflections on the question of justice, reflections which serve to clarify and develop the enigmatic reference at the end of *The Postmodern Condition* to 'a politics that would respect both the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown' (1986:67), I want to elaborate further on the notion, implied above, of an interpretive turn in philosophical reflections on justice, and the problems of interpretive conflict which are an unavoidable corollary. As one contributor has remarked, 'our society is not one of consensus, but of division and conflict, at least as far as the nature of justice is concerned' (MacIntyre 1988:1–2). The turn away from the idea that universally valid principles of justice might be established and towards the notion that principles of justice are subject to cultural difference(s) and interpretive conflict(s) raises the question of how, if at all, in a complex, modern society or community we are able to determine what is just (Warnke 1992).

The question of justice, whether posed by philosophers or anyone else for that matter, frequently leads to disagreement. It is much easier, as Morris Ginsberg comments, 'to recognize injustice man to define justice' (1965:73), easier, as Agnes Heller (1987) agrees, to denounce injustice than to determine what is justice. As the competing and conflicting conceptions and theories demonstrate, the debate over the question of justice is characterized by disagreement, at times fundamental disagreement, rather than consensus. In his study on moral theory, *After Ambivalence,* Alasdair MacIntyre outlines the dilemma confronting modern society in the following terms: 'we have all too many disparate and rival moral concepts, in this case rival and disparate concepts of justice, and…the moral resources of the culture allow us no way of settling the issue between them rationally' (1987:252). Subsequently, in another text which addresses the question of justice in greater detail, MacIntyre re-emphasizes the point, arguing that we inhabit a culture (modern, Western, post-Enlightenment) in which 'an inability to arrive at agreed rationally justifiable conclusions on the nature of justice and practical rationality coexists with appeals by contending social groups to sets of rival and conflicting convictions unsupported by rational justification' (1988:5–6). Note, it is not simply a matter of disagreement about the principles of rational justification: more is at stake; there is an awareness of the existence of a diversity of traditions, of 'rationalities rather than rationality…justices rather than justice' (MacIntyre 1988:9; see also Lyotard 1988b; Lyotard and Thebaud 1985).

Contemporary disputes over justice derive primarily from the limits and limitations of Enlightenment assumptions according to MacIntyre. In particular, it is a continuing inability to deliver on the promise of principles of rational justification, which are independent of 'social and cultural particularities', which is portrayed as the most significant limitation, and it is the exclusion of a conception of rational inquiry as embodied in a tradition, 'the conception of tradition-

constituted and tradition-constitutive rational enquiry' as MacIntyre (1988:6–10) terms it, which is presented as the most important limit. Acknowledging the existence of a diversity of traditions of enquiry and seeking to evade what he terms 'relativist' and 'perspectivist' challenges, MacIntyre argues that it does not necessarily follow that 'differences between rival and incompatible traditions cannot be rationally resolved' (1988:352; 10). But precisely how disputes about criteria of rationality between different traditions are to be rationally conducted, let alone resolved, is not satisfactorily demonstrated.

At issue here are questions of understanding between or across traditions, and associated problems of (incommensurability and (un)translatability between different tradition-informed communities. MacIntyre's position is simultaneously critical of both the idea of a globalizing modernity seeking to emancipate itself from 'social, cultural, and linguistic particularity and so from tradition' (1988: 388), and a relativist or perspectivist acceptance of differences between traditions as beyond rational resolution. The thesis outlined, reminiscent in some respects of Kuhn's (1970) reflections on the transformation of scientific paradigms, is that some traditions may confront insoluble 'epistemological crises', or anomalies, and in such circumstances may 'encounter in a new way the claims of some particular rival tradition, perhaps one with which they have for some time coexisted, perhaps one which they are now encountering for the first time' (MacIntyre 1988: 364). Further, on achieving an understanding of a formerly alien tradition the adherents of a tradition-in-crisis may be 'compelled to recognize' that the other (alien) tradition is superior by virtue of the fact that it offers the necessary conceptual and theoretical resources to explain the problems and anomalies defeating the tradition-in-crisis. While reference is made to potential problems of translation between different tradition-informed communities, ultimately MacIntyre makes light of the difficulties of achieving an understanding of other traditions, and he has nothing to say on the subject of the politics of the complex process of recognition and selection implicit in the movement from a tradition-in-crisis to an embrace of another, apparently alien tradition. Indeed MacIntyre is only able to make light of the difficulties of translation between and across ostensibly different tradition-informed communities because the traditions analysed– Aristotelian, Augustinian, 'the Scottish blend of Calvinist Augustinianism and renaissance Aristotelianism' (1988:349) and liberalism–are in a relationship of resemblance in so far as they already share assumptions about the character and conduct of rational enquiry. Despite an acknowledgement that there is 'no place for appeals to a practical-rationality-as-such or a justice-as-such' (MacIntyre 1988:346), in short that the social field is populated by rationalities and justices, MacIntyre finally (re)turns for inspiration to one particular tradition, the Aristotelian tradition, albeit re-cast, the assumption being that it alone offers the prospect of restoring 'intelligibility and rationality to our moral and social attitudes and commitments' (MacIntyre 1987:259). There may be an acknowledgement of 'contested justices and contested rationalities' but the Aristotelian tradition is ultimately presented as constituting, for the time being at

least, and for reasons that are not always entirely clear or convincing, the best prospect of thinking through the problem of justice.

As I have noted, MacIntyre's argument is broadly informed by the Aristotelian idea of justice as a virtue, the 'first virtue of political life' (1987:244). For Aristotle to be 'just is to give each person what each deserves; and the social presuppositions of the flourishing of the virtue of justice in a community are therefore twofold: that there are rational criteria of desert and that there is socially established agreement as to what those criteria are' (MacIntyre 1987:152). In particularly novel cases, where criteria may not yet be established or clear, virtue is to be found in pursuit of the mean: 'To judge *kata ton orthon logon* [according to right reason] is indeed to judge of more or less…justice [lies] between doing injustice and suffering injustice' (MacIntyre 1987:153–4). However, whereas Aristotle (1962) was able to proceed on the assumption that a communally shared conception of 'right reason', the good and justice, was already present within the citystate, or at the very least was attainable, in a complex, pluralistic modern community, such an assumption is much more problematic, for there are a variety of competing and conflicting conceptions of the good in play and associated criteria are frequently a matter of dispute. In short, in a highly individualistic modern moral culture agreed, socially established, 'rational criteria of desert' are for the most part absent, indeed such matters routinely constitute the fabric of political contestation. Given that increasing diversity, fragmentation and rootlessness are prominent tendencies within modernity, the identification of rival justices and competing rationalities as problematic features is hardly controversial, but MacIntyre's promotion of an Aristotelian 'resolution' remains contentious (Stout 1990; Bernstein 1991; Poole 1991).

MacIntyre's Aristotle presents the good as a quest:

> The good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is.
>
> (1987:219)

But this notion of virtue as a practice has been displaced within the modern context, as MacIntyre acknowledges when he discusses the marginalization of the tradition of the virtues following the development of a culture of bureaucratic individualism. The virtues, practices characteristic of a unitary life, have been undermined by the 'liquidation of the self into a set of demarcated areas of role-playing [which] allows no scope for the exercise of dispositions which could genuinely be accounted in any sense remotely Aristotelian' (MacIntyre 1987: 205). Given the marginalization and transformation of the virtues—the fragmentation of the narrative unity of human life and an associated displacement of engagement in forms of practice 'with goods internal to itself' by forms of 'aesthetic consumption' (MacIntyre 1987:227–8)—what is the point of promoting the Aristotelian tradition? Given a marginalization of the virtues in modern society

what is to be gained from a (re)turn to Aristotle? For MacIntyre the attraction is the remote prospect of a retrieval of 'ethical life'; the possibility of sustaining 'civility' and 'intellectual and moral life…through the new dark ages which are already upon us' (1987:242, 263). However, as one of his critics has commented, MacIntyre ultimately fails 'to clarify either his indictment of our society or the practical implications of his position. In fact it is hard to know where he locates himself in social and political space, despite his attempt to identify himself with Aristotle's legacy' (Stout 1990:223). Even if the indictment of modernity as a complete moral catastrophe is considered well founded, MacIntyre's response is not, for it represents merely 'nostalgia for a past in which moral certainty was possible…an evasion of the problems of modernity, not a solution to them' (Poole 1991:149–50). In a comparably critical fashion Jeffrey Stout remarks, 'We can all dream of what life would be like in a world united in perfect rational consensus on the good, but this dream represents no accessible alternative to what we have now' (1990:224). What we have now is not moral certainty but moral ambivalence. Ironically it is ambivalence of which we can be certain.

Like MacIntyre, Lyotard is concerned with the relationship between traditions. However, unlike MacIntyre, Lyotard argues that traditions 'are mutually opaque' and further it is emphasized that 'a universal rule of judgement between heterogeneous genres is lacking in general' (1988a:157:xi). Both analysts also share an indebtedness to Aristotle. But when Lyotard turns to Aristotle in his discourse on justice, it is not to finally resolve the problem of justice, to answer the question of justice, on the contrary, if the quest for justice is to remain a possibility, the question 'what is justice' must continually be (ex)posed. What Aristotle offers Lyotard is

1 the idea of the prudent (pagan) judge who, given the absence of true criteria, models, or universal grounds of validity to guide judgement in the ethicopolitical sphere, has to rely on the invention of rules;
2 another perspective on the differentiation of language into types of enunciation, each of which has its own rules;
3 an example of the self-application of doubt, captured in the epigraph to *Just Gaming* drawn from *Nicomachean Ethics*–'The rule of the undetermined is itself undetermined'.

Modernity and justice–without criteria or models

What are we to make of justice under conditions of modernity?[1] One of the defining features of modernity is 'an impulsion to exceed itself into a state other than itself (Lyotard 1991:25); an impulsion which is not simply innovative but experimental. In other words modernity is not so much a historical period for Lyotard, rather it represents 'a way of shaping a sequence of moments in such a way that it accepts a high rate of contingency' (1991:68). And in so far as it is experimental, modernity is necessarily without criteria, without models. As Lyotard

remarks in *Just Gaming,* 'anytime that we lack criteria, we are in modernity' (1985:15). But given the absence of criteria how are we to differentiate between (political) opinions, to draw distinctions, or to determine whether a given thing is just or unjust? Lyotard's response to the question of how we make distinctions and reach judgements in the absence of universally agreed criteria is simply that we do it, 'It is decided, that is all that can be said. We are dealing with judgements that are not regulated by categories' (Lyotard and Thebaud 1985:14). Such a situation, one in which judgements are made without criteria, is described as pagan. For Lyotard 'modernity is pagan' (1985:16).

Throughout Lyotard's discourse on justice there are two recurring themes, namely that 'one cannot derive prescriptions from descriptions' and that although one is 'without criteria,…one must decide' (1985:59:17). Implied here is the notion of language games, a notion which Lyotard employs to argue that there is no common measure between the multiplicity of language games, between, for example, a description of reality ('the game of scientific denotation') and an artistic, poetic, or prescriptive language game. In so far as language games are not translatable then prescriptive statements cannot be derived from statements that describe a state of affairs. A discourse of justice cannot be derived from a discourse of truth. Clearly Lyotard's position is to be distinguished from the Platonic determination of the essence of justice, its 'truth', to which practices or forms of conduct have to conform if they are to be judged 'just'. The latter type of discourse is characteristic of the Western political tradition. Here, as Lyotard remarks,

> We are dealing with discursive orderings whose operations are dual… on the one hand, a theoretical operation that seeks to define scientifically, in the sense of the Platonic *episteme,* or in the Marxist sense, or indeed in some other one, the object the society is lacking in order to be a good or a just society; on the other hand, plugged into this theoretical ordering, there are some implied discursive orderings that determine the measures to be taken in social reality to bring it into conformity with the representation of justice that was worked out in the theoretical discourse. So that there is, on one side, a theoretical ordering made up of denotative statements…. On the other side, there is, paired to this ordering, a set of discourses that are implied by the previous one, at least in principle, but that differ nonetheless from it greatly, since their function is a prescriptive one with respect to social reality. (1985:21)

Lyotard counters that different classes of statements are incommensurable and that it is not possible to find justification for a prescription in a denotative statement. In other words, in so far as justice is prescriptive it cannot be derived from theorizing 'the true'.

Justice is a matter of politics and ethics, an open question, one which needs to be continually articulated. The question of justice cannot be answered with models, rather it is met with 'statements about possibilities', 'statements of opinion'. It is a matter of case by case judgement without the security of a

metalanguage, and given the presence of justice lies only in just judgements it is not possible to determine 'what the being of justice is' (Lyotard and Thebaud 1985: 66). There is no reality to which justice already corresponds, so it is not to be confused (or conflated) with 'conforming to laws', or accommodating to ontology. Justice is, of necessity, open to question, to debate, to suspicion, and to the future. Prohibition or obstruction of the possibility of debating the question of justice, of continuing to interrogate the question of 'the just and the unjust', is for Lyotard 'necessarily unjust'. In other words the obligation which appears in the form of a prescriptive, the authority which prescribes/commands is not simply to be obeyed. Justice is not a matter of conformity, or 'unanimous convention', to the contrary, it is more a matter of (political) responsibility, of determining, in the absence of rules or criteria for conduct, what to do. What guides the pursuit of just judgement is imagining the effects of 'doing something else than what is' (Lyotard 1985:23) in the absence of any knowledge-guarantees as to the course events will take. In sum justice is a matter of ethics and politics rather than knowledge.

The concept of rational politics is 'collapsing', if not already over for Lyotard. There is, as he puts it, 'no knowledge of practice. One cannot put oneself in a position of holding a discourse on the society…it is not true that a rational *knowledge* of social and political facts is possible, at least insofar as they imply judgements and decisions' (1985:73–5). In short, instead of a science of politics, a 'politics of judgement'; and rather than a politics of reason, a 'politics of opinions', which notwithstanding the absence of criteria offers the capability of deciding between opinions. Furthermore, rather than proceeding to develop an analysis of justice in terms of a notion of 'social totality' it is a matter of 'reflecting upon what is just or unjust…against the horizon of a multiplicity or of a diversity' (Lyotard and Thebaud 1985:87). In brief the problem of justice revolves around the politics of differences. The central issue being how to 'distinguish between what is just and what is not just' (1985:88) in the absence of universal criteria and the presence of a 'multiplicity of small narratives'.

Given that the idea of a totality or a unity has been eroded, if not entirely displaced, by the idea of a multiplicity or a diversity, how is a regulated politics, a politics able to continue to distinguish the just from the unjust, possible? Lyotard's response is that it is necessary to countenance 'the idea of a justice that would at the same time be that of a plurality', to place justice not 'under a rule of convergence but rather a rule of divergence' (Lyotard and Thebaud 1985:85), a rule appropriate to the presence of a multiplicity of 'minorities'. Where none of the minorities prevails, then 'we can say that the society is just' (1985:95). But such a politics runs a risk of 'indifferentism', of simply reversing Kant's Idea of totality, and this leads Lyotard to offer as a caution that 'one should be on one's guard… against the totalitarian character of an idea of justice, even a pluralistic one' (1985:96). However, such a response continues to leave open the question of the basis on which the idea of a pluralistic justice associated with a 'rule of divergence' is to be upheld.

There is a predictable equation of minorities with 'territories of language' rather than 'social ensembles' in Lyotard's argument and this makes necessary an exploration of the question of the relation of justice to the implied multiplicity of language games. Given a purity of non-prescriptive language games (denotative, narrative etc.) it is not appropriate or possible to 'judge from the point of view of justice' (Lyotard and Thebaud 1985:96). But where language games are not pure, where prescription intrudes, where, in Max Weber's (1970) neo-Kantian terms, the distinction between science as a vocation and politics as a vocation is compromised, which it frequently is, then the idea of justice must play a regulatory role. Justice operates to keep different language games within their respective rules, regulates their 'excesses', maintains their differences and counters the idea that they may have 'the value of sources of universal obligation'. The corollary of the multiplicity of justices implied above, 'each one of them defined in relation to the rules specific to each game', is what Lyotard terms 'the justice of multiplicity…which prescribes the observance of the singular justice of each game' (1985:100). But if the distinction between a 'multiplicity of justices' and a 'justice of multiplicity' clarifies matters it does not resolve the question of justice. For Lyotard, unlike Kant, the idea of justice has no finality. Quite simply what justice consists in 'remains to be seen in each case…one is never certain that one has been just, or that one can ever be just' (1985:99). Certainty is not the objective, rather the strategy advocated is to work to the limit of 'what the rules permit, in order to invent new moves, perhaps new rules and therefore new games' (1985: 100). The desire for justice is very much a desire for the as-yet unknown.

Lyotard's limitations

Lyotard's view of justice is re-established in *The Differend,* but there is a shift from an anthropocentric Wittgensteinian notion of language game, with its implication of players making use of 'language like a toolbox', to an adoption instead of a notion of phrase regimens.[2] Lyotard argues that players are 'situated by phrases in the universes those phrases present "before" any intention' (1984:17) and that the phrase is the only object incapable of being doubted, 'it is immediately presupposed. (To doubt that one phrases is still to phrase, one's silence makes a phrase)' (1988a:xi). Although phrases from different regimens may be linked, it is argued that it is not possible to translate from one into the other. The decline of 'universalist discourses' means that the linking of phrases is a problem, a problem which is identified as the property of a 'philosophical politics', a discourse which, ironically, is presented as, if not exploring, certainly able to testify to the differences between phrases or narratives. In short a philosophical politics seems to be able to mark the incommensurabilities between phrase regimens, illuminate differends, and thereby to challenge the authority of discourses claiming to be able to resolve disputes by invoking criteria (in)appropriate for translating difference into 'the same'. Politics in this context becomes, as Lyotard remarks, 'the threat of the differend. It is not a genre, it is the multiplicity of genres, the diversity of ends,

and par excellence the question of linkage' (1988a:138). But there is a serious difficulty here, namely that a philosophical politics bearing witness to differends and exploring the question of linkages itself begins to resemble a *de facto* metalanguage. Reading Lyotard's reflections on the politics of difference and the problem of justice it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that a form of philosophy is being re-positioned, effectively as a meta-discourse guaranteeing 'the inviolability of discursive boundaries' (Rasch 1994:61). Notwithstanding an acknowledgement that for 'the philosopher to be at the governorship of phrases would be just as unjust as it would be were it the jurist, the priest, the orator, the storyteller (the epic poet), or the technician' (Lyotard 1988a:158), the philosophical discourse proposed risks being identified as a metalanguage. Following the paradox present in *The Postmodern Condition* (1986 [1979]), of a grand narrative announcing the end of grand narratives, the possibility of which is acknowledged in *The Differend* (1988a:135–6), it looks like Lyotard has proceeded to assemble a metalanguage charged with defending differends from the injustice(s) of metalanguages.

Another way of stating the difficulty might be to ask how, or from where, in which language game/phrase regimen, is it possible to know/argue that there is 'no common measure…that we know of nothing in common with these different language games' (Lyotard and Thebaud 1985:51), *other that is, than their differences*? Does Lyotard's discourse not depend upon the possibility of a vantage point from which to identify the existence of plurality/difference and the absence of a common measure? There is an acknowledgement of the possibility of a problem in this regard in Lyotard's comment that the 'fact that I myself speak of this plurality does not imply that I am presenting myself as the occupant of a unitary vantage point upon the whole set of these games' (1985:51). However, given that the differentiation of the various language games (phrase regimens) is based upon identification of the different rules by which they are played (constituted), the denial of a 'vantage point' is unconvincing. As Rasch argues, there is a self-referential paradox in Lyotard's philosophical deliberations on the problems of language. At the very moment Lyotard 'maintains the radical incommensurability and radical, horizontally-structured autonomy of discourses, he seems to remove one such discourse from the field of play' (Rasch 1994:61).

In drawing a contrast between the role of 'the philosopher' and the role which might be attributed to 'the intellectual' Lyotard argues that the responsibility of the former lies in 'detecting differends and in finding the (impossible) idiom for phrasing them', while the latter 'helps forget differends, by advocating a given genre, whichever one it may be…for the sake of political hegemony' (1988a: 142). The act of detecting differends implies the possibility of identifying different phrase regimens, that is reading, interpreting, effectively moving between and around (translating?) differences in order to understand the specificities of and incommensurabilities between phrase regimens, and this in turn suggests the existence, or at the very least an assumption of the *possible presence,* of an 'idiom' for phrasing both the regimens and their differends, effectively a metalanguage. The possibility of detecting differends and finding an idiom for phrasing different

phrase regimens is demonstrated by Lyotard's own narrative in *The Differend,* a text which privileges both the genre of philosophy and the faculty of judgement.

Now if what is at issue is justice, and Lyotard does after all argue that 'in *Le Différend,* what is specifically at stake is the re-establishment of justice under the form of the ethical' (1988b:301), perhaps it might be possible to argue that there is no problem. Lyotard might be considered to be offering a form of prescription, a purely normative metalanguage, rather than a description of what is the case. However, 'truth' also seems to be at stake in the sense that statements about phrases and incommensurabilities between phrase regimens assume the form of descriptions. If reality 'entails the differend' (1988a:55), differends certainly seem to constitute reality in Lyotard's discourse. In short Lyotard appears to be playing two games simultaneously; description *and* prescription. But is he passing from one to the other, trying to 'figure out new moves', or even inventing new games, that is practising what he describes as 'paganism' (Lyotard and Thebaud 1985: 61), or is he guilty of hesitating between, if not of conflating them?

In *The Differend* Lyotard continues to affirm that 'it is impossible to deduce a prescription from a description', illustrating his position at one point with an example, 'That two million people are unemployed in a country does not explain that the unemployment must be remedied' 1988a:108). The example is very interesting for in another paper, 'A Svelte Appendix to the Postmodern Question', written around the same time as *Le Différend,* Lyotard argues that 'the penetration of capitalism into language', exemplified by the accelerating economic deployment of relatively inexpensive language machines, appears to be reducing the demand for wage labour, for 'working'. Lyotard suggests the emphasis will have to shift from working to 'much more learning, knowing, inventing, circulating'. And further that '[j]ustice in politics lies in pushing in this direction. (It will indeed be necessary one day to reach an international accord on the concerted reduction of labour time without a loss of purchasing power.)' (1993:29). Does this not constitute a *svelte* deduction of a prescription from a description? And which figure is responsible for identifying the necessity of an international accord on the reduction of labour time? Given Lyotard's assertion that the only responsibility of the artist, writer or philosopher is to pose and explore the question 'What is painting, writing, thought?' (1993:6), then the presence in his work of prescriptions concerning the virtues of free public access to data banks *(The Postmodern Condition),* and the necessity of responding imaginatively to the problem of unemployment, suggests that the diagnosis he offers of the demise of 'the intellectual' is premature. Premature and misleading, for if there is no longer the possibility of intellectuals speaking 'in the name of an "unquestionable" universality' (Lyotard 1988b:301), a more 'local' role and responsibility remains, namely to respond to the problems which arise within specific sectors, 'at the precise points where their own conditions of life or work situate them' (Foucault 1980:126), which is precisely what Lyotard's reflections on transformations in the condition of knowledge and his more explicitly political writings (Lyotard 1993) seem to exemplify. The task of the specific intellectual is not to claim competence and authority 'in matters where there isn't

any…. For example in matters of justice, in matters of beauty, of happiness, and perhaps even of truth' (Lyotard 1993:98), rather it is, as Readings suggests, to question and challenge the assumption of a 'privileged access to the referent, [through which] discourse is legitimated' (1993:xxii). In brief, it is to take on, to expose, what Foucault terms the regime of truth so essential to the operation of our society (Smart 1986).

Activate the differences

While it is not possible in Lyotard's view to determine the being of justice it is possible to say what is unjust, namely:

> that which prohibits that the question of the just and the unjust be, and remain, raised. Thus, obviously, all terror, annihilation, massacre, etc., or their threat, are, by definition, unjust…moreover, any decision that takes away, or in which it happens that one takes away, from one's partner in a current pragmatics, the possibility of playing or replaying a pragmatics of obligation–a decision that has such an effect is necessarily unjust.
>
> (Lyotard and Thebaud 1985:67)

It follows that Lyotard's preferred strategy is to try to counter forms of prohibition and exclusion, or their threat, by encouraging experimentation, which in practice means operating at the limits of what the rules permit, inventing new moves, or possibly new rules and games. It means activating differences and maximizing the 'multiplication of small narratives' (Lyotard 1986:82; Lyotard and Thebaud 1985:59). But are there any limits to the differences to be activated, do there not have to be limits? Experimentation and the pursuit of new rules and moves, if not new games, surely cannot mean that all forms of difference are to be activated. The observation that it is the idea of a multiplicity, or a diversity, rather than the idea of a totality or unity which is necessary today 'to make decisions in political matters' (Lyotard and Thebaud 1985:94), suggests, as a corollary, the unthematized presence of what Richard Bernstein calls a '*universal* regulative ideal', namely the need to 'learn to live in peace with incommensurable vocabularies and forms of life' (1991:313), or rather, it should read, to learn to live in peace with incommensurable vocabularies and forms of life *which do not threaten the universal regulative ideal*.[3]

It is more than a matter of a tolerance of difference which is at issue here. On its own, tolerance 'degenerates into estrangement', it fragments, and with 'mutual links reduced to tolerance, difference means perpetual distance, non-cooperation, and hierarchy' (Bauman 1991:274–5). For tolerance to survive as something more than a silent partner of social domination it needs to be 'reforged into solidarity: into the universal recognition that difference is one universality that is not open to negotiation and that attack against the universal right to be different is the only departure from universality that none of the solidary agents, however different,

may tolerate otherwise than at its own, and all other agents', peril' (Bauman 1991:256). The solidarity identified is that within, or better yet, of a community which is 'always keeping open the issue of whether or not it actually exists' (Lyotard 1988:38), a contingent, polycentric community, one constantly in a process of (un)making itself, one which is destined to remain perpetually not-yet-just, perpetually on the way to (the horizon of) justice.

Class, difference and justice

A radically different response to the question of the fate of justice, but in a comparable context where the idea of universally agreed norms and criteria is acknowledged to be a matter of increasing doubt and suspicion, is to be found in David Harvey's (1993) deliberations on class, justice and politics. Harvey's concern is that while it seems appropriate, indeed necessary, to question the idea of a universally agreed conception of social justice–'too many colonial peoples have suffered at the hands of Western imperialism's particular justice; too many African-Americans have suffered at the hands of the white man's justice; too many women from the justice imposed by a patriarchal order; and too many workers from the justice imposed by capitalists, to make the concept anything other than problematic' (1993:48)–there is a risk that we may deprive ourselves of the possibility of condemning forms of injustice. The implication is that to condemn injustice we need first to be sure of what justice is, the problem, as Harvey sees it, being that postmodern critiques of universalism threaten to precipitate the 'death of justice'.

In the course of a discussion of postmodern critical analyses Harvey acknowledges a number of difficulties with the notion of justice. To begin with there is a range of competing 'idealist and philosophical interpretations' of the notion of justice in Western thought, for example egalitarian and utilitarian views, positive law theories, social contract and natural right views, along with several other interpretations. The problem here is how to differentiate between the respective theories, or as Harvey puts it, how to determine '*which* theory of social justice is the most socially just?' (1993:48). Then there is the related difficulty of how to determine the respective merits of the different interpretations and claims to justice held by individuals and groups. Harvey argues that there have been two problematic responses to these problems of justice. One has been to accept that 'social justice has no universally agreed meaning' and to proceed instead to explore 'how the multiple concepts of justice are embedded in language' (1993: 49). The other has been to move from an admission of the 'relativism of discourses about justice' to place emphasis on the social and political context in which the different terms in or on which justice is articulated are constituted. Once again the possibility of a universal conception of justice, to which Harvey is committed, is displaced, if not denied, by the identification of local, 'competing, fragmented and heterogeneous conceptions of and discourses about justice' (1993:50).

Harvey's critical response to the implications of postmodern reflections on justice takes the form of an acknowledgement of the possible risks and dangers of

injustice arising from the application of universal principles of justice 'across heterogeneous situations', which is subsequently heavily qualified by an expression of concern that unqualified respect for 'heterogeneity and openendedness about what justice might mean' (1993:53) makes it difficult to argue against 'unacceptable' forms of otherness. The answer, for Harvey, involves trying to reconcile legitimate criticism of the possible risks associated with the application of universal principles of justice (viz. the marginalization of 'others') with the need to reconstitute some general principles of social justice. There are two main elements to the strategy proposed, namely the need to go beyond a focus on local, 'small-scale communities of resistance' and the importance of recognizing that while notions of justice may be situated in a 'heterogeneous world of difference' there may nevertheless be similarities which offer the possibility of communication and understanding across differences and, as a corollary, the prospect of alliances. For Harvey it is a matter of recognizing that in the final instance the most significant '[r]elationships between individuals get mediated through market functions and state powers' (1993:56) and in consequence it becomes necessary to return to political economy, the question of contemporary capitalism and its transformation, and the importance of analytically identifying 'political and ethical solidarities and similarities across differences' (1993:60–1). Implied throughout is the existence of a metadiscourse which is able to both reveal the basis of similarity between 'seemingly disparate groups' and, thereby, promote the possibility of, or legitimate a prescription advocating, the formation of a (working class led) political alliance. As Harvey somewhat predictably concludes, '[o]nly through critical re-engagement with political economy…can we hope to reestablish a conception of social justice as something to be fought for as a key value within an ethics of political solidarity' (1993:62).

The only *significant* difference for Harvey is class difference and in consequence to be effective the politics of difference has to be subordinated to class politics. Given Harvey's perspective, it follows that a descriptive statement, namely that 'the historical and geographical *process* of class war…has feminized poverty, accelerated racial oppression, and further degraded the ecological conditions of life', will in its turn be followed by, and will be deemed to authorize, a strategic prescription, notably that 'a far more united politics can flow from a determination to check *that* process than will likely flow from an identity politics which largely reflects its fragmented results' (1993:64). Such a conclusion assumes the continuing possibility, and relevance, not only of the constitution of an allinclusive class-based form of political solidarity, but also that such a politics will protect 'rather than oppress and marginalize, interests based on gender and race' (Harvey 1993:59). In contrast to Harvey's assumption that it is either a question of fragmented and heterogeneous discourses about justice, and the implied corollary, a 'paralysis of progressive politics', or a return to a 'materialist' epistemology and a *de facto* modernist form of radical politics, which are deemed to authorize the right to speak for others and to guarantee a *(the)* progressive politics, there are other possibilities, other perspectives on the significance and radical potential of

identity politics. For example, Soja and Hooper make reference to the emergence of a radical 'polyvocal postmodernism' the intent of which is to 'deconstruct… the ebbing tide of modernist radical politics…and to reconstitute an explicitly postmodernist radical politics, a new cultural politics of difference and identity that moves toward empowering a multiplicity of resistances rather than searches for that one "great refusal"' (1993:187). In this instance it is a matter of recognizing that the structural reality of social and cultural difference is not binary but multiple, and that political alliances are not analytically predetermined but contingent. In the terms employed by bell hooks (1990) it means recognizing the margins not as places of exclusion, but as sites of possible new polycentric interconnected communities of resistance capable of 'counter-hegemonic cultural practice'. It is a matter of simultaneously affirming 'marginal' identity while remaining 'open to combinations of radical subjectivities, to a multiplicity of communities of resistance' (Soja and Hooper 1993:194). And open to reflecting upon the question of (in)justice against, what Lyotard describes as, 'the horizon of a multiplicity or of a diversity' (Lyotard and Thebaud 1985:87).

Just differences?

Does recognition of a multiplicity of justices lead to relativism, to 'anything goes', to an inability to make just judgements? For Lyotard the answer is clearly 'no'– we continue to arrive at judgements, but we do so without criteria, without models, uneasily and insecurely. The question of justice is a matter of ethics and politics, not truth, and recourse to criteria or models of universal justice is inappropriate and misleading. A universal model 'necessarily totalizes one narrative of the state of things and victimizes those excluded from political performativity' (Readings 1992:170), it does not offer a path to justice or a way around injustice, to the contrary, illegitimately invoked to provide a warrant for a prescriptive politics it exacerbates injustice. The idea of justice is indeterminate, and necessarily so. Representation of (the possibility of) justice in terms of correspondence to a model of the 'true being of society' (Lyotard and Thebaud 1985:23) simultaneously marginalizes and silences other narratives, and in consequence promotes injustice.

If universal models or criteria of justice are not available to us then with what are we left? For Lyotard it seems that there is something like an obligation 'left hanging in midair', an obligation to conduct just judgements, an obligation to be guided by the idea of justice. An obligation which does not admit of derivation or deduction. Here judgement assumes the form of a process which is never finally concluded, it is always potentially open or vulnerable to the indeterminate idea of justice, to the obligation to keep open the 'question of the just and the unjust'. And given that 'we' (that problematic 'never stabilized' [non-]identity) are constituted through the politics of difference and are living amidst a 'diversity of cultures' (Lyotard 1989a; 1989b), can there be any acceptable or appropriate alternative to keeping open the question of justice? Does the idea of justice permit any other conclusion? There can be no final word on justice, indeed that is a

necessary condition of its possibility, as Derrida recognizes when he cautions that 'one cannot speak *directly* about justice, thematize or objectivize justice, say "this is just" and even less "I am just", without immediately betraying justice'. (1992:10). Once articulated it seems the question of justice is impossible to conclude and it will undoubtedly continue, as Bauman (1992) cautions, to 'haunt and pester us'.

NOTES

1 Although Lyotard has been identified as a key contributor to the discourse on what is sometimes termed 'postmodern justice' (White 1987/88; Pavlich 1996) there are very few direct references to the postmodern in the texts in which he addresses the question of justice. And the references which do exist emphasize the need to recognize that the 'postmodern is not to be taken in a periodizing sense' (Lyotard and Thebaud, 1985:16n) and that thought, in any event, remains 'modern' (Lyotard 1988a:135–6). In a subsequent clarificatory essay Lyotard remarks that the term postmodern 'was a slightly provocative way of placing (or displacing) into the limelight the debate about knowledge. Postmodernity is not a new age, but the rewriting of some of the features claimed by modernity, and first of all modernity's claim to ground its legitimacy on the project of liberating humanity as a whole through science and technology. But as I have said, that rewriting has been at work, for a long time now, in modernity itself' (Lyotard 1991:34).

2 In *The Differend* Lyotard makes a number of references to the limitations of the language game metaphor. For example, 'An I will be presumed to make "use" of language, to "play" it with "another" or "others". This is a success for anthropomorphism, a defeat for thought…. The addressor must be understood as a situated instance in a phrase universe, on a par with the referent, the addressee, and the sense. "We" do not employ language' (1988a:55); and later, 'You don't play around with language…. And in this sense there are no language games. There are stakes tied to genres of discourse' (1988a: 137).

3 In a similar vein Charles Taylor draws attention to a 'universal potential' at the basis of the politics of difference, namely 'the potential for forming and defining one's own identity, as an individual and also as a culture. This potentiality must be respected' (1992: 42).

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4

SAYING GOODBYE TO EMANCIPATION?

Where Lyotard leaves feminism, and where feminists leave Lyotard

Caroline Ramazanoglu

> How can anyone ask me to say goodbye to 'emancipatory metanarratives' when my own emancipation is still such a patchy, hit-and-miss affair?
>
> (Lovibond 1989:12)

Introduction

While passing references to Lyotard flit through feminist social theory, the shifts and abstractions of his work have made it difficult for feminists to respond to his ideas in any general way. He is frequently ignored, dismissed as a relativist or reduced to a few sentences on postmodernism. Relatively few feminist theorists have engaged seriously with the implications of his work (e.g. Morris 1988, Benhabib 1990, Fraser and Nicholson 1990).[1]

There has been a good deal of confusion in Western feminism, as elsewhere in social theory, over the meaning of postmodernism, and Lyotard's contribution to thinking on it. Jane Flax warns of the problems of trying to pin the varied postmodernisms of Lyotard and others down: 'By even speaking of "postmodernism" I run the risk of violating some of its central values–heterogeneity, multiplicity and difference' (Flax 1990:188). And Judith Butler (1992:5) takes a severe view of those who carelessly conflate Lyotard's ideas with some wider sense of 'postmodernism'.

Such carelessness perhaps occurs because of the divergence between feminists' and Lyotard's political concerns. Bennington identifies Lyotard's thought as 'fundamentally political', but:

> This is to be sure not a politics of programmes and prescriptions, and could almost be described as a systematic frustration of politics through its refusal

> of the transcendental illusion which pretends to present in the real what can only, or at best, be an Idea of reason acting regulatively on political judgement. (1988:175)

Whereas Lyotard comes to identify politics with the task of philosophy, feminists (problematically) ground politics in differences of political interest.

Lyotard's criticisms of 'modern' claims to knowledge, however, can be taken as relevant to the legitimacy of feminist claims to knowledge of women's subordination, and their hopes of emancipation. Attention to Lyotard's reflections on truth and justice can indicate critical problems for the legitimation of feminist politics.

Lyotard does to some extent engage in an oblique critique of Marxism but, like most other poststructuralist and postmodernist thinkers, ignores debates within feminism and feminist deconstructions of the foundations of modern thought. Craig Owens' reproach (1983:62) that not only have theorists of postmodernism been 'scandalously indifferent to sexual difference', but have also avoided dialogue with women and have treated feminism as monolithic, suppressing its internal differences, clearly applies to Lyotard. However, Lyotard's critique of the grounds of modern knowledge implicitly identifies feminism as guided by a modern grand narrative of women's liberation, in the sense that it tells a story (metadiscourse) of patriarchy which is legitimated through reference to a dream of universal emancipation to which all women should subscribe.

The justice of the feminist case for emancipation is located in its knowledge of subordination. If Lyotard is taken seriously, then feminism, in the guise of an international women's movement addressed to a (more or less) common cause, not only cannot be justified, but is itself a form of terror.

The problem of how to justify feminist concern about the social condition of women, in the absence of any general or natural justification for such interest, is much debated within feminism. While their arguments are still widely ignored, feminist thinkers have a parallel critique of modern knowledge to that of masculinist philosophers. Many feminist theorists have deconstructed the universalizing political category of 'Woman' to reveal it as a 'modern' construction, rather than a natural quality of female existence (e.g. Butler 1990; Flax 1990; Haraway 1992; Hekman 1990; Riley 1988). Women's diverse accounts of the specificity of their own relationships to power have established how feminism itself can be terrorising (Saadawi 1980; hooks 1982).

An opposition to any dream of women's collective interests apparently frees feminism from the limits of theories of patriarchy, and opens positive visions of multiplicity and difference. Donna Haraway (1990:215), for example, points out that any particular feminist viewpoint can only be a partial one. We do not need an insistence on totality to work well: a feminist dream of a common language for women is totalizing and so imperialist.

Some feminist theorists have tried to avoid such imperialism by deconstructing feminism into multiple, fragmented feminisms with no universal claims to

justification, and no particular political direction. But feminists are not unproblematically absorbed into supposedly neutral deconstructions, since their own existence as 'women' confronts them with problems in simply abandoning modern categories of thought.[2]

Deconstructions of feminism have proved problematic because an improper sense of political direction tends to creep back in. Running through feminist comments on postmodernism generally, and Lyotard specifically, there is a varied, but striking, reluctance wholly to abandon the grand narratives that have legitimated feminist politics. While Haraway denies that 'women' constitutes a position from which women (female persons?) can claim natural unity, she does claim (1990:199) that women have a responsibility to build unities, even though they should not naturalize them. The challenge of Lyotard's ideas forces recognition of a profound ambivalence in feminism on the issue of where political accountability lies, and how feminist politics can be justified.

Feminists have identified the masculinity of Western philosophy (an identification that Lyotard (1978) admits but then ignores), but are in the tricky situation of accepting the logical weaknesses of their political positions, while hanging on to hopes of emancipation. Many feminists are happy to say goodbye to a modern grand narrative of emancipation that overlooks social divisions between women, but not unequivocally. Saying goodbye to their own emancipation, as Lovibond suggests, is a different matter.

Recent, Western feminist theory suggests that feminists are not generally willing to let some general impetus to emancipation go, and so cannot wholly abandon 'modern' thought. Addressing Lyotard's challenge to feminism, Patricia Waugh comments '…feminism cannot sustain itself as an emancipatory movement unless it acknowledges its foundation in the discourses of modernity' (1992: 190). Feminist assumptions about autonomy, agency, freedom, justice, accountability and emancipation have proved disorderly: first, because they are ambivalently engaged with the binary thinking and foundationalist epistemologies of modern thought; second, because even when feminists accept deconstructions of the foundations of feminist knowledge, they experience the uncomfortable problems of living as women in male-dominated societies–they experience life differently from Lyotard.

Even privileged, successful, able-bodied, Western, feminist theorists are generally conscious of male, heterosexual, white, etc. domination in their own lives and academic institutions; many remain concerned, in different ways, about the subordination of women, and involved in struggles for the promotion of women's interests. So the possibility of women's collective interests poses a problem for Lyotard's philosophy by obstinately surviving feminism's supposed death as a modern narrative.

When feminists confront Lyotard, only a handful are qualified to do so as philosophers. While it is possible to respond to Lyotard's challenges to feminism within the limits and conventions of masculinist philosophical debate, the main point of feminist criticisms of Lyotard comes from varying attempts to query

these conventions. However, both Lyotard and feminists have been questioning the ground rules of how we think, and what can be done about them; both Lyotard and feminists have analysed connections between knowledge and power, justice and politics.

Lyotard challenges the grounds of any general feminist emancipatory politics in three main ways: through his opposition to the grand narratives of modernity; by his conception of rules of truth as constituted in the rules of incommensurable language games, and in his ideas about the impossibility of judging in general what is just. It is these points of potential difficulty for the legitimacy of feminist politics that I consider in this chapter. First, I want to comment briefly on what 'feminism' means in this context.

I cannot do justice here to the numerous strands of thought and practice that constitute 'feminism', nor their various engagements with each other. Feminism has no political centre to provide an authoritative definition of common goals and strategies for liberation, and gender cannot be separated in practice from other oppressive relationships, including those which empower and privilege some women at the expense of others. To define feminism at all closely is to exclude 'non-feminism', or 'not-quite-feminism', or (especially) feminisms of which the definer disapproves, thus exposing what Donna Haraway has termed 'painful fragmentation among feminists' (1990:197).

Fragmentation among philosophers occurs at the level of ideas, making way for new specialisms (and new careers?) to be carved out and debated. But feminism founders on the real divisions of political interest between women. Feminist dreams are generally too revolutionary for some feminists and for most women, and the goals of social transformation very actively contested. But something survives of a dream of emancipation which is uncertainly grounded in claims to common aspects of female existence that recur across profound social differences.

In the 1990s, feminism is continuing to diversify and is producing varied local practices, but there are also numerous connections through which women work pragmatically on their differences and the many possibilities for alliance. As I write, the fourth United Nations Women's Conference is meeting in Beijing bringing together (despite efforts to keep them apart) official delegates, but also a plethora of non-governmental organizations representing an enormous range of clashing, contested and intersecting interests. There is no clear conception of feminism, no consensual dream, that can embrace such diversity and its intractable divisions. The point perhaps is not to assume some fictive female unity, but to deal creatively with real divisions between women. Women continue to work out the considerable tensions between their ideas of 'women' and these social divisions, through their conceptions of what they have in common, what their rights should be, and how gender engages with other social divisions. It is hard not to see these efforts in terms of investment in some general narrative that sustains and reproduces dreams of resistance, agency and emancipation across social divisions.

When I use the term feminism in this chapter, I am referring to an unstable political construction grounded in some sense of women having some common

political interests across their social divisions. More specifically, I am drawing on the work of some Western social theorists who have responded directly to the challenge Lyotard's ideas pose to the legitimacy of feminist politics.

Playing language games with Lyotard

Meaghan Morris (1988:217) suggests that Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) is arguably his worst book. But it is in this work that his opposition to the legitimating function of the grand narratives of modernity is clearly laid out, leaving the requirement that some other way of legitimating the relationship between what is just and what is true is required. Lyotard focuses on knowledge, and specifically on science and its legitimacy. But feminists are implicitly challenged to justify their politics without recourse to metadiscourse or grand narratives.

Lyotard (1984) opposes the legitimacy of 'modern' (and so Western feminist) claims to truth, on the grounds that these are improperly dependent on grand narratives of emancipation, science and progress. Recent Western feminism is predicated on some sense of the necessity of emancipation as liberation from subordination, but Lyotard does not allow a general appeal to emancipation to be legitimate. He comments:

> I have myself used the term 'postmodern'. It was a slightly provocative way of placing (or displacing) into the limelight the debate about knowledge. Postmodernity is not a new age, but the rewriting of some of the features claimed by modernity, and first of all modernity's claim to ground its legitimacy on the project of liberating humanity as a whole through science and technology.
>
> (Lyotard 1991:34)

Feminism, viewed through this version of rewriting modernity and Lyotard's requirement of incredulity towards grand narratives, can be seen as illegitimately caught up in a 'totalizing obsession' (Lyotard 1993:7) in its struggle against patriarchy/male domination. Following Lyotard, feminism can be identified not only as improperly humanistic and universalizing but also as terrorizing in its general political prescriptions. A feminism which inappropriately speaks for all women, and offers a prescribed way forward is itself illegitimate.

Lyotard's logic requires feminists to recognize that while there is justice and there is truth, these are not universals that can be established or evaluated from some position of neutrality. There is no such thing as a just society. Establishing 'what is true', according to some set of rules, does not enable us to derive 'what is just' from this, or any other truth. Female emancipation, cannot then be justified by the 'facts' of female subordination. If male domination is claimed as real and illegitimate, this is only within the rules of a particular, limited, language game in which the rules of this particular game produce this particular knowledge (Lyotard 1984:60).

Sabena Lovibond points out (1989:20) that Lyotard does not condemn the local pursuit of truth and virtue, but denies any universal standard which allows their comparison between different games with different rules. The truth of 'women's subordination' cannot then be carried between different games: this is a critical problem for feminism. The language of modern feminism (like that of modern science) is linked to the language of ethics and politics, but it is this connection that Lyotard specifically disrupts (Lyotard 1984:7). A postmodern scientist does not discover 'the truth', he *(sic)* simply tells stories–though he has a duty to verify them within the terms of the relevant language game (ibid.: 60).

Lyotard situates science in the rewriting of modernity in a peculiar twist that makes 'postmodern' science, through its concern with matters such as 'undecidables', change itself into the pursuit not of knowledge of the known, but of the unknown (ibid.: 60). This, a critical point in Lyotard's argument, rests on a simplistic, empirical comment which may or may not be justified. It is from this questionable assumption, and from his disapproval of Habermas' dependence on consensus, that Lyotard moves to valuing dissensus and the unknown.

In *The Postmodern Condition,* Lyotard's challenge to feminism becomes somewhat confused when he slips between philosophy and social analysis. While he makes the philosopher's case that justice cannot be derived from truth, he also makes simplistic statements about the character of 'postindustrial' society, and particularly about the 'social bond', which have no clear foundation.[3] Generalizations about the nature of 'society' cannot be derived solely from reflections on thought. While Lyotard speaks disparagingly of sociology (1978:14), and quite reasonably critiques the social systems theories of Parsons and Luhmann, his own sociological observations are of doubtful validity.

Lyotard does note that in *The Postmodern Condition* he has not been able to 'analyze the form assumed by the return of the narrative in discourses on legitimation…' (Lyotard 1984:100 n.211) but says that his argument applies 'to everything I group under the name *paralogy*' (ibid.). It is not entirely clear how Lyotard would group feminist discourses as paralogism–based on reasoning contrary to logic–but in his conception of the instabilities of the practice of *paralogism:*

> the point is not to reach agreement but to undermine from within the very framework in which the previous 'normal science' has been conducted. The rhetoric in which all this is conveyed is to be sure one of struggle, conflict, the agonic in a quasi-heroic sense;….
>
> (Jameson in Lyotard 1984:xix)

Through this macho model of struggle, Lyotard arrives logically at the position in which legitimation must be local. Because language games are heterogeneous, they lack any basis for consensual rules that could apply across

local rules. Lyotard, in criticizing Habermas (1984:66), explicitly argues against the possibility of a common goal of emancipation providing any general legitimacy for human action, because (ibid.: 65) first, there are no general rules that are agreed across diverse language games, 'when it is clear that language games are heteromorphous, subject to heterogeneous sets of pragmatic rules'; second, the goal of dialogue is dissent not consensus. The right to emancipation has to be fought for according to what is possible in each game, through recourse to its little, local, narrative. 'The little narrative remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention, most particularly in science' (ibid.: 60). The point is then not to establish universal grounds for emancipation, but to generate 'new ideas' (ibid.: 60–1).

Philosophy itself, Lyotard claims, cannot prescribe what should be, because the postmodern philosopher does not know its rules and cannot specify the links between ethics and politics (Beardsworth 1992:48). While Lyotard's unstable, dissensual and creative possibilities for political innovation might have its attractions, it cuts feminism, like Marxism, off from any progressive political direction. Progress as another exhausted narrative can only take variable and unstable forms in different games.

Seyla Benhabib (1990) draws on Rorty's critique of Lyotard (Rorty 1984) to deal briskly with this area of instability, as Lyotard's failure to consider in more detail the possibility of distinguishing between different kinds of knowledge shows up the slippage between his logical propositions, and his assertions about the nature of society.

> Rorty's argument is revealing for two reasons. First, it indicates that epistemological questions flow into assessments of culture and society. Whether the 'narratives which hold our culture together do their stuff' is an empirical question.
>
> (Benhabib 1990:118)

She points out that the answers to such empirical questions undermine Lyotard's claim that moral and political questions are isolated in discrete, local language games:

> Likewise, whether critical theory 'scratches where it does not itch' depends on our understanding of the problems, struggles, crises, conflicts, and miseries of the present. Epistemological issues are indeed closely linked with moral and political ones.
>
> (ibid.)

It is this closeness that Lyotard's argument closes off:

> Is the meaning of Lyotard's postmodern epistemology a gesture of solidarity with the oppressed? A gesture towards the otherness of the other? This may seem so, but Lyotard constructs the epistemology of narrative knowledge in

> such a way that it can no longer challenge scientific knowledge, let alone provide a criterion transcending it. Narrative knowledge belongs to the ethnological museum of the past.
>
> (ibid.: 118–9)

If feminism loses its narrative, questions about how people can live together in complex societies without oppressing each other are steered towards dissensus and hearing differences rather than working on them.

In *Just Gaming* (Lyotard and Thebaud 1985) the idea of language games is developed to make the point clearer that there are different rules for deciding what is true and what is just.

> Lyotard's concern in *Just Gaming* is to insist that there is no bridge possible between the just and the true, and that injustice and political terror (totalitarianism) proceed directly from the assumption that the true and the just may be united.... Political prescriptions as to the 'just' are incommensurable with descriptions of the 'true'…
>
> (Readings 1991:108)

Feminists cannot derive a programme of emancipation from the 'facts' of subordination since what is true is an effect of the way that any particular game is played.

> Thus the ethical, political and aesthetic are three realms of indeterminate judgement and none must claim to function as a metalanguage, as a ground of determinate knowledge regulating the others.
>
> (ibid.: 109)

In *The Differend* (1988), Lyotard's conception of language games becomes a more abstracted and qualified analysis of the elements of gaming. He argues that language is not itself an instrument of communication since it is characterized by an:

> irremedial opacity…it is a highly complex archipelago formed of domains of phrases, phrases from such different regimes that one cannot translate a phrase from one regime (a descriptive, for example) into another (an evaluative, a prescriptive).
>
> (1993:27–8)

Different 'phrase regimes' are then incommensurable in the sense that a differend is constituted in disputes between games which are being played by different rules. The rules of one language game cannot resolve its differences with those of another game, since their rules of what is true, right or just differ. Bennington (1988:176) suggests that in *The Differend* Lyotard qualifies this separation. The islands in the archipelago are separated from each other, 'but they have a means of communicating by sea, and that sea is the milieu of judgement'. Nevertheless,

Bennington concludes that 'injustice is inevitable' (ibid.: 177) because judging justly in Lyotard's terms does not lead to something better, but only 'attests to the activity of thought' (ibid.).

In feminist understandings of this activity, Lyotard's separation of truth, ethics and politics pits adversary against adversary since each game constitutes its players *as* adversaries. Kate Soper (1990:219) notes that when Lyotard characterizes the idea of consensus as an 'outmoded and suspect value' (Lyotard 1984:66) it is to replace it with a notion not just of language games but of language games inimical to feminism, since by definition in any game we are always sparring with an adversary.

> Indeed, is it not the case that when we strip away the ludic affectations of this language-gaming, we are seeing a celebration of those old-fashioned, pompous, male-adversarial modes which Virginia Woolf saw straight through back in the 1930s?
>
> (Soper 1990:219)

Soper (1990:222) argues in opposition to Lyotard, that there is still a need for some general criteria of truth so that, for example, discrimination can be made between what can truly or falsely be said about women.

In *The Postmodern Condition* Lyotard says (1984:11) that he has chosen language games as his method, but that he does not claim that the entirety of social relationships are like this. What the residue is like is still an open question. This convenient aperture in his argument allows Lyotard to be left gazing 'in wonderment at the diversity of discursive species' (ibid.: 26), without needing to do anything in general about inequalities or injustices between them—a frustrating position for feminism. It allows Lyotard an abstracted, simplistic notion of the 'social bond' without any explanation of what social bonding is, and why we should believe that it is composed primarily of specific sorts of language moves. The problem of accounting for the entirety of social relationships in order to judge them and, if necessary, to change them is bypassed.

Earlier Lyotard had commented (1978:9) 'When someone says that he is not political, neither on the right nor on the left; everyone knows he is on the right.' He makes no claim to be 'not political', but approving admiration of the diversity of, say, games of sexual politics, comes dangerously close to falling off the fence onto the side of a masculinist status quo. Bennington suggests that Lyotard is fundamentally a political thinker to the extent that he contests the 'totalisations fundamental to most ideas of politics' (1988:9), but that feminism resists the direction of his later work.

Feminist reluctance to abandon either its moral commitment to women, or its responsibility for general social criticism, problematizes Lyotard's struggles to define judgement in terms of the rules of language games: but Lyotard's critique of the incommensurability of language games leaves feminism with an unresolved problem of legitimizing emancipation.

Hanging on to emancipation–hanging on to 'women'

Wherever feminists assert a hope of emancipation, or strategies for transforming power relations, they are placed in the impossible position of women being 'really' both the same and different, both material, embodied beings and an unstable social category/categories. It is now widely accepted that feminism cannot legitimately speak with a single voice based on some general, independent criteria of what is good/better for women–any feminist who claims such a voice is swiftly countered by other voices. A position that comes ambivalently out of recent feminist theory and practices is the contradictory conclusion that while a Western conception of feminism is not justified as a common voice for divided women, emancipation cannot be disintegrated into divergent, local struggles that obscure and so reproduce, wider power relations between women, and the real power that men can exercise over women.

Feminist social theory was never a simplistic, modern view of women as all the same (although it is often caricatured as such) and theory has been transformed by theoretical and political attention to differences between women in recent years (Maynard 1995). But if feminist politics is to claim any general, as opposed to merely local, foundation, the problem that women are both the same and different has to be addressed.

The level of abstraction at which these problems have been discussed makes it difficult to connect specific political practices with general grounds of legitimation. In her review of *Feminism as Critique* (Benhabib and Cornell 1987), Kate Soper comments on the level of abstraction and difficulty at which the problems facing feminism are being discussed, and asks of this collection (and of her own review):

> who will read it and understand it and how does it relate to the practical changes needed to implement quite minor improvements in the lives of the most severely economically and socially oppressed women?
>
> (Soper 1990:221)

bell hooks comments:

> It is sadly ironic that the contemporary discourse which talks the most about heterogeneity, the decentred subject, declaring breakthroughs that allow recognition of Otherness, still directs its critical voice primarily to a specialized audience that shares a common language rooted in the very master narratives it claims to challenge.
>
> (1991:25)

Feminist philosophers are no more in agreement with each other than any other category of women (see e.g. Benhabib *et al.* 1995), but critical disagreements on the nature of power relations, how they can be known and whether 'women' exist independently of ideas of their existence, cannot be addressed simply at the level of abstracted ideas.

Into various versions of feminist social theory, actual, embodied, gendered, women make their entrances, resisting injustice and demanding diverse forms of emancipation from real relationships of power and real violence. This does require a rewriting of 'truth' (for example to distinguish 'male violence' from 'domestic tiffs', or 'women's work' from 'family labour') but this does not mean that truths cannot be compared or evaluated.[4]

One implication of Lyotard's ideas, in concert with those of other postmodern/poststructural thinkers, is that while assertions of reality, experience or material embodiment may be 'true' to those who assert them within a given language game, *it does not matter* that there is no neutral position from which they can be judged. However, while philosophers can assert this position and move on, 'real women' still judge both common and varied experiences of male power, and demand change. Even when feminists welcome postmodernism, a sense emerges from the literature that an inability to legitimate emancipation does matter (e.g. Hekman 1990:189–90). The separation of justice from morality and politics is somehow to be resisted.

A strong argument can be made that 'women' and the 'female' are always constituted in discourses as unstable social categories (since what a 'woman' is/is not can be shown to vary over time and between cultures, and be established in struggle). Haraway (1990:196–7) for example, states that there is nothing about being female that naturally binds women, since being female is a socially constructed category–a fiction mapping social and bodily reality that does not require 'a myth of original unity' (ibid.: 192; Haraway 1992). But it does not follow that women are nothing more than a social category in their differences from men (Ramazanoglu 1995). The weakness of attempts to treat 'women' as terminally deconstructed lies not only in the political disintegration of feminism that ensues, but in an inability at the level of practice to grasp what embodied women have in common independently of their discursive constitution as 'women'.

Rosi Braidotti (1991:171) accepts the discursive character of feminism in that 'women have adopted a variety of places of enunciation and discursive strategies', but claims that feminism is marked by both theoretical and political passions which distinguish it from philosophy and so, by implication, from postmodernism or a position simply of a counter discourse.

> There is no feminism beyond the lived experience of women themselves, expressed in a collective movement: this is the fundamental point distinguishing it from other forms of *reflection on women,* above all in philosophy. To be a feminist is to be a woman aware of her oppression, acting on the basis of this awareness, with other women: it is to 'think oneself one' with them.
>
> (Braidotti 1991:170–1)

This is a critical point in potential encounters between feminism and Lyotard. Feminism bulges out of its attempted reduction to local narratives or language

games, because subordination is claimed, through experience, as real and illegitimate, and emancipation still waits. But contrariwise, the hope of emancipation can no longer simply be claimed as right or just through appeal either to experience as simply productive of truth, or to some general criterion of justice. Feminists confront both some level of common interest between women in social conditions of male domination, but also deep and divisive power differences between women (and between men) so that women's power over each other, and the powerlessness of some men, still mean that one feminism cannot legitimately speak across these differences.

The difficulty this leaves feminists with is illustrated in Denise Riley's deconstruction of 'Woman'. 'Woman' in Riley's view (1988:114) can be seen as a fluctuating identity, and so 'indeterminate and impossible'. A fluctuating identity is an unstable category and so feminism loses its claim to emancipation: women do not share common interests, and deconstructed women can get on with their own local and specific struggles (ibid.: 2). Riley, however returns at the end of her analysis to the question of whether this deconstructed feminism can or should have a political programme. She notes that her argument then 'grinds to a halt' (ibid.: 112). This leaves her in a contradictory position in which she pragmatically reverts to the feminist policies that her theory precludes:

> I'd argue that it is compatible to suggest that 'women' don't exist–while maintaining a politics of 'as if they existed'–since the world behaves as if they unambiguously did.
>
> (Riley 1988:112)

In this twisted sense of compatibility, the 'world' occupies a curious position as a key agent of subordination. Behind this nebulous 'world' lurks some implicit sense of real female existence that postmodern feminisms cannot name.

Knowledge of the significance of power differences and of the effects of power on silenced voices has been produced not from theoretical logic, but in struggles between women over exactly what they share and do not share in their conditions of existence, bell hooks, for example, argues passionately that black experience must be linked to the production of critical theory (hooks 1991:25), but also that African-Americans face specific issues of 'racial domination' (ibid.: 26). The question of what it is that women have in common is, at least in part, an empirical question.

Kate Soper (1990:234) accepts the logic that *if* it is the case that difference between men and women is not anchored in the feminine body and function, then there is no need for feminists to call a halt to moves towards deconstruction of differences. (This is the position that Riley should sustain in order to make her position consistent.) But Soper comments of this logic: 'At this point one is bound to feel that feminism as theory has pulled the rug from under feminism as politics' (ibid.). She tucks the rug back, by claiming that 'there are conditions of existence

common to all women' (ibid.: 243). In this, more materialist, view, feminism should resist deconstruction into local language games and claim political coherence through the reality of some extra-discursive sameness that actually connects women.

It is this point that cannot be openly accepted by postmodern feminists, and it is precisely this point that Riley, for example, rejects. Such rejection, however, seems to be derived from the *logic* of postmodern theory, rather than from establishing that such common conditions of existence can be shown really *not* to exist.

Susan Hekman for example, while embracing postmodernism also acknowledges (1990:188) that 'a fundamental ambiguity informs the feminist movement in the late twentieth century'. This ambiguity lies in feminism being both critical of, but also a product of, the 'emancipatory impulse' of the Enlightenment (ibid.). Lois McNay (1992) identifies the same problem, and argues that feminism should retain its commitment to social transformation. It is significant though that McNay, like Riley, has difficulty in identifying what is to change. This of course is a key problem in the absence of a theory of power, since women have differing political interests in which the exercise of male power is just one strand. There can be *a priori* no general prescription of emancipation. McNay (1992) points out that emancipation necessitates a notion of human agency and the self–people's ability to shape their own future as self-determining agents who can resist domination. This ability to shape the future depends on a feminist ethics which can judge between legitimate and illegitimate power. Feminism cannot be squeezed into local language games, as long as it actively maintains links between justice, ethics and politics.

It is at the point of connecting the legitimation of emancipation to some general sense of justice that feminists most clearly fall out with Lyotard. This is not only because Lyotard does not allow any general, independent criteria for judging what is just: it is also because he does not allow a theory of power as a basis of politics. McNay (1992) argues that feminists must attend to the differences between women–differences that disintegrate general moral criteria–but should also avoid deconstructing feminism to the point of political fragmentation and the politics of indifference. Indifference is unacceptable because of what women have in common.

The boundaries between the differences and commonalities of women's existence and experience are not, though, simply available as neutral or general knowledge: they have to be made meaningful and accountable. Experience only makes sense as it is mediated by language and concepts. Social actors cannot claim their own limited experiences as universal truth, but philosophers cannot know social relations purely *from* theory or language or discourse.

Feminism, like Marxism, can suggest that the subordinated should always ask where philosophers get their ideas from–and why these ideas rather than others? Thought does not start from thought, it is inseparable from existence and experience. Simultaneously, existence and experience are inseparable from

the ways we know them. Feminists must take account of *what* social relations people live in and *why,* as well as *how* these are known and what the social world *means* to them. Feminism, like any other social theory, has no certain way of doing this, but this does not mean that connections between truth and justice cannot be established.

Sabena Lovibond's cry for the desirability of her own emancipation challenges the imposition of Lyotard's conception of politics onto the injustices of other lives. There is perhaps a danger of the subordinated being bullied out of their grand narratives by logical schemes which refuse the moral necessity of judging moral judgements. Explanation is needed of why academics have been so accepting of conceptual schemes which fragment politics and deny resolution of differences.

Critics have then turned on Lyotard to suggest that his wholesale dismissal of modern narratives is both indiscriminate and unwarranted.

> Why are the post-structuralists so frightened of the universal? And why is Lyotard telling us yet another grand narrative at the end of grand narratives?
> (Sarup 1993:146)

Fraser and Nicholson (1990:25) suggest that 'Despite his strictures against large, totalizing stories, he narrates a fairly tall tale about a large-scale social trend.' Lyotard 'goes too quickly from the premise that Philosophy cannot ground social criticism, to the conclusion that criticism itself must be local, *ad hoc* and non-theoretical' (ibid.).

The inadequacy of some narratives as sources of legitimacy can well be questioned without having to abandon all narratives without question (Lovibond 1989; Best and Kellner 1991). In a feminist rewriting of modernity, 'rewritten' is not the same as 'written off'.

Patricia Waugh comments:

> To argue at a theoretical level that all assertions are the fictions of incommensurable language games is to deny the fact that most people do, indeed, continue to invest in 'truth-effects'. If we continue to invest in 'grand narratives', such narratives can be said to exist. Grand narratives can be seen to be ways of formulating fundamental human needs and their 'grandness' is a measure of the urgency and intensity of the need.
> (Waugh 1992:9)

Feminism is left with the problem of how to justify its politics without either resorting to assertions of women's experiences of subordination as unproblematically true, or claiming female persons as a fixed, natural category. This requires some more general theory 'of justice or normative positions whereby one can criticize a social system as a whole' (Best and Kellner 1991:178). Fraser and Nicholson argue (1990:26) that feminists are unwilling to abandon powerful

political tools as a result of debate in philosophy. In order to think about legitimation, they need a wider sense of social criticism than Lyotard can provide.

What then of justice?

Lyotard comments that Adorno has an element of the postmodern in his thought, but he refuses it.

> What pushes him to this refusal is the political question. For if what I am roughly and quickly describing as postmodern here is accurate, what then of justice?
>
> (1993:28)

A shared conception of justice/injustice is critical to any feminist politics, but the legitimacy of feminist dreams of righting wrongs requires opposition to Lyotard's case that there are no determinate grounds for judging between political options.

> Consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value. But justice as a value is neither outmoded nor suspect. We must thus arrive at an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to consensus
>
> (Lyotard 1984:66)[5]

Lovibond comments, however, 'the idea that justice ought to be salvaged receives very perfunctory attention in *The Postmodern Condition* in comparison with the idea that universality ought to be jettisoned' (1989:15). Feminists then need to work on the possibilities of justice that are neither derived from consensus, nor disempowered by confinement in incommensurable language games.

Bill Readings (1991) argues that the further development of Lyotard's argument in *Just Gaming* (Lyotard and Thebaud 1985) on the legitimation of political action is disturbing for those whose politics proceed from a coherent programme. 'That there are no grounds for a politics any longer means for Lyotard that the political only begins at the point where determinant grounds for judgement are withdrawn' (Readings 1991:105). Lyotard can 'fit' feminist politics into his thinking by treating feminist judgements as indeterminate judgements produced in the rules of specific games of sex/gender politics. But feminists cannot accommodate Lyotard's position into feminism since they take responsibility for producing consensus. If they cannot derive the justice of their judgements of illegitimate power *from* a female consensus, they have to justify their dreams of emancipation through the possibility of *creating/contesting* consensus. They cannot beat Lyotard at his own game, but they can put their political energy into a more accountable conception of justice.

Bill Readings (1991:125) points out that in *The Differend* Lyotard distinguishes between first, indeterminate judgement (a judgement which raises questions about whether it is good judgement, but which has no criteria of justice that can be

drawn on in advance); second, a relativist refusal to judge, and third, a pluralist claim that all judgements are equally valid.

> The multiplicity of justices evoked by the heterogeneity of language games is thus not a mere relativism, since it is regulated by a justice of multiplicity. This judgement is not an undifferentiated pluralism, rather it is based in the most rigorous respect for difference. This is a respect for difference *among* things, not relativism's respect *for* things, which ultimately erases difference by making all things worthy of respect…. There are not 'all sorts of justice': there is a necessity that we keep discussion as to the nature of the just open.
>
> (Readings 1991:125–6)

In this view a feminist judgement can never finally be judged as just, since the justice of judgements lacks any determinate criteria. Lyotard's argument can still be used against feminism since: 'If we continue to understand the political as a set of criteria for judgement, then the political will produce injustice, will function as a metalanguage' (Readings 1991:127). But from a feminist reading, Lyotard's resistance to relativism cannot be worked out through his own ideas. Feminist thinkers have not refused to have their thinking disturbed by these problems, but Lyotard's solution is particularly unattractive to anyone with a personal interest in emancipation. Benhabib comments that:

> Postmodernism can teach us the theoretical and political traps of why utopias and foundationalist thinking go together, but it should not lead to a retreat from utopia altogether. For we, as women, have much to lose by giving up the utopian hope in the wholly other.
>
> (1992:230)

Lyotard certainly accepts that injustices exist and should be changed (1993:159), but it is not clear how he can justify this commonsense view, if justice cannot be based on any determinate criteria and the consensus of common sense is itself an exhausted narrative. He argues that there is no consensus because there is no common reality that could produce it:

> there is no universal subject-victim, appearing in reality, in whose name thought could draw up an indictment, that would be at the same time a 'conception of the world'.
>
> (1993:6–7)

Since he observes that injustices exist, Lyotard accepts the political necessity of intervention, but seems to perceive injustice from the standpoint of the respectable citizen, as the experience of others.

> I am not saying that there is no need to get involved in the fate of the most disadvantaged: ethical and civic responsibility demand that one should. But

> this point of view only allows defensive and local interventions…. The decline, perhaps the ruin, of the universal idea can free thought and life from totalizing obsessions.
>
> (1993:7)

Seyla Benhabib admonishes Lyotard for adopting the perspective of the observer rather than the participant:

> which is hardly the attitude to take when confronted with the moral and epistemic problems that the coexistence of incompatible discursive modes pose for us qua children of the modern West.
>
> (1990:125 n.35)

bell hooks also challenges the political detachment of theoretical abstraction by seeing herself as specifically situated in relation to disadvantage, but also as responsible for the level at which her ideas are accessible.

> While I work in a predominantly white institution, I remain intimately and passionately engaged with black community. It's not like I'm going to talk about writing and thinking about postmodernism with other academics and/or intellectuals and not discuss these ideas with underclass non-academic black folks who are family, friends, and comrades.
>
> (1991:30)

A feminist response to Lyotard then rests on refusing to accept that 'interventions' can only be defensive and local. Donna Haraway suggests (Bhavnani and Haraway 1994:36) that an important question to consider in the production of knowledge is: 'What kind of partiality, what kind of commitment, engagement, what way of life are you *for,* in your knowledge-production factors? This question insists on accountability.' What feminism adapts from its critique of Enlightenment thought is a moral responsibility for our politics, and so a general ethic of accountability.

Accountability itself is inseparable from some theory of legitimate/illegitimate power, and so problematically situated in social theory. Exactly how accountability is to be salvaged from consensus, and power is to be theorized are disagreed within feminism, and mark a point of extreme difficulty in understanding the complexities of intersecting power struggles in the world today.

Feminists have approached these difficulties by insisting on the necessity of making judgements about legitimacy. Lois McNay comments:

> at some basic level, feminist critique necessarily rests on normative judgement about what constitutes legitimate and non-legitimate forms of action in relation to the political goal of overcoming the subordination of women.
>
> (1992:117)

It is this 'normative underpinning' of feminism that conflicts with postmodern privileging of the local and contextual (McNay 1992:122). It refuses the disconnection of ethics and politics.

Although Judith Butler is a poststructural/postmodern critic of modern feminist thought, she still has her own feminist sympathies in recognizing the connections between politics and justice.

> It is clear that in order to set political goals, it is necessary to assert normative judgement…it is crucial to rethink the domain of power-relations, and to develop a way of adjudicating political norms without forgetting that such an adjudication will also always be a struggle of power.
>
> (1995:141)

This conception of struggle for power which is so central in both feminist thinking and women's experience is lacking in Lyotard's thought. Power raises particularly difficult problems in terms of whether it is only discursively constituted, or has structural or material bases that can be correctly identified, how it is experienced and known, whether it is legitimate and what, if anything, is to be done about it. In practice, power is contested as women struggle pragmatically to establish the meaning of 'women'. Judith Butler argues (1992:15–16) that this does not mean that the category of women should not be used politically. But that 'women' remains a normative and exclusionary identity, and an area of 'rifts among women over the content of the term' (ibid.: 16). Establishing a normative foundation for settling the question of what 'women' means, would simply call into question who would set such norms (ibid.).

What stands in the way of emancipation is not necessarily the multiplicity of political interests in complex societies, nor the inability of anyone to define in a general way the just society or defend criteria for linking justice and truth. A significant barrier is the reality of power relations that constrain how truths are defined and how life is experienced, and the force, violence, and armed strength that underpin them.

Feminism can offer resistance to the postmodern rewriting of modernity by disputing whether Lyotard is 'right' about the sort of society we live in and the ways truth/justice can be legitimated. Who has the right to pronounce the death of the subject; the exhaustion of the modern narrative; the incommensurability of language games? Braidotti (1991:122) comments that in order to announce the death of the subject, one must first have gained the right to speak as one. Feminism's graveside eulogy, it seems, has not yet found its moment.

The engagement between feminism and Lyotard is, therefore, rather more tangled than a simple rejection, but feminists leave Lyotard not just at the point at which they hang on to the need to adjudicate between norms, but in their ideas of how this can and should be done. The political necessity of emancipatory politics cannot be justified solely through thought. It is a moral responsibility that arises from general judgement of gendered (and other) experiences of difference,

subordination, domination and death. It depends critically on women establishing common conditions of existence that ground women's lives as women, however partial and difficult this may be.

Bill Readings (in Lyotard 1993:xxiv) characterizes Lyotard's view of politics as 'the attempt to handle conflicts that admit of no resolution, to think justice in relation to conflict and difference'. Within the terms of Lyotard's logic, feminists cannot justify a political programme of emancipation, but can only bear witness to differends (Lyotard 1993:10). By refusing to say goodbye to emancipation, feminists deny the legitimacy of Lyotard's strictures on consensus and judgement. By claiming that there are still lively narratives of consensus and that emancipation should be struggled for, they start from different premises and rewrite the modern with different intent.

NOTES

1 I have not attempted in this chapter to give a balanced overview either of feminist encounters with the work of Lyotard, or of the current diversity and debate within feminist thought. I have picked out some ways in which Lyotard's thought identifies problems for feminism.

2 See for example contributions to Nicholson 1990; Ramazanoglu 1993.

3 Such slippage is also striking in his comments on the social construction of the feminine as masculine's 'other' (Lyotard 1978). In this article he identifies the masculinity of theoretical discourse, rather than analysing power relations between women and men, but this does not stop him indulging in ungrounded empirical observations: 'Men (Western men in any case) want to conquer not love…. Men feel undone when they love. They prefer prostitutes whose impassivity protects them' (ibid.: 11).

4 Nazroo (1995), for example, argues that quantitative measurement of the incidence of female violence towards male partners is less adequate for understanding such violence than an approach which compares the context, meaning and severity of marital violence between women and men.

5 Lyotard does not explain how he knows (1984:65–6) that 'consensus is only a particular state of discussion, not its end. Its end is paralogy', and by what right he makes what Rorty (1984:33) terms 'this odd suggestion'. Why is his thought privileged in making this judgement? He justifies his position through his belief in the nature of language games, which leads him to the claim that 'any consensus on the rules defining a game and the "moves" playable within it *must* be local, in other words, agreed on by its present players and subject to eventual cancellation' (Lyotard 1984:66; my emphasis). Presumably his claim to the local character of consensus is an example of a local agreement.

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5

NARRATIVE, KNOWLEDGE AND ART

On Lyotard's Jewishness

Ioan Davies

All at sea

There is an image that occurs in Lyotard's *Driftworks* (first published in French in 1972), that of the sea, of the Ship or barque simultaneously leaving several shores:

> Driftworks in the plural, for the question is not of leaving *one* shore, but several, simultaneously: what is at work is not one current, pushing and tugging, but different drives and tractions. Nor is just one individual *embarking* here, or even a collective of individuals, but rather, as in Bosch's ship, a collection of fools, each fool being an exaggerated part of the normal subject, libido cathected in such and such a sector of the body, blocked up in this or that configuration of desire, all these fragments placed next to each other…for an aimless voyage, a collection of fragments impossible to unify for it drifts with the Ship, its very drift giving the advantage of the strongest resonance now to one *Trieb-fool,* now to another, in accordance with the diversity of the times and sceneries wafted through. Not at all a dislocated body, since there has never been anything but pieces of the body and there will never be a body, this wandering collection being the very affirmation of the non-body.
>
> (Lyotard, 1984a:10)

Even though this is a middle-aged poetic Lyotard, it catches the sense of his subsequent work and the imagery that flows through it. And in many ways it is a powerful image for the end of this century–mass migration, travelling cultures, the detritus of old cultures and civilizations, the segments of bodies in cyberspace, in Rwanda, in Bosnia, as boat people in Cambodia or off the coast of West Africa. It is, as he notes, Joyce's *Ulysses* and, as he might note now, Walcott's *Omeros* or Neruda's Pacific poems. But Lyotard's Sea is a casting off not in order to 'return home, to the self, which will be the model of Hegelian dialectics and of bourgeois socialist thought and praxis in their entirety. Rather the intense stationary drift wherein the fragments clash in Joyce's *Ulysses*' (1984a:10).

In order to find this point of chaotic stasis, and not to find the great White Whale, but Ishmael, an Ishmael who represents the 'unpresentable' (1984b:80), Lyotard leads us through coves and headlands which are occupied by Kant, Hegel, Plato and Aristotle, Freud, Feyerabend, Marx, Descartes, Habermas and Adorno as well as the *Nouveaux Philosophes*. It is perhaps no accident that the book for which he is best known, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* is based on lectures he gave to the Conseil des Universités of the government of Quebec, a body which surely conforms closely both to the image of many shores, and a rudderless ship, and also to Lyotard's major definition of the artist as formulating 'rules of what *will have been done*' (1984b:81). For if the notion of the postmodern is to have any meaningful locus, if the *event* is to be founded on 'activating difference', then surely Quebec is as good a ship to be on as anywhere. For the crucial thing about Quebec (and nowhere does Lyotard actually talk about it) is that it is defined by its future anteriority, the event is always a hiatus between what might have been and what might conceivably be. It was here that Pierre Trudeau sent in the Army in 1970, not to quash a rebellion or a riot, but to silence an 'apprehended revolution'. It is this space where the competing claims of Micmac Indians, assorted immigrants from Ireland, Haiti, Côte d'Ivoire, the Shtetl, Scotland, England, Acadians, as well as 'Canadians', Americans and multinational corporations contend with the artistic practice of the Quebecois whose

> political party…inhabits the silence of the signifier, the silence of domination…[which] considers the surface of experience as appearance, mere symptom, and even if it decides not to take power, power is already taken by it to the extent that it repeats this device of appearance and effacement, of theater, of politics as a *domaine*. Even should 'total resolution' be deferred endlessly, this party will be a tragic political party, it will be the negative dialectic.
>
> (1984a:108–9)

Needless to say, this mode of reasoning has many antecedents and Lyotard could locate himself in an antinomian tradition that goes at least as far back as the Sophists, taking in the Gnostics, Kabbalists, Jansenists (including Pascal), William Blake, the Muggletonians and probably the Zen Buddhists, should he care to actually so locate himself (which he does not). It is a noble tradition of resistance which carries in its tow a large number of writers, artists and musicians. In what way does Lyotard fit in?

Centrally, it is important to recognize that Lyotard's trope in developing his arguments is invariably the Artist, but in producing the Artist he leads us through three important fields–history, psychoanalysis and language, and his guides are, by and large, Kant, Freud and Adorno. This is not to say that they are systematic guides. As with all of his analyses, Lyotard's use of his sources is highly selective. The Kant that he draws on is primarily that of the *Third Critique* (though partly

mediated through Emmanuel Levinas), the Freud is that of *Moses and Monotheism, The Interpretation of Dreams,* and *Leonardo,* while his Adorno is that of the concluding sections of *Negative Dialectics*. As foils to these, he draws in a large number of other writers (too numerous to discuss here) and across all is a concern with language games as the mechanism (or method) by which he develops his analysis. Unlike other French postmodern writers, Nietzsche only figures aphoristically, while his views on science seem to be influenced by Mandelbrot, Kuhn and Feyerabend. For a moment let us examine the major thrust of this *collage*.

Theory and narration

> The grand narrative has lost its credibility.
>
> (1984b:37)

Lyotard's central target is the closure that metanarratives impose on knowledge. His earlier membership of the important *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group (which also included Cornelius Castoriadis) had already established an important critique of orthodox Marxism. His signal academic contribution during this period was a popular introduction to phenomenology, published in 1954. He was involved in trade union activities in Algeria, and was active in the Paris upheavals of 1968. At this time his intellectual (and political) position was closer to that of Henri Lefebvre, while his philosophical analysis derived from his mentor Maurice Merleau-Ponty (of whose influence traces still remain). His break with Marxism occurred after 1968 (*Driftworks* is the direct product of that break). Thus the syndicalist libertarian took on a wider canvas, though still concerned with the theory and practice of action. It might be important to compare the Marxist with the post-Marxist Lyotard in order to develop the continuities/discontinuities of his thought, but this is hardly of significance to this chapter. Crucially, however, in Lyotard's own words, certain markers from the immediate past stand out:

> certain events which provide a paradoxical, negative occasion for this highly cultivated community sense to reveal itself publicly: Auschwitz, Budapest 1956, May 1968…
>
> Each one of these abysses, and others, asks to be explored with precision in its specificity. The fact remains that all of them liberate judgement, that if they are to be felt, judgement must take place without a criterion, and that this feeling becomes in turn a sign of history.
>
> (1989:409)

And thus we start with moments when the Grand Narratives blew themselves up: Hegel/Nietzsche at Auschwitz, Marx in Budapest, Liberal Kapital in Paris.

Lyotard sums up his arguments at the end of *The Postmodern Condition* by offering a new manifesto:

> The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience. Under the general demand for slackening and appeasement, we can hear the mutterings for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. The answer is: Let us wage a war on totality, let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honour of the name.
>
> (1984b:81–2)

Lyotard places himself in the position to invent a new programme for the state of the world. But because he has to go back in order to go forward, he has to dredge up from the past likely candidates for routes that might have been taken. In something that reads like a classical Popperian scenario, the grizzly enemies of the past are Plato (even worse, Aristotle), Hegel and Marx. The relation of the one to the whole is the clear problem. Its ultimate political resolution is the penitentiary, Auschwitz, the Gulag. 'Where you establish the penitentiary is up to you: Kolyma, Dachau, Cologne-Ossendorf' (1989:140). All the metanarratives lead to the death camps:

> They will be interned in the desmostery, the central prison. They will see no one. The judges will decide what food rations they should get, and these will be brought to them by slaves. When they the, their bodies will be cast outside the city walls and left unburied.
>
> (1989:139)

But the solution to all this is not to create yet another metanarrative. It is, rather to make a distinction between the narrator and the narratee. In discussing Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago,* he spells out his theory of 'narration without transitivity':

> Solzhenitsyn passes on stories as he narrates his story…. The functions of the narrator and of what he is talking about (the narrated) are permutable because his companions (the narrated) are his narrator-heroes. And because it is also possible for the narrator to change places with the people he is addressing, with his companions and us. After all, anyone can tell stories; this is the source of Everyman's strength. Anyone who discusses the *Gulag* is simply using the book as a reference for his own discourse, and using it to make up another narration, his own narration, and addressing readers who may or may not be the same.
>
> (1989:134)

Of course, it matters not in this account by Lyotard that Solzhenitsyn, like Dostoyevsky, had behind all this his own metanarrative of Slavism and the primacy

of the Orthodox church, what matters more is that this lower-level narratology confirms in Lyotard that there exists, somewhere, a

> swarm of narratives, narratives that are passed on, made up, listened to and acted out; the people do not exist as a subject; it is a mass of thousands of little stories that are futile and serious, that are sometimes attracted together to form bigger stories, and which sometimes disintegrate into drifting elements, but which usually hold together well enough to form what we call the culture of civil society.
>
> (1989:134)

The problem with Plato, Hegel and Marx was that these stories were woven into a whole, a monologic whole to use Bakhtin's language (to which I shall return, as Lyotard never does) in which language games which are contests between tricksters are sealed off. If language is a performance, then in the metanarrative the cards are stacked against most of the actors because, whatever stories they want to say, they are ultimately doomed to act out the script that has been written for them. In this libertarian project the problem, then, is in what ways the major theorists foreclose, but also offer the potential for revealing the stories of that which might have been done. This is no idle project, and derives from Lyotard's days as a phenomenologist. It owes something to Merleau-Ponty, something to Greimas, something to Husserl, a fair amount to Heidegger, a debate with Lévi-Strauss on universalisms, but is overlaid with the performance/games language of English, Canadian and American writers such as John Austin, Erving Goffman, Gregory Bateson and Anatol Rappoport. The issue of what stories we tell about ourselves and experiences, how do they connect with other stories, and how do they survive the telling by those who would mastermind ours and everyone else's destinies is surely an important one. The tragedy of Lyotard, as with many other contemporary theorists, is that in posing the question, he lost the sense of the equipment that we may need to develop a strategy. The aesthetic route, taken by many others (Baudelaire, Marcuse, Benjamin) may be the source of his problems.

Banishing the poets and artists: reifying scientific stories

Written across Lyotard's work is a debate with the Jews. (Is this a legacy from the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* days? Freud, Levinas, Adorno, Benjamin and Lévi-Strauss replacing Trotsky? Who will know? Need we know? But we do know that Lyotard is not Jewish.) It is clear, however that, in finding the artist as the metaphor for the postmodernist revolution he finds Jewish authors very seductive, though in doing so he uses Kant as his guide. The key is Freud, in part because of his debate with the Greeks but also because of his negotiation with patriarchy. (Jews have for several millennia been debating the issue of

representation: no graven images of any likeness in the heavens above or the earth beneath, but the super-ordinate importance of the text, and, as Freud recognized, the death of the father, the castration of Moses as the text was shattered before the reality of Moloch.) Freud, as Isaac Deutscher would have remarked, was the non-Jewish Jew, or, as Lyotard puts it,

> Freud is truly the Jew who has lost his faith; he tries to be the father, to construct the father…. [He] departs from Judaism in that the word (the truth) is for him no longer an object to be listened to, but an object to be produced (constructed): writing the book, knowing. He remains loyal to Judaism in that what he wants to construct is still a word, in that for him the truth can only be sought in the manifestation of a text, can only be heard in words.
>
> (1989:106–7)

Thus Freud is the storyteller who is seduced by science, the man who came so close to killing off the father, only to find that his patricide had a scientistic rationale. Freud has to provide an empirical (biological) basis for understanding relationships. He can tell stories well, connecting the Greek, the Roman, the Hebrew, the German, but somehow his science overtook the storytelling. All of this may be evident, but Lyotard's way of telling *his* story of Freud is instructive. The central story is obviously the connection between Oedipus and Moses. In Lyotard's version, there are three characters–Moses, Oedipus and Hamlet–a wonderful and teasing trinity, all of whom, in one way or another, appear in Freud's writings. Moses, the Egyptian prince, claims a people as his own, and introduces them to a form of magic which compels them to worship an invisible God whom only he has seen from behind. His only gift to his people is a text (Moses is killed off precisely because he destroyed the first text).

> God gives no sign and no means of fulfilment. He chooses the Jewish people, not as his heir or the bearer of his mandate, but as his allocutor: he gives them his word in the sense that he addresses them. What is chosen is not a fulfilment, a place, or an earthly origin, but a discursive position. God gives nothing; he gives his people something to listen to.
>
> (1989:97)

What ensues is a struggle between the invisible God/Moses, his sons, and the visible mother. The invisible God does not expect a search for truth or knowledge, or an interpretation of meaning. 'Knowledge is a temptation; righteous relationship to the law is an obligation to reply by doing' (1989:99). The son's desire for the mother, his guilty acting-out of his father's death, are all aspects of a vertiginous search for action. But it is a practice which is not visual–except in dreams. And these dreams, Lyotard argues in the case of Freud, were a struggle against the visual. In one of his dreams, Freud tears out images from a picture-book that his father had left. Lyotard, contrary to

other interpretations which saw this as an image of the mother, as 'the transgression of Oedipus', instead takes the images literally:

> Freud always looked on art, and on Italy, as something that was forbidden to him. And does transgression 'reveal' a wish? Is it not, rather, a manifestation of wishes as something concealed, as something whose origins are concealed? Where was the transgression, if he was given the book in order to destroy it? His father ordered that nothing should remain of the plates. Freud will try to speak the language of truth, which stands in the corner between the word-axis and its figure-axis. That position has to be constantly won. Freud does not conquer it in the face of a rich phantasy life, but in the face of a lack of images…. The figure formations were torn out; their leaves were torn out and they withered.
>
> (1989:105)

In this, the Freud who came so close to seeing through the mythology of Judaism is sucked back into it. The father wins and the polysemy which Freud had invoked by introducing the pagan gods, is foreclosed in the command of the father. The man who, through the interpretation of dreams, would be the artist, sacrifices art for science.

But why art and what art? The answer to this is wrapped up in the idea that the postmodern moment is one in which the 'unpresentable' is present in the presentation. For what Lyotard despises most of all is not totalizing theory but theorizing itself. Art, to work and to be communicated, must be steeped in the 'good childhood of minimal thought' (1989:238). He goes on, quoting with approval Kant's Third Critique,

> We have to imagine a comparison which does not compare, a transition from my appreciation to yours without any mediation, without any *tertium comparationis,* a transition which is possible because it is immediate. And the field of the visible provides the model for this silent exchange because it is made up of an implicit toing and froing between this and that, here and there, now and then, you and me. As with the visible, the silent exchange demanded by the beautiful never ends, because it can never be concluded. It is merely a promise of unanimity…. Art for art's sake? No, there is no *for,* because there is no finality, and no fulfilment. Merely the prodigious power of presentations.
>
> (1989:239)

Art, almost any art, is the 'freeplay between the imagination and the understanding. Am I seeing, or am I dreaming? Hallucinating, or sharing? My madness, or our meaning?' (1989:239). Thus, the fascination with Freud, and, even more so, with Jewish artists (they should not exist, should they?). The Jewish artist tempts Providence. In discussing the work of Barnett Newman, Lyotard notes that 'For Newman, creation is not an act performed by someone; it is what happens in the

midst of the indeterminate' (1989:243), and, further, 'The message "speaks" of nothing: it emanates from no one. It is not Newman who is speaking, or who is using painting to show us something. The message (the painting) is the messenger; it "says": "Here I *am,*" in other words, *"I am yours" or "Be mine"*' (1989:242). The work of art is the Word which was *before* anything else was. If this is a beginning, in the work of art it is always a new beginning, a flash which is always there and never there.

The problem is further taken up with Adorno in discussing Auschwitz, though, as it were, from the other end. If in art, the word is always being re-made, if it is the presentation for Continuous Revolution, then what Lyotard has to confront in Auschwitz is Adorno's statements from the conclusion of *Negative Dialectics:*

> After Auschwitz there is no word tinged from on high, not even a theological one, that has any right unless it underwent a transformation.
>
> If death were that absolute which philosophy tried in vain to conjure positively, everything is nothing: all that we think, too, is thought into the void.
>
> In the camps death has a novel horror; since Auschwitz, fearing death means fearing worse than death.
>
> (Adorno 1973: 367, 371)

As Lyotard comments, 'This question of the end, death, and the aim of speculative dialectics, is also necessarily that of the ends of man, of "our" ends' (1989: 363). But it is interesting that here Lyotard does not engage in metaphysics (as he surely does in his aesthetic writing) but converts Adorno's dialectic at a standstill into phrase-games. There is no talk of Auschwitz as a 'performance'. Instead he disputes the logic of Adorno's aphorisms, the linking of 'Auschwitz' with 'we'.

> To link is to disjoin. The calm completeness of the infinity *actu* at rest within a phrase becomes discontinuous…. The one (a phrase) is not first, nor last, nor both; it is among the others which are within it. The *absolutely other* is a phrase which designates the incommensurability between the universe of the prescriptive phrase (request) and the universes of the descriptive phrases which take it as their referent. 'Auschwitz' is an abhorrent model for this incommensurability.
>
> (1989:385)

By introducing the phrase-games, Lyotard does not wish to ignore 'Auschwitz' as a major event that throws into question all of the theorizing that went before. Rather, he wants to preserve that sense of finality in order to return to the ongoing beginnings. He wants to '"invent" rules for the linking of phrases; and with a rule, in turn, to link on a phrase…' (1989:386). Unlike Adorno, who argued

that, after Auschwitz, poetry was no longer possible, Lyotard wants to keep the door open to more poetry.

Thus, with a little bit of Kant here, some Adorno there and dollops of 'phrase-games', Lyotard puts us in the paradox that Marcuse left us some years before. If we cannot have revolution, why not have art? 'When we have been abandoned by meaning, the artist has a professional duty to bear witness that *there is,* to respond to the order to be. The painting becomes evidence, and it is fitting that it should not offer anything that has to be deciphered, still less interpreted' (1989:248). But what Marcuse's flawed project directed us towards was art and artists as a community. Ultimately, Lyotard's aesthetic dimension is totally an abstraction. The 'Jews' are abstractions, the 'artists' are abstractions, 'history' and 'science' are abstractions. The space, the performance, that Lyotard wants us to inhabit, is a pure figment of his imagination. If there is a postmodern space (and, as I will show in the conclusion, there is) Lyotard has betrayed it. The search for a world in which the resistance to Kapital (a term he uses regularly in his earlier writings, but rarely in the 1980s) is sloughed off to a linguistic game in which the act, any act, is supreme against any theoretical encounter with action or any of its meanings.

Because, in the end, Lyotard is victim of the very procedures he tried to escape from. The issue, of course, is that in trying to construct a theory of the everyday as not being beholden to the abstractions of philosophers, he has no tools, except those of the philosopher, for establishing a stance. The tortuous exclusion of the sweep of philosophy by seeing everything as closure leads him to find 'practices' which do not allow closure. 'Art' is a clear discovery, but it is as much an abstraction as anything else. The artists that he chooses to discuss–Duchamp, Malevitch, Newman, Valerio Adami–are only there because they 'illustrate' his debates with Freud. He tells us nothing about them, their works, except by philosophical reference. His best line, on any painter, is on Newman:

> Chaos threatens, but the flash of the tzimtzum, the zip, takes place, divides the shadows, breaks down the light into colours like a prism, and arranges them across the surface like a universe. Newman said that he was primarily a draughtsman. There is something holy about the line itself.
>
> (1989:246)

So art is linear! The author who would persuade us of non-linearity in philosophy, is drawn to linearity in art ('A strong, thick, ample line' in another essay on Adami, 1989:231). But the faces must always be turned away (on Adami, 'Turn Away in order to be seen,' 1989:228; 'the *form figure* is that which supports the visible without being seen, its nervure,' on Picasso, 1984a:63).

So beauty or the sublime is that which is hidden, but hidden in such a way that its linearity confirms our desire. It's the Jewish metaphor again, with the forbidden image of the Other who is God, Moses, Mother in one. If Lyotard strives to understand the image, he can only find images which conform to his

own stereotypic vision of which images matter. Although he invokes Lévi-Strauss on the totem, he does not seem ever to have seen a totem. The discourse on art that he invites is not only culture-bound, but text-bound. Freud is the father that Lyotard would like to have been. Ah! those dreams of coming to terms with the images that father wanted destroyed…

This is not a critique, but rather a sublimation. Even when he ventures to deal with cinema, he has no films worth talking of, but a discourse (if that's the word) about how cinema does not measure up to the idea of a performative act but rather that of repetition. 'Cinematic movements generally follow the figure of return, that is, of the repetition and propagation of sameness…. All endings are happy endings, just by being endings [but did not *Shoah* or *Berlin Alexanderplatz* go on for nine hours?], for even if a film finishes with a murder, this too can serve as a final resolution of dissonance' (1989:173). This does sound as absurd as the early Adorno on Jazz or the Mass Media. Otherwise, Lyotard's grasp of the newer media is tied up with his perception of the modern. His analogies are all with theatre and painting, and his theorists, with the exception of Christian Metz, are those who never saw a film. ('Abstract cinema, like abstract painting, in rendering the support opaque reverses the arrangement, making the client a victim. It is the same again though differently in the almost imperceptible movements of No Theatre' [1989:179]).

At the end of *The Postmodern Condition* the Lyotard of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* reappears as the protagonist of freedom in cyberspace. It is a call which has been echoed by anarchists, liberal democrats, nihilists, *narodniki* everywhere.

> [computerization]…could become the 'dream' instrument to include knowledge itself and governed exclusively by the performativity principle. In that case, it would inevitably involve the use of terror. But it could also aid groups discussing metaprescriptives by supplying them with the information they usually lack for making knowledge decisions. The line to follow for computerization to take the second of these two paths is, in principle, quite simple: give the public free access to the memory and data banks. Language games would then be games of perfect information at any given moment…. This sketches the outline of a politics that would respect both the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown.
>
> (1984b:67)

It is, of course, an illusionary vision, not because it bears the marks of a demented utopia, but because Lyotard, as in all of his other writings (and, presumably, his life as an academic and political organizer) never thought about Kapital except as an abstraction. The illusion of the artist as conveying the reality principle is now translated to lonely activists typing out messages (probably in code) to unknowns throughout the world on their IBM Aptivas. The plan will not work because Kapital is not simply a Moloch or Baal to be overcome, but part of a much wider set of social structures and processes. That is a sociological issue, and Lyotard is not a sociologist.

Reconstructing postmodernism

The problem with Lyotard is that in privileging culture as the postmodern condition, he ultimately abdicates any concern either with social structures or with moral regulation. That culture is an issue is not in question. Zygmunt Bauman, in his trek through the postmodern condition, puts the issue squarely as a situation embedded in the Market and in the growth of non-consumer repression. The 'seduction' of the market and the 'repression' of panoptical power between them provide a fundamental shift in the ways that knowledge is conceived. If the market defines all cultural activity in consumerist terms, it is also tolerant of any kind of intellectual debate in so far as it can be marketed (Bauman 1992:94–101). Thus the intellectual who trades in ideas has infinite freedom to do or say as he/ she thinks, but nobody listens unless it can be proved that it works. Habermas's 'legitimation crisis' can be seen as the crisis of the intellectuals, the artists, the authors. They can write/paint/design what they like, but ultimately their legitimation is themselves against the massive appropriation by the market and the repressive apparatus of what they are doing. If, in the modernist world, the state, Kapital, tradition, the civilizing process (of Norbert Elias) colluded in providing a comfortable niche within which the definitions of knowledge could be seen as legitimated, in the postmodern world everything is up for grabs. Once the market takes over, not only do you have the freedom to say/write/paint/film what you like, but also no one is behind you if you do, unless you can sell it to Hollywood or the nearest Armani agent. Everything is pigeonholed: Culture and History are Heritage; Knowledge is Market Relevant Information; Ethnicity is Multicultural Packaging, and so on. It is to this world that Lyotard introduces us, but, in a curious way, leaves unspecified for us, whose profession is to act as cultural brokers and producers. Bauman puts the issue squarely:

> Culture is one area of social life which is defined (cut out) in such a way as to reassert the social function claimed by intellectuals. One cannot even explain the meaning of the concept without reference to human 'incompleteness', to the need of teachers and, in general, of 'people in the know' to make up for this incompleteness, and to a vision of society as a continuous 'teach-in' session. The idea of culture, in other words, establishes knowledge in the role of power, and simultaneously supplies legitimation of such power…. Whatever their other ambitions, modern intellectuals always saw culture as their own private property; they made it, they even gave it a name. Expropriation of this particular plot hurts most… What hurts…is not so much an expropriation, but that intellectuals are not invited to stand at the helm of this breath-taking expansion. Instead it is gallery-owners, publishers, TV managers and other 'capitalists' or 'bureaucrats' who are in control. The idea has been wrested out of the intellectual heads and in a truly sorcerer's apprentice's manner, put to action in which the sages have no power.
>
> (1992:99–100)

The search for the artist as the kernel of the postmodern condition is, in this context, rather odd, but hardly novel. From Shelley's Poets as the Unacknowledged Legislators of the World through to the poets bursting like bombs in Spain, the belief in the artist as the vector for the transformation is one of the great romantic drives of all society since the Enlightenment.

> Inasmuch as art preserves, with the promise of happiness, the memory of the goals that failed, it can enter, as a 'regulative idea,' the desperate struggle for changing the world. Against all fetishism of the productive forces, against the continued enslavement of individuals by the objective conditions (which remain those of domination), art represents the ultimate goal of all revolutions: the freedom and happiness of the individual.
>
> (Marcuse 1978:69)

Thus Marcuse, at the end of another career which engaged with Freud, Adorno, Marx, Hegel and Kant, wrestles with the aesthetic as the bearer of a noumenal tradition which exists in spite of the phenomenal reality which called it into being, and yet which might bring with it the promise of a new phenomenal reality. Of course, there has been a particular fragmentation in the idea of the aesthetic between Marcuse and Lyotard. The differences hinge on the uses of history. For Marcuse aesthetic form, autonomy and truth are interrelated. Art is committed to a perception of the world which takes as its point-of-departure alienation as a functional existence and performance in society and commits itself to an emancipation of sensibility, imagination and reason. It stands under the law of the given while transgressing and contradicting it. Thus for Marcuse, the promise of the liberating potential of art is that it bears in its creativity a memory of lived communities, and the anguish of mimesis as the 'representation through estrangement, subversion of consciousness. Experience is intensified to the breaking point; the world appears as it does for Lear and Antony, Berenice, Michael Kholhaas, Woyzeck, as it does for the lovers of all times. They experience the world demystified' (Marcuse 1978:45). With Marcuse the noumenal is always present as part of the other Geist, that trinity of aesthetic form, autonomy and truth which draws us to other than pure relativity. This is an historical commitment, where the purpose of art is to pull us towards the idea of what we know, on what bases are our certainties. If the artist in the service of the revolution seems like a chimera (what artist? what revolution?), at least we can begin to debate the issues.

With Lyotard the debate is with the nebulous sublime. His metaphors are visual. 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven images.' Transgressing the Judaic commandment is the core of his definition of the modern. 'I shall call modern the art which devotes its "little technical expertise" *(son "petit technique"),* as Diderot used to say, that the unpresentable exists. To make visible that there is something which can be conceived and which can neither be seen nor made visible: that is what is at stake in modern painting' (Lyotard 1984b:78). This is a curious definition of modernism, as if he set up the Jewish injunction in order

only to shoot it down: modernism is Jewish because Jews finally discovered that they could construct graven images without anyone feeling guilty. But what about film, or fiction, or the genuflecting before the Torah? Or the search for the noumenal through the Kabbala? What if, as John Berger has been trying to persuade us for a long time, the images, the language games, the filming, the writing are all simply other ways of storytelling? The issues relate to what stories we are telling for whom.

And there is more than this. Both Lyotard and Marcuse are ultimately caught up in the same game plan, though with nuanced differences. Both keep to the notion of revolution as the backdrop master-narrative. The Artist as Saviour becomes the common solution to failed utopias, because the Artist transgresses either by 'standing under the law of the given while transgressing this law' (Marcuse) or by 'working without rules in order to formulate the *rules of what will have been done*' (Lyotard). The Artist carries within his or her work the liberating potential of the anarchic. Only a partial truth, at best. Too much deconstructionalist argument (and counter-argument) has attended this topic since Marcuse wrote, for us to even begin to convey the serious problems that arise if art and creativity alone are taken as the templates for a postmodern consciousness. But what is absent, of course, is the concern that the world within which these discussions take place is still one within which the power of metanarratives continues to dominate the fabric of everyday life. What is missing in Lyotard's writing (and was always missing in Marcuse, in spite of *One Dimensional Man*) is the relationship between the very tangible negotiating of the everyday in the context of the social structures that emerge within contemporary society. If abstract Kapital has to be given flesh and bones, it surely exists in multi-national corporations, the international money markets, the stock and bond traders, the World Bank, the various international trading conglomerates and the metanarratives that they spin about the significance of the Market as the core of freedom, democracy, well-being. Within this spectrum of control and power, against it, and within it, we negotiate our spaces.

In this context, the form of ludic narcissism which is at the heart of Lyotard's project, as with much deconstructionist rhetoric, does little more than maintain the ongoing system in its privilege of power and knowledge. Two alternative strategies suggest themselves. The first derives from Mikhail Bakhtin, the second from Zygmunt Bauman. If we start with Bauman, it is clear that postmodernity represents both an epistemic rupture with certain grand narratives (which themselves are embedded in particular forms of social structure), but that certain people who claim the sobriquet of being postmodern are themselves ideologues of something that they wish to term 'postmodernity'. The ideology of postmodernity has been criticized acutely by Fredric Jameson and David Harvey (see, in particular, Jameson (1991) and Harvey (1989) where the distinctions are clearly made). But the distinctions are frequently elided or blurred. The real conditions of postmodernity are not that the Berlin Wall collapsed or that capitalism is triumphant, but that the *deus ex machina* does not exist any more (nor has since

Nietzsche and Sade put the kibosh on the whole sorry state of Enlightenment rhetoric). The 'modernist' era since then has been playing out both a social structural change and one in which what is considered knowledge has been transformed. For 200 years humanity has been subjected to a mechanistic conception of production which has simultaneously been the route to mass destruction. The benefits that a very few people acquire are outweighed by the increasing misery of the rest of humanity. The real change of the past two decades is that previously people repeatedly hoped that there could be a total reconstruction of the system, that the world could be re-made in a new image to conform more to the sense of what it might have been. (That is the message that comes through the major social thinkers, from Marx to Durkheim to Weber and even to Parsons.) No longer is that true. The relentless logic of mechanization, commodity, money has blown out the universal utopias. In this Lyotard is clearly correct. Those totalistic schemas are clearly dead. But with their death we will do none of us any good if we ground our futures in will-o'-the-wisp romanticisms about the artist or the nebulous nightly sojourns of the internetters.

What is missing in Lyotard is the sense that it is the moral choices that have both multiplied and collectively diminished. In his superb attempt at pulling together the strands of the postmodern condition, Zygmunt Bauman sees that the modern was bound up with the idea of Bentham's Panopticon, that the grizzly history of industrialism was bound up with the workhouse, the poorhouse, the prison, the slave camp, the lunatic asylum, the 'factory', the gulag, the concentration camp, the military barracks. In some cases–Stalin's Russia, Mao's China, Hitler's Germany–the prison became the model for all social order; in others–the post-bellum United States, Peron's Argentina, Nationalist South Africa, Eretz-Israel, occupied Vietnam and Cambodia–it became a partial one. The search for collective utopias went hand-in-hand with these collective brutalities. The collapse of the Berlin Wall, if it symbolizes anything, surely stands for the collapse of both the idea of mechanized terror and of collective utopias. Two certainties have been destroyed: the certainty that there is a Big Bad Brother out There who will surely destroy us or herd us into camps and the certainty that We Shall Overcome. What is left is the world of imagined communities in which 'it is the symbolic significance that counts' and in which 'the postmodern privatization of fears has prompted and will prompt a furious search for communal shelters all the more vehement and potentially lethal for the brittle, imagined existence of communities' (Bauman 1992:xx–xxi). Within this is played out what Bauman calls 'the ethical paradox of postmodernity'. This paradox is one that 'restores to agents the fullness of moral choice and responsibility while simultaneously depriving them of the comfort of universal guidance that modern self-confidence once promised' (xxii). Thus the absolute certainties that guided both the organizers of 'development', 'progress', 'exploration', and so on, as well as those held by those they dominated, are fragmented to so many particular moralities. The need to be sure of my own ethical bearings and the impossibility of imposing them on others provides the tension of contemporary life.

Much of this, as Bauman acknowledges, owes its force to the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin. The language of modernism was, by and large, a monological one, in which the sense of a determining narrative overrode all others to provide a mode of discussion which buried other voices. Bakhtin's project was to unveil the hidden voices, to make the utterances heard. And he did this without allowing the Many to become Any, so that absolute relativism of narcissistic indulgence in word-play pulled apart the monologic in such a way that there was no dialogue, merely deconstruction. Bakhtin's dialogic principle was based on finding collective voices of the marketplace, the street, the factory, and in creating the basis by which the laughter, the jokes, the acting-out, the performances and the carnivalesque could not only reveal the language of the people, but also provide an alternative making of history.

> Every act of world history was accompanied by a laughing chorus. But not every period of history had Rabelais for coryphaeus. Though he led the popular chorus of only one time, the Renaissance, he so fully and clearly revealed the peculiar and difficult language of the laughing people that his work sheds light on the folk culture of humour belonging to other ages.
>
> (Bakhtin 1984:474)

In Bauman's account of the postmodern, this laughing chorus becomes the ethical paradox of the 'struggle with the unfamiliar' and the voice of the new tribalism and the imagined communities suggested by Benedict Anderson, Michel Maffesoli and Agnes Heller. If we wish to find the strategy for continuing to work, to survive, to live, we must therefore recognize that the task of being the Rabelais of the postmodern world is a great deal more complex than even Bakhtin imagined. Bauman suggests that the contemporary world is situated at the intersection between 'seduction' and 'repression' in which 'market dependency' replaces old life-skills with new ones, the 'shifting disaffection and conflict from the area of political struggle to the area of commodities and entertainment… the penetration of the "private" sphere to an ever growing degree, disempowering of the objects of normative regulation as autonomous agents' (Bauman 1992: 112). Thus the task of the sociologist (and we are talking as sociologists) is to explore the antinomies of 'control-through-repression' and 'control-through-seduction' and thus to place sociologists not as the managers or hand-servants of a new social order, but as its interpreters and critics.

The picture on the wall

This provides a different vantage-point for viewing the task that Lyotard set himself. By burying his arguments in the ways that science proceeds with its work, and by taking Kapital as a given, remorseless logic, Lyotard can only fish around for alternative allies in his drifting. His explorations into the arts and into the finer points of Judaic imagery, ignore the ethical dilemmas of our present

condition and leave us stranded on the inter-webbed shore. The task is more serious than Lyotard imagined, and the lenses through which we view the predicament of knowledge and action might be very different.

In an interview at the end of *Intimations of Postmodernist,* Zygmunt Bauman discusses his perception of the Holocaust (and it is worth contrasting this or, indeed, Bauman's own book on the Holocaust, with Lyotard's chapter 'Discussions, or Phrasing after Auschwitz', 360–92 in Lyotard 1989). After mentioning the impact that Janina Bauman's *Winter in the Morning: A Young Girl's Life in the Warsaw Ghetto and Beyond* had on him, he comments:

> I saw the Holocaust as a picture on the wall, and then, suddenly, I saw it as a window, through which you can see other things. So I became fascinated, intellectually fascinated, with this issue, and, step by step, while starting reading the literature and trying to recover the experience from other people's reports, I came to the third stage… I discovered that peculiar condition in which Jews were first cast in the second half of the nineteenth century. If one goes through the ideas of people like Marx, Freud, George Simmel, Kafka, all these people who actually created what we call modern culture and beyond that, to people like Lévi-Strauss, Levinas, Derrida, or lesser figures, lesser known, like Jabes or Shestov, but also quite influential in shaping the essential categories of modern culture–one can find some sort of (I will use the Weberian term) elective affinity between the enforced condition of social suspension in the process of assimilation, and the kind of penetrating, perceptive, insightful modern culture which saw through the modernity deception.
>
> (Bauman 1992:226)

Lyotard's invocation of the Judaic remains the Picture on the Wall, just as his nomadic drifters are fragments of an imagination unlocated in time or space. For all the radical 'insistence on narrative analysis in which the narratives themselves henceforth seem impossible' (Jameson, 'Foreword' to Lyotard, 1984b:xx), the elective affinity between those who thought through the narratives is absent. And this is surely crucial if the importance of the postmodern is to be seen as more than simply the domination of science as a performative principle of everyday language. Bauman's exploration of the Judaic sensibility in wrestling with the modern gives us the opportunity to explore all of our encounters with the modern and postmodern. For what Lyotard leaves with us are a series of graphic images in which the modern and the postmodern are collapsed, particularly in his writings on art. But *that* Jewish sensibility was not located purely in Freud's terror of graven images. The exploration of the Jewish encounter with the image has not yet been written, but it would have to include discussions on the work of Chagall, of Max Raphael, of Walter Benjamin, of John Berger, of Jonathan Miller as a Theatre Director and Television Producer, and, much more to the point, the importance of Jews in the development of the American film and television industry. Lyotard's aesthetics is ultimately thus not a 'postmodernist' one, but

one which is still bound up with the sense of 'high modernism'. (See Jameson's 'Foreword', particularly pp. xv–xix, for a critique of Lyotard's aesthetics.) Walter Benjamin gave us several snapshots of the way that the image has been transformed, re-made, transgressed. There is nothing of this in Lyotard. The picture stays on the wall for the prurient gaze of the disobedient son. Lyotard is the curator of the postmodern museum.

Beyond the postmodern museum

I have treated Lyotard's work as an engagement with Jewish thought and culture for a particular reason. Lyotard's 'postmodernism' dwells in the realm of pure abstraction. The artefacts that he trucks out for our gaze are disembodied and lifeless. Even the surfer of the cybernet is a disembodied being, confined to the museum of a future and virtual history. In this, Lyotard is no better than the Kapital or Science of his imagination. His Jews are equally abstract, as they were for Hegel. What Bauman suggests as the route for reading the Jewish experience through how the Jewish intellectuals came to terms with modernity would be as true of Blacks, Chinese, Japanese, Brazilians, Spanish Americans. Unless we can begin to understand those accounts, those theorizings, we will not even begin to understand the meaning of the great cultural transformations on which we are embarked. If Lyotard's writing is based on form as the substance of change, then the real image of postmodernism is how the content transforms the form (to transpose one of Marshall McLuhan's favourite aphorisms). And content is rooted in the existential experiences that try to explode the form.

Many Jews are still with us, in spite of a mechanized, calculated extermination that was both part of a folk memory and a direct consequence of the will to global power. Their negotiations (both before and after the Holocaust) are part of the grounding of all of our experiences. But we should not fool ourselves that the Jews alone bear witness to the transformation. The whole world contains within it exemplars of the terror of the modernist will to power. Lyotard's museum, with its closed view, at least preserves some of the necessary artefacts. But it is necessary, if we are to take the condition of postmodernity seriously, to open the windows and look at the refuse that has been accumulated outside.

And so, as intellectuals, what do we do? Who am I? we ask with Lyotard, Bauman and Marcuse. But Lyotard and Marcuse barely answered that question. Bauman's answer is much more suggestive:

> All this is rather intellectual and unemotional. And so I am–in this sense, I was, and remain–a stranger. I like very much what three people said about the Jews. One is the playwright Fredric Raphael; he is extremely conscious of being a Jew, as you know, and quite active in spelling out what it means. But he said that 'the meaning of being a Jew is that I am everywhere out of place.' That's one statement. The second statement is by George Steiner, who said that 'my homeland is my typewriter.' And the third statement,

> made by Wittgenstein, was that 'the only place where real philosophical problems could be tackled and resolved is the railway station.' These three statements point in the same direction. And I think this 'nowhere', as these people said, is an intellectually fertile situation. You are somewhat less constrained by the rules, and see beyond.
>
> (Bauman 1992:226–7)

And so postmodernism, if it is true to itself, is, as a wise Zen master once said, the sound of one hand clapping.

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6

IDENTITY, MEMORY AND DIFFERENCE

Lyotard and 'the jews'

Victor J.Seidler

The world stands on three pillars: justice, truth and peace.
(in memory of Dr Arthur Katz)

Judaism and modernity

Many Jews living in Western Europe welcomed the Enlightenment and the promises of freedom and equality that were offered by the French Revolution.[1] It seemed to be a prophetic dream come true and promised the realization of an age-old notion familiar to the prophets of Israel. It was the dream that differences between peoples would at long last begin to disappear as a shared humanity before God would be realized. In its secular and universalized form this was part of the secular humanist dream that informed an Enlightenment vision of modernity. If modernity was largely to be expressed in terms of a secularized form of Christianity, its universalism was also to realize a Jewish prophetic inheritance.

For years Jews had been denied equal civil and legal rights within Europe and had been forced to live in ghettos. The Jews were to exist as a separated people, marked by their residence and located at a safe distance from the Christian population. Jews were different and they could only escape from their Jewishness with a great deal of difficulty. In Western Europe many Jews were more than ready to give up their 'special' status as Jews, for this had so often meant exclusion and marginalization. It had meant all kinds of restrictions in relation to the public sphere of politics and civic life. For within Christian dogma Jews were obliged to live as Jews, for it was as Jews that they were supposed to witness the Second Coming of Christ. This gave them a certain degree of protection in the eyes of the Church. They had a position to uphold within the divine order of things.[2]

But within an Enlightenment vision of modernity Jews were to become 'like everyone else'. They were to become free and equal as citizens with an equal voice within a democratic polity. They were to take their place as equal citizens within civil society. But it was crucial to the Enlightenment vision that within civil society they were no longer to exist as Jews, but as citizens 'like everyone else'. So it was that Jews were *not* to remember their histories as Jews for they were to cease to exist as a distinct people with their own histories. Rather the histories that a new generation was to learn and which they were to identify with was the history of the national state into which they had settled so, for instance they were to be German, French or English 'like everyone else'. Identities were to be established within the public realm, especially dominant masculine identities. An Enlightenment vision of modernity was to be characterized by a sharp distinction between the public and the private spheres, set as it was within the terms of a dominant, white, Christian, heterosexual masculinity.

Modernity was racialized in the terms that it set for participation. Citizenship was to be open to all, but on distinct terms. The assumption made was that people had everything to gain in terms of freedom and equality and nothing to lose. For Jews it was only that their 'Jewishness' was to be transformed/ constructed as a matter of individual religious belief alone. This has to do with the status of belief within a rationalist vision of modernity. It was taken to be a private matter, to do with individual perfection and with the organization of private and domestic life. It had to do with the particular place, a church, synagogue or mosque in which you happened to want to worship.

So it was that as an Enlightenment vision of modernity took shape, Jews no longer existed as a people within a collective identity, with a distinctive 'Jewish consciousness'. Rather people existed as individuals in their own right, who happened to have particular religious ideas or none. This is something that Sartre recognises in *Anti-Semite and Jew* where he names the intolerance and arrogance of an otherwise liberal vision of modernity.[3] Jewishness had become a matter of individual belief alone and within a liberal moral culture there was suspicion about any emergence of collective identities, which were treated in Kantian terms as a regression and as reflecting a weakness of will, an incapacity to take freedom into your own hands and think for yourself as an individual. In Western Europe, particularly in Germany, Jews were to become 'Israelites' of 'mosaic' beliefs. Religion was to be a matter of private belief alone and supposedly had no connection with identities established as citizens within the public sphere of politics.

Modernity and 'the Jewish question'

Lyotard recognizes in *Heidegger and 'the jews'* that the Jews were a testing ground for the aspirations of modernity.[4] For the Jews were a 'question' and if that could be 'solved' so the women's question might also have a solution. For modernity was established in terms of an identification of a dominant, white, Christian, heterosexual masculinity with a vision of reason radically separated from nature. To be human was to be rational and it was a dominant masculinity which could

alone take its reason for granted. So it was that men alone claim to be human and it was for 'others', namely women, Jews, people of colour who were deemed to be less civilized and less human, because they could not take their reason for granted. Rather they had to prove their reason and rationality. Structured into their identities was a sense of self-doubt and self-blame. They were supposedly without an inner relationship with reason, because they were deemed to be closer to nature. They were influenced by their emotions, feelings and desires.

It was already known as part of a dominant Christian theology that the Jews were a stubborn and stiff-necked people for had they not alone refused to acknowledge the divinity of Jesus? Had they not insisted that he was a human being, possibly a prophet with special healing powers? Did this not prove their irrationality and did it not make it difficult to reason with them? For the Jews were supposedly 'beyond reason'. Luther had offered them a chance to convert to the new Protestant religion. Their refusal only reinforced the anti-semitic language which pervades parts of Luther's writings. If they refused the 'gift' that he was ready to offer them, they only had themselves to blame. They were to be condemned and little tolerance was to be shown to them. They were only to confirm their blindness, their inability to see 'the truth' even when it was presented to them.

Within an Enlightened vision of modernity that was set in predominantly secularized Christian terms, a similar deal was to be offered by Napoleon. This time the Jews were to be accepted as citizens but they were to be rejected if they were to insist on remaining Jews. Napoleon writes a revealing instruction to his minister of the interior on 23 August 1806

> Do the Jews who were born in France and whom French law treats as French citizens regard France as their fatherland? And are they obliged by their laws to defend France, to obey her laws, and to conform to all the provisions of the Civil Code?–the Sanhedrin must declare that the Jews are obliged to defend France as they would defend Jerusalem, since they are treated in France as they would be in the Holy City.
>
> (*The Mind of Napoleon:* 114)

Republican France presented the messianic dream come true, so it is that France becomes Jerusalem and deserves the devotion that Jews traditionally give in their prayers. The France of Napoleon was no longer to be one nation amongst others for it has shed its particularism in the universalism represented in the Civil Code. Being a citizen of France made you a citizen of the world, a universal human being. But the Jews were to cease to be a people and remain a religion alone. As Richard Cohen puts it in *Elevations:*

> In this enlightened perspective the voluntary decrease and ultimate disappearance of the Jewish people is no tragedy at all but rather the very measure of universalism, the bright sign of a higher ideal coming of age, the

> increase and spread of equality, liberty and fraternity, the realization of the true gifts and goals of Judaism itself.
>
> (1994:5)[5]

So it was that the Jews were to disappear as a distinct people with their own history, culture and traditions. This was the promise of an Enlightenment universalism and it is part of the arrogance of modernity. So it was that modernity through the disappearance of the Jews as a distinct people was to solve the Jewish question that had stubbornly persisted for Christianity. Jews could only exist for Christianity as an abject people for this was the only way to confirm God's new choice for Christianity. It was crucial that Judaism should be seen as superseded, just as the 'old' Testament was to give way to the 'new' and an ethic of justice was to give way to an ethic of love. This was part of an evolutionary underpinning for the vision of progress which was so crucial to modernity. As Richard Cohen writes about this in 'Jewish Election in the thought of Rosenzweig' (1994) 'G-d's change of heart must therefore be premised upon the error of the Jews, and hence only as erroneous, as at fault, as having failed G-d, in direct contrast to Christian faithfulness, can Jews be represented in Christian consciousness. According to this view, only an abject Judaism fits into the Christian scheme; a chosen, elect Judaism does not' (1994:9). Jewish consciousness of Jewish election and an affirmation to difference is what Christians call Jewish 'stubbornness'.

Franz Rosenzweig affirms the intrinsic worth and independence of the Jewish spiritual world. His arguments for Jewish difference make him a difficult figure within a classical tradition of social theory which insists on identifying knowledge with universality. He recognizes how threatening the notion of Jewish election is for Christianity and how this is reflected in secular terms in the difficulties modernity has with the integrity of difference. This is a theme that Lyotard appreciated in different terms, recognizing how issues around anti-semitism and racism are central to defining an Enlightenment vision of modernity. Rosenzweig knows that the exclusiveness of Jewish election is provisional. As Cohen expresses it 'From being G-d's one chosen people, in the sense of being one nation among nations, separate *because* of their election, a divine people differentiated from the pagan nations who do not follow G-d's path, the Jews must become G-d's chosen people in the sense that all people, all nations, also come to follow G-d's path, and hence all enter in the state of being G-d's chosen ones. From one among many, election must come to mean one for all' (1994:13). This shows the important role of history in the redemptive process, in the movement from revelation to redemption. For Rosenzweig Christianity has a crucial role to play in this sacred history, as the progressive election of the nations.

Modernity, identity and Jewishness

The assimilation of the Jews into civil society was in different ways a crucial test case for modernity. It set the terms for the ways classical social theory was to

think of 'race' and ethnic identities within modernity. For Jews as citizens of the nation state were to learn that their identity as Jews was to form no part of their identities as rational selves. It is as rational selves that, in Kant's terms, people are supposedly 'free and equal' to legislate for themselves. It is as rational selves learning to guide their lives by reason alone that people can recognize themselves as 'free and equal'.

This marks the fragmentation that is already present, even if forgotten within modernist forms of social theory, in the vision of identity as rational self that informs an enlightenment vision of modernity. As I have argued in *Kant, Respect and Injustice* (1986), for Kant there is already a split that would treat Jewishness, like class and gender, as forms of unfreedom and determination.[6] These collective identities are deemed to be residual, backward looking identities that serve as signs that people are not free and autonomous, able to work out their life plans through reason alone. But, as I have argued, this is to set in place a dominant form of white, Christian, heterosexual masculinity which can alone take its reason for granted. It exists as the centre of the modern world that comes into being with the identification within modernity of reason, science and progress. It supposedly knows itself and can assume its status as a rational self. Since for Kant morality is to be identified with reason, it also represents principled gender and moral sex.

It is against such an implicit norm that 'others' are defined through what they lack. Women, Jews, people of colour and children are all deemed to lack an inner relationship with reason. It is only through voluntarily subordinating themselves to the authority of men, either as fathers, husbands or masters that they can supposedly secure the guidance of reason and so become free and autonomous. They have to accept a condition of dependency as a unspoken condition for freedom. They are deemed to lack reason partly because of their closer relationship to nature. They have to continually prove their status as rational selves for they can only enjoy an externalized and mediated relationship with reason so they can never take their status as human beings for granted. They constantly have to seek the approval of a dominant masculinity. Even if feminism and black consciousness movements have questioned these structures, they often remain at an unconscious level. Learning to blame themselves, it makes it difficult to feel pride in one's identity. Afraid of making the wrong move and constantly seeking the approval of others, it becomes difficult to trust one's own impulses, for there is a fear they will betray and show traces of a closeness to nature.

This builds a tension and unease into the experience and identities of those deemed to be 'other' within the terms of modernity. Women, Jews, people of colour are in different ways deemed to be 'closer to nature'. They are supposedly more influenced by their 'animal' natures, by their emotions, feelings and desires. For it is the ability to radically split from nature and to identify with an autonomous and independent faculty of reason that is taken to be the mark of superiority. As I argue in *Unreasonable Men* (1994a) this separation of reason from nature helps to produce an unreasonable form of reason.[7] It serves to identify a dominant white

heterosexual masculinity with a disembodied conception of knowledge as it sets the terms for male superiority. For Kant it is supposedly only through 'rising above' our 'animal' natures, so creating an inner hierarchical relationship, that we can prove that we are rational selves and so moral agents.

Lyotard does not frame 'others' in these terms, for he does not dwell upon the split/separation between reason and nature, but rather takes this for granted. He is ready to take a certain dominant heterosexual masculinity for granted in the ways he is ready to assume the rational self, in its Cartesian self-definition. He takes modernity to be underpinned by a unified and homogeneous rational self able to govern his life on the basis of reason alone. The unease and tension which can build into the relationship which diverse men can feel with a notion of a dominant, white, heterosexual masculinity are rendered invisible. For supposedly the Cartesian male is a man who is necessarily at home with himself and at peace in the world, secure in his authority and identity. This is hardly surprising since this is supposedly a world which is made in his image.

But at some level this vision of self within modernity is already fragmented and already carries the marks of its secularized Christian sources. For at some level the notion that Judaism has been superseded by Christianity and so remains a tradition that is 'backward' and 'tribal' in its rejection, sets crucial terms through which 'progress' within modernity is understood. It sets the terms through which the ascendancy of culture is to be established in relation to nature. Where nature used to stand we will have science and culture. Where emotions were we will have reason, for emotions are deemed to be 'irrational' and 'unreasonable'. So it is that women, deemed to be closer to their emotions and feelings, are silenced for where emotions used to be placed we now look towards the guidance of reason alone. Women learn that they cannot think for themselves, for they are deemed to be emotional. So it is that reason supersedes emotion and men and women learn to despise the traces of their 'animal' natures.[8]

Within modernity women do not *need* to speak for they have men to speak for them, rather they have to learn deference and silence. They are to forget that they have voices at least in the public realm for this is established as the realm of an impersonal and objective reason. In polite middle-class society women have to withdraw into a space of their own while men talk seriously. This reflects the ways that Jews in Europe had to learn to keep their own counsel. Whatever they knew could not be valued as part of a spiritual tradition with its own ethics and visions. Only an abject Judaism can fit into the Christian scheme for it can no longer have the ear of G-d. It is a tradition that has proved itself wanting and therefore it has nothing to say within a Christian world. Rather Jews have to wait in silence locked into a tradition that has been surpassed, so deemed incapable of speaking any truths. Within modernity this silencing took a different form as Judaism was deemed to be a religion alone. Jews and Judaism were to be relegated to a privatized space, while it was only as individuals separated from their religious traditions that they were to be visible within the public realm. This was a different way in which they were to be forgotten. This went hand in the hand with the

denial of the Jewish sources of Christianity. So it was that the West was to forget an important source of its traditions.

The way that Judaism was to be superseded was also reflected in the ways identities within modernity were already racialized. The rational self already existed in tension within an 'animal' nature that was deemed to be 'uncivilized'. There was already in place an inner struggle against an animal nature that was identified in different ways with Blackness and Jewishness. In crucial ways antisemitism set some of the crucial terms for the ways racism was to be constructed within modernity. For as reason was to be set against nature, so Christianity has been identified with a disembodied spirit that was set against the sins of the flesh. It proved the superiority of a Christian spirituality which has been able to separate itself from a carnal Israel. Judaism was to be identified with the body and sexuality. The body was a site of sin and temptation. Emotions were placed in the body and so devalued, along with the experience of women.[9]

As reason was set in a relationship of inner superiority to nature, so the terms of what it means to be human were redefined within modernity. To have an inner relationship with reason was alone a guarantee that you were 'human'. As people of colour were deemed to lack reason, so they were forced into a relationship of dependency, for it was only in relation to their colonial masters, that they take a path towards freedom and independence. So it was that the guiding vision of the rational self was already gendered and racialized. It was to forget its sources in Christianity's relationship to Judaism. But the way that Judaism had been superseded was to establish the vision of progress, which was to allow people of colour to become 'civilized' if they followed the rule of their colonial masters. If reason was deemed to be available to all, it was on very strict terms.[10]

Forgetting 'the jews'

Modernity had its own way of forgetting 'the jews'. In different ways it encouraged the Jews to forget themselves and to forsake their histories and traditions, in the name of a freedom and equality that was supposedly open to all. But if modernity, in its particular vision of the rational self, as a self set in opposition to an 'animal' nature, was already set within the terms of a secularized Christianity there was a different kind of forgetting, a different price to pay for these new freedoms. As Sartre recognized, it was Jews who were being asked to forsake their Jewishness. They were to become 'like everyone else'. In the process they were often shamed for they had to learn to police their experience, so that they did not show signs of their Jewishness.

Lyotard looks to psychoanalysis to explore the nature of the forgetting that seems necessary to Western culture. But often it is not clear how this helps, other than to remind us of experiences that will not go away. It helps question a rationalist tradition of modernity which again is linked to a dominant white, heterosexual masculinity. For it is a particular masculinity which learns that it can shape its experience according to will alone. So it is that men often learn to deny their

feelings and emotions, especially if they are not deemed appropriate to the situation. This is reflected in an interpretative tradition within social theory that treats experience as being freely assigned meanings. In Weber's work there is an implicit assumption that men are free to assign meanings to their experience. This becomes the self-control which men often identify with. Freud upsets and disturbs such a rationalist assumption and Lyotard goes some way to endorsing this. Reason does not have the power to forget, for what is repressed will return in different forms. In this way Freud helps to challenge a masculinity that assumes men can control their lives through controlling the meanings of their experience.

When Lyotard talks about Jews he makes a point of using a lower case and quotation marks. As he explains it in the opening to his essay entitled 'the jews',

> I use lower case to indicate that I am not thinking of a nation…. I use quotation marks to avoid confusing these 'jews' with real Jews. What is most real about real Jews is that Europe, in any case, does not know what to do with them: Christians demand their conversion; monarchs expel them; republics assimilate them; Nazis exterminate them. 'the jews' are the object of a dismissal with which Jews, in particular, are afflicted in reality.
>
> (1990:3)

What seems crucial for Lyotard is an obligation to remember what the West is so ready to forget. As he has it 'The Forgotten is not to be remembered for what it has been and what it is, because it has not been anything and is nothing, but must be remembered as something that never ceased to be forgotten' (ibid.: 3).

There is a long history of forgetting the Jews in the West. But the Jews were always crucial in the Christian iconography of the West, so often identified with evil and with the devil. But it is crucial for Lyotard that we continue to forget so that the West cannot really understand itself because it is built upon a denial in part of Jesus as a Jew. In Freudian terms this creates its own forms of self-hatred, for Europe cannot be at peace with itself as it lives a lie. For Lyotard the Jews remind us of the forgotten while at the same time they cannot be forgotten. As he has it 'this concealment lets something else show, this contradictory feeling of a "presence" that is certainly not present, but which precisely needs to be forgotten to be represented, although it must be represented' (ibid.: 4). In Poland we can still have anti-semitism without many Jews left. But the memories of Jewish lives in Poland cannot be obliterated, cannot be forgotten. It is there in the atmosphere and in the buildings, even if it is rarely spoken.[11]

For Lyotard 'the jews' come to represent the enduring tendency to forget, the 'anesthesia' that he recognizes in the West. It is also there in Western philosophy and Lyotard is particularly struck by the scandal of Heidegger's silence in the face of the concentration camps. He never speaks about them. Lyotard refuses to excuse Heidegger's silence. He is concerned with how we can continue to read Heidegger in a critical way, in terms of the complexity of his thought *and* in terms of the seriousness of his involvement with Nazism. As Lyotard states it is the

problem of how the 'greatest thought can lend itself, as such, to the greatest horror'. As David Carroll points out in his Foreword to *Heidegger and 'the jews',* 'Much rests upon what is meant by "can lend itself". In any case, Lyotard clearly and forcefully rejects the alternative, 'if a great thinker, then not a Nazi; if a Nazi, then not a great thinker,' which he claims, regardless of which thesis is chosen, is always a way of simplifying both the philosophical *and* the political implications of the work of someone of the importance of Heidegger' (ibid.: xviii).

Lyotard is struck by the fact that Heidegger's thought which is 'so devoted to remembering that a forgetting (of Being) takes place in all thought, in all art, in all "representation" of the world, how could it possibly have ignored the thought of "the jews," which, in a certain sense, thinks, tries to think, nothing but that very fact? How could this thought forget and ignore "the jews" to the point of suppressing and foreclosing to the very end the horrifying (and inane) attempt at exterminating, at making us forget forever what, in Europe, reminds us, ever since the beginning, that "there is" the Forgotten?' (Lyotard 1990:4). If this is a terrible 'fault' in Heidegger's work, sometimes it seems as if Lyotard is saying that it is connected to the Western philosophical tradition itself, to the persistence or endurance of the question of Being in its thinking. As David Carroll has it 'The people responsible for the guardianship of Being are still too Western (that is, Greco-German), too "fashioned", and too philosophical a people for Lyotard' (1990:xxii).

Countering Heidegger's 'fashioning of a people', Lyotard draws upon a different notion of 'the people' linked to his notion of 'the jews':

> The 'people' dispersed in the desert, refusing to fashion themselves into a 'people', or to project themselves according to what is 'proper' to them alone, having learnt that unity and properness are neither in their power nor in their duty, that even the pretension to be the guardian of the Forgotten lacks consideration for it, since it is the Forgotten that holds the 'people' hostage whatever their 'fashion' of being together.
>
> (1990)

There is something awkward in the way Lyotard talks of 'the jews' which come to exist in a kind of symbolic space which he seems to question in his sense of what is 'too philosophical'. Of course there could be no notion of 'the jews' without the Jews and a particular Jewish tradition and ethics. We lose a sense of the diverse ways in which Jews have been together. Lyotard leaves us without an analysis of the ways 'the jews' are connected to and different from the Jews and their histories. In what sense is it 'the Forgotten' that holds the 'people' hostage? For it is not the Jews who have for long periods forgotten their own histories, even if this has often become their predicament in an Enlightenment vision of modernity. It is 'others' who have forgotten the Jews.

For Lyotard 'the jews' represent a resistance to the foundational thinking of the West. They are in perpetual exodus, both from themselves and from the Law

they attempt to respond to, but can never adequately respond. The community of 'the jews' is without a project for its unification and is, in this sense, an 'unfashioned' and 'unworked' community. This is what explains why for Lyotard justice demands that 'the people' be thought of in terms of 'the jews'. Justice demands that there cannot be any easy reconciliation and modernity is questioned because of its insistence of turning the different–the 'other'–into an instance of 'the same'. It has been the suppression of difference in the name of some unitary notion of the 'human' that has characterized a western philosophical tradition. This was a tradition that excluded and forgot what the Jews had to offer. This is why, in Lyotard's terms, they serve as such a sharp reminder of the forgotten.

Philosophy and Judaism

For Lyotard 'the jews' exist as a disturbance to the terms of a Western philosophical tradition that is largely cast in Greek terms. They cannot be completely forgotten yet they cannot be heard either. Within modernity Jewish philosophy was deemed to be a separate stream that had to do with religious thought. It was to be taught, if at all, in theology but it was not to find any space within philosophy. If Maimonides or Spinoza were to find a place it was not as Jewish thinkers who were thinking both within and against particular traditions of thought and feeling. This uneasy relationship still exists, where Jewish philosophy still exists in an uneasy exile. But this is part of what Lyotard can help us rethink, as the boundaries between different disciplines begin to soften. It is also an issue for Levinas who thinks about the conflicts Greek/Jew in different ways.[12]

This is the way that Lyotard thinks of 'the jews' in relation to the West:

> It seems to me, to be brief that 'the jews' are within the spirit of the Occident that is so preoccupied with foundational thinking, what resists this spirit; within its will, the will to want, what gets in the way of this will; within its accomplishments, projects, and progress, what never ceases to open the wound of the unaccomplished. 'The jews' are the irremissible in the West's movement of remission and pardon. They are what cannot be domesticated in the obsession to dominate, in the compulsion to control domain, in the passion for empire, recurrent ever since Hellenistic Greece and Christian Rome. 'The jews,' never at home where they are, cannot be integrated, converted or expelled. They are always away from home when they are at home, in their so-called own tradition, because it includes exodus as its beginning, excision, impropriety, and respect for the forgotten.
>
> (1990:22)

Lyotard is clear that 'The anti-Semitism of the Occident should not be confused with its xenophobia; rather, anti-semitism is one of the means of the apparatus of its culture to bind and represent as much as possible–to protect against–the originary terror, actively to forget it' (ibid.: 23). It represents a history that is so easily forgotten; it also represents something more. As Lyotard reminds us 'One

converts the Jews in the Middle Ages, they resist by mental restriction. One expels them during the classical age, they return. One integrates them in the modern era, they persist in their difference. One exterminates them in the twentieth century' (ibid.: 23). But here Lyotard is reminding us of the histories of 'real Jews' for it is a history that real people have to come to terms with, as a remnant survives in Europe to reconstruct what it means to be Jewish, 'after Auschwitz'.

But in the years after the war there was a collective forgetting as people in Europe wanted to put this history behind them so that 'life could return to normal'. But what could this 'normality' mean for a generation that was born in the shadows of Auschwitz? Even the survivors learnt not to talk to *their* children; they wanted to 'protect' the next generation, for we were to present a new beginning. As Kitty Hart shares her experience in *Return to Auschwitz*. (1981), as a child survivor she was warned not to talk to her own family about what she had been through for this would only prove embarrassing to them and everyone in England wanted to put the war behind them. So it was that a deafening silence passed over these events as the Jewish community, in England at least, found itself frozen and unable to come to terms with what had happened.[13] This was also reflected in the larger intellectual culture that so often passed over these events in silence. It took over forty years in the wilderness, before people were ready to begin to share more of what had happened.

Lyotard is insisting that Europe has to remember as he helps us understand the centrality of anti-semitism in the history of the West. We do not want to recognize how we live in a different world after Auschwitz that calls for a different kind of philosophy and social theory–one which does not forget so easily. As Lyotard has it 'But this slaughter pretends to be without memory, without trace, and through this testifies again to what it slaughters: that there is the unthinkable, time lost yet always there, a revelation that never reveals itself but remains there, a misery; and, that this misfortune, this soul, is the very motive of thought' (1990:23).

For many Jews it was impossible to imagine what was to happen to them, for in Western Europe they often felt they were citizens 'like everyone else'. In the middle-class they often felt secure in their rights and they learnt that rights were to be their guarantee to a sense of human dignity. Lyotard quotes the little child of Sighet in Elie Wiesel's story *Night* 'The Germans were already in the town, the Fascists were already in power, the verdict had already been pronounced, and the Jews of Sighet continued to smile' (ibid.: 19). This does not simply reflect a lack of political awareness or a culpable innocence. Many Jews had learnt to see themselves through the eyes of the Christian West. They were so identified with, say, German philosophy and culture that Jewishness only had to do with the personal sphere of religious belief. It is as if they had forsaken the right to recognize traditions of Jewish philosophy and culture and so been disempowered in their own eyes. This was part of the tragedy of Enlightenment for the Jews and it is partly what allows Lyotard to write that 'The extermination falls upon them, and they are unable to represent it to themselves. Incredulous, they have to learn

from others that it is they who are to be exterminated, it is they who have been represented as the enemy in the Nazi madness' (ibid.: 27).

So for Lyotard the Nazi attempt to exterminate European Jewry cannot be understood as an aberration, though he also slips into the language of madness. Rather it is 'an extreme way of repeating the traditional "adjustment" by which Europe has, since Christianity, hoped to place outside of itself this inexpressible affection by naming it: "the jews," and by persecuting it'. But this also shows the weakness of Lyotard's position and the ease with which he can unwittingly reproduce the silencing of Jewish traditions and cultures.[14] It is too easy to confuse the 'real' Jews with 'the jews' that he creates as a category. He tends to fall into treating Jews in traditional terms, through what they lack, so echoing a dominant Christian tradition he might otherwise question. Sometimes his discussion is confusing and difficult to follow where he treats an 'absence of representability, absence of experience, absence of accumulation of experience (however multimillenial), interior innocence, smiling and hard, even arrogant, which neglects the world except with regard to its pain—these are the traits of a tradition where the forgotten remembers that it is forgotten, "knows" itself to be unforgettable, has no need of inscription' (Lyotard 1990:28). It is difficult not to feel some of the very anti-semitic notions that Lyotard would otherwise question.

This is a problem with Lyotard's notion of 'the jews' which too easily becomes an empty signifier that works to deny real Jews their traditions of philosophy and social theory. So it reproduces some of the difficulties he wants to engage with for his strategy works to leave Jews without their own voice. Somehow they become subsumed, made to serve a role in relation to European culture that can so easily serve to reinforce their own silencing. Raised as a child within Catholicism he does not say enough about the forms of Christian anti-semitism he was brought up to accept, though in an introduction that he wrote to the Vienna Conference (1989) he acknowledges that

> I also know the power of healing and forgetting, of seduction that can be exercised over individual and collective consciousness by *one* Catholicism that is present in all national Catholicisms, and that is Roman. What I fear here is the conjunction of catholicity and the tradition of the Reich. For historic, geographical, and political reasons, Austria has been able to heal the Shoah without working it out: that is my fear and my prejudice.
>
> (Heidegger and 'the jews': A Conference in Vienna and Freiburg, 1989:135)

Lyotard was visiting for a series of meetings on the fiftieth anniversary of Kristallnacht somehow reassured that 'My imagination was no longer preoccupied by "Austria" but by real Austrians, committing themselves to the task of working through the poorly healed trauma completely' (ibid.: 136).

Here we find a helpful echo with 'Austria' and the real Austrians where a shift is to be welcomed. We do not have the same process with real Jews which would

help to recognize their struggles with representing Jewish history, philosophy and culture. But the difficulty which Lyotard has in making this transition seems to be echoed in difficulties coming to terms with his own history in relation to both Catholicism and France. This is evidenced in his last preliminary remark where he acknowledges that 'I have not forgotten that my country, alone among those of "democratic" Europe, managed to produce a "state" capable of active collaboration with Hitler. Thus I do not come before you to speak as a Frenchman to Austrians. We speak together, if you like, as Europeans who are trying to forget' (ibid.: 136). But is the 'thus' helpful here for does it not contain its own form of forgetting? It might be that he has to learn how to talk as a Frenchman first and also how to come to terms with traces of his own catholicism. It is a different form of universalism encoded in 'as Europeans' that is suspect, at least for the moment.

We have different things to remember because the personal and national histories that we carry have sought to forget different things. There is also a different kind of remembering that is at stake for Jews and in a different way, for Germans. There has been a silence on both sides, though it is a different kind of silence. I know how little I was told by my mother who left Vienna after Kristallnacht. It was too painful for her to accept her own sense of rejection by the culture she had grown up to love and identify with. It was enough for her to have survived and she did not want to talk about what had happened because it was too painful. At some level she carried an anger and frustration that would break through the surface. As children we felt it was often out of control, but we often took it. Unconsciously we learnt to carry many of the unresolved feelings. We were also shamed with the common notion that 'they went like sheep to the slaughter' with the implied suggestion that if they did not defend themselves, how could they expect others to.

I know that young Germans carry a different history as a second generation. They had to deal with a different kind of silence. I was recently told by a young woman that she was beaten every Sunday just because she refused to eat meat. For her father having meat on the table was a sign that the war was over and her refusal was an affront he could not tolerate. It brought back his experience as a soldier. His unresolved anger was taken out on his daughter. But he would not talk about it. She felt unsafe whenever referred to as German, as if it meant she was not being recognized as an individual in her own right. There is a flight from national identity and a seeking after a liberal universalism that still makes it difficult to fly the German flag. In its own way this is dangerous and the denial only serves to fuel a renewed anti-semitism and xenophobia in a younger generation who want to escape from an inheritance of guilt and shame. Again there is an issue of how people are to come to terms with their own history, not just intellectually but at a feeling level too. It is the conversation between the generations that has not really happened in families. There is a sense often that the feelings are just too difficult to handle.

In Lyotard's 1989 talk he offers a further clarification: 'the expression "the jews" refers to all those who, wherever they are, seek to remember and to bear witness to something that is constitutively *forgotten,* not only in each individual mind, but in the very thought of the West. And it refers to all those who assume this anamnesis and this witnessing as an obligation, a responsibility, or a debt, not only towards thought, but towards justice' (1989:141). This is a fine sentiment but it threatens to make everyone into 'the jews' for who can refuse the invitation when it is offered in such times, at the same time as forgetting not only the Jews and their histories as a people, but also the discrete and particular histories of women, of children, of people of colour, of gays and lesbians. For it is important to recognize that we cannot remember for others, we can only support them in their own remembering as they struggle to find their own voices. In this regard Jewish women and Jewish men carry a different history and relation to the tradition, as do Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews, as do gay men and lesbian women. It is the recognition of the diversity of human voices that gets lost in an assumed focus upon textuality.

Yet at the same time it is because the Jews share a particular history in relation to the West, that Lyotard takes them as the prime representative of 'the jews'. He tends to think of this primarily in Freudian terms since this unconscious affect is 'a representative without a representation' (1989:142). The link to Heidegger becomes clear. 'The discussion of philosophical representations in the West, which has been the object of Heideggerian anamnesis since 1934, is dedicated to leaving this affect forgotten' (ibid.: 143). As Lyotard puts it elsewhere 'Heidegger's political engagement within the National Socialist Party in 1933 and 1934 is one thing; his absolute silence (except for one phrase) concerning the Shoah right up to his death is another' (ibid.: 136). For Lyotard 'this silence affects what is most essential in Heidegger's thought' (ibid.: 137). He seeks to show that 'in Heidegger's "Nazi" engagement there is at the same time an intrinsic consistency with the existential-ontological thought of *Sein und Zeit* and an inconsistency. This inconsistency consists in missing the deconstructive task of thought in various ways' (ibid.: 145).

What is being forgotten for Lyotard is crucial to the history of the Jewish people which allows him to think 'the jews' in his way. This is the way he explains it in the conference paper :

> In Western history, the Jewish condition, and it alone, is the impossible witness, always improper (there are only bad Jews), to this unconscious affect. It alone admits that an event has 'affected' (does not cease to affect) a people without that people being able or permitted to represent it, that is, to discover and restore its meaning. This event is called the Covenant that the (unnameable) Lord has imposed on a people (the Hebrews) who are not ready to submit and respect it. The anguished (exultant and painful) violence of this seizure is accompanied by a promise of forgiveness.

> Thus it is that the Jews cannot manage to find their place in the systems by which thought is represented in the politics and social practices of the European West. They cannot form a 'nation' in the medieval sense, nor a people in the modern sense. The law forbids them to acquire the communitarian status of an ethnic group. Their relation to the event of the Covenant and the Promise is a relation of dependence, not a relation to a land and a history but a relation to the letters of a book and to a paradoxical temporality.
>
> (ibid.: 145)

Not only does the Covenant mean that the Jews stand alone as a people but it is said that Jews have to imagine themselves present at Sinai as if the Covenant was not simply made with their ancestors but with themselves in the present.[15] This offers a different relationship with time and a specific notion of community. But Lyotard gives us a Christian reading which ties the Covenant to what he deems to be a 'Promise of forgiveness'. There are echoes of a redemption in a world to come and a Christian reading that does not seek out Jewish readings of the Covenant. As Lyotard presents it 'Anyone who represents himself as the Messiah (Jesus) is suspect. He is suspected of being only a "screen memory" that betrays the immemorial event of the Law' (ibid.: 145). But this is a suspect reading that ignores the tradition of Jewish messianism. Rather than giving voice to a distinct Jewish tradition of philosophy and interpretation, we find that the Jewish experience is being subsumed and fixed in Lyotard's abstracted narrative of 'the jews'.

The Jewish tradition is less concerned with forgiveness in a world to come than in the sanctification of the life we live in this world. This is the entrance of eternity that Levinas talks of. It is a different vision of time which allows for the meaningfulness of moments when the still small voice of eternity can be heard. Jonathan Sachs (1991) presents a challenge to the implicit Christianity in Lyotard's account. According to him Judaism's unique vitality lies in the fact that the Torah charts a new path between an ascetic ethic which equates spirituality with an abandonment of pleasure and a hedonistic ethic that identifies it with the pursuit of pleasure.[16] Sachs claims that Judaism 'is *both* other-worldly *and* this-worldly. It does not abandon pleasure nor does it worship it. Instead, it sanctifies it. Rather than forcing us to choose between heaven and earth, Judaism is a sustained discipline in bringing heaven down to earth. That is why, for us, the holiest things are at the same time the simplest things: eating, drinking, fellowship, hospitality.'

Jewish voices

For Lyotard it is 'the jew' that represents 'the other' for it is the Jewish experience that cannot be represented within the dominant discourses of the West. Within modernity Jews learn to treat themselves as rational selves and to accept that, as Jews, they cannot be visible within the public realm of politics. It is only as a rational self speaking in the universal terms of reason that the Jewish man in particular can feel entitled to speak. This is the way he has to learn to present himself to speak on behalf of his wife and children. For women are also silenced within the sphere of religion where the ritual of the synagogue is set in male terms with women largely being consigned in orthodox traditions, as onlookers. It has been crucial for feminists to assert that they were an equal presence at Sinai when the Covenant was made, even if they have been marginalized in the long history of rabbinic Judaism.[17] Women have had to remember this for themselves, as they struggle to find their own voice within a patriarchal tradition that has long marginalized their spiritual experience. It is not enough for 'the jews' to have an abstract commitment to remember, for it is important for differences to be recognized and to realize that some people have the power to forget.

Within postmodern social theory we have learnt a new sensitivity to the difficulties of representation. Within modernity it was white, heterosexual, Christian men who were supposed to be able to represent the interests of 'others' for they alone could take their reason and rationality for granted. It is in the context of a secular rationalism, as Susan Griffin (1980) has recognized in *Pornography and Silence,* that women, Jews and people of colour are in some ways identified as being closer to nature. She helps us think out the connections between racism, anti-semitism and misogyny that find themselves positioned in relation to each other within an Enlightenment rationalism.[18] This is born out, for instance in Weininger's influential *Sex and Character* (1906) where we find that the Jewish male is feminized and so unable to think creatively in terms of a universal reason. In Kantian terms he is positioned with women and people of colour. They are not 'real' men but constantly have to be on the lookout so as to be able to imitate ethical behaviour.[19]

bell hooks recognizes the love that Black men can also feel for white men in her essay 'Doing it for Daddy':

> Patriarchy invites us all to learn how to 'do it for daddy', and to find ultimate pleasure, satisfaction, and fulfillment in that act of performance and submission. …Representations that socialise black males to embrace subordination as 'natural' tend to construct a world view where white males are depicted as all-powerful. To become powerful, then, to occupy that omnipotent location, black males (and white females) must spend their lives striving to emulate white men. This striving is the breeding ground among black males for a politics of envy that reinforces the underlying sense that they lack worth unless they receive the affirmation of white males.
>
> (Berger, Wallis and Watson, 1995:99)

In different ways, this is also echoed the experience of many Jewish men who learn to judge themselves not in terms of their own making. Rather they learn to fear their inner responses which might only serve to betray a Jewishness that they are doing their best to curb and control. These are anxieties that are often sublated within postmodern discussions of hybrid identities. It is presented as a much easier matter for people to create their own identities out of what is culturally available. Often questions are silenced as we worry that we must be appealing to some notion of 'authentic' identity, when often the issues are more complex than can be illuminated within this duality. At school I wanted to be 'like everyone else' so that I learnt to imitate behaviours because I could not learn what it meant to 'be English' at home. Of course it could mean many things, but I was concerned to be accepted by the boys I related to at school.

This is part of a process of dispersion and de-centring which is familiar in the experience of many marginalized groups who within an Enlightenment vision of modernity grow up aspiring to be 'like everyone else'. There is a sense in which they cannot be grounded in their own history and culture for this comes to be demeaned and devalued within their own eyes. In different ways it is deemed to be 'backwards'–'foreign'/uncivilized. Rather you grow up often willing to leave your own history and culture behind in the aspiration to become 'modern'/Western and crucially 'like everyone else'. In my own experience this meant a willingness to learn what it meant to be 'English'–something that I could not learn from within my own family. Rather I often had to learn to imitate other boys at school, watching for signs and learning to adapt my behaviours so that I could learn to 'pass' within the dominant culture.

If they liked football then it was difficult for me to think that I might not like football, for this could so easily be used against me–or so I feared–as something that might betray my 'foreign' origins. I knew that I was Jewish and so 'different' from others but growing up in England in the 1950s into a culture of assimilation there was a strong pressure to feel that I was 'English'–like everyone else. There was an intolerance of difference, for difference could so easily be a sign of 'foreignness' and there was a prevailing feeling that Jews could be acceptable if they were 'like everyone else'. I felt that I was 'English' because I was born in England but I also felt that I could not be sure of this because my parents were 'foreign'. This was part of a double consciousness. It reflected the fact that you were living in two discrete worlds. You became so adept in the switching that you barely recognized that it happened. Again this is familiar to many immigrant and refugee communities. But this involved a mode of self-policing and regulating of the boundaries that can become almost automatic. In the different contexts you learn to curb traits that might show that you are 'different'. You learn to adapt to the contexts you are in.

Within an Enlightenment vision there is a prevailing, if unspoken, fear of difference. This is linked to 'otherness' but it cannot be generalized. Lyotard is not helpful in making 'the jew' stand for others, for not only does this serve to deny the historical experience and specificity of Jewish cultures, histories and

identities but it can so easily–even if not intended–render 'the Jew' *invisible* in different terms. For 'the jew' so easily becomes a floating signifier, assuming whatever meanings are at play within a particular text and the very diversity of meanings serves to prove that 'the Jew' does not exist for herself/himself but just through the reflections of others. So it is the anti-semite who somehow brings 'the Jew' into existence. This in part was Sartre's early position in *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1960). It was the discourses of anti-semitism which helped to construct 'the Jew' and in some sense helped to keep 'the Jew' alive. So, put crudely, if there was no anti-semitism Judaism would wither away. Sartre questioned this position towards the end of his life and the negative vision it sustains of Jewish traditions. He eventually came to recognize the distinct cultural, historical and spiritual traditions of Judaism.

Identities and differences

Not only does Lyotard's notion that 'the jew' can somehow serve to symbolize 'others' who would be 'forgotten' within the dominant traditions of the West do a disservice to Jewish traditions, it also works to flatten the experience of women, people of colour, gays and lesbians who are deemed as 'others'. It tends to merge what needs to be understood in its diversity. In its own way it threatens to see 'others' as somehow lumped together and evaluated in relation to a norm. In this way it serves to unwittingly perpetuate an Enlightenment vision, which it otherwise seeks to challenge. It also makes it difficult to understand the diversity of Jewish traditions, both Ashkenazi and Sephardi and the tensions and contradictions that have existed between them in different times and places.

This also affects how we understand the significance of Auschwitz for different Jewish communities as well as *how* we are to remember Auschwitz in its relation to modernity. It is important that for Lyotard Auschwitz does not present itself as an aberration or a moment of madness, but as the end of a long historical process of Christian anti-semitism. But the Shoah can only be understood, as Bauman also claims, if we also grasp it within the terms of modernity. For Lyotard also questions the idea that Auschwitz represents an irrational 'other' that can be set against the rational project of modernity. This forces us to ask difficult questions, as we have been trying to, about the conditions of freedom and equality that are offered within the terms of modernity.[20]

Auschwitz has left its mark not only on Jews and Jewish histories but on Europe and its visions of the modern world. For Auschwitz says more about modernity in its Enlightenment vision than it says about Jewish history and culture. But who is to speak after Auschwitz? Who is entitled to speak and who needs to learn to listen and remain silent? But why has it been so difficult to listen and learn from the survivors? For years in the 1950s and 1960s this dark period in European history was passed over in silence. There was denial that was difficult to crack and as Lyotard recognized it is only recently that Austria has begun to think seriously about its own collusions. It was much easier for people to present

themselves as victims of Nazism so as to avoid asking difficult questions about their own silence as bystanders and perpetrators when it came to the treatment of Jews, gypsies and homosexuals. Lyotard helps us think of denial as a form of 'forgetting', not simply on the part of individuals but also in terms of collective memories. It is not simply a matter of identifying the 'guilty' parties, allowing them to carry the blame for others. It involves a deeper remembering of what has been so easily 'forgotten' in the histories of the West.

When we think about the ways the West presents itself, as the Age of Reason presenting the identification of reason, science and progress after the long night of feudalism, we need to remember what is forgotten in this story we tell so often in school. The significance of the witch-burnings in the silencing of women and the re-ordering of gender relations somehow drops from view. The place of slavery in sustaining the early developments of capitalism and the meaning this has for the ordering of relations of 'race' is also a marginalized part of the story. It was a dominant white, heterosexual masculinity that could alone take its inner relationship with reason for granted so it could speak for others, because in different ways they were defined as lacking a relationship to reason that would allow them to tell their own stories. In this dominant tradition men learn to speak before they have learnt how to listen.

After Auschwitz it was difficult for the survivors to talk about the horrors they lived through for often there is guilt at having survived at all. There is an abiding sense that survival in no way indicates goodness, and that the good had long perished. In the early postwar years they soon learnt that people did not want to hear what they had to say. Some felt that their experiences of war had proved that it was just too dangerous to admit to being Jewish so that they brought up their children without a knowledge of their Jewish identity. Often this made it harder for people in the second generation to find their own voice, for often they were ignorant of what their parents had gone through. There was an uneasy silence around the events of the war. Sometimes they had to prove through their own achievements, that their parents had not suffered in vain. Often they were made to carry the unresolved feelings of their parents which could make it difficult to discern their own feelings and separate from their parents emotionally. Sometimes they had to realize their parents' broken dreams which made it difficult to identify with their own.

In the shadows of Auschwitz it has been difficult for the second generation to find their own voices. Torn between wanting to be accepted as 'English' and not wanting to betray their own Jewishness, it has taken time to explore their own experience and lift some of the shame so often identified with being Jewish after the war. There was a strong pressure to be 'normal', as if this alone could redeem the sufferings of the parental generation. This can create its own intensity and unease at a sense of living in fragments. Rather than simply developing something new as a hybrid identity, there is an abiding sense of unease relating to whether you are entitled to exist at all. The opening lines of Leah Thorn's poem 'Stories in Second Generation Voice' expresses some of this:

I don't tell my stories often

I fear being too intense
Overbearing

I'm scared, when people hear my stories they'll think there's
something
wrong with me
find me inconsequential

I fear indifference most of all because it was that
not hate
that
killed my grandparents

(May 1996:10)

You begin to think that your history is 'normal' so that you can be genuinely surprised at the shock people feel when you tell them of how your family was killed in the Shoah. This is also because you can feel that you are telling a story, which at some level you have yet to feel for yourself. This is an issue of memory in its relation to feeling. For you might have learnt the history intellectually but not found ways to integrate it emotionally. I know this from my own experience, having known that my uncles were killed in the Warsaw Ghetto and in Treblinka but having felt that this somehow happened to someone else. It was only when I recently got a document which confirmed what had happened, that I could begin to deal with the memories emotionally. I had learnt to believe that my childhood was little different from other children. At some level I did not want to know different and I still find it difficult to do so.

If parents do *not* want to remember because the past is too full of rejection and pain, then it is difficult for the second generation to remember for itself. Rather, growing up as a child in a refugee family in the post-war years we were to live without history and without memory. We were to be 'English' and we were to be different from all those Jews who had died in camps. We were to be 'normal' and were to be 'like everyone else'. So it was difficult to acknowledge a history that would signify a difference and in many ways it was easier to live as if there was no painful past that we somehow carried in our bones. In terms of an Enlightenment vision of modernity, we did not have a past to remember only a future to look forward to. This was a difficult dream for us, but many of us in the second generation did our best to live it out. If we left Judaism behind as a religion that we no longer shared, it seemed even easier to identify with an Enlightenment rationalism.

An Enlightenment vision encouraged people to identify with the future where they could be free and equal and to renounce the past as a realm of unfreedom and determination. To allow yourself to be influenced by your parents' history

reflected a failure to live the freedom that was yours and to think for yourself as a free and autonomous individual. This Kantian vision of freedom gave little respect to memory and even less to a sense of collective roots. Much postmodern theory has continued its questioning of the search for roots, as if it has to mean the search for an authentic tradition waiting to be rediscovered in the past. But a relationship to histories and memories has a more complex part to play in the creation of identities. But this is easily forgotten within a Kantian vision which seeks to deny the significance of history and culture as forms of unfreedom.

This aspiration has a particular weight for Jews growing up in the shadows of the Holocaust. How could our lives be 'normal' and how could we be 'like everyone else' even if we were brought up to be so? It is so easy to feel 'inconsequential' as if you have no right to exist in the face of such horror. It is so much easier to put all this pain and suffering aside and to pretend to live a 'normal' life. Who would want to deal with such a history? Too often we have learnt to speak to our children about such events, before really having learnt how to speak to ourselves. This is a crucial difficulty in Jewish education in a post-Holocaust period. The burden can seem too heavy to carry and it can feel so much more tempting to leave this history behind. It can seem 'safer' not to have anything to do with it and many Jewish people take this option, breaking all connections with their Jewish identities. Supposedly it does not matter to them where their parents came from or what they have lived through. That is the past and they are to live in the present.

With postmodernism we often learn to construct identities in the present and so not to allow ourselves to be influenced by the narratives of the past. This is to unwittingly remain within a Kantian ethic though breaking with aspects of it. People are to live their own truths in the present, refusing the grand narratives of modernity which might otherwise insist upon transcendent conceptions of truth waiting to be realized through the historical process. But life is more complex and it is not always possible to create fragmented identities within the present. Lyotard's unsteady rejection of history and his uneasy relationship to truth does not help here. For it is not easy to live in pieces, celebrating the fragmentations of postmodern identities. It can be painful and too easy to feel that you are being torn apart, or that you do not exist at all in some way but are somehow trapped into responding to the expectations of others. You can feel that you are 'fitting in'/adjusting to others but at some level betraying an inner truth that is difficult to voice within the terms of much postmodern thinking.

For Jewish people growing up in the shadows of the Shoah it can be difficult to maintain a sense of your own identity, whilst also being aware of the pain and rejection that is often unconsciously carried within families. The parents' denial can leave children with an abiding sense of guilt for existing at all. Often this guilt is communicated unconsciously as children are left with an uneasy sense that it is up to them to redeem their parents' broken lives. Sometimes the second generation have to break with the narratives that have been passed on, to find ways of expressing their own truths. Hanna Schlesinger writes in the *Second Generation*

Voice about her experience of Commemoration Days at Haberdasher Aske's School for Girls, how they 'came to these words of the anthem (taken from the Book of Ecclesiastes, praising Jewish leaders):

> 'And some there be, which have no memorial, who are perished as though they had never been. Their bodies are buried in peace, but their names liveth for evermore.' This hymn was torture for me for seven years of Commemoration Days. My voice would not come out and I stood there, rigid, trying desperately not to shriek out loud with pain, outrage and loss. Tears always broke through. These words were a lie. There were too many who 'had no memorial'. Too many had 'perished as though they had never been', after persecution, starvation, torture, cruelty beyond imagining, but they were part of me and I of them. Their bodies were not 'buried in peace'. They were kicked into mass graves dead and still alive after having been stripped naked and shot. They were gassed and became ash in the sky falling over the land after having been robbed of the gold fillings in their teeth and the hair of their heads. Soap was made of their fat and lampshades of their skin. Worst of all, their names, far from 'living for evermore' were lost, lost in a vast number, six million, meaningless in its horror.
>
> (May 1996:5)

These words are still difficult to write. We need to retain a vision of truth so that we can expose lies when they are spoken. We need to think very carefully before we abandon a notion of truth or think that it is enough to position it as an effect of particular discourses. It is not only that we create our own truths as we construct our own identities. Lyotard can help us with this as he can help us think about the difficulties of ethics, set within the Kantian terms of abstract moral principles, after Auschwitz. We are left with the question of how we are to think of ethics after Auschwitz, as we are left thinking whilst the embers are still warm in Bosnia, about the inhumanities that people do to each other. These are questions that an Anglo-American tradition of analytical moral philosophy has largely avoided. At least when I was a student in the 1960s these were not our concerns. Moral examples were more likely to be drawn from the polite conventions of a liberal moral culture.

As Simone Weil also recognizes, morality cannot be separated from politics and from issues of power and domination. But this does not mean that ethics can be reduced to politics but that we need different ways of exploring the relation between ethics and social theory. It is an issue, as Weil recognizes in the early 1940s, thinking in relation to the Nazi occupation of much of continental Europe, of the ease within modernity, but not only, with which we seem to be able to regard 'others' as 'less than human'.[21] Once the Jews could be represented as 'vermin' the path to genocide lay open. This is why it is crucial to think of real Jews in relation to their histories, cultures and spiritual traditions and why we have to reject talk of 'the jews' as symbolic representation of the 'forgetting' of 'others' that is structured into Western history and culture.

The importance of recognizing the ease with which we can treat 'others' as less than human and so deny the integrity of difference is something we can learn from diverse intellectual and spiritual traditions. The critique of ethnocentrism that Lyotard can help to foster has yet to give way to an appreciation of diverse traditions, including Judaism, that was systematically marginalized within an Enlightenment vision of modernity. The distinction Lyotard makes between real Jews and 'the jews' cannot be sustained. It serves to silence a Jewish tradition which it needs to learn to listen to. Within postmodern discourses it is too easy to identify critiques of humanism with a devaluation of the struggles we need to engage in to become human. We still need to learn *how* easy it is to treat others as 'less than human'. This has to do with truth and it has to do with power. It also has to do with ourselves: 'We may never say one thing with the mouth and another with the heart.'

NOTES

1 For a helpful discussion of how Jewish people were treated within the context of the Enlightenment and the changed status that was to be allowed to them, especially within Western Europe see Arthur Hertzberg (1970).

2 A discussion of how Jews and Judaism were represented within different periods within a Europe which so often presented itself in Christian terms is provided in *Antisemitism through the Ages* edited by Shmuel Almog (1988). See in particular 'The Church Fathers and the Jews in Writings Designed for Internal and External Use' by David Rokeah pp. 39–70 and 'The Devil and the Jews in the Christian Consciousness of the Middle Ages' by Robert Bonfil pp. 91–8.

3 Sartre reflects upon the intolerance that is very much a part of liberal conceptions of tolerance in *Anti-Semite and Jew*. He shows how Jews are divided against themselves through coming to see themselves through the eyes of a liberal moral culture. This is a form of double-consciousness as their Jewishness becomes a matter of private concern alone. Sartre questions his notion that Jewishness is itself a product of anti-semitism towards the end of his life. His changing conceptions of Jewish consciousness are explored by J.H.Friedlander in *Vilna on the Sein* (1990).

4 Lyotard's text *Heidegger and 'the jews'* (1990) brings together two separate pieces which reflect upon related themes and questions. The first piece is entitled 'the jews' and the second 'Heidegger'. As David Carroll says in the introduction 'Thought and writing thus have for Lyotard profound responsibilities to the "forgotten" and/as the unrepresentable. *Heidegger and "the jews"* is his own plea/command that the forgotten and the unrepresentable not be forgotten and left unrepresented' (foreword xiii).

5 Richard Cohen thinks about the changing status of Jews in the time of Napoleon in 'Jewish Election in the Thought of Rosenzweig' in *Elevations* (1994:3–39). It is part of an argument about the Jews' relationship with history whereby they stand as a reminder of a divine revelation that questions notions of historical relativism.

6 In *Kant, Respect and Injustice* (1986) I show how modernity is established in the terms of a secularized Protestantism. I argue that Kantian ethics allows for an inner relationship to reason as a source of freedom and autonomy whilst only an external and so contingent relationship to class, gender, 'race' and ethnicities. These marginalized

identities have to be resisted as forms of unfreedom and determination forming no part of dominant identities as rational selves.

7 In *Unreasonable Men* (1994a) I attempt to show how an Enlightenment vision of modernity is already set within the terms of a split Cartesian self–between 'reason' and 'nature'–so questioning the terms in which postmodern theories are so often set in contrast with modernity. It is because identities are *already* fragmented that ecology and feminisms, in their different ways, provide such radical challenges.

8 An important discussion of the ways Christianity's 'superseding' of Judaism and so its denial of its Jewish sources provides a model for the ways in which modernity in its relationship to nature is conceptualized, is provided by Franklin Littell *The Crucifixion of the Jews* (1975).

9 An insightful discussion which bears upon how Christian antisemitism is sustained in the West through the identification of Judaism with devalued and debased bodies and sexualities is provided in Daniel Boyarin *Carnal Israel* (1993). See also the more general historical discussion in David Biale *Eros and the Jews* (1992).

10 Showing the ways that antisemitism is tied up with Christianity and modernity will hopefully help to open up a much needed discussion about the relationship between racism and antisemitism. A useful contribution is provided in the concluding chapter in Paul Gilroy *Black Atlantic* (1993).

11 For a discussion of the persistence of antisemitism without Jews in postwar Poland and a consideration of some of the arguments between Jews and Poles in the aftermath of the Second World War see Victor J.Seidler *The Moral Limits of Modernity* (1991: 168–204).

12 A useful introduction to Levinas's thought on the relationship between Jew and Greek is provided by Susan A.Handelman *Fragments of Redemption* (1991). See also the essays collected in E.Levinas *Difficult Freedom* (1990), in particular, 'Antihumanism and Education' (277–88) and 'Signature' (291–5).

13 For a more general account of the Jewish refugee community in Britain which helps to give them a voice and which in different ways echoes what Kitty Hart had to say in *Return to Auschwitz* (1981) see *Continental Britons* by Marion Berghahn (1988).

14 For a different account written out of the sources of Judaism by a Jewish philosopher who had to leave Germany in the wake of the Holocaust, see Emile Fackenheim *Mend the World* (1987). See in particular the moving introductory essay given on his return to Cassell after 50 years.

15 An insightful exploration of the theme of Covenant in Jewish tradition and philosophy is provided by David Hartman in *A Living Covenant* (1985).

16 Jonathan Sachs writes about his interpretation of the relationship between Judaism and modernity in his interesting and accessible Reith lectures *The Persistence of Faith* (1991).

17 A moving exploration of the relationship of Judaism to feminism focusing upon issues of covenant is given by Judith Plaskow *Standing at Sinai* (1988).

18 Susan Griffin in *Pornography and Silence* (1980) has been an important voice in sustaining the connections, otherwise so easily forgotten within contemporary philosophy and social theory, between racism, antisemitism, misogyny and homophobia. Even though her notion of the 'pornographic mind' can be overgeneralized it can serve to remind us of connections.

19 An interesting discussion of Weininger's influential work linking his work to other discussions of Jewish difference is given by Sander Gilman in *Jewish Self-Hatred* (1989).

20 Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1990) raises important questions about the relationship of scientific rationalism, bureaucratic authority and the culture of modernity which helped to make the holocaust possible. For an account which opens up issues about the relationship of morality to modernity see the concluding chapter 'Modernity, Morality and Social Theory' in Victor J.Seidler *Recovering the Self* (1994b).

21 Simone Weil talks about the ease with which we can treat others as 'less than human' in her reflections on the Spanish Civil War. See her letters collected in *Seventy Letters* (1965). This is also a central theme in Chapter 7 in L.Blum and V.J.Seidler *A Truer Liberty* (1989:194–256).

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7

LOST IN THE POST

(Post)modernity explained to youth

John O'Neill

Ideally, the 'post-game' should be played by post. Of course, we 'bad readers', as Derrida (1988) calls us, shouldn't expect the mail to arrive, far less that it should be readable in any way that accords with our habits. Yet somehow the post does arrive and after all we do seem to be invited to read over the shoulder of the writer, busily declaring that s/he is absent, if not dead (O'Neill 1992). So, on with the game!

Dear Jean-François,

I've never had a card from a pagan before! I picked Toronto's CN Tower so you can see how much Canadians enjoy getting it up for the message. Actually, the ecstasy of communication (McLuhan, Baudrillard and yourself) leaves me out. The medium (desire) *isn't* the message–*mediation* is the message (Hegel). You won't like this–but I think the *Phenomenology* already did the postmortem on Postmodernism! But more later…

Regards,
John

Dear John,

So I wrote two bad books–the *Postmodern Condition*–for which Jameson should take some of the blame–and *Libidinal Economy,* whose recent translation will haunt me! Why is it so hard to dump Hegel/Marx/Freud? Our civilization is dead. It worships philosophical ghosts *(Geistes)* and admires only dead art. The kids don't have a chance! Capitalism desires for them, and science thinks for them–we must re-invent our kids!

Cordially,
Jean-François

Dear Jean-François,

It's your own fault! *The Postmodern Condition* seemed wrong-headed to me when I first read it in 1979–and even more so once one has any idea of the sociology of science. Why did you separate the language games of science and society *altogether*? Weber didn't do that and neither did Parsons/Merton/Kuhn. You talk as though sociology were nothing but wish-fulfillment and science nothing but oppression. Once you've raised this 'terrorist' prospect, you embrace the technoromance of public information banks! Meantime the computerization of all forms of work forces even the unemployed to look for a job on the screens that are shutting them out! The implosion of culturalism and psychoanalyticism in academia, on the other hand, is merely a language game! The current oversubscription to fictionality in the arts and sciences cuts them off from the hard facts of the political economy of symbolic capital. For what it's worth, science is realist and conformist within its disciplinary paradigms (O'Neill 1992) and fictional or revolutionary whenever theory and data work together to reconfigurate the paradigms (Kuhn, by the way took this from Fleck 1979/1935). Art is no different. In fact, it's just gaming to pretend otherwise about any social institution.

As ever,
John

Dear John,

You're such a pain in the ass! Get paranoid man, play with uncertainty and disbelief; quit trying to straighten things out!!! Forget Hegel and Marx; why hump around those old fairy tales of reason and freedom? Lighten up! Nowadays you don't need to be an author to write. That's the old game of shutting out the reader–the same way capitalism shuts out its consumers, the way communism shuts out the party faithful.

John, do yourself a favour. Come in/to Paris! It's the cafés, you see; they're the real site of revolution–the desiring machines of mini-talk, going anywhere/nowhere!

Up Yours 'truly',
Jean-François

P.S. This is all I'm trying to say in *The Postmodern Condition, Just Gaming* and *Pagan Instructions*.

Dear Jean-François,

Psychosis is OK with me–I can't imagine how anyone would learn anything without distant voices. But postmodernism makes listening more difficult than ever because it's

obsessed with its own voice. This is why I think it's bad for kids. By the way, Derrida's critique of phonocentrism can already be heard in Hegel's phenomenological critique of the rhetorical deafness of self-consciousness to mediation. Without the dialectic of otherness, it's surely a short road from subjectivity to psychosis. Lacan (1993) nicely borrows this from Hegel, i.e., psychosis speaks when self-reference drives all of one's discourse. But I need to write to you at greater length, if you can stand it! Or is 'it' Hegel who's writing to you???

All the best,
John

A child's guide to postmodernism

Lyotard's (1986) message that the grand narratives of knowledge and freedom are either extinct or incommensurable with the 'terrorist' language game of information was sent to young people, or at least to students. It was rejected by their teachers whose *ad hominem* attribution of the message to Lyotard drove him to explain himself to the kids once more. But it is hard to say who exasperates Lyotard the most–teachers or students. On balance, the (philosophy) teachers seem to be the biggest nuisance:

> Why is the reconstitution of a Hegelian process written more easily in the future? Narrative ease? Pedagogical ease? Why does a philosopher so hard on narrative, on *récit*–he always opposes it to the concept–why does he incite us to use a kind of conceptual narration?
>
> When Hegel is explained, it is always in a seminar and in telling students: the history of the concept, the concept of history. Rearing (the student), in French *élève:* that is the word I am treating here, like the thing, in every sense.
>
> Rearing (the student), *l'élève*. What is *élever* in general *(élevage, élévation, élèvement, breeding, elevation, education, upbringing)*? Against what is rearing *(une élève)* practised? To what is it answerable *[De quoi relève-t-elle]*? What does it relieve? What is *relever une élève,* relieving a rearing?
>
> There is some lightness in all this. The dream of the eagle is alleviating. Wherever it (ça) falls (to the tomb). And is sublimating.
>
> When a future is used for the student, it is a grammatical ruse of reason: the sense that reason will have meant (to say) is, in truth, the future perfect, the future anterior. The encyclopaedic version of the greater *Logic* (circular pedagogy, for the student) narrates itself in the future perfect.
>
> (Derrida 1986:15)

Like Derrida, Lyotard complains that teachers simply cannot give up the initiation of students into the thought conventions that are the very death of eventfulness. Teachers crush youth by allowing them neither to forget the past nor to imagine what might have been their future. But, the students themselves come to class

well adjusted to a society that has no time for what it considers childish games *(enfantillage)* of unlearning what they are supposed to learn in school. In fact, Lyotard is sick of their lack of narcissism and their collusion with conventional society. Their complete amnesia of the 'event' of childhood–for themselves and for their parents–drives Lyotard to look out for students over thirty-five whom professional life has taught that they need a degree in childhood:

> A new task for didactic thought: look for your childhood anywhere, even beyond childhood.
>
> (Lyotard 1986:160)

I think Lyotard abandons youth in the very act of trying to seduce them. His proposal to free the children from the master narrative cuts them off from an essential lesson of modernity, namely, the adventure of youth (Moretti 1987). In premodern society, youth is a liminal stage between childhood and adulthood and it is entirely subordinated to the drama of collective reproduction. With the transition from traditional to modern society, the apprenticeship of youth becomes more adventurous because social destiny is less predictable. Indeed, youth becomes the figure of a double adventure–of the discovery of one's self *(individuation)* and of finding one's social place *(conformity)*. Lyotard misconceives the grand narrative of reason and freedom by dislocating the formal contradiction between reason and freedom, or between society and the individual. But contradiction is constitutive of the master narrative of modernity (Lukács 1971/ 1920). One does not 'post' modernity by dissolving the dialectical transformation of contradiction in the grand narrative into the mini-narrative of unlimited individuation versus total conformity.

We cannot abandon the Hegelian-Marxist narrative because it is the cultural story of the transformation of society, mind and personality that figurates the history of philosophy, political economy and sociology. The antagonism between conformity and individuation, between lordship and bondage, between subjectivity and intersubjectivity demands their sublation *(Aufhebung)* but not the suppression of one or other side. Sublation is sublimation not repression. The desire to overcome repression without 'working through' *(durcharbeiten)* the necessity of sublimation results in the oppression of opposites–in an 'I' that merely declares itself a 'We' or a 'We' that is nothing but an 'I', as Hegel (1910:227) says. Individual and cultural maturity *(Mundigkeit)* are achieved through compromise and reconciliation *(Versöhnung)*, i.e., through dialectical communication. In this process the solipsistic subjectivity learns to distribute itself in the fourfold of an intra-subjectivity opened up by an inter-subjectivity. See Figure 7.1.

Hegel's account of the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness is taken by most commentators (Navickas 1978; Lowenberg 1965; O'Neill 1996) to occur through the experience of Desire. In the *Phenomenology,* Hegel historicizes consciousness as a structure-within-difference, as a living entity with subject (Ego) and object (Other) polarities that continually cancels any exclusivity in either

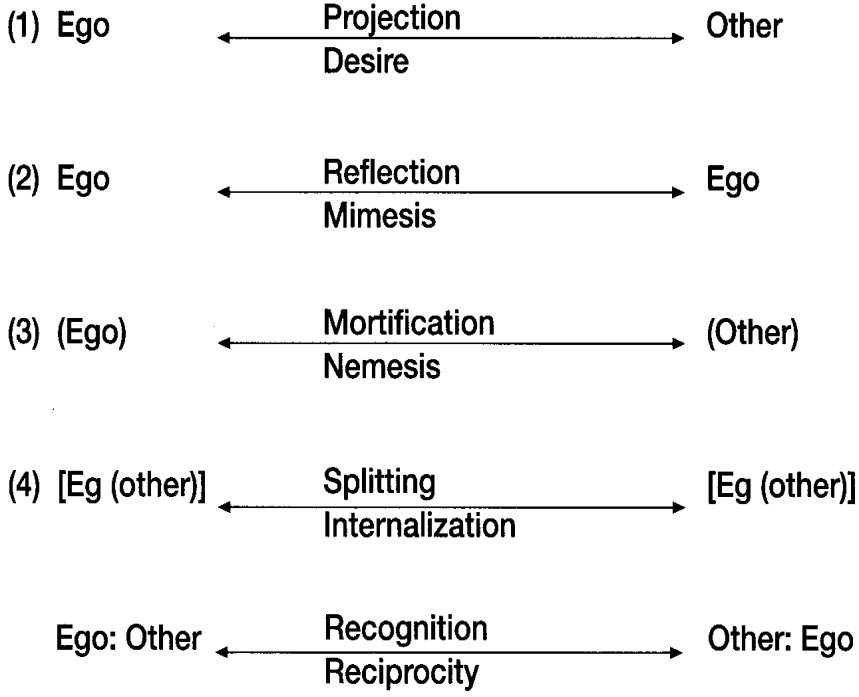

Figure 7.1 Dialectic of desire and recognition

object-awareness or self-awareness. In Figure 7.1, the desiring Ego (1) can never be satisfied on the level of appetite because the living body is a complex structure of differentiation and integration, involving higher levels of endo/exo-structuring. Hence, in stages (2) and (3) the senses are subject to fading and exhaustion in the wake of the embodied subject even before the ego encounters the higher level of intersubjectivity. The projection of subject and object-consciousness appears to break down in the experience of Desire since in cancelling its object the desiring consciousness merely reproduces its object as the essence of desire. Consciousness is therefore obliged to treat the object of this desire as something living; as an Other endowed with an opposing consciousness. Having achieved primacy over the object, self-consciousness has still to press on with the articulation of its own self-determination. To achieve this, in stage (4) self-consciousness must both split and integrate its awareness of its self *qua* 'self' and its awareness of objects as other than its self. Thereafter, consciousness exists in a *double entente* of mutual recognition, i.e., as an *intra-subjectivity* that is an *intersubjectivity*. Each consciousness achieves a social identity accorded to one another rather than project a possessive self excluding all others except as objects of appropriation and domination. Self-consciousness must seek reason and freedom as higher goods than its own independence since in the worst possible scenario only *one* self might survive the

struggle for life and death. But this negative freedom would return us to the very impossibility of self-possession that the *Phenomenology* recounts.

It is Hegel who explores the illusions of the sovereign subject commanding nature and others in the name of its independent desire and purpose. Hence his experiment with the minimal conditions of the state of nature to show that, even at the level of animality, life presupposes certain general categories, e.g., edible/inedible, if it is to achieve its barest aims. The heart of the matter *(die Sache selbst)* is reached when the predatory self realizes that by projecting every other thing as its thing, it is condemned to a fate that is always potentially its own death or enslavement. Strictly speaking, this moment of reflection is not available in the state of nature. It involves a complex inter- and intra-subjective splitting and recognition of the desire for society. In other words, human independence lies not in its origins but in its ends which we come to realize in society and history. Human nature, therefore, is second nature *(Bildung)*. Any question about human origins or ends presupposes a cultural narrative that is already under way. This cultural narrative, as we know it, is populated with the figures of Stoicism, Skepticism, the Covenant and the Social Contract, through which we understand ourselves on the way to the romance of individualism.

In the classical *Bildungsroman*–whose form *(Gestalt)* is operative in the Hegelian-Marxist narrative rejected by Lyotard–there are two principles at work (individuation and conformity) whose relative weight varies (third principle of reconciliation):

1 *the conformity principle,* i.e., transformations are clearly marked from beginning to end and are thereby intelligible as events in a story (of marriage) whose own narrativity is unthematic;
2 *the individuation principle,* i.e., transformations are not clearly marked but are open-ended and their (un)intelligibility (case history) raises the question of narrativity and closure (case history):
3 *the dialectical principle,* i.e., the apparent conflict between the adventure *(Bildungsroman)* of individuation, rejecting conformity and a final recognition of the necessity of conformity, subordinating individuation, represents the achievement of maturity (Mundigkeit) on the level of personality and society (grand narrative).

These relations are mapped in Figure 7.2.

Figure 7.2 is intended to show that if we take our instruction from the left side only (Lyotard) men we inscribe ourselves into a libidinal economy driven by pleasure, play and creativity. We seem to have overthrown the domination of the right hand rules of reality, sublimation and work by embracing anti-oedipus (Deleuze and Guattari 1977). But what can be learned from the legend of Hegel, Freud and Parsons (if read) is that both options are rhetorically overstated as absolute opposites and that each is mediated by the other, if it is to have any cultural sense. Social conformity is only regarded as an impediment to

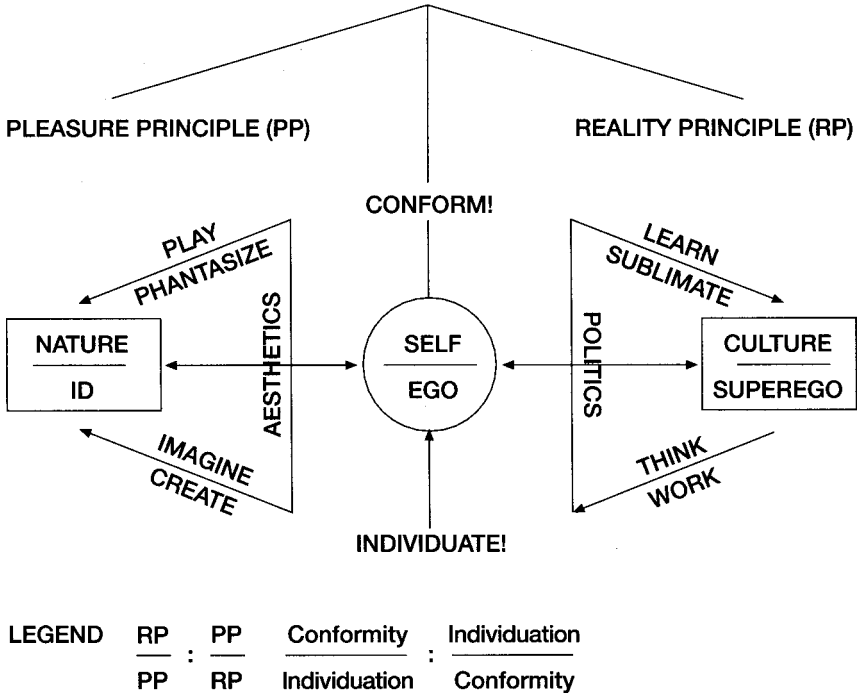

Figure 7.2 A. child's guide to modernity
Sources: Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920)
G.W.F.Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1807/1910)
Talcott Parsons, *Social Structure and Personality* (1964)

individuation where the latter embraces a possessive 'id-eology', as Hegel might have put it, while individuation is feared only by totalitarian rather than by communitarian society. The choice between conformity or individuation merely results in two repressive solutions, i.e., the reduction of politics to aesthetics or the repression of aesthetics by politics. What is missing is the dialectical mediation of conformity and individuation in a civic society.

Lyotard's position on the grand narrative is defiantly 'French' (Flaubert), youthfully resisting conformity, rather than 'German' (Goethe), coming to terms with society and maturity. But this means that Lyotard's instructions to children are at best only *half* the story–whereas the story is that there are always at least two sides to a story. They can only be separated to produce disaster. They are otherwise likely to interweave, separating and recombining–impurely but wisely:

> When we remember that the *Bildungsroman*–the symbolic form that more than any other has portrayed and promoted modern socialization –is also the *most contradictory* of modern symbolic forms, we realize that in our world

> socialization itself consists first of all in the *interiorization of contradiction*. The next step being not to 'solve' the contradiction, but rather to learn to live with it, and even to transform it into a tool for survival.
>
> (Moretti 1987:10)

Lyotard's (1984) message to children is—do not interiorize social contradictions! You will lose your youth! Acquire neither insides nor outsides—become a libidinal surface, a skin or film *(pellicule)* resistant to social inscription. Adopt the (ir) reality principle! All socialization is pathological; all identity demands the non-identity of others whom it necessarily excludes—of whom youth itself is the principle figure of marginalization. The language games of maturity and youth are incommensurable—their reconciliation *(Versöhnung)* is a myth grounded in the rites of castration and marriage that are the death of individuation. The language games of life and work are similarly incommensurable. The art of life demands an a-social (in)division of labour, an absolute waste of energy, a totally unorganizable body of excess. Be a *drifter*!

The children who follow Lyotard get the worst of both worlds—they neither integrate themselves into the commonality of everyday life, since their narcissism is too strong for that fate, nor do they aspire to transformation on the level of history and politics because they identify with infamy rather than fame. Infamy fattens personality and heterogeneity by compressing the past and the future into the moment whose event is total. The postmodern child is instructed in particularity, prejudice and partisanship paraded as ethico-epistemological insights into a world of suspicion and distrust—but not worked through in the forum of public opinion. The result is an implosion of mini-narratives in which individuals self-destruct or age prematurely rather than come to terms with institutions that are committed to preserving the critical tension between individual autonomy and civic cohesion. The public domain—its eyes and ears—drowns in individuated events that colloid/collide endlessly—unless switched off (O'Neill 1991). Thus television operates on desire like a fast food menu, i.e., to collapse interpretation and freedom into an instant that any exercise of interpretation would violate. To slow down the drift in which desire has already been read and incorporated outside of the public institutions of the family, community and civic state is to long for that cultural satellite Lyotard and Baudrillard have declared a dead star (O'Neill 1995). Such pronouncements seduce the child with a false identity between virtuality and social reality, underwritten by the commercial collapse of the difference between youth and maturity on the level of both the personality and society. Worst of all, the injunction that youth should be itself merely mortifies youth since youth cannot be possessed although it may be protracted, as it is among their aged rock stars. The latter portray the lack of institutional authority that otherwise instructs youth in the passage of youth to a maturity upon which old age will not fall as yet another disaster.

There is nothing an individual can claim about the world, himself or her relations that is uniquely intelligible or valuable or authenticated solely by one's experience of it:

> There is then, as much deception of itself as of others, if it is pretended that the 'bare fact' is one's sole concern. A consciousness that lays open a 'fact' soon learns that others hurry to the spot and want to make themselves busy there, like flies to milk newly put out; and they in their turn find out in its case that it is not dealing with 'fact' *qua* object, but with fact as 'its own'. On the other hand, if only action itself, the use of powers and capacities, or the expression of a given individuality, is to be the essential thing, they reciprocally learn that all are on the alert and consider themselves invited to deal with the matter, and that instead of a mere abstract action, or a single *peculiar* action, something has been elicited and exposed which was equally well *for others* or is a real intent. In both cases the same thing happens; and only appears to have a different significance by contrast with that which was accepted and assumed to hold on the matter. Consciousness finds both sides to be equally essential moments, and thereby learns what the nature of the 'fact of the matter', the real intent, is, viz. that it is neither merely 'fact', which is opposed to action in general and to individual action, nor action which is opposed to permanence and is the genus independent of these moments as its species.
>
> (Hegel 1910:439)

One's life, reasons and desires only achieve currency in a public world and a public discourse that they presuppose for their identification, evaluation and acknowledgement. The self, in other words, is a communicative self endlessly invoking a similarly communicative self to sustain its projects (O'Neill 1989). The 'missing subject' at the heart of modernity is that the self-identities we have come to cherish involve mis-recognition of the historical, social structures of mind, self and society:

> A certain mental breathing space seems indispensable to modern man, one in which his independence not only of any master but also of any god is affirmed, a space for his irreducible autonomy as individual, as individual existence. Here there is indeed something that merits a point-by-point comparison with a delusional discourse. It's one itself. It plays a part in the modern individual's presence in the world and in his relations with his counterparts. Surely, if I asked you to put this autonomy into words, to calculate the exact indefeasible freedom in the current state of affairs, and even should you answer, *the rights of man,* or *the right to happiness,* or a thousand things, we wouldn't get very far before realizing that for each of us this is an intimate, personal discourse which is a long way from coinciding with the discourse of one's neighbour whatsoever.
>
> (Lacan 1993:133)

Post-script

Between them, Lyotard and Derrida have made a mockery of the Hegel-Marx corpus in the name of transgressive thought and emancipatory writing. They rage against the three R's–reason, repression and revolution–as though they conveyed nothing but a deceitful lesson, a disappointed love. They defamilize Hegel and Marx, attacking them as fathers, mothers and sisters to renounce them, to reject their fascination and to rename themselves as self-born signatures to messages we may never get.

The potency of Hegel's Idea of the interpenetration of whole and part is that it particularizes the universal but does not individualize it (Harris 1983). Thus, it is the *civic authority* of the parents that underwrites the child's socialization and not their natural property in the child (O'Neill 1994). In Hegel, it is civic culture not nature that is the source of the transgressions otherwise identified with nature. It is civic culture that offers us our destiny for which every child must leave its parents. The potency of *Sittlichkeit* lies in the civic intuition that we belong to society more than to ourselves, even for the love of our self. But Lyotard and Derrida are locked into a struggle over filiation without reconciliation *(Versöhnung)* with either the family, through which one achieves personality on the individual plane, or with the political community, where civic recognition is the impersonal guarantee of the personality of individuals, communities and families.

The lesson offered to youth in Hegel's *Phenomenology* is that firstness is an infantile disorder. The result of the individual appropriation of everything as an extension of oneself is that no thing and no one has any other status than that of an object. In such a world the appropriative subject itself is yet another object. As such, each subject is at the mercy of nature since it lives only by death. Nor is the mortification of the solitary subject eased by its sexuality since in a world of predatory objects there can be no sexual relations–any more than there can be any injustice.

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8

LYOTARD'S EARLY WRITINGS 1954–1963

Mike Gane

Lyotard's writings are constructed over an apparent contradiction: he attempts to establish a radical opposition to and critique of power, while at the same time to avoid all such oppressive power effects in his own practice. Almost all his professions of anti-politics are immediately accompanied with highly political positional statements such as the one that ends *Libidinal Economy:*

> No need for declarations, manifestos, organisations, provocations, no need for exemplary actions. Set dissimulation to work on behalf of intensities.
> ([1974] 1993a:262)

In this chapter I want to examine how this apparent tension was set up in Lyotard's writing in the 1950s.

It is important to remember that Lyotard was born in 1924 and thus was already thirty in 1954 and was fifty when his intellectual career took flight in the mid-1970s: it should be remembered that after his book on *Phenomenology* (first published in 1954) he did not publish another book for some sixteen years *(Discours, figure)*. Bill Readings says in his foreword to Lyotard's *Political Writings* that the texts collected there span 'more than thirty years'. Actually the collection includes pieces from 1948 to 1990, that is more than forty years. It seems to me important not to forget Lyotard's early formative period covers perhaps at least a decade in which he was theoretically and practically active as a militant on the Marxist ultra-left and this constituted a very specific politico-theoretical formation.

The long engagement with, and attempting to go beyond, what might be called the practice of 'permanent revolution', is something admitted by Lyotard himself and is not a particularly controversial observation What is perhaps not so often argued is that this early period with its commitment to revolutionary struggle against what he saw as bureaucratic deviations in the revolution remains the deep structure of engagement of his later polemical writings and explains the key features of his mature thought. In other words my argument is that Lyotard

should be read as a revolutionary thinker who has remained loyal to his radical youthful projects, if not to the letter of the theory and practice certainly their spirit. Or to be more precise, what is important is to find the ways in which Lyotard has since modified his positions on the terrain of (revolutionary) practice. For it is clear that if he now rejects all attempts to build utopian alternatives to existing society he also specifically rejects totalized standpoints such as atheism and nihilism as equally vain. His writings reveal a consistent attempt to find a way to a position of permanent radicalism. At one moment in the 1970s he promoted a version of 'paganism' (see Lyotard 1995:62–143) only to distance himself from it when he felt it was in danger of becoming a religion, and then a postmodernism only to redefine it when it seemed in danger of becoming totalized. This should alert us to the fact that it is the practice in movement, the revolution-in-permanence which is perhaps the central feature of Lyotard's way of experiencing and dealing with the world.

This chapter then will examine Lyotard's situation within French thought and politics in the 1950s and 1960s in search for an explanation for the way that the specific features of this form of radical theory and practice were installed. It might then be possible to indicate briefly some of the ways it has subsequently changed. My aim is also to try to show how, although Lyotard has been read as contributing primarily to philosophy, he has also, perhaps even despite himself, made important contributions to social theory. This fact should not really be so surprising since Lyotard's theoretical formation was within the framework of a certain variant of Marxist engagement. This engagement was always given a parallel career in the academic institutions in which Lyotard worked: in his case within the distinct ambience of French philosophy (not French sociology or anthropology). Lyotard has even talked of sociology as a 'contemporary travesty' of philosophy (1989a:118), and his intellectual trajectory seems to have charted a voyage from Marx to Kant–via Freud (1989a:324ff). One of the interesting problems confronting any reader of Lyotard is that of reconstructing the changes in position and doctrine. Although there are impressive works of interpretation on parts of Lyotard's oeuvre, there is as yet no adequate analysis of the course of say the political, historical or social analyses which form an important part of the overall intervention.

What Lyotard is consistent in developing therefore is an oppositional, indeed revolutionary, frame of analysis and practice. In his first period, the one considered here, it is clear that the main target is capitalism, the alienated society which corresponds to it, and the totalitarian versions of communism which are also viewed as alienated and class divided. The principal promise of an alternative to these is found in the direct experience of workers' struggles and the struggles of the oppressed peoples on the one hand, and, in theory and philosophy, a radical phenomenological Marxism on the other. Lyotard tries to develop a radical alternative to both Marx and Freud in the subsequent periods of his career without recourse or appeal to a pre-modern radical other (Baudrillard) or modern consensual forms (Habermas). Lyotard remains anti-totalitarian (but significantly

broadens the definition of totalitarianism (1992:24)), and anti-liberal (there is no reconciliation with bourgeois society in its social democratic form). In effect Lyotard's writing is haunted by the continuing complexities of French social and political life in the widest sense: the unfinished trajectory of the struggle in Algeria, the failure of the May 1968 student movement, the eclipse of Marxism, and the complex emergence of a new society and culture (with new forms of resistance) in the post-cold war period.

Phenomenology: from Husserl to Merleau-Ponty

Lyotard's essay on phenomenology ([1954/1969], 1991) can be read in a number of different ways. Here I want to pose the question of his consideration of phenomenology and social theory. The French social science tradition from Comte, Durkheim to Mauss, was attacked by a wide range of writers in the 1940s and 1950s as being founded on a rather crude methodological basis of positivism and objectivism. Lyotard considers and rejects the rather unbalanced attempts of writers like Monnerot (1946) to pose against this tradition a pure form of methodological subjectivism. Lyotard considers in depth the more complex and critical positions of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. These writers want to insist on exploring from an epistemological point of view and founding on an adequate basis the important difference between the natural and the human sciences. They secondly argue that behind the growth of all science there is an already pre-structured 'gaze', for even before the objects are observed, an idea of their 'essence' is already presumed. This 'forgotten' substratum is the flux of living encounters in movement, the site of the truth of the social–for truth is not a thing, it is a movement ([1969:40] 1991:63). Lyotard is evidently drawn to the radical critique of philosophy and particularly the social sciences that this programme announces.

Lyotard's aim and position are lucid, yet misunderstanding still abounds. Gayle Ormiston's reading of this work suggests that for Lyotard 'it is not a question of having to choose between the adequacies of phenomenology… Marxism…whatever else' (1991:17) and stresses for Lyotard 'Each case is different' (ibid.). Indeed this view can be found elsewhere for in a recent essay by Arthur Kroker we find that here Lyotard 'loses himself in the static dualisms of the phenomenological imagination as a way of saving himself from committing to Marxism or Augustinian Christianity' (Kroker 1992:145). In the text however, this is not what we read, and is not what Lyotard is trying to work toward. His position is that 'we can grasp history neither through objectivism nor subjectivism, and even less through a problematic union of the two.' In a move which is significant in any attempt to characterize the intellectual style and sophistication of Lyotard, he suggests that history can only adequately be grasped 'through a deepening of both which leads us to the very existence of historical subjects in their "world" on the basis of which objectivism and subjectivism appear as two equally inadequate options' ([1969:121] 1991:131). Lyotard goes on, in a note, to criticize Merleau-Ponty's one-sided appreciation of Marxism, one-sided because

of a refusal to consider the objectivity of 'relations of production and their modifications'. Clearly for Lyotard, it *was* a question of the inadequacy of phenomenology. In 1954 Lyotard joined the *Socialism or Barbarism* group: it was the year of the French defeat in Vietnam (Dien Bien Phu), it was the year the Algerian war of independence began.

Lyotard's choice of writing a presentation and critique of phenomenology was characteristic, since this was no purely intellectual enterprise, as phenomenology had become in France since the 1930s the predominant frame, with key positions marked out by Sartre and de Beauvoir, Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty through to Raymond Aron. Vincent Descombes suggested in his survey of French philosophy that Lyotard's essay on phenomenology 'is a significant document which well illustrates the preoccupations of the fifties' (1980:61). In 1950 Lyotard was in Constantine in Algeria (then joined with France of course) as a teacher, he came under the influence of radical Marxist thought of his friend Pierre Souryi (as described later in the essay 'A Memorial of Marxism' (1988:45–75)). It was he says at a union meeting around 1950–1 that they met, and he 'had the good fortune, while the great century of Marxism was already declining, to learn… that the historical and materialist dialectic could not be just the title of a university chair or responsibility in a political bureau, but rather the name or form of a resolve' (1988:65).

Lyotard's essay on phenomenology could be read as a passive 'tragic living meditation of a process of human experience which is fractured between existence and meaning' (Kroker 1992:144): but it could also be read as an active intervention, an attempt to develop the methodological and philosophical foundations of social science. Indeed, he asks, how can phenomenology itself be grasped and understood except as an interventional practice? Lyotard poses these questions dramatically since it is clear what is at stake in his discussion is the very nature and legitimacy of science and philosophy. It is clear that this poses a radical challenge, and the question is, in a sense, does phenomenology live up to its own radical promise? As we shall see his answer is that it does not.

The essay presents in detail the thought of Husserl (1859–1938) as the key to understanding phenomenology, for what Lyotard is interested in is Husserl's idea that 'to each empirical science there corresponds an eidetic science concerning the regional *eidos* of the objects studied' (1991:42). The widespread scepticism as to the claims of modern science arises from the fact that they appear ungrounded, as simply pragmatic or as in mathematics founded on a set of tautological axiomatic suppositions. They do not produce a true knowledge of the world but rather a contradictory relativism striving to find universals. Husserl tries to think this in terms of the suppressed essence or *eidos* of things. Lyotard presents this ground as the residue left after the imagination works towards the absolutely necessary 'originary givenness' of a thing. For example in perception, he says, it is impossible to imagine colour without extension, the very thing itself establishes necessary limits to the variations found possible in the imagination (1991:39). The

phenomenological gaze aims to find this originary givenness in the thing itself in all domains as the site of all infrastructural, indeed foundational, truth.

What Husserl envisages then is a series of investigations which define the 'eidetic laws that guide all empirical knowledge' which can act as basic controls on the way spheres of knowledge are studied. Such a study of material objects has as its basic feature a geometry of spatial being; there are other regional essences, like cultural objects; and there may be a level of the essence of objects in general which is concerned with pure logic of forms. In this way the problems of scepticism and relativism are overcome, since what these sciences demonstrate is that an *eidetic* reduction allows a contingency to give way to a necessary form (1991:41).

There are various possibilities for phenomenology at this point says Lyotard. What is significant is that Husserl chose to follow a very radical route into the deeper analysis of 'eidetic knowledge', and along with Kant suggests that it is only when 'sensible intuition' is the basis for 'categorical intuition' that a 'clear comprehension of the ideal object' can be formed. For Lyotard Husserl manages to avoid either an empiricism of the ego or a transcendental idealism, either a 'realism' of essence or an idealism of the subject (1991:44). It is therefore Husserl who begins to pose the question: for who is the subject of perception? If after finding the world before it (the natural attitude) particular elements are questioned (are thrown into doubt), all that takes place with Descartes's proposition on doubt is a modification of the natural attitude. This is the point at which Husserl invokes the *epoché,* the reduction whereby the world's existence is placed in suspension. Drawing on Marxist critic Tran Duc Thao, Lyotard argues that the effect of the *epoché,* however, is not so much on the object as its dramatic recasting of the subject, for the agent of this suspension, the ego, becomes radicalized as pure ego. This transition is presented by Lyotard as a decisive critique of the Cartesian tradition, for it reveals that the subject can never be treated in the same way as an object, or rather the pure ego is 'not given to itself in the way an object is given' (1991:50). The eidetic essence is given as residue of the movement of thought: but at the same time the transcendental ego is revealed in, not a logical, but its existential modality.

A further radicalization is effected in Husserl's thesis (taken from Brentano) that consciousness must always be considered eidetically as 'consciousness of something', that consciousness is inevitably 'intentional'. This is a crucial reflection, says Lyotard, because it allows Husserl to develop the point that consciousness is not really exterior to objects: 'on the one hand, the object is…a phenomenon, leading back to the consciousness to which it appears; while on the other hand, consciousness is consciousness of this phenomenon. It is because the inclusion is intentional that it is possible to ground the transcendent in the immanent without detracting from it' (1991:55). Thus phenomenology is not a passive activity, rather it puts 'to work the "philosophy" immanent in natural consciousness' (1991:56). Lyotard's formulation of this aim of phenomenology is the attempt 'to transform all data into phenomena, and so reveal the essential characteristics of the I: the radical or absolute foundation, the source of all signification and

constitutive power, the connection of intentionality with its object' (1991: 54). Lyotard is able to suggest that any tendency to idealism here is checked, brought back to the lifeworld and this is why objectivism's 'power to alienate' can be ended (1991:61). He is also able to draw out the implication for the notion of truth itself, for it is evidently no longer adequate to refer truth to the internal logical workings of ungrounded science, but only to a process of the 'lived experience of truth' in the 'primordial world' of this experience, where the experience and the world are in harmony ([1969:42] 1991:61–4).

This brings the first part of the book to a close, and it is possible to see that what interests Lyotard is Husserl's stigmatization of all unreflecting claims to objectivity as a possible route to reification and alienation. There is an evident delight in Lyotard's account in trying to direct analysis towards the realm of popular everyday experience in the lived world. At the same time it is clear that he wishes to avoid the trap of radical individual solipsism, and sees in Husserl's radicalization of the concept of the ego and the attack on the Cartesian tradition a promising way of posing the relation between the subject and the object in a new way, a way which overcomes both theoreticism and empiricism. The second part of his book deals with the question of phenomenology and the human sciences (particularly psychology, sociology, and history). He suggests that the aims of phenomenology here are to constitute: 'at the same time both a "logical" introduction the human sciences in seeking to define the object eidetically prior to all experimentation; and a philosophical "reprise" of the results of experimentation, insofar as it seeks to retrieve fundamental meaning' (1991:76).

It is in his discussion of psychology that Lyotard begins to assess the differences between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty from the principles he has laid out from Husserl. He takes the phenomenological position to be a critique of the way that psychological positivism assumes the most fundamental of its categories like "memory". This already, he claims, is a reification which denies the more fundamental process of retention (1991:79) which is closer to the experience itself than its rationalization. And it is also closer to intentionality, since it grasps the essential inferiority of the process. Here Merleau-Ponty shows that this involves a fundamental connection with the world of the body, and the problem of 'meaning' is always secondary to that of a more fundamental level of perception which overcomes the subjective-objective dichotomy persisting in Sartre's work (1991: 88–9). Again, while Sartre insists on an analysis resting on a 'transcendental consciousness' Merleau-Ponty struggles for a 'passive synthesis from which consciousness draws its meaning'–in an analysis which retains the existential and the interpretational on all levels (1991:93–4). Lyotard's analysis then leads at this point to a conception of phenomenological analysis as existential rather than transcendental, and as an *a posteriori* interpretation of experience (for further clarification of Merleau-Ponty's thought see Schmidt, 1985: ch 2).

Lyotard turns to sociology and to a consideration in particular of the Durkheimian school and its critics. Durkheim's method is a sociology which treats social facts as things and explains social facts only in relation to other social

facts. This methodology was widely criticized by phenomenologists as based on a deep misunderstanding of the nature of social realities. One such critique was made by Jules Monnerot (1946). It is significant that Lyotard completely rejects this critique as representing the 'infantile disorder of phenomenology' (1991:100). It is, says Lyotard, based on an 'enormous misunderstanding' in calling for a sociology based only on a method of subjective interpretation. Lyotard's analysis is to suggest that Durkheim's method is entirely one-sided in trying to account for social laws at a single level of objectivity. Certainly, he says Durkheim is not the author of a purely static or naive sociology. It is a creative sociology that cannot in any way itself be reduced to its data. But it produces its operational definitions dogmatically, its definition of religion (through the sacred/profane) itself could quickly be shown to be at a distance from any eidetic definition and therefore arbitrary (1991:98).

It is at this point that Lyotard again turns to Merleau-Ponty to show that it is Durkheimian 'objective prejudices' which block the way to understanding the nature of social things, for it is to the originary social and its adequate description that sociology must have its beginnings. If it is a fundamental error to begin with the assumption that the social be treated as a thing, it is nonetheless crucial to accept this sociology as providing the main way in which the concept of the social is raised and analysed. A true method must start, says Lyotard with an imperative 'not to reduce this behaviour, and the meaning it bears, to its conditions–and so dissolve it–but ultimately to answer this question, using the conditioning data clarified by objective methods. To explain…in the human sciences is to understand' ([1969:78] 1991:99). Durkheimian sociology 'covers over the problem' whereas the real task is to 'recover' the latent meaning below the appearance of social facts and to explain their emergence. This implies, he argues, something prior to methodology, unrecognized in Durkheim, the construction of an adequate 'eidetic definition of the social' ([this 'socialité originaire' 1969:80] 1991:100). For Lyotard this is only to be found in the human sciences in the structures of human comprehension, person to person, as an 'originary sociality' as the essential 'ground of all social scientific knowledge' (1991:100–1). His appeal here is directly to the formulations found in the writings of Merleau-Ponty: 'Prior to the process of becoming aware the social exists obscurely and as a summons' (Merleau-Ponty 1962:362). Lyotard does not cite the whole passage. It continues in Merleau-Ponty's text: 'the social does not exist as a third person object' (a very direct refutation of Sartre's position). Merleau-Ponty continues: 'It is the mistake of the investigator…and the historian to try to treat it as an object'–for example 'the nation and class are neither versions of fate which hold the individual in subjection from the outside, nor values which he posits from within. They are modes of co-existence which are a call upon him' (1962:362). It is largely from Merleau-Ponty's inspiration that the significance of Husserl's work is developed. Lyotard suggests that against the view that the Other is the site of an inevitable alienation (Sartre), an attempt must first be made to recover 'the possibility of an originary relation of understanding… We must consequently discover, prior to any

separation, a co-existence of the ego and the other in an intersubjective "world" on whose basis the social itself draws meaning' ([1969: 82] 1991:102). Thus Durkheim is wrong to suggest that society is only a social fact (Monnerot 1946:77ff). Phenomenology does not try to inaugurate a new sociology from scratch, but indeed sides with the view of Marcel Mauss within sociology itself, whose concept of the 'total social fact' permits a critical re-appropriation of sociological research as a form of understanding (1991:104). (The same can be said of structuralism, say of Lévi-Strauss, against which Mauss clearly works 'towards an understanding' of gift exchange). The problem is essentially the respective role of the elements of the analysis: the primary element must be an adequate description of fundamental experience 'in order to reconstitute its meaning (and) this description in turn can only be made on the basis of sociological data, themselves resulting from a prior objectivation of the social' (1991:105). In this way the artificial separation between individual and society is overcome in a strategy which aims to recover truths lost beneath objectivist accounts.

The last section of the book concerns history as 'the total science' (1991:109). Here Lyotard becomes far more directly concerned with the political character of the analysis. His discussion is framed in terms of the divisions within phenomenology, between its right wing (Aron), and the possibility of a marxist phenomenology. Again he begins with the question of the eidetic, here the definition of the nature of time. Merleau-Ponty rather than Husserl now provides the preferred definition, not a consciousness for the ego of its experience of time (Husserl), but a mode experienced now as presence, which 'intentionalises…in the mode of no longer, or the mode of not yet' (1991:113). This sense of time cannot be grasped directly, only through historical consciousness: it is always already lived before its reflection. And this is crucial for Lyotard because he wants to insist that this time is always open, and a space of freedom (1991:116). As the discussion passes to consider Marxism there is a noticeable shift in his relation to Merleau-Ponty. The central and key problem, says Lyotard, is that of phenomenological idealism. If the problem for phenomenology is the problem of meaning, and this resides in the problem of defining the 'world', what world is this? Husserl's observations do not relate to a given material world. Lyotard here discusses Tran Duc Thao, and Lukács, who suggest that phenomenology, in trying to find a way between objectivism and subjectivism, a 'third way', becomes ambivalent before the choice between Marxist materialism and bourgeois idealism. For Lyotard this form of posing the question is too simple and too negative, and he begins to suggest ways in which phenomenology might contribute to Marxism. It might suggest ways of rethinking the relation of base and its superstructures, it might suggest ways of drawing attention to how the 'lived experience of new conditions of life' brought about by the rise of a new class (e.g. the bourgeoisie in the reformation) can be seen as a new grounding for the meaning and truth of Marxist analysis. Merleau-Ponty is right to insist that it is through phenomenological procedures that Marxism can address the question of how to overcome the oppositions which haunt it: between freedom and necessity,

contingency and determinism, subjectivity and objectivity. However, just as this appears to endorse Merleau-Ponty's programme Lyotard writes that the fundamental problem lies not, in fact, in these general philosophical oppositions but in the content of the theory itself. For when Merleau-Ponty rejects the specific content of Marx's theory of proletarian revolution, Lyotard states that 'in refusing any reference to the objectivity of the relations of production and their modifications, phenomenologists were led imperceptibly to treat history and class conflict as the development and the contradiction of individual *consciousnesses*' (1991:131). Lyotard's final conclusions are drawn in a surprisingly harsh way against phenomenology:

(i) Husserl's historical constructions cannot be sustained, and the phenomenological position either falls to the right (even fascism) or to 'infantile disorder'. The third way has proved an illusion.
(ii) Phenomenology is caught between an attempt to identify 'originary' structures as given infrastructures of thought and an attempt to 'account phenomenologically for them', thus Husserl moves from intentional analysis to a system of speculative history.
(iii) Phenomenology is a step back from Marx on the question of material structures, for phenomenology in trying to establish the 'source of meaning in the interstices between the subjective and the objective, it has not realized that the objective (and not the existential) already contains the subjective as negation and supercession' ([1969:125] 1991:135).
(iv) Phenomenology is caught between a possible spiritualist subjectivism, and a project that aims to recover humanity beneath the schemas of the objective social sciences. If Merleau-Ponty takes up Marx's formula that 'we cannot eliminate philosophy without realizing it', Lyotard insists, against the incipient idealism here, this realization can only occur in a classless society (1991: 136).

'A note on Marxism' (1957)

Lyotard contributed a brief note on Marxism to a large scale three volume survey of European philosophy since 1850 (Lyotard, 1957). The essay appears in the text under the title 'The point of view of a non-Marxist' but in the *errata* slip to the book the title was altered to 'A note on Marxism'. Was Lyotard a Marxist in this essay? The answer seems to suggest that Lyotard felt his position to be identical with Marx's own famous distantiation from currents of his time when he said in frustration: 'I am not a Marxist', for Lyotard's short essay followed another essay (by Paul Meier and Emile Bottigelli) which was a far more conventional support of Communist party views on Marxism. It is very clear that Lyotard in fact believed this conventional Marxism was a caricature.

What is curious, however, is that this short essay by Lyotard seems to continue directly from the very point his book on phenomenology broke off: the distinctiveness of Marxism lies not just in its observation that 'we cannot eliminate philosophy without realising it' (1957:55), but also that 'philosophy cannot be realised without the elimination of the proletariat, and the proletariat cannot be eliminated without the realisation of philosophy' (1957:56). Lyotard rejects the Hegelian notion that the motor of history is the spirit, it is he says, labour *(le travail),* for man not only works on nature, this work is one of self-transformation. For Marx the facts of spiritual alienation are interwoven with a material alienation, and that is why Marxism is not a philosophy in the traditional sense of the term.

It was at this point Lyotard began to question the right of Stalinism to claim to be a Marxism, indeed to be a science which resolved the critical problems posed by philosophy. What happens with the transformation of the critical dialectic into a science of dialectical materialism is that 'Marxism' becomes a means by which a certain state of society becomes legitimated as no longer alienated, no longer class divided. Things had changed around, for here theory had become the complacent tool of a certain bureaucratic class, and to make a critique of bureaucratic Marxism has to go beyond questions of theory: it would require a critique of a bureaucracy enveloped in 'Marxism' (1957:59). For Lyotard one could not be Marxist and Stalinist, since Stalinist Marxism was an ideology of a 'dominant class' and this condition introduced the very alienated separations which Marx denounced as alienating (1957:59). A critique had to be made at the level of the 'human reality' of this system, of the very contradictions between theory and practice it introduced. Living Marxism is the practical critique of a dominant class ideology, not the process by which intellectuals established the laws of a social science in order to produce the legitimation of totalitarian social and economic planning (1957:60). Scientific Stalinism, in producing a social science only ended up by suppressing a knowledge of the real dialectic of its own history. Lyotard claimed that from Lenin's *What is to be Done?* the capacity of the proletariat in the advanced countries had developed to the point that it could act for all society, and at that point socialism was not the suppression of private property or capital, a purely negative act, but of the effective installation of workers' control (1957:60). This meant that Marxism developed a theory of this new relation, that is to say it was *'a new theory of political action'*–and, he added, this was a fact that neither Leninism nor Trotskyism had ever really understood. It was here then that Lyotard specified his own vision of a new political practice, a practice very specifically related to the way practice and theory was outlined by Marx (Lyotard 1957:60–1). Thus it is possible to see here that what Lyotard is really seeking is not simply a method which will find the fundamental level of human experience, either as an originary sociality or level of experience, but one which would find a theory/practice relationship which might escape the apparently inevitable route to reification and alienation, in exactly the same way he had tried to pose the problem of the theoretical and empirical at the heart of the phenomenological project. At this period Lyotard was, as critics have noted,

developing and deepening the productivist thesis that 'man is the product of his works' (1957:57; see also Descombes 1980:181; Pefanis 1991:87) in the context of a conception of the world as involved in an intensifying struggle which would lead to socialism *or* barbarism. It was entirely consistent of Lyotard therefore, some years later, to question Althusser's conception of the relation of theory to practice as only partially adequate for in eliminating the concept of alienation from theory it tended also to eliminate its value in experience, its value in pointing to a theory of the experience of abstract universals (1984:19ff).

Algeria

Lyotard had graduated from the Sorbonne and had taken up a two-year teaching post in Constantine in Algeria in 1950. It was a fateful location. He went through a rapid process of political radicalization under the aegis of Pierre Souryi from 1951. His involvement in the politics of the revolutionary left was long and profound: 'for fifteen years I neglected all forms of activity other than those directly connected to this cause. I gave up all writing except notes and studies on political topics that were published either in our review or in a mimeographed paper we gave out to workers early in the morning at the gates of factories' (1988:17). The review in question was *Socialism or Barbarism*. He was elected to the board with Souryi in 1954 (1988:66), the very year of the outbreak of war in Algeria. Lyotard's contribution to the journal largely concerned this war, and his writings have recently been collected and translated ([1989b] in 1993b the collection in English unaccountably omits one important essay). Against the trend in recent commentary on Lyotard (see especially Sim 1996:xix) I want to discuss the way in which they complement his critique of phenomenology, and to examine, to what extent is there a continuation between the two sets of writing? Was his writing betraying 'the invisible, but tangible presence of a Marxist theorist who, like a priest who has lost his faith, still dispenses a rhetoric of salvation' (Kroker 1992:145)? Or, was Lyotard committed to writing an *eidetic* Marxism, and through this to discover the depoliticization of the proletariat in the heartland of capitalism, as well as the paradox of a revolution without a proletariat in Algeria?

In his brief introduction to the republication of these essays on Algeria, he recounts the political orientation of the *Socialism or Barbarism* group. The particular Marxist genealogy of the journal is traced from Trotsky's Fourth International, and the 1947 break-away group which developed a far more radical critique of the possibilities for socialism in the Soviet Union and indeed Western societies. It was this group which wanted to go beyond the framework of Leninism maintained by traditional Trotskyism, through a close examination of the immediate and concrete forms of opposition developed on the ground by workers themselves (1993b:166). The project was, he says elsewhere, 'to critique the class structure of Russian society and all bureaucratic societies (and) to analyse the dynamics of the struggles in underdeveloped countries' (1988:66). Thus it seems clear that just as Lyotard was attracted to the promise of reconstructed Husserlian

phenomenology as a critique of reified and alienated knowledge, he was also attracted to forms of Marxism which could 'rebuild from scratch the framework of leading conceptions of workers' emancipation' (['reconstituer à neuf le tissu des idées directrices de l'emancipation des travailleurs' (1989b:34)] 1993b:166, trns mod.); that is, as he stresses, the aim of his intervention was not to produce a scientifically 'true idea' but to identify in the very grounded creativity of struggle that 'secret from which all resistance draws its energy' (1993b: 167). The aim of the group was not to develop an institutional organization, or political party as such (thus it was free from constraints and the responsibilities of any practice of leadership), but by intervening in a new way, by developing new forms of political analysis, to keep open and complex the spaces of resistance to oppression and injustice (1993b:168).

Lyotard took responsibility for covering the Algerian War for *Socialism or Barbarism* in 1955 and his articles appeared from 1956 to 1963. It is clear, even from his first article, entitled simply 'The situation in North Africa', Lyotard believed that the social conflicts in Algeria could not be fitted into any of the preconceived and available Marxist schema. Algeria, a French colony since 1830, had very specific social structures and cultural divisions which made it quite different in character from other societies engaged in independence struggles. From his experience in Algeria his position from the start was that here was a paradoxical struggle, which from a Marxist, or rather as he says himself 'from the perspective of the global proletariat' (1993b:172), was one where 'the only solutions (were) solutions that none in the struggle can provide' (1993b:178). His objective is consistently to find, however, 'what line the revolutionary movement ought to take' (1993b:172) even in a struggle where a proletarian consciousness had not developed and was not likely to develop (1993b:178). Thus what he expected to happen was that through the revolutionary struggle in Algeria there would evolve some kind of 'embryonic military and political bureaucracy which the scattered elements of the Muslim commercial and intellectual stratum' would likely join (1993b:178). In this first very remarkable article Lyotard outlines the stark contrast between the life of the French in Algeria and that of the majority Muslim community in its objective economic reality. The 'radical exploitation' that his analysis reveals however only appears to those engaged in struggle not simply as an economic one but as a cultural or worse a racial one, for 'since class frontiers are almost exactly homologous with "ethnic" frontiers, class consciousness is impossible: a person is crushed for being an Algerian…as much as for being a worker or a peasant' (1993b:174). Thus if political power passed to nationalist forces economic exploitation would not have been addressed, since the struggle was taking place at the purely cultural level. Yet the specific feature of Algerian society was precisely the problem of identifying the nature of the 'nationalist' forces, for here there is a remarkable vacuum, the French 'cannot depend on any local bourgeoisie in Algeria' (1993b:176). This mirrored the problem of the forces of the left in France who could not

find their equivalents in local organised forms of resistance. Lyotard thus concluded that the only tenable revolutionary position was to abandon any pretence to continue French presence in Algeria on the one hand, and to see that the course of the struggle would be 'determined by underground resistance forces'(1993b:178).

This first article thus identified a number of very stark contradictions, and was written incisively in a sombre tone, a tone which continued for the remaining course of the revolution. Theoretically, he delivered cruel evaluations of the orthodox communist (PCF) and Trotskyist analyses of these events, particularly of the way in which the theory of permanent revolution was being applied. The Communist line which wanted a renegotiated union with Algeria, Lyotard stigmatizes as a consequence of its dependency on the power strategy of the Soviet Union, and an attempt to juggle with the forces in Algeria to produce the best outcome for itself (a view endorsed in Joly 1991:44–8). And thinking that in such a process in a 'relatively backward' society an industrial proletariat, however small, would form the principal force in the cities, and that it was to this force that the analysis should deliver a revolutionary programme, all Marxist analyses fell into a schematic formalism: they all sought the Algerian Lenin. Analysing the programmes of the various political groups in Algeria, Lyotard concludes 'there cannot be any Algerian bolshevism in the present state of industrial development' (1993b:208). Marxism loses its way, since it cannot grasp on the ground the peculiar features of Algerian society where class borders 'are buried under national borders' (1993b:210). It was only by a certain kind of abstraction that it was possible to talk of class structure, and yet the basis of national consciousness was almost entirely a peasant one. For the Algerians every French soldier was an enemy and so, says Lyotard, one must hear 'in this intransigence, which perhaps shocks the delicate ears of the French "left" (which is often paternalistic and always treacherous toward the Algerian people) the direct expression of the split that runs through, and tears apart, all the classes of Algerian society' (1993b: 212–13).

Lyotard was generally pessimistic about the outcome of the revolution (from a communist point of view), he seized on the fact that, in contrast to the settlements in Tunisia and Morocco (where the French negotiated with established bourgeois political groups) the situation in Algeria was more fluid, the 'bourgeois leadership is not strong enough to stand the growing hostility of the labouring classes supported by the dynamism of the Frontists (FLN)' (1993b:213, trns mod), radicalization in Algerian society could produce new forms of resistance. But this was in a situation where the insurrections, the 'battle for Algiers' had been won by the French, the revolutionary organizations driven underground, a condition leading in May 1958 (the coup in Algiers) to an 'authentic totalitarianism' (1993b:215). In his contribution of 1958 Lyotard developed a close analysis of the situation in the French army which he located at the heart of the growing contradictions in the French position:

on the one hand that between the ultra-right generals and the new political demands initiative from de Gaulle in Paris, and on the other where in Algiers 'power is divided between the armed forces and the extreme right' (1993b:215). Essentially this produces, though Lyotard does not use the expression, a double dual power conjuncture, in Algiers: 'an unstable political situation whose resolution will certainly involve the subordination of one group to the other', for the army (not even itself homogeneous) was effectively out of control.

It is probably in his analysis, not of the revolutionary movement itself, but– very surprisingly–of the army that Lyotard was able to produce his most insightful writing. The crucial contradiction is identified here, where the army is caught in a dilemma: on the one hand it believes, certainly from its defeat in Vietnam that it is dealing with a guerrilla movement operating a classic Maoist strategy; but on the other hand the Algerian people cannot be defeated as such and have to be won over to the French position in a political and administrative struggle in the villages. The army was thus pulled in two directions, either towards building and maintaining a local elite, or to maintaining its own hegemony, and 'this is where the army splits apart' (1993b:217). The logic of maintaining French hegemony also threatened to turn the whole of France itself into a totalitarian society in order to mobilize the materials and the ideological conformity necessary to the task. But the Gaullist political faction was not totalitarian and thus the project was frustrated, and even in Algeria de Gaulle had a certain level of support as offering an honourable resolution. If this resolution to the crisis was feared by the Ultras since it would mean that all the army's work would have been in vain ultimately, says Lyotard, the key to the situation now lay in Paris.

His articles dealing with this complex situation from 1958, that is during the formative period of the Fifth Republic, chart carefully the changing balance of forces. Some of the key sections of these articles omit in the English version Lyotard's account of the mobilization of the extreme right in Algeria (see note 1, ch. 30, 1993b:335), which is unfortunate since it is precisely here that Lyotard begins to notice a phenomenon which will have crucial ramifications for his own position. He notices that in the crisis of the Republic the proletariat itself in metropolitan France had played only a minor role, and that a dramatic process of *depoliticization* had occurred. It now became widely accepted in France itself that the solution to the Algerian problem was in some way bound up with de Gaulle himself as purely his 'personal problem' (1989b:122), an intervention which led directly to replacements of personnel at the top echelons of the administration and army. Yet this only further exposed the insoluble problem facing the army, its complete inability to build up local elites (1993b:222). For Lyotard's analysis the key and determining structures of these political problems were revealed to be the specific character–not of the army–but of the army's impotence in the face of Algerian society. Thus, Lyotard's analysis defined 'a remarkable sociological situation: if French imperialism has not to this day managed to provide this society with any other mode of organisation than that of terror, it is because no institution

can currently respond satisfactorily to the needs of the Algerians… Algerian society is "destructured" [déstructurée]' (1993b:223). After six years of war it was clear that the elements of an Algerian bourgeoisie have still been excluded from socio-economic advance in the ruling bloc: its continuing 'political weakness results from its economic and social weakness' (1993b:235). And it was this fact which accounts for the exceptional duration of the war and its specific intensity. On the ground Lyotard charts the resistance, the ways in which 'duplicity, laziness, ill will, the tendency to steal…express at different levels, the refusal (of the Algerians) to take part in their own exploitation' (1993b:236). In the absence of civil society as such, these forms of resistance do not and cannot 'constitute a dialectical negation of the society' (1993b:227). Attempts to deal with this 'colonial non-society' by military or administrative means could only lead to more brutalization. As soon as the Algerians began the uprising, the truth of this situation was revealed, since what was rejected was any possibility of resolving the crisis on behalf of, *for* the Algerians: the spell was broken (*la lutte armée a brisé le charme* (1989b:135)), while as yet the crisis could not be resolved.

All the uprisings since 1954, Lyotard suggests, had taken place in this social and political void, where 'the armed groups crystallized among themselves a nationalism that the situation of the Algerian bourgeoisie had prevented from finding expression…(and then) this role (was assumed) by an organization based directly on the peasant masses' (1993b:239). In this struggle it was driven first underground, and then there developed among the insurgents the resolve to drive out the colonial power. The formation of these revolutionaries was different from elsewhere. They were uprooted from traditional society and spent years in France where they were 'stripped of their way of life' (1993b:241), yet never integrated in metropolitan society, even in left wing organizations. In Algeria itself all radicals were ruthlessly deported. So the only active resistance left in Algeria was the tradition of peasant banditry. The evolution from these primitive forms of resistance since 1954 had been a gradual politicization and involvement of wider sections of Algerian society into a struggle for national, not socialist, emancipation. This had become Algeria's specific 'revolutionary meaning', for it involved the intervention of these colonial workers 'themselves, practically and directly in the transformation of their own society…they break off, effectively, without asking permission from anyone…and provide an example of socialist activity …to all the exploited and exploiters: the recovery of social humanity by its own efforts' (1993b:251, trns mod.). By contrast in France, the proletariat was becoming more and more passive and the vision of social transformation gradually losing its force.

In Algeria, from May 1958 to January 1960, the successive insurrections of the colonists had also become manifestly weaker and less resolved. His analysis concentrates on the position of the army and clearly anticipates the army's crisis leading to the army putsch of April 1961: it is in 'this army that the contradictions of modern capitalist society are lived, if not thought more intensely than in any other fraction of the bourgeoisie' (1993b:265, trns mod). Once

more, Lyotard insisted that it was a fundamental mistake to define the army's position through the grid of a preconceived objectivist theory. This would identify in an ungrounded analysis the army's ideology as simply 'fascist'. He suggested that the work of the army was pivoted on an irresolvable dilemma: it was sent to 'pacify' a village, but it could neither build links with it on the one hand, nor destroy it on the other. The same dilemma faced de Gaulle: the administration of Algeria becomes impossible, yet it cannot get rid of Algeria. The French want to manage Algeria–with the Algerians and without them–the essential contradiction. Thus the Algerian war was 'exemplary because it crystallized and strips bare *the* most fundamental contradiction of the capitalist world, the only one which is insoluble *within* the system itself' (1993b:267). For Lyotard the real, the grounded, contradiction in the system is discovered–through this specific form of analysis–to be, not that of labour and capital, which is posed at a more abstract and secondary level, but of that within the system which required the working people to participate in the working of the system, but also that this participation never lead to direct popular control. Lyotard expressed this in relation to the developing situation in Algeria in 1960–1, as presenting the complete absurdity of the 'participation' of the Algerians in a French Algeria: 'the problem is not that of knowing whether the absurdity will really disappear, it is that of knowing whether one can act as if it did not exist' (1993b:267). If the left (the French Communists) invoked fascism here its function was not that any more of political analysis, but of an attempt to reinvigorate a fading energy, restore a lost solidarity, in a new orientation which had begun to support independence (Joly 1991:52).

It is at this point Lyotard begins in earnest to examine the changes within the revolutionary movement in France itself. Proletarian organizations, and the proletariat itself, were unable to find a way of confronting Gaullism: they could not oppose and they could not support it. This dilemma effectively neutralized them politically, a fact which set in train a shift to new forms of social integration in France itself: 'the idea of a global and radical transformation of society seems absent from the present attitude of the workers, along with the idea that collective action can bring about this transformation. The spread of this de-politicisation greatly exceeds implicit criticism of the parties and the unions' (1993b:269). What was involved was an 'immense transformation in the everyday life of the working class.' Lyotard sketched the profound reasons for these changes as they began to affect French society in the early 1960s: the disintegration of family life on the one hand, and the new consumerism, and leisure, on the other, in a general process combining cultural homogenization (1993b:272). Significantly all protest, having become institutionalized was being incorporated into the prevailing order: for 'the ruling class assimilates it…turns it against those same ones who have acted… That is its function as an exploiting and alienating class: to place humanity in the past tense, in the passive mood' (1993b:274). Yet in the face of this assimilation inevitably new forms of resistance paradoxically mirroring those being left behind in Algeria turn to an idiom of 'incredulity, lassitude, and irony'

(1993b:275). Lyotard presents this as a fundamental crisis facing all those who want to keep alive the revolutionary project. He did not pick up at this point the way in which the radical opposition within the communist movement and organizations which became marked at this time began a process which culminated in May 1968 (see Joly 1991:145–8).

As Lyotard's analysis returned to the situation in Algeria, it is clear that there are strange ways in which the situations in the two domains reflect each other. In 1961 (in an article omitted from the English collection), Lyotard described how a new wave of resistance has swept through Algeria, which has consciously turned the traditional values and ways of life of the Algerians into defensive communal forms. This form is a revolt, he argues, but one which remains non-aggressive (1989b:213). The new social agent that emerged here was a youthful generation that has been brought up in years of war, and it has begun to formulate the elements of a programme of a coherent Algerian revolution. In his penultimate article (1962) he posed the question: how are the French to leave? The prospect of a French secessionist regime was impossible, it would not be viable. The French presence had become unviable, yet the army could not withdraw. But the initiative no longer rested with France but had switched dramatically to the organizations that had grown up in the struggle; they remained eclectic and characterized by rapidly built compromises. The key question was how will they negotiate with de Gaulle? In this last article (1963), Lyotard surveyed the aftermath of French withdrawal and the immediate social collapse in Algeria. As predicted the social and political void had become apparent once more as the effective entity (France) which sustained the Algerian compromises simply vanished: a 'society absent from itself' (1993b:318ff).

Perhaps what is crucial in this account is not so much the internal life of the revolt in Algeria, which Lyotard is only intermittently able to describe directly, it is in effect the transformation that occurs in France itself. Clearly Lyotard believed that the crisis of the Fourth Republic presented a revolutionary opportunity for the revolutionary left. His essay 'The State and Politics in the France of 1960' is the high point of his political disenchantment: 'France is politically dead' (1993b:252). The various political defeats of France as an imperial power crystallized into a political crisis, provoked not as Marxists had expected from the left, but from the extreme right. De Gaulle's success was premised on the fact that there was during this crisis no threat from the left; 'the proletariat left capitalism at leisure to resolve the crisis…the workers did not attempt, during those few days when the decayed state ended up in the streets, to destroy it and impose their own solution' (1993b:255). In that crisis it became evident to Lyotard that the project of revolutionary socialism no longer existed as a real project, for the viability of the Fifth Republic was in a very fundamental sense built on a process of disenchantment, disillusionment and the neutralization of proletarian initiative. At the same time, paradoxically, the fact of independent Algeria had vindicated the reality of self directed emancipation as an exemplary form–in the absence of any revolutionary agency identifiable from classical theory.

Conclusion

It would not be facile to draw a simple structural comparison between Lyotard's critique of phenomenology, its emphasis on finding a way of counteracting the tendency to impose 'truth' on lived experience, and the revolutionary process which discovers at the level of lived experience the real forms of resistance to the 'truths' imposed, as universals, by ruling classes and bureaucracies. Yet it is the case that in both these forms of critique (and this enables us to answer the question posed at the beginning of this chapter) Lyotard holds not only to the programme of recovering direct and lived experience as the basis of truth and justice (for there is no real separation between truth and practical criticism), but also during this period they are bound together in a conception of the experience of *proletarian* emancipation as the touchstone of *political* analysis. In the introduction of the republication of his Algerian articles he notes that if one compliments the *Socialism or Barbarism* group for its 'not having been too much in error' this only 'perpetuates the very thing against which the group fought' (1993b:166), and it 'perpetuates the forgetting of what is and what remains absolutely true and about what was at stake' and adds: 'True even today, when the principles of a radical alternative (i.e. workers' power) *must* be abandoned (something that allows many people, innocent or guilty, to relinquish all resistance and surrender unconditionally to the state of things). This stake, which motivates the carrying on of resistance by other means, on other terrains, and perhaps without goals that can be clearly defined, has always been and remains the intractable' (1993b:166– 7, 1995:144–6). Indeed one could read the slogan given at the beginning of this chapter 'set dissimulation to work on behalf of intensities' (1993a:262) as precisely the lesson to be learnt in the encounter between phenomenology, Marxism, and the experience of the paradoxes of the Algerian struggle for emancipation– where truths were discovered within the experience (and not detachable from it) of a critical confrontation: an originary sociality against 'universals'. One might call this Lyotard's critical materialist method, but in the late 1960s and early 1970s he tried to recast his own 'problematic of alienation' by ruthlessly eliminating all religious implications from its humanism and its complement: the theorist as saviour (1993a).

Lyotard often returns to the example of Algeria. A significant example took place at a meeting in London on Postmodernism in 1985. Accused by Terry Eagleton of abandoning any concern for the real condition of the oppressed and the poor especially in the Third World, Lyotard's reply was characteristic:

> I protest against the idea that political progressivism consists in referring to the poor of the Third World the revolutionary task. I think that if the intellectuals of the developed countries (do) this…they are behaving in an absolutely irresponsible manner. Their task is that of confronting this question head on, and of elaborating it… This does not mean that we don't have to concern ourselves with Third World struggles. But we can only (do this) on an *ethical* basis, not a political one. As a long-standing militant, I helped…the struggle of the Algerians, but knowing very well that nothing revolutionary

> would come out of that struggle… So one can contribute on an ethical basis. But that basis must not be confused with a political line. I think that the intellectuals should carry out this work of distinction between discursive genres (here the ethical and the political): that's part of the complexification of our situation.
>
> (1986:11–12)

Thus the work of the 1950s still constitutes some of the basic terms and issues for Lyotard's very recent reflections. And even his analysis of depoliticization at the origin of the Fifth Republic was, as he has recently noted, 'in fact the announcement of the erasure of this great figure of the alternative, and at the same time, that of the great founding legitimacies', and, he notes 'this is more or less what I have tried to designate, clumsily, by the term "postmodernism"' (1993b:169).

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