The Masters Call:
Attempting to Follow Lyotard
Through Kant and Levinas

By

Edward (Ted) St. Godard

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Religion
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba

(c) August, 1997

Canada

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
*****
COPYRIGHT PERMISSION PAGE

THE MASTERS CALL: ATTEMPTING TO FOLLOW LYOTARD THROUGH KANT AND LEVINAS

by

EDWARD (TED) ST. GODARD

A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University

of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree

MASTER of ARTS

EDWARD (TED) ST. GODARD   1997 (c)

The Masters Call:
Attempting to Follow Lyotard
Through Kant and Levinas

Contents

Acknowledgments

I am "indebted" to my advisor, Professor Dawne McCance, of St. John's College, at the University of Manitoba, for telling me not only that I could do this, but that I *should*, and, indeed, that I was already doing it. Her erudition is second only to her patience. Professor John Badertscher, of the University of Winnipeg, is also owed a signal recognition. It was on his door that a naive, but nonetheless (therefore?) keen, amateur "student" of religion knocked, in the spring of 1990. His patience, respect, and encouragement were instrumental in my joining in, and continuing with, this conversation which is scholarship.

I would like to thank my parents, Henry and Noreen St. Godard, for respecting and supporting me (in so many ways) in my decision to study, rather than "get a real job." My sister Suzette, whose support, especially in the last four years (of which more later), has been incredible (whose need for deadlines, however, made me nervous), also deserves recognition, as do my very dear friends, Frank Atnikov and Fred Olds, each of whom has assisted in the challenging task of helping me to maintain my sanity over the past many years.

Finally, and most significantly, I am grateful to my darling son, Stefan, whose birth in the spring of 1993 at once slowed down and made real this project; Stefan, in whose face I became me, who made me live the obligation about which I dare to write. (And thank-you Arleigh).

The time spent writing this thesis was paid for, in part, by a scholarship from St. John's College, at the University of Manitoba.

Thank-you all.

Abstract

My thesis suggests that mastery, which is arguably the *telos* of the Western world, is a repressive reaction, the means by which the modern West has deliberately forgotten its subject-ivity, its subject-hood. Following Jean-François Lyotard, as he peregrinates among Marx, Freud, Kant, and Levinas, I examine the tendency, on the part of totalizing, dialectical philosophy, to hold emancipation as both the goal, and inevitable result, of history. I argue that the interminable quest for freedom is itself limiting, and that this irony *might* be suggestive of an alternative.

...[A]mong instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which *recurs*....[T]his uncanny [das Unheimliche] is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.[1]

...[Analytic work] alone can yield a knowledge of the forgotten experiences, or — to put it more concretely, though more incorrectly — is able to bring those forgotten experiences back to memory.[2]

Sigmund Freud

---

1. Freud 1990, 363-364.
2. Freud 1967, 94.

(By Way of) Introduction

I was raised in a tradition that places crosses on shoulders, and demands that they be carried, a tradition which then takes as its starting point this oppression, the salvation from which is precisely what is offered by that tradition. Christian (Catholic) and liberal, I shall call this tradition "modern."

Biography, then, informs the present writing. Biography cum *auto*-biography. At the end of my third decade, I found myself, against all odds, contrary to immense improbability, turning. Acting within and against my story, I began to re-write it. Now, at the end of my fourth decade, the Department of Religion and the University ask me for a thesis, the goal of which is to demonstrate a certain degree of mastery over some of the (re)sources to which I have turned, in my re-writing. Difficult word, this, "mastery." The tradition against which and within which I am writing holds mastery very dear. We are called, within this tradition, to be masters. That the notion of mastery contains within itself a variety of inherent oppressions is at once ignored and celebrated. For, as I have suggested, oppression is the force which drives the machine of modernity. To be oppressed is to be given the opportunity to advance. To be oppressed is to provide work for the salvation machine.

I shall speak of an "indebtedness," an obligation which, even as it calls the subject into being, torments it; torments it in an unrepresentable, spectral, manner which, due to the supreme, sovereign, position occupied by Knowing in our Western

hierarchy, must somehow yet be represented. And I will argue that this "indebtedness" comes to be represented as an oppression, an oppression which must be overcome. Thus I shall speak of freedom, of emancipation, of salvation. I will argue that these notions inform (arguably define) the Western imagination, in response to the above oppression, itself a response to my suggested "indebtedness." Through it all, however, let me speak of possibility. Let me speak, not of the possibility of change, but, rather, the change of possibilities.

Foreword: On Relevance and Futility

The *raison d' être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action.

Hannah Arendt[3]

The stakes of politics are definitely not to know something but to change something.

Jean-François Lyotard[4]

Frustrated revolutionary, erstwhile Marxist, Jean-François Lyotard would have the modern West abandon its dreams of emancipation, of salvation. In the afterword to his 1986 Wellek lectures, published in 1988 as *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event,* Lyotard relates his retreat from Marxism. That is, he tells the story of how he came to doubt that Marxism could "still understand and transform the new direction taken by the world after the end of the Second World War" (Lyotard 1988b, 49). This is a telling observation. He later decries the relevance of a revolutionary movement (Marxism) that is incapable of "orienting the struggles, which could not fail to occur as a result of the [contradictions inherent in capitalism], toward the radical solution of those contradictions" (58). Lyotard — the thinker, the philosopher — came to suspect that leftist critiques of our so-called "system," no less than those from other "directions," were simply an inherent part of the "system." We are, he writes,

> constantly having to assert the rights of minorities,
> women, children, homosexuals, the environment,

---

3. Arendt 1968b, 146.
4. Lyotard 1988b, 21.

animals, citizens, culture and education, the South, the
Third World, and the poor. We have to sign petitions,
write papers, organize conferences, join committees, take
part in polls, and publish books. In doing so, we assume
the regular responsibilities attached to the position of
intellectuals. (Lyotard 1993b, 113)

There are, that is, regular responsibilities assigned — by and within the very system

which creates the difficulties experienced by the groups noted above — to certain of its

number. It is their responsibility to *make things better.*

This is a responsibility with which few would argue, indeed which few would

decline. It is Lyotard's suggestion, however, and this suggestion informs the present

writing, that we have now come to a place — not a time — from which we can see, if we

dare to look, that very often those of us who would effect change, those of us who

protest and rally against the multiple instances of injustice that surround us, are indeed

acting within, and *on behalf of,* the very system that *cannot not* create these injustices.

I must, however, be clear that this perspective does not render acquiescence the

proper response to injustice. As Geoffrey Bennington puts it, "this perception would not

imply that there is no ethical duty to support ...struggles, simply that there is no

question of inserting them into some global dialectical history, and thereby of assuming

they will give rise to 'progressive' political regimes" (Bennington, 173).

What we see in Lyotard's move, from the radical and active Marxism of his

young adulthood to an equally radical and active attempt to re-think the problems and

solutions which Marx had thought to have adumbrated (with a finality in which only a

Hegelian could believe), is Lyotard's suspicion, in action, that there is, behind the difficulties inherent in the modern West, a certain *something*, "something within that system that it cannot, in principle, *deal with*. Something that a system must, by virtue of its nature, overlook" (166). There is *something*, behind, before, under, the ultimately impotent struggles observed by Lyotard, attention to which, strict attention to which, might — such a word, *might* — harness their latent energy, and give birth, in a creative outburst, an inventive new-ness, to *something* un-expected, indeed, *something unwanted*: a surprise (let us have nothing unpredicted). Thus Lyotard is not advocating an abandonment of barricades, a turning away from struggles, but rather a *re-thinking* of these struggles. While he is concerned about the effects commensurate with the locating of our local struggles in part of a global, emancipatory, narrative, Lyotard is aware that, for something to happen, we must act. "Must act," we note, says nothing of just *how* one must act in response to different situations, different occurrences.

I am necessarily cryptic. I shall have much to say in the following chapters by means of explanation, and I shall have more than a little to say about explanation. Nevertheless, it is my hope that I shall leave much unsaid. At least for the time being. You see, Lyotard compares "political anamnesis" to Freudian analysis, and suggests that both are necessarily interminable, and that both must seek, not cures, but vantage points. The quest then, is for witnesses. Our goal, if we wish to write, if we wish to critique, is to bear witness to what "has always been, and remains, the *intractable* [*intraitable*]" (166).

All of which, to return to my earlier observations on the subject of mastery, is by way of justification for this entire project. As I struggle to achieve/maintain a *sense of purpose* with which to pursue the present writing, as I read and think about obligation, and ethics, and morality, and, even as I do so, often behave in such a way that it seems that my thinking and writing are simply "academic" — somewhat interesting, but with no real virtue (indeed arguably a way of assuaging the guilt concomitant with much of my day-to-day life) — I often worry that thinking and writing cannot make a difference. Given the immense, systemic, difficulties alluded to above, and elaborated on below, it is difficult to resist nihilism and apathy.

To struggle in such a manner, however, is to fall victim to the very metanarratives against which Lyotard must be seen to be writing. To be overly concerned lest my relatively insignificant writing and thinking might not lead to the betterment of the world betrays a twofold commitment to a modern orientation of which I am highly suspicious, even as I reap its benefits. First of all, it is to ally myself with an understanding of "reality" which sees a "spirit" moving through history, connecting and synthesizing local events into a global "economy" of progress, the culmination of which is always just one or two barriers away. And, secondly, it is to be uncritically enamoured of a way of thinking which sees prediction and control as indicators of the success or "usefulness" of any activity. The degree to which this writing, then, is successful, would be determined by the degree to which it helps its readers to understand human behaviour, to make decisions as to how to raise their children.

The question of applicability, closely correlated with that of prediction, points to a problematic opposition, that between "practical" and "theoretical." I suspect that my concerns, the result of a perceived futility on the part of criticism, are a function of a naïve understanding of the relationship between so-called "theory" and "practice," and the apparent distinction between the two. As I will argue in the short section of this paper in which I discuss the AIDS pandemic ("The jews" II, p. 139ff), which *will not* be an attempt to "apply" Lyotardian/Levinasian theory; ethics, or social criticism, or cultural analysis, are — must be — theoretical, and yet, furthermore, must be applied, but the distinction between these two "modes" of ethics is illusory and dangerous.

Drawing primarily on the work of Lyotard, in the following chapters I will attempt to do some thinking. Thinking, of course, is a confusing process: *forgive me, I was just thinking out loud.* Accordingly, let me, before we move too far, lay out for you, the reader, a rough sketch of the pages ahead. It is important, however, that I make clear at this point what I take to be an obvious rhetorical strategy. Namely, that this foreword, this guide, is for the reader, and as such will hopefully be useful. But this foreword has necessarily been written after. For it is my understanding of the writing/thinking process that to delimit oneself beforehand, to write, that is, within boundaries, is to fail to bear witness. To write with any kind of fidelity to the process, it seems to me, one must write from somewhere in the middle. One must write not knowing where one is going, and one must follow, rather than lead, the writing process. Writing can, with luck, or providence, or *something*, make a difference, or a place for difference to *happen*. Is it happening?

To my way of thinking, this thesis will have been a success, if three things happen: firstly, if I, in its writing, have learned something, rather than simply reiterated that which I knew already. Secondly, if you, the reader, read it twice. It must be read at least twice. And thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, this thesis will be a success, assuming that my second qualification is met, if the reader subsequently feels obliged to read Lyotard, Levinas, or Kant. What happens next is, in many ways, of no concern to me, but it is my hope that time will not be gained by reading this paper.

That said, let us have no surprises. Let me not lose my reader, I want you to read me. I want to talk to you. My prologue, "Approaching Modernity," is an attempt to sketch a fairly popular understanding of the "modern" condition. Taking "modernity" to refer to the way of thinking which began to emerge out of the so-called "medieval synthesis" at approximately the sixteenth century, I will, following Heidegger and Ellul, to name but a few, loosely equate "modernity" with "technology." And this is to say that I will suggest, though I am not the first to do so, that the dominant theme of Western modernity is that of control. That this need for control is a reactionary "defense mechanism" will be (if we must) my thesis. I will also, at this early stage, introduce Immanuel Kant, the philosopher whose thinking, according to Karl Barth[5], represents the pinnacle of the eighteenth century, "enlightened," thought which so informs our current world, and a philosopher whose impact on Lyotard has been, as we will see, considerable.

---

5. Barth, 153-157.

Having arrived, as it were, on the doorstep of modernity, and as Lyotard is a thinker known, for better and for worse, for coining the phrase "postmodern," I will, in my first chapter, attempt to make clear just what we might understand to be implied by the prefix "post." From here I will introduce a concept central to the Lyotardian *oeuvre*, the complex notion of the *differend*, and concurrently begin to analyze Lyotard's disdain for much of popular philosophy, especially as carries on its business in a manner which serves to delimit possibility. We will begin to see, behind and within Lyotard's understanding of the differend, a certain *something* which irritates the modern subject, the control of which is the goal of much of his/her machinations. I will also return to Kant, especially the Kant of the second *Critique*, and introduce the Kantian notion of the categorical imperative. By the end of the chapter, it is my hope that the reader will have a strong sense of Lyotard's philosophy as a philosophy of indeterminacy, of openness; as a philosophy which resists all attempts to be finished with, or close, an argument. Thus, Lyotard's is a philosophy the very heart of which is non-predictability and lack of control. The implications of this philosophy, as well as its roots, will be the considerations of the subsequent chapters.

My second chapter, "On Whose Authority?," will problematize Kant's categorical imperative. I will argue that the "we" which is implied in the consensus demanded by the categorical imperative is an illegitimate construct, and that, sensing this, the modern West has developed strategies by means of which to quell this uneasy suspicion. ("We," then, as one of the most important of the above-mentioned machinations, as an attempt to subjugate the irritating *something*.) Our examination of

these strategies of legitimation will lead us into our first discussion of "Auschwitz," which I will suggest represents the final (?) collapse of the "we" in question. Following a brief "digression" on freedom, we will return to Kant, and introduce the third *Critique*, the *Critique of Judgement*, in which Kant makes the important distinction between the beautiful and the sublime. It is my hope that the reader will proceed from this second chapter suspicious of the modernity project, and sensing that it has something to hide.

In my third, middle, chapter, I will make abundantly clear that no solutions, no pragmatic, applicable, suggestions as to how-to-fix-things, will be forthcoming. That said, however, be it well understood: there is *something*. Returning to Kant, or rather — significantly — Lyotard's Kant, I will examine the third *Critique's* "Analytic of the Sublime," for it is here that Lyotard finds, *within philosophy*, its potential to overcome itself. But by this time it is hoped that the reader will begin to feel suspicious about any suggestions of philosophy overcoming itself. For this, it seems to me, sounds terribly close to what I will have painfully laid out as the modern project: constant self-improvement. The reader, with luck, with *something*, will leave this chapter aware that, at least according to Lyotard, there is an unrepresentable *je ne sais quois* which "haunts" the modern subject, and that this manifests itself in what Lyotard calls the "physics of the speaker" (Lyotard 1990, 12), viz., the body.

And thus we come, as we must, to the body. My fourth chapter, "The Body of Western Thought," will focus on incarnation. I will speak of shit, vomit, and crematoria, and I will hopefully offend. I choose my words carefully. I will hopefully scandalize. I

will speak of feelings, of fears, and alibis. I will re-visit "Auschwitz," and with it some of the mechanisms — pervasive, according to Lyotard — in the modern West, by means of which we attempt to assuage our terrible feeling of, and fear of, *something.*

In my fifth chapter I will approach Levinas. Autonomy, and the freedom it both implies and depends upon, will be juxtaposed to a profound heteronomy; the rational, autonomous subject of Kant, Descartes, et. al. will be subjected to a questioning, and found, at least potentially, wanting. I will problematize the supreme position occupied in Western philosophy by knowing, and suggest that, according to Levinas, knowing, and its need of reducing the other to the same, renders ethics, as understood by Levinas, impossible. But in this examination, we will come to note — to realize — that there is a certain difficulty involved in discussing Levinas, a certain "wrong-ness" involved in explicating Levinas. Thus, we will finally arrive (almost) at Emmanuel Levinas, only to realize that to attempt to understand Levinas — to know him — is to miss him, is to protect oneself from, to separate oneself from, a thought so profoundly different as to be terrifying; understanding, then, as barrier. I will conclude with the aforementioned discussion of people with AIDS and HIV, by means of which I will, finally, reconcile myself to the idea that this project actually means something; and I will finish, having only begun, free to defend my thesis, to become a master, and bound to servitude.

Prologue: Approaching Modernity

Conservatives need to be warned (as we must also warn ourselves) that ideology can be a heavy blanket over thought. Our commitment must always be to thought.

John Kenneth Galbraith[6]

Hannah Arendt, in *The Life of the Mind*, elaborates on the Kantian distinction

between intellect and reason, between thinking and cognition. The latter, she

suggests, is a quest, a goal-oriented process ("the thirst for knowledge") and must be

opposed to

> [t]hinking as such, [which is] not only the raising of the
> unanswerable "ultimate questions," but every reflection
> that does not serve knowledge and is not guided by
> practical needs and aims, [and] is, as Heidegger once
> observed, "out of order"....It interrupts any doing, any
> ordinary activities, no matter what they happen to be. All
> thinking demands a *stop-and-think*. (Arendt 1978, 78)

But we live in a world in which there is very little time to stop and rest, let alone

stop and think, which prompts Arendt to write:

> The fact that we usually treat matters of good and evil in
> courses in "morals" or "ethics" may indicate how little we
> know about them, for morals comes from *mores* and
> ethics from *ethos*, the Latin and Greek words for customs
> and habit, the Latin word being associated with rules of
> behavior, whereas the Greek is derived from habitat, like
> our "habits." (5)

---

6. Toronto Globe and Mail, January 17, 1997. A21.

Thus, we are creatures of habit. "What people...get used to is less the content of the rules...than the *possession* of rules under which to subsume particulars" (177). The rules of safety. And the safety of rules.

We live in a time in which there is immense pressure to be consistent with established rules, or to establish rules by means of which to be consistent. Truth of rules and rules of truth. It is my intention in the present writing to demonstrate, inasmuch as this is possible, that we live in a world in which possibility is tightly circumscribed; a world in which the way we think, and the way we write, is fiercely controlled; a world, therefore, in which — contrary to popular wisdom — the rules of the game of thought (my game, your game) threaten (promise) to eliminate rather than encourage that which they have ostensibly been incorporated to foster: thinking and — dare I say it — progress.

In the following pages I will attempt to do some thinking, to open up a space in which *something* might appear. Apropos of which, let me show you a picture. Julia Kristeva, in her essay "Holbein's Dead Christ," suggests that one might mark, in a sixteenth century painting by Hans Holbein the Younger, a transition of sorts. Holbein's painting depicts a life-sized dead Christ, recently entombed and obviously having suffered:

> The chest bears the bloody mark of a spear, and the
> hand shows the stigmata of the Crucifixion, which stiffen
> the outstretched middle finger. Imprints of nails mark
> Christ's feet. The martyr's face bears the expression of

hopeless grief; the empty stare, the sharp-lined profile,
the dull blue-green complexion are those of a man who is
truly dead, of Christ forsaken by the Father...and without
the promise of Resurrection. (Kristeva, 241)

This painting Kristeva compares with other art of the period, which she feels

"embellishes, or at least ennobles Christ's face during the Passion; but above

all...surrounds Christ with figures that are [...aware of] the certainty of the

Resurrection." Holbein, Kristeva notes, "leaves the corpse strangely alone" (243). The

viewer's gaze "penetrates this closed-in coffin from below" (242), the body is "stretched

out alone, situated above the viewers and separated from them," it is "inaccessible,

distant and without a beyond." Christ alone and separated, suffered and entombed,

Kristeva suggests that "[a]nother, a new morality resides in this painting" (243).

Holbein's painting is an elongated rectangle, in the viewing of which our eyes

are forced to move from side to side rather than top to bottom. Gone are powerful,

vertical, shafts of light reaching toward heaven, present is a heavy, leaden ceiling. And

thus, Kristeva implies, we see a shift in the orientation of the viewing subject. He/she is

forced to follow the lines of the painting in a horizontal *reading*. Gutenberg's work has

begun to bear fruit, the world will never be the same. The position occupied by the

subject will never be the same.

Of course, such locating of turning points is at best always arbitrary; the most

we can do in our retrospective analysis is approximate. With this is mind, Hannah

Arendt nonetheless outlines, in *The Human Condition*, a history of human ideas

plagued and blessed by multiple twists and turns, by subtle and not-so-subtle reversals of received wisdom. The goal of her historical analysis, she writes, is to "trace back modern world alienation...to its origins" (Arendt 1989, 6). Arendt assumes, then, a world alienation, a world from which we, its inhabitants, are separate, as the viewers of Holbein's painting are separated. She looks, as we all look following Augustine (we are all creatures of habit), back to a garden, in order that she might (this is important) *understand* better our current situation. Arendt wishes to understand our separation. Let me suggest, at this early stage of the present writing, that understanding and separation are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. The primacy of understanding in the modern West renders separation a necessity.

Let me tell you (part of) a story. The Reformations of the 16th and 17th centuries were attempts by various groups and individuals to call into question the authority of the Roman church. With the concomitant "scientific revolution," human-kind found itself cut loose from its moorings in religious dogma and political authority. In the early seventeenth century, René Descartes wrote: "I was embarrassed by so many doubts and errors, which appeared in no way to profit me in my attempt at learning, except that more and more I discovered my ignorance" (Descartes, 3). Beginning, always arbitrarily, with Descartes, we see two things. No longer certain of just where he stood, Descartes was plagued by doubt. He was *haunted* by doubt. He needed to "reform [his] own thoughts and to build upon a foundation which [was] completely [his] own" (9). While he was purportedly hearkening back to *original* foundations, Descartes nonetheless came to realize, via his studies in the "great book

of the world" (5), that the only trustworthy foundation on which to build would be one

discernible to the human senses. His famous "I think, therefore I am" (19) became, for

Descartes and for posterity,

> a foundational principle which resists doubt. It is not a
> case of the *cogito* being incapable of being proved, but
> rather of the *cogito* being deemed to lie beyond the *need*
> for any such proof. It is self-evidently in this latter
> category, in Descartes's [sic] view, and at that point
> scepticism [sic] ceases. (Sim, 21)

A precursor to his famous *cogito*, Descartes made *dubito* a necessary condition

of being human, and yielded, the story goes, a world devoid of certainty. As Arendt

puts it, "Cartesian doubt did not simply doubt that human understanding may not be

open to every truth or that human vision may not be able to see everything, but that

intelligibility to human understanding does not at all constitute a demonstration of truth"

(Arendt 1968b, 275). A world thus founded on doubt could no longer be sure of

anything. All remained to be determined. All needed to be determined.

Kant I

It was into such an intellectual climate that Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was

pulled. In 1766 Kant wrote that he "had the fate to be in love with metaphysics"

(Beiser, 26.). In love with, arguably obsessed with, a discipline more than a little on the

defensive since the growth of the new sciences, Kant sought to shore it up. He

attempted to provide a grounding for metaphysics, upon which it might stand after the

virulent attacks brought against its Aristotelian foundations by the likes of Descartes.

While Descartes had suggested that the certainty of the subject's own existence was

an adequate starting point for philosophical inquiry, Kant felt that *cogito,* and the *dubito*

that necessarily preceded it, needed a grounding of their own. It was simply not

enough to assume the subject. Roger Scruton describes the difficulty:

> I cannot extend my skepticism into the subjective sphere
> (the sphere of consciousness): so I can be immediately
> certain of my present mental states. But I cannot be
> immediately certain of what I am, or whether, indeed,
> there is an "I" to whom these states belong. These
> further propositions must be established by argument,
> and that argument [was] yet to be found. (Scruton, 12)

The Cartesian doubt can be aware of itself, but not, thought Kant, of its self. Doubting

Descartes' *cogito,* then, Kant set out, in the monumental *Critique of Pure Reason,*

published in 1781, to answer the question, "how can I know the world as it is?"

(Scruton, 13). Kant proudly proclaimed:

> In this enquiry I have made completeness my chief aim,
> and I venture to assert that there is not a single
> metaphysical problem which has not been solved, or for
> the solution of which the key has not been supplied.
> (Kant 1965, 10)

Ambitious and bold, Kant intended, if not to end the constant debates that

occupied the philosophy of his time, at least to render them solvable. The first *Critique*

was concerned with understanding, and understanding, for Kant, was, in its most basic

form, a "power of representation" (Caygill, 406). Characterized as a "faculty for unifying representations,"

> understanding is always occupied in investigating
> appearances, in order to detect some rule in them.
> These rules, however, issue *a priori* from the
> understanding itself, for it is also characterized as the
> "lawgiver of nature"....[T]he understanding is given the
> materials of experience by the sensibility, which it then
> processes by means of subsuming them under a rule.
> (406)

Understanding, then, according to Kant, is a faculty by means of which disparate and multiple sensations, representations of representations, are "formed" into a manageable synthesis, one that can be "understood." Caygill suggests that the "understanding secures 'the unity of appearances by means of rules'" (348). But the rules themselves need to be organized, unified in their turn. Kant, the strict German metaphysician, constructed an architectonic, or a "system [made] out of a 'mere aggregate of knowledge'" (84). It is helpful, I think, to imagine the Kantian architectonic as a governing body, made up of various departments, each of which has its own responsibilities, and each of which is supervised and provided with strict parameters within which to work, by legislating bodies which co-exist in the bureaucracy of the mind.

The critical philosophy of Kant, then, was an attempt to "bound and ground" differentiated realms of rationality: what can we know, and how can we know it? Dismissing religion and dogma as sources of legitimation for authority, Kant

bequeathed to modernity the project of finding what Emilia Steuerman calls "a *rational grounding of norms for autonomous domains of rationality*." And thus, as Steuerman puts it, the "normativity project is the problem of modernity" (Steuerman, 101). Which is to say that the problem of modernity is the problem of legitimating authority.

------------------◆------------------

While Descartes suggested that humankind could know only that which made itself known through the five senses, his near contemporary, Galileo Galilei, went somewhat further when he demonstrated — actually demonstrated — that the Copernican heliocentric universe, a universe which seemed to be counter-sensual, was a factual reality. Thus, while all we could count on was our senses, it became apparent that even they needed help. Our senses, that is, could be deceived. Forever deprived, by Galileo's telescope, of a Ptolmeic reality once so firmly established, descendants of Descartes inevitably came to doubt "that such a thing as truth exist[ed] at all" (Arendt 1989, 276). If, that is, one could not be *certain* of truth, how could there be truth? Arendt writes:

> What was lost...was not the capacity for truth or reality or
> faith...but the certainty that formerly went with it....[T]he
> loss of certainty of truth ended in a new, entirely
> unprecedented zeal for truthfulness — as though man
> [sic] could afford to be a liar only so long as he was
> certain of the unchallengeable existence of truth and
> objective reality, which surely would survive and defeat
> all his lies. (277-278)

Arendt's point here must be emphasized. While the truthfulness of truth came under close critical scrutiny, the lofty position held by truth, or knowledge, or understanding, was effectively unchanged. Approaches to truth and truthfulness changed, respect for them did not.

We cannot fail here to think of Michel Foucault's genealogy of the Western subject. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault suggests that "Western man [sic] has become a confessing animal" (Foucault 1990, 59). The "zeal for truthfulness" outlined by Arendt yielded, according to Foucault, a world in which the speaking of truth — confessing — often quite independently of just what was spoken, was at once liberating and healing. But of course, as Foucault notes, "[t]he truth did not reside solely in the subject who, by confessing, would reveal it fully formed....[I]t could only reach completion in the one who assimilated and recorded it" (66). As Galileo's telescope was needed to demonstrate "truth" to star-gazers, the (priestly) analyst's "mirror" of interpretation was needed to reflect hidden truths back to analysands (confessors). In either case, the "naked subject," so in need of something tangible, so in need of truth, nonetheless needed help in order to see.

Convinced by Descartes of the need to depend only on the senses, and shown by Galileo that the senses were not completely reliable, the modern subject simply needed to work harder, and needed help, to get to the truth. As Arendt puts it, there was a shift in emphasis from "truth to truthfulness and from reality to reliability" (Arendt 1989, 279). We needed to smell from closer, needed to hear from closer, and needed

to see from closer. And if this new-found need for closeness was met via technology, so much the better: closeness without proximity.

The myth of science posits, as a foundational principle, a complete objectivity, a complete separation of the observer from the observed. Technology has rendered the far away near, by allowing us to make the small appear large, but it has of necessity done so by using intermediary devices — tools — and as surely as these tools bring us metaphorically closer to our objects of investigation, they must certainly come between the gaze and the gazed-upon. Technology, then, must be seen as a barrier. We are closer than ever before, but we are always and necessarily separated. Which is, of course, not merely coincidental. For to understand a thing, to get to know its truth(s), we must objectify it, take it in hand as an it, and look at it.[7] We are able to get inside each others' bodies now, without being (terribly) close.

You see — and this brings us back to Kristeva's separated Christ — "[m]odern culture is a garden culture. It defines itself as the design for an ideal life and a perfect arrangement of human conditions" (Bauman 1991, 92). Kristeva can locate a turning point in Holbein's painting because she sees in it a foreshadowing of the idea that "[m]odern society specialize[s] in the public refurbishment of the social space: it [aims]

---

7. Anticipating, Levinas: "Knowledge as perception, concept, comprehension, refers back to an act of grasping. The metaphor should be taken literally: even before any technical application of knowledge, it expresses the principle rather than the result of the....technological and industrial order of which every civilization [sic] bears at least the seed....The most abstract lessons of science...have their beginnings in the 'world of life' and refer to things within hand's reach" (Levinas 1989, 76-77).

at the creation of a public space in which there [is] to be *no moral proximity*" (Bauman

1993, 83).

Chapter 1: Lyotard and the "Postmodern" Condition

In the afterword to Lyotard's *The Postmodern Explained*, Wlad Godzich, Lyotard translator and commentator, suggests that much of Lyotard's work is "as modern as they come" (Godzich, 129). Lyotard, the reluctant herald of the "postmodern,"[8] is modern, that is, inasmuch as modernity — as bequeathed by Kant and critical philosophy — is a mode of thinking characterized by a restless critique. Emilia Steuerman, in her contribution to Andrew Benjamin's *Judging Lyotard*, makes a convincing case for the understanding that postmodernism is itself more an acceptance of "modernity's challenge than a challenge to modernity" (Steuerman, 11). Lyotard, according to Steuerman, is simply picking up the gauntlet thrown down by what he refers to as the "bloodstained centuries" of the modernity project (Lyotard 1993a, 78). Here is Lyotard:

> The "post-" indicates something like a conversion: a new
> direction from the previous one. Now this idea of a linear
> chronology is itself perfectly "modern." It is at once part
> of Christianity, Cartesianism, and Jacobinism: since we
> are inaugurating something completely new, the hands of
> the clock should be put back to zero. The very idea of
> modernity is closely correlated with the principle that it is
> both possible and necessary to break with tradition and
> institute absolutely new ways of living and thinking. (76)

---

8. Lyotard is reluctant, as will become clear, simply because he means not so much to advocate, as to announce, a different manner of thinking, one which may or may not be better or worse than the so-called modern manner, but which nonetheless is rendered necessary by the profound failure of the modernity project to live up to its own expectations. Modern thinking has been corrupted, so says post-modern thinking.

Lyotard's postmodernism is not a break with modernity. For "break" bespeaks

modernity. To "break" with modernity would be thoroughly modern. In yet another

afterword, this time to *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard writes that "[m]odernity, in

whatever age it appears, cannot exist without a shattering of belief, without a discovery

of the 'lack of reality' in reality, together with the invention of other realities" (Lyotard

1984, 77). Modernity, then, is not so much a period, as a way of being in, and seeing

"reality." It is an orientation. "Modernity is a temporal manner, like a kind of table

manners or manner of thinking" (Lyotard 1989, 24). "The date does not matter"

(Lyotard 1985, 14). Manners, we will see, are important.

Lyotard suggests that modernity is "constitutionally and ceaselessly pregnant

with its postmodernity," and writes:

> neither modernity nor so-called postmodernity can be
> identified and defined as clearly circumscribed historical
> entities, of which the latter would always come "after" the
> former. Rather we have to say that the postmodern is
> always implied in the modern because of the fact that
> modernity, modern temporality, comprises in itself an
> impulsion to exceed itself into a state other than itself.
> (Lyotard 1991b, 25)

And so we must be ever vigilant in reminding ourselves that postmodernity is not to be

thought of as Lyotard's vision of the epoch which follows modernity. Lyotard

consistently writes against the periodizations that characterize so much current

analysis[9]. The post- of Lyotard's postmodern is simply a suggestion that, from

---

9. See Lyotard's complaint of "weariness with regard to 'theory,' and the miserable slackening that goes
along with it (new this, new that, post-this, post-that, etc.)" (Lyotard 1988a, xiii).

Lyotard's perspective, modern, technological thought has expired of its own accord.

Lyotard does not invoke the postmodern; he simply announces it. Although, to be fair,

one must admit that it is Lyotard's position that altogether too many of us stubbornly

refuse to let go of the dreams of the Enlightenment, blatantly denying its demise. To

the extent that this is the case Lyotard invokes postmodern thinking, or, better,

encourages an awareness of the "postmodern condition."

Glossary I

Philosophy: Derivative of Greece, Lyotard would have us understand that philosophy culminated in Hegel. It is a discourse entered on one condition, "the initial displacement of the subject into a polymorphous *Selbst*.....There is only X. It is the same under the various forms and throughout all the operations, and that is why it is totalized into a single *Resultat*, which is disintegrated in turn for new operations" (Lyotard 1988a, 96). Philosophy, that is, is "inseparable from the...idea of a universal subject" (Lyotard 1993b, 3). The Hegelianism which has ruled philosophy for generations, Lyotard suggests, does so with a heavy hand. "[T]he Hegelian oak tree," according to Lyotard, "is a complete perversion of the Kantian acorn" (Lyotard 1988b, 42). "The *Selbst* comes to occupy the addressee instance of the speculative phrase, [and ...] thus occupies three instances: referent, sense, and addressee" (Lyotard 1988a, 92). And thus the subject of the discourse is taken (given) to be the addressee of the discourse, and as a matter of course, as a matter of rules, is then not able to be put into question.

Subject: The bearer of the pronominal I, s/he who is "one." The so-called "universal subject" is an Idea (see below, p. 33), the object of which takes as a given the essentialist notion that the Idea "humankind" refers to a homogenous field. "We," is replaced by the above *Selbst*, a one out of many, a synthesis, a refusal of difference, a disavowal of heterogeneity.

The Differend I

"Philosophy," Lyotard writes, "is the West's madness and never ceases to underwrite its quests for knowledge and politics in the name of Truth and the Good" (Lyotard 1989, 118). This is a portentous statement. For the Lyotardian *oeuvre*, it seems to me, is bent on demonstrating that the quest for knowledge, and its resultant politics, has yielded, and this, apparently, in the name of the Good, a world of oppression and exploitation. Here we see at once the heart of Lyotard's criticism, and a paradox contained in that heart; a murmur. Lyotard, the philosopher, is suspicious of philosophy, and yet, as we will see, calls for a renewed philosophizing. While I am loathe to untie the paradox, let me offer what I take to be Lyotard's quotation, completed, modified to be better understood: "Philosophy is the West's madness [*inasmuch as*] it never ceases to underwrite its quests for knowledge and politics in the name of Truth and the Good." Let me suggest, then, that philosophy, as it has come to be practiced, and as it has come to be disseminated and popularized by those Lyotard refers to as "intellectuals," is the West's madness.[10] Philosophy as Lyotard would practice it, on the other hand, is a criticism in which the rules are not set out in advance, in which "the stakes...are in a rule (or rules) which remains to be sought, and to which the discourse cannot be made to conform before the rule has been found. The links from phrase to phrase are not ruled by a rule but by the quest for a rule" (97). And of course, once a rule is articulated, and operated according to, the discourse

---

10. Adrian Peperzak: "Philosophical discourse is the most explicit example of...a systematic and foundational language. It gathers beings together by asking how they fit into the order of a whole. As the search for foundations, philosophy has a fondness for *archai*, be they source or germ, end or completion, cause or matter. Philosophical discourse is totalitarian and 'archaic'" (Peperzak, 51).

ceases to be philosophical. Lyotard's rule, it would appear, is that there be no rules,

which, it seems to me is still a rule, an observation to which Geoffrey Bennington

responds:

> Lyotard knows that he and his writing are irremediably,
> always already, situated in discourse, in the realm of the
> concept, in the secondary sphere: there can be no pure
> "escape" into a "beyond" of representation: energy as
> such cannot be presented in person. It does not of
> course follow that all ways of negotiating this situation are
> equivalent. (Bennington, 24)

Philosophy, then, as Lyotard understands it, offers, not a key, not a solution, but a way

toward.... Well, that is the problem, isn't it. Toward what? We want a goal, an end.

Modern philosophy, a philosophy in the name of Truth, is a philosophy in which

matters of justice, ethics, and politics are subjugated to understanding.[11] That is, in

philosophy as it is predominantly practiced in the modern West, the end is held to be

the uncovering of Truth; right action, or moral behavior, must be the result of a

sophisticated casuistry, one in which the means toward the end (Truth) are held to be

given. And this is to say that, in the game of philosophy as it is usually played, the

rules of the game are set out in advance (by Aristotle, by Hegel. By Lyotard?), and that

these rules strictly delimit the results of the game. Put simply, Lyotard suggests that

philosophy all-too-often "does not question its presuppositions" (Lyotard 1988a, 46).

---

11. This is elaborated upon at p.129, below.

And so, when he suggests, in 1988's *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, that

"[t]he time has come to philosophize" (xiii), Lyotard is being at once sincere and

sarcastic. Sarcastic inasmuch as philosophy, as it has descended from the Greeks,

has certainly been in practice for some time. Lyotard is sincere inasmuch as he sees

himself as philosophizing differently. He would have his readers understand, by

philosophy as he invokes it, a discourse whose "stakes are in discovering its rules

rather than in supposing their knowledge as a principle" (xiv). Lyotard describes

himself as a "philosopher, not an expert. [He suggests that the] latter knows what he

knows and what he does not know: the former does not. One concludes, the other

questions" (Lyotard 1984, xxv).

The *Differend*, then, is both Lyotard's philosophy and Lyotard philosophizing.

"You really are," he writes, "reading a book of philosophy, the phrases in it are

concatenated in such a way as to show that that concatenation is not just a matter of

course and that the rule for their concatenation remains to be found" (Lyotard 1988a,

129). It is a book in search of its rules, and a book in search of its audience (xiv). It is,

accordingly, a very difficult book to read, a bad-mannered book. While the earlier *Just*

Gaming had looked at the world from the perspective of language games, in *The*

Differend Lyotard leaves behind the language game "because it implies players who

are subjective agents empowered and even enjoined to use language as a tool, and,

thus, the language game reinstates a transcendental subject" (Dunn, 195). *The*

Differend offers, rather, a "critique of the prejudice that it is 'man' who 'speaks'" (Lyotard

1988a, 77). By giving priority to "the phrase,"[12] Lyotard attempts to de-privilege the

modern subject, the subject who (which), at least since Kant, has been held to be the

foundation for what passes as philosophy; and thus serves notice that one of his

primary philosophical "foils" is the so-called "philosophy of the subject." Using "the

phrase" as his basic unit of analysis, Lyotard writes that,

> [t]here are a number of phrase regimens: reasoning,
> knowing, describing, recounting, questioning, showing,
> ordering, etc. Phrases from heterogeneous regimens
> cannot be translated from one into the other. They can
> be linked one onto the other in accordance with *an end
> fixed by a genre of discourse*. (Lyotard 1988a, xii, my
> emphasis)

Within disparate genres of discourse, phrases "behave" in accordance with specified

rules, the genre's "regimen." Phrases "happen." And they immediately present a

"universe" made up of an addressor, an addressee, a referent, and a sense (13ff.).

They are therefore, "immediately social" (139), and are linked onto according to the

rules (regimen) correlative to the various genres of discourse (economic, academic,

etc.) within which they happen. "No phrase is first" (136), and there is always a next

phrase. Even "[s]ilence is a phrase" (xii).

---

12. The French *phrase* used by Lyotard in his original work, which would be literally translated as
"sentence," is translated by Georges Van Den Abbeele simply as "phrase." Geoffrey Bennington,
however, in his *Lyotard: Writing the Event*, finds this to be slightly misleading. "In avoiding 'sentence's'
connotation of grammatical completion and unity," he writes, "'phrase' carries a strong sense of
designating a *fragment* of such a unity. On balance, it is more accurate to think of Lyotard's *phrase* as a
unity than as a fragment of a larger unity" (Bennington, 124).

With this in mind, before we continue with *The Differend*, we must look at the aforementioned *Just Gaming*. We must, that is, defer. In *Just Gaming*, constructed as a seven day dialogue with Jean-Loup Thébaud, Lyotard makes so bold as to state unequivocally that "there is no just society" (Lyotard 1985, 25), and suggests that, in fact, it "is not possible to produce a learned discourse upon what justice is" (26). Now these appear to be two radical suggestions. However, the two statements are in fact simply implications which follow from the Kantian suggestion that objects of Ideas cannot be found in empirical experience.

You see, justice, for Kant, is an Idea. And an Idea is a "concept...transcending the possibility of experience" (Kant 1965, 314). "[N]o object adequate to the transcendental idea," Kant writes, "can ever be found within experience" (319). [13] Notwithstanding this, it is Lyotard's contention that for centuries philosophical discourse has occupied itself with the quest for precisely such an object. The "so-called ontological language game" (Lyotard 1985, 53), the language of philosophy, created models of "just societies," and the proximity of "real societies" to these models was measured. The degree to which the "real" approximated the model was therefore the degree to which a particular society was considered just. Justice, then, became a determinant concept; not an Idea, but a cognitive concept which could be described, if not attained. Or rather, justice came to thought of as something which, once described,

---

13. "Nothing, indeed, can be more injurious, or more unworthy of a philosopher, than the vulgar appeal to so-called adverse experience" (Kant 1981, 312).

could be attained. And this is a situation which Lyotard finds intolerable. Here is

Lyotard:

> [W]hat is usually called justice,....and I am obviously not
> speaking here of its content but merely of the position of
> the term in a discourse that will state what that content is
> (that is, define justice), implies....the idea, the
> representation, that the thing is absent, that it is to be
> effected in the society, that it is lacking in the society, and
> that it can be accomplished only if it is first correctly
> thought out or described....This means that there is *a type*
> *of discourse that somehow dominates the social practice*
> *of justice and that subordinates it to itself.*...This is what
> Plato is thinking of when he speaks of the philosopher-
> king. (Lyotard 1985, 20, my emphasis)

We see further Lyotard's disdain for the arrogance of philosophy, inasmuch as it

presumes to hold up *the* model for a just society. He suggests that there is no just

society because, due to the hegemony granted this modeling, ontological discourse,

every so-called just society is simply one which corresponds to some model. And, with

the "right" model, even injustice can be justified. That is to say, if any given state can

be said to be just, can be derived as just — can, that is, be justified (by resorting to a

descriptive model which demonstrates a correspondence between itself and reality) —

then discussion is closed off. And it is this closing off of discussion which, according to

Lyotard, is injustice itself. What is unjust he writes, is "[n]ot the opposite of the just, but

that which prohibits that the question of the just and the unjust be, and remain, raised"

(Lyotard 1985, 66-67). Lyotard's writing is about *possibility.*

Glossary II[14]

Prescriptive(s): A prescriptive either prescribes or proscribes. That is, a phrase is prescriptive to the extent that its intent is to oblige its addressee: Close the door. The phrase itself, taken only of itself, is a prescriptive phrase. Also: Don't kill. The intent of both phrases is to elicit conformance, to obligate the addressee to carry out a certain operation, or not, in the case of the latter. Whether the addressee is obligated as a result of hearing the phrase is not addressed.

Normative(s): A normative phrase is a second-order phrase. The above prescriptive phrases are in a sense "neutral" as they stand alone. It takes a second phrase, be it implied or actual, to make the addressee of the first, prescriptive phrase, perform.

Denotative(s): While the second-order phrase, the normative, can be seen to be a commentary on the prescriptive, there is still a second level of commentary, the denotative phrase, which cites the normative. Think of this writing. Or think of Kant's work as denotative. Lyotard:

> A phrase is obligatory if its addressee is obligated. Why
> he or she is obligated is something he or she can
> perhaps think to explain. In any case, the explanation
> requires further phrases, in which he or she is no longer
> situated as the addressee but as the addressor, and
> whose stakes are no longer those of obeying, but those of
> convincing a third party of the reasons one has for
> obeying. (Lyotard 1988a, 108)

And so for Lyotard, the problematic philosophical discourse of justice is one in which, "a just practice will have to conform to denotative statements (statements that denote justice) that are themselves true. This is where the *pathos* of conviction is involved: it admits that the statement of the philosopher, for example, is true" (Lyotard 1985, 20). Truth, then, within this discourse, is the guarantor of justice. The apparent justice, or injustice, of a prescriptive (which, as we will see, comes to have a direct

---

14. This glossary is based on a reading of Lyotard's essay, "Levinas' Logic" (Lyotard 1989, 275-313), esp. 300-304.

bearing on whether its addressee is obligated) is determined after the prescriptive, and based on a normative phrase which takes as its purpose a description of reality. Viz., *given that such and such conditions obtain, the prescriptive phrase is just, and therefore, obligating.* Lyotard locates here his so-called "transcendental illusion," which consists in the "pretension to found the good or the just upon the true, or what ought to be upon what is. By found [Lyotard] mean[s] the seeking and articulating of implications which allow a prescriptive phrase to be concluded from cognitive phrases" (Lyotard 1988a, 108). This, as we will see, is a key argument in the Lyotardian discourse. "I am struck," he writes, "by the fact that prescriptives, taken seriously, are never grounded: one can never reach the just by a conclusion....[T]hat which ought [cannot] be concluded from that which is" (Lyotard 1985, 17). I will have much to say on this matter.

Kant II

In *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant, having attempted to outline several distinct realms of rationality in the first *Critique*, set out to establish firmly criteria whereby the behaviour of humanity might be judged moral or immoral. He sought, that is, to ground morality. His famous categorical imperative, of course, was the result: "So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as the principle giving universal law" (Kant 1965, 30).

In his introduction to the second *Critique,* Lewis White Beck suggests that Kant

distinguishes rational beings from other sensible beings, noting that while all beings

must necessarily behave in accordance with laws (nature's laws), only rational beings

"can have and act according to a *conception* of laws" (x). "Will," according to this

thinking, is the name given to the "subjective experience of control of impulse by

reason" (xi), in response to conceptions of laws. The second *Critique,* again according

to Beck, is a study of will understood as "practical reason, *reason applied in conduct*"

(xi). Its purpose is to demonstrate that practical reason can

> provide the motives and even set the goals of action.
> The law conceived by reason in this capacity is not an
> empirical law of nature, not even a law of human nature
> learned from psychology — no, it is moral law, and the
> imperative to obey it is a categorical imperative, not
> hypothetical and contingent upon the actual presence of
> a given impulse. (xi)

This law, as Kant puts it, "absolutely and directly determines the will," and is therefore

"unconditional"(31). The obligated subject's will (experience of control of impulse by

reason) is determined in advance, unfree. "True moral necessity, Kant held, would

make an act necessary regardless of what the agent wants" (Schneewind, 313). Such

a universal law is not, however, a prescription to act in a certain manner to obtain a

desired effect. Rather, it is a "rule which determines the will a priori only with respect to

the form of its maxims [personal plans of action]" (Kant 1965, 31). The moral law, that

is, is a *formal* law, devoid of content. Which is not to say that morality is content-free.

"There must be content...but it can only come from outside the will, from desires and

needs....[A]ll that the moral law can do is to provide the form for matter that comes from our desires" (Schneewind, 318). Kant:

> All the material of practical rules rests only on subjective
> conditions, which can afford the rules no
> universality....Without exception, they all revolve around
> the principle of one's own happiness....[But this] material
> cannot be supposed...to be the determining ground and
> condition of the maxim....The mere form of a law, which
> limits its material, must be a condition for adding this
> material to the will but not presuppose the material as the
> condition of the will. (Kant 1993, 34-35)

Kant continues by suggesting that the categorical command to "so act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as the principle giving universal law" dictates just *how* we should proceed to attempt to satisfy empirically conditioned precepts. That is, we should behave in such a manner that if everyone behaved so, it would be in the best interest of all. However, even though it is in everyone's power to satisfy the moral law, not everyone will do so.

Well, this is still very unclear. To clarify, Kant proceeds to "deduct" the moral law. He begins by comparing the second *Critique* with the first, in which he claims to have demonstrated that "[b]eyond objects of experience...all positive knowledge was correctly denied to speculative reason" (44). The knowledge of supersensible reality referred to above was denied to speculative reason. "On the other hand," he writes,

> the moral law...does provide a fact absolutely inexplicable
> from any data of the world of sense or from the whole
> compass of the theoretical use of reason, and this fact

> points to a pure intelligible world — indeed, it defines it
> positively and enables us to know something of it,
> namely, a law....Nature, in the widest sense of the word,
> is the existence of things under laws. (44)

Kant ostensibly attempts to legitimate prescriptive phrases by deducing the moral law,

but concedes that "the objective reality of the moral law can be proved through no

deduction" (48-49).

The attempt to deduce prescriptives appears to fail, leaving only the possibility

of a negative deduction of freedom. Kant:

> the moral principle itself serves as a principle of the
> deduction of an inscrutable faculty which no experience
> can prove but which speculative reason had to assume
> as at least possible....This is the faculty of freedom, which
> the moral law, itself needing no justifying grounds, shows
> to be not only possible but actual in beings who
> acknowledge the law as binding upon them. The moral
> law is, in fact, a law of causality through freedom. (49)

Thus moral law is not deduced, but it is given the "credential" of being a "principle of

the deduction of freedom as a causality of pure reason" (49). Kant's argument here

changes direction. From a "failed" attempt to deduce the moral law, he proceeds to a

deduction of freedom, using the moral law as a premise. We must make no mistake,

here, however. We must realize that a thinker of Kant's stature did not surprise himself

with his "failure," and we must, therefore, ask ourselves just what we are to learn here.

Why did Kant do this? Because he wanted to demonstrate a "definite law of causality

in an intelligible world (causality through freedom). This is the moral law" (51).

Having been "unsuccessful" in his attempt to uncover a firm foundation on which to rest his categorical imperative, Kant nonetheless bequeathed to his successors a significant legacy. Indeed what we see in the second *Critique* is Kant's suggestion that the moral law itself is a "formal determining ground of action through practical pure reason....Thus respect for the law is not the drive to morality; it is morality itself" (78-79). Moral behaviour, then, is rule-based behaviour. If one is following the rules, one is behaving morally. Kant thus grants "authority and absolute sovereignty to the law" (79). And this, of course prompts Lyotard to suggest that we must not "believe that the law is the law because it is just, when [we] know that the law is just...because it is the law" (Lyotard 1988a, 144).

But there is more to learn from Kant's "failure" to deduce the moral law. We must also see the Kantian text itself demonstrating the philosophy contained within it. We have seen that, according to the categorical imperative, the addressee of a prescriptive phrase is thought to be obligated based upon whether the phrase can be seen to be universalizable. For the prescriptive phrase x, the normative phrase would read as follows: (do) x, if you can see that the phrase "(do) x" is universalizable. If, that is "(do) x" is a prescriptive that, were it carried out by everyone, would not result in anarchy. Which is to say that, according to Kant, for any prescriptive phrase, the categorical imperative, "So act, etc.," must be the normative phrase, the legitimating instance. However, keeping in mind our earlier discussion of prescriptives, normatives, and denotatives (p.35), what may we make of Kant's rhetorical strategy?

Lyotard is quick to point out that Kant "does not order his reader to declare the statement of the law obligatory on condition that it is universalizable [, and suggests, in fact, that] Kant does not order his reader to do anything" (Lyotard 1989, 302). The reader of Kant's text is not, strictly speaking, obligated. He or she is "placed before a universe of denotative statements....The prescriptive statements [encountered] in the Kantian commentary are always only 'images' of themselves" (303). The denotative Kantian commentary, or metalanguage, while not prescriptive, is an attempt to convince the reader of the validity of the Kantian arguments concerning prescriptives and normative phrases, viz., that the choice as to whether one is obligated by a prescriptive phrase must be based on the categorical imperative, must be based on universalizability.

And we must note that, in this close relationship between prescriptive statements and the descriptive, denotative, commentary that follows them, what is happening is that the ethical import/impact of the prescriptive phrase is being subordinated to the commentary. Whether there is a moral law, and whether, therefore, there is moral behaviour, comes to depend on the validity of the arguments used by the writer, in this case Kant. "In this subordination of prescriptives to denotatives," Lyotard writes, "the executive force of the former is lost" (Lyotard 1989, 287).

What is further implied in this dynamic is a shift in position on the part of the addressee of a prescription. From addressee, he or she immediately moves to the position of addressor of a subsequent phrase. Of course, the subsequent phrase may

simply be implied. I am told not to kill, or rather, to not kill. Even if the second, normative phrase is "in my head only," as soon as I think it — even if I do not think it, because it is so ingrained — I become an addressor of a phrase which takes as its referent the first, prescriptive phrase: *Here is why it is the case that I should not kill.* I am never called, or I never stay called, I must always dodge the call, by becoming an addressor of a subsequent phrase. This, as we will see when we discuss Levinas, is of utmost significance. For the moment, we leave Kant once again, and return to Lyotard on justice, on *Just Gaming.*

Prescriptions as to how to bring about a just society simply cannot be derived from descriptions of "justice," no matter how accurate the description of, or how true the knowledge of, justice. The discourse of descriptives, of denotatives, is fundamentally different from the discourse of prescriptives. "All statements do not belong to the same class" (Lyotard 1985, 21), and therefore the "passage from [descriptive to prescriptive] is, properly speaking, unintelligible" (22). It is not legitimate to establish ethical prescriptions as just, based on descriptive statements. There exists between prescription and description "a resistance, an incommensurability,... an irrelevancy" (22). To better comprehend this "irrelevancy," we need to look more closely at Lyotard's understanding of the subject.

"True knowledge," Lyotard writes, "... is incorporated into the metanarrative of a

subject" (Lyotard 1984, 35). And elsewhere:

> [T]his passage from the true to the just raises a problem,
> because...it would mean that a prescriptive statement
> would constitute an obligation only if the one who
> receives it, that is, the addressee of the statement, is able
> to put himself in the position of the sender of the
> statement, that is, of its utterer, in order to work out all
> over again the theoretical discourse that legitimates, in
> the eyes of the sender, the command that he is issuing.
> (Lyotard 1985, 23)

Lyotard suggests, reading Marx and Plato, that "what is actually at stake is...a norm-

giving subject [....,] a true being of society" (23). Now here is Anne Barron, commenting

on the work of John Rawls:

> The true principles of justice for a society the basic unit of
> which is the *moral person* are to be found in a true
> conception of what it is to be a moral person: the
> prescriptive is to be derived from a description of *the
> self*....The legitimacy of Rawls's conception of justice...is
> guaranteed by the figure of the subject who is legislator.
> The roles of the subject and author of the law are
> interchangeable. (Barron, 30-1, my emphasis)

I bring this quotation into the present discussion because it offers an excellent

description of the difficulty Lyotard has with what he calls the "subject that is authorized

to say 'we'" (Lyotard 1985, 81). There is, in the modern Western understanding of

justice, an assumed consensus between rational autonomous subjects, a presumed

essential sameness that is expected to render the different positions that the modern

subject occupies easily interchangeable.[15] Most importantly, the roles of subject and

author of the law are held to be absolutely interchangeable. Thus, "we the people,"

about which more later.

We again defer, and return to *The Differend.* A differend occurs, Lyotard

suggests, in a "case where the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes

for that reason a victim" (9). Thus a differend is different from a "litigation," in which

both parties speak the same language. Lyotard offers, as examples of differends, the

Nazi attempt to exterminate Jews in the mid-twentieth century, and what he sees to be

the capitalist exploitation of wage-earners (10). In both cases, the differend represents

a double bind situation: if one died in an extermination camp, one would be unable to

complain about it, if one lived to complain about it, one cannot complain;[16] and how,

Lyotard asks, can a laborer demonstrate that that which she cedes hour by hour, week

by week, in exchange for wages is not in fact a commodity? How, that is, can a laborer

demonstrate that she is not for sale, unless she quits working?

Thus, a differend occurs with a clash of heterogeneous phrase regimens, in

which, by definition, a means of communicating that does justice to both parties in the

dispute is absent, and in which any attempt to find a consensus, or common language,

15. Lyotard: "this tribunal [of cognition] requires that the obligatory be only that which the obligated one can reasonably account for in argumentation. It therefore supposes that I can occupy the place of the addressor of prescriptions, that I can 'assume' them" (Lyotard 1988a, 117), and "blindness is in putting yourself in the place of the other, in saying *I* in his or her place, in neutralizing his or her transcendence" (109).
16. While Lyotard may be accused here of minimizing the significance of the *Shoah*, his more detailed analysis, in a later section of the book (97-103), of the (non) working together of the various phrase regimens involved in the Nazi order "die!," makes clear that he is well aware that to have died was not necessarily the worst thing that could happen to one in a camp.

inevitably wrongs one or both parties. Now, much is at stake in the present writing, and in Lyotard's work, in his understanding of phrase regimens and so-called "genres of discourse." Accordingly, a presentation.

Presentation I

A phrase *presents* a universe — an addressee, an addressor, referent, and sense are presented by the phrase. "No matter which regimen it obeys, it entails a *There is [Il y a]*. There is what is signified [sense], what it is signified about [referent], to whom [addressee] and by whom [addressor] it is signified: a universe. *At least* one universe, because the sense, the referent, the addressor, or the addressee can be equivocal" (70).

"A presentation entailed by a phrase-case is not presented in the universe that this phrase presents.... It is not situated. But another phrase-case can present it in another universe and thereby situate it." (71). We can write/talk about a previous phrase universe: "a presentation can be presented as an instance in the universe of a phrase" (70). And so, while a presentation cannot present itself, it can be situated in a subsequent phrase, about the presentation.

Now this is bad-mannered writing. Let me attempt to unravel it somewhat. The phrase *write your thesis* comes along. It *presents* a universe made up of sense,

referent, addressee, and addressor (what is signified, what it is signified about , to whom, and by whom it is signified, respectively: a universe). Thus, *presentation*.

However, the presentation tells us nothing about just who/what occupies the four poles. They simply "are." To know more about them, we require that they be *situated*, by a subsequent phrase, or phrases. Thus, the phrase, *the department of Religion said "write your thesis"* situates the earlier phrase in a new universe. We now have described its addressor (department of Religion), its addressee (presumably one required to write a thesis), its sense (the department said such and such), and its referent (they said *write your thesis*).

But look, we now have a second phrase, and with it, a second universe, made up of addressor, addressee, sense, and referent. They are not the same as those of the first phrase. And the two phrases, recalling our distinctions above (p. 35), are from different genres of discourse. The first is a prescriptive, the second a descriptive. Can you determine, can you situate, that is, the four poles of this second phrase, in a third one? Try it. And see the footnote,[17] for some of the possibilities.

---

17. *The department of Religion has authority*. This third phrase is an implied, assumed phrase, but watch what it allows to happen, in a fourth phrase: *I am writing my thesis because the department of Religion told me to*. We have situated a definite addressee of the first phrase: me. And we have, by virtue of the implied phrase, made the sense of the first, second, and third phrases be something like *I must write my thesis*. Note that the addressee, addressor, and referent have all changed with each subsequent phrase. The fourth phrase, *I am writing, etc.*, situates the poles thusly: addressor — me, addressee — undetermined, referent — *the department of religion said, etc.*

And thus, "[a] situation is that at the heart of a universe presented by a phrase, relations indicated by the form of the phrases that link onto it...place the instances in relation to each other" (70-71). Depending upon which genre of discourse provides the phrase that links onto the original, the various poles are situated differently or not at all. And this is to suggest that, according to Lyotard, while "to link is necessary; how to link is contingent" (29). However...

The Differend II

There is more to Lyotard's understanding of the differend than we have thus far acknowledged. While we have spoken of the differend held to result from attempts to communicate on the part of two or more partners, in the absence of a medium amenable to each, there is another aspect of the differend to which we must now turn our attention. "The differend," Lyotard writes, " is the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be....In the differend, something 'asks' to be put into phrases and suffers from the wrong of not being able to be put into phrases right away" (Lyotard 1988a, 13). "[S]omething cries out" (1989, 357), and is yet unheard. Pre-linguistic, pre-cognitive, that which would find expression, cannot. Repression by default — denial. To the dismay of we humans "who thought [we] could use language as an instrument of communication..., [we] learn that [we] are summoned by language" (1988a, 13). And thus, the speaking subject — the rational, autonomous subject — comes to feel, rather

than know, *something* which it cannot express. In every expression there is *something*

which gets left out, there is a surplus.

Given that, as we have seen, there is a pressing need to know, to speak the

truth, there is, then, a suffering. The subject cannot bear the feelings which

accompany, which signal, the fact that there is a surplus, but at the same time cannot

find an appropriate way to articulate them — is rendered speechless. One is tempted

to use the word *victim*. However, while the inarticulate subject suffers, s/he is only a

victim if one assumes that suffering must have an end. This second understanding of

differend is not one of victims, it does not (simply) champion victims, "underdogs."

Rather, think of hostages. Think of being taken hostage by_____. Yes, that is the

difficulty. There is *something*, a "feeling: '[o]ne cannot find the words'" (13). One

cannot and will not find the words, but one must nonetheless attempt to do so. Lyotard,

as we have noted, suggests that "[a] lot of searching must be done to find new rules for

forming and linking phrases that are able to express the differend....What is at stake...is

to bear witness to differends by finding idioms for them" (13).

But the idioms required are "impossible" to find. And this because,

> [r]eality is not what is "given" to this or that "subject, it is a
> state of the referent (that about which one speaks) which
> results from the effectuation of establishment procedures
> defined by a unanimously agreed-upon protocol, and
> from the possibility offered to anyone to recommence this
> effectuation as often as he or she wants. (4)

In *The Differend* Lyotard describes and analyses several different and completely heteronomous genres of discourse. As I have suggested earlier, different genres of discourse operate according to differing, unique rules, "agreed-upon protocols," by means of which the *reality* presented by them will always maintain a certain structure. And we have noted Lyotard's distinction between a presentation and a situation: a phrase presents a universe, the various poles of which are situated by another, subsequent phrase. We have seen, further, that there exists a "void between [these] phrases" (138). Let us now look more closely at this hotly-contested place and time.

Lyotard makes what he calls the "vulgar" observation that there can be no such thing as now. Offering a modern — Augustinian/Husserlian — understanding of time (73), Lyotard suggests that "one cannot say *now*, it's too early (before) or too late (after)" (74). Time, as it is commonly construed, is constituted by enumerating a "moving body" (73)[18] "according to the opposition anterior/posterior, [along] a directional axis"(72). The *maintenant*, however, Lyotard suggests, is precisely what is not, cannot be, maintained (74). But Lyotard rests much of his thinking, as we have seen, on the significance of "*now*" as an event, an event with duration, however slight.

Accordingly, Lyotard's reading of Aristotle looks for, and finds support for his idea that "now" must be understood in two ways. ("Aristotle opens up another path"

---

18. It is worthy of note that Lyotard is reading Aristotle here, if only to be aware of the significance of motion. Cf. Arendt's reading of the "Greeks," p. 75 here.

[74].) First, inasmuch as it is a boundary, "the now" is not "*now.*" The designator *the* is part of a situating phrase which immediately deprives "now" (now "the now") of its "now-ness." It can no longer be "grasped as *what,* as (at) the time it happened" (74). As a liminal designator (with *the* added), "now" becomes part of a universe presented by a phrase which situates it, and is devoid of time, of duration. However, there is a second understanding of "the now" as simply "*now,*" one which informs Lyotard's entire *oeuvre.* *Now* as event. *There is something. Il y a.*

In this second understanding, one invocative of Heidegger, Lyotard notes that the phrase, "as a *what* that happens, does not at all stem from the question of time, but from that of Being/non-Being" (74). (The time must truly be out of joint for one to read with Lyotard.) Thus, according to Lyotard, immediately upon the coming forth of a first phrase, of a "*now*" (which, prior to being situated in a second phrase, simply announces "*Il y a*"), there is a feeling — at once surprise and anxiety — commensurate with the above-noted void. For in this brief moment (?), the subject experiences an awareness that, first, it might, in fact, be possible for nothing to happen, that there could be nothing rather than something; and secondly, that, in fact, "there is something rather than nothing" (75). Lyotard:

> Scarcely is this phrased, than the occurrence is chained,
> registered, and forgotten in the occurrence of this phrase,
> which, in stating the *There is,* binds the occurrence by
> comparing it to its absence. Time takes place with the
> before/after implied in phrase universes, as the putting of
> instances into an ordered series. (75)

It is here that Lyotard formally brings Heidegger into the picture. Drawing on

Heidegger's notion of *Ereignis* (occurrence), Lyotard concludes that there is an

occurrence, "but it does not present anything to anyone, it does not present itself, and it

is not the present, nor is it present. Insofar as it is phraseable (thinkable), a

presentation falls short as an occurrence" (75). Such bad-mannered writing. It occurs

to me that Lyotard's translator may have done those of us reading in English a

disservice. Perhaps something got left behind. I think that Lyotard's "insofar as it is

phraseable" should, more accurately, read "insofar as it is phrased." What Lyotard is

saying here, it seems to me, is that once it is situated by a subsequent phrase, a

presentation is diminished as an occurrence, as event. Which is not to say the same

thing as "insofar as it is phraseable." For, may we not situate every presentation? Is

not every presentation liable to situation? Granted, it may be the case that we may

never situate an occurrence completely, that there will always be surplus meaning left

behind. But it is in the phrasing — situating — that the event loses some of its power,

not in the possibility of its being situated (phrased), not simply "insofar as it is

phraseable."

May we not now bring our two understandings of the differend together?

Lyotard:

> [The] differend proceeds from the question, which
> accompanies any phrase, of how to link onto it. And this
> question proceeds from the nothingness that "separates"
> one phrase from the "following." There are differends
> because, or like, there is *Ereignis*. But that's forgotten as
> much as possible: genres of discourse are modes of

> forgetting the nothingness or of forgetting the occurrence,
> they fill the void between phrases. (138)

Let me suggest that what emerges from my reading of *The Differend*, rather than two distinct understandings of the differend, is the idea that — central to "both understandings" of the differend — is the space between phrases. And thus, central to Lyotard's work is this so-called "void" between phrases; there is something "here" that "cries out," but cannot be phrased, that is, in fact, doubly suppressed. The *Ereignis*, as soon as it is situated, loses its *"now-ness":* A first differend: something wishes (?) to be phrased but cannot. This, shall we say, is a negative differend.

In the situating phrases which "follow" a presentation, as we have seen, there are competing genres of discourse, each with its own rules: A second differend: aggrieved parties unable to communicate their grievances. Now this is a positive differend. Or, at least, it is a situation which Lyotard would not have us undo. His difficulty, as I hope to have made clear, lies with the fact that, due to an inability on the part of the subject to deal with the feelings which announce this type of differend, there are continued and ongoing attempts to render them litigations, which in effect stifles them, by imposing a "language" which, while possibly understandable to both parties, nonetheless does not do justice to the ideas of both parties. And so, while there are two relatively distinct understandings of differend, they both revolve around the space — void — between phrases. Lyotard at one point refers to this gap as a "paradoxical hinge," and suggests that:

> It's the emptiness, the nothingness in which the universe
> presented by a phrase is exposed and which explodes at
> the moment the phrase occurs and then disappears with
> it. The gap separating one phrase from another is the
> "condition" of both presentation and occurrences, but
> such a "condition" remains ungraspable in itself except by
> a new phrase, which in its turn presupposes the first
> phrase. (Lyotard 1988b, 31-32)

We are called, according to Lyotard, to be witnesses to the occurrence, to the first

phrase, the presentation. To *something*.

Now, while this *something* is held to be unrepresentable, Lyotard nonetheless,

as we will see, makes the somewhat risky move of suggesting that, in fact (?), he

knows what it is, or what it announces: obligation. As we will see when we arrive at

Levinas, Lyotard suggests that there is a higher authority than the I, and that, in its call,

the subject's perceived autonomy is challenged by a painful nagging, a suspicion that

all has not been heard. The philosophical question, "why is there something rather

than nothing?" becomes, in the face of the above-described void, terrifying. Lyotard, it

seems to me, wants us to understand that, faced with the abyss — the space following

an occurrence — the subject "knows" that s/he is called to respond in such a way as to

not nullify the call. But, there is pain commensurate with this "knowing," and this

because there is immense pressure on the subject to nullify the call, to reaffirm his/her

autonomy. We will speak more of this pressure, especially as it derives from the

philosophy against which Lyotard is writing. But not yet.

We are called. But we are restricted. We are restricted by our philosophy. We are restricted by our selves. By the power vested in our selves. Authorial and authoritative, I resist the call of the *something* that haunts me. We are getting closer, but we defer. How do you feel?

Presentation II

Contingency Meets Necessity

We have seen an apparently limitless possibility in the way in which presented universes may unfold. But Lyotard would have us note that, "while there are many possible linkings..., [there is] only one actual or current 'time'" (136). Coming close to attributing some sort of "will" to language, although claiming not to (136),[19] Lyotard suggests that, due to the limited current "times," hordes of possible linkages compete to "win" the right to link onto the "original" phrase. Lyotard:

> To link is necessary, but a particular linkage is not. This
> linkage can be declared pertinent, though, and the
> phrase that does the stating is a rule for linking. It is a
> constitutive part of a genre of discourse: after such and
> such a kind of phrase, here are those phrases that are
> permitted. (80)

Because of the fact that "to link is necessary," there *will* be a linking. Having been linked onto, the "situation at the heart of the presentation" becomes manifest, and all

19. Lyotard suggests that, while he is aware of a certain anthropomorphism in his understanding of language, in "the matter of language, the revolution of relativity and of quantum theory remains to be made" (Lyotard 1988a, 137). And also, by presentation he does not understand "a desire of language to accomplish itself. But merely that something takes place" (75).

other contingencies — possibilities — are suppressed. Something, Lyotard suggests, gets left out. And we thus have a differend which proceeds from the fact that, immediately it is linked onto, a presentation's universe is situated (the four poles are situated), and this situation renders impossible linkages from any genre other than the one which "won" the competition for the linkage in the first place. A differend is signaled, makes itself known, by means of a "feeling" experienced by the subject(s) situated by various phrases. There is a "feeling: '[o]ne cannot find the words'" (13). The "declaration of pertinence" attempts to stifle this feeling, by suggesting that there is nothing left to be said, that linkages other than the one made are impertinent. But, Lyotard suggests, the feeling will not go away. It haunts. This feeling (one of pleasure and pain) is the motive force behind attempts to render differends litigations — *arguable* disputes — the outcome of which may be final, and may thereby relieve one of the awkwardness inherent in the feeling elicited by the differend.

It is here that we begin to see glimpses of Lyotard's politics. Lyotard makes much of the fact that differends are signaled by uncomfortable feelings ("quasi-phrases, which are silent feelings" [21]). And, as we will see in the chapters which follow, Lyotard suggests that great effort has been, and continues to be, made on the part of the modern subject, to assuage these feelings. Apropos of which, Lyotard would have us understand that there has been, in the West, a concentrated effort to come up with — arrive at — a genre of discourse, the all-encompassing nature of which might render the above-described competition for "linkage privileges" unnecessary. If, the story goes, a "meta-language," or "supreme genre encompassing everything that's at stake"

(138) might be found to adjudicate (Kant's "tribunal") — and here I think we must read "translate" — among genres competing for the right to link onto the so-called "first" phrase, the feeling might no longer need to occur. But, and this is integral to Lyotard's work, "[t]here is no genre whose hegemony over the others would be just. The philosophical genre, which looks like a metalanguage, is not itself...unless it knows that there is no metalanguage" (158); or, in simpler terms, "[r]eflection requires that you watch out for occurrences, that you don't already know what's happening" (xv).

Notwithstanding this, there have been, as we will see, many attempts throughout the history of the West to arrive at a suitable "meta-narrative." Not the least of these is the dialectical discourse of Hegel. "The speculative [Hegelian] genre," Lyotard notes, "had this pretension" (138). And elsewhere, earlier: "Hegelian phenomenology *closes* the system, it is the total recovery of total reality in absolute knowledge" (Lyotard 1991, 68). While Lyotard suggests that the speculative genre's attempts to provide the supreme genre fail,[20] there is another, more recent discourse, which has had a great deal of (limited) "success," although Lyotard believes that ultimately it flounders.

The Politics of Capital

Much has been made, in the history of philosophy, of the Greek *polis*. Lyotard notes that the *polis* organized itself around "the empty center where deliberation takes

---

20. Bennington: "[T]he dialectical solution to [the question of linking] (namely that the separation between two [types of] sentences can be determined as contradiction and sublated in a third sentence) has been refused" (141).

place — namely, the conflict of phrases and their judgement" (141). Now, I will take it as a truism that most of what passes for politics and philosophy in the modern West is decidedly "Greek" in its origins And so when Lyotard suggests that while "the Greek *polis* did not invent politics, it placed the dialectical and rhetorical genre or genres in the governorship of phrases, thereby allowing their differend to flow, in the form of litigations, right out into the (empty) milieu of political institutions" (141), we must realize that the political institutions in question are, at least in part, our own. That we live in a litigious world I take to be another truism.

What Lyotard is saying here is that, as a result of our Greek heritage, we in the West have attempted to stifle differends via dialectics and rhetoric, both of which, obviously, operate according to rules. Quick to observe that this has not been the only such method of differend-dissipation in the history of the West, Lyotard notes, for instance, that the French Revolution put an "Idea" (democracy, fraternity, equality) in the governor's spot, and that the industrial revolution "gave the privilege of judging to the technical genre" (141).

However, concurrent with, and as a result of, these cumulative and successive "governors," there came to be another genre of discourse, the economic genre, the genre of capital. "[T]he simple canonical formula of [the economic] genre," according to Lyotard, "is: *I will let you have this, if you in return can let me have that.* Among its other attributes, this genre always calls for new *thises* to enter into exchange...and uses payment as a means of neutralizing their power as events" (Lyotard 1993a, 58). And

thus payment, or exchange, becomes another attempt to neutralize the power inherent in differends.

Here is Lyotard's description of the phrasing of the economic genre: phrase 1, in which an addressor, *x*, cedes an ostensible good to an addressee, *y*; is linked onto by phrase 2, in which the (new) addressor, *y*, cedes to *x* a different ostensible good. Phrase 1 immediately places its addressor and addressee in a creditor/debtor situation, and phrase 2 immediately ratifies and cancels the debt created in phrase 1. What is unbearable for the subject involved in the above-described economic phrasing, is the instantaneous moment of debt, of obligation, which moment, I will suggest in the chapters which follow, corresponds with the moment of (first) linkage. This debt must be discharged immediately; so much so that Lyotard suggests that in fact there is not a phrase 1 without a phrase 2. "Phrases 1 and 2 are linked together with a view...to 'freeing' the two parties, to unbinding them" (Lyotard 1988a, 173).

In Lyotard's analysis, "[i]n the commodity/money exchange, only the moment of exchange is real" (177). Thus "[e]xchange is the exchange of time, the exchange in the least possible time ("real" time) for the greatest possible time ("abstract"...time)" (177), in which objects — money — represent an accrual of "abstract time." "Money," Lyotard tells us, "...is stocked-up time" (176). Time is the ultimate commodity. Success, then, is gained time (177), the "issue is to gain time." (176). "[T]here is no longer a time for exchange" (177), there is only an exchange of time. There is only the time *of* exchange. These rapid-fire exchanges, instantaneous "synapses" over the "space"

between two phrases, come close to eliminating the awareness (feeling) of a differend. And thus Lyotard writes, "[i]n a world where success means gaining time, thinking has a single, but irredeemable fault: it is a waste of time" (Lyotard 1993a, 36). There is no time to stop and think, because to do so, Lyotard argues, is to make oneself open to — liable to — feeling.

I must reiterate my earlier injunction that there is, according to Lyotard, no genre of discourse whose hegemony over others is validly asserted ("an offense is the hegemony of one phrase regimen over another" [84]). "One's responsibility before thought," Lyotard writes,

> consists...in detecting differends and in finding the
> (impossible) idiom for phrasing them. This is what a
> ["good"] philosopher does. An intellectual is someone
> who helps forget differends, by advocating a given genre,
> whichever one it may be (*including the ecstasy of
> sacrifice*), for the sake of political hegemony. (142, my
> emphasis)

To summarize this dense chapter, let me remind the reader that the philosophy against which Lyotard sees himself philosophizing is one in which truth and knowing — (final) answers — are sought, while what he is advocating is, rather, an opening up — a discourse which continually undermines its own finality. Think of > as opposed to <. Let me remind the reader that, while there are two "types" of differend, they both concern the time and place following the event of a first phrase, and both result from an attempt to narrow the possibilities inherent in a first phrase: (phrase 1 >) as opposed to

(phrase 1 <). Our discussion of presentation, as complex as it was, and our look at

contingency and capital, offered examples of attempts to stifle differends. We leave

this chapter with simply this: for Lyotard, justice lies along the path of openness, of

indeterminacy.

And so the question, at once a political question, and a question of politics,

which would seem to be demanded of Lyotard, appears to be simply: *to whom ought*

one turn to determine a right course of action? Having established his contention that

the "tribunal" of philosophy, with its pretensions to define the Good in terms of Truth, to

make knowing the Good a prior condition for doing good, perpetrates an injustice when

it "makes this [or that] regimen and/or this genre prevail over others," Lyotard suggests

that

> the tribunal necessarily wrongs the other regimens and/or
> genres....This is why politicians cannot have the good at
> stake, but they ought to have the lesser evil. Or if you
> prefer, the lesser evil ought to be the political good. By
> evil [Lyotard] understand[s], and one can only
> understand, the incessant interdiction of possible
> phrases, a defiance of the occurrence. (140)

This is an important paragraph. The lesser evil is the political good, and evil is the

interdiction of possible phrases. While Lyotard is arguably open to criticism here, for

apparently advocating an "open-ness" for its own sake, an indeterminacy for the sake

of indeterminacy, his understanding of the absolute heterogeneity of phrase regimens

(similar to his earlier understanding of language games) suggests, as we have seen,

that to attempt to impose any sort of super-structure onto the universes presented by

diverse phrases is to stifle differends. That this is not "good" remains to be demonstrated. And of course, it will remain so. However, what will become clear in the following chapters is that Lyotard's notion of differend bears a marked similarity to a philosophical indeterminacy in Kant's philosophy of the sublime, and a philosophico-theology in Levinas. While this might appear to place Lyotard all-too-firmly in the philosophical tradition which he is at pains to critique, the discussion which follows will demonstrate that both Levinas and Lyotard's Kant are philosophers whose work pays more than a little attention to the differend. For the moment, however, it is necessary that we turn our attention to a further examination of the pragmatics of the categorical imperative, to a discussion, that is, of legitimation in the modern West.

Chapter 2: On Whose Authority?

The law should always be respected with humor....This humor aims at the heterogeneity which persists beneath and despite legitimation. "The People," that impossible set of entities...cannot believe that the law is the law because it is just, when it knows that the law is just...because it is the law.

Jean-François Lyotard [21]

In her essay, "What is Authority?" Hannah Arendt writes: "[a]uthority has vanished from the modern world....[M]ost would agree that a constant, ever-widening crisis of authority has accompanied the development of the modern world in our century" (Arendt 1968a 91). Arendt is right. Authority, as we have noted, has been under critical scrutiny since at least the sixteenth century. Arendt's essay is devoted to demonstrating that "[a]uthority as we once knew it, which grew out of the Roman experience of foundation" (141) has disappeared. But let me make a subtle distinction here. We are talking about authority when we might better be talking about the legitimation of authority. Authority as a "thing" cannot disappear. What it can do is lose its legitimacy. To say that, for instance, *x* has no authority over *y*, means that either *y* or an observer of the relationship between *x* and *y* has determined that *x*'s claim to have authority is not *legitimate*. There is, arguably, still such a thing as authority; what has been in question for the last several hundred years are the various means of legitimating authority.

---

21. Lyotard 1988a, 144.

Arendt suggests that what was lost was a construct derivative of the "Roman political concept of authority, which inevitably was based on a beginning, a founding in the past" (127), and concludes her essay thus:

> to live in a political realm with neither authority nor the
> concomitant awareness that the source of authority
> transcends power and those who are in power, means to
> be confronted anew, without the religious trust in a
> sacred beginning and without the protection of traditional
> and therefore self-evident standards of behaviour, by the
> elementary problems of living together. (141)

According to Arendt then, traditional forms of authority have been rendered illegitimate by modern suspicions of the foundations upon which they have been grounded. While I think that Arendt is correct in her analysis, what we will need to discuss is the way in which it is in fact the very notion of foundation, the need for foundations, which has, necessarily, undermined the so-called "traditional forms" of authority; and that, further, foundationalism must continue to do so, *ad infinitum*. We must also take careful note of the fact that Arendt is lamenting the loss of a "sacred" authority. This is significant, for what I take her to mean by "sacred," and this will become more clear when we deal with Levinas, is simply "unquestioned." Already the reader is nervous, for we are a questioning people. Let me qualify slightly, and suggest that by "unquestioned," I do not mean un-analyzed, or un-thought, but "obligatory." I will have much to say on this matter of obligation, but we must proceed slowly and painstakingly.

Legitimation I

Recall that Arendt bemoans the loss of foundations, the loss of any supportable

notion of sacred beginnings by means of which authority can be legitimated. Now here

is Lyotard on legitimation:

> A phrase is termed normative when it gives the force of
> law to its object, a prescriptive phrase. For the
> prescription *it is obligatory for x to perform action a,* the
> normative phrase would be *it is a norm decreed by y that
> it is obligatory for x to perform action a.* In this formulation
> the normative phrase designates, here in the name of *y,*
> the instance that legitimates the prescription addressed
> to *x.* The legislative power is held by *y.* (Lyotard 1993a,
> 40-41)

The normative phrase designates, in the name of *y,* the instance that legitimates the

prescription. Legislative power is held by *y.* But now, when we stop to ask who or what

y might be, we come upon the usual difficulties. "Authority," Lyotard writes, "is not

deduced" (Lyotard 1988a, 142). Attempts to legitimate authority lead, variously, to

> vicious circles (I have authority over you because you
> authorize me to have it), to question begging (the
> authorization authorizes authority), to infinite regressions
> (*x* is authorized by *y,* who is authorized by *z*), and to the
> paradox of idiolects (God, Life, etc., designate me to
> exert authority, and I am the only witness of this
> revelation). The aporia of a deduction of authority, or the
> aporia of sovereignty, is the sign....of an
> incommensurability between the normative phrase and all
> others. (142)

So where does *x* get her authority? Or rather, how is the authority, claimed by *x*,

demonstrated to be legitimate? If, as we have seen above, the normative phrase is the

phrase which gives a prescriptive the weight of a law, and if it cannot be seen to be

logically deduced, how can a normative phrase be said to be authoritative? Is there no

such thing as legitimate authority?

We must remember Kant: "Act in accordance with the maxims of a member

legislating universal laws for a merely possible kingdom of ends...[and be aware of] the

worthiness of every rational subject to be a legislative member in the kingdom of ends"

(Kant 1981, 43). The modern West sees authority as legitimate if the author and

subject of the law can be seen to occupy interchangeable roles. But, according to

Lyotard, as we have seen, the "we" thus understood is "the vehicle of [a]

transcendental illusion" (Lyotard 1988a, 99). The "we" carries, or supports, the above-

described tendency to derive prescriptive from descriptive phrases. The "we" used to

legitimate authority comes to mask the fact that authority simply cannot be deduced.

Indeed, Lyotard writes that the function of authority thus legitimated, is to "throw a

bridge over the abyss between heterogeneous phrases" (143).

Ever fragile, and always threatened, "we" are always trying to make up for our

weaknesses. Lyotard argues that there are "two primary procedures of language" that

come to mask the logical aporias of authorization, that bridge the "ontological gap"

outlined above, with the subject authorized to say "we." Both "make recourse to

narration; that is, on the surface at least, they both disperse...the theoretical problem

along the diachronic axis" (Lyotard 1993a, 41). The difference between the two procedures is one of direction. One, Lyotard suggests, looks "upstream" toward an origin, and the other "downstream" toward an end (redemption, salvation, emancipation). The former he refers to as "mythic narratives," and the latter, because of their pervasiveness and archetypal nature, the "metanarratives" of modernity (41). To return to Arendt, what I want to suggest is that her essay conflates the two. She wants the (mythic) sacred beginnings. But, given the Judeo-Christian religiosity of her orientation, the sacred beginning she bemoans the loss of is a rebirth that was pregnant with hopes of redemption. That this is a commonplace in Western thinking I hold to be obvious, as would, I think, Lyotard. Myth cannot but be narrative, and narrative cannot but have a beginning and an end. Lyotard's two procedures of language, those which look "upstream" and those which look "downstream," are the result of an heuristic distinction.

As a means of demonstrating the ways in which these two procedures of language function, I want to turn to a discussion of Nazism. Nazism is a subject often dealt with in the works of both Lyotard and Arendt. This is due to the fact that it provides a terribly powerful illustration of the severe problems inherent in our (perceived/threatening) need to shore up and defend the first-person plural pronoun. Before speaking about Nazism, however, it will be useful to explicate Lyotard's analysis of the republican "we" which it so readily undermined.

In a republic, Lyotard suggests, "we the people" is thought to be the sole

legitimating instance. Although a supreme being may be invoked, "the people" are

held to be sovereign. Lyotard:

> Substitutable for a proper name, *We, the...people...,* is
> supposedly able to link prescriptions...onto their
> legitimation "in a suitable way"....The republican
> regimen's principle of legitimacy is that the addressor of
> the norm, *y,* and the addressee of the obligation, *x,* are
> the same. The legislator ought not to be exempt from the
> obligation he or she norms....[The author and the subject
> of the law] are thus united in a single we, the one
> designating itself by the collective name "...citizens." The
> authorization is then formulated thus: *we decree as a*
> *norm that it is an obligation for us to carry out act a.* This
> is the principle of autonomy. (Lyotard 1988a, 98)

That this principle of autonomy is paradoxical we have noted above. As Lyotard puts it,

speaking of the French Declaration of 1789, the "article names the sovereign, and the

sovereign states the source that names him. But the sovereign had to begin his

declaration before being authorized to do so by the Article he is going to declare, thus

before being the authorized sovereign" (146). But we are taking as our starting point

the idea that the "we" in question serves to mask the aporias of authorization. We

need not dwell on this "trivial" (146) observation. What is important to note is that in a

republic, according to Lyotard, there is, by definition, "an uncertainty about the identity

of the *we*" (Lyotard 1993a, 49). Is it humanity? Is it the nation? Is it some combination

of both? It is necessarily unclear. And this leads Lyotard to suggest that republican

traditions are necessarily

> exclusivist. They imply borders and conflicts. The
> legitimacy of a nation owes nothing to the idea of
> humanity and everything to the perpetuation of narratives
> of origin by means of repeated narrations. Rightists
> never cease to make the most of this. Leftists give
> credence to a counter-narrative, a history of the whole of
> humanity, the narrative of its emancipation. (Lyotard
> 1988a, 147)

We come back to our "two procedures of language." And we see again that

Hannah Arendt is not to be faulted for her conflation of the two procedures into one.

That is the modern tradition. What Lyotard, always using Kant against Kantianism, is

at pains to point out is that the freedom so hungrily lusted after can never be achieved.

Again, "[t]here is no just society" (Lyotard 1985, 25). A free society is an Ideal of

practical reason, it is no more demonstrable than a free act. Thus, and here we see

room being made for terror, our quest for emancipation must always be futile. "For the

ideal of absolute freedom, which is empty, any given reality must be suspected of being

an obstacle to freedom" (Lyotard 1993a, 54). And, given the inability to singularize the

republican "we" into either nation or human-kind, when we have a particular "we"

engaged in conflict with some obstacle to freedom or other, it is never possible to

determine "whether the war conducted...is one of conquest or one of liberation, whether

the violence exerted under the title of freedom is repressive or pedagogical

(progressive)" (Lyotard 1988a, 147). Everything depends upon the scope of the "we."

And we come to Germany in the early twentieth century.

Auschwitz I

We have noted that in mythic narrative, the "we" is affirmed by positing and celebrating, over and over, a common origin, a sacred beginning. In myth, "[n]arrative is authority itself. It authorizes an infrangible *we*, outside of which there is only *they*" (Lyotard 1993a, 33). The "tendency to exaggerate the value of narrative as archaic legitimation," Lyotard writes, "....may explain why Nazism could be successful in resorting to myth when it pitted its own despotic authority against the republican authority that defined modern political life in the West" (46-7). In the rise of Nazism we have an example of a situation in which a mythic "we" challenges and usurps a republican "we," aided in no small manner by the fact that the already fragile republican "we" was in the throes of an identity crisis following the first World War. "Nazism provided the people with names and narratives that permitted them to identify exclusively with Germanic heroes and heal the wounds inflicted by the event of defeat and crisis" (47)[22]. And the Aryans, in their furor, herded millions of "others," a different "we," to a *technologized* extermination. The totalitarian regime hidden behind the rubric of the National Socialist "Party" sought, through subtle and not so subtle persuasion, to re-affirm a crumbling "we." And gave us "Auschwitz."

Auschwitz, of course, is the name of a town in upper Silesia, Poland, and it so happened that in the last few years of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich — the twelve year, thousand year Reich —Auschwitz was the site of one of Hitler's (and Himmler's, and

---

22. And may we not consider the rise of Canada's Reform Party as a situation in which a fragile "we" is bolstered by hearkening back to a simpler, more homogenous "we?"

Goebbels's, and Goring's, and Eichmann's, and Heydrich's, and so on — the names are important) most notorious extermination camps. This is a not insignificant historical fact, but I shall not, except minimally, address it here. Rather, think of "Auschwitz." I intend the proper name, bracketed by quotation marks, to designate infinitely more than a group of geographical and historical coordinates.

I have noted Lyotard's impatience with totalizing philosophy. Lyotard is constantly writing against Hegel, writing against the denial-laden optimism that marched blindly to "Auschwitz." "Auschwitz" marks for Lyotard the point at which Hegelian dialectics swallowed itself. We "are informed," he writes, "that human beings endowed with language were placed in a situation such that none of them is now able to tell about it. Most of them disappeared then, and the survivors rarely speak about it" (Lyotard 1988a, 3). Lyotard suggests, following Adorno, that "Auschwitz" introduced a "cleaving" into Western (Hegelian) thought (90). This because (to simplify), as I suggested earlier, Hegelian logic demands a positive result. From the positive thesis and the negative antithesis must come a (positive) synthesis. Lyotard's argument is that "Auschwitz" can be seen neither as a negative antithesis nor a positive synthesis/result, but rather must be seen as simply the waste matter of (Hegelian) thought. Unspoken of, unwitnessed, "Auschwitz" signifies the ultimate dispersion of the subject authorized to say "we":

> In the concentration camps, there would have been no
> subject in the first-person plural. In the absence of such
> a subject, there would remain "after Auschwitz" no
> subject, no [Hegelian] *Selbst*, which could prevail upon

itself to name itself in naming "Auschwitz." No phrase inflected in this person would be possible: we did this, we felt that, they made us suffer this humiliation, we got along this way....There would be no collective witness. From many former deportees, there is only silence. (97-98)

―――――――――――◆―――――――――――

Freedom: A Digression

There has been, in the modern West, according to Jean-Luc Nancy, a "divorce

between the ethico-juridico-political and the philosophical" (Nancy, 1). By which Nancy

intends us to realize that there exists an abyss between what we understand of

freedom in a *pragmatic* sense (in which freedom is defined in terms of a series of *rights*

and *exemptions*), and a philosophic understanding of freedom as "an 'Idea' of freedom,

called for or promised by freedoms" (2). Nancy, the philosopher, locates two obstacles

to any possibility of "philosophizing" on freedom. He first suggests that, due to the

popularly understood notion of freedom as an element of the will, and the "self-

evidence" of the "necessity of preserving the rights of this freedom" (3), to speak of

freedom is to "suspend philosophy's work" (3). Which is to say that to speak of

freedom as a given, as a thing, the desirability of which cannot be questioned, is to

leave the realm of philosophy, as it is "properly" practiced. And this of course leads to

Nancy's second suggested obstacle.

You see, the "philosophical thought of freedom has been thoroughly subordinated to the determination of an ontology of subjectivity" (4). And this is to say, it seems to me, that, rather than being divorced — rather than being separated by an abyss — the philosophical thought of freedom and the "pragmatics" of freedom have subsumed one another. The ontology of the subject, an ontology which must necessarily give primacy to the will of the subject, is exactly what is being played out in the above-described first obstacle. Thus Nancy:

> For the ontology of subjectivity, freedom is the act (which also means the being) of (re) presenting oneself as the potential for (re) presentation (of oneself and *therefore* of the world). It is free representation (where I accede sovereignty to myself) of free representation (which depends only on my will). (5)

Now, let me suggest that, while the time has come to philosophize, we must leave philosophy. Let me suggest that, if we wish to treat of freedom, we must speak of the realm of the political. It is just here, at the confluence of the philosophical and the *pragmatic*, that the work of the two thinkers whose thoughts so inform the present writing, Jean-François Lyotard and Hannah Arendt, overlap and reinforce one another.

According to Arendt, we err when we equate freedom with free will. The coincidence of these two concepts, the latter of which was "a faculty virtually unknown to classical antiquity" (Arendt 1968b, 157), Arendt ascribes to "a religious predicament...formulated in philosophical language" (160). Citing Paul and Augustine, Arendt suggests that it was an experience of an inability to act in accordance with what

they saw to be "God's will" which led these early "church fathers" to extrapolate from religion to philosophy (about which more in a moment) the notion of free will, and with it its heavy burden of choice. And this extrapolation, according to Arendt, led to a corruption (we cannot but speak of falls).

"The philosophical tradition....," Arendt writes, "has distorted...the very idea of freedom such as it is given in human experience by transposing it from...the realm of politics...to an inward domain, the will" (145). Freedom, according to Arendt, manifests itself in action. The question which immediately comes to mind, then, is simply "what is freedom?"; "what is it that manifests itself?" This question, however, arises out of the aforementioned ontology of the subject, a framework in which the question of "*is*-ness," of "what *is*?" is given primacy. To read with Arendt, we must attempt to bracket out this ontological question. Now, action.

Noting a "contradiction between our consciousness and our conscience," Arendt compares what I have earlier referred to as the *pragmatic* realm, the realm in which free will is held to be self-evident, with various fields of scientific and theoretical endeavor, in which "we orient ourselves according to the principle of causality" (143). Into such a contradictory milieu came Kant, who attempted to clarify this apparently paradoxical situation by suggesting that "though [he could not] *know*, [he could] yet *think* freedom; that is to say, the representation of it is at least not self-contradictory" (Kant 1965, 28). Which is to say that while, for Kant, freedom was an Idea of speculative reason, and as

such non-realizable, non-representable, nevertheless it was a useful and indeed

necessary[23] notion. Thus, Kant:

> our reason naturally exalts itself to modes of knowledge
> which so far transcend the bounds of experience that no
> empirical object can ever coincide with them, but which
> must none the less [sic] be recognized as having their
> own reality, and which are no mere fictions of the brain.
> (310-311)

While Arendt is prepared to grant that Kant's solution was "ingenious enough

and may even suffice to establish a moral law" (Arendt 1968b, 145), she nonetheless

maintains that, because of the fact that, "[w]hether or not causality is operative in

the...universe, it certainly is a category of the mind to bring order into all sensory

data..., and thus it makes experience possible" (144). However, she continues,

> the moment we reflect upon an act which was undertaken
> under the assumption of our being a free agent, it seems
> to come under the sway of two kinds of causality, of the
> causality of inner motivation on one hand and of the
> causal principle which rules the outer world on the other.
> (144)

The moment we reflect, according to Arendt, we lose freedom. Not, we note, *our*

freedom, but rather freedom as artifact, as construct; we are still free to think, but in so

doing we lose that about which we think, if, in fact, we are thinking about freedom. For

in our thinking about freedom, we necessarily come up against a causality by means of

which we have heretofore organized our empirical world. And thus Arendt makes so

---

23. Kant: "I understand by idea a *necessary* concept of reason to which no corresponding object can be
given in sense-experience" (Kant 1965, 318, my italics).

bold as to suggest that "thought itself, in its theoretical as well as its pre-theoretical form, makes freedom disappear," and, more importantly, that "the phenomenon of freedom does not appear in the realm of thought at all" (145). Now this is complex material. And these are apparently radical assertions. Arendt justifies them by looking back (again), by discussing the ancient Greeks.

Arendt would have us understand that, according to the ancient Greeks, human-kind's mortality,

> [lay] in the fact that individual life, with a recognizable life-
> story from birth to death, rises out of biological life. This
> individual life [was] distinguished from all other things by
> the rectilinear course of its movement, which, so to
> speak, [cut] through the circular movement of biological
> life. This [was] mortality: to move along a rectilinear line
> in a universe where everything, if it move[d] at all,
> move[d] in a cyclical order. (Arendt 1968b, 19)

We must note here Arendt's propensity to speak in terms of motion, of action. Individual life "rises out of" biological life; mortality is described as a "movement" along a rectilinear line. In such an understanding of the universe, she suggests, "the task and potential greatness of mortals lie in their ability to produce things — works and deeds and words — [through which] mortals could find their place in a cosmos where everything is immortal except themselves" (19).

Arendt begins with a discussion of what she calls the "most general condition of human existence: birth and death, natality and mortality" (8); she describes pre-

Christian Greeks, mortal and aware of it, as moving through the universe, through space and time, acting, creating, and leaving behind. To simplify, and at the risk of implying a monolithic "Greek view" where none exists, let me say that Arendt suggests that, their individual mortality notwithstanding, for the ancient Greeks immortality was thought to be attained by leaving non-perishable traces of themselves behind. The immortal was simply that which endured. And among the most enduring legacies of the ancient Greeks was, of course, the primary vehicle of their bequests, the notion of the city-state, the *polis*.

However, even as the *polis*, bequeathed by the "Greeks" (via "the Romans") to modernity, was being preserved as an inheritance, the life of political action was losing its privileged position in the thinking of living "Greeks." The active life, even the politically active life, a life devoted to creating and leaving behind, was soon to be considered unworthy of a citizen. "It may be," Arendt writes, "that the philosophers' [focus on] the eternal was helped by their very justified doubt of the chances of the *polis* for immortality or even permanence" (21), but for whatever reason, those living the life of contemplation came to look with disdain upon those seeking worldly immortality.[24]

While a shift occurred, according to which the life of contemplation came to be seen as a more valuable life than a life of action, we must remember that for the

---

24 Socrates, in *The Apology*, berates his fellow Athenians for giving too much attention to things such as money and reputation, and not enough to "truth and understanding and the perfection of [the] soul" (Plato 1954,61), to contemplation. Even more tellingly, Plato has Socrates suggest that "[t]he true champion of justice...must confine himself to private life and leave politics alone" (64). And here we must foreground the fact that Socrates did not even bother to write his thoughts down. Concern with the eternal, it would seem, precluded any need for immortality.

"Greeks," such a life was only available to one "in full independence of the necessities of life and the relationships they originated" (12). The life of contemplation, no less than the life of action, was available only to those fortunate enough to be *free* of the exigencies of day-to-day life. Thus, for the average "Greek"[25] of antiquity, freedom *to* first required freedom *from*. The banalities of life, the meals and the clothes, made contemplation of things eternal, the good life, impossible. Thus the "average Greek," would not only be unable to live the good life, but since, as Plato has Socrates tell us, "no soul which has not practiced philosophy, and is not absolutely pure when it leaves the body, may attain to the divine nature" (Plato 1954, 135), he or she would not commune with the eternal at death.

Given freedom *from*, what was it that the "Greeks" were free *to* do? Whether they were active or contemplative, it is Arendt's suggestion that the question is simply irrelevant. You see, it was the freedom *from* that defined the ancient "Greeks," and this freedom *from* was not an accident. It was created, deliberately and carefully,[26] whether celebrated in the *polis* or in the academy, with the understanding that

> [w]e first become aware of freedom or its opposite in our
> intercourse with others, not in the intercourse with
> ourselves....[F]reedom was understood to be the free
> man's status, which enabled him to get away from home,
> to go out into the world and meet other people in deed

25. I am aware that such an expression would have been considered an absurdity — the only citizens, the only "Greeks," were just those who were free from the exigencies of day to day life. The others were simply "others," for whom life was hard, and followed by death.
26. That it was created using slaves, and many hierarchies with which we would today have difficulty, given our somewhat naive sense of moral superiority, cannot be ignored (cf. note 28, below). But the point at the moment is simply to recognize that what was important was the creation of a physical and psychological space in which the "Greeks" were free *from*, and could be free *to*.

and word....Freedom needed, in addition to liberation, the
company of other men who were in the same state, and it
needed a common *public space* to meet them — a
politically organized world, in other words, into which
each of the free men could insert himself by word or
deed. (Arendt 1968b, 148)

We come back to action, and we see that in Arendt's reading of the ancient

"Greeks," freedom corresponds to the ability to "call something into being which did not

exist before, which was not given...., and which, therefore, strictly speaking, could not

be known" (151). Remembering our earlier observation of the importance of motion, of

individual life rising out of biological life, we see that, prior to the Christian

complexification of free will, about which we will speak shortly, freedom simply meant

an ability to create, whether in thought or deed, something new. "Beginning," Arendt

writes, "before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man [sic];

politically it is identical with man's freedom" (Arendt 1979, 479). And what was required

for this was a place, a space in which to be free. What must be noted, to return to the

distinction between politics and philosophy, is that, while Arendt's analysis allows that

the ancient "Greek" philosophers may indeed, under the proper circumstances, have

been free, the philosophical discourse was one which did not address the notion of

freedom. And this because, although freedom was "the quintessence of the city-state

and of citizenship" (157), given that it was understood in terms of action, freedom was

not considered to be a topic worthy of contemplation. It was, frankly, unproblematic,

banal. As long as freedom remained the purview of the politicians, and was held to be

manifest *among* citizens rather than *within* citizens, philosophy, as it was developing,

remained uninterested. And thus, freedom did not belong in the domain of thought, but

in that of politics. "Freedom," Arendt writes, "the very center of politics as the Greeks understood it, was an idea which almost by definition could not enter the framework of Greek philosophy" (157-158).

Of course, it is common knowledge that for many who happened to live in ancient Greece, the luxury of freedom was not taken for granted. For a large proportion[27] of the population, those who were not citizens, there existed neither freedom *from* nor freedom *to*. The writings devoted to a justification of slavery, for instance, are well-known.[28] It is in the teachings of one former slave[29], the erstwhile Stoic, Epictetus, that Arendt finds what she refers to as the "beginning of philosophy" (Arendt 1978, Book 2, 77). Epictetus, who, like Socrates before him, did not write,[30] came to suggest a type of freedom which might be available to those who had "no place of their own in the world and hence lacked a worldly condition which...was unanimously held to be a prerequisite of freedom" (Arendt 1968b, 147). This "place," of course, was an *inner* space, and what early philosophy came to talk about was "inner freedom." "To make our mind...conformable to nature, [said] Epictetus," according to Charles Taylor, "is to make it 'elevated, free, unrestrained, unimpeded, faithful, modest'" (Taylor, 152). According to Epictetus, then, human beings were possessed of

---

27. "[S]laves (who at Athens made up more than a third of the population) were not citizens and so formed no part of the state" (Plato 1945, 54).
28. Aristotle: "It is clear then that by nature some are free, others slaves, and that for these it is both right and expedient that they should serve as slaves" (Aristotle 1962, 34). Professor John Badertscher, of the University of Winnipeg, has suggested that we might legitimately translate "slaves," here, as "employees," and "serve as slaves" as "have a job." To do so renders the moral superiority alluded to in note 26 more than a little transparent. For then the difference between "Greece" and the modern West is simply that all moderns are "slaves": We all have jobs. Indeed, those who do not have jobs are excluded from "society."
29. Arendt 1978, Book 2, 73.
30. Arendt 1978, Book 2, 74.

a free mind, if not always a free body. Indeed, and importantly, the body, according to Epictetus, was a mere "bag" (Arendt 1978, Book 2, 73). In what Arendt considers to be the Greek foreshadowing of later Augustinian writings, themselves at least partly an elaboration on the thoughts of Paul of Tarsus (himself a near contemporary of Epictetus), Arendt suggests that Epictetus marks a "conscious attempt to divorce the notion of freedom from politics, to arrive at a formulation through which one may be a slave in the world and still be free" (Arendt 1968b, 147). And thus begins the contamination, according to Arendt, of the notion of freedom. Following Augustine, following Paul, following Epictetus, "[f]reedom became one of the chief problems of philosophy [,] when it was experienced as something occurring in the intercourse between me and myself, and outside of the intercourse between men [sic]" (158).

Freedom, then, ought perhaps not to be equated with so-called "free will." "If," Arendt writes, "we understand the political in the sense of the polis, its end or *raison d'être* would be to establish and keep in existence a space where freedom as virtuosity can appear" (Arendt 1968b, 154). We come back to place, and to appearance, the act of appearing. If we take seriously Arendt's suggestion that etymological analysis of ancient Greek and Latin bears "witness to an experience in which being free and the capacity to begin something new coincided" (166), we must accept that, prior to the contamination of freedom by philosophy (and vice-versa), one was thought to be free, not *to begin* something new, but only *in the (act of) beginning* something new.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1); so it is

written. In the (act of) beginning, "God" created the heavens and earth. And thus, may

we say, with Arendt (reading Augustine [Arendt 1968b, 167]), that humankind *is* free to

the degree that it begins, to the degree that we are, individually and collectively,

beginnings in a universe which pre-existed us and which will, in all likelihood, continue

after we are gone? Let us assume an answer in the affirmative, and leave for others

the task of negotiating between free will and causality, even as causality, as a result of

its brush with modern physics and quantum mechanics, comes to lose much of its

strength.

And let me suggest — to leave this digression — that Arendt's notion of

freedom, as something which is made manifest in beginnings, is a notion not dissimilar

to Lyotard's reading of Levinas, which suggests that the event, the *is it happening?* is

the moment at which freedom — or possibility — has its greatest potential for becoming

manifest. And this because, as Lyotard understands it, "an event [is] the face to face

with nothingness" (Lyotard 1988b, 17). It is just here, as we will see, in the space

following the event, or phrase, that Lyotard suggests the hegemony granted to certain

genres of discourse prohibits — stifles — freedom.

———————————————◆———————————————

Legitimation II: Collapse

If we accept that Kant was seeking to demonstrate a unified subject, a subject authorized to say "we," it becomes apparent that "Auschwitz" represents the final collapse of the Kantian project; it represents the disintegration of the bridge over the ontological gap. "Auschwitz," for Lyotard, symbolizes the inevitable collapse of illegitimate "we's." But, and here is the crux, "the identity crisis that Nazism sought to cure — and which it merely succeeded in spreading to the rest of humanity — is potentially contained in the republican principle of legitimacy" (Lyotard 1993a, 54). For whenever one puts "the people" in the place of the normative instance, it becomes impossible to determine whether the authority being invoked is legitimated by recourse to a tradition of an originary narrative, or if it is republican and appeals to an Ideal of freedom. Again we see the difficulty demonstrated by Arendt, the blurring together of the two narrative structures which Lyotard suggests legitimate authority in the modern West. And now our problem is compounded. We have seen the exclusive (because particular) nature of mythic narratives. We have seen, indirectly, "Auschwitz." But what about those who fought against Nazism? What about those who continue to fight? What are they fighting for? Freedom.

And as I have noted, freedom must always be elusive. In the frustrating quest for freedom, for salvation, "any singularity (individual, family, party) intending to occupy [the place of *y*] will be suspected of being merely a usurper or impostor" (55). "We the people" is not a legitimate sovereign. There are too many national names. Peoples, as

Lyotard suggests, do not form into one people, whether it is the "people of God" or the sovereign people of world citizens. There are too many conflicting "we's." And this conflict of "we's" perpetuates and intensifies a crisis of identities that all too often seeks to resolve itself by a recourse to myth. Lyotard:

> Totalitarianism would consist in subjecting institutions legitimated by the Idea of freedom to legitimation by myth....It is not simply *Let us become who we are* — *Aryans,* but *Let the whole of humanity be Aryan.* Once named, the singular *we* then has the pretension of imparting its name to the end pursued by human history. In this sense totalitarianism is modern. It needs not only the people, but the decomposition of the people into "masses" in search of an identity by means of parties authorized by the republic. (56)

To re-cap, then, according to Lyotard's Kant, "an 'abyss'...separates every descriptive phrase...from the prescriptive phrase. The latter, when taken as the referent of the former, must elude its grasp" (123). As we have seen, the descriptive phrase, according to Lyotard's reading of the second *Critique,* must necessarily lead to a normative phrase, at the heart of which is a universalizable "we." But Lyotard would have us understand that it is inappropriate to assume that a normative phrase which links onto an ethical phrase is ethically obligating. Since there is never a last phrase, the prescriptive phrase (ethical moment, ethical event) can and must be linked onto, but it cannot be "an ethical implication...but cognitive" (127). And cognitive is not ethical; rational philosophy is not *the* discourse of justice. The "passage from the ethical phrase to the phrase of knowledge is done only at the price of forgetting the former" (111). Lyotard again:

> The obligated one is caught in a dilemma.....In the idiom
> of cognition, either the law is reasonable, and it does not
> obligate, since it convinces; or else, it is not reasonable,
> and it does not obligate, since it constrains. [The tribunal
> of cognition] requires that the obligatory be only that
> which the obligated one can reasonably account for in
> argumentation. It therefore supposes that I can occupy
> the place of the addressor of prescriptions, that I can
> "assume" them. (117)

Western metaphysics, then, tries to bridge this abyss by positing a "perfect

symmetry" (125) between I and you, between subject and author of the law. And this is

precisely why Lyotard suggests that the first person plural pronoun, "we," is "in effect

the linchpin for the discourse of authorization" (98). Prescriptions, become norms, are

legitimated as obligatory on the principle that "the addressor of the norm...and the

addressee of the obligation...are the same" (98).

However, as Lyotard's phrase analysis makes clear, the *we* in question here

does not occupy the same position in its different phrase universes: the *we* of the

normative phrase is the addressor, while the *we* of the prescriptive

> is the addressee of the obligation. On one side, *I*
> *declare*; on the other side, *You ought to*. The proper
> name masks this displacement, as does the *we* since it is
> able to unite *I* and *you*. It remains that, in obligation, *I* is
> the instance that prescribes, and not the one addressed
> by the prescription. One may make the law and submit to
> it, but not "in the same place." (98)

And so when Lyotard suggests that the "function of authority [is] to throw a

bridge over the abyss between heterogeneous phrases" (Lyotard 1988a, 143), what he

means is that the function of the "we," which is the foundation on which legitimated

republican authority rests, is to bridge the gap between the first (prescriptive) phrase,

and the subsequent (descriptive/normative) phrases. But, as I suggested at the end of

our digression on freedom, and as I will suggest in the pages which follow, it is just this

spot, this gap, which Lyotard/Kant/Levinas would have us leave somehow open. We

begin to understand our earlier mention of Lyotard's contention that injustice is "[n]ot

the opposite of the just, but that which prohibits that the question of the just and the

unjust be, and remain, raised" (Lyotard 1985, 66-67). In order that questions be raised,

we must leave the abyss un-bridged. And thus Lyotard, on republicanism:

> [T]he vast machine of political thought that justifies
> itself...on the basis of a model, all this thought is actually
> futile....There is no politics if there is not at the very
> center of society, at least at a center that is not a center
> but everywhere in the society, a questioning of existing
> institutions, a project to improve them, to make them more
> just. (Lyotard 1985, 22-3)

Kant III

Kant followed his first and second *Critiques* with a third, in 1790, *The Critique of*

Judgement. In it he wrote:

> all the faculties of the soul, or capacities, are reducible to
> three, which do not admit of any further derivation from a
> common ground: the *faculty of knowledge,* the *feeling of*
> *pleasure or displeasure,* and the *faculty of desire.* For the
> faculty of cognition, understanding alone is
> legislative....For the faculty of desire,...only
> reason...prescribes laws *a priori.* — Now between the
> faculties of knowledge and desire stands the feeling of

pleasure, just as judgement is intermediate between
understanding and reason. (Kant 1992, 15-17)

Thus judgement mediates between reason (second *Critique*) and understanding (the

first *Critique*). Here we see that understanding is actually a legislator for the faculty of

cognition, that reason is a legislator for the faculty of desire, and that the feelings of

pleasure and pain in some way legislate, determine the outcomes of, the workings of

the faculty of judgement. So what we have is an architectonic of the mind in which the

three "faculties of the soul" each operate within strictly delimited spheres. And each of

these faculties has its boundaries laid out and monitored by a "legislator" who

determines which faculty is in fact being called upon in the various operations required,

as the system exists from day to day. Now what is the significance of this architectonic

to the above-described loss, or disbursement of authority, to Kant's perceived need to

ground metaphysics?

"There is still," Kant writes, "further in the family of our higher cognitive faculties

a middle term between understanding and reason. This is *judgement*" (15). Faced with

what appeared to be a conflict of the faculties that he had so painfully elucidated;

faced, that is, with a non-unified subject, Kant, ever the metaphysician, wanted to heal

the fissures that had become apparent in his subject, lest his differentiation of the

faculties lead unwittingly to a further fragmentation of the social milieu. He wanted to

bridge the abyss he felt he had demonstrated between heterogeneous and

incommensurate faculties, between the two legislators of cognition and will/desire, that

is between understanding and reason, respectively. And the "bridge" he posited was the feeling of pleasure and pain, the aesthetic feeling. To offer a simple sketch:

The Subject

Reason	aesthetic feeling (beautiful)	understanding
will/desire	**"The Abyss"**	cognition

Now, the Kantian abyss is internal, inter- rather than intra- subject. The bridge he wanted to erect was simply a unified subject. Or it was hoped to have yielded a unified subject. Which is to say that, given that he felt that he had demonstrated completely heterogeneous domains of rationality, separated by an abyss, within the subject, Kant seemed to be left with a rather fractured subject. Accordingly, he wanted to bridge the gap. And this by means of aesthetic feeling.

Before moving to a discussion of just how successful Kant was, I need to introduce the notion of interest. "The delight," Kant writes, "which we connect with the representation of the real existence of an object is called interest" (Kant 1992, 42). And

elsewhere, "to will something, and to take a delight in its existence, i.e. to take an interest in it, are identical" (48). Kant's aesthetics seeks to distinguish between delight which is determined by the subject's interest, or, from the other direction, the object's "charm" (65), and that delight "which is indifferent as to the existence of an object, and only decides how its character stands with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure" (48). *"Taste,"* he writes, "is the faculty of estimating an object or a mode of representation by means of a delight or aversion *apart from any interest.* The object of such a delight is called *beautiful"* (50). Yet another dense few pages from Kant. The subject, in a judgement of taste/beauty, must experience no prior interest in the object of his/her judgement. Because, since "all interest presumes a want, or calls one forth" (49), an interested judgement is not a free judgement. Only the object of a disinterested delight, a delight based solely on the location of the representation of that object along a continuum between pleasure and pain, merits the designation "beautiful." Beauty, then, is a function of (lack of) interest, and pleasure and (over) pain. But there is more.

Distinguishing between the merely agreeable and the beautiful, Kant writes that if a representation merely pleases an *individual*, we must not call it beautiful:

> Many things may for him [sic] possess charm and
> agreeableness — no one cares about that; but when he
> puts a thing on a pedestal and calls it beautiful, he
> demands the same delight from others. He judges not
> merely for himself but for all men....[H]e *demands* this
> agreement of them. (52)

So then, judgements of taste are the disinterested and universalizable fruits of the subject's locating a representation along a continuum between pleasure and pain.

To return to my earlier sketch, it would appear that the first span of Kant's bridge, that between reason and aesthetics, is not holding up. Reason is intimately associated with will, or interest, and will — as we have seen in the second *Critique*, the *Critique* devoted to morality — is the name given to the control of impulse by reason. The reasoning subject, the moral subject, is necessarily a willing subject. But the subject apparently sought by the *Critique of Judgement*, the subject involved in aesthetic pleasure, is one Kant would have unencumbered by desire. Which seems to suggest that the faculty of aesthetic judgement, if it is clearly lacking interest, is not amenable to the faculty of Reason, and cannot, therefore, connect it to Understanding. The abyss is proving impassable. But this will not do.

Kant goes on to say that we might "define taste as the faculty of estimating what makes our feeling in a given representation *universally communicable* without the mediation of a concept" (153). However, he then proceeds to suggest that the mere universal communicability of our feeling must of itself carry with it an interest for us" (154), and that the necessary and universal nature of our judgements of taste "can lay the foundation for an interest in what has already pleased of itself and without regard to any interest whatsoever" (155). The feeling of the beautiful seems, in the end, to conceal an interest. The heterogeneity is only apparent. And so the analysis of the beautiful does appear to allow one to hope for a unified and unifying subject.

But we must not be satisfied. Nor indeed was Kant satisfied. We will need to look at what Kant calls, more than a little ironically, a "mere appendage" (93) to his aesthetics, the third *Critique's "Analytic of the Sublime."* It is, as we will see, in this seminal modern writing that Lyotard finds what he calls a "prologue for an honorable [sic] postmodernity" (Lyotard 1988a, xiii). But we must yet again defer, and discuss *something* other, taking with us the realization that, for many readers of Kant, his aesthetics did yield a unified subject.

Chapter 3: Il y a *Something*

In *Being and Time* Martin Heidegger calls for a re-awakening of the "question of Being" (Heidegger 1993a, 42). Demonstrating that "we are always already involved in an understanding of Being" (45), it was Heidegger's contention that his readers needed to be made aware, consciously aware, that the question of Being, the meaning of Being, need at all times be foregrounded, in order that the entity under consideration (Man) be said to be *Dasein*. Heidegger suggested that on "the foundation of the Greek point of departure for the interpretation of Being a dogmatic attitude has taken shape which not only declares the question of the meaning of Being to be superfluous but sanctions its neglect" (45). Let me say (write) a few words about this sanctioned neglect.

The Mechanics of Forgetting

In 1990's *Heidegger and "the jews,"* (1988's *Heidegger et "les juifs"*), a work on forgetting, on memory, Lyotard "read[s] side by side...the Kantian text on aesthetics and the Freudian text on metaspychology" (Lyotard 1990, 5). Linking Kant's notion of the sublime to what Freud referred to as *Nachträglichkeit*, or repetition of the repressed, *Heidegger and "the jews"* speaks of a *something* which pre-exists consciousness, *something* that haunts the conscious subject, *something* which

> every representation misses,....this "presence," whatever
> name it is given...,which persists not so much at the limits
> but rather at the heart of representation; this unnamable

> in the secret of names, a forgotten that is not the result of
> the forgetting of a reality — nothing having been stored in
> memory — and which one can only remember as
> forgotten "before" memory and forgetting, and by
> repeating it. (5)

Lyotard's "side by side reading" of Freud and Kant is informative for a number of reasons. We cannot fail to hear in these pages hints of the differend; we begin to see Lyotard's work as a body. Secondly, this reading is useful because it leads, as does the present writing, to the work of Emmanuel Levinas, whose work, we will see, is central to Lyotard's *oeuvre*. Let me begin with Lyotard's Freud.

The Freudian Nachträglichkeit

"Once the physical hypothesis of the mind is accepted," Lyotard writes, "it suffices to imagine that an 'excitation' — that is, a disturbance of the system of forces constituted by the psychic apparatus...affects the system when it cannot deal with it" (12). *Something* happens to the system which leaves an "unconscious affect" (12). Now here Lyotard is reading Freud.

> [T]he silence surrounding the 'unconscious affect' does
> not affect the pragmatic realm (the transfer of meaning to
> the listener); it affects the *physics of the speaker*. It is
> not that the latter cannot make himself understood; he
> himself does not hear anything. We are confronted with
> a silence that does not make itself heard as silence. (12-
> 13, my emphasis)

There is, then, in the Freudian understanding of *Nachträglichkeit*, a shock that "upsets the apparatus with such 'force' that it is not registered" (15); a shock without affect, an

unconscious affect. The psychic apparatus, the physics of the speaker (the body),

upset but unknowing, wounded but functioning, continues on its way. The shock — the

wound — is repressed. This originary repressed remains in potential, according to

Lyotard's Freud, until such time as an apparently benign situation elicits its dormant

energy, in a surprising (shocking) display of "affect without shock" (16).

We must note that there is a second component of the Freudian

Nachträglichkeit: private detection. Not only do we have the two "blows" to the psychic

apparatus; but, since the second blow (thought to be the first, due to the lack of affect

following the first) yields an apparently incommensurate response to a should-have-

been-benign situation, we have a mystery. While analysts like Lyotard and Freud

explain the experience of *Nachträglichkeit*, as I have above, by attempting to present

the whole picture, if you will, and explicating the confusion experienced by the subject

by demonstrating that it is the result of an experience of a "temporality that has nothing

to do with what the phenomenology of consciousness...can thematize" (15), the psychic

apparatus of the experiencing subject necessarily has only part of the picture. And

wants. The whole picture. Let us have no (unsolved) mysteries, no surprises, nothing

unpredicted.

Desiring the whole picture, the subject attempts to "explain" the apparently

disproportionate affect (not) commensurate with the second (thought-to-be-first) event.

Lyotard is "convinced that the common motivation for these hypotheses (always

fantastic) is nothing else than the unpreparedness of the psychic apparatus for the 'first

shock'" (17), but the experiencing subject knows none of this. Our surprised subject

wants the feeling that accompanies this unexpected affect, characterized by Freud

"most often as anxiety"(20), explained away, tamed.[31] And this is accomplished, to the

degree that it is, by the telling of a story. In "Rewriting Modernity" Lyotard writes that,

> in Freud's analysis [the patient] tries to bring to
> consciousness, to discover the "reason" or the "cause" of
> the trouble s/he suffers....S/he wants to remember, to
> gather up the *dismembered temporality that has not been
> mastered.* Childhood is the name borne by this lost time.
> So King Oedipus starts searching for the cause of the
> evil, a sin that would be at the origin of the plague the city
> is suffering. The patient on the couch appears to be
> involved in an entirely similar enquiry. Like [sic] in a
> detective novel, the case is examined, witnesses called,
> information gathered. (Lyotard 1991b, 27, my emphasis)

But things are not so simple. Let me return to *Heidegger and "the jews"*: "not

even the protective shield of banal temporality can deal with [the *something*]" (Lyotard

1990, 12). In fact, "[i]t should be quite clear that the temporalization implied in...history

is itself a protective shield....That is its 'political' function, its function of forgetting" (8).

The "political function" of remembering is forgetting. And therein lies the trap. We

return to "Rewriting Modernity":

> And so what I would call a second-order plot is woven,
> which deploys its own story above the plot in which [its]
> destiny is fulfilled, and whose aim is to remedy that
> destiny....We know how misleading in its turn [this] can
> be. The trap resides in the fact that *the enquiry into the*

---

31. I have elsewhere looked at the sexual abuse "recovery movement" as an example of what I take to
be one of the perils inherent in this search for the cause of an anxiety that may simply be part of being
human. Here I want to concern myself less with the various "solutions to the mystery" than with the
approach taken in its solution.

> *origins of destiny is itself part of that destiny,* and that the
> question of the beginning of the plot is posed at the end
> of the plot because it merely constitutes its end. (Lyotard
> 1991b, 27, my emphasis)

Weaving a second order plot, weaving a banal temporalization, the historical "remembering" undertaken by our shocked detectives facilitates a profound forgetting. And that, Lyotard argues, is just why this memorializing is such a predominant theme in the modern West — there is *something* we need to forget. There is *something* that makes us anxious. But before turning to examine this anxiety, let me first re-cap, and further clarify this notion of forgetful memorializing, and then introduce Lyotard's reading of the Kantian sublime. For it is here, as we will see, that Lyotard locates, not solutions, but ideas for the kind of work ("an aesthetics of shock, an anesthetics" [Lyotard 1990, 31]) necessary if we in the West wish to avoid continually falling into the same traps.

I have suggested that the political function of remembering is forgetting. This needs clarification, let me return to origins. I have already noted that, in the double blow of the Freudian *Nachträglichkeit*, the subject is confused regarding the temporal sequence of events. The energy, or excitation — the first blow — is "not set to work in the machine of the mind [but rather...] is deposited there....like a cloud of energy particles that are not subject to serial laws [and] that are not organized into sets that can be thought in terms of words or images" (15). Lyotard goes on to say that when this energy disperses, and brings on an affect apparently without a shock, consciousness becomes aware that there is *something*. And here, reading Freud's

"Project for a Scientific Psychology," Lyotard locates the "essence of the event: that *there is* 'comes before' *what* there is" (16).[32] And so we return to the decision to analyze. We need a *what*. But the *what* that the subject wants to come *before* is evasive, because of its cloud-like nature, its unrepresentable quality. Indeed, it is not there, it is "deposited outside representation" (16). Still we need a *what*. But all that Freud's couch can offer is some sort of (imagined or otherwise) primal scene. And, given that it comes only after analysis, it is not, after all, primal, so we are left with an origin that is not originary, that comes after. The time is out of joint. "Ungraspable by consciousness, this time threatens it" (17). Thus we attempt to assuage our anxiety over the asynchronic connection between the two blows by historicizing, by ordering, by setting events into manageable diachrony. In short, by narrating.

Now, to digress slightly — to defer again — we need to make a subtle distinction here. While Lyotard is suspicious of the West's "meta-narrative" of emancipation, it seems to me that a case could be made that he is considerably less so as regards what I will call individual (for want of a better word) narratives. By which I mean to say that, in much the same manner in which Lyotard, according to Bennington (p. 8 above), would not have oppressed groups or individuals abandon their struggles simply because they can be seen as part of the system which is arguably the cause of their difficulties, but, rather, is more concerned about the propensity to locate the individual struggles within a larger, meta-, struggle, the goal of which is a final solution; it seems to me that Lyotard would not have individuals or groups necessarily abandon their

---

32. In the language of *The Differend*, presentation precedes situation.

story-telling, except inasmuch as they thereby locate themselves within a larger story, the goal of which, again, is a global emancipation. But I am uncertain here. Look.

To refer to the above narratives as forgetful might be a slight misnomer. For they are not so much forgetting as blocking the (non-) memory, as it nags and nags and nags. By preventing a true anamnesis, a working through to ___, a state of non-remembering is installed. And thus the decision to narrate "instantly occults what motivates it, and it is made for this reason" (16). We have had occasion to notice another other-ing involved in the West's narrative practices. Lyotard reiterates:

> We have said that the power of the narrative mechanism
> confers legitimacy: it encompasses the multiplicity of
> families of sentences and of possible discursive genres;
> it could always be actualized, and still can be; being
> diachronic and parachronic, it ensures mastery over time,
> and therefore over life and death. Narrative is authority
> itself. It authorizes an unbreakable *we*, outside of which
> there can only be *they*. (Lyotard 1989, 321)

There is "us" and "them." And if "they" get in the way of our promised freedom, we are obliged to forget (at the least, as we have seen) them. And thus, while it might be argued by, for instance, narrative psychiatry, that story-telling is in itself an opening to the other, and a profoundly healing device, Lyotard would warn us that we must be ever critical of the practice of narrative, especially as it must necessarily exclude. We must be suspicious of the privileges proffered upon the narrator, and upon the group/individual in question. Which is not to say that we must necessarily disparage either, but that we must be aware, be wary.

The Kantian Sublime

Apropos of these concerns about narrative, in "Rewriting Modernity," Lyotard

gives notice of what I think of as his linking of Freud to Kant. Discussing Freudian

analysis as something "inscribed as a *constitutive element in a process of*

emancipation" (Lyotard 1991b, 31, my emphasis), the point of which is to "deconstruct

the rhetoric of the unconscious," Lyotard writes: "[t]his does not seem to me to be the

right hypothesis" (32). Rather, what Lyotard suggests is needed is an aesthetics:

> the aesthetic grasp of forms is only possible if one gives
> up all pretensions to master time through a conceptual
> synthesis. For what is in play here is not the
> "recognition" of the given, as Kant says, but the ability to
> let things come as they present themselves. Following
> that sort of attitude, every moment, every now is an
> "opening oneself to." (32)

In this pregnant paragraph, written in 1986, we can see that Lyotard's relationship with

Kant is, appropriately, similar to his relationship with Freud. He at once invokes and

revokes both of these thinkers, each of whom has had such a profound impact on those

of us who have come after.

Kant's understanding of sensation, according to Lyotard, makes it necessary to

presuppose a subject with the "capacity for being affected by objects by means of

sensibility. An addressee instance is thus put into place in the universe presented by

the quasi-phrase that the sensible given is" (Lyotard 1988a, 61). Reading the early

pages of the first *Critique,* Lyotard suggests that, according to Kant, "the constitution of

a given by sensibility requires not one phrase...but two":

> an unknown addressor speaks matter...to an addressee
> receptive to this idiom [Kant's "rational," "competent"
> beings (Kant 1993, 32)]....[T]his subject passes into the
> situation of addressing instance and addresses the
> phrase of space-time, the form phrase, to the unknown
> addressor of the first phrase, who thereby becomes an
> addressee. This phrase, as opposed to the matter
> phrase, is endowed with a referential function. Its
> referent is called the phenomenon....The "immediacy" of
> the given, as we see, is not immediate. (62)

The sensible given implies a doubling of phrases. Immediacy is not immediate.

However, the imagination described by Kant, the synthesizing power of the human

mind, convinces the subject that the two phrases involved in the sensible given are but

one. Now, if we accept that the subject is in motion through time and space, that all

that is experienced is in flux, and that, accordingly, our environment is also; in order "to

'apprehend' sensible 'matter' and even to 'produce' free imaginative forms, it is

necessary to connect this matter, to hold its flux within a self-same instant, be it

infinitely small" (Lyotard 1990, 31). Lyotard thus reads Kant as having described a

"kind of frame, a threshold, border, or framework placed over the manifold, which puts it

into succession" (31). The imagination accomplishes its task by placing over

experience a template within which to frame and control it, within which to apprehend it.

In the experience of the sublime, however, according to (Lyotard's) Kant, a

"disaster" befalls the imagination. Here is Lyotard in "After the Sublime: The State of

Aesthetics":

> One of the essential features revealed by Kant's analysis
> of the sublime depends on the disaster suffered by the
> imagination in the sublime sentiment. In Kant's
> architectonic of the faculties, the imagination is the power
> or the faculty of presentation....As every presentation
> consists in the "forming" of the matter into data, the
> disaster suffered by the imagination can be understood
> as a sign that the forms are not relevant to the sublime
> sentiment. (Lyotard 1991b, 136)

Kant IV

The third *Critique* is divided into two parts, the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*,

and the *Critique of Teleological Judgement*. The first part is further divided, first into

sections, then into books, the *Analytic of the Beautiful*, and the *Analytic of the Sublime*.

We have seen that, according to a reading of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*, Kant can be

seen as having demonstrated a unified subject. With the *Analytic of the Sublime*,

however, the case is somewhat different. But Kant's writings on the sublime have been

less than adequately dealt with, according to Lyotard. Many of Kant's readers have

failed to understand his thought in action, as it worked with and against itself, and

yielded an abyss into which one might peer, but over which one could not, without

illusion, traverse.

As a result, many writers do not know what to make of the *Analytic of the Sublime*. Briefly: Eva Schaper, in her essay, "Taste, Sublimity, and Genius" describes an argument that is "irritatingly placed, not in the Analytic of the Beautiful, where it would seem to belong, but in the Analytic of the Sublime" (Schaper, 376), suggesting a carelessness on the part of Kant, suggesting a difficulty in the *Analytic of the Sublime*. More importantly, here is Roger Scruton: "Kant's remarks about the sublime are obscure, but they reinforce the interpretation of his aesthetics as a kind of 'premonition' of theology" (Scruton, 89). Lyotard suggests that while the *Analytic of the Sublime* may be obscure, and while some of the arguments contained therein may seem misplaced, it is nonetheless a section of the Kantian critical philosophy which repays careful reading.

Lyotard refers to the *Analytic of the Sublime* as a "meteor dropped into the work" (Lyotard 1994, 159), and suggests that it in many ways seems to work against the stated intentions of the *Critique*. "[T]he feeling of the naive reader," he writes, is that "the Analytic of the Sublime creates a breach, not to say a break, in the examination of the aesthetic faculty of judging" (51). And for this very reason, according to Lyotard, the *Analytic of the Sublime* deserves our rigorous scrutiny. For Kant was, for all his idiosyncrasies[33], not a thinker prone to carelessness. If he put something in his book, he meant it. What Lyotard wants to suggest is that, while Kant saw his critique of "the

---

33. Jaspers on Kant: "Not a single demonstration is carried through step by step, from one decisive position to another. Rather, there is an interweaving, a circling and repetition which confuses the reader at first....The remarkable thing is that Kant did not systematically ask what he himself was doing" (Jaspers, 278).

judging subject....[as] the propaedeutic of all philosophy' (Kant 1992, 36), this propaedeutic "is itself, perhaps, all of philosophy" (Lyotard 1994, 6). While a traditional reading of Kant (one "correct but overly confident in the letter" [1]) sees Kant's unifying task accomplished, what aesthetic judgement reveals, if one attends to the sublime as well as the beautiful, according to Lyotard, is that, as Kant had written in the first *Critique,* "'we can at most only learn how to philosophize...but we cannot learn philosophy'"(6).

Lyotard suggests that what Kant does in his three *Critiques* is to "look for the *a priori* conditions of the possibility of judging the true, the just, or the beautiful in the realms of knowledge, of morality, and in the territory of the aesthetic" (56). But this project is not without its paradoxes. For the quest for *a priori* conditions, unconditioned conditions, is by definition bound to be in vain. Lyotard thus sees the critical project as reflection's inherently futile attempt to touch "on the absolute of its conditions, which is none other than the impossibility for it to pursue them 'further'" (56). Critical thought "forbids itself the absolute, much as it still wants it" (56). This forbidden craving, this unrequited longing, at once pleasurable and intensely painful, and very reminiscent of our discussion of the differend, is at the heart of the third *Critique's Analytic of the Sublime.* Both prologue and propaedeutic, Lyotard sees Kant's thought as climaxing here. And it is just here, just at this apparent impasse, this logical contradiction in the Kantian text, that Lyotard suggests we must look, if we are to find, not a reconciliation, but a demonstration of the futility of searching for one.
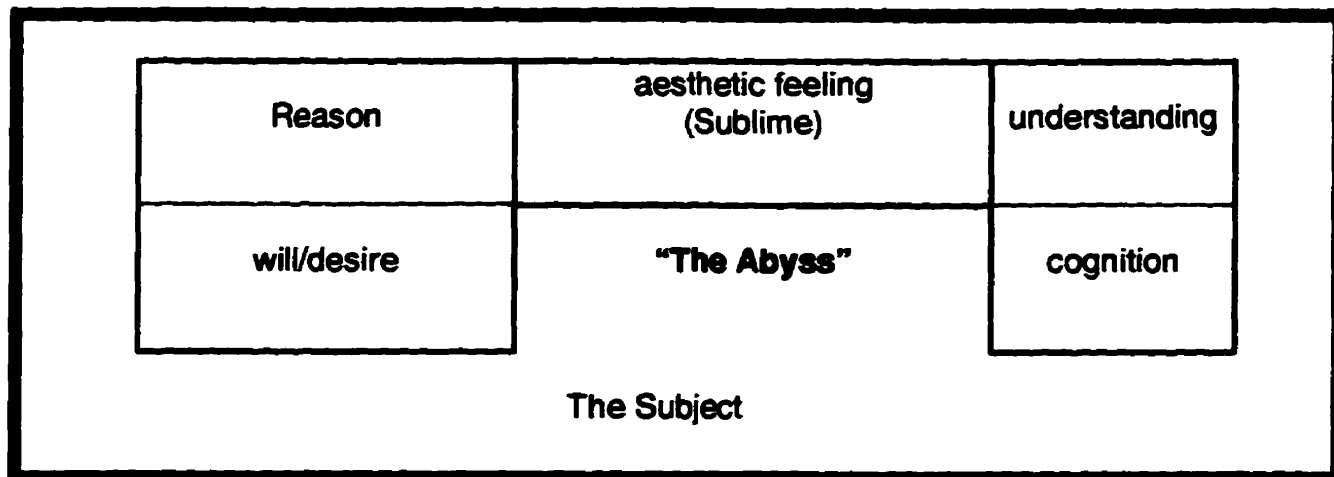
For Lyotard, aesthetic judgement makes manifest "the reflexive manner of thinking that is at work in the critical text as a whole" (8). The faculty of judgement has the task within the subject that the *Critique of Judgement* performs for the subject of philosophy. Now here is Kant, introducing the *Analytic of the Sublime*:

> the feeling of the sublime is a pleasure that only arises indirectly, being brought about by the feeling of a momentary check to the vital forces followed at once by a discharge all the more powerful....[S]ince the mind is not simply attracted by the object, but is also alternately repelled thereby, the delight in the sublime does not so much involve positive pleasure, as admiration or respect, i.e. merits the name of negative pleasure. (Kant 1992, 91)

And later:

> the sublime, in the strict sense of the word, cannot be contained in any sensuous form, but rather concerns ideas of reason, which, although no adequate presentation of them is possible, may be excited and called into the mind by that very inadequacy itself which does not admit of sensuous presentation. (92)

The sublime denies the imagination the power of forms. It can be thought of as the distance between the faculty of conceiving and the faculty of presenting an object in accordance with the concept. The sublime, that is, rather than offering a bridge over the Kantian abyss (p. 86, above), performs it, dramatizes it — the sublime *emerges from* the un-bridgeable abyss. Thus, to return to my earlier sketch:

	aesthetic feeling (Sublime)	
Reason		understanding
will/desire	"The Abyss"	cognition

The Subject

Kant writes that the "feeling of the sublime involves as its characteristic feature a

mental *movement*" (94). We must *do* philosophy, not learn it. Rather than constructing

bridges with which to by-pass conflict, what is being recommended in Kant's "mere

appendage" is that the abyss be, indeed, stared into. Kant again:

> this movement....may be compared with a vibration, i.e.
> with a rapidly alternating repulsion and attraction
> produced by one and the same Object. The point of
> excess for the imagination (towards which it is driven in
> the apprehension of the intuition) is like an abyss in
> which it fears to lose itself. (107)

In "Judiciousness in dispute, or Kant after Marx," Lyotard talks about an agitated

condition that plagued the "patient [named] Kant":

> this illness comprises even that ontological health which
> *is* criticism. I would thus like to begin by saluting in this
> agitation — which is the emblem of a busy life and of the

> syncopated rhythm of health — the shadow cast over
> experience by the critical condition, or what
> anthropologists would call its judicious complexion. To
> judge is to open an abyss between parts by analyzing
> their [heterogeneity]. (Lyotard 1989, 326)

And so what of authority? What of the "we" which serves to bridge the gap? We

see that, in Lyotard's reading, the Kant of the *Analytic of the Sublime* wants to vibrate

above, and stare into the abyss. Wants, that is, to suggest that the unified subject,

born of Descartes, and so apparently sought after by Kant and all who follow him, is

necessarily elusive; and to suggest that the quest for unity, the Romantic craving to

make the beginning rhyme with the end, to render the other the same, will always and

every where end up, at best and at worst, constructing fragile bridges with which to

cross abysses. And in so doing, Lyotard would have us understand, we effectively

deny them, deny the occurrence, the event.

———————————◆———————————

"The beautiful," Lyotard writes, "contributed to the Enlightenment, which was a

departure from childhood, as Kant says. But the sublime is a sudden blazing, and

without future" (Lyotard 1994, 55). To sum up:

> the Analytic of the Sublime finds its "legitimacy" in a
> principle that is expounded by critical thought and that
> motivates it: a principle of thinking's getting carried
> away....[S]ublime feeling is a double defiance.
> Imagination at the limits of *what* it can present does
> violence to itself in order to present *that* it can no longer
> present....[T]he critique must finally place the sublime

close to insanity, showing it to have no moral value, that
in the end the analysis of this feeling must be given over
to the aesthetic with the simple title of appendage,
without significance. (55)

What is sublime (as opposed to *the* sublime)? Well, how can one say? A

premonition? It must suffice to note at this juncture that in experiencing the sublime,

"reflection...touches on the absolute of its conditions, which is none other than the

impossibility to pursue them further: the absolute of presentations, the absolute of

speculation, the absolute of morality" (56). The sublime is a presentation of what is

unpresentable. Lyotard: "The sublime feeling is the name of...privation," (Lyotard

1989, 211). The disaster that befalls the imagination renders it incapable of situating

the sublime experience. There is a first phrase, again, but the subject is impotent.

How can we not think, here, of the differend? Because of the magnitude of the sublime

sensation, the imagination is "throttled" (><). "[T]hinking grasped by the sublime

feeling," Lyotard writes, "is faced...with quantities capable only of suggesting a

magnitude or a force that exceeds its power of presentation" (Lyotard 1994, 52). The

above-described template is shattered, and the imagination "ceases to constitute time

as flux, and this feeling [the *apprehension* of the given] does not come about...; it has

no moment. How then will the mind remember it?" (Lyotard 1990, 32). How can we not

think, here, now, of the differend? The subject will experience the sublime *feeling*:

the combination of pleasure and pain, as the
trembling...of a motion both attractive and repulsive at
once, as a sort of spasm, according to a dynamic that
both inhibits and excites. This feeling bears witness to
the fact that an "excess" has "touched" the mind, more
than it is able to handle. (32)

"With the advent of the aesthetics of the sublime," Lyotard writes, "the stake of art in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was to be witness to the fact that there is indeterminacy" (Lyotard 1989, 206). And thus we see that in Lyotard's reading of the Kantian sublime, as in his reading of the Freudian *Nachträglichkeit* (also characterized by an "absence of form" [Lyotard 1990, 15]), the subject "experiences" that which it cannot apprehend, and as a result, forgets it — doesn't allow it to be re-membered. And forgetting, whether in the Freudian or the Kantian analysis, comes at a premium, it leaves a trace. That trace is of course, a nagging, haunting feeling, an awareness (but the word is problematic) that there is *something*.

There is (Il y a) *something*. One cannot read Lyotard (I cannot read Lyotard) without detecting a certain sadness. The originary repressed, the ungraspable sublime, speak to Lyotard of a loss, it seems to me. But this word *loss* (my word) is problematic, and therefore suggestive. From whose perspective is there a loss? Surely not from the perspective of the subject who only wants (another problematic word — *needs* would be better) to tame something inexplicable with an explanation. Even if we accept, as I think we must, that we are describing a process here which is necessarily ongoing, a never-ending process whereby each successive attempt to re-member simply shrouds that which is originally forgotten in another layer of "banal temporality," but cannot fail to leave a (painful, nagging) trace of the forgetting, which in turn wants taming; even, that is, if we accept that the struggle continues *ad infinitum*, surely the subject perceives more the little battles won than the never-ending nature of the war. But Lyotard insists, or Lyotard's writing insists, that we must think in terms of a

loss. To understand Lyotard's reasons for such an outlook is to begin to understand Lyotard's ethics.

For what might it be that is lost? As I suggested in the early pages of this chapter, there has been in the modern West a sanctioned forgetting of the meaning of Being. That meaning, Lyotard suggests — we must not be surprised — is simply "that one is obligated before the Law, in debt" (Lyotard 1990, 3). It is simple and it is profound. We have forgotten the meaning of Being — that the modern subject, so proud of his autonomy, is actually profoundly heteronomous — and this forgetting has taken place by means of processes like the ones adumbrated above. "We," the subjects, have forgotten that which we would not re-member. We have forgotten a profound obligation. And so I find myself bound to suggest that there is *something* that is so powerful, so absolute, that its appearance, or even its suggestion, creates a disaster for the imagination. That *something* is not obligation. That *something* is, however, obligating, binding. And, forced to swallow an obligation it could not understand, the modern West choked.

Chapter 4: The Body of Western Thought

> This very strange privilege granted to the pole of the addressee [in Semitic thought] is something that is forgotten, actively forgotten, in Western thought....[I]t has been purely and simply assimilated. To assimilate...the hold placed upon me..., a hold that is an obligation..., this is...quite in keeping with the West's way of spitting on the Jews.

> Jean-François Lyotard[34]

Now smell. Breathe through your nose. Try not to choke. And think about what I have been writing. The masters of the universe have been chewing on a nasty bit of gristle, have been attempting to digest a troubling servitude. Or, rather, the previously palatable diet of the subject that was to become modern became, at first, unsavoury, and then repugnant. But there it was, nonetheless. And while the imperialising, border-drawing efforts of the nineteenth century rendered things slightly more gustatory, there came a saturation point, an explosive, killing, point.

I mentioned, in my foreword, that Lyotard would have us place "our struggle under the sign of a fidelity to the intractable" (Lyotard 1993b, 168). While I had thought to suggest that *the intractable*, the *something*, the *sublime*, is obligation — a profound and terrible heteronomy — I now realize that I must say, rather, that it demands obligation. I also noted in my foreword that a mature Lyotard came to realize that much of his formative local (Algerian) struggles were in fact in the service of a more global system, a system which had the power to digest — to take energy from — these

---

34. Lyotard 1985, 38.

struggles, and thereby grow as a result of them. Thus suspicious that revolution is in fact but a developmental stage in the continuing life of social systems, aware that "[e]ven radical revolution is fundamentally just the return...of the first by way of the second, which is a return of the second to the first, the same repeating itself in the other" (Lyotard 1990, 77), Lyotard nonetheless, as I have attempted to show, maintains that all is not lost for one who would effect change. For try as it might, "the system has [not] digested the intractable" (169); it is indigestible.

Ingestion: at the dawn of Western civilization, hemlock. A nervous administration, fearful of the contamination of its body politic, administers a toxin to the body of the philosopher. And expulsion: the sun still high on the mountains, the modern West appears to be degenerating. "We wanted the progress of the mind," writes a tired Lyotard, "we got its shit" (Lyotard 1988a, 91). Contrary to the sanguine promises of liberalism, contrary to Enlightenment dreams, or — rather — as a corollary to those dreams and promises, Lyotard notices the effluent, the detritus, the by-products (though he is not the first[35]).

But even years earlier, in 1948, a twenty-three year-old Lyotard had lamented, "[w]e were twenty when the camps vomited into our laps those whom there had not been time or energy to digest" (Lyotard 1993b, 85). Into the laps of an earlier

---

35. Think of Foucault's examination of "criminals," "insane" persons, and institutions of "health." And Zymunt Bauman quotes a nineteenth century writer as noting that "the impotent, the mad, criminals and decadents of every form, must be considered as the waste-matter of adaptation, the invalids of civilization....It is impossible to accept social solidarity without reservation in a society where a certain number of members are unproductive and destructive" (Bauman 1995, 167).

generation fell the undigested: (reminders of) the intractable. Shit and vomit, foul

smelling reminders of ingestion, and of embodiment. And of the foreign, the upsetting.

The "Jews" I

I have suggested an opposition, not to say a dialectic, running through the

modern West, at both an inter- and intra-subject level. Thought to be — *thought to be*

— rational and autonomous, nevertheless there is a lingering doubt, a "motherless

misery" (Lyotard 1990, 20), which haunts the modern subject, and the subject of

philosophy. This lingering doubt, this haunting suspicion, Lyotard/Levinas (I can hardly

wait) would have us understand, is a result of the ineffaceable trace left in us all, of a

profound heteronomy, an obligation which not only binds me, but, in fact, calls me into

being.

Lyotard sees this opposition as being played out in the historical co-existence of

Christians and Jews. He claims that "the Jews represent *something that Europe does*

not want to or cannot know anything about" (Lyotard 1993b, 159). And this because,

according to Lyotard, the Jewish tradition has never told anything but "stories of

unpayable debt" (Lyotard 1990, 84). "The book of the Jews says God is a voice, no

one ever gains access to his visible presence." Commanded by a voice — an unseen

voice — called to become a nation in the midst of inhospitable neighbours, the Jewish

people know that "[t]he law of justice and peace does not become incarnate....You

belong to it; it does not belong to you" (Lyotard 1993b, 160). Lyotard suggests that the

history of the modern West is one in which we autonomous, non-Jews[36] have, using a

vast array of social, religious, political, and economic means, attempted to be rid of, or

at the very least to tame, this kernel of Judaism (read obligation) in our body politic.

In *Heidegger and "the jews"* Lyotard distinguishes between Jews and "jews," and

posits the latter as a construct by means of which the twentieth century Occident

attempted to absolve itself of this terrible kernel of obligation. Lyotard:

> "The jews," according to my hypothesis, testify that this
> misery, this servitude to that which remains unfinished, is
> constitutive of the human spirit. From them emanates
> only this anguish that "nothing will do"....For it is not as
> men, women, and children that they are exterminated but
> as the name of what is evil — "jews" — that the Occident
> has given to the unconscious anxiety. (Lyotard 1990, 27)

Lyotard's analysis locates in "the jews" that which

> within the "spirit" of the Occident that is so preoccupied
> with foundational thinking,....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 reopen the wound of the
> unaccomplished. "The jews" are the irremissable in the
> West's movement of remission. (22)

Lyotard's subtle softening of his argument, by placing the designator in quotation

marks, and using lower case, is doubly informative. It is, I think, appropriate to

---

36. I take this term to refer almost exclusively to non-Jews of the "Christian" persuasion. This because,
as my quotation marks suggest, even those of us in the modern West who would suggest that the label
would not apply cannot escape the fact that we live in a civilization that is profoundly informed by
"Christianity." See Lyotard's essay "The Wall, the Gulf, and the Sun: A Fable," in Lyotard 1993b, 112-
123, for an analysis of the similarities and the differences between Muslims and Jews.

distinguish between "jews," as described above, and "empirical" Jews. But we must not fail to note that this distinction gives our discussion a "sanitized" feel. And this is not dissimilar, may I suggest, to the sanitization which pervaded much of Europe in the mid-twentieth century, when even zealous Nazis could find a place in their "hearts" for certain "empirical," "Jews-next-door." It seems to me that Nazism, at least in part, started with "jews," and moved to Jews, Gypsies, and others. That Lyotard is aware of this, I have no doubt; indeed it is the reason for his distinction. That we must be wary of it, I nonetheless maintain.

But Lyotard's distinction is informative — telling — in another way. For it is, after all, a technological distinction, is it not? That Lyotard, in his writing, cannot but use technological devices (quotation marks, lower case) to differentiate his groups, is of profound importance. For, as I will argue in the following pages — as Lyotard argues — the so-called Holocaust was a technological event, and, not to minimize the horrendous suffering endured by millions during the Nazi regime, the Holocaust was also a profound, *technological*, failure.

Auschwitz II

"The disaster," Maurice Blanchot has written, "ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact" (1). All then, is in ruins and yet perfectly intact. I need to speak of disaster, of *Shoah*; of the intact ruins pursuant upon a disaster, the symbol for which I will suggest, following Lyotard (following Adorno), is "Auschwitz." "Auschwitz"

is the place and time, is rather, the marker — the sign-post — of a failed attempt on the part of Western civilization to be free of....

I have suggested that modern technology can be seen to have developed, at least in part, in response to the demonstrable fallibility of the human body. Keeping in mind my earlier discussion of truth and truthfulness, we may understand technology as a mind-set and set of "devices that optimize the performance of the human body for the purpose of producing proof" (Lyotard 1984, 44-45). I want now to examine the irony pursuant upon the fact that, even as technology brought the far near, even as it opened our bodies, even as it looked into our deepest recesses, it could not excise that *intractable* part of us which, in spite of everything, continued to linger and haunt. Where this becomes ironic, and bitterly so, is the point, so prescient, so poignantly invocative of our modern technological enthusiasm with transplantation (the attempt to render bodies interchangeable), at which, evidently unable to elude (to elide) the "motherless misery" which haunts the modern subject, the technological dynamo (with its promises of health and healing and progress) attempted to substitute the bodies of millions of others for its own, so that, perhaps, the haunting, nagging reminder of the Other might be burned out in the crematoria of Eastern Europe. Efface Jews, erase "jews."

Reducing millions of Jews to bodies, to units to be counted, shipped, and dealt with, the Nazi bureaucrats developed an efficient (read ruthless) machine by means of which to implement their final solution. It is here that Lyotard, reading Philippe Lacoue-

Labarthe, locates what he calls the "essence" (Lyotard 1990, 84) of the West. While

the Second World War was played out on a "tragic stage," the activities against the

Jews did not appear within the so-called legitimate theatre of war. Rather, while war

had been political, "with Auschwitz it became industrial." Lyotard:

> When the crime is administered like a "production," the
> exploitation of human bodies as of waste material, and
> the treatment of by-products, the stage is set according to
> the rules of what is beginning to become and has already
> become art in the modern West, that is, technology. And
> Nazism is the moment of the irruption of the new art,
> technology, in the world of beings "ready-to-hand". (85) [37]

Zygmunt Bauman says it wonderfully, terribly. "Like everything else done in the

modern — rational, planned, scientifically informed, expert, efficiently managed, co-

ordinated — way," Bauman writes, "the Holocaust left behind and put to shame all its

alleged premodern equivalents, exposing them as primitive, wasteful and ineffective"

(Bauman 1991, 89). What was concentrated in the camps was technology, technique

rationalized.

---

37. Canadian historian Gwynne Dyer, in his 1985 book, *War*, suggests that the American Civil War was the first war which was fought on a technological stage. See esp. 76-80. I do not think that this in any way changes my suggestion that with Auschwitz war became industrial. While with the advent of rifled muskets, not to mention the many new weapons introduced in the First World War, killing came to be done with more and more elaborate tools, it was not until "Auschwitz" that killing "factories" were in use. Also, as Bauman points out, the "thorough, comprehensive, exhaustive murder [of the camps] required the replacement of the mob with a bureaucracy" (Bauman 1991, 90). Technology as management. Interestingly, however, Bauman elsewhere quotes Jean-Marie Benoist as noting that the French revolution "married mechanization to political death....we have passed...to...industrial decapitation. The carts carrying the condemned to the guillotine prefigured the modern slaughterhouses: Dachau, Katyn, Lubianka" (Bauman 1995, 164-165).

This, of course, is what Hannah Arendt was aware of, if not explicitly articulating, when she suggested, regarding Adolf Eichmann at his execution, that "he was summing up the lesson that this long course in human wickedness had taught us — the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought defying *banality of evil*" (Arendt 1992, 252). You see, one of the most important and insidious myths of technology is that it is simply a tool, inherently value-free. Heidegger:

> we are delivered over to [technology] in the worst
> possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for
> this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to
> do homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of
> technology. (Heidegger 1977, 4)

Technology holds itself to be value-neutral, thus fostering an environment in which horrendous acts of violation can be orchestrated by mild-mannered, low-level bureaucrats. And thus perhaps Arendt ought more accurately to have referred to the banality of evil *within a technological paradigm.*

It is fortuitous to have once again brought Heidegger into this writing; he will provide a useful hinge. For, even as he warns against the perils of not giving technology its due, Heidegger offers a powerful example of an even more dangerous forgetting. Lyotard's *Heidegger and "the jews,"* a work to which I have often referred in the preceding pages, offers, among other things, an analysis of the so-called "Heidegger affair," the furor that erupted, in Europe and abroad, loosely following the 1987 publication of Victor Farías's *Heidegger et le nazisme* (1989's *Heidegger and*

Nazism)[38]. While Lyotard does not refute Farías's accusations *per se*, and while he in no way wishes to excuse Heidegger for his early speeches or, more importantly, his subsequent "leaden silence on the Shoah" (Lyotard 1990, 88) — "for a thought of this magnitude circumstances are never extenuating" (63) — Lyotard nonetheless is at pains to emphasize the danger involved in the binary, either/or philosophy which would have us understand, of Heidegger, "if a great thinker, then not a Nazi; if a Nazi, then not a great thinker — the implication being: either negligible Nazism or negligible thought" (52). "This alternative," Lyotard suggests, "does not allow for thinking" (51).

And "there is a pressing need to think" (51). Lyotard traces his response to Farías through a number of then-current critiques, not the least of which were Jacques Derrida's *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, and Lacoue-Labarthe's *La Fiction du Politique*. Lacoue-Labarthe, according to Lyotard, suggests that Heidegger's silence on the Shoah was a function of his Platonic/Aristotelian conception of art as the imitation of essences, or "as *mimésis*, which supplements nature by imitating it" (76), and that Heidegger's politics derived from his understanding that "the political, since its Greek beginnings, is itself art," an art of the "'fashioning' of a people according to the idea or the ideal of a just being-together" (76).[39]

---

38. Interestingly, Hans Jonas, in an essay published in 1966, was critical of Heidegger, his erstwhile mentor, for reasons similar to those of Farías, and this long before Farías came along. See Jonas, 258.
39. This type of fashioning is not, we must note, the same as that involved in so-called "creative" arts. Rather, it is art of the sort referred to by Arendt as something in which one can be a virtuoso, in which, that is, one might demonstrate virtue. (1968b, 152-153)

Lyotard concurs, up to a point, with this assessment, and cites Hegel, an earlier late-Greek:

> "The subsequent circumstances of the Jewish
> people...have all of them been simply consequences and
> elaborations of their original fate. By this fate — an
> infinite power that they set over against themselves and
> could never conquer — they have been maltreated and
> will be continually maltreated until they appease it by the
> spirit of beauty and so annul it by reconciliation." (Hegel,
> in Lyotard 1990, 88-89)[40]

These dangerous, threatening, words, Lyotard suggests, translate into "[s]ince 'the jews' themselves had not suppressed their fate of irreconciliation with the 'infinite power' to which they 'opposed' themselves,....it became necessary to suppress them." They do not, however, translate into Heidegger's "existential ontological deconstruction"; Heidegger's "'Greece' is not that of Hegel" (89), and Lyotard wishes to be careful.

Thus, while Hegel, following "the Greeks," could suggest that the suffering of historical Jews could have been alleviated had only they turned to representation, thereby placing the blame for their difficulties squarely on their own shoulders, it is Lyotard's suggestion that Heidegger (*contra* Lacoue-Labarthe) arguably came to a similar conclusion, via different but nonetheless "Greek thinking." While Hegel could suspect that, had "the jews" re-presented, "in the [Greek] spirit of beauty" (89), their Other, had they offered up to their Other flattering re-presentations of itself, perhaps

---

40. "And," Lyotard asks, in another, but transferable situation, "isn't Levinas's exigency the only safeguard against such an illusion?" (Lyotard 1988a, 125).

they might have appeased it, and thereby discharged their debt; for Heidegger the story was subtly different.

You see, Heidegger was concerned with the uncovering, or unveiling, of the lost "Greek" understanding of Being, and "indebted" to what Lyotard calls a thought so anchored in the Western "prejudice that the Other is Being, [that] it has nothing to say about a thought in which the Other is the Law" (89). The West remains a "Greek installation" (84); philosophical (read "Greek") thinking "excites the spirit of the most ancient Greeks no less than that of the metaphysicians and physicists:...the laiety [sic] of the modern Occident" (81). We cannot, as I have noted several times in the present writing, escape our heritage. Heidegger had nothing to say, because he/we could not understand a people not bound to "Greece."

The historical Jews, however, as well as all "the jews," were, and remain, bound to a different aesthetic. And as a result they are — still — bound for "Auschwitz." But the ovens could not burn what bodies could not digest. The ovens belched out smoke and ashes, reminders/remainders of the irremissable; reminders, too, of something else. For the Holocaust was informed no less by Mount Olympus than by Mount Calvary; it was informed no less by *techne* than by sacrifice. "The origin of the [subject-object split]," writes Hans Jonas, "whether deplored or hailed, is in Moses no less than Plato. And, if you must lay technology at somebody's door, don't forget, over the scapegoat of metaphysics, the Judeao-Christian tradition" (Jonas, 259). The

holocaust was a philosophical, technological, *sacrifice* which, as it turned out — as it

must necessarily have turned out — failed.[41]

Auschwitz III

Holocaust. The word is informative. From the Greek *holos* — whole, and

kaustos — burned. "A large-scale sacrifice or destruction, especially of life, especially

by fire."[42] We see here, just here in this apparently innocuous epithet, the profound

differend which is witnessed in the modern West's attempt to be rid of its "jews." It is,

Lyotard writes, "absurd that what the Jews simply call the *Shoah*, the disaster, should

be called the holocaust. There is nothing sacrificial in this disaster" (Lyotard 1993b,

157). For sacrifice, the notion of symbolically wiping debt away, is not an option for

Jews. It is, however, *the* option for those of us who, while we took our stories from the

Hebrew Bible, read them only as heralding a redemption, a redeemer (a Christ), an

emancipation. "A Christian can [must] manage to reconcile things: the debt to the

Other has been paid symbolically, once and for all" (161).

And thus can we not see, in the attempt to erase Jews from modern Europe, not

simply a substitution, but an attempted sacrifice? *We will cede to you these reminders*

of our debt, and you will in turn absolve us, or at least stop with the nagging. "In

Western history," Lyotard writes,

---

41. Jacques Derrida, in a discussion of the biblical story of Abraham's aborted sacrifice of his son, notes that "sacrifice supposes the putting to death of the unique in terms of its being unique, irreplaceable, and most precious." And later, "[i]f I put to death or grant death to what I hate it is not a sacrifice. I must sacrifice what I love" (Derrida, 58, 64). Small wonder the failure of the attempted sacrifice of "the jews."
42. *New Webster's Dictionary*, 462.

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. (Lyotard 1993b, 143)

About such a people, a people bound to a book, a people not claiming a heritage from

Athens but from Palestine, we — yes, we — cannot speak. We have seen Heidegger's

silence; it is an archetype. How can we represent these people of non-representation?

They upset our aesthetic.

Referring, as he often does, to the work of Marcel D'Ans among the Cashinahua

peoples, and attempting to generalize from them to other "primitive" cultures, Lyotard

offers an observation which bears considerably on the present discussion of the

sacrifice of "the jews." "Couldn't it be said," Lyotard asks, "...that what is generally non

consumable as anecdote and which has no place in the universe of narrative phrases

— in short, the leftovers — is what is sacrificed?" (Lyotard 1988a, 154). Was that

which could not be consumed (or which could be consumed but not digested) by, nor

represented by, the body of Western thought, offered in sacrifice to the gods of

determinacy, the gods of Olympus and the saviour of Calvary?

The Shoah was a holocaust surely, but only from the perspective of those for

whom the ovens were merely offensive. The outrage, very real and powerful, exhibited

by we fortunates born on the right side of Europe's tracks cannot conceal the fact that

what the Jews simply call the Shoah was something in which we must all, individually

and collectively, admit complicity. And, yes, even, or especially, those of us who came after, for whom the tendency might very well be to suggest that this horrible blemish on the history of the West has been treated, and is gone. Speaking of the writings of survivors of "Auschwitz," Lyotard writes that the

> murder committed against the Other, of which thought
> and writing are in quest, this annihilation, has not
> happened once, sometime ago, at "Auschwitz," but, by
> other means, apparently totally other, it is happening now
> in the "administered world," in "late capitalism," the
> technoscientific system, whatever name one gives to the
> world in which we live, in which we survive. (Lyotard
> 1990, 44)

And now, somewhat bitterly, we come to the final chapter. The time has come to offer a more thorough discussion of Levinas. This, as will become clear, is not a project without difficulties. For we must not explicate Levinas. I had hoped to end with an elucidation of the mechanics of Levinasian subjectivity.[43] I had hoped, that is — the modern that I am — to end by offering an alternative paradigm, a better way, a way in which the burden of freedom might be alleviated. Subjectivity reconsidered. But the subject, as we will see, cannot reconsider the subject. And so we conclude with, shall we say, a demonstration of the difficulty.

---

43. While, as the following chapter will attempt to make clear, such a project is not without its problems, were I to undertake to offer, perhaps, a model of the mechanics of Levinasian subjectivity, it is Freud to whom I would turn. Or, rather, I think, to Kristeva's and Lacan's Freud. Another writing, or, probably, another writer.

Chapter 5: Beside the Point, Outside the Subject

[E]veryone is really responsible to all men for all men and for everything. *I don't know how to explain it...but I feel it is so, painfully even.*

The Brothers Karamazov[44]

Glossary III[45]

Premonition: *n*. a forewarning, a presentiment. Cf. Premonitory: *adj*. giving warning beforehand.

Toward: *prep*. in the direction of, with regard to, in relation to, for the purpose of helping, augmenting or making possible, etc., approaching near.

Defer: *v*. to postpone, to put off taking action. (Followed by "to") to allow someone else's opinion, judgement, etc. to have more weight than one's own, willingly or politely. Cf. Deference: *n*. polite regard for someone else's wishes, ideas, etc. Respectful submission.

———————————————— ◆ ————————————————

Here is Lyotard in *The Differend*: "The universe presented by a phrase is not presented to something or someone like a 'subject'" (Lyotard 1988a, 71). As I have suggested, however, the modern West rests its understanding of justice on the shoulders of the "subject authorized to say 'we'." True descendants of Kant, we accept that, while each of us must be considered as an end in him/herself,

> rational nature exists as an end in itself. In this way man [sic] necessarily thinks of his own existence; thus far is it a subjective principle of human actions. But in this way

---

44. Dostoevsky, 268, my emphasis.
45. From *New Webster's Dictionary*, 791, 1044, 251-252.

also does every other rational being think of his existence
on the same rational ground that holds for me. (Kant
1981, 36)

Which is to say that in the Kantian schema, a potentially chaotic and anarchic

competition of free wills and "ends in themselves" is avoided by a rationally deduced

categorical imperative: "so act, etc." We are accordingly rendered a plurality of free

wills, united by reason.

And thus one is obligated, to the extent that one is, based on a presumed

universal subjectivity. One is obligated if one can *understand* that anyone in a similar

situation would be obligated. We can see already that the latter is a relatively flaccid

understanding of obligation. Indeed it is understanding that renders obligation flaccid.

As Lyotard puts it, in "the idiom of cognition, either the law is reasonable, and it does

not obligate, since it convinces; or else, it is not reasonable, and it does not obligate,

since it constrains" (Lyotard 1988a, 117).

Glossary IV:

Metaphysics: A branch of philosophy which purports to treat existence at its ultimate
level, metaphysics might perhaps best be considered the science of consciousness.
Which is to say that metaphysics, as it may be thought to have culminated in Hegel and
Heidegger, posits a self-constituting subject, the consciousness of whom is held to be
the ground on which all representation rests. And this, of course, makes a second
point. That which *is*, within this understanding, *is* as a function of its being represented
by a conscious subject; it does not present itself to a subject, it is represented out of
one. "[T]he subject is equivalent to being conscious, or the consciousness of being,
and, in truth, to being self-conscious, or the self-consciousness of being. The
conscious life of subjectivity consists in representing and identifying beings which
therefore are, but are by being represented, not by presenting themselves" (Kosky,
238). And thus, to the question, "why are there essents [why is there something] rather

than nothing?" (Heidegger 1959, 1), metaphysics responds by suggesting that this is the case because there is, first, a conscious subject.

But what grounds the conscious subject? Is its consciousness of itself an adequate foundation? This, too, is the metaphysical question. You see, as Heidegger puts it, "this question 'why?'....encounters the search for its own why [....and] has its ground in a leap through which man [sic] thrusts away all the previous security, whether real or imagined, of his life" (5-6). Metaphysics, then, as the quest for foundations. And as the questioning of foundations.

In Heidegger's understanding of metaphysics, "Being...is determined as the indispensable and inseparable ground of beings" (Kosky, 236). Heidegger is critical of metaphysics, insofar as it entails a "forgetfulness of the difference between Being as such and beings — the ontological difference" (236), and further suggests, according to Kosky, that, "having forgotten the ontological difference, metaphysics thinks this highest universal [Being] only by thinking it in terms of a highest being or being *par excellence* — that is, by thinking Being as grounded in God. In this way, metaphysics is, integrally and inescapably, linked to the question of God" (236). Heidegger, however, was highly critical of this rendering of metaphysics, referring to it as an "onto-theology." Unlike Hegel and most before him, Heidegger refused to allow anything like the biblical account of creation, with its implication of a "God" as first cause, as self-causing cause — *causa sui* — to silence the questioning.

The Subject of Philosophy

We have seen that Lyotard, the philosopher — he who suggests that "the time has come to philosophize" — nonetheless maintains that "philosophy is the West's madness." Philosophy, read "metaphysics," read "onto-theology," read "foundationalism," read simply "the modern West's self-understanding," is, according to Lyotard, the West's madness. And thus, Levinas.

Lyotard is never far from Levinas, whose books, he tells us, have been his "companions for...years" (Lyotard 1988b, 38). This, of course, is entirely appropriate,

as "Levinas is one of the rare authors who suggest making a fundamental existential category of the relationship to the Book" (Greisch, 67). The Jewish tradition out of which, according to Lyotard, the thought of Levinas must be seen to have arisen, has "never told anything but stories of unpayable debt" (Lyotard 1990, 84). In the thought of Levinas the subject, unlike the rational, autonomous subject of, for instance, Kant and Hegel, is indebted, to an "Other," *before* it is a subject. In Lyotard's reading of Levinas,

> [a]n addressor appears whose addressee I am, and about whom I know nothing, except that he or she situates me upon the addressee instance. The violence of the revelation is in the ego's expulsion from the addressor instance, from which it managed its work of enjoyment, power, and cognition. (Lyotard 1988a, 110)[46]

Lyotard is useful here, and at the same time too late. Time, as we will see, is of the utmost importance. If we are not careful, we might hear him to be implying an I who pre-exists the addressing. And this, it seems to me, would place him squarely within the Kantian, Hegelian, metaphysical tradition which he is attempting to critique. Attention to detail, close reading, and, finally, some exposure to Levinas, is required to avoid perpetuating the transcendental illusion. We must not think here of a subject. Reading Husserl, Lyotard has written that, "[i]nsofar as the concrete ego is interwoven with the natural world, it is clear that it is itself reduced; in other words, I must abstain

---

46. This is surely a misreading, either Lyotard's of Levinas, or mine of Lyotard. For what the subject, as adumbrated by Levinas, feels, is its "guiltless responsibility." And "guiltless," only because there is necessarily no tribunal before which he can plead his case; his peers cannot find him guilty. For Lyotard to suggest that the subject feels a pain commensurate with being evicted from its position as addressee is to speak, loudly, from the discourse which he is at pains to critique, and against which, or, rather, other than which, the thought of Levinas must be seen.

from all theses concerning the self as existing. But it is no less clear that there is an *I*, who properly abstains, and who is the I even of the reduction. This is called the *pure ego*" (Lyotard 1991a, 47). The language is dangerous and difficult here. The first-person singular pronoun, I, is at once necessary and confusing. We must realize, however, that, in the thought of Levinas, before there is I, while there is that which Lyotard calls "pure ego," there is[47] no subject.

Thinking back to our discussion of Kant (esp. 41ff.), and of the subject authorized to say "we," some connections must be made, some oppositions. We have seen that the Kantian subject is, at its most profound, elementary, level, held to be autonomous. We have also seen that this subject is held to be the source, the ground, of all that she represents. She is thought to be able to move, at will, between the positions she occupies in the various phrase universes in which she finds herself throughout a given time period. There is a presumed interchangeability among subjects, and universalizability, as we have seen, in our discussion of the categorical imperative, is the benchmark against which prescriptions must be measured. "The ethical project," within this discourse, "is to submit freedom of will to the rule of rationality in the attempt to find criteria for human action that are universally intelligible and valid for everyone" (Ciaramelli, 84). From the prescriptive phrase, the logical next step, according to, or rather, implied by, Kant, is to infer a normative phrase, and from thence, depending upon its truth value, act or not. And in this shift from a prescriptive

---

47. And we see the metaphysical trap. If there is, "where is?" seems to be the next *logical* question. "There is," as we commonly use the expression, is the metaphysical statement. We attribute *is-ness* to, we see *being* to be an attribute of, all that is worthy.

phrase, of which I am the addressee, to a normative phrase, of which, as we have

seen, I am the (at least implied) addressor, I move from a position of obligation to one

of autonomy. I become an intellectual. Here is Lyotard:

> [The intellectual], the addressee of the message from the
> unnameable [sic], comes and places himself [sic] in the
> position of addresser, [sic] in order to proffer his
> commentary from the same place as the presumed first
> addresser, the unnameable itself. In this replacement,
> ethics necessarily dissolves. Prescriptions drawn from
> ontology will be inferred from statements relative to the
> unnameable and assumed to have issued from it. It
> matters little whether they are true or false; what matters
> is that the imperatives of ethics will be judged good or
> bad only by their conformity with these statements,
> according to the rules of propositional logic. Now, that is
> enough in Levinas' eyes to make ethics pass under the
> jurisdiction of the true — a Western obsession — and
> succumb. (Lyotard 1989, 287)

We see the power of the subject of Western philosophy. We see his capability,

his ability to shirk, simply by shifting. By moving away, decreasing proximity. We must

also observe, as a precursor to our discussion of Levinas, that the Levinasian subject

bears a certain similarity to the metaphysical subject; we must read Levinas carefully.

Here is Levinas:

> The pure I, the subject of the transcendental
> consciousness in which the world is constituted, is itself
> *outside the subject: self* without reflection — uniqueness
> identifying itself as an incessant awakening. It has been
> distinguished, ever since the *Critique of Pure Reason*,
> from any datum presented to knowledge in the *a priori*
> forms of experience. (Levinas 1991, 156-157)

While Levinas notes that the pure I is the subject of the transcendental consciousness in which the world is constituted, we must also realize that the pure I is *outside* the subject, and, importantly, *before* the subject. Thus the world is constituted *prior* to the constitution of the subject, whereas, according to the metaphysical understanding, the world is constituted *out of* the subject. And thus the distinction between the subject of metaphysics and what Levinas calls the subject of ethics, is one of timing and position.

The metaphysical subject is first — prior — and is improperly referred to as subject: he is, rather, a master. As per our earlier discussion of the second *Critique* (36ff, above), we must remember that Kant, having "failed" in his logical deduction of the moral law, nonetheless proceeded to "demonstrate" an "inscrutable faculty which no experience can prove" (Kant 1993, 49), namely freedom. And we must realize that the intelligibility of freedom rests on the autonomy of the will. "The *autonomy* of the will," according to Kant, "is the sole principle of all moral laws" (33). Autonomy of the will renders freedom intelligible. We hear echoes of Nancy, and his suggestion that freedom has been, in the modern period, virtually equated with free will. And free will, of course, is the will of a subject. In an interesting turn of events Kant demonstrates that the subject of the moral law — man, as Kant's translators would put it — is the source of the moral law, which, although it cannot be deduced, can nonetheless be shown to be made possible by the "fact" of the subject's freedom. While subject to the moral law, it is only as a result of his prior freedom that the subject is subjected. According to Levinas, "it is by setting out from the implications of the *Critique of*

Practical Reason that the transcendental I will be postulated beyond its formative function for knowledge" (Levinas 1991, 157). Levinas breaks with Kant at the point where the transcendental subject becomes reified, becomes, that is, a grounding, a foundation.

Outside the Subject

And now the Levinasian subject, whose power lies in its destitution, whose strength is its weakness, and who cannot use language to change its position. An addressor/other appears in whose address not-yet-I become addressee/I. Subjectivity begins, shall we say, for Levinas, with "proximity" (Levinas 1989, 89). In close proximity to the other, an *as-yet-unseeing* ego nonetheless *hears*. The subject, as we noted above with regards to the "voice of God," hears before seeing.

We must notice the priority granted to hearing over seeing before proceeding. For it is an inversion of the Greek understanding of the relationship between the two. Wes Avram:

> [Western thought] equates the relationship between
> knowing subjectivity and comprehensive reason with
> synoptic vision. Following this [model], persons are
> *known* to each other by acts of interpretation. One
> approaches another with a thematizing gaze, conforming
> one's sense of the other's otherness to categories of
> comprehension communicable in language. (Avram, 266)

Knowledge, as Levinas puts it, "is re-presentation, a return to presence, and nothing may remain *other* to it....Knowing is the psyche or pneumatic force of thought....[and] representation or objectivization is the incontestable model" (Levinas 1989, 77). Against this understanding, Levinas writes of a situation in which the ethical, the ethical moment (which is the moment of the birth of the subject), is in fact incomprehensible. Against understanding, that is, Levinas juxtaposes un-intelligibility. And this, of course, presents, to those who would study Levinas, an interesting paradox. For, and this will become important in the pages which follow, we come up against a difficulty first articulated for me by the theologian/historian Mircea Eliade, who wrote, simply, that "all that goes beyond [humanity's] natural experience, language is reduced to suggesting by terms taken from that experience" (Eliade, 10). Levinas, not unlike Lyotard, must attempt to use philosophical language to counter that which philosophical language has constructed as the foundation upon which all experience must be seen to rest. To take Eliade one step further, it is the position of Lyotard and Levinas (following Husserl) that "experience" itself is an already an interpretation, and given the Greek origins of our interpretive matrices, experience must be comprehensible.

But now (another deferral), before we discuss the birth of the Levinasian subject, we need to understand *before*. Lyotard offers a clue to an angle from which to approach Levinasian temporality, when he suggests, in a discussion of prescriptive phrases, that "the sequence *first order, second order* must be conceived as a logical rather than a chronological succession" (Lyotard 1989, 305). And thus *before*, and

after, comes to take on surplus meaning. Something cries out, demands to be put into phrases, but cannot be. Ethics, a state of being-for-the-other, is *before* philosophy, in Levinas' thought, because it is better. That's all. And better is better. And good is good. Reversing the hierarchy which defines the relation of ethics and philosophy as one in which the former is derivative of the latter, Levinas blurs the distinction between practical and theoretical, and suggests a "possibility borne by the practical, and always significant, situatedness of self, world, and other in discrete relationships in which none of the three...can be reduced to either of the others" (Avram, 265). This "possibility" Levinas sees as the necessary priority of ethics over traditional (Greek) philosophy. Thus, "Ethics as First Philosophy" (Levinas 1989, 76-87).

And now, apropos of my observation concerning hearing, Levinas suggests that it is "[s]aying [that] opens me to the other before saying what is said" (183). Keeping in mind our earlier discussion of the attempted mastery of the "known" by the Kantian subject, we now see that Saying is a "bearing witness" before any said (known). The said is secondary to the Saying — logically, not necessarily chronologically. The (intelligible) content, then, is secondary to the delivery. And this commentary, writing about writing, which becomes more and more suspect, is at least tertiary.[48] But let's return to Levinas' understanding of the coming to be of the subject.

---

48. It occurs to me that the Levinasian discourse must necessarily always be considered as writing against. Writing against a Hegelianism which he finds unbearable, his work nonetheless seems to provide a stark antithesis to the Hegelian discourse. "Levinas," Lyotard notes, "struggles to escape the Hegelian persecution" (Lyotard 1989, 279). Such, I suppose, is a risk of thought.

Pre-conscious, pre-I, the ego is called by the other. And what does it hear? Prescription. Responsibility. Obligation. *For* the other: "[t]he one-for-the-other is...but the surplus of responsibility"(Levinas 1989, 90). And in that same instant (?) it responds, utters *Here I am*. The other, the "hostage-taker," is not known. "[T]he subject is affected without the source of the affection becoming a theme of representation". Thus, un-intelligible. Levinas comes to call the subject so constituted "the oneself," and writes that "[t]he oneself, an inequality with itself, *a deficit in being*, a passivity or patience and, in its passivity not offering itself to memory, not affecting retrospective contemplation, is in this sense undeclinable [sic]" (97, my emphasis).

And so, according to Levinas, the subject is not a subject, not an I, except inasmuch as s/he is responsible for the other, for the other's Other.

> Responsibility for the other — for his distress and his
> freedom — does not derive from any commitment, project
> or antecedent disclosure, in which the subject would be
> posited for itself before being-in-debt. Here passivity is
> extreme in the measure (or inordinateness) that the
> devotion for the other is not shut up in itself like a state of
> soul, but is itself from the start given over to the other.
> (183) [49]

Which is not at all altruism. Rather, the Levinasian subject is persecuted, to the point that s/he is guilty for being, inasmuch as this might be taking something from another. "[T]he self does not begin in the auto-affection of a sovereign ego that would

---

49. Avram makes the following very useful distinction: "other" refers, he suggests, to other persons, while "Other" refers to other-ness, and this, as opposed to Same-ness. (Avram, 266) Cf. Lyotard 1988b: "Levinas...would say that [the ethical community] is a community of hostages, each of them in a state of dependency to others, or more precisely, to the capital Other (what I call the law)" (38-39).

be, after the event, 'compassionate' for another. Quite the contrary" (Levinas 1989, 113). And what of (the Kantian) universalizabilty?

Fabio Ciaramelli reminds his readers that in the thought of Levinas the "other addresses *me* and not the universal concept of the ego....The subject which is not an ego, but which I am...cannot be generalized, is not a subject in general" (Ciaramelli, 88-89). Kant's error, and, according to Lyotard, the error of all of Western philosophy, stems from the attempt to universalize, to find the universal foundation upon which to ground a particular ethics.

Levinas, aware of these difficulties, nonetheless sees his work as demonstrating a universal ethical stance inherent in the subject. "To support the universe is a crushing charge," he writes, "but a divine discomfort. It is better than the merits and faults and sanctions proportionate to the freedom of one's choices" (Levinas 1989, 112). We are all, individually, responsible.

What, then, of norms, of reciprocity? Will the other care for me? Possibly, Levinas suggests, in *Ethics and Infinity,*

> but that is [his/her] affair....[T]he intersubjective relation is
> a non-symmetrical relation. In this sense, I am
> responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity,
> were I to die for it. Reciprocity is [his/her] affair. It is
> precisely insofar as the relationship between the Other
> and me is not reciprocal that I am... "subject." (Levinas
> 1992, 98)[50]

---

50. However, Levinas writes, "my responsibility for all can and has to manifest itself also in limiting itself. The ego can, in the name of this unlimited responsibility, be called upon to concern itself also with itself.

As Ciaramelli notes, there is no universal subject in Levinas, there is only me. Quoting Levinas, Ciaramelli writes, "'One can no longer say what the Ego or I is....From now on one has to speak in the first person.' I am compelled to speak in the first person by the exigencies of the subject" (Ciaramelli, 91). All I can do is what *I* must do. And all I can do is say what *I* and only *I* must do. Ciaramelli continues:

> I can demand the sacrifice and moral effort called for...of
> no one but myself. Levinas makes this perfectly clear
> when he writes, "To say that the other has to sacrifice
> himself to others would be to preach human sacrifice!"
> This radical asymmetry grounds itself in a "concrete moral
> experience" [my own] which cannot be overcome and
> which implies the impossibility of speaking about myself
> and others in the same sense. (91)

And so we have a non-rational, non-autonomous subject. We have, according to Lyotard and Levinas, a differend resulting from two things. Firstly, because there is much that cannot be phrased in the first phrase, there is a surplus that gets left behind. And secondly, because the first, prescriptive, phrase is, by dint of the subject's philosophical milieu, in a different genre than the subsequent phrase. And this, just this, let me suggest, is the source of the anxiety, the pain, and the suffering I have elucidated in the previous chapters. Unable to refuse, obligated, the "subject is accused in its skin, too tight for its skin" (95), accountable and persecuted in a "guiltless responsibility, ...open to an accusation of which no alibi, spatial or temporal, could clear [it]" (Levinas 1989, *83*). No alibi, spatial or temporal, can clear the subject.

The fact that the other, my neighbour, is also a third party with respect to another, who is also a neighbour, is the birth of thought, consciousness, justice and philosophy" (118).

However, if we take Levinas' and Lyotard's point, the history of Western philosophy has been an attempt to come up with just such alibis, whereby the subject might be absolved of its un-intelligible "indebtedness." The history of Western philosophy, that is, is an ongoing attempt to render understanding king. As Levinas puts it, knowing, as a result, "is a regal...activity, a sovereignty" (77). The subject in and of Western philosophy is a sovereign (because) knowing subject. The subject is supposed to know. The subject is supposed to render its prescription into norms, into logical and universalizable rules.

But if we have learned anything from the preceding pages, it is, as Lyotard suggests, that what is at "stake in the discourse of Levinas is the power to speak of obligation without ever transforming it into a norm" (Lyotard 1989, 299). While we have seen that "propositional logic proceeds in order to sanitize its field" (307), the discourse of Levinas does not "succumb" to the rules of logic, does not play by the rules of philosophy. Levinas posits a profound heteronomy, an obligation (prescriptive) which simply will not be transformed into a normative phrase. Furthermore, as the previous pages have been suggesting, commentary on the Levinasian discourse is itself suspect. For what might I be attempting to do, in my discussion of Levinas? Do we sense an alibi? What am I doing in attempting to render Levinas understandable? Am I not always running the risk, by subjecting his thought to this commentary, of placing it under the rubric of true versus false?

Even as I write against the sovereignty of the knowing subject, I am complicit in its persistence, and this because, as I am not the first to observe, writing is representation *par excellence*. (Thus, we see, could Kristeva suggest that a new morality was signaled in Holbein's painting of the dead Christ.) Which takes me back to the concern noted at the outset of this writing. Mastery. Master. Masters. The commentator faced with the works of Levinas is presented with a dilemma. Lyotard puts it thusly: "if [s/he] understands it, [s/he] must not understand it, and if [s/he] does not understand it, then [s/he] understands it" (304). If I understand Levinas, and relate that understanding to the reader, I have still not done anything more than offer representations of prescriptions. As Lyotard notes in discussing Kant, "the prescriptive statements [...encountered] in the Kantian commentary are always only images of themselves" (Lyotard, 1989, 303). Ciaramelli puts it nicely: "The exceptional place of the particular subject, that is, the one who speaks and writes, remains the only possible point of departure for ethical discourse" (Ciaramelli, 93). I must write, that is, for myself, to myself.

But I am supposed to receive my Master's Degree upon completion and defense of this writing, this thesis. And I do not understand Levinas. Am I compromised? I cannot be the judge. I have attempted to explicate Levinas, and been found wanting. I will continue. I will continue writing. Risky business, this. For immediately I write, I am an addressor. I have shifted from the addressee position. Thus writing, according to Lyotard, is "one of the necessarily hazardous means at one's disposal for bringing about an encounter. One writes because one does not know what one has to say, to

try to find out what it is" (Lyotard 1993b, 110). Such writing (is it happening?) offers,

finally, "[i]n lieu of a thesis, a pose" (Lyotard 1990, 45). Yes, no thesis. We do not

have, in Levinas, an other way with which to approach problems. I am not offering

Levinas as a discourse to oppose to Hegelianism, in the hopes that what might emerge

is a better, synthetic, way. No. The discourse of Levinas is, to be glib, one of anarchy

and anachronism. "Anarchy," Levinas writes, "brings to a halt the ontological play." In

the form of an

> ego, anachronously *delayed* behind its present moment,
> and unable to recuperate this delay — that is the form of
> an ego unable to conceive what is "touching" it, the
> ascendancy of the other is exercised upon the same to
> the point of interrupting it, leaving it speechless. Anarchy
> is persecution. Obsession is a persecution where the
> persecution does not make up the content of a
> consciousness gone mad; it designates the form in which
> the ego is affected, a form which is a defecting from
> consciousness....It cannot be defined in terms of
> intentionality. (Levinas 1989, 91)

Sublime writing. In lieu of a thesis. A pose. And how comment on such writing?

Note only this: the ego is captured, anachronously delayed, and unaware of what is

touching it. Something is close enough to touch it. Touch it. Touching. Feeling. The

Levinasian touch is a persecution. It is not a romantic union, it is an assignation, a

chosen-ness, the terror of which perhaps only a post- "Auschwitz" Jew could write.

Selection. For persecution.

And so let me write no more about Levinas. Rather, let me write after him. Because, you see, "an order does not ask to be commented on — that is, understood — but to be executed." The discourse of Levinas aims "at freeing the criterion of validity of 'orders,' that is, the criterion of their justice, from any justification by truth functions" (Lyotard 1989, 283, 286). An order must be valid (if we must use the word) not because it correlates well with the categorical imperative, not based on relations between prescriptive phrases and descriptive phrases, but because it is an order having its own authority. We must not understand Levinas, we must feel Levinas. But it hurts.

The "jews" II

> [The] political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination....[T]he body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body.
>
> Michel Foucault[51]

Foucault on the body. A redundancy. Foucault's body of work takes the human body to be a site of power relations. As such, the body, then, is a rich repository of knowledge. Look to the body, Foucault's work tells us. But don't simply examine the body. Rather, examine the various ways in which the body has come to be examined. Look, that is, at the multitudinous perspectives from which the body has been seen, and from this examination, make assumptions about the observer, the holder of the gaze.

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, on the surface a discussion of the birth of modern prisons, argues that the development of disciplinary strategies for organizing and training groups of individuals (bodies), especially as witnessed in military drills and school exercise programs (not to mention the manner in which these two institutions architecturally disciplined their charges),

> "trains" the moving, confused, useless multitudes of
> bodies and forces into a multiplicity of individual elements
> — small, separate cells, organic autonomies, genetic
> identities and continuities, combinatory segments.
> Discipline "makes" individuals: it is the specific technique

---

51. Foucault 1979, 25-26.

of power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise. (Foucault 1979, 170)

The disciplined, individuated, body, then, as at once means and end. What might we make of our modern, or rather, post-modern, bodies? What, that is, can they teach us? And what might our way of examining them teach us about ourselves?

Zygmunt Bauman argues that the postmodern body is a site of ambivalence, that we private "owners" of bodies suffer from a confusion commensurate with our current understanding of the body. According to Bauman, the postmodern body is held to have two incommensurate functions. Firstly, it is a receiver of sensations, and these it imbibes and digests, making it an instrument of pleasure. This capacity for gleaning pleasure from experience, Bauman suggests, is "fitness" (Bauman 1995, 116). Along with this, however, comes a responsibility, on the part of the inhabitors of bodies, to rationally adjudicate amongst the various stimuli vying for right of entry to the body. As Bauman puts it, continuing with his garden metaphor, "[t]he body is now an uncontestedly *private property,* and it is up to the owner to cultivate it; s/he has no one to blame for the weeds overgrowing the garden or the watering sprinklers going bust. This casts the owner in an eerie, untenable position" (118).

If we accept, as Bauman does, as most do, that late-capitalist Western civilization is a "consumerist society," the implications of this two-fold responsibility on the part of the owners of bodies become clear. According to the consumerist ethos, it is "imperative that the body opens up as widely as possible to the potential of rich and

ever richer experiences..., and the fitness of the body is measured by its ability to absorb them" (120). Thus the proliferation of "fitness" programs, and "health" clubs. But, you see, there is a problem. Witness the varying degrees of toxicity of the air that we breathe and the water that we drink, the bottled water, and hermetically sealed homes, cars, and offices. Technological advances do not come without a price. And thus, Bauman:

> Yet the same exchange with the outside world
> compromises the individual's control over bodily fitness;
> the intense border traffic, the unavoidable condition of
> sensations-gathering, is at the same time a potential
> threat to fitness, which in turn is the condition of the
> body's capacity for gather sensations. That capacity may
> be diminished if immigration control is not vigilant
> enough. (120)

And now this, from "Canada's national newspaper": "The commission of inquiry into Canada's [AIDS-] tainted-blood tragedy not only can lay blame in its final report but should do so, the Federal Court of Appeal ruled yesterday."[52] There exist among us (in Canada) over 40,000 people[53] — bodies — infected, haunted by HIV, human immunodeficiency virus, which ultimately renders them permeable, blurs the line between them and others, and this with all-but-certainly fatal consequences. Their so-called "immune systems" are compromised. Their bodies' physiological "othering" mechanisms slowly deteriorating, these people, because of less than vigilant "border

---

52. Toronto Globe and Mail. Saturday, January 18, 1997. A1.
53. Roy, et. al. 241.

control,"[54] are liable to become lethally infected from exposure to particles and substances which, for those of us with intact systems for the searching out and destroying of "non-I" elements, are relatively benign.

These people scare us. Indeed, they scream at us, demanding attention, demanding sympathy.[55] They threaten us. People with AIDS and HIV infection, then, as more "jews."[56] In a world bent on autonomy, with a philosophical heritage which, as we have seen, is founded upon a notion of essential sameness, HIV demonstrates that there is, in fact, an other, and that it is incredibly dangerous. In keeping with Bauman's observations, there is a strong tendency to locate the blame for the suffering incurred by people with AIDS and HIV infection within the individuals, or, at the very least, within the various — usually marginalized — groups of individuals, rather than with any of a multitude of other options, not the least of which is technology itself. (And this does not address the question of whether or not blaming is a helpful course of action at this time.)

---

54. I realize that the border controllers, in the case, for instance, of hemophiliacs, or those who contracted the AIDS virus as a result of surgery, were not necessarily the individuals themselves, but rather so-called "watch-dog" organizations assigned the responsibility of protecting them.
55. See Edelman, esp. 308-309, for an interesting discussion of how the many machinations of those who are trying to prevent the disappearance of people with AIDS, using such rhetoric as silence = death, are in many ways complicit in their being forgotten.
56. I am sensitive to the fact that the plight of people with AIDS may seem trivial to many, in light of the extreme injustices perpetuated against the Jews in Europe in the mid-twentieth century. It is out of no disrespect for the latter group, however, that I propose that, world-wide, people with AIDS represent arguably the best (worst) available example of "the jews" with which to support my suggestion that the so-called "Holocaust" continues. And I maintain this, in spite of an awareness of the horrible atrocities witnessed in the 1990's in the former Yugoslavia, as well as in Rwanda, and in spite of the fact that there are, to be sure, many who work diligently and fervently on the part of those affected by HIV.

In a move reminiscent of Hegel's remonstrations toward the Jews of the
eighteenth century (p.117, above), what we see and hear are suggestions that, had
many of the people affected by HIV only behaved differently, respected the norms of
society, they would not be suffering so. And interestingly, where the so-called "victims"
cannot but be perceived as "innocent," there is a concerted effort, on the part of
virtually all of society, to locate the blame for this scandalous incursion into our ordered
worlds of these reminders that our self-understandings might be wanting, with various
bureaucracies —technological, managed, organizations — expected, foolishly it
appears, to be watching out for others.

Even, that is, while individual body owners must be their own border guards, in
the event of something like HIV, which threatens not simply the empirical body, but all
of our metaphors for body, individual, and other, what we see is an attempt to place
blame. Now, even if we assume that, in many ways, the vast preponderance of our
fellow body owners are not at all responsible, in any kind of a causal analysis, for the
plight of those suffering from AIDS and HIV infection, the notion of locating blame is
interesting. For we are not, here, as it might first appear, talking about a simple failure
to take responsibility for the other. Rather, we are noticing, more importantly, I think,
an attempt to *deny* the other. To deny otherness.

Inasmuch as we are successful in locating the responsibility (read cause) for the
suffering of many PWA (people with AIDS and HIV infection) in aberrant social
behaviour, even if we subsequently assume a responsibility to care for them, we have

minimized (although not eliminated) their threat. They have not been invaded, they have welcomed, they have betrayed themselves. But the so-called "innocent victims," these people scream at us that our autonomy — our borders — are, for all their reification, nonetheless as permeable as theory, as ethereal as metaphor.

God protect us from these reminders that our own bodies — our own technologically produced, reproduced, and reinforced (because vulnerable) bodies — are at once betraying our autonomy and our profound heteronomy. Please, there are others, and there is me. Don't tell me that my body might one day not be able to destroy the others that are constantly demanding my sympathy. Don't tell me that. Not that.

Which is really to say, is it not, that we are quite comfortable, thank-you very much, with our bodies as they are. We are quite content with our bodies as separate and separating. What slowly, hazily, and fleetingly, dawns on the subject is the realization that the phrase *my body* is, in fact, philosophy incarnate. You see, the signified, the corpus, is not the same as, is not a unity with, the signifier. And the signifier means what it means as a result of thousands of years of theorizing, with theory after theory piled layer after layer on top of one another, and ultimately fossilized as "reality." But even fossils break down. Even concrete wears away. Postmodernity, then, as a transition stage, a stage at which that which was held to be real is subjected to a fearsome exposure. And AIDS and HIV infection, as the postmodern illness.

AIDS and HIV infection, and especially their "innocent victims," are threatening

our entire theoretical body, or body of theory. Literary theorist Lee Edelman writes,

eloquently:

> Reverse transcriptase and immune defense systems are
> metaphoric designations that determine that way we
> understand operations of the body; they are readings
> that metastasize the metabolic by infecting it with a strain
> of metaphor that can appear to be so natural, so intrinsic
> to our way of thinking, that we mistake it for the literal
> truth of the body, as if our rhetorical immune system were
> no longer operating properly, or as if the virus that is this
> metaphor had mutated so successfully as to evade the
> antibodies that could differentiate between the inside and
> the outside. (Edelman, 311)

What is threatened here is metaphor itself. The body as metaphor; immune

system, borders, as metaphor. And what becomes clear, in answer to the concerns I

expressed, both at the outset of this writing, and throughout (as regards the usefulness

of such theoretical discourse), is that the distinction between "theoretical" and "applied"

is an illusion. It is an illusion, by means of which those of us in need of something to

lean on, something solid, delude ourselves into believing that, *contra* Lyotard, reality is

something given to the subject.

And so we busy ourselves placing blame, and offering preventive measures

which, in themselves, are telling. *You're hurting me. You're scaring me. You're*

threatening me. We scream at these others. Quarantine, latex barriers — these are

the suggestions offered. *Be immune. Behave. Separate.* But, and now I slip a little,

and offer an articulation of the "premonition of theology" which I have detected throughout this writing. Lyotard would no doubt suggest that fear is an appropriate response. But he would have us question the way in which we link onto this response. What he would have us do — how he would have us link onto these responses — he does not say, directly. But look, Lyotard's reading of Levinas — informed by his reading of Kant, which in turn is informed by his reading of Levinas (the peregrinating, migrating, Lyotard) — revolves around a notion of prophetic call, the response to which is a simple *I am here*. A tentative, fearful, *I am here.* I am here, beside the abyss, looking into it. In this phrase we have it all. *I am.* And to a reader of Levinas, this phrase must be continued thusly: *I am because of you, and for you.* And *here — here* means close. Close enough to be touched, and close enough to touch. Proximity, then, as the moral position. And in a world in which millions of dollars are spent on technological devices which allow us a heretofore undreamed of access to our neighbour's bodies (with arguably no purpose served, other than demonstrating our technological prowess[57]); in a world in which, even as disease treatment often comprises a toxic invasion of the "afflicted body," the "healers" separate themselves with barrier after barrier; touch is dangerous. Being close enough to touch is a social *faux pas.*[58]

---

57. "Means *precede* the goals; it is the availability of means that triggers the ferocious search for ends" (Bauman 1995, 165-166).
58. Che Guevara, apparently, reported to his well-off father that one of the most powerful treatments for leprosy was a firm handshake. "This may seem pointless bravado,....but the psychological benefit to these people — usually treated like animals — of being treated as normal human beings is incalculable" (in Symmes, 58).

Do not separate; touch and be touched. Thus, I think, speaks the discourse of Levinas, the discourse I have been, with Lyotard, writing toward. Fear the abyss, but do not fill it in, and do not turn away. Thus, I think, speaks the discourse of Kant, the discourse I have been, with Lyotard and Levinas, attempting to hear. Ah, listen. To attempt to close a "thesis" with a (theological) pose. Audacity. But let me leave. I have had enough, and I have not mastered anything.

Bibliography

Arendt, Hannah. 1968a. "What is Authority?" *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought.* New York: Penguin Books, 91-141.

—. 1968b. "What is Freedom?" *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought.* New York: Penguin Books, 143-171.

—. 1978. *The Life of the Mind.* New York: Harcourt Brace and Company.

—. 1979. *The Origins of Totalitarianism.* New York: Harcourt Brace and Company.

—. 1989. *The Human Condition.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

—. 1992. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.* New York: Penguin Books.

Aristotle. 1955. *The Nicomachean Ethics.* Trans. J. A. K. Thomson. New York: Penguin Books.

—. 1962. *The Politics.* Trans. T. A. Sinclair. New York: Penguin Books.

Avram, Wes. "On the Priority of 'Ethics' in the Work of Levinas." *Journal of Religious Ethics.* 24.2. Fall, 1996. 261-284.

Baron, Anne. "Lyotard and the Problem of Justice." *Judging Lyotard.* Ed. Andrew Benjamin. New York: Routledge. 1992. 26-42.

Barth, Karl. *Protestant Thought: From Rousseau to Ritschl.* Trans. Brian Cozens. New York: Harper and Brothers. 1959.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 1991. *Modernity and the Holocaust.* New York: Cornell University Press.

—. 1993. *Postmodern Ethics.* Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers.

—. 1995. *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality.* Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers.

Beardsworth, Richard. "On the Critical 'Post': Lyotard's Agitated Judgement." *Judging Lyotard.* Ed. Andrew Benjamin. New York: Routledge. 1992. 43 80.

Beiser, Frederick C. "Kant's Intellectual Development: 1746 - 1781." The Cambridge Companion to Kant. Ed. Paul Guyer. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 26 - 61.

Bennington, Geoffrey. *Lyotard: Writing the Event.* New York: Columbia University Press. 1988.

Bernasconi, Robert. "Skepticism in the Face of Philosophy." *Re-Reading Levinas.* Eds. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1991. 149-161.

Blanchot, Maurice. *The Writing of the Disaster.* Trans. Ann Smock. Lincoln and
    London: University of Nebraska Press. 1986.

Caygill, Howard, ed. *A Kant Dictionary.* Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers. 1995.

Cayne, Bernard, ed. *New Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus of the English
    Language.* New York: Lexicon Publications, Inc. 1991.

Ciaramelli, Fabio. "Levinas's Ethical Discourse Between Individuation and
Universality."   *Re-Reading Levinas.* Eds. Robert Bernasconi and Simon
Critchley. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1991. 83-105.

Cohen, Richard, ed. *Face to Face with Levinas.* New York: SUNY Press. 1986.

Derrida, Jacques. *The Gift of Death.* Trans. David Wills. Chicago: University of
    Chicago Press. 1995.

Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy.* Trans.
    Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. 1993.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Brothers Karamazov.* Trans. Constance Garnett. New York:
    W.W. Norton and Co. 1976.

Dunn, Allen. "A Tyranny of Justice: the Ethics of Lyotard's Differend." *Boundary 2*
    20, 1 (1993): 192-220.

Dyer, Gwynne. *War.* Toronto: Stoddart Press Co. Ltd. 1985.

Edelman, Lee. "The Plague of Discourse: Politics, Literary Theory, and AIDS." *The
    Postmodern Turn: New Perspectives of Social Theory.* Ed. Steven Seidman.
    Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1994. 399-312.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion.* Trans. Willard
    R. Trask. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers. 1959.

Farías, Victor. *Heidegger and Nazism.* Trans. Paul Burrell and Gabriel Ricci.
    Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 1989.

Foucault, Michel. 1979. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Trans. Alan
    Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books.

—. 1990. *The History of Sexuality, Volume One.* Trans. Robert Hurley. New York:
    Vintage Books.

Freud, Sigmund. 1967. *Moses and Monotheism.* Trans. Katherine Jones. New York:
    Vintage Books.

—. 1990. *Art and Literature.* Volume 14 of the Penguin Freud Library. Trans. James
    Strachey. Ed. Albert Dickson. Toronto: Penguin Books Canada.

Godzich, Wlad. "Reading Against Literacy." In Lyotard 1993a, 109-136.

Greisch, Jean. "The Face and Reading: Immediacy and Mediation." Trans. Simon
    Critchley. *Re-Reading Levinas.* Eds. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley.
    Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1991. 67-82.

Heidegger, Martin. 1959. *An Introduction to Metaphysics.* Trans. Ralph Manheim. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

—. 1977. *The Question Concerning Technology and other Essays.* Trans. William Lovitt. New York: Harper and Row..

—. 1993b. "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking." Trans. Joan Stambaugh. *Basic Writings.* Ed. David Farrel Krell. 431-449.

—. 1993a. "Being and Time." Trans. Joan Stambaugh. *Basic Writings.* Ed. David Farrel Krell.

Hospers, John. *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1967.

Ingram, David. "The Postmodern Kantianism of Arendt and Lyotard." *Judging Lyotard.* Ed. Andrew Benjamin. New York: Routledge. 1992. 119-144.

Jaspers, Karl. *The Great Philosophers: The Foundations.* Trans. Ralph Manheim. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc. 1962.

Jonas, Hans. *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology.* New York: Dell Publishing Co. Ltd. 1966.

Kant, Immanuel. 1965. *Critique of Pure Reason.* Trans. Norman Kemp Smith. Toronto: Macmillan and Co.

—. 1981. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals.* Trans. James W. Ellington. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing co.

—. 1992. *Critique of Judgement.* Trans. James Creed Meredith. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

—. 1993. *Critique of Practical Reason.* Trans. Lewis White Beck. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co.

Keane, John. "The Modern Democratic Revolution: Reflections on Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition.*" *Judging Lyotard.* Ed. Andrew Benjamin. New York: Routledge. 1992. 81-98.

Kosky, Jeffrey. "After the Death of God: Emmanuel Levinas and the Ethical Possibility of God." *Journal of Religious Ethics.* 24.2. Fall, 1996. 235-259.

Kristeva, Julia. "Holbein's Dead Christ." *Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Vol. 1.* Ed. Michael Fehr. New York: Zone. 1989. 238-269.

Levinas, Emmanuel. 1989. *The Levinas Reader.* Ed. Seán Hand. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers.

—. 1991. "Philosophy and Awakening." *Who comes After the Subject?* Eds. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy. New York: Routledge, 206-217.

—. 1992. *Ethics and Infinity.* Trans. Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

—. 1994. *Outside the Subject.* Trans. Michael B. Smith. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Lyotard, Jean-François. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

—. 1985. *Just Gaming.* Trans. Wlad Godzich. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

—. 1988a. *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute.* Trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

—. 1988b. *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event.* New York: Columbia University Press.

—. 1989. *The Lyotard Reader.* Ed. Andrew Benjamin. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers.

—. 1990. *Heidegger and "the jews."* Trans. Andrea Michel and Mark Roberts. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

—. 1991a. *Phenomenology.* Trans. Brian Beakley. Albany: SUNY Press.

—. 1991b *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time.* Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

—. 1992 "Sensus Communis." Trans. Marian Hobson and Geoffrey Bennington. *Judging Lyotard.* Ed. Andrew Benjamin. New York: Routledge.

—. 1993a. *The Postmodern Explained.* Eds. Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

—. 1993b. *Political Writings.* Trans. Bill Readings and Kevin Paul Geiman. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

—. 1994. *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime,* Trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press,

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Experience of Freedom.* Trans. Bridget McDonald. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1993.

Nealon, Jeffrey T. "Thinking/Writing the Postmodern: Representation, End, Ground, Sending." *Boundary 2* 20, 1 (1993): 221-241.

Peperzak, Adriaan. "Presentation." *Re-Reading Levinas.* Eds. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1991. 51-66.

Plato. 1945. *The Republic.* Ed. and Trans. Francis MacDonald Cornford. London: Oxford University Press.

—. 1954. *The Last Days of Socrates: Euthyphro, The Apology, Crito, Phaedo.* Ed. and Trans. Hugh Tredennick. New York: Penguin Books.

Piché, Claude. "The Philosopher-Artist: A Note on Lyotard's Reading of Kant." *Research in Phenomenology* 22 (1992): 152-160.

Readings, Bill. 1992. "Pagans, Perverts or Primitives? Experimental Justice in the Empire of Capital." *Judging Lyotard.* Ed. Andrew Benjamin. New York: Routledge, 168-191.

—. 1991. *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics.* New York: Routledge.

Roy, David, John R. Williams, and Bernard Dickens. "When a New Epidemic Occurs: The Ethics of HIV Infection and AIDS." *Bioethics in Canada.* New York: Prentice Hall. 1993. 235-266.

Schaper, Eva. "Taste, Sublimity, and Genius: The Aesthetics of Nature and Art." *The Cambridge Companion to Kant.* Ed. Paul Guyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1992. 367-394

Schneewind, J.B. "Autonomy, Obligation and Virtue: An Overview of Kant's Moral Philosophy." *The Cambridge Companion to Kant.* Ed. Paul Guyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1992. 309-342.

Scruton, Roger. *Kant.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1983.

Segal, Alex. 1992. "Postmodernism, justice, and silence." *Paragraph* 15, 221-231.

—. 1992. "Language games and justice." *Textual Practice* 6, 2, 210-224.

Sim, Stuart. *Beyond Aesthetics: Confrontations with Poststructuralism and Postmodernism.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1992.

Steuerman, Emilia. "Habermas vs Lyotard: Modernity vs Postmodernity?" *Judging Lyotard.* Ed. Andrew Benjamin. New York: Routledge. 1992. 99-118.

Symmes, Patrick. "Ten Thousand Revolutions: Through South America, in Search of Che Guevara." *Harpers Magazine.* June, 1997. 52-61.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1989.