

Community beyond instrumental reason: the idea of donation in Deleuze and Lyotard
[draft]

Passibility, as possibility of undergoing (*pathos*), presupposes a donation. If we are passible, it is because something happens to us, and when that passibility has a fundamental status donation is itself something fundamental, originary.¹

No less than a determination of signification, nonsense operates a donation of sense. But this is not at all in the same way. Since, from the point of view of sense, the regressive law no longer connects the names of different degrees to classes or to properties, but distributes them in heterogeneous series of events.²

“197.5”

It's your results: “197.5,” written in a small box on the output from the doctor's printer. As the explanation begins, in the dispassionateness learned not from theories about objectivity but long experience of the mutual needs for distance and for the clarity of simple repetition, the number begins to take its place in longer series of meanings. Event turns into sensory effects. Effects coagulate into affects. Affects generate phantasms and images. We have come to expect more though – some of us, not all of us, and only very recently on any great scale. What will be done? How can the number become part of a chain that defuses its power to terrify and doom? How can the event be defused, rather than spread through our lives and over those we love and hate? Where is the cure? Images must become real.

So how could some philosophers in our hopeful scientific age have come to call that small phrase, this fatal number, a donation? I do not want to be donated “197.5,” give me “122.33”. It's not a donation anyway. It's a curse, cruel revenge, fate, blind necessity, stupid chance, but not a gift, not a generous contribution to my lifecycle. Donation: the meaning of the word has become banal, in the way most of our words are now chained to dominant behaviours or scenes, snapshots from visual and aural media, rather than the products or a slower, more disciplined but perhaps also more free textual research. *I'll make a donation. Have you donated? Please donate now! Your gesture will make a difference! (It's also tax deductible...)* When Gilles Deleuze and Jean-François Lyotard used the French word, *donation*, twenty years apart in the Logic of Sense and ‘Something like “communication without communication”’, in order to capture an important characteristic of events, perhaps even the essence of events, they not only relied on a different etymology than our young charitable meaning, but also took the word and bent it to different understandings of events. The stakes here then are not directly about the meaning of donation, but rather about whether events can properly be called donations, as opposed to facts, to meaningful information, or to ‘particular things that happen to us’.

The scale of Deleuze and Lyotard's task can be measured against the tenacity and long tentacles of the current images. Today, a donation is from a subject: we give a donation. This giving is not symmetrical, though (something Deleuze and Lyotard understand very well and will make important use of). The modern charitable donation never goes to a subject: who really wants to be the recipient of a donation? Who would not rather be in a possible world where the need for donation was absent, where they were in the luxurious position of benefactor? The donation does not therefore go to a counter activity. It goes to a lack, or to a cause, or towards an image, or to a projection generated by the giving subject: *my good kind heart and their suffering; my conscience and those pictures with their unwanted power to haunt the most superficial levels of the unconscious, and shape deeper ones*. A donation is a gift, not the gift of legend implying authentic self-sacrifice, but the simulacrum of an offering, the holiday gift, the childhood bribe, the phantasm of boxed happiness, cleaned slate, unambiguous message. "With this broach I love you." "With these regular 72 florins, I express my humanity and make it universal." "With this 14 billion I change the world." A donation is good. Never good enough though, but relatively so; yet not wrong for all that, it is another of our modern accommodations with something like community without commonality, or community without equality. A donation is therefore always measurable and measured, weighed not for its absolute value ("I will always be your servant") but to set position within modern manners and self-analysis ("Is this enough?" "The tithes has always been more in this parish, of course if that's what you are comfortable with..." "Oh! You are too generous. No – it really is too much, really!" "I have worked hard in order to be able to give *and there lies my superior value and salvation.*")

This measurement or calculation and its relation to effectiveness and to objective facts, laid out before and after the act of giving, is one of the main worries behind Deleuze's and Lyotard's work. The latter says it best in the title of his short article: 'Something like "communication without communication"...' Lyotard is discussing the possibility of art that does not depend on the communication of meaning and on the exchange of measurable goods and outcomes. He does not mean art without community. Rather, in a reading following Adorno, Kant and Heidegger³, Lyotard searches for a community presupposed by art when it interpolates, introduces a new event into the flow of phrases, and thereby connects, creating some kind of community, but without communicating a meaning or measured substance⁴. This community is a precondition for art as unmediated communication, where mediation must be understood as the presence of a representation in the transmission process of information. In the mediated art of representative communication, something is exchanged through the art-work – a message, a picture of an original, a perception, an experience, an affect, a concept. The event of art is therefore subsumed under the fact of that communication and the community called for by the artwork depends on 'getting' the communication. It is therefore a restricted community; some will 'connect', some will not, dependent on possession of the right meanings, feelings, prior experiences and interests (economic and libidinal). Communication in this representative form leads to a community of competing interests and calculations. According to Lyotard, in such a state art disappears. But is there ever a community dependent on the event as donation without measured or meaningful exchange?

La volonté du Ciel soit faite en toute chose

The original context of Lyotard's article was a conference on art and communication. His contribution, written in his ironic phase where a top-line message is undermined by subtle yet devastating counters, is a three-phase critique of the chosen topic. First, possibly to the delight of his audience, Lyotard makes the point that art has to be 'communication without communication' for otherwise it cannot differentiate itself from other modes of exchange, advertising or commentary, for instance. Second, also perhaps to the delight of his listeners, though fewer, Lyotard points out that in our postmodern age it has become much harder to achieve this communication without communication because the modes of art and its contexts have become largely conceptual. Not only is the artwork itself conceptual, where any material presence is mediated by a conceptual account, from the near-ubiquitous commentary label, *this work is an evocation of the fissure running through contemporary civilisation*, to the mass media and marketing demands on artists' lives, *tell us about your background and intentions - and the sex and desire - and then pose for the photo...* The work also depends on a conceptual environment for its transmission, commercial success, measure of value, situation within society, and position as political. As communicators the works must enter a pre-existing flow of 'discourse' standing as a condition for their being as what is to be recognised as art. The artwork thereby bathes in conceptual mediation and one of Lyotard's questions is whether we can remove it from this discursive fluid yet keep it alive, that is, in a living relation with its community as resistant to mediated communication and representation.

Finally, though, Lyotard adds the most powerful ironic twist – indicated by the suspension points at the end of his title. There is nothing definite in this communication without communication; it is a question or a wager; itself a risky donation left hanging not only in his title but also the last lines of his text. In an era of electronic communication, of email and mobile phone, is there space for something like communication without communication?⁵ Can those forms of communication achieve it: 'Can something *happen* through it? Can something happen to *it*?'⁶ For Lyotard, the artwork does not presuppose a community of subjects based around shared meanings, a shared essence or properties, shared values *or even shared feelings*. The presupposed community is determined by an inseparable dispossession and passibility, where the feeling of pathos is not a specific sensation that we could positively describe and value, but rather a negative state where we are shorn of meaning and direction. That's why he is interested in donation, not where we are subjects of the verb to donate, but where something is donated to us, something registers in our sense apparatus, but we know not what, 'something like communication without communication'. However, the fact that something arrives resistant to representation means that a community is created as the group of those capable of registering the arrival and the lack of set information. In registering this, the members of the community - in principle any being open to a combination of sensation and questioning - are obligated to the event. The sensation and questioning are that obligation.

In art we have a donation free of representation but not free of obligation. There is a remnant of this sense in our usage of the verb ‘to donate’, but it is one associated with everything tawdry about donation, where the donated to are supposedly obligated or beholden to those who give. *I would not want to be beholden... I’d rather die...* The subtlety of Lyotard’s position is in its avoidance of this archaic, cap-doffing gratitude and debt, because nothing positive is demanded in the donation, it comes before exchange and active subjects, as a condition for any such representation or activity. There has to be a donation – an event, an arrival – before we can speak and act upon any happening thing⁷. The artwork in its materiality, however minimal, reveals the event prior to communication and thereby depends upon a community of those who can be donated to. Matter is important for Lyotard as something that is given prior to signification. It is also important because in any communication there has to be a material support – even in virtual media where sounds or colours are required to translate code into sensations⁸.

The community addressed by this materiality is not empirically universal for Lyotard (nothing could be) but it is transcendently. The community is a condition for this material communication. His argument goes through a series of steps that replicate the kind of transcendental deduction of community in his readings of Kant in Lyotard’s article ‘*Sensus communis*’⁹ and his book on Kant’s aesthetics Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime¹⁰. First, the community of those addressed must not have the contingent limitations of possession and capacity associated with meaning, because this would set signification as a prior condition for being addressed. Any member of the community must be able to register a difference beyond representation independent of their capacity to understand a meaning or assess an exchange. Second, in response to the question ‘Why a community rather than a monadic individual or set of individuals?’ those addressed must form a community through their obligation to the donation or event. It is a community of obligation but not of specific answers to that obligation. ‘Why is this community in principle universal? If we accept that any communication depends on a material donation prior to signification, then, independent of whether those addressed acknowledge the donation, they must have been donated to if they are addressed in any way.’¹¹ The only restriction on the community is that its members must be capable of being donated to and this is a condition for any member of any possible community, since if there was no connection for a given being they would be totally separate from the community. A potential objection here might be that something could become a member of a community through the way other members communicated to it and not through its receipt of that communication. Setting aside this objection, Lyotard’s argument is that underlying all communication there is a material event and, because this event is not itself significant, it is an invitation to decipher or respond to a donation that cannot be satisfactorily responded to. Any communication conceals a failure to communicate as its condition. This failure determines a universal community.

The original meaning of the French term *donation* is legal, signifying a gift without preconditions or a free gift (gratuitous, in its first non-pejorative sense). The Littré dictionary cites Molière’s use in *Tartuffe* (Act 3 Scene 7) where the hypocritical manoeuvres of Tartuffe over his master, Orgon, come close to attaining their final goal in Orgon’s donation of all his worldly goods to Tartuffe, the scheming false-zealot. Molière

is then more of a cynic than Lyotard: the donation has been manufactured and is part of a struggle over wealth and influence (Tartuffe has just feigned to leave Orgon's family to save Orgon's relation with his wife who he also desires). For the playwright, donation is never unconditional and the sign of ever-present calculation is Tartuffe's duplicity in a smarmy thanks to a God he does not believe in, the guarantor of the unconditional, and a conspiratorial wink to powers he does give allegiance to, human gullibility and his own greed and their place in the operations of instrumental reason: '*La volonté du Ciel soit faite en toute chose.*'¹² Is Molière closer to the truth here than Lyotard? There are no free donations and everything is calculation and rational distribution. There is no otherworldly power that can guarantee a free act. Even in law, a donation can be rescinded (*he was not in his right mind, your honour*).

Lyotard's answer is a threefold challenge. First, he writes to convey the arrival of an event free of representation and therefore to show how communication can occur without having to be the communication of meaning or information. This writing is critical in showing the limits of representation; it shows what is missed if life is only communication taken as representation. When a determined fact, whether calculable or interpretable, is represented we miss the ethical and political import of differences we should be obligated to testify to rather than reduce to identities. Lyotard's writing is creative in fragmenting ideas and genres, thereby making disjointed spaces and times for experiences of events through ironic overlapping of inconsistent ideas and sensations¹³. This disjointedness is designed to make way for the material side of any event, where matter is distinct from message. Many of his essays collected in The Inhuman therefore focus on the difficult task of forging times and spaces that are not those of unifying representation, that is, forms of space and time that contain representations and organise them into coherent order according to series of ideas (such as progress towards ideas such as the good or scalar increases in important measures such as profit, productivity or growth)¹⁴. The collection and its title are therefore misunderstood if taken as advocating inhumanity in the sense of ethical values. The point is instead to reveal the role of instrumental reason, teleology and representation in the concept of the human. It is also to advocate forms of ethical community free of the demands and consequences of representation and measured equivalences and exchanges. If to be human is to follow an unconditional ethic, beyond even the Kantian test of universalisability, then Lyotard's inhuman is still humanist.

Second, according to Lyotard, events necessarily register initially through passivity by stunning us and forcing us into series of tentative questions. To follow these events is necessary; to follow them in way that does justice to the form of donation is an obligation. The challenge is then how to respond and find new ways of testifying to the events and to the differences they gesture to. If we are to be true to the events that happen to us, we must not bury them under final representations and subsequent communications of information. So, third, this is not to say that there must be no representative communication, it is rather any claim for the sufficiency of the communication of meaning and information must be resisted. This resistance takes the form of an extension of the donation found in art into any phrase, at least as a possibility. There has to be an event in any representation and the challenge is to draw this out and thereby to draw out

the ethical and political stakes underlying 'mere' communication. The obligation resulting from donation is then to sense and then to struggle to testify to the multiple and irreducibly different stakes in any event. The necessity of donation is that we cannot escape having to follow the donation. Donation is not therefore to be simply passive to events, but rather to be passive to the sensation that any given model of what the event means, of its value and future path, is necessarily insufficient and in a struggle with different models, values and paths, despite the fact that following the event is necessary¹⁵. This combination of necessity and obligation allows Lyotard to claim that we can never have done with donation or with differends (the irreducibly multiple and agonistic side to any event). To follow is not an obligation, but to testify is.¹⁶

Points, lines and process

This essay started on the doctor's couch. Lyotard's prescription as outlined above can seem perverse and unsatisfactory when viewed from the urgency conveyed by a portentous number and a poor prognostic. His point though has never been to turn away from the message, context and rational understanding of any given phrase. It is rather that in addition to these and within them we have to be aware of the many tracks competing for the legacy of the phrase. We also have to be aware that the phrase – even the diagnostic number – does not allow for a resolution of this competition. That's why it is a donation. Of course we should seek cures. The point is though not to conceal the struggling pressures at work in any given choice, whether this be in terms of social equity, existential choices, balances of pain and longevity, awareness of our strength and fears and – above all – the differences these carry with them in our relations to others (*In the end it's my decision! – No it is not...*) If this has to be put in simple terms it is that Lyotard appeals to the obligation conveyed with the donation of an event in order to insist upon the political and ethical responsibility in following on from any phrase. This appeal is a resistance to the way in which communication as representation tends towards the hegemony of a particular set of values and rationale.

It is a mistake to think that Lyotard's description of the event as a donation is incoherent, nihilistic, irrational or lacking in guidance for activity. It is reasonable to indicate the limits of instrumental reason. There is no nihilism or implied passivity in defending the obligation to difference and to insoluble conflict in the event, since part of that obligation is still to do something. In earlier writing, I criticised this work on the event for the nihilism implied by the lack of specific structures for activity to take place.¹⁷ I now realise that the demand to testify has some such structures through the multiplication of genres and the effort to write forms of communication resistant to communication (as representation). This point is made forcefully and with great precision by Maria Prodromou in her as yet unpublished thesis Writing, Event, Resistance.¹⁸ Nonetheless, these structures are thin and dominated by aesthetic considerations. Perhaps though these are not necessary limitations and we can see a possible extension of Lyotard's use of donation in Deleuze's earlier use of the term in relation to the event. The

problem with an aesthetic approach to the event lies in the line/interruption model it depends upon.

For Lyotard the event breaks a concatenation of phrases, or a flow of images, or a train of conceptual understanding, or a cycle of exchange, or indeed combinations of all of these linear developments.¹⁹ This means that when he uses the term donation it is associated with a stop combined with a remnant of forward momentum. The silent actor teeters over the precipice shocked into a halt by its sudden appearance yet still shakily propelled towards the void. Whether before the paintings of Barnett Newman or in the ingression of a misplaced phrase, the sublime event in Lyotard combines this external ambiguous trigger and an internal sensual conflict: rupture and invitation; lack and desire; terror and pleasure; obligation and absence of rule.²⁰ The pragmatic effect of this structure is the concern act in a state where no rules exist as to how to act. This lack invites the accusation of nihilism, but can be countered by the response that there is an invitation to create such rules in writing after the event. The fact that no rules exist does not mean that we cannot act.

However, the resulting line/interruption/creation model still seems to narrow down real situations in terms of their extent and multiple interconnected lines. Life is rarely determined by all encompassing events, such as a transforming shock or a sudden happening. It is not that such events do not occur (Lyotard is right to tenaciousness remind us of such devastating yet obligating events in his work on Auschwitz).²¹ It is rather that life is not always of this form and that this has a bearing even on events that are and should be life-determining. So it could be that the form of any event depends on a more complicated and less linear background. Sublime events, on a grand scale, do occur but they do so within ongoing lines that can be pushed into the background yet continue. As you leave the doctor's office ordinary life continues, changed for sure, but not in a uniform manner and not such that the event can be taken as the key either to understanding its broad context, or even as sufficient for understanding its own status as sublime interruption. The problem is therefore that in the paradoxical interruption put forward by Lyotard nothing is communicated other than a necessity to begin communication anew and an obligation to be faithful to the sublime event.²² His reading of meaning of donation is extreme in repudiating that there is anything at all donated. This extremism has the strength of resisting the return of utility and restricted signification in communication (that it is about outcomes and particular transfers of meaning) yet it has weakness in setting out a narrow and implausible model for how the many lines of communication and creative thought take form around and through events. Real events are multiple and complex, as are real sentiments, they are neither linear nor defined according to dualistic opposition such as terror and pleasure, or repulsion and attraction around a single occurrence.

In Logic of Sense, Deleuze studies the relation of events to language and instead of situating the event as a break in a concatenation of sentences he extends the event as a process along multiple lines themselves divided into four linguistic forms: denotation (or reference), signification (or meaning), manifestation (or utterance) and sense (not meaning, but intensity).²³ An event therefore changes from the line punctuated by breaks

model to a process that travels along series back and forward in time. The event therefore resonates, rather than interrupts. It creates interferences and disjunctions, rather than cuts and new beginnings. For instance, the mark on the note handed to you by the doctor has a well-defined denotation and this allows the note to refer to ulterior and future denotable things (your past body and future one, for example). Yet this denotation is incomplete unless it is accompanied by a signification, something that adds meaning to the denoted things (dying, suffering, growing). Without the signification the denotation is mere neutral fact. Again, this meaning travels back and forward along series (you thought you were dying, but you were not; you thought you had this future and it became that one). Yet this meaning is itself incomplete unless it is situated with respect to what manifests it. Without such manifestation we cannot judge the truth and falsity of the connection of denoted thing and signification. The manifestation gives the here, now and who which transform a statement such as 'a body has this property' to '*this* body has this property', or 'I love you' to '*I* love you'. Finally, neither denotation, nor signification, nor manifestation have any value unless they are associated with a sense, that is, a felt and expressed intensity turning brute fact into individuated significance, shared meaning into a singular effect, and manifestation by a well-determined individual into a process of becoming.

Deleuze calls this process 'the circle of the proposition'.²⁴ It is movement from denotation, to signification, to manifestation and back to denotation via the role of sense. In other words, language is generated by the search for value and significance defined as the production of sense (as opposed to signification).²⁵ The event works as sense unlocks paradoxes in language and its relation to world: What is denotation without meaning? What is meaning without who and where that meaning is for? What is that location and identity without value? How can there be genuine value, if not through the transformation of those identities? The astonishing inventiveness of Deleuze study of language in relation to the event lies not only in the claim that the paradoxes are what allows language to work without being reduced to the priority of one or other of its components, strictly to denoted facts, or to manifested intentions, for instance. The brilliance is also in the generating role of sense, that is, in the claim that the world referred to, the meanings about it and the individuals arise out of the production of sense and value, out of the intensities occurring in the world.²⁶ Moreover, these values are themselves incomplete unless they are expressed in the world. The figure "197.5" is only complete when it is associated with a meaning, itself associated with an individuals (or series of individuals), where all of these require the intensity of a value that transforms each one forward and back in time, or along series – since Deleuze claims that time is constituted by events, rather than events occurring in a pre-given time. An event is a transformation generated by the expression of a change in intensity.

So why does Deleuze use the term donation in the passage quoted in *exergue*? How can he respond to a critique based on Lyotard's intuitions that the event must somehow be beyond representation and exchange, if Deleuze's processes can be charted and evaluated? The answer is that sense is a donation for Deleuze. The process of generation cannot be represented, traced or repeated and, instead, sense and the other components of the proposition are involved in asymmetrical processes where they determine one another

but where that determination is neither reversible nor subject to rules and functions allowing for inductive moves or secure predictions.²⁷ That's why his work in Logic of Sense is so dependent on paradoxes to ensure that no logic comes to flatten denotation onto signification, or sense onto manifestation. This means that despite its character as process the event is still a donation in Lyotard's usage as resistant to interpretation and free of transcendent rules. The challenge for both thinkers is how a singular event is to be worked with or replayed in the absence of rules. Yet, for Deleuze, there is much more precise material to work on forward and back in time in terms of the structures that are transformed by the event. We are not hit by wall that stops time and disrupts space, but rather by a series of waves or folds travelling through us, initiating transformations and demanding creative solutions. These will necessarily be creative in the radical sense of having to create themselves without external guidance and with the demand for genuine novelty (a thoroughgoing and detailed transformation of a world).

There is hence great closeness between Lyotard and Deleuze in their use of the concept of donation, because for both a donation is beyond meaning and beyond exchange. The discussions of language in Le différend and Logique du sens have many fascinating parallels, extending from the critique of the dominance of reference, through the importance of paradox for understanding how language works, on to the search for a domain of language beyond reference and meaning. For Deleuze, the donation of sense or value occurs through nonsense, an occurrence that registers, setting off puzzles and thereby having an effect, but where this effect resists incorporation into preset meanings, or forms for the reception of facts. Nonsense though is not rare; it a potential for any phrase, where its utterance has the effect of disruption and transformation (*It's a girl! But it has to be a boy. You failed. I cannot afford to fail. Never speak to me like that again. Life is nothing without you. I cannot believe anymore. What is my life without belief?*) For Lyotard, the donation occurs whenever a phrase resists the incorporation into genres such as a given account of the proper form of knowledge in its relation to progress, or a given discourse on the form and value of art. The difference between the two philosophies is therefore in the detailed effect of donation, rather than its essential form as disruptive, obligating and inviting creative responses. This leaves two pressing questions: What is at stake in these remaining differences? Are these differences so great as to mean we have to choose between the two models, or is at matter of inflexion and appropriateness for different situations, where Lyotard is the thinker better adapted to the reception of Newman's paintings, Kant's sublime and Adorno's aesthetic theory, but where Deleuze allows for a more intricate and open response to the relations between Bacon's figures and triptychs, Nietzsche and Foucault's genealogies and Hume's account of the role of repetition and the inventiveness of the imagination in habit and the passions?

Withdrawal and donation

The question of the sublime is tightly linked in some way to what Heidegger calls the withdrawal of Being, the withdrawal of donation. The welcome paid to the

sensible, that is, to sense embodied in the here-and-now before any concept would no longer have place and moment. This withdrawal would signify our current destiny.²⁸

Lyotard follows Heidegger up to the withdrawal in donation: any phrase is a withdrawal even when it is also a communication of meaning and the basis for an exchange. Even phrase as simple as a command such as “Do your duty” is a withdrawal. In setting out an exchange of rights and responsibilities, of relations of belonging to a community and exclusion, of acts sanctioned and forbidden, of rewards and punishments, the phrase also invites in questions about the justice of these rights, rewards and punishments, of the limits of community and the clashes occurring at those limits, but also within any given community, which is therefore never homogeneous. These questions and our desire to answer them have no intrinsic limits and there are no rules as to their propriety, nor rules for determining the number or value of any questions. Questioning comes after a donation and can never determine it; on the contrary, that the questions remain undetermined depends on the donation defined as a withdrawal rather than a giving of any well-determined thing. For Lyotard the phrase can never simply command obedience and give it as such or to receive it as such is to ignore what withdraws in the phrase as it is uttered and received. This ambiguity and openness of the phrase in all its linguistic relations (reference, meaning, manifestation and sense) is however not a fate for Lyotard, and this is where he departs from Heidegger. It is instead a political problem and state of affairs. We have to respond to the tension between what we can understand in the phrase, but also to what is beyond knowledge and understanding and therefore calling for new responses – ones that neither pretends that withdrawal is an inevitable fate, nor an eliminable passing phase.

Withdrawal is a translation of the French word *retrait*, or retreat. It can seem that if we think of donation as retreat we are ceding too much to ideas of abandonment and cessation, when action is called for and failure to act is a betrayal of life, desire and community. A joint reading of Lyotard and Deleuze’s versions of donation allows the idea to move away from any association with retreat. Withdrawal becomes part of a creative and affirmative process. For Deleuze donation is dual: a withdrawal of sense and a donation of sense according to a division in structures between a placeless occupant signified by our questions and the intensities that fire them, and an empty space signified by our efforts to identify novel solutions to recurrent problems.²⁹ The occupant and the space run back and forward along parallel but separate series; each series is incomplete without the other, but whenever one is referred onto the other it commences a disjunction within it. The new question splits answers to old ones and those answers transform old questions and demand new ones. Placeless occupant and empty place never finally coincide because they belong to asymmetrical processes and series; as the question finds an answer it changes into a new question, or, in Lyotard’s terminology, each new phrase is itself an event and a donation. Everything is in the creative search, which is politically active but never secure, nor finished, nor satisfied. The event is always a donation, but this donation does give something: a problem.³⁰ The problem generates a creative search for its solutions. It also sunders those solutions and demands new ones. Lyotard’s work defines phrases such that they are singularities as defined by Deleuze and, in turn,

Deleuze defines events as problems determined by these singularities. A donation is then the gift of a problem, not an insoluble puzzle but the genesis of series of multiple temporary solutions that must testify to that multiplicity and impermanence.

Notes

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- ¹ Jean-François Lyotard, 'Quelque chose comme: "communication sans communication"' in L'inhumain: causeries sur le temps (Paris: Galilée, 1988) pp 119-30, esp. 121-2
- ² Gilles Deleuze, Logique du sens (Paris: Minuit, 1969), p 87
- ³ 'Quelque chose comme: "communication sans communication"' p 119-22
- ⁴ 'Quelque chose comme: "communication sans communication"' p 120
- ⁵ 'Quelque chose comme: "communication sans communication"' p 127
- ⁶ 'Quelque chose comme: "communication sans communication"' p 129
- ⁷ 'Quelque chose comme: "communication sans communication"' p 122
- ⁸ For a discussion of this minimal material donation in relation to aesthetic sentiment and to the sublime see Jean-François Lyotard 'Anima minima' in Moralités postmodernes (Paris: Galilée, 1993), pp 199-210, esp 207
- ⁹ Jean-François Lyotard 'Sensus communis, le sujet à l'état naissant' in Misère de la philosophie (Paris: Galilée, 2000) pp 13-42
- ¹⁰ Jean-François Lyotard Leçons sur l'analytique du sublime (Paris: Galilée, 1991)
- ¹¹ 'Quelque chose comme: "communication sans communication"' p 128
- ¹² Molière, Le Tartuffe (Paris: Gallimard, 1999) acte 3, scène 7
- ¹³ See 'Le temps, aujourd'hui' in L'inhumain pp 69-88, esp 82
- ¹⁴ See 'Matière et temps' in L'inhumain pp 45-56, esp pp 47-8. See also the claim in Le différend that phrases occur before time and create time (pp 94-5). It is this latter claim that explains how Lyotard's politics of testifying to differends as they are raised in phrases can resist the capitalist genre and its rule 'to gain time'
- ¹⁵ 'Qu'il n'y ait pas de phrase est impossible, qu'il y ait *Et une phrase* est nécessaire.' Le différend (Paris: Minuit, 1983) p 103
- ¹⁶ Le différend, p 260
- ¹⁷ See James Williams, Lyotard and the Political (London: Routledge, 2000) pp 133-4
- ¹⁸ Maria Prodromou, Writing, Event, Resistance, PhD thesis, University of Essex, 2008
- ¹⁹ Le différend, p 103
- ²⁰ See 'L'instant, Newman' in L'inhumain pp 89-100
- ²¹ See Le différend pp 132-7
- ²² The limits of Lyotard's political position come out here in relation to Badiou's very different version of faithfulness with its concrete moves in relation to the event we must be faithful to, as opposed to the resistance of the Lyotard event to such concreteness. For a short discussion of the connection of Lyotard to Badiou see Alain Badiou, Logiques des mondes (Paris: Seuil, 2006) p 578, as well as Badiou's excellent article on Lyotard 'Custos, quid noctis' in Critique numéro 450, 1984, pp 851-63
- ²³ Logique du sens, pp 22-35
- ²⁴ Logique du sens, p 29
- ²⁵ For extended discussions of Deleuze's philosophy of language see Jean-Jacques Lecercle Deleuze and Language (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) and James Williams Gilles Deleuze's Logic of Sense: a Critical Introduction and Guide (Edinburgh University Press, 2008)
- ²⁶ Logique du sens, pp 142-51
- ²⁷ Logique du sens, pp 217-8, 226-7
- ²⁸ 'Quelque chose comme: "communication sans communication"' p 124
- ²⁹ Logique du sens, pp 54-6
- ³⁰ Logique du sens, pp 68-9