

## JEAN-FRANÇOIS LYOTARD [final draft]

Jean-François Lyotard was one of the great philosophical essayists of the twentieth century. He contributed to a renewal of the essay form and wrote on a series of important questions with subtlety, humour and style. If the lasting value of his work is to be recognized, the distinction drawn between philosophical arguments and essays is essential. Two commonplace questions often asked of philosophers determine an approach to Lyotard's work that fails to do it justice: 'What is your main idea or concept?' and 'Can you describe your key philosophical concern and method?' Both questions set up what he came to call a 'differend' with his approach, that is, a difference or opposition that cannot be bridged on terms that are just towards both sides of an argument. If the views or position defined by one side are imposed on the other, there is in Lyotard's terms a 'tort', a wrong that cannot be rectified according to a system of justice set up by the side that does the wrong. In misrepresentations of his work, the wrong comes partly from the reasonableness of the questions. Why not enquire about a philosopher's main idea, key concern and method? Would it not be suspicious were the thinker unable or unwilling to answer? Would this not be a clue to a failing in the thought, perhaps a basic lack of clarity or a malign desire to confuse issues?

The early critical reception of Lyotard's work has often concealed the deep value of his essays: their multifaceted sensitivity and balance. A thinker who sought to avoid generalisation found himself at the center of a widely followed and denigrated truism. Lyotard's 'main' idea was never that we now live in a postmodern age characterized by postmodern art-works and politics – where modern would mean united and responsible for unity, and postmodern would mean disjointed and cynically celebratory of fragmentation. Only a very limited reading of his The Postmodern Condition (1979) and a failure to read, for example, his The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985 (1986) would allow such conclusions. One of his claims was indeed that we live in an epoch of fragmentation marked by the failure of "grand narratives". These narratives are accounts of history and of progressive development that bring together many strands of human effort into a single vision of a better future. This utopian focus emerges out of a past that it makes sense of but also repudiates in favour of a new beginning. Some of the more simplistic Marxist and liberal democratic commentators fit this description (for example, Francis Fukuyama's famous thesis on "the end of history" in capitalist liberal democracy). However, Lyotard never claimed that the failure of these grand and totalizing visions should simply be celebrated and accomplished in a postmodern art, politics and philosophy associated with a particular epoch.

Due to this erroneous ascription of satisfaction with late-capitalist postmodernity, Lyotard is accused of being a poor philosopher with a weak grasp of key forms of argumentation and with a typically postmodern unwillingness to broach key ethical and political aims in a clear, consistent and principled manner. There is no textual evidence for any of these conclusions. Lyotard strove to renew the energy and rigor behind

philosophical forms of justice, but free of the crudeness and violence of certain types of modern thought and politics. This was never to be achieved once and for all in a postmodern epoch or in fragmented works; instead, a creative philosophical resistance had to draw on resources found at all times, on the margins and in the avant-garde, but also in 'canonical' works. These resources themselves demand to be drawn out in new forms, rather than as critical overviews or judgements. Far from defending fragmentation, his philosophy is much closer to a view of an ongoing transformation of works taken as 'difficult wholes'. This transformation is guided by a resistance to wrongs and has the goal of testifying to differends, that is, to enduring differences that are unjustly hidden or eliminated.

### Beyond the modern and the postmodern

There is then something of the modern *and* of the postmodern in Lyotard. His work reflects notions of difficulty and complexity that combine a modern desire for unity and a postmodern sense of fragmentation. This combination extends into his understanding of the roles and forms of argument and position-taking in philosophy. Style and form must reflect the paradoxes and contradictions necessary for the expression of multiple positions that cannot be reduced to one another. Ethical and political concerns cannot lead to final categorical truths, but rather must lead to testimonies to the need for further varied thoughts eschewing exclusive positions, whilst trying to do justice to many positions and to richness of the matter at hand.

Lyotard's work therefore consists of a series of essays – some of them book-length – as opposed to a series of philosophical positions or arguments. The essays are experimental attempts to think round a problem or challenge, whilst at the same time drawing our attention towards a wide set of delightful but also shocking and puzzling aspects of a topic. They are art-works with a style, originality and complexity that resist simple reductions to primary ideas and methods. They are also crafted political interventions, philosophical because designed to prompt and guide thought, yet resistant to a definition of philosophy as, essentially, a clearly argued form of problem-solving and bridge-building. This resistance is not perverse or willfully obstructive, rather, it stems from the intuitions that, firstly, the problems at hand cannot be truly resolved through simple methods and concepts and, secondly, that the matter encountered by artists and thinkers of all kinds deserves a rich and expressive medium, rather than any reductively clear categorization or definition.

Lyotard comes closer, in French philosophical lineage, to the tradition that includes Montaigne, Voltaire, Diderot, Alain and Barthes, rather than Descartes, Fourier, Comte and Bergson. His work updates the essay form because he adapts it to a series of features that have determined the twentieth century, without being exclusive to it. Lyotard's thought is deeply-marked by the events of his century and by the relation of those events to a set of philosophical ideas, methods and thinkers. In parallel, it is also marked by a long series of aesthetic works, primarily in literature and painting, but also in architecture

and film. The first source means that his work is an ongoing attempt to intervene politically and philosophically within key trends and events, but with an acute awareness of the failings of many forms of thought in the face of events. This failure can be explained by the roles the thought has played in the event – though these need not be central or active. Lyotard belongs to the set of thinkers troubled by the relation of ideologies, including rationalism and Marxism, to catastrophic events. However, he is again misunderstood if the conclusion is drawn that there is a necessary connection between ideology and violence. When we read him as an essayist, we move from an emphasis on the necessity of that relation, to an understanding of his work as charting cases of it, in all their complexity, but also as resistant to any debilitating fatalism or exclusive judgements.

### Resistance in art and philosophy

A key companion intuition to Lyotard's connection of events to the failings of ideology is that this flaw is avoided by some artworks, or more precisely, by the relation of artwork, matter and affect. So the second main source of his thought provides a counterpoint to the first. This is because art-works are seen as reflecting the necessity of failure whilst refusing to allow it to smother them. He is then attempting to pass somewhere between the thwarted desire to change the world forever for the better and the despair at that breakdown. Lyotard is aware of the value of the desire, but he is equally aware of its history in an attraction to violence and to nihilism as a loss of values and of reforming political activity. Art can express its own limits in the attempt to grasp matter, but that expression becomes an affirmation of matter in its capacity to stun and to energize. This power is a counter to a three-fold cause for despair after historical events: first, events cannot be represented whilst still doing justice to what has occurred in them; second, events are signs of the impossibility of final reconciliation; third, they occur beyond any predictive logic. In its combination of expression, limitation and productive materiality, art can provide testimony to events whilst avoiding representation and the reduction of fault-lines to false resolutions. It is important for Lyotard that this materiality be seen as elusive in terms of linguistic descriptions and theories.

Much of his emphasis on historical events and their social and political consequences can be drawn out of Lyotard's biography, though any simple equation of life and work would be far too abrupt, since the works seem to prefigure and go beyond events rather than merely follow them. Lyotard's earliest works describe the effects of the Second World War and, in particular, the Holocaust on young post-war thinkers. He argues that neither orthodox Marxism, nor liberalism, nor techno-scientific rationalism can allow us to comprehend and do justice to those events. It is not that reason and socialism are not necessary, they are and will continue to be for Lyotard - but they are not enough. After passing his French *agrégation*, he taught at a Lycée in Constantine, Algeria, in the early fifties. This experience led directly to his involvement, from 1954 to 1963, in the French revolutionary group *socialisme ou barbarie*, seeking to encourage revolution and independence for Algeria (his essays for the group are collected in Political Writings,

1993). Algerian independence happened in 1962 after a long and bloody conflict, but according to Lyotard's analyses, revolution failed. Later, he took up a university post at the University of Paris VIII, Nanterre (working with Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou and many other key French academics of the time). He played an active role in the May 68 student revolts, again, this revolution can be seen to have passed, in particular with what he saw as the betrayal of the French socialist party when it took power in the nineteen-eighties. Later, Lyotard helped form the *Collège International de Philosophie* (with Jacques Derrida and François Châtelet, among others). He then took on the role of an international academic and intellectual with a series of posts and lecturing assignments around the world, notably the University of California, Irvine and Emory University, Atlanta.

Lyotard's life and career follows cycles of dispiriting events that he later identified through a series of names (Auschwitz, Budapest, 1968). His writing is then a form of struggle against discouragement but with a determination not to resort to false consolations or to inaccurate images of the past, the present, or even the future. His essays use the historical and contemporary resources of philosophy, but in an ironic manner, thereby creating literary assemblages rather than works of pure theory (this irony comes out most strongly in the collection The Inhuman). So, in parallel to events, we find series of theoretical focus points corresponding to different stages in his output. These range from a very early and popular critical introduction to phenomenology (Phenomenology, 1954) through an engagement with structuralism and psychoanalysis (Discours, figure, 1971) to reflections on Marx and Freud (Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud, 1973) and a Nietzsche/Klossowski-inspired dynamic philosophy (Libidinal Economy, 1974). These are then followed by a turn to Ancient philosophy and a revival of paganism (Instructions paiennes, 1977) then developed into works that draw on Kant and Wittgenstein around questions of justice and incommensurability (Just Gaming, 1979, The Differend, 1983). After these, Lyotard's most mature period of essay writing begins with the important collections The Inhuman (1988) and Postmodern Fables (1993). Though his output was very great, it is arguable that it was still cut short since his most beautiful essays, on Malraux (Signed, Malraux, 1996 and Soundproof Room: Malraux's Anti-aesthetics, 1998), are followed by important posthumous works on Augustine (The Confession of Augustine, 1998 and Misère de la philosophie, 2000).

Misère de la philosophie is Lyotard's last collection of essays. It connects to nearly all of the work that precedes it, not only in terms of content but also through its styles and reflection on earlier ideas. This connection is not surprising given the consistency of issues and ideas throughout his philosophy. This is not say that there are a few lines that draw his work together, but rather that there are many different ones, present in each essay in different ways and to varying degrees. The late collection is then a good example of the transformation of the essay form achieved by Lyotard. Theory and conceptual innovation become key components of the form, but are not allowed to dominate it. Instead, an ironic juxtaposition of style, theoretical argument, aesthetic moments and careful autonomous descriptions of 'external topics' (such as art-works or historical cases) forms an unstable unity where none of the sub-parts is allowed to dominate, but where all work together as a critical and creative ensemble. The essay form then moves

beyond the model of an open discussion, or of an aesthetic intervention, to become a 'transformer' and 'resistor' on the margins of other forms of pure theory, art-works, historical cases, philosophical argument and social commentary. The concepts of the transformer and of resistance are key to understanding Lyotard. He used the former in a short essay on Duchamp and, among others, Kant: Duchamp's TRANS/formers (1977). The latter is one of the dominant themes of the works on Malraux through Lyotard's sense that Malraux's life (and any well-lived life) is an ongoing resistance to infamy.

### Narrative and the unconscious

Narrative is one of the main concepts transformed and resisted by Lyotard. His work studies what he sees as the necessary but not sufficient role played by narratives in the constitution of selves, communities, political groups and social movements. This necessity comes from the way identity grows out of a primary flux that unfolds over time and requires organization and limits. Identity is then a form of narrative order and selection over a much larger and disparate set of events, individuals and characteristics - as well as their multiple and varying relations. The insufficiency of narratives comes from the way in which events exceed their attempts to give them shape over time. A narrative brings order to a matter that it depends upon but cannot control. This matter is not only what we could term the external event (what happened and how it was perceived) but also the internal matter (the language that has to be bent into a narrative shape). Both of these decay and renew themselves in ways that go beyond the original attempt to capture and to express.

Unlike philosophers who stress conceptual or ideal identity, where a sense of definition comes from a set of conceptual predicates or an independent idea ('I or we are X'), he is interested in the way a story or account draws together and relates some elements whilst also excluding others. Lyotard is wary of the conceptual model because it does not have the capacity for flexible patterns and evolutions offered by a narrative, where many different and contradictory strands, some present and others defunct, can be held together without having to be sifted for consistency and ultimate order. Thus, the narrative 'My past runs through Y and leads to my present X' is opposed to the conceptual 'I was X, but now I am Y'. It can be argued, following Lyotard's study of discourse in Discours, figure, that conceptual clarity always hides a minimal narrative in the conjunct of the 'but' which introduces a form of narrative account into the present concept through the story of how one becomes what one is. Moreover, the bald statement 'I am X' cannot escape the subtext 'But I was Y', unless it denies any historical development, thereby plunging identity into a series of atomic moments rather than a development through time. Concept-formation assumes narrative, which in turn assumes a struggle of narrative with excessive events and their return in novel demands to narrate anew. Narrative provides a conscious line of identity, but it hides an unconscious line that it cannot legitimately ignore and yet cannot finally include in its totality.

Grand narratives, as described in The Postmodern Condition, maintain a relation between a drive towards a better future and a past that remains a threat and a lesson, for example, in the thought 'Never that again'. This relation is then allied to an account of how the tools necessary for achieving the passage from past to future came into being (for instance, in the edifying narrative of enlightenment as able to draw us out of obscurantist dogmatism thanks to reason deployed in the sciences and ethics). In The Differend, Lyotard explains how political communities emerge from a founding definition of their values and principles, for instance, in the signing of a constitution. This founding moment is then narrated so that later parts of the community can both interpret it and feel they belong. For him, simply having an idea of enlightenment values or a concept of a constitution is not sufficient for the emergence of identity because those original sources are themselves divided and divisive. On a territory inhabited by many different groups, with a history of many different social and political systems, a single nation emerges through a narrative that *always imposes* unity. In a community formed around a constitution, where there does not appear to be quite such an imposition, Lyotard is concerned with the problem of how the few signatories of a constitution are connected to the many who are signed up to it by proxy. They must be made to belong and this belonging comes from narrative that explains how 'we' are represented by 'them', or are continuous with them in some way.

In a parallel manner, he sees how the many stages of an individual self require a narrative that connects the very different aspects of childhood, adolescence and adulthood, not only in terms of maturity but also in terms of the individual tensions that run through any life. This contributes to the acuity of his Signed, Malraux and The Confession of Augustine because Lyotard can both describe those tensions and the difficult attempts to reconcile them in autobiographical fictions. It also contributes in Lectures d'enfance (1991) to his interest in childhood as a positive state detrimentally hidden in adulthood. However, this requirement to narrate always has a cost, because the continuity and integrity of a recounted life are built on a series of exclusions. These are the necessarily unconscious aspects of a life that each narrative generates as it tells the life. He is particularly concerned with the form and extent of this cost, since the exclusions beget injustices that cannot be righted easily (the exclusion banishes outside the law, by denying a right to be heard, for example) and involve forms of violence that is hard to render visible (it creates new forms of violence, such as the denial of roots and culture). The function of Lyotard's essays is then often to reveal the unconscious exclusions behind narratives and theories dependent upon them.

### Exclusion and injustice

Lyotard's worry with narratives of identity, whether communal or of the self, is that they necessarily involve exclusions both in terms of their external borders – those or that which does not belong – and in terms of their internal construction – that which is at work in the founding moment or process but not avowed. These exclusions lead to differences that cannot be done justice to in terms of the original narrative. Contemporary

cases of this kind of exclusion might take in those rejected in tales of the emergence of an intrinsically 'superior' set of values based on gender, religion or ethnicity, but it could also take in those banished through an appeal to a narrative about original owners of a land, or those expropriated because unable to make 'reasonable' claims to original ownership, and those discriminated against for failing to be 'rightful' heirs to a religious tradition or authority, or those excluded or mistreated because they fail to recognize the 'validity' of a dominant economic or social discourse, on market values or certain forms of liberal democracy, say. This process should not only be seen as one of unjust *exclusion*, but also one of unjust *inclusion*. Lyotard's point is not only that narratives leave something out, but rather that they construct a false identity. There is never a pure inside that others are excluded from, rather, both sides of the process are based on an illegitimate covering of more complex and irreducible differences at the outset. This is why his account also extends to the self, where the narrative that accompanies the emergence of a given self-identity creates a false view of the self because it necessarily fails to take account of all aspects behind this emergence.

Three possible objections to Lyotard can be raised at this point. 1. Is he committed to an amoral position where all narratives are equally at fault in terms of illegitimate exclusions and inclusions? 2. What alternatives does Lyotard propose to narrative and, if he fails to have any, is he not offering us a council of despair? 3. Is it not possible for some narratives to respond sympathetically and positively to what they have excluded or failed to include properly? The first two questions allow for simple answers in Lyotard's defence. He does not believe that all narratives are equal in the violence of their exclusions. On the contrary, certain narratives are viewed as paradigms of violence and wrongdoing, hence his denunciation of Holocaust deniers in The Differend and his continued critique of racism and colonialism from its beginnings in his essays on Algeria. The view that all narratives involve exclusions does not imply that all narratives are the same in the violence or scope of that exclusion. The notion of paradigmatic wrongs or exclusions does not commit Lyotard to an overarching tale that allows him to relate different narratives. Instead, the cases he takes as exemplary are determined by the extreme nature of the wrong, when taken from the point of view of how to do it justice. Attempts to put witnesses to the Holocaust in a double-bind on its scale, denials of humanity in racism and the eradication of cultural history in colonialism are therefore recurrently attacked in his work because of the call to testify for those who cannot express a wrong done to them.

Neither does Lyotard think that there are no alternatives to narrative. Rather, his argument is that there are no positions standing completely above and beyond narrative and its power to bequeath identity. Narratives must therefore be supplemented by critical accounts that show exclusions and illegitimacy, in order to replace and improve on given positions. These critical moves cannot finally 'win'. Nevertheless, we are rightly driven to continue to testify to injustice and to wrongs even if this cannot be in the context of an overall grand narrative or of a reliable improvement determined by stable and enduring principles and values. It is not nihilistic to think that violence and its causes will return and cannot be replaced by some utopian peace, so long as motivations remain for reforming and just action. Neither is it nihilistic to claim that such action is relative, not

only in its own capacity for injustice, but also in its failure to have external and inviolable principles. This relativity must not be confused with claims to equivalence with respect to different moral acts. The relativity concerns the necessary persistence of some exclusions and false inclusions, rather than the equivalence of specific exclusions across different cases. There are always illegitimate exclusions, but some are worse than others. The assumption that there will always be new exclusions does not imply that it is not worth struggling in the name of particular injustices. It means that we should never be satisfied that a social situation, political theory or philosophical methodology are finally good and therefore beyond reproach.

The third objection is more difficult to answer. It is in connection to it that Lyotard turns to many different interpretations of the role of the unconscious in narrative and to philosophical concepts that define experiences, events and feelings as approachable through narrative and discourse but as never finally captured by them. The fact that he develops such concepts could be seen as a contradiction, since he would be providing a conceptual argument for non-conceptual things, but this serves only to emphasise the importance of his work as an essayist, where concepts and methods cannot be separated from a form of communication that adds expression, style and feeling to them in order both to deny that all we have is the concept and that the concept can stand independent of emotion. Indeed, this emotion or affect is Lyotard's link to the unconscious in all his works. This explains the variety and persistence of accounts of the relation of feeling, structure and unconscious drives in his works, from the role of figural events in discourse in Discours, figure, to intensities dissimulated in dispositions in Libidinal Economy, to the feeling of the sublime undoing and yet also feeding into Ideas of reason in The Differend. It also explains his deep impatience with the accusation of 'performative contradiction' in his rational defence of the irrational. Lyotard's defence was never simply rational or a simple appeal to reason. The argument never accepted the far too simple dichotomy drawn between reason and that which lies beyond it. Rational structure and emotional dynamism are inextricably linked and their separation is an illusion, a temporary conjuring trick, rather than a permanent achievement of argument and analysis.

### Time and the limits of knowledge

Lyotard's study of time (for example, in 'Emma' in Misère de la philosophie) reveals a series of arguments as to why certain events necessarily escape narrative and why he thinks of this in terms of the unconscious through a critical reading of Freud. The first and perhaps most important argument is about the nature of time in narrative or, more precisely, the limits that time sets for narrative in its relation to feelings and affects. Given this connection of time and narrative, it is worth recalling that Lyotard worked with Paul Ricoeur in the 1960s and that there are many connections to Ricoeur's work in Discours, figure, notably his work on hermeneutics and on Freud. Later, Lyotard does not mention the author of Time and Narrative (vols. I, II, III) very much, perhaps because he had already covered a lot of the same ground in Discours, figure whilst developing a very



different position, but also perhaps because of their opposed sides during the events of May 68 when Ricoeur was Dean at Nanterre. Lyotard made severe comments on what he saw as Ricoeur's compromises with political authority and repression in his essay 'Nanterre, here, now' (reproduced in Political Writings). These remarks were prescient with respect to the shift from political goals to managerial ones in modern universities: "The latter [Ricoeur's politics] is precisely a non-politics. It consists in defining 'success' by a ridiculous quantitative change within the institution: a 3 percent increase in salaries spread out over a year; n percent of students admitted to university councils [...]"

Lyotard divides time into a series of diverging but also interfering lines. There is not a single and united time, but many timelines running alongside each other with points of contact and capacities to transform one another. One line, the one we are most familiar with, stands for the way *conscious* recollection can return to earlier events. Such conscious recollections follow one another in the familiar linear manner, that is, according to a straight line passing from past, through present, to future. The forward momentum of this line, its 'passing away' and 'moving towards', describes a loss or insufficiency and a counter possibility for novel creation. This is because, when we remember earlier events, we do so in a manner that is necessarily limited, that is, the early event can never be entirely and accurately brought back. Instead, the earlier event has to be renewed in the present through a narration (*this is what happened...*) However, another line departs from the same early event and drifts away from the straight line of successive conscious recollections and narrations. This other line describes the *unconscious* life taken on by aspects that escaped consciousness at the time of the event but that were nonetheless inscribed unconsciously. A very simple example of this would be cases of missed insults and slights. At the time of the initial injury we consciously perceive no sign of malevolence and hence have no evidence for later cognitive analysis or associated narration (we cannot say 'she did *it* to hurt', because there is no *it*) – to all intents and purposes nothing happened. But something did happen, and it returns unexpectedly, this time signified not by the actual injurious fact, but by a disturbing feeling (*Hold on minute! What did she say exactly?*) This feeling occurs on the familiar conscious line but sets it in relation to another unconscious one, where the unconscious event has bubbled away independent of our blithe conscious thoughts.

It could be assumed from the distinction drawn between conscious and unconscious times that we have only two lines and that the second can be folded back on to the first, but an important feature of the difference between the two times is that it sets up a wider fragmentation and incommensurability. This is because, firstly, each time the lines interfere they set off new divergences and, secondly, because different aspects of the original event lie on different unconscious lines. For example, an original meeting may involve an unconscious slight (*immature fool – she thought*), but also an unconscious attraction (*the reddening in his cheeks betrayed his attraction and revolted her all the more*). These may return to the conscious line in different and incompatible manners, setting up interferences between each other and with the conscious line. The attraction and the insult bubble along independently of one another; they are triggered to return into consciousness at different times; and when they do they set off new relations to one another (for example, the attraction becomes doomed and hence even more troubling

when we realize the slight). An event fans out into a set of time lines which then fold back on to one another. Time therefore unfolds in a complicated manner, not as a simple stream, but as a series of connected but unpredictable whirls and eddies.

Lyotard denies that conscious reflection or narratives can somehow regain full control of unconscious processes. He accepts that these processes must reappear in perceivable and knowable forms, but he points out that this return is particularly troubling and disruptive. The reappearance of something hidden involves an undoing of control through the disruption of current conscious lines of knowledge, understanding and narration in their relation to the past. This is why he is interested in Freudian psychoanalysis through its studies of deep-seated neuroses triggered by the return of two-fold past events. An event in the past is twinned with another later event and this twinning explains the particularly troublesome return in the present. It is not that a new fact occurs to be added to a set of ongoing accounts. It is rather that two combined and hitherto concealed events return to question and undermine those ongoing processes. So the unconscious returns with the power of a betrayal rather than as an innocent discovery. This return is doubly difficult to handle because it disrupts the accounts we have formed for our conscious recollections and resists further incorporations through its dual nature. We do not only have to handle one returning event but two apparently incompatible ones.

This series of unconscious lines and their power to disrupt chaotically yet with great intensity is detrimental to the claims of narrative. Our conscious tales have the role of setting up identities over time against the necessary failure and waning of memory, but these narratives are themselves prey to different aggressions and failures in relation to unconscious events and timelines. It is crucial to note that throughout his work Lyotard viewed this fragility in relation to the return of the unconscious, as a positive platform for the resistance to false inclusions and exclusions. Narrative is reminded of its necessary limitations and injustices through the affects and feelings that express what has been unconsciously concealed. His philosophical essays can be seen as repeated efforts to conduct this unconscious power, not only in the name of justice, but also for the renewal of creative narratives themselves. This explains his concern with Freudian psychoanalysis and its work on suggested recollection or anamnesis, but it also explains why he criticises and adds to this sense of recollection. Lyotard agrees that anamnesis is necessary, but once it is set as a specific practice with a set psychoanalytic theory, then it is constricted and misunderstood. There can never be a final theory of the unconscious, but only essays that attempt to express why there could be no such finality. This is not a dishonest attempt to 'say what cannot be said'. It is rather an attempt to think through the nature of our sources of knowledge and identity, to work out their limits, and therefore to see how we may begin to reflect on how to remind ourselves of those limits, given the precise nature of necessary forms of exclusion and forgetfulness.

### Affects and matter

This return of a forgotten or repressed unconscious is described in terms of figural events in Discours, figure, of libidinal ones in Libidinal Economy, of sublime ones in The Differend, the Inhuman and Postmodern Fables, and of emotion-laden bodily events in Lyotard's last works. In each guise, he also constructs theories of how these events erupt into economic, narrative and cognitive structures. The political point of these constructions lies in the way they make space for further events and creations designed to allow us to be reminded of what has been left out, necessarily and unknowingly, in our current forms of understanding and valuing of the world, of others and of ourselves. His essays then have the task of giving voice to that which is not and cannot be known. This is not a simple contradiction. It is a paradox that lies behind the emotive and aesthetic style of his work: to write in order to make space for events, rather than close them off; to write in order to do justice to wrongs that have not been recognized; to write in the awareness that philosophy often sets itself goals inconsistent with this sense of otherness and injustice.

The aesthetic and political power of events is frequently described by Lyotard in terms of the combination of matter and affect. This connection is designed to answer the problem of how consciousness and unconscious events come into contact and can be worked with. It allows him to subvert and transform oppositions drawn between a scientific and naturalistic view of matter and a more aesthetic phenomenological view of emotions. For him, affects are transforming and disturbing bodily events, they should not be identified with standard feelings, sensations or emotions in relation to a form of intentionality – though they can overlap with them. Instead, an affect combines a cognitive challenge, in the sense that something occurs that resists knowledge yet registers as something that has an effect on our structures of knowledge or intention. For example, an affect could be the occurrence of a strange background distaste that does not fit with our current senses of taste but changes their value and status. This distaste is an affect, since it transforms our senses in relation to our knowledge of them whilst resisting incorporation, but also registering a longer-term and troublesome event (*meat lost its savor, after the stench of the abattoir*).

The importance of affects is two-fold. Firstly, they are Lyotard's way of convincing us of the limits of knowledge and of established narratives. This conviction is not a matter of argument, but of providing a framework of concepts and ideas for readers to either sense that they have also undergone such affects, or to recognize that they have not. Again, the essay form of his writing, as well as his work through art and artists, is important here. Lyotard has to enact and dramatise affects and their occurrence as events in order to transmit their possibility to readers (this is done particularly well in Libidinal Economy through literary descriptions, or in his later ironic use of dialogue in The Inhuman and Postmodern Fables, or in his late poetic style in Soundproof Room). Second, affects are a way round the problem of having to present something that resists identification. Lyotard often describes this as the challenge of having to 'present the unrepresentable' and connects it to his deep interest in Judaism, for instance, in Heidegger and 'the Jews' (1988) or the late 'D'un trait d'union' in Misère de la philosophie). For him, the ineluctable demand in Judaism to testify but without representing connects to the demand to follow on from an affect but with the impossibility of accurately representing it. Thus, for Lyotard, the

demand to bear witness to the Holocaust is necessarily without end because the affect that drives the demand can never be assuaged yet must always be answered. This state of being 'beyond measure' is important for his treatment of affects, since measure would allow for cognitive treatments and comparisons of affects. This does not mean that we should eschew knowledge; on the contrary, it means that knowledge must be supplemented by testimony to the event. Justice requires knowledge *and* affect.

Affects are material events. They happen in the body and in relation to other material occurrences (the taste happens in response to an external prompt, a smell or a foodstuff). However, as much as affects resists ordered representation so does the prompting matter (sounds, visions, things touched, things read). So Lyotard is committed to a view of matter as different from objects or any scientific determination of objective reality, because the matter that accompanies affects must allow for their capacity to resist identification and knowledge. This view recurs through his work and allows him to counter forms of naturalism, but it also lays him open to criticisms concerning a form of dogmatism with respect to material reality. Lyotard would appear to have to have a non-scientific and in principle unverifiable definition of matter, because he claims that matter is not solely determined by the natural sciences nor defined through philosophical definitions of objective reality. Yet this is not the case, because he resists offering a definition counter to naturalistic ones. Instead, he seeks to convince us that we should allow for the moving nature of matter on the evidence of the occurrence of affects and *in addition to* scientific accounts. Lyotard does not offer a pure theory about the form of matter, but a combination of descriptions of what matter must be given the occurrence of affects and given our creative responses to them (where we create new forms with them rather than seek to represent and identify them within established frameworks).

### Art against recuperation

The connection of matter and affect comes out most strongly and is explained best in Lyotard's studies of art and artists. He describes artists as working with a matter that drives them to experiment through affects. The artist is then both working through an affect, in an echo of Lyotard's work on Freudian anamnesis, and creating new affects by allowing matter to stand as something that is not simply an object of knowledge. For example, in his many references to Cézanne, Lyotard describes the painter as attempting to create colours that 'vibrate' in such a way as to trigger sensations in the viewer beyond sensations of specific colours. The colours go beyond their objective frame; they are not the colours of something. They also go beyond set meanings and narratives; they do not carry a specific sense but call for new ones. So though we have scientific definitions of matter, we must also have ones that leave a space for matter that drives artistic creation, provides a material for it, and becomes its effect. So when he speaks of the importance of 'motion' for Cézanne, this must supplement objective and psychological approaches to motion with a sense of matter and affect as disruption, including the disruption of exclusive claims to understanding.

The sensitivity and precision of Lyotard's work comes out well in this discussion of painting. He is not saying simply that there are emotions beyond our understanding, nor that the artist 'sees' differently, nor that we can have a romantic view of nature beyond a scientific one. Instead, his point is that there is a cycle of affects prompted by and carried through matter, where the artist is both driven by a material event and creator of one. Matter in the art-work must be thought of in conjunction with affects, so there is never simply matter, nor simply affect. All the relations are essentially circulating and driven onwards on a cycle of physical demands and creative replies. This is a 'donation', a *given to* and a *given by* art as affect and matter, where neither of them nor any of their combined individual instances can be separated out as the grounding moment for true knowledge or true ungraspable feeling: "It is not the search for the condition, impersonal or not, of the given which immobilized Cézanne before his mountain; it is the search for its donation. Phenomenology cannot reach donation because, faithful to the philosophical tradition of the Occident, it is still a reflection on knowledge, and the function of such a reflection is to absorb the event, to recuperate the Other in the Same." ('Discours, figure' in The Lyotard Reader and Guide, 45)

In parallel to this resistance to the desire to recuperate the otherness of matter and affects into knowledge, Lyotard's essays resist recuperation into final theories or argument, ideas or visions. This is not out of any preciousness or elitism, much less out of a desire to fool readers or to adopt a false depth. Rather, his essays lead us to the connection of fields with their 'Others', that is, with that which is supposed to be kept outside them, or lies unconscious within them, denied but at work in strange and unpredictable ways. Like the art he spends so long describing and interacting with (much longer than any other topic) his works repay greater attention to their detail rather than a focus on their final points or arguments. Detail here means a combination of material with sensation: how an ironic style can connect distant arguments by revealing and triggering strange yet accurate sensations. So The Differend, for instance, can be read as a thesis about certain types of legal and extra-legal conflicts, but its aphoristic style is also suited to a retracing of influences and consequences between multiple political desires and philosophical positions. This is not in order to finally condemn any single position, but to get a better sense of what it presupposes and leads to, of which political desires and dreams it may commit us to and with which commitments about the resolution – the false resolution – of underlying disputes and claims. Lyotard's works are therefore deliberately suggestive in a sense taken from Freudian anamnesis. Yet, even in this link to Freud as key influence, we learn little from Lyotard if we think of him as Freudian or anti-Freudian. He is a critical, constructive and inventive essayist in his own right, always helping us to read in ways that point us towards unexpected omissions and rich associations. This should not be seen as a luxury, something we can afford only when all goes well – that is – never. It is rather a necessity driven by the requirement to remind ourselves of what we have excluded illegitimately, triggered by an affect we cannot ignore, that we must attempt to testify to, whilst never letting ourselves rest with the illusion that we have succeeded with a final just outcome: "The articulated phrase and the affect-phrase can 'meet' only in missing each other. From their differend, there results a wrong. If articulation and inarticulation are irreducible to one another, this

wrong can be said to be radical.” (‘The affect-phrase’ in The Lyotard Reader and Guide, 105)