

By way of an Introduction: These pages contain individual chapters from my 1990 book, Postmodern Sophistications. I have obtained the rights to the essays am making them available separately. The entire text of the book is also available on Research Gate.

The underlying aim of this collection of essays was to question the opposition between the Sophists and Plato. That classic dispute has been the model for many discussions of tensions within our society:: on the one hand you have the clever manipulative salesmen who care nothing about truth. On the other hand the rigorous scientific investigation that never quite makes contact with politics. Rootless nihilism vs. naturally grounded values. Anarchy vs. Rules.

In this book I developed a pragmatic middleground, using themes from Heidegger and Dewey; in later writings I rely more on Hegel. But the point remains the same: don't listen to the Straussians and others who try to force on our politics or art or philosophy a simple opposition between truth-loving traditionalists (Socrates) and flaky relativistic postmoderns (the Sophists). It was not so simple in Greece and it's not so simple today.

Part of the book deals with postmodern critiques of rational knowledge, with Lyotard and Habermas on center stage. Their opposition between postmodern and modern views remains relevant, although post-1990 developments in deconstruction and critical theory have widened and deepened the debate. The points made in these essays remain useful, if not complete.

The second part of the book deals with architecture. The word postmodern has gone out of fashion in architecture. But the earlier use of the term for an attempt to bring substantive content into formal modernity retains important.

My conclusions about postmodern architecture's failure to escape modern distance from history also remain true, as does my argument that

that proclaimed modern distance from history is itself an illusion, that we are more embedded in history than the moderns wanted to think, although that embodiment is not as total and restrictive as we have imagined true of our ancestors.

If you find any of these ideas useful, true, provocative, let me know. If you find them absurd or useless airy nothings, I'd still be delighted to learn from your reactions.

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This chapter examines the face-off between the defiant modernist Jürgen Habermas and the self-proclaimed postmodern Jean-François Lyotard.

Chapter 4. Postmodern Sophists : Lyotard vs. Habermas

The fear of the Sophist is the fear that we may be so manipulated that we have no secure place to collect ourselves, and no time to stop and think. In the previous chapter I tried to diminish that fear by examining its presupposition. But many thinkers who would accept my conclusion would not accept the further, postmodern claim that we have no unified self to collect. Indeed that seems to open the way for the Sophists: without a secure center how could we think critically? In this and the next chapter I explore the issue of criticism without security; later the issue will recur in thinking about architectural decisions. Here I discuss Jürgen Habermas and Jean-François Lyotard, who are often taken as representative modernist and postmodernist. Each believes the other insufficiently critical.

Postmodern thinkers try to describe a realm of opinion that does not stand in opposition to a realm of knowledge. The attack on Plato's dream of founded knowledge and on metaphysical centering has become bound up with assaults on other suspected enemies such as logocentrism, patriarchy, and instrumental reasoning. By a curious reversal the quest that Plato envisioned as the guarantee of true human flourishing has

for many postmodern thinkers become linked with repression and false consciousness. The Sophists and their realm of opinion then come as a liberation.

Lyotard and Habermas

In his dialogue *Au Juste* (translated as *Just Gaming*), Lyotard explains how he sees the Sophists as relevant to our life today. The Sophists affirm that there is no knowledge in matters of politics and ethics; there is only opinion. We too must reject the claims of such knowledge, for those claims lead to the continuing "rationalist terrorism" we experience from those with a pretended science of politics, be it capitalist or Marxist. Socrates's quest is no longer credible. Neither are the related stories told by the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century about progressive human liberation or the growing embodiment of the human spirit in the world. Instead of these Socratic and modern tales we are coming to understand the variety of language games and their irreducibility one to another. There is no foundation to reach and no unified story to tell.

Yet we still need a politics. Judgments must be made, and Lyotard admits that the conventionalism about values usually attributed to the Sophists would lead to the conclusion that whatever any group comes to agree on is by definition right for them. In such a situation there would be no possible politics, only consensus. "But we know what that means: the manufacture of a subject that is authorized to say 'we'" (81). In a world where consensus has become a commodity, in a world after the Nazis, we cannot accept conventionalism as the base of political ethics. It would allow injustices that we must reject even though we can give no firmly grounded reason for rejecting them. This is Lyotard's major disagreement with the Sophists. As usually portrayed they would seem to allow actions and regimes that should not be allowed. Lyotard also admits that the Sophists defend a realm of opinion that is too fixed on past practice and convention (and, he should have added, on an unproblematic notion of desire).

Lyotard does argue that at least some of the Sophists went beyond conventionalism. They teach that "there must be laws, but no laws are given." We find ourselves already addressed by prescriptions in our encounter with others. That we be so addressed and have norms placed upon us is a fact prior to any reflection, a fact that cannot be made to go away. Yet no particular norm or prescription can have its content

guaranteed.

Whatever the truth of Lyotard's Lévinasian points about obligation, the historical claim about the Sophists is not convincing, since the arguments for the necessity of law given for instance in the Anonymous Iamblichus involve a kind of cost-benefit analysis that Lyotard elsewhere rejects.

For Lyotard, we are put in the position of obedient listener and we cannot neutralize the address made to us. Yet we cannot take as definitive any particular prescription. Some are unjust. We are addressed; we are called to respond; but we must judge how to respond in each particular case. In doing so we have no rules to follow. In his attempt to ground some particular content, Plato tries to reduce prescriptions to descriptions taken from a superior realm, but this does not certify the prescriptions; it only changes the game. Language games are to be accorded their own autonomy. Prescription should not be reduced to description.

Nor can we return to rational politics based on metaphysical assumptions and methods. By "rational politics" Lyotard refers mainly to conservative natural law theories and doctrinaire Marxist views that claim rational authority. There is not much in Lyotard about the rational politics discussed on the Anglo-American scene derived from the utilitarian and contractarian traditions. Perhaps he knows little about them, perhaps they appear too systematic and metaphysical; perhaps he dismisses these, as would Nietzsche, because he sees them enforcing mediocrity and not allowing the true liberation of a creativity that goes beyond limits and refuses to base life on cost-benefit calculations.

Lyotard describes the problem he sets out to solve in his book *Le différend*: "Given (1) the impossibility of avoiding conflicts (the impossibility of indifference), (2) the absence of a genre of universal discourse for regulating conflicts [Platonic metaphysics and its descendants], or, if you wish, the necessity that the judge be partisan, find, if not a way of legitimating the judgment . . . at least how to save the honor of thinking. (10)" Thinking's honor will be saved if we can avoid "might makes right." Lyotard hopes to overcome conventionalism by joining themes from the Sophists with themes from Kant to create a politics of opinion.

We need to make our judgments in reference to an Idea, in Kant's sense of that word. For Lyotard an Idea is not a rationally constructed concept that gives us criteria for judgment. It is an extension of an existing concept into a description of an unrealized state, a goal that may be impossible to experience (or even contradictory were it to be realized) but can still guide our judgment by giving it a direction. The irreducible differences between the various kinds of language games can be so extended into an Idea. Lyotard proposes the Idea of a society where there is no majority, where all language games are allowed to flourish and new ones constantly invented, and none are allowed to dominate the others. This Idea does not provide rules for deciding any particular dispute, but it gives a direction or horizon within which we can have room to feel our reactions to a particular case. This mirrors what Kant says about aesthetic, rather than moral, judgments.

Lyotard would also like to have something like Kant's negative moral judgments, a way of saying that this or that particular claim or language game cannot be reconciled with the Idea. He realizes the difficulties of this and of his position generally, since it implies that he, at least, is taking the stance of one who prescribes for all language games. To prescribe noninterference is still to prescribe. On this see Lyotard's remarks in *Just Gaming* about his own descriptions (51) and his laughter when the objection is brought against his prescriptions (100), and the perceptive deconstruction of Lyotard's text in Weber 1985. In a later essay, "*Judicieux dans le différend*," Lyotard tries to describe this Kantian attitude in more detail, without reference to the Sophists (Lyotard 1985, 195-236).

As ideal citizens of the realm of opinion, for Lyotard, we would constantly be inventing new moves and "master strokes" in the language games we find ourselves involved in. And we would be creating new games involving new rules. Despite their diversity, language games and forms of life remain structures and forms that cannot capture that which is unrepresentable, desire, life. We must honor this uncapturable by constant innovative ferment. The postmodern person is always to be moving beyond the language of the tribe, acquiescing in nothing, always creating anew. Lyotard admits (1984, 79) that the postmodern extends that part of the modern movement that aimed at

always starting over from new beginnings.

There is a serious problem with Lyotard's demand for the creation of new language games as it is stated in *Le différend*. His notion of a language game encompasses several different levels: (a) the standard Austinian examples such as describing, promising, prescribing (what he calls *régimes de phrases*), (b) more extended speaking that involves linking many kinds of sentences towards some chosen goal (what he calls *genres de discours*), (c) concrete institutional examples such as getting married, (d) very complex activities, such as present-day capitalism, that seem to be built up out of the other levels. It is not clear what constant innovation would mean on the first level, nor whether the others are sufficiently alike for his injunctions to be applicable on all levels.

Whatever the problem with this injunction, and elitist as it may be, it plays an important role. In transposing an aesthetic goal of originality to the broader realm of language games generally, Lyotard introduces constant criticism and innovation into the realm of opinion. In its way this plays the same role as Plato's eros, the search for fuller reality that keeps us dissatisfied with where we are. Like eros it is a manifestation of desire, but not a desire for totality and fulfillment. We do not search for ever deeper grounds but for ever newer moves and games, and there is no final goal to specify criteria for judging novelty or mastery. Yet there is criticism; if a new form of life catches on and spreads (as might, for example, a new way of painting, or a managerial system with a new hierarchy of values) the effect is a criticism of the old way of life for not embodying our desire. Such changes, however, do not follow any linear progress towards some perfect way of life.

Lyotard's critics do not find this adequate. There has been an acrimonious debate between Habermas and Lyotard concerning the role of rational agreement. For Habermas, Lyotard's fragmented vision provides no real place for a community to recollect itself and think critically about its goals and practices. While Habermas would agree in rejecting the isolated critical ego that withdraws to some secure point in order to picture the world, he would not accept Lyotard's fragmentation of language. In so far as we are self-conscious about acting within a community that shares values, that is, in

so far as we speak a language in anything like a modern mode, Habermas believes we are involved in one overarching process of coordinating our actions through seeking for truths based on rational argument.

Language is not simply a code for transmitting information between computing devices; language exists as and within the net of interpersonal relations that bind people together into a community. Those relations allow us to feel and act in common. Coordinating action is not simply a matter of arranging parallel responses to stimuli. In its fullest sense, such coordination demands that we all act, together, as rational agents. It is this conjunction of rationality and sociality that in various ways distinguishes Habermas from the Sophists, from Lyotard, and from Plato.

Habermas is not Lyotard, because for him language games are all involved in a larger structure. In order to coordinate action among rational speakers, they must implicitly offer each other assurances that they are able to meet challenges about the truth of what they say, its appropriateness to the situation, and their sincerity in speaking. Often, established institutional criteria can be used for settling these issues of truth, appropriateness, and sincerity, but with speech acts that are not tightly bound to institutional procedures, real communication requires an implicit promise that those three dimensions of validity can be explicitly discussed and their claims satisfied. We have the power to step above our practices and question them for their validity. This means that even in the case of communication that is institutionally structured, the norms of the institution can be questioned for validity whenever the participants desire. And the procedures used to settle those questions can themselves be queried in the same manner. Any language game exists as a particular way of structuring this basic web of intersubjective promises and claims, which has as its guiding ideal a rationally motivated consensus about the world and our interpersonal connections.

While this sounds like the Socratic story as Plato tells it, for Habermas there is no individual enlightenment at the end of the dialogue, only mutual agreement. There is no demand that some absolute foundation be reached; Habermas is concerned that challenges to validity claims be always appropriate, but such rationality is procedural in nature, and its results are always provisional.

Although Habermas does not demand a Platonic substantive base for rationality, Lyotard and others portray him as a "dinosaur of the Enlightenment" (Lyotard 1985, 168) who continues Plato's hopeless quest for certitude and consensus. On the other hand Habermas has insisted that the seemingly radical claims made by Lyotard and others, claims reminiscent of the Sophists, are crypto-conservative. He charges that proponents of the postmodern who see the Enlightenment as a failed or totalitarian project of rationalization provide no process by which existing institutions or culture can be challenged in any way that can command legitimate assent. They leave us open to persuasion and manipulation, and at most they recommend counter-persuasion. But if this is all that is available then there is no politics, only social engineering.

Lyotard too believes that there is more to language than information transfer. But rather than stressing interpersonal connections and the reform of institutional goals and criteria, he sees a need to violate established language games by making new statements that cannot be communicated in clear language. As he says, "the problem [is] not consensus (Habermas's *Diskurs*), but the unrepresentable, the unexpected power of the Idea, the event as the presentation of an unknown and unacceptable phrase which then gains acceptance by force of experience" (1986, 217, cf. 1984, 81-82). "The work of the artist or scientist consists precisely in seeking operators capable of producing phrases that have never been heard before and are thus by definition--at last at first--noncommunicable." "The important thing in art is the production of works which bring into question the rules constituting a work as such." (Lyotard 1986, 212, 214)

Lyotard's creative individual makes new master-strokes and new rules that are unexpected by those who play the ordinary games. What is important now is "suppleness, speed, and the ability to metamorphose" (1986, 219). So too the Sophists worked surprising moves. Lyotard emphasizes that they were *antilogikoi*, always finding two or more opinions, always questioning received ways, always refusing to let opinion stay settled down. In *The Postmodern Condition* Lyotard urges disputation and paralogism in order to stimulate conflict and novelty. But the Sophistic refusal to let opinions stay settled was a stage in the process of "making the weaker case appear the stronger." The multiplicity of opinions was involved in a strategy of persuasion that leads

the listener to accept what the Sophist wants him to think. The Sophists were not interested in a multiplicity of opinions for its own sake.

The darker side of Sophistic persuasion is invoked by opponents of postmodernism. Instead of the Sophists as innovators, we have Callicles's lust for power. The *Protagoras* portrays the Sophist as teaching manipulation in the name of education. The historical Gorgias, in his *Defense of Helen*, is eloquent about the power that persuasion has over opinion: Helen is blameless because she has been manipulated through words. Is this any different from what Lyotard proposes?

I argued earlier that we should not share Plato's extreme fears about the Sophists, though we need to be alert and critical. But it is not very clear what kinds of individual or community self-reflection helps the process of criticism. Habermas says: "Post-empiricist philosophy of science has provided good reasons for holding that the unsettled ground of rationally motivated agreement among participants in argumentation is our only foundation--in questions of physics no less than in those of morality. (Habermas 1982, 238)"

Lyotard would agree that we stand on unsteady ground, but not with the phrase "rationally motivated agreement among participants in argumentation." If by "rationally motivated" we were to mean "acceptable according to the rules of the game," Lyotard would agree, but he would claim that the rules of the game themselves can be changed and there is no rule or process for agreeing on new rules.

Habermas, on the contrary, claims that the process of communication as rational agents guarantees the possibility of stepping up the area for discussion and consensus to a higher level where we can work at agreeing on rules or changes in rules. Relying on the goals and criteria implicit in the structure of communicative action, we can fight against mystified and distorted agreement where relations of force or causality, rather than evidence and validity, determine our beliefs and practices. Lyotard, claims Habermas, has no way of distinguishing between legitimate and ideological agreement about the rules for forms of life. He leaves us no recourse against Sophistic persuasion.

A German Plato and a French Sophist?

Just how far can we pursue the parallels between Plato and Habermas, Lyotard

and the Sophists? Is it significant that just those darker aspects of the Sophists that most bothered Plato tend to be downplayed in Lyotard's presentation of their views?

Plato's Sophists, in so far as they talk about truth at all, subordinate it to persuasion, and end by making all use of language instrumental. Plato proposes a new discourse, the metaphysical quest and its dialogical method, which escapes means-end calculations, though it serves the larger purpose of grounding the individual and society. Similarly, Habermas accuses the postmoderns of being unable to distinguish persuasion from argument, and he urges a liberating self-critical discourse.

Plato seems close to Habermas in many ways, but Habermas can be made to look more Platonic than he is. For one thing, Plato makes a sharp distinction between the unforced dialogue of philosophy and the force and violence of action in the world. The difficulty of returning the philosopher back into the cave, the willingness to use the noble lie, and the belief that the multitude can never philosophize all indicate that for Plato there was a difficult transition from the purified atmosphere of Socratic discourse to the realm of practical decisions. Habermas refuses the strict separation (found also in Hannah Arendt) of the idealized realm of discourse from the realm of strategic action. His ideal discourse is tied to the task of coordinating action, and so always potentially involved with power and violence.

Also, Plato seeks personal unity and fulfillment, and a grounded effective community life, by means of direct contact with substantive truth, which Habermas would deny we can achieve. Yet, Plato's practice is closer to Habermas than is Plato's doctrine. I argued earlier that as dialogue extended and practical results were not forthcoming, the end of the metaphysical quest was indefinitely postponed. As the search became longer and deeper, in the dialogues and in the Academy, the search itself, with its concomitant virtues and pleasures and its internally structured activity of criticism, became self-sufficient. The metaphysical goal remained as a distant pole orienting the way of discussion. The resulting mixed discourse, seeking the final truth yet finding its satisfaction in the incremental criticisms made during the search, closely parallels Habermas's notion of the Idea of uncoerced communication as a norm for everyday communicative action and criticism.

If Habermas is not quite Plato, neither does Lyotard quite fit with the Sophists. It is true that he locates himself on the side of rhetoric and persuasion. Speaking of one of his previous books, Lyotard explains that it was not meant to present an argument.

Here is a book the writing of which . . . perpetrates a kind of violence What is scandalous about it is that it is all rhetoric; it works entirely at the level of persuasion This is a book that aims to produce effects upon the reader, and its author does not ask that these effects be sent back to him in the forms of questions. This kind of writing is generally taken to be that of the rhetorician and of the persuader, that is, of the maker of simulacra, of the sly one, the one who deceives. To me, it is the opposite.

Lyotard explains that in the Platonic dialogue each participant is really trying for the power to control the effect of his words on the other. This produces a discourse in which each of the participants is, in principle, trying to produce statements such that the effects of these statements can be sent back to their author so that he may say: this is true, this is not true, and so on. In other words, so that he can control, or contribute to the control of, these effects.

By contrast, the more rhetorical style of the books in question opened up a space for the reader, who is not dominated by the author.

I was trying . . . to limit myself to the delivery of a mass of statements barely controlled in themselves, and, insofar as the relation to the addressee is concerned, they were drawn up more in the spirit of the bottle tossed into the ocean than in that of a return of the effects of the statements to their author. Without knowing it, I was experimenting also with a pragmatics that, for some Sophists, is a decisive aspect of the poetic. . . . These theses are advanced not in order to convince or to refute but to persuade--let us say, to take hold of or to let go These theses are not up for discussion. But actually they can be discussed. . . . It presupposes that the reader does not allow himself or herself to be

intimidated, if I may say so." (Lyotard 1985, 4-5)

It is clear that Lyotard is not identifying his attempts with the manipulation traditionally attributed to the Sophists. Yet his talk about "effects" intentionally blurs the distinction between convincing by argument and convincing by force. How does something "take hold"? While he admits that the most rhetorical of texts can still be discussed and its theses analyzed, he does not allow that a second text can reexamine and test the truth of the first text, as Socrates would claim.

It is not really a matter of arriving at the truth of the content of the theses of the book, but rather a question of coming to grips with the new effects produced by the new situation of a joint discussion. And there will be no attempt then . . . to tell the truth of . . . the other books; it will be rather an attempt to produce a new book. The effects that had been produced upon us will be constitutive elements of the new book . . . not the clarification, the correct version, of the previous ones, but one of their effects upon two addressees, you and me, who are in no way privileged. (Lyotard 1985, 6)

This notion of the effect of a text leaves many open questions. How does one bring it about that the reader is not intimidated? Whose responsibility is it to do so? Is it enough to presuppose that the reader will be alert and tough, and that it is up to the reader alone to judge what kinds of effects are appropriate, or should the writer exercise self-restraint? Are there kinds of effects that are never appropriate?

In his discussion of terrorism Lyotard emphasizes the need to deal directly with another party and not manipulate through threats to a third person. Direct assassination attempts are more acceptable than holding hostages. Might there be a textual or dialogical analogue to this distinction?

Still, despite his vagueness, Lyotard's comments about not controlling the effect of his words show that for him rhetoric is not a matter of calculative means-end rationality. At its best it is neither pure self-expression nor pure calculation but a continual, often mutual creation of novelty. This distances his ideas from the Sophists, since for them rhetoric involves calculation of effects and mobilization of means to

success.

Habermas, on the other hand, does hold that discourse should return to the author in the form of questions, so that the effect of the discourse can be mutually assented to. True mutual dialogue is not a form of control but a means to rationally motivated agreement. "The fundamental intuition connected with argumentation can best be characterized from the process perspective by the intention of convincing a universal audience and gaining general assent for an utterance" (1981, 26). This distinguishes argumentation from rhetoric since rhetoric always works with an eye to the limited factual situation of its audience; knowing your audience provides the "handles" persuasion needs. An audience defined in completely formal, universal terms offers no definite points of contact for the rhetorician to use in calculating the means of persuasion.

The generality of the intended audience can also pose a difficulty for Habermas, since the goal of gaining universal assent will only work if the universal audience can be described in such a way as to allow the intention of addressing it. The notion of shared coordination of action allows Habermas to find some constraints on speaking, since speaker and audience share goals that can be defined in a purely formal way. Whether these universal goals do not cause Habermas other problems will be an issue in a later chapter concerning the role of historical and traditional content, a role that I think neither Lyotard nor Habermas have described correctly.

One way of distinguishing Lyotard from Habermas is to say that for Lyotard the only possible description of the universal audience would be as "players of some language games," while Habermas wants to describe the audience in terms of the specific language game of communicative action, which involves a whole network of speech acts and their requirements that characterize any speaker.

I am not sure Habermas would or should agree to the description of communicative action as a language game, particularly given Lyotard's broad use of that term, but the disagreement concerns how much or how little is needed to characterize speakers or language users in general.

For Lyotard the general picture is of a competition (an *agon*) where innovations

strive for an acceptance that comes not by rational rules but by something close to an act of aesthetic judgment. Justice involves not consensus but respect for boundaries and differences. Habermas orients language towards consensus, and insists on the primacy of communicative action. Even if it is not the only function of language, communicative action overrides the others as the vehicle of a growing social self-awareness.

Habermas thinks of human relations with an eye on Hegel's notion of mutual recognition in an intersubjective network where the parties agree because they have cooperated in creating (or at least validating) their relationship in general and in detail. But this is not through a social contract between already fully formed individuals. In Hegel's vision of society I attain my individuality and selfhood only in cooperation with others, through actions and structures that recognize others as full persons who are at the same time recognizing me as a full person. History is the story of the gradual purification and rationalization of the structures by which people come to recognize and constitute one another as selves. Complete mutuality is attained when there are no inequalities built into the structures by which persons attain their selfhood; then social structures and acts come about through the mutual approval of each member. In such a state nothing is different from what it appears to be: there is no hidden content or secret interest. The reasons for any structure or act are in principle accessible to all.

For Lyotard there can be no public sphere of discourse that is not divided and agonistic. He speaks not of agreement but of moves and counter-moves, master-strokes and changing the rules. A new language game may sweep us along or answer to desires that go beyond their present articulations, a new prescriptive address may call us to respond, but none of this happens in the transparent, mutually controlled intersubjective space that Habermas sees as ideal.

So, although Lyotard and Habermas both agree that language is not essentially a tool for calculated manipulation, the opposition between them can resemble the Sophists versus Plato, at least in terms of agonistic display versus cooperative inquiry.

Yet, as we have seen, it would be too simple to say that Habermas favors critical judgment and Lyotard opposes it. Lyotard sees constant innovation as a critical tool. Nor do the targets of his criticism differ much from those Habermas attacks. Despite

Lyotard's talk about rhetoric and persuasion, he as much as Habermas fights the leveling effects of the mass media. Both of them worry about the increasing concentration of education on technical mastery to the exclusion of communicative and creative skills. Both of them are concerned that in our times impersonal systems that maximize efficiency are distorting human ways of interacting. Both examine the structure of our interaction with one another; both seek norms already implied in what we do, norms that when put into practice more explicitly will make room for the voiceless and the exploited to speak effectively. Both seek justice, and agree that in its name we must fight the totalizing forces of modern systems. Both agree that we must develop new social practices that let us take time out from the bombardment of information and pressure, time to think and create anew. In all this Habermas and Lyotard are on the same side, and it is the side Plato would approve.

Facing the media barrage and the distorted communications of the contemporary world, what Habermas urges seems more classical: that we take time to collect ourselves together, to think and demand arguments. He urges mutual recollection and concentration in order to clear the channels of communication. But this is not the same as Plato. Plato wants us to build our city through a dialogue based on the logos we all share, and that deep reason that makes our dialogue possible leads the individual to a vision of the forms definitive of reality. The cooperative group discussion works to facilitate individual enlightenment. Perfected individuals would then form an elite that could apply grounded knowledge in managing a properly ordered community. While Habermas too would have us work cooperatively to establish consensus based on reasoned agreement, this leads to no foundational knowledge nor to any Platonic social manipulation by experts.

Lyotard insists that Habermas would substitute one form of total uniformity for another. But in practice both thinkers urge piecemeal reform. Habermas is not demanding we institute global change all at once, and Lyotard is not telling us to go off and play by ourselves.

For Lyotard, if our communications are distorted, we should invent new ways to communicate. If society is dominated by a few kinds of language games, we should

devise more. Divergence and creativity are the answer: secession, not consensus. This does not mean that we should go away to play new games by ourselves. Such isolation would only create smaller domineering societies. What is needed is a plurality of language games and modes of life acknowledged as such. We think we have that now, but the plurality is dominated by the rules of efficiency and capital accumulation. There is one overriding game in our society: exchange.

Although it is not a process of rational appraisal, the creation of novel language games effects a critique of the world we know. Present practices will be criticized not by discussing them but by creating new practices that by the way they take hold show up the unspoken desires frustrated by previous forms of life. This process does not converge; there is no cumulative learning process such as Habermas describes. New games will be in a public space not structured by any one language game (such as capitalist accumulation) nor by any one set of goals (even ones as refined as Habermas's consensual structures).

That public space will be open and tolerant; is Lyotard, for all his radical panache, a liberal at heart? He denies the charge, "Does what I say lead to an advocacy of neoliberalism? Not in the least. Neoliberalism is itself an illusion. The reality is concentration in industrial, social, and financial empires served by the States and the political classes" (Lyotard 1986, 218). But this is not enough; neoliberals also fight concentrations of power (cp. Rorty 1988, chapters 3 and 8).

What makes Lyotard in one sense more a liberal than Habermas is that participants in Lyotard's different language games are never forced to justify either the rationality or the appropriateness of the games they play. In his concern to safeguard the different forms of life from external domination Lyotard renders them immune to internal challenge, except through the creation of a competing game that may seduce away their players. Because there is no mutuality demanded, judgments of justice, about which Lyotard is very concerned, come only from outside.

Modern and Postmodern

While Habermas champions modernity, he opposes the contemporary reduction of human action to the manipulation of objects, and the reduction of rationality to

instrumental calculation. He urges that these only exist in the broader context of communicative action and rationality whose liberation is the true modern project.

For Lyotard "the issue in modernity . . . was not, and is not, . . . simply the Enlightenment; it was, and is, the institution of will into reason" (1986, 216). Rational calculation is now at the service of a will to power that has only its own infinite productive expansion at heart. Measure and efficiency spread domination everywhere, but there are no dominating individuals or classes. Habermas opposes this Heideggerian description of the modern scene; for him the symptoms Lyotard discusses show not a sickness at the heart of reason and will but the effects of current capitalist economic and social structures, which allow "systemic" considerations of efficiency and productivity to invade areas of life which should be managed by consensual methods.

Both Habermas and Lyotard oppose the standard modern purified notion of the individual. Such individuals populate many philosophical and social scientific theories; they consist of a set of preferences coupled with abilities to choose. These individuals use their freedom to maximize their success in realizing their preferred goals. Their social relations are chosen or constructed with these interests in mind. Social reality results from the aggregation of these individuals and their negotiations. Both Habermas and Lyotard believe in "thicker" individuals whose relations to community are more intimate because individuality is itself a social construct.

So far as modern thought attempts to devise universal formal systems of representation on a different level than the content they unify, neither Habermas nor Lyotard are modern. Habermas argues that his analyses of discourse must be submitted to the structures of discourse they reveal (Habermas 1979). Lyotard claims that his analyses of language remain submitted to all the operations and forms they describe; there is no independent meta-language; the synthesis of the series is also an element in the series (Lyotard 1983, no. 97).

Habermas's individuals strive not simply to realize individual preferences, but to question and validate their preferences amid a social process of clarification and reasoning. That process is not something added to their already finished individuality; it is in the process of rational interaction that they become fully individualized. When we take

time out to reflect and collect ourselves, it is our dialogically constituted selves we recover. Society is not an aggregation of independent atoms.

Lyotard's individuals are also more complex than modern preference machines. Individuals are constituted by their social relations in the varied language games they play. But they do not have a unified center either individually or in community; there is no one "self" constituted by one drive for truth and consensus. Neither the individual nor the community can get itself together to the degree Habermas would require. The social bond has many strands; we play many roles in many games; there is no overarching or underlying unity, only the need to be involved in games and to play them well. Language games do not emerge from one unified player in us or one unified "we" among us bound by one set of rules of discourse. Indeed, "the human" could well be "replaced by a complex and aleatory assemblage of (nondenumerable operators) transforming messages" (Lyotard 1986, 217-218). Yet Lyotard still shares Habermas's demand for judgment: not every game should be allowed. Lyotard labors to impose conditions of justice on this multiplicity of games without decreeing either a central self or a unified meta-game.

Both Habermas and Lyotard would agree that there is no way to avoid making judgments case by case on conflicts and novel forms of life. They disagree about which Idea opens the space within which judgment functions. The controversy is between Lyotard's aesthetic judgment, and Habermas's rational consensus. It is here that Plato and the Sophists appear yet again, in the old fight between poetry and philosophy.

Habermas aims at showing that we have ideals and goals built into language that give us a chance to criticize apparent truths. It is just this he thinks Lyotard and the postmoderns do not provide, so they leave us in the hands of the Sophists. Lyotard suggests that a combination of individual judgment and aesthetic novelty can do the job that needs to be done.

But what is the job that needs doing? I argued that the hopes and fears that motivate Plato's strong distinction between reason and rhetoric involve metaphysical fantasies on both sides. If we cannot deploy a perfect method neither do we have to avoid some shapeless persuasive force. Yet even if the Sophists are not so powerful as

Plato thought, there is critique to be done. The job is not necessarily that of getting free of all conditioning and opacity, but rather of criticizing and building as best we can. But can that be done without at least aiming at some full self-knowledge and self-transparency? What kind of self-criticism is possible for us in a world that is neither Platonic nor Sophistic? When we are building or rebuilding our world or our city, when we are facing one another and our differing traditions, how do we talk to one another in a way that is self-critical and not merely talking "to have an effect"?

My approach in the later chapters will be broadly pragmatic. I will not try to defend the existence of some one structure that is the key to self-criticism, so I will not be offering a master argument for such a structure; rather I will make a series of observations and claims that are meant to keep open the variety and heterogeneity of our modes of self-criticism and their practical import. Later, in discussing changes in architectural vocabularies, I will propose something more similar to Lyotard's innovation than to Habermas's consensual process, but still later, in discussing the city as a whole, I will come back to Habermas and agree that Lyotard's mode of self-criticism does not allow the mutual dialogue that is necessary for living and building in the finite spaces we must share together.