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Enframing: Art's Epoche and the Promethean Community

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I. Art, Technology and the Cosmopolis

I have taken the title of this paper, the word "enframing," from a text by Jean-François Lyotard, who in turn took it from a text by Martin Heidegger. As is well known, Heidegger uses it to describe the essence of technology, which according to him is characterized by what he calls *Gestell*, that is, framing or enframing, by which he means a very particular, we might say "modern" or even "late modern," way of gathering together and revealing the world, a particular way of giving it meaning and allowing it to be understood. In a famous essay on technology, he describes an "enframing" of *phusis* or nature by *techne*, by technology. The essence of technology is to enframe nature in order to master it, which in turn will lead to the "mastery" of technology itself. Modern technology, says Heidegger, reveals what is actual or real in a very particular way, as what he calls "standing-reserve" (20).

If Heidegger's concern is to identify a certain underlying essence of technology, Lyotard, for his part, usurps this term to speak of what he calls "an enframing [*arraisonnement*] of art" ("Enframing" 177)—though this enframing, too, taken as it is from Heidegger, is directly linked to technology.[1] Lyotard's interest would appear to be in a kind of situating or revealing of art by a very particular type of technology: global infrastructures of telecommunication. Perhaps we can summarize Lyotard's questions in the following way: Where does art sit with regard to contemporary technological systems? How is it related to communication, including so-called "global" communication? How should we think art's complex relation to *techne*, and

1. Although Lyotard uses *arraisonnement* in this text, it is perhaps worth noting that Heidegger's *Gestell* is also translated by the French *dispositif*, a term with its own history and importance in many of Lyotard's works.

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in particular to the programmability of modern technologies? And where does it sit, then, within what Lyotard calls the "programs" (ethnic, computational, audio-visual, educational, national, political, etc.) of "today"—or at least, the "today" of the short text by Lyotard that I have in mind here, delivered as a lecture in 1985?

Although this little text, "Enframing of Art," was not published in Lyotard's lifetime, we can see its abiding interest, especially for the humanities, given that it contains an explicit attempt by Lyotard to situate art in a "global" context, where the processes of job creation and the modernization of economic, social and cultural infrastructures that he identifies with a certain globalism are linked, on the one hand, to the obvious economic concerns that we all know. But because, as he puts it, "the technologies in question convey 'contents,'" this way of understanding globalism (as the inexorable process of a kind of program of "development," a question to which we shall return) is also linked to aesthetics "in a very broad sense," that is, aesthetics taken as a question of sensibility ("Enframing" 181). In this respect, he remains close to Heidegger's conception of technology as a particular way of revealing the world. On the one hand, sensibility is linked to *aisthesis*, to the perception or sensation that this old Greek word invokes, and we might note that Lyotard has a very particular understanding of *aisthesis*, as "matter given in form." It is this formed matter that occasions judgments of taste or aesthetic pleasure (Lyotard, *Heidegger and the "jews"* 4). But if "matter" is to be formed before it can be said to have meaning, then sensibility is also directly linked to meaning, and not just—or even primarily—the meaning of the work of art, but of the world itself. Technology, then, plays a role in the very meaning and structure of the world. What role might art also play in this economy?

We can see that the stakes of such questions are relatively high. Nothing less than the question of the community, including the "global" community of human beings, is being raised here. On the one hand, Lyotard tells us, telecommunication technologies are "mnemotechnologies," technologies of common or collective memory ("Enframing" 179). They are thus linked to humanity as a social body, to its very organisation into a body or bodies. But this also means that social development comes to be associated with the development of these very technologies, a state of affairs which constitutes, according to Lyotard, "a very new fact in the history of communities" (181). Such technologies have a cosmopolitan import. On the one hand, then, this strange and slightly obscure little text of Lyotard's would appear to offer

a way to situate his views on art in the broader context of his writings on the epistemological and political "crises" of the late 20th century (and, one presumes, early 21st century), crises most often—if at times somewhat too easily—associated with what he sometimes calls the "postmodern" (the texts I have in mind date mostly from the 1980s and 1990s). Such a discussion may even allow us to problematize or at least complicate this term somewhat in the process. On the other hand, given Lyotard's willingness here to place the question of an "enframing" of art in terms of a (very problematic) global or cosmopolitan human community, this text will also allow for some reflections on what thinking the human and its community might mean once the very idea of "humanity" has been questioned. I will not confine myself to this short piece in what follows, then, but I will allow it to organize, insofar as it is able, these brief reflections.

Ⅱ. Technoscience and Idiotic Tele-Communication

Of course, societies have always developed along with technology in some sense. But let us recall Heidegger's claim that modern technology marks a change from the older technology of the craftsperson insofar as it appears not simply as a revealing (*Entbergen*) but as what he calls a challenging (*Herausfordern*). All technology is both instrumental and human, "[f]or to posit ends and procure and utilize the means to them is a human activity" (Heidegger 4). In this sense, to address the question of technology is also and at the same time to address the question of the human, as well as the very "human" organization of time into relations of means and ends. Nonetheless, the revealing that "holds sway" in modern technology is different to what has come before, since it makes a demand on nature, the "unreasonable demand that [nature] supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such" (14). The sails of an old windmill do indeed turn in the wind, says Heidegger, but "they are left entirely to the wind's blowing" and make no attempt to "unlock" the energy contained in currents of air in order then to store it (14). A tract of land that is dubbed a coal mining district, on the other hand, "is challenged into the putting out of coal and ore" (14); the hydroelectric plant changes the river, turning it into a supplier of water power (16). The entire meaning of "nature" changes, as does the human relation to it, which is now conceived in terms of mastery (regardless of how unsuccessful this "mastery" may turn out to be).

This particular means of revealing that holds sway in modern technology is what Heidegger calls "enframing" (*Ge-stell*), and we might note that it itself is "nothing technological" (20). It is not the nuts and bolts of technology that is at issue, but what we might perhaps think of—using an idiom that is admittedly more common to Lyotard than to Heidegger—as a certain logic at work in modern technological development. This would at least seem to be what Lyotard is suggesting when he claims that the link between social and technological development is something new in history. Human societies have always made use of a certain amount of *techne*, of technology (I leave aside here the question of other animals). But now, perhaps, a certain technological logic is shaping societies: "the present completion of a *tekhnologos* constitutively at work in the western *logos*" (Lyotard, *The Inhuman* 47).

For the "technological question," at least according to Lyotard, is accompanied by a discourse, an "essentially productivist point of view" that dominates all other discourses and calls for a new "techno-culture" ("Enframing" 181). Though he does not use the language here, this is very close to the logic of what he elsewhere calls "techno-science," a term which is closely linked to the various texts devoted to the "postmodern."

It is by now well known that this word should be approached with some care in Lyotard's work, since the postmodern, whatever it might be, is in any case not a school of thought or a theory (or, indeed, a "fad"); nor, at least in the texts following on *The Postmodern Condition* itself, is it an attempt to designate the contemporary age. Indeed, in its most basic form, it is associated with a crisis in the very understanding of history that would attempt to situate the "postmodern" as yet another in a long line of historical periods. Most famously, the "postmodern condition" can be described as a mistrust or lack of faith in the great philosophico-historical projects of European modernity that promise the emancipation of humanity through the interpretation of a history that is universal for all people (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* xxiii-xxv; "Universal" 314–16). In most of the texts of the 1980s and 1990s, such projects are described as having been replaced today by a single process that Lyotard calls "techno-scientific" development (and sometimes "Development" with a capital 'D')—a process that would be very close to the logic of what Heidegger calls "enframing." Indeed, Lyotard explicitly links the terms in an interview from the late 1980s (Lyotard and Marcadé 217). The "new technologies" have transformed our conception of knowledge and of the passage of that knowledge through education—from the German *Bildung*, a kind of broadening of

the mind, to "quantities of information" fitting with the model provided by computers, which bring along with them "a certain logic, and therefore a certain set of prescriptions determining which statements are accepted as 'knowledge' statements" (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* 4). Knowledge is "exteriorised," says Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition*, separated off from the (speculative) model that sees education as inseparably entwined with "the training (*Bildung*) of minds," becoming rather one more commodity within the late-capitalist system of exchange (4, 32). Since this commodity is essential to the production and maintenance of the mechanisms of power, knowledge as "informational commodity" becomes "a major—perhaps the major—stake in the worldwide [we might even say 'global': *mondiale*] competition for power" (5).

What is important for understanding the role that technology plays in the acquisition and legitimization of knowledge, as Lyotard formulates it in *The Postmodern Condition* but also elsewhere, is that technology follows a particular principle, one that has come to define capitalist society in general: the principle of performativity or of "optimal performance," the maximization of output "(the information or modifications obtained)" and the minimization of input "(the energy expended in the process)" (*The Postmodern Condition* 44). This principle, which gains currency as a result of transformations in technological capacity, itself effects transformations in society as a whole. Such, at least, is the "strategic" hypothesis as Lyotard sets it out in *The Postmodern Condition* (7). But it is also behind his claim in *The Postmodern Explained* that "[s]uccess is the only criterion of judgment technoscience will accept" (18). For technoscience cannot say what success is, nor, importantly, why it might be good, just, or even true—since, as Lyotard puts it, "success is self-proclaiming, like a ratification of something heedless of any law" (18–19). It therefore cannot be universalized, which in turn means it cannot complete the project of modernity, even though it has won out over the other possible candidates for what Lyotard refers to as "the universal finality of human history" (18). Technoscience thus appears to be another project of emancipation, but in fact it only masquerades as one. Indeed, it is the destruction of such projects. Its principle of constant development is driven by a dynamic that in fact takes no account of human needs (83). It proceeds, rather, entirely according to its own logic of improved performance, of constant building, promotion, usefulness and utility. Rather than a project, technoscientific development is a *program* (Lyotard, *The Inhuman* 68–69).

Such "programs" will come to be described as "inhuman" by the time of

the text of that name.[2] They are what Lyotard invokes in the "Enframing" essay when he asks about art's place in them. These programs are deterritorializing, which means they threaten the loss of what he calls the "idiomaticity" or originality of territorial communities—the loss of what is unique or singular about different regions and peoples, for example. They thus announce "a crisis of originality" that Lyotard sees as one of the primary concerns of a so-called "globalized" world. And the stakes are rather higher than one might be tempted to think, since it is precisely this originality that, in the "absence of common origin," as Lyotard puts it—and also, we might add, in the absence of a universal narrative—"is the only thing upon which humanity can form a body": the quality, that is, of "being without qualities" ("Enframing" 183). Perhaps it comes as no surprise, then, that art enters the picture here. For Lyotard claims that of all things, it is art that can suspend the probable (187) and perform what he calls an "*epoche*," a kind of bracketing or suspension, of all programs (189). Technology, understood here as the most all-encompassing of programs, cannot fully "enframe" and master art (any more, in fact, than it can master itself), since the "aesthetic force" of art cannot be contained within the logic of the program itself.

In this text, this power given to art would appear to reside in what Lyotard calls the "idiotic" (*idiotique*) affirmation that is at the origin of art. This "idiotism" invokes both the privacy of *idios/idiōtēs* and the peculiarity of *idiōma*, the idiom—not to mention, no doubt, a certain ignorance, the "stupidity" of a presence that as yet has no clear sense or meaning. As an impulse, it depends, on the one hand, on the common memory and on a kind of tele-communication. But this means that it is also paradoxical, "the unforeseen destination of both the community beyond local determinations and of all ethnic programs" (185). The idiotic affirmation "sends the idiom beyond itself," it suspends it, *epoche* (185). The signature of the work marks an "improbable and unprogrammable authority" inherent to it (185). This

2. Importantly, this "inhumanity" of the technoscientific system is contrasted with another "inhuman," that which accompanies human consciousness as a "secret" to which the soul is hostage (Lyotard, *The Inhuman* 2). Though I will not be able to touch on this second "inhumanity" explicitly here, it can be seen to be operative in the "affectivity" to which we shall return, particularly in terms of the sublime. We can already see that while Lyotard is content to follow Heidegger with regard to what the latter calls *Gestell*, Lyotard's own account goes beyond what one might call a "phenomenology" of the artwork.

idiomatic, idiotic impulse gives itself its authority, for otherwise it would be unauthorized. The work of art is thus epoch-making, both a suspension, *epoche*, and a new beginning.

This idiomaticity would have its effects, or perhaps more properly, its affects. In the text on enframing this appears to be related, at least in part, to its ability to telecommunicate, to telegraph itself beyond any particular context of meaning. Thus, for example, with the paintings of Lascaux, which are in fact TV, says Lyotard ("Enframing" 179). But this can also be linked with the broader concerns of the other texts of this time. If technology is associated with the inscription of a common memory, for which linear writing would provide the model (Lyotard, *The Inhuman* 47), the idiomatic, idiotic gesture of the work of art plays no role in such a program. Precisely in its idiocy, its singularity, it would be linked not to "memory" but to anamnesis and to Sigmund Freud's *Durcharbeitung*, the need to "work through" what strikes a blow to sensibility without being able to register itself there (54). Lyotard refers to a kind of presence that can break the support on which it is prescribed, a "breaking presence" that is neither inscribed nor memorable (55). Rather than Heidegger and the phenomenological tradition, we are here in the realm of Freud's primary repression and the logic of *Nachträglichkeit* that accompanies it: the idiotic, idiomatic gesture of art is a kind of blow that cannot be "recorded" because it propels itself outside of any economy of meaning. It is that in art which strikes the mind without retaining itself there, which, if it can be said to "repeat," appears to arise each time anew. It is thus linked to what Lyotard calls the affect.

We can see that Lyotard's concerns here are very much in keeping with a thinking on art that goes back at least to *Discourse*, *Figure*. The "practical critique of ideology" on the way to which that earlier work presents itself as being "nothing more than a detour" (14) would certainly have its analogues in the power of art to interrupt programs as this is described in the texts with which I am concerned. Nonetheless, the question now is no longer that of a critique of ideology pure and simple, and it is no longer framed in terms of the libidinal. This "blow" that does not inscribe itself in consciousness is much closer to the analyses of the sublime that are more or less contemporaneous with these later texts. Art's "critical capacity" here resides in the fact that it works from "outside" the subject, that it makes its publics "susceptible to every other '*epokhal*' affection" (Lyotard, "Enframing" 187); "prey to unforeseeable feelings," as Lyotard puts it in a text on the sublime (*The Inhuman* 97). If

there remains a reference to Freud in these later works, it is to affectivity and *Nachträglichkeit* more than to libidinal desire.

But in fact, the explicit reference in the text on enframing, perhaps surprisingly, is to Gilles Deleuze, and particularly Deleuzian repetition.[3] This reference to Deleuze arrives quite suddenly and Lyotard does little to contextualize it. Nonetheless, it is this repetition that, in the "Enframing" essay, at any rate, appears to signal this unprogrammability from the point of view of the tele of telecommunication, telegraphy and television. Clearly invoking the secret or "hidden" repetition identified by Deleuze (which, contrary to generality, involves "non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities" [Deleuze 1]) Lyotard refers to it as both an "elementary necessity" and an "originality without end" ("Enframing" 193). I cannot do justice to Deleuze's complex analysis here, but let us note that he associates repetition, at least in part, with "the brutal form of the immediate," a reunification of the singular and the universal that "dethrones every general law, dissolves the mediations and annihilates the particulars subjected to the law" (Deleuze 7; Hallward 151). Associated as it is with imagination and passive synthesis, and with the very constitution of time (Deleuze 70–71), repetition for Lyotard would seem to be at the origins of sensibility itself. This is what makes it epoch-making ("Enframing" 189). And yet it is also a question of telecommunication, of the constant availability of works that are nonetheless singular and "idiotic" (191). Repetition allows the work to telecommunicate "through time and as time," then, but the repetition of this idiotic, always singular gesture produces "results," as we might put it, that cannot be anticipated and thus programmed, that "dethrone" general laws and even "annihilate" the subjects of those laws. If such an inscription were a program, then in the idiom of Lyotard's text it would have to be a program of the incalculable (189).

Technologies of telecommunication, then, seem to appear as double-sided in this text. On the one hand, they threaten the idiomaticity of cultural practices or habits by "telegraphing" memory across cultures, a "global" movement that is already inscribed in writing itself (183). But on the other, they would appear to open the work of art to another kind of tele-graphing,

3. References to Deleuze are not common in Lyotard but he does invoke repetition in some of the texts from the 1980s. See, for one example, "God and the Puppet" (*The Inhuman* 153–64). Whether or not such repetition is always "Deleuzian," however, is another question, and will have to await another discussion.

to an unprogrammable repetition and an "idiomatic differentiation" that is not the work of memory and that suspends the current programs. It is this unprogrammability that prevents the work of art from being (fully) enframed.

The risks and dangers of technoscience are nonetheless clear. Rather than a technology in the service of humanity, the human race is the vehicle for this organizing and instrumentalizing power, this "power to 'put in series'" (Lyotard, *The Inhuman* 53). Human beings even have to "dehumanize" themselves in order to rise to this kind of telegraphy, which, in the name of development, forecloses the possibility of other ends. What is left of the community, and particularly the human community, in the face of this dehumanization? For the Lyotard of these texts this remains a question, formulated in the essay "*Logos* and *Techne*" thus: "Can a *telekoinonia*, a telegraphic community without telos, be constituted around or out of this foreclosure" (54)?

No clear answer is provided in either this or the "Enframing" text—and how could it be, without running the risk of another programming? And yet, perhaps we can still say something about such a possibility, by turning to the texts on the avant-garde that are also implicated here. For it is possible that Lyotard's discussion of the avant-garde could provide us with a way of thinking this problem of community, in a manner quite consistent with the problem of technoscience.

Ⅲ. The Event of the Avant-Garde: An Opening for Politics?

For Lyotard, "avant-garde" is not so much a historical movement of specific artists as it is a kind of "vanguard" of experimentation that counters any (reactionary) "call to order" (*The Postmodern Condition* 73). We might say, any demand to speak sensibly (we can think here of the reception of virtually every major movement in Western art from the Barbizon painters and the Impressionists through to at least the mid-20th century; but we already have a sense that Lyotard would include any "experimental" art right up to today). In this sense, they share something of the "idio(ma)ticity" that all art would appear to at least be open to in the "Enframing" essay. In a famed footnote to the little book called in English *Just Gaming*, Lyotard makes an early attempt to draw a distinction between the modern and the "postmodern" that situates the avant-garde very clearly within the latter. The postmodern is there described in terms of literatures or arts that lack what he calls an addressee, an audience.

This means they also lack a regulating ideal, that is, some idea of what is proper to art, for instance, or of what the public wants and how to satisfy that desire (Lyotard and Thébaud 16). In other words, they lack any norm, and remain outside of any recognized language game (to use Lyotard's Wittgensteinian idiom in this text). Lyotard is quick to point out that this is a political problem and not only "in the usual and simplistic sense of the term" but insofar as it is a problem of the way in which one "views history and society" (10). The question implicates humanism, since it is one of the subject of history, which is to say, of the universal human subject whose adventure history is. The avant-garde does not assume the existence of such a subject, has no audience, "no readers, no viewers, no listeners" (10). The "postmodern" here, still being formulated as a problem, is a condition in which the question of value has not yet been answered, in which there is no subject to whom one speaks and no subject in whose name one speaks:

> To presuppose such an addressee or tutor [i.e., the subject to whom or in the name of whom I speak], is to admit that all the actions that form history, including those of the works in question [that is, those of the "artistic vanguard"], find their ultimate meaning in the accomplishments of a universal subject. It is the idea of such a subject that modern [but within a few pages, "postmodern"] artists refuse. (10)

The avant-garde artist (and by extension, those who are in the "minority" more generally), is willing to go alone, "to be celibate." He or she writes, paints or films without "authorization," as Lyotard puts it in a text on cinema—that is to say, without any authority or even any legitimacy ("Idée" 211). They are incommunicable, then—but not necessarily destined to remain so. If the avant-garde have no addressee, no audience, this does not preclude the formation of such an audience at some later time. The avant-garde work is always able to "wind up producing its own readers, its own viewers, its own listeners," so that one of the effects of such a work is "the constitution of a pragmatic situation that did not exist before" (Lyotard and Thébaud 10). The message itself, and indeed, the *form* of the message, will "elicit its own addressees," positioning sender and receiver only then, when the new pragmatic situation is obtained.

Let us note Lyotard's suggestion in an essay on "Universal History" that "the core, the minority, or avant-garde" might just be that "we" that "anticipates today what liberated humanity might be tomorrow" (323). The suggestion is

one of possibilities, of possibilities present in the very projection of a future. The avant-garde do not obey existing rules, but dare to invent new ones; they thus open the possibility of a different future. David Carroll summarizes the role of the avant-garde thus:

> The importance of the avant-garde for Lyotard is that it continually puts into question the art we already know (or think we know) by producing forms and constructs that force us to ask whether they can be considered to be taken as art and whether, therefore, we really do know what art is and whether we shall ever know. The avant-garde, for Lyotard, always gives to the question "Do we know what art is?" the response "Not yet." (155–56)

The question here is that of the rules by which the "game" of art is played—and this is linked by Lyotard to the question of "reality." Rather than provide the "correct" image of reality, the "correct" form of the real (that is, rather than be "sensible" in the sense of providing an already-understood or understandable work, one that "properly" reflects or reproduces the world as already-conceived), the avant-garde experiments with new forms, and in the process demands that the understanding of "reality" be put into question. Such a demand is uncomfortable—it fails to conform to any *a priori* categories of good or proper representation and has thus an "unrecognizable" quality about it. It is not "well-formed," as we might put it, to invoke the reading of the sublime that is not, in fact, far from this discussion. The call to good order that "realism" signifies for Lyotard is at least in part a reaction to this discomfort, one that itself signals anxiety at the potential loss of what is taken as "real." This call to good order demands conformity to norms as a defense against this crisis. One possible reaction to the anxiety of what Lyotard calls the "lack of reality" of reality is to demand a retreat to the safety of the familiar, to subordinate what is represented (or maybe, presented) to the order of knowledge, the order of the known, of what is already known or understood.

We might recall here Jacques Lacan's claim that, contrary to G. W. F. Hegel's philosopher, "the relation of the artist to the time in which he appears is always a contradictory one" (*The Ethics* 142). The artist for Lacan works against the current of his or her time, "in opposition to reigning norms—including, for example, political norms, or indeed, systems of thought" (142). Lyotard's well-known misgivings about Lacan notwithstanding, this is very close to what he

is getting at here and in the texts on technology, especially with reference to political norms and systems of thought. The importance of the avant-garde (and of the "minority" more generally) therefore reaches beyond the confines of art. Indeed, "science and industry are no more free of the suspicion which concerns reality than are art and writing" (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* 76).

In a text that constitutes one of Lyotard's more direct discussions of the avant-garde, "Answering the Question: What is the Postmodern," he claims that the avant-garde find their "axioms" in the aesthetics of the sublime (*The Postmodern Condition* 77).[4] If the avant-garde artist is one who works to constitute a pragmatic situation that did not exist before (Lyotard and Thébaud 10), the sublime is "a rule awaiting its universality" (Lyotard, *The Differend* 168). Far from coming "after" the modern, the postmodern, according to Lyotard's famous formulation, "would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms" and the consensus of taste that such forms would bring, in order to search "for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable" (*The Postmodern Condition* 81). The sublime in some sense exemplifies the unpresentable—for in the sublime the imagination is unable to form an image adequate to what is sensed, which crisis induces reason to work to present Ideas that are adequate to this event. And Ideas, in the Kantian sense invoked here, cannot have a sensuous presentation. Ideas go beyond the sensible. This means that the "postmodern" artist or writer is in a position similar to that of the philosopher: "the text he writes, the work he produces is not in principle governed by preestablished rules" (81). What the artist, writer, or philosopher have in common, then, is that they "are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*" (81; italics given). Lyotard thus connects the work of the artist, writer or philosopher to the radical singularity of the event. There is a breakdown of sensibility and thinking, but this does not lead to the end of thinking. Quite the opposite: it produces the need for more thought, the need to find new rules or idioms for what defies systems of sensibility or economies of meaning—the

4. I have slightly modified Régis Durand's translation of the title. Although the best known version of this text in English is the one appended to *The Postmodern Condition* that I reference here, it is worth keeping in mind that it was written three years after the book and marks a reconsideration of the notion of the "postmodern" that appears in the earlier work.

need for Ideas. The ordering of the sensible, the delimiting or even "enframing" of what can been seen, heard, recognized, comprehended, is open, as Derrida might say, to a kind of chance, susceptible to be interrupted by what does not appear in good and due form. And because it marks the suspension, the *epoche* of all programs, this "opening" is the place where politics becomes possible.

Lyotard insists on an aspect of *responsibility* with regard to the event, responsibility here being directly linked to the need to respond to what happens, to find an idiom with which to link on to it (it could be said to be broadly Levinasian, then, but only broadly so). Justice, for him, is very closely associated with this need to respond. Put simply, Lyotard is interested in opening a space for those—the avant-garde, the minority—who have no place or voice, no public. This minority would obviously include those whose situation is intolerable. The need is to find a new law, a new rule, perhaps even to define new realities. Indeed, it is the avoidance of this responsibility that leads to the worst kinds of violence. Politics, says Lyotard in *The Differend*, is the threat of the differend, that is, the threat of a disagreement for which there is no mutually recognized third party to judge (138, §190). In a certain sense, one could say that politics, for Lyotard, is in its deepest sense a question of what happens outside of or up against the legal order, not so much in the carrying out of the law (which he would associate with calculation) but in the suspension of its programs. But this means it requires responses that are not confined to that legal order, or that are at least willing to suspend the law of the discourses that govern it. What is at issue is the willingness to recognize that the present genres of discourse, the current programs, may not be adequate to what has happened. For Lyotard, then, the event taken in this sense means that serious political work has yet to begin.

It is not clear exactly how Lyotard understands Heidegger's "enframing" in the little text I have been tracking in this paper. For Heidegger, enframing means a way of revealing or unconcealing, and is, as I have suggested, only one among other modes of revealing—in the way that technoscience, in Lyotard, might be only one (though now dominant) logic of "progress." As I have already indicated, the word Lyotard uses in French (it is a standard translation of Heidegger's *Gestell*) is "*arraisonnement*," literally a kind of boarding and inspecting, which would seem to include the imposition of a particular law. It is at least clear that for Lyotard "technology" is a kind of law, an attitude or logic rather than a collection of circuits and software. But perhaps the idea of revealing that "enframing" invokes also implies that there is always that which

is absent from this revealing, excluded and left in the shadows. Indeed, the act of framing is always an act of setting-off, of exclusion as much as inclusion, absence as much as presence. This sense of enframing is certainly maintained in Lyotard's essay, and we have seen that art will resist and even work to interrupt or suspend (*epoche*) the programs of technoscientific development that seek to envelop it, in part through being other to them. And we have seen, through Lyotard's discussion of the avant-garde, how we might take this suspension of a certain logic or law. The "political stakes" of such a suspension return us to the question of territorialization and deterritorialization, of communities that need to be formed within this "global" problematic. I shall try to say something about this, by way of conclusion.

Ⅳ. The Being-with of Being-there: Promethean Daring

I return, then, one more time, to the text on "Enframing." There, as I have already suggested, the problematic of art's relation to technoscience opens on a crisis of originality that is linked, on the one hand, to a threat to idiomatic cultural expression, and on the other, to the inability of humanity to form a body, political or communal. In spite of his distrust of what he calls technoscience, however, it is clear that Lyotard is not arguing for a new humanism, and not only because of the well-known suspicions of the humanist tradition present throughout his work and clearly articulated at the outset of *The Inhuman* (1–7). To remain within the logic of the texts of the "postmodern" and after, the loss of the modern historical narratives is in part a loss of the *subject* of those narratives. The "postmodern condition" would at the very least be the condition in which the Idea (in the Kantian sense) of a totality of human beings, along with the corresponding Idea of the totality of the world, the cosmopolis, would no longer unproblematically form the horizon of political thought. As Lyotard puts it in *Just Gaming*, the problem that faces the political thinker today is precisely that it is no longer a question "of reflecting upon what is just or unjust against the horizon of a social totality, but, on the contrary, against the horizon of a multiplicity or diversity" (Lyotard and Thébaud 87).

But it is not just the end of the "grand narratives" of modernity that produces the sense of what he elsewhere calls a "fissure" in the "great deliberative political core" (along with the attending need for an Idea of multiple ends

or Ideas of heterogeneous ends for humanity) (Lyotard, *Enthusiasm* 63). As we have seen, development does not really provide an end in this sense; though its proponents often use the language of emancipation, there is in fact no "destination" toward which the universal human subject is seen to be progressing. Its only imperative is to be productive. Human beings and their needs in fact remain alienated from it.

Of course, Lyotard is quite content to question the value of the human, for philosophical as well as for political reasons. That human beings are precisely not "programmed," despite the best intentions of technoscience, is nothing to be lamented. One need not, indeed, ought not to give in to nostalgia for some lost human essence. Which is why in the "Enframing" text he speaks of communities as "promethean," a reference to the myth of Prometheus as it is recounted, for instance, in *Protagoras*, where, in Lyotard's words, "the community of mortals" clings to nothing other than "its lack of community" ("Enframing" 183). The promethean community is not based on a new understanding of humanity, nor is it based on any new "humanism." One indeed would have to say that it has no basis at all. It is occasioned, in part through "*epochal* affectations." The community thus conceived is one that arises only reflectively, out of the "default" of community that art, as the very *epoche* of communication, marks (193). Although Lyotard takes Heidegger's *Gestell* as a kind of starting point, the influence here is perhaps as much Kantian as it is phenomenological. The Kantian *sensus communis*, which arises out of the judgment of taste, presupposes a community of those with a shared sensibility. Lyotard does not share Immanuel Kant's confidence that this can be presupposed *a priori* in all humans insofar as they are taken to be rational subjects with similar cognitive powers. For him such a community can only be one *in absentia* (185). But from the point of view of reflective, perhaps "aesthetic," judgment, it remains a necessity to think. And perhaps there remains a bit of Heidegger in this necessity, since this community is called for not through any shared human essence but out of "the having-to-be of being-there" (187). Necessity requires it, then, and it requires interpretation—which means it is also necessarily open to continual reinterpretation. We should recall that "promethean" also means creativity; creativity through daring and originality more specifically. Daring, creativity, interpretation: perhaps these terms bring us to the "political stake" of our initial question, then, the question of the enframing of art by technology. Art, for Lyotard, can never be subordinated to political imperatives, and yet, he tells us, "a political question arises regarding the possible publics of art," a

public that is no longer that of a city but is now "global" (*mondiaux*) (191). This would seem to be closely linked to the avant-garde's need to find a public. If the community is conceived as forming a social body through objects and the programmatic rules that apply to them (179), the work of art—at least insofar as it is "avant-garde"—defies these programs and "defaults" on the promise of community given in them. But this default is also a call for new communities, for new practices of the *epoche* (193). The question of sensibility, the "aesthetic" significance of global systems of telecommunication, can perhaps be linked to this default and the attending call. The contents of these systems exceed their programs, open their users to unforeseen effects—to "affects." As such, they cannot be communicated. But might they be shared?

Perhaps we can say that art, insofar as it opens the possibility of a new law (and if we are to take the argument in "Enframing of Art" seriously, cannot not open such a possibility), must always find its publics, which means it also forms them to a certain extent, although only fleetingly. The "aesthetic" question these "new technologies" raise would thus be exemplified by the artwork. I suspect that what Lyotard has in mind with the *epoche* or suspension of programs, with a certain kind of interruption of the expected or probable (that is, of the sensible), is the constant possibility of the formation of new publics, new communities, which in turn would be unstable, shifting, brought together in unexpected and unprogrammable ways. In the default or interruption of any given community lurks also a community of this default. In the absence of a common origin or universal human history, the possibility or even ("structural") necessity of this default might even harbour a kind of hope for the "non-citizens of the world" (Lyotard, "Enframing" 193). If thinking must, as Lyotard claims *a propos* of the sublime, exceed the given in order to have ideas, this hope lies precisely in the possibility of exceeding what is normally taken to be sensible, in the suspension of programs and their attempt to contain what cannot be contained.

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Abstract

This essay takes as its point of departure a little known text by Jean-François Lyotard on art and its relation to global networks of telecommunication in order to explore the possibilities for social and political communities in the context of global capital. Borrowing Heidegger's notion of an "enframing" (*Gestell*) of nature by technology, Lyotard inquires into a similar enframing of art, arguing that art, through the very fact that it is an unprogrammable kind of techne, has the power to "suspend" the programs of what he calls "capitalist technoscience," and in so doing works against the loss of originality such programs produce. Linking this to Lyotard's famous discussion of the avant-garde, I examine the potential political force of such a suspension or "epoche," particularly with regard to the formation of possible publics in the absence of world historical "grand narratives" that would situate a universal human subject within a particular conception of historical progress. Lyotard argues that the Idea (in the Kantian sense) of totality no longer unproblematically provides the horizon for political thought. Any such cosmopolitan community is therefore problematic, communities can only be formed in the absence of necessarily shared qualities or traits. They must therefore be "promethean" in the sense of being creative, daring, and open to reinterpretation. Not only is this not something to be lamented, however, it is something that should be affirmed for the open possibilities it offers.

Keywords: Lyotard, Heidegger, art, technology, community, avant-garde

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