Although today we are surrounded by discussions of a postmodern sensitivity or style, of postmodern social movements, and of a postmodern science, the term 'postmodernity' has been used in so many different ways that one can no longer be sure exactly what it means. It can be used to indicate non-conformative aesthetic attitudes (avant-garde movements), a refusal of grand political theories (the critique of totalitarianism), a critique of rationality and representation (Foucault, Derrida, and Rorty), or a radical critique of empiricist scientific method (Feyerabend). But it has also been invoked in a more conservative defence of post-industrial societies (Daniel Bell), in defence of a new figuratism in art, or to eulogize the artificial intelligence model for a representation of knowledge. In a way, one longs for a clear-cut (re)definition both of 'postmodernity' and also, necessarily, of that 'modernity' which it is supposed to have followed or transcended. The problem, of course, is that the idea of the postmodern is itself sometimes used to challenge the possibility of a stable theory of meaning as reference or representation. Nevertheless, a review of the philosophical themes encompassed by these terms is more than ever urgent.

In such a review, the philosophical landscape is dominated by two figures: Jurgen Habermas and Jean-Francois Lyotard. The confrontation between these two authors is, in my view, extremely rewarding: at issue between them is the nature or definition of the modernity project, with all its philosophical, political, and aesthetic implications. My own approach has been strongly influenced by Habermas. From this perspective, I find Lyotard's work the most challenging alternative, because it avoids the conservative implications of pre-modern and counter-enlightenment views. Habermas, and this is part of his appeal, speaks in the name of emancipation. He wants to develop the modernity project as the rational discussion and redemption of the notions of truth, justice, and freedom. Habermas calls for more philosophy, for a rational discussion of values and norms. But Lyotard also asks what is the meaning of truth and justice in contemporary societies and has clearly stated the purported political dimension of his writings. But whereas Habermas speaks in the name of emancipation, Lyotard warns us of the dangers of speaking 'in the name of. He shows how one can, in defending the idea of emancipation, deny this very notion of freedom.
On the other hand, re-reading Lyotard one is surprised to see how close his analysis of the status of knowledge in contemporary societies is to that of Habermas. The conclusion I would draw from this closeness is that the postmodern condition, as characterized by Lyotard, is indeed a radicalization that in no way challenges the modernity project as such. Rather, it takes it further in a way that, for me, answers Habermas's plea for the development of modernity as a yet unfinished (unvollendetes) project. For all those familiar with Lyotard's refusal of the modernity project - for him it has been liquidated in Auschwitz - this should sound provocative and controversial enough.

I shall start with an overview of Habermas's presentation of the central themes of modernity and the problems with his attempt to ground norms on communication. I shall then discuss Lyotard's postmodern critique of modernity as the Enlightenment project and show how indebted to the Enlightenment his critique is. And, as Lyotard's critique is based on language, I shall attempt a small discussion of modernity and postmodernity from the point of view of norms and language. This discussion should further our understanding of modernity as a project and highlight the main issues at stake in the modernity-postmodernity controversy.

II

Habermas has always situated himself within the Enlightenment tradition, from Kant to Hegel to Marx, in his pursuit of a rational critique as emancipation from dogma and domination. In the famous Kantian text 'What is Enlightenment?\(^2\) reason is opposed to ignorance, religious or metaphysical dogma, and political domination. 'Mündigkeit' is the task of the modern age, and Mündigkeit, reason's 'coming of age', is a critical rationality that no longer relies on revealed religion, past models, or metaphysics for its emancipation from dogma and political domination.

This project need not be identified with a narrow definition of reason as scientific rationality. Indeed Kant's argument is that reason is theoretical (scientific) rationality but also that reason is moral-political and aesthetic. Habermas uses Kant's differentiated approach to reason and Weber's critique of means-end rationality for his famous critique of the role played by science and technology in modern contemporary societies.\(^3\) Habermas's point is that in advanced capitalist societies reason has become reduced to instrumental reason, to means-end rationality. When this happens, the moral and the political realms are approached from the point of view of technical management and control, and the question of the good and just life disappears. Reason then becomes a legitimating principle for political domination. It is only in so far as one recaptures the differentiated realms of rationality that the possibility of critique and of emancipation can be pursued.

The Kantian critique of reason is a reflection on the conditions of possibility of these differentiated domains of rationality. These domains have now to be grounded on rational principles and can no longer rely on religious authority or political dogma. Modernity is the project of a rational grounding of norms
for autonomous domains of rationality. The normativity problem is the problem of modernity.

Moreover, modernity is the awareness of a 'new age' that no longer relies on criteria from the past. As Hegel put it, modernity is the awareness of a 'new world' that breaks with the past, a 'birth-time, and a period of transition'. Habermas likes to recall the late seventeenth-century 'querelle des anciens et des modernes' as the epitome of the modernity consciousness as a consciousness of a new, historical age that can no longer rely on classical criteria of timeless and absolute beauty, but which has got to work out its 'new' criteria and models in a break with the past. As Habermas argues in The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, modernity has got to create its normativity out of itself, following criteria which are no longer external but historical and immanent. Indeed, in so far as modernity is the 'new' as opposed to the 'old', it has to recapitulate the break with the past in a continuous renewal. The problem of universal norms which would ground the differentiated domains of rationality becomes, with modernity's awareness of time, a historical endeavour.

And finally, the last great problem I want to mention concerning modernity and normativity is that modernity's awareness of time is also modernity's self-awareness. The activity of critique, or the reconstruction of the conditions of possibility of the differentiated domains of rationality, is not in itself a problem for Kant. But, as Hegel has argued, the activity of critique has got to be itself accounted for and has got to be submitted to the critical gaze. The synthetic unit of heterogeneous domains of reason proposed by Kant can no longer be accepted uncritically. With Hegel, critique becomes self-conscious and the problem of rational norms is now not only a problem in time but a problem that is itself problematic.

I want to stress here that modernity's awareness of time introduces the question of historicity and relativism and that modernity's self-awareness brings to the fore the problem of reflexivity. I think it is worth stressing this because reflexivity and relativism are some of the arguments used against the project of modernity as the project of a rational grounding of norms. More often than not we seem to forget that these are themes of modernity. And I think we forget this because it is Hegel's and Marx's solutions to the normativity problem which have become, in our memories, the theme of modernity.

Hegel's solution to the normativity problem is carried out in terms of a philosophy of the subject, that is, it takes as its starting-point a reflection on the conditions of possibility of reason in terms of a subject of experience. Since Kant, this subject is double: empirical and transcendental. But in pointing out that the transcendental dimension of reason has got to be itself accounted for in terms of its empiricity, of its historicity, Hegel moved on to an idea of an universal subject in history - Absolute Reason - that would provide a totalizing unity for the diversity and empiricity of domains of rationality. However, this unity, Absolute Reason, assumed a form which was so overwhelming that in the end it denied the very problem it attempted to solve: the subject as universal denied the subject as individual and the problem of
critique and normativity disappeared. As Habermas puts it, with Hegel 'the question about the genuine self-understanding of modernity gets lost in reason's ironic laughter. For reason has now taken over the place of fate and knows that every event of essential significance has already been decided.'

If one follows this path - and Marx in his materialistic re-reading of Hegel faces the same problem - modernity becomes the symbol of totalitarianism. One should indeed beware of the political consequences of a totalizing absolute reason embodied in an universal subject, be it the state or the proletariat.

However, it is important to stress that, although Habermas approached Hegel as the philosopher of modernity, he is extremely critical of Hegel's solution to the normativity problem. Indeed Habermas distances himself from Hegel and - to a certain extent - from Marx. In order to recover the differentiated realms of reason which had been dissolved in Hegel's idealist solution (Absolute Reason) and in Marx's materialist solution, which also reduced reason to one dimension of human action - labour. This was Habermas's initial project in *Knowledge and Human Interests*. But given the problems he encountered, Habermas has been trying to rework this project in terms of an analysis of the necessary conditions of possibility of communication. Implied in this move is a recognition that the problems encountered in his initial project were due to a framework still too indebted to a philosophy of the subject, that is, to a reflection on the conditions of possibility of reason and action which did not acknowledge that the very possibility of reflection is not a subjectivity turned on to itself but an intersubjectivity of discourse, of language, of communication. Habermas therefore now stresses the necessity of overcoming the framework of a philosophy of the subject in terms of a philosophy of *intersubjectivity*, of language. To this end, he proposes an analysis of the conditions of possibility of communication as the starting-point for a critical theory.

This analysis reconstructs the three domains of rationality (theoretical, practical, aesthetic) in terms of three modes of communication (cognitive, interactive, expressive). In so far as one speaks, one always necessarily raises three validity claims: truth, Tightness, and truthfulness, as well as an intelligibility claim which can be left aside in this article. These claims are presupposed by every act of communication. They can be rationally redeemed in a situation of discourse, where only reason prevails. These validity claims form a structure of linguistic rationality which is necessarily and universally presupposed and anticipated by every act of communication. For Habermas, in communication the speaker raises validity claims that are accepted or rejected by the hearer(s). The framework of the three validity claims and the ideal speech situation as the situation of pure discourse where these claims would be met without internal or external constraints form not only a structure of rationality which is presupposed by communication: for Habermas they are the very possibility of communication.

Now, Habermas is clever enough to point out that this presupposition (*Unterstellung*) - the ideal speech situation - is not an empirical reality or an ideal construct. His point is more subtle: what he is saying is that every time...
we engage in communication we must inevitably assume, *even as an illusion*, a 'transcendental illusion', that we are speaking the truth, being truthful, and following legitimate social rules. The possibility itself of telling a lie, deceiving, or evading a norm rests on the supposition that these claims form a necessary background for communication. And, because there is such a background, we can ultimately question our interlocutors about the truth, truthfulness, and Tightness of their acts (and ours). In order to communicate at all, we have to presuppose that we are able to distinguish between truth and falseness, truthfulness and deceit, Tightness and distortion, rational and illusory consensus, even if, in order to do so, we have to resort to a promise not yet fulfilled, to argumentation, to discourse as the rational validation of the three validity claims. The possibility of communication is based on this presupposition, which also works as a 'critical standard with which every factual reached consensus can be questioned and examined'.

Habermas’s solution of grounding critique on language is an attempt to maintain the differentiated domains of rationality in a framework of intersubjectivity. Habermas therefore assumes that there is an universal and necessary consensus in language, even if this consensus is a counterfactual one. The ideal speech situation is the 'effective anticipation' of a pure structure of rationality, with no internal, external, or social constraints, where we could therefore agree on truth, norms, and authenticity.

Habermas has been criticized for this idea of consensus. However, it is important to stress that this consensus is a counterfactual one, a promise not yet fulfilled. What Habermas is saying is that language, as a structure or intersubjectivity, implies that we share a form of life, is indeed itself a form of life, to use Wittgenstein's words. In order to disagree, we are still within language, language here being more than a collection of words: language here should be understood as an intricate network of words and practices. For Habermas, this agreement is continually open to disagreement. Still, language itself is the promise and the possibility of realizing this agreement.

But Habermas takes one step further. He wants to show that every speech act in actual language demonstrates the possibility of reaching a rational consensus. In order to do so, he has to show that every speech act actually raises the above-mentioned validity claims. But, in doing so, Habermas has to reduce his analysis of communication to communicative action, thus excluding from his analysis *strategic action*. But this is, to say the least, a very problematic move because in so doing he is excluding from his analysis those instances of communication where the use of power leads to a distortion in communication. His argument is that strategic action is *derivative* from communicative action. But strategic actions are precisely those instances where the use of power *excludes* the possibility of a rational discourse.

Moreover Habermas further reduces his analysis to explicit speech acts of the standard form F(p), where F is the illocutionary act (the act of promising, announcing, inviting, etc.) and p the propositional content ('He promises *that he will come*'). He does this in order to show that every speech act always introduces a cognitive dimension through the objectivating attitude of the propositional content (validity claim of truth), an interactive dimension
through the performatory attitude of the illocutionary act (validity claim of Tightness), and an expressive dimension in the authenticity of the speaker’s intention (validity claim of truthfulness). This is a very important point if Habermas wants to maintain that the dimensions of truth, Tightness, and truthfulness are universal and necessary conditions of every speech act and therefore that discourse is the rational validation of these claims raised in speech. But not every speech act is of the form $F(p)$.

Habermas’s attempt to justify this type of analysis rests on the problematic principle of expressibility of Searle. I shall not go here into the criticisms in the linguistic literature of this principle. Suffice to say that this reduction of analysis to explicit speech acts of the form $F(p)$ excludes from the analysis most of the cases of day-to-day communication, where communication is not synchronic, not transparent, and not explicit. And finally, although Habermas recognizes the background context implicit in every act of communication, his analysis does not take this context into account as, for Habermas, this context can always be made explicit in terms of the linguistic structure of human rationality. But again this is a way of approaching the background context - the form of life in Wittgenstein’s words - as reasons in discourse. The Wittgensteinian agreement on form of life which is necessary for communication becomes, in Habermas’s terms, an agreement on the consensus theory of discourse. In other words, Habermas’s idea of an agreement in language is an agreement about the commitment to provide reasons for the claims raised in communication. Wittgenstein’s point about the agreement on a form of life is rather different. He in fact stresses that giving reasons is one possible language game and not the foundation of all possible games. In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein says:

I am told, for example, that someone climbed a mountain many years ago. Do I always enquire into the reliability of the teller of this story, and whether the mountain did exist years ago? . . . What stands fast does so, not because it is intrinsically obvious or convincing; it is rather held fast by what lies around it.

I shall come back to these points in my discussion of Lyotard. For the moment it is sufficient to stress that Habermas’s analysis implies an approach to language which reduces communication to communicative action, speech acts to explicit acts of the standard form $F(p)$, and the background context of human practices (forms of life) to giving reasons in language. These reductions seriously question the universality and necessity of Habermas’s analysis.

But if one takes seriously Habermas’s idea that the ideal speech situation is a ‘transcendental illusion’, and ‘unavoidable fiction’, one need not show that this fiction is an universal and necessary condition of every speech act in its empiricity. What one needs to show is that this illusion is what enables us to pursue a rational discussion on values and truth, even though the idea of a situation of pure discourse, where truth, justice, and freedom would be rationally met without any internal or external constraints, must remain an illusion. Indeed, the anticipation of this ideal constitutes a form of life, it enables us to pursue a discourse on truth and justice, and it provides the
criteria for a rational discussion. Of course, this ideal remains an illusion, a fiction, albeit a transcendental and unavoidable one in so far as we share language as a structure of intersubjectivity. The ideal speech situation is a transcendental illusion in the sense that this illusion constitutes the 'appearance of a form of life'. Needless to say, this appearance is not an empirical reality. However, the idea itself of such a form of life, implicit in language, constitutes the possibility of a rational discussion of the values anticipated. It does not matter here if this illusion is a delusion. What is important is the recognition that in language we are given this idea. And if one wants to pursue a discourse on truth and values, one has to assume, even as an illusion, an idea of truth, justice, and freedom, given by language and in language, which can be rationally pursued. The problem is when we move from this 'unavoidable fiction', from this 'transcendental illusion', to an analysis that wants to show how we indeed anticipate an idea of truth, justice, and freedom in every speech act.

The great asset of Habermas, in my view, is how he puts back into the agenda the problem of normativity. For Habermas, a reflection on the meaning of rational validation of truth, justice, and freedom is more than ever urgent. This reflection entails a discussion of what sort of grounding and criteria one needs to pursue such validation. Habermas's concern with these themes makes him dismissive of what he calls the premodern and the counter-enlightenment positions. The 'premodern' chooses to regress to religious or fundamentalistic approaches to values (neo-conservatism). The 'counter-enlightenment' cannot avoid surrendering altogether the values of modernity (truth, justice, and freedom) in its critique of rationality. And then, asks Habermas, how is critique (of modernity and rationality) itself possible? And how is political critique possible if we abandon altogether a notion of truth and justice? 22

This is precisely why I think Lyotard is the most interesting challenge to Habermas's project. Indeed, Lyotard's question is the question of the meaning of justice and knowledge in contemporary societies. And I want to show now how close Lyotard is to Habermas, the modernity philosopher. But I also want to show where their views part, and it will be on their analysis of language. I shall then draw some conclusions about the meaning of a modernity-postmodernity controversy.

III

Like Habermas, Lyotard also starts his analysis from the recognition of a change in the status of knowledge in advanced industrial societies. (I am here quite deliberately avoiding the terms postmodern age, postmodern societies.) This change has been brought about mainly by the impact of technology and information technology in knowledge research and knowledge transmission. Knowledge is no longer associated with Bildung, with the 'formation of spirits'. Rather, knowledge has become technically useful knowledge. The criterion of technically useful knowledge is its efficiency and its transitivity into information (computer) knowledge. Therefore the questions 'Is it true?',

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'Is it just?', 'Is it morally important?' become reduced to 'Is it efficient?', 'Is it marketable?', 'Is it sellable?', 'Is it translatable into information quantities?' Through this reduction, a dimension of knowledge as a 'savoir-faire', 'savoir-vivre', tends to disappear or to be translated in terms of efficiency. Moreover, as knowledge becomes a commodity and produces commodities, it also changes its relation to nation-states. Knowledge as a force of production becomes one of the central tenets of power and what is at stake ('l'enjeu') for political domination.

The understanding of society, given this approach to knowledge, follows the paradigm of an efficient machine. Society becomes a system regulated by inputs and outputs, and its criteria only efficiency. Society - and we are familiar with this functionalist approach - is a technocratic system where the hopes and needs of groups and individuals, the ethical and political life, tend to disappear inside the optimization of the system's performativity. Crises are merely rearrangements of the system's optimization of the general relation between inputs and outputs.

This thesis, as Lyotard himself recognizes, is not new and indeed is a central theme in the work of the Frankfurt school and of Habermas. The problem is how to produce a critique of this functionalist approach, given the role played by science and technology in contemporary developed societies. And although Lyotard disagrees with Habermas's recourse to a consensus theory, there is no doubt that he is on Habermas's side. In discussing Habermas's arguments against Luhmann's Systemtheorie, Lyotard says that 'Habermas's cause is good'. And although consensus is, for Lyotard, an 'outmoded and suspect value', the question remains of producing an 'idea and a practice of justice that is not linked to that on consensus'.

However, the parallel does not stop here. Indeed, both Lyotard and Habermas recognize that the central problem is the problem of norms, of criteria, what Habermas calls the normativity problem and Lyotard the legitimation problem.

Both claim that, in order to criticize technical rationality and its criterion of efficiency, one has to have a broader approach to knowledge. In Habermas's terms, rationality is not reducible to instrumental rationality. In Lyotard's terms, knowledge (savoir) is not reducible to science (connaissance). Both stress the diversity of human linguistic competences already implied by the language game of science. Science restricts its linguistic scope to denotation (or mainly to denotation), but this game is only possible in language and it presupposes a wider range of competences, as for instance a 'savoir-faire', a 'savoir-dire', and a 'savoir-écouter'. It is the stress on the different competences that gives them both an edge for their critique of instrumental rationality. But, in so far as one recognizes the diversity of language games, one also recognizes the rule-governed character of those localized practices. And the problem of modernity is precisely the problem of normativity, the problem of criteria, of what rules govern our practices.

As I mentioned before, Habermas uses the 'querelle des anciens et des modernes' as the paradigm of modernity's consciousness. Once the differentiation of domains of rationality has been accomplished and art stands as an
autonomous domain, what are its criteria of beauty if one can no longer rely on
the models of the past? How is critique possible if one no longer relies on a
transcendental ahistorical subject? What are the norms for a critical activity
once one recognizes the immanence of norms for critique itself?

Lyotard has a story that captures in an exemplary way the problem of
legitimation or, in Habermas’s terms, the normativity problem. But instead of
being a paradigm of modernity, the Cashinahua narrative stresses a different
set of pragmatic rules.

A Cashinahua tells a story. He starts it with the fixed formula: ‘Here is the
story of Z, as I’ve always heard it told. I will tell it to you in my turn. Listen!’
And he ends it by saying: ‘Here ends the story of Z. The man who has told it
to you is X [Cashinahua name], or Y to the Whites [Portuguese or Spanish
name].’ Here there are pragmatic rules which decide who can tell the story (a
male Cashinahua), who can hear the story (a bearer of a Cashinahua name, a
male Cashinahua, or a pre-puberty Cashinahua girl), and who can be the
theme of the story (all Cashinahuas). But in this form of narrative, the truth,
the truthfulness, and the Tightness (in Habermas’s terms) of the story are not a
problem. It is the repetition of the story, the endless and timeless repetition
which gives it its legitimacy. The questions about the reliability of the speaker
and the truth of the story are absent. Although the story might change in its
continuous retelling, the telling itself has a timeless quality that forbids the
problem of the author and his legitimacy. In Lyotard’s terms, there is an
‘immemorial beating’ that prevents a differentiation between diverse
historical times. But in the narrative of modernity, modernity’s self-
consciousness in time opens up the dimension of norms in history. Therefore
the legitimation of the pragmatic rules themselves becomes a problem. The
question of modernity is the question about the conditions of possibility of a
discourse historically and contextually situated once the norms for deciding the
norms become themselves a problem. In other words, who (but this might be
misleading for it is not a ‘who’) decides what counts as knowledge but also
who decides who is going to decide?

I think the Cashinahua story and, for that matter, the Jewish narrative
discussed in Just Gaming should be approached carefully. Rather than a
theory about ‘other (better) cultures’ (Jewish or primitive) I think they should
be used, in a Wittgensteinian way, to ‘show’ something. They are a way of
talking about the legitimation and double-legitimation problem of modernity.
Any reading of these other types of narrative as a theory about other (‘better’) societies will assume that Lyotard is nostalgic or romantic. In this type of
reading, modernity is reduced to the grand narrative, to the narrative of an
author or a hero, spirit or proletariat. Then modernity’s mistake is the search
for a grand narrative that would ground all other narratives. This search for a
totalizing unity stems from the idea of a subject as author or hero of the
narrative. However, this unity is no longer possible in postmodernity, given
the fragmentation of our localized practices and the suspicion about a unitary
subject or author. Although in many ways the Postmodern Condition lends itself
to this type of reading, Lyotard’s critique of modernity becomes much more
interesting and complex once we abandon the facile idea that modernity is the

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legitimation through a grand narrative and postmodernity the suspicion of the
great narrative. In order to understand this point, it is useful briefly to recall
Habermas's remarks on modernity.

Habermas stresses that the problem of modernity is the problem of norms
and criteria in an age that sees itself as continuously breaking with the past.
Modernity can no longer rely on any 'given' criteria. Reason's coming of age is
precisely the suspicion of narratives through the awareness of the immanence
of norms. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard sometimes does speak of
modernity as the resort to a great narrative, a narrative of a hero, spirit of
praxis. Habermas's remarks on modernity help us to differentiate between the
normativity problem of modernity and the Hegelian or Marxist solutions in
terms of a totalizing unity of a subject. Thus one could say that the
postmodern suspicion of the great narrative is *modernity's challenge* rather than
a challenge to modernity.

In the paper 'What is postmodernism?', ingeniously included in the English
translation of *La Condition Postmoderne*, Lyotard takes up this point. Indeed,
in this paper he no longer concentrates on 'the great narrative' and 'small
narratives' as characteristics of the modern and postmodern conditions.
Rather, he now develops the strategy of language games as a non-reconciliatory
strategy, as a way of answering the modernity challenge without resorting to a
philosophy of the subject, to a hero, or to the totalizing unity of heterogeneous
domains of rationality.

As I mentioned before, Habermas also moves to language as a way of
avoiding a dissolution of differentiated domains of rationality in a totalizing
unity. But in his attempt to show that every speech act always raises the
validity claims of truth, truthfulness, and Tightness, Habermas has to restrict
his analysis of communication to a certain type of speech act. In the end,
Habermas reduces language to giving reasons in discourse, thus overemphasizing
the cognitive dimension of language to the exclusion of other language games.
Lyotard's strategy is different. Rather than taking language games to mean
that one always already anticipates the possibility of a rational discourse,
Lyotard stresses the *agonistic* aspect of games. The agonistic aspect stresses the
strategic dimension of speech acts where *l’enjeu*, what is at stake, is never
decided in advance, but is always being fought over. The moves in language
are therefore never predetermined but are continuously being made. The
problem for Lyotard is the problem of moves, of definition of rules and criteria
through moves. The problem is the problem of invention, of imagination, of
judgement, of new moves (rather than the grounding or foundation of rules) in
a game which, although rule-governed, does not have a fixed or transcendental
set of rules. In *Just Gaming*, Lyotard mentions Aristotle's judge who has no
true model or criteria to guide his judgements. The problem of judgement is
precisely the problem of having to make a good judgement without resorting to
epistemology or ontology. The approach to language games as agonistic
stresses that the rule-governed character of language is constituted in the
practice itself of language through moves rather than grounded on a
transcendent set of rules as its criteria.

Now, this approach to language stresses the invention of rules rather than
the absence of rules. Postmodernity in this view is not an overcoming of rules but the recognition of the problem of normativity once one no longer relies on a fixed set of rules. Aristotle's judge is the best example here. As I said before, this is modernity's challenge, and Lyotard seems to accept this point. He says that modernity rather than postmodernity is the recognition of how little reality there is in reality (the 'peu de réalité'). What is to count as reality in a certain language game is fought over in language. Reality is constantly being invented and fought over in localized games. The challenge of modernity is the invention of rules. Postmodernity is the taking up of this challenge.

I think at this point one could ask if it really matters if one approaches postmodernity as the overcoming of modernity or as the radicalization of modernity. And I think this is very important for what is at stake here is how one approaches the modernity-postmodernity controversy. Indeed what is at stake here is the meaning of doing philosophy, of political views, of moral values. If one approaches postmodernity as an overcoming of modernity, the danger is to give up the problem of normativity altogether and in so doing to play into the hands of a technological society where the ethical, the political, and the philosophical become the efficient technology. Moreover, this approach to postmodernity as an overcoming of modernity also relies on a superficial critique of representation and rationality that in discovering - two centuries later - the historicity and contextuality of a discussion of values and norms says that every story is nothing but a story amongst other possible stories. I think Habermas is right in calling this position premodern and conservative. Indeed, nothing is more nostalgic than the disappointment of a pseudo-postmodern position which, when recognizing the impossibility of an absolute grounding of norms, dismisses the problem of normativity and therefore the problem of critique in an 'anything goes'. I believe that as one adopts this position, one is indeed saying that there is no difference between a true and an illusory consensus, a just and an unjust society, a good and a bad action. Again, I believe that if one adopts this position, one is playing into the hands of the efficiency criterion of a technological society that says anything goes - as long as it is efficient. Here the work of Habermas is extremely important for it stresses the need for more rather than less philosophy, the need for working out what a moral, an aesthetic, and a cognitive rationalities could be, rather than dissolving them into a meaningless relativism or into a discourse of technical efficiency.

On the other hand, if one does not take modernity and postmodernity as norms versus absence of norms, in other words if one takes modernity as the normativity challenge and postmodernity as the taking up of this challenge, postmodernity is the continuous critique demanded by modernity. And here the problem becomes how to produce a discourse on justice, on truth, and on art when one no longer relies on ontology or epistemology. The move to language for both Habermas and Lyotard is a way of answering modernity's challenge. But whereas Habermas has to reduce the scope of his analysis in order to argue that communication is grounded on the possibility of giving reasons in language for the claims we raise in speech, Lyotard's approach to language as strategic games stresses the dimension of language which, although
rule-governed, is not reducible to rational validation. Going back to the quotation of Wittgenstein given above, giving reasons in language is a possible language game and not the foundation (even as an 'anticipation') of all language games. In other words, where Habermas still relies on a theory of knowledge - now disguised in terms of a linguistic rationality — in order to ground an ethical and a philosophical discourse, Lyotard stresses the need for the invention and creation of new rules - how, for instance, Aristotle's judge is a good judge precisely because he does not rely on a theory or models. This is, however, not *episteme*: it is *techne*, it is art.

IV

I would like to make a few comments on Lyotard's strategy of moves and invention of rules. I think that while this point has been generally overlooked, it is here that the possibility of a critical discourse on modernity lies. For this is the attempt at producing a discourse on norms which, although critical, would no longer rely on a theory or an ontology. And it is Kant rather than Nietzsche who inspires Lyotard's remarks. He uses Kant's idea of the sublime as a way of approaching rules, modernity and postmodernity.

The sublime for Kant is the distance between the faculty of conceiving and the faculty of presenting an object in accordance with the concept. We have the Idea of a world, of the simple, of the absolutely big or the absolutely powerful, but we do not have the capacity to show an example of these ideas. Indeed these ideas have no possible presentation, they are unpresentable and therefore not related to our faculty of understanding (cognitive). The idea of presenting what is unpresentable, Kant's idea of the sublime, is Lyotard's idea of what is at stake in modern art. But how is one to show what can be conceived but cannot be seen? Kant himself shows the way when he quotes Exodus 20:4, 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image' as the 'most sublime' passage in the Bible, for it forbids all presentation of the absolute. It is only through the absence of form, the empty abstraction, the negative presentation, that one can present the impossibility of presenting an idea which is still conceivable.

But this impossibility of presentation of the unpresentable but yet conceivable can take two modes. One, which Lyotard calls 'melancholic', stresses the impotency of our faculty of presentation and dwells in the nostalgia of the presence. The other mode, which Lyotard calls 'novatio', stresses the potency of the faculty of conceiving which is not the faculty of understanding. This mode stresses the invention of new rules, of new forms in a pictorial, artistic, or philosophical game. The invention of new forms is not a matter of pleasure or a nostalgia of the presence. It is a matter of mixed pleasure and pain for it is the extension of our capacity of conceiving and, if anything, it widens the gap between what is presentable and what is conceivable. It is not a matter of providing an unpresentable reality but of inventing allusions not to the unpresentable but to the unpresentability of the unpresentable. And these two modes of the modernity theme, the nostalgic and the innovative, are for Lyotard the modern and the postmodern modes. Postmodernity is therefore a
radicalization of the modernity theme, the refusal of a nostalgic reconciliation of conceiving and presenting in the illusion of a totality. In this sense postmodernity is not the other or the overcoming of modernity, but its radicalization: postmodernity is the 'futur anterieur' of modernity.31

I think this approach to postmodernity stresses the need for a discourse on rules which does not rely on the faculty of understanding. Here language would have to be approached as a language game, to use Wittgenstein's terminology; that is, language as a practice which involves various skills and forms of knowledge, rather than language as a deep structure of rules which could be reduced to theoretical knowledge (episteme). Wittgenstein's own remarks on rules and rule-following are extremely rewarding for such discussions.32 I do not have enough time to develop these ideas here but I would like to mention briefly a few points.

Wittgenstein's approach to language has to be read in the overall context of his critique of a general theory of language in the lines of the *Tractatus* (language is not just cognition). 'A picture held us captive', he says, and this picture, this bewitchment of theory, is the idea that language is grounded on a deeper structure of norms and on rules. Thus the search for the theoretical foundation of language. In 'On certainty' he argues that it is the epistemological approach to language as cognition, as propositional knowledge, that leads to philosophical paradoxes. The problem therefore is how to avoid offering a 'better' (because more accurately depicting this deeper structure) theory of language without being reduced to silence. The way out of this dead end is recognizing that language is not just theory, not just theoretical knowledge, cognition, rational justification. Indeed the idea of language as a form of life is the refusal to reduce language to rational justification, to cognition, to knowledge.

But the recognition that language is not everywhere bound by theoretical definitions does not mean that language is vague or meaningless. Wittgenstein's remarks on rules and rule-following are meant to show (rather than theoretically argue) the rule-governed character of language which, although making language possible, does not predetermine the game. Rule-following is not the application of a deeper set of rules. Rule-following is itself a practice and it is the practice of the game that defines the interpretation of the rule and what counts as a rule in a certain game.

One of the most rewarding points of Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following is how it warns us against an approach to language games as *competences*, even as localized, fragmented competences. The idea itself of 'competence' implies a deeper set of rules that grounds the application, the performance of a game. And although Lyotard seems to point to a fruitful way of discussing norms, he still approaches games as localized competences. This is not enough, for it still holds on to an idea of a deeper set of rules, although now these rules govern localized, fragmented practices. It is in so far as one moves away from the idea of a theoretical foundation of games that one indeed moves towards a discourse on rules that stresses the innovative rather than the applicatory character of rules and language as a human practice, as a form of life. But again, it is only in so far as one recognizes that the possibility of a
rational discussion on norms and rules is implicit in language, implied by the 
very possibility of communication, that one can take up the challenge of 
modernity as an unfinished project. The definition of rationality itself changes 
when one moves from a philosophy of subjectivity centred on a knowing 
subject to a philosophy of intersubjectivity which recognizes the linguistic 
dimension of human rationality. Here human rationality is no longer just 
knowledge, theory or episteme, but also techne, art, phronesis.

NOTES

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1 See, for instance, W. van Reijen and Dick Veerman, 'An interview with Jean-
2 H. Reiss (ed.), Kant's Political Writings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 
1970).
3 J. Habermas, 'Technology and science as ideology', Toward a Rational Society 
5 The 'Querelle' was a dispute between two factions in the Academie franchise, the 
'Anciens', led by Boileau (1636-1711), and the 'Modernes', led by Charles Perrault 
(1628-1703), concerning the aesthetic rules and criteria for a literary work. Whereas 
Boileau defended the classical criteria as absolute and timeless, Perrault argued that 
the new age required the invention of new standards.
6 J. Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity (Cambridge: Polity Press, 
1987), 7.
7 See, for instance, H. Lawson, Reflexivity - The Post-Modern Predicament (London: 
Hutchinson, 1985).
8 Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 42.
9 The political consequences of privileging the subject as universal, that is, the state, 
over the subject as individual, as Hegel does in Philosophy of Right, are well known. 
To challenge, to question, or to work against a state which embodies the concrete 
universal is to move against reason itself.
10 The criticisms were various and they were acknowledged and sometimes answered 
by Habermas himself in his 'A postscript to Knowledge and Human Interests', 
Philosophy of the Social Sciences, 3 (1973), 157-89, as well as in the preface of Theory 
criticism for the present discussion is that Habermas's idea of a critical discourse, 
which sought to overcome Hegel's idealism and Marx's materialism, was based on 
the problematic notion of self-reflection. As many commentators pointed out (see 
for instance F. Dallmayr, 'Reason and emancipation: notes on Habermas', Man and 
Society, 5 (1972)), the notion of self-reflection was still too idealistic - and therefore 
did not achieve the overcoming of the dichotomy between theory and practice - 
and, moreover, led to authoritarian political consequences that denied its
emancipatory purpose; here the critical theorist, endowed with self-reflection, becomes the avant-garde and judge of emancipatory political movements.


14 ‘So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?’ - It is what human beings say that is true or false and they agree in the language they use. That is not an agreement in opinions but in form of life.’ (L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), §241.)

15 In communicative action, participants share a tradition and their orientations are normatively integrated to such an extent that they start from the same definition of the situation and do not disagree about the claims to validity that they reciprocally raise. In strategic action (conflict, competition, manipulation, and systematically distorted communication), it is not possible to reach a direct understanding orientated to validity claims. J. Habermas, ‘What is universal pragmatics?’ *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979), 209.

16 ibid.

17 J. B. Thompson gives a number of examples of speech acts which cannot be represented by a performative expression and a propositional content. He also argues that in cases such as reading a poem, telling a joke, greeting a friend, or even in the common case of saying ‘The sky is blue this morning’, we cannot show that the speaker is raising the three validity claims of Habermas’s scheme (J. B. Thompson, ‘Universal pragmatics’, in J. B. Thompson and D. Held (eds), *Habermas - Critical Debates* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 126.


21 Habermas, ‘Vorbereitende Bemerkungen. . .’, 120.


24 ibid., 20.

25 ibid., 22.


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27 This is Rorty’s reading of Lyotard (R. Rorty, ‘Habermas and Lyotard on postmodernity’, in R. Bernstein (ed.), *Habermas and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985)).
30 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 78.
31 ibid., 81.