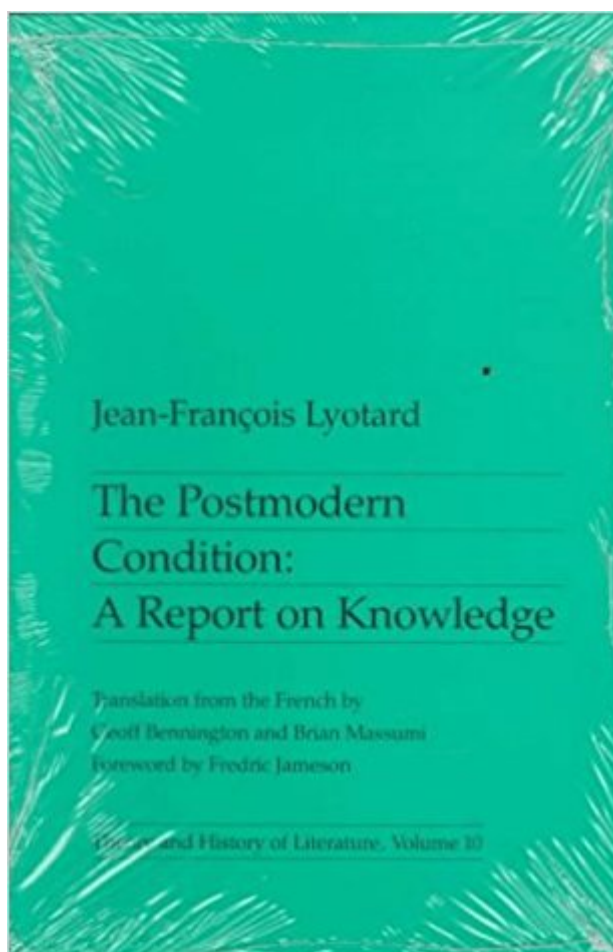


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The Postmodern Condition: A Report On Knowledge (Theory And History Of Literature, Volume 10)



Synopsis

Many definitions of postmodernism focus on its nature as the aftermath of the modern industrial age when technology developed. This book extends that analysis to postmodernism by looking at the status of science, technology, and the arts, the significance of technocracy, and the way the flow of information is controlled in the Western world. -- . --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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In this book it explores science and technology, makes connections between these epistemic, cultural, and political trends, and develops profound insights into the nature of our postmodernity.

Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) was a French philosopher, sociologist, and literary theorist, best known as a pioneer of Postmodernism. He was co-founder of the International College of Philosophy with Jacques Derrida, François Châtelet, and Gilles Deleuze. He also wrote The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence 1982-1985, Postmodern Fables, The Lyotard Reader, etc. He wrote in the Introduction to this 1979 book, "The object of this study is the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies. I have decided to use the word

“postmodern”™ to describe that condition. The word is in current use on the American continent among sociologists and critics; it designates the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts. The present study will place these transformations in the context of the crisis of narratives.

Simplifying to the extreme, I define “postmodern”™ as incredulity toward metanarratives. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert’s homology, but the investor’s paralogy [i.e., similarity without shared ancestry].

He observes, “When we examine the current status of scientific knowledge---at a time when science seems more completely subordinated to the prevailing powers than ever before and, along with the new technologies, is in danger of becoming a major stake in their conflicts---the question of double legitimation, far from receding into the background, necessarily comes to the fore. For it appears in its most complex form, that of reversion, revealing that knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question: who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided? In the computer age, the question of knowledge is now more than ever a question of government.” (Pg. 8-9) He states, “The ruling class is and will continue to be the class of decision makers. Even now it is no longer composed of the traditional political class, but of a composite layer of corporate leaders, high-level administrators, and the heads of the major professional, labor, political, and religious organizations. What is new in all of this is that the old poles of attraction represented by nation-states, parties, professions, institutions, and historical traditions are losing their attraction. And it does look as though they will be replaced, at least not to their former scale.” A SELF does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. (Pg. 14-15) He summarizes, “We no longer have recourse to the grand narratives---we can resort neither to the dialectic of Spirit nor even to the emancipation of humanity as a validation for postmodern scientific discourse. But the little narrative remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention, most particularly in science. In addition, the principle of consensus as a criterion of validation seems to be inadequate. The problem is therefore to determine whether it is possible to have a form of legitimation based solely on paralogy. Paralogy must be distinguished from innovation: the latter is under the command of the system, or at least used by it

to improve its efficiency; the former is a move played in the pragmatics of knowledge. The fact that it is in reality frequently, but not necessarily, the case that one is transformed into the other presents no difficulties for the hypothesis. (Pg. 60-61) He explains, "What, then, is the postmodern?... It is undoubtedly a part of the modern. All that has been received, if only yesterday must be suspected. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end for in the nascent state, and this state is constant. The emphasis can also be placed on the increase of being and the jubilation which result from the invention of new rules of the game, be it pictorial, artistic, or any other. The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what WILL HAVE BEEN DONE. Postmodernism would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (post) anterior (modo). (Pg. 79-81) This is perhaps Lyotard's best-known and most influential book, and will be of great interest to students of contemporary philosophy and culture.

In the Postmodern Condition, Lyotard rejects Metanarratives, like Marxism, Science, Nationalism and Religion for being too exclusive and oppressive to all the counter viewpoints that exist in today's society. He favors more limited narratives that do not claim sweeping truths and that better fit the heterogeneous nature of society. To my personal understanding, his take on narratives is itself a metanarrative. Lyotard was right in his predictions on the changing status of knowledge in post WWII highly developed societies. He described knowledge as an informational commodity as indispensable to productive power. He rightly predicted that nation-states will one day fight for control of information as they did in the past for territory and natural resources. He holds the view that multi-national corporations imperil the stability of the state by making financial decisions that bypass the nation-state. This effect is compounded, he argues, by companies that hold vast amounts of information in their databases. Their effect is expanded from the financial to knowledge itself. In his book, which was first published in 1979, he was concerned with the question of who will have access to knowledge, and will the state be just another user? Today, vast databases of information are held not only by companies large and small, but also by states, civil society organizations and universities. Networks, and the network of networks, facilitate access to vast amounts of raw and published information. Most of existing regulation, while evolving, is mostly

concerned with limiting unauthorized access to information for individual privacy and intellectual property considerations. Knowledge and access to knowledge have experienced a growth rather than a decline in computerized societies. The quality of available knowledge is not all secondary or transactional by any measure. To the contrary, and in many cases, it is unprecedented. Big Data, which refers to very large and complex data that needs superior processing capabilities, for example, deal with subjects of great significance like meteorology, genomics, complex physics simulations, and biological and environmental research. Another indication of available knowledge is MIT OpenCourseWare, which is a web-based publication of virtually all MIT course content. On the state side, there are numerous open government initiatives that make vast amounts of government data available directly to the people.

a very fine book, creative, nuclear, interesting and very singular in the most foundational line of la France philosophique. Cute. Important.

This brief report on the condition of the legitimation of knowledge was a ground breaking text at the time it was written; the predictions made by Lyotard about the role technology would play in the pursuit for power became a reality that freezes anyone (consider some recent events: WikiLeaks and the most recent virus sequestering users' personal information). Lyotard's book enters the arena of modernity in order to propose a new condition in the legitimation of knowledge. At times confusing, this could be sorted out if one tries to highlight synonyms for the key concepts. Jameson's preface is an excellent help while doing this. The Postmodern Condition: a Report on knowledge is a perfect match to dialogue with Georg Lukács and other critics interested in Modernity.

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