

CHAPTER ONE



“As if” History—Kant, Then and Now

L'enthousiasme multiplie ces paysans
—Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*

The possibilities offered by a reading of Kant for a deepened understanding of the history of Romanticism, its (self-) conception, and its major themes has long been recognized. One could, according to conventional wisdom, count Kant among a handful of philosophical forefathers who from the camp of systematic thought provided some of the impetus for the Romantic movement. In what might amount to little more than a mere historical accident, it is no less true that Kantian philosophy has played a decisive role in the conceptualization of our current historical situation, what, for better or worse, has come to be called postmodernism. The apparent complicity between these two historical epochs, the postmodern and the Enlightenment, however, could be reduced to the status of an accident only at the risk of nullifying the principle of their unity and its role in both defining and determining their history and historicity, Kantian philosophy itself.

If, however, we take this coincidence seriously as itself a historical repetition, this would mean, not that there is no difference between then and now, between Enlightenment philosophy and its more or less immediate aftermath and the postmodern, but rather that Kant could provide a means of thinking that very difference. In this case, the repetition is not historical in the common sense (the historical situation of the Enlightenment and its aftermath is radically different from contemporary historical conditions), but rather in that the understanding of those distinct conditions, their conceptualization, is similar. The recourse to similar concepts, such as the sublime, for the self-definition of Romanticism as well as a certain postmodernism as historical discourses, that is, marks the relation between these periods as that of an analogy. The repetition at issue here, then, is not so much that of historical events as it is the repetition of the relation between history and its thinking, the repetition of the relation between an event and its conceptualization and representation in language.¹

This structure underlines what is at stake every time we speak of historical cycles or historical repetition as it is expressed, for instance, in that famous adage claiming that if we forget or fail to understand history it will repeat itself. Perhaps it does not go without saying, then, that what history has never done and can never do is repeat itself. The historical event, however world historical or seemingly trivial, is radically singular. When we say that history repeats itself, this can only be in the sense of that relation between distinct situations understood analogously. Historical repetition is in fact the repetition of our understanding of history. Every attempt to understand a historical event or situation in terms of a previous conceptual model or representation put forth, in turn, as the explication of a previous event or situation operates by way of a certain mediation. The representation is not a direct rendering of history but the re-representation of a previous representation of history. A critical account of the structure of historical representation thus offers the possibility of an understanding of our present historico-political situation and its relation to the past, this relation itself describing a history. Moreover, to the extent that a conceptualization and representation seeks not only to understand its object, a historical given, as the repetition of a past situation, but itself as the repetition of the representation of that given, historical repetition offers the unique possibility of dramatizing historical representation, representing historical representation. Historical repetition opens an access to the gap between history and its conceptualization.

Such an investigation into the conditions of historical representation is precisely what is at stake in Lyotard's description of a Kantian critique of history, which for Lyotard comes the closest to his own understanding of the postmodern.² But the explication of Kant's critique of history and the political immedi-

ately encounters a major obstacle: Kant never wrote a *Critique of Political Reason*. While there is nothing new about this statement (it has, in fact, become something of a commonplace, even a cliché), it is by no means clear whether the absence of such a *Critique* signals a lack in the Kantian philosophical system, for instance, or whether something like political reason does not exist or could not be subject to the exigencies of critique (and a *Critique*). A determination of precisely what has left us without a *Critique of Political Reason* is therefore crucial, for it is a matter of distinguishing between a lapse or failure in the philosopher and/or his system, on the one hand, and the resistance of what might be described in terms of a field of possible knowledge, that offered by political reason, to philosophy, on the other. The burden presented by the historical fact that no *Critique of Political Reason* has been written, that is, would be to question the very possibility of such a *Critique*.

Rephrasing the sentence “Kant never wrote a *Critique of Political Reason*” slightly, one might begin to account for the absence of a Kantian *Critique* of history and the political: “Les textes historico-politiques de Kant sont dispersés, grosso modo, entre les trois *Critiques* et une dizaine d’Opuscules. La critique de la raison politique n’a pas été écrite” [Kant’s historico-political texts are dispersed, *grosso modo*, among the three *Critiques* and about ten opuscles. The critique of political reason has not been written.]³ Apparently, little has changed here, though the assertion (obvious though it be) that Kant wrote “historico-political texts” would at least suggest that the philosopher did not merely overlook history and politics. Things take on quite a different aspect, however, when we locate this citation in a book by Lyotard entitled *L’Enthousiasme: La critique kantienne de l’histoire*. If Kant did not write a *Critique of Political Reason*, he nonetheless subjected history to critique, or so Lyotard’s subtitle would suggest. Or perhaps we could read the title somewhat differently, shifting the emphasis on the colon separating “Enthusiasm” and “The Kantian Critique of History.” Thus, we might read, “Enthusiasm, that is, the Kantian Critique of History.” This would mean that *Enthusiasm*, not the sentiment so much as the book, is the Kantian *Critique of History*.

Lyotard can thus be seen as extending the Kantian project, filling in the gap, writing what might be called the fourth *Critique*. In order to lay claim to such a title, he cannot simply restate Kant or elaborate upon what Kant might have said had he written such a text, but must critique, must occupy the place of the philosopher-critic, the only position from which any *Critique* can be written. In order to write the fourth *Critique*, Lyotard must occupy the chair of the philosopher, must transplant himself to Königsberg, as it were. This would suggest that a *Critique of Political Reason* is not only possible but has been realized

as such, and also that such a *Critique* will never fully be Lyotard's but will always take place under the aegis of Kant, forever displacing the question of originality. Lyotard will write the original, the *Critique* that has yet to be written, and yet he will write it not merely as Lyotard but as the repetition of Kant, as Kant's *Critique* by Lyotard.⁴

To become the writer of a *Critique of Political Reason*, Lyotard must critique the gesture upon which the political is founded by the writer of critiques. To undertake such a project is, Lyotard himself acknowledges, a "political decision" (16). Even more radically, it might be called the decision of the political. For what the critique of the gesture founding the political achieves is to put into question just what is and what is not political (15). Lyotard's critique is the decision of the political in that it will establish the criteria according to which the political is to be deemed truly political. Thus, Lyotard must begin with a critique of the analogy founding the political as such: "La phrase philosophique selon Kant est un analogue de la phrase politique selon Kant" [The philosophical phrase according to Kant is an analogue of the political phrase according to Kant] (16). What must not be lost in the repetition of the phrase "according to Kant" is that this analogy, whatever its validity, is never made explicitly by Kant. For this to be the case, one would have to add another "according to Kant," to give: "According to Kant, the philosophical phrase according to Kant . . ." Rather, the analogy is according to Lyotard. According to Lyotard, the philosophical phrase according to Kant is an analogue of the political phrase according to Kant. When he critiques the implications of this analogical relation, then, Lyotard is not merely critiquing a Kantian statement, what would be a description of the political according to Kant, but rather critiques the Kantian conception of the political according to Lyotard, yet as if it were Kant's. As it is performed here, criticism is double, in fact reflexive: it critiques the analogy that makes any consideration of the political in a Kantian sense ("according to Kant") possible, while with the same gesture submitting criticism's own understanding of the political to a rigorous critique.

Such a reflexive structure is essential for any understanding of the political articulated as an analogue of philosophy in a Kantian sense. If there is to be any possibility of a fourth *Critique*, the political must be compatible with criticism, critique itself. The analogical relation between the political and philosophy means that no criteria upon which the political could be judged (political) is presupposed. As soon as the political is understood as analogous to critical philosophy, it must be critical and not doctrinal; that is, the political like the philo-

sophical cannot have its rule outside itself in a doctrine or system that could judge once and for all that the political is legitimated. Rather, even because the political is an analogue of the philosophical, it must itself be critical (or else the analogy would dissolve) and that means that it must itself be the judge. Just as a critique of pure reason (and thus the first *Critique*) does not form a part of philosophy conceived of as the system of rational knowledge but rather questions its very possibility, so too a critique of political reason, were it to exist, could not form a part of either this philosophical system or of the political conceived as the system of political knowledge, but would question its possibility.⁵ A critique of political reason, that is, merits the name to the extent that it questions the conditions of possibility of the political itself; it determines the possibility of any philosophy of the political.

Such a conception of criticism, were its reign to spread, would have broad consequences for what currently passes under the name of “critical theory”—even that theory that has recourse to Kant and Lyotard. It would put in question, at the very least, any attempt to read a text, a concept, or even a historical situation in terms of an already elaborated rule or theory, although this would equally be the case for studies that in no way understand themselves as theoretical. What is more, any attempt merely to “apply” (the word is Lyotard’s [18] but is pervasive enough in critical theory) a theory could no longer be called “critical”—perhaps not even “theory”—with any rigor. In order to earn the name, such critical theory would itself have to be the object of its critique, would have to legitimate itself as truly critical.

In Kant’s system, objects in nature are essential to such a criticism, since every presentation must be capable of encountering an object against which the presentation could judge its validity, its pretension to having made an accurate judgement. This condition proves somewhat embarrassing for critical philosophy, since, functioning on the level of Ideas, which by their very definition can have no intuitable object, no natural referent,⁶ it is apparently left without an object that would allow it to validate itself (as critical philosophy). Philosophy therefore runs the risk of being cut off from the world and remaining relegated to the task of system building, which would deny it its place as philosophy “in the world,” as philosophical in the most rigorous sense. It is therefore crucial that Kant find a way for judgements of presentations in the realm of Ideas to be made despite their lack of an intuitable referent. Not only given Ideas, but the very Idea of critical philosophy, the entire Kantian system, is at stake. That the ostensible answer to this difficulty should be found in the *Critique of Judgement*, already given the task of making the passage from the first to the second *Critique*,

from pure to practical reason, and therefore of unifying philosophy, should come as no surprise. Indeed what comes to the rescue is the symbol:

Alle Anschauungen, die man Begriffen a priori unterlegt, sind also entweder *Schemata* oder *Symbole*, wovon die ersten direkte, die zweiten indirekte Darstellungen des Begriffs enthalten. Die ersten tun dieses demonstrativ, die zweiten vermittelt einer Analogie (zu welcher man sich auch empirischer Anschauungen bedient), in welcher die Urteilskraft ein doppeltes Geschäft verrichtet, erstlich den Begriff auf den Gegenstand einer sinnlichen Anschauung, und dann zweitens die bloße Regel der Reflexion über jene Anschauung auf einen ganz andern Gegenstand, von dem der erstere nur das Symbol ist, anzuwenden.

[All intuitions which we apply to concepts a priori are therefore either *schemata* or *symbols*, of which the former contain direct, the latter indirect, presentations of the concept. The former do this demonstratively; the latter by means of an analogy (for which we avail ourselves even of empirical intuitions), in which the judgement exercises a double function, first applying the concept to the object of a sensible intuition, and then applying the mere rule of reflection made upon that intuition to a quite different object of which the first is only the symbol.]⁷

The very possibility of not only the judgement of Ideas but of a philosophy of the political in a rigorously Kantian sense resides upon a reading of the symbol. To live up to its name, to fulfill its mandate and achieve what can only be conceived of as its teleological destiny, philosophy must overcome what by its very definition is a certain distance between it and the world (as witnessed by its lack of an intuitable referent) and impose itself, intervene in the world. Rather than an internal contradiction in the very definition of philosophy, this means that the intervention signified by a philosophy in the world, what we might prematurely call the political, will be of another order than the intuitable.

The symbolic intervenes to allow philosophy at once to maintain its critical distance from the empirical world and to engage with that world and assert its philosophical claim to practicality.⁸ Lyotard's gloss is particularly revealing here, for not only does it capture the structure of symbolic substitutions, it elicits the paradox of absence that inhabits them:

On dégage la forme de présentation, qui est celle du mode intuitif (le schème), du contenu intuitionable, puisqu'il est absent, et l'on place sous cette forme une autre intuition, "également empirique," qui en somme permettrait de valider l'Idée si elle était un concept de l'entendement. Autrement dit, on présente à la phrase non cognitive (descriptive, mais dialectique) un "comme si" référent, un référent qui serait le sien si la phrase était cognitive. Cette présentation indirecte est appelée symbolique, ou par *symbole*.

[The form of presentation, which is that of the intuitive mode (the scheme), is extricated from its intuitable content, since it is absent, and another, “equally empirical” intuition that in sum would permit a validation of the Idea if it were a concept of understanding is placed under this form. In other words, an “as if” referent, a referent that would belong to it if the phrase were cognitive, is presented to the noncognitive (descriptive, but dialectical) phrase. This indirect presentation is called symbolic, or by way of the *symbol*.] (25)

According to its Kantian formulation, critical philosophy engages itself in the world, in the first place, through an act of disengagement, a dislocation of “intuitable content” from the “form” of its “presentation,” this content then being replaced by another. This substitution is called symbolic by Kant. The initial disengagement is ultimately the dislocation of philosophy from the world, which should lead to philosophy’s reengagement in the world. But, as we have seen, such a reengagement appears impossible, for it supposes philosophy to have been engaged before the fact. This double bind cannot be recuperated (as something like an oversight, an accident, an imprecision in terminology), for the argument in fact depends upon it. The analogical operation of presentation, after all, is the disengagement of content from form, permitting the symbolic or analogical substitution of a new content.⁹ But the intuitable content that is dislocated (before the fact, actually) is “absent.” This is no slip, no mere error on Lyotard’s part; rather, he follows the Kantian conception of the symbolic with precision here. How, then, does one dislocate an absence, that which has no locale, that which can never be located, and that which, to borrow from Kant’s description of the ideal, is nowhere in particular but everywhere? What happens, what is left, when an absent content is subtracted from form?

The passage raises all the conventional problems of the relation of form and content in (re)presentation, of their separability or inseparability. Lyotard’s summary of symbolic substitution not only follows in the spirit of Kant’s system by clearly stating the possibility and necessity of such a separability but is in fact already contained and controlled by Kant’s own argument. The very possibility of philosophy in the world, that is, of a truly critical philosophy, in fact depends upon such an understanding of form and content and of an engagement in the world that is already a disengagement from the world. Kant at once articulates the practical engagements of philosophy and of philosophy’s knowledge of its difference from the practical and political, and he does so in the symbolic mode as the “as if” engagement in the world. Since what is separated from form is an absence, content itself *as absence*, the very concept of separability resides upon an absence. The thinking of the separability of content from form that grounds

symbolism and critical philosophy, then, depends upon the absence of the term to be subtracted, dislocated, in order for separation to take place.

The symbolic substitution that takes the place of this subtracted absence in no way recuperates the originary loss (already lost before the loss) of content, however. The twice-absent intuition is replaced, so to speak, form given content once again. Yet this new intuition is “equally empirical,” just as empirical as the intuition or content already subtracted from form. Just as empirical, that is, as an absence. The quotation marks Lyotard places around the phrase “equally empirical,” apparent signs that the difficulty of replacing an absence by an intuition that shares the empirical status of an absence has not escaped him, by no means alleviate the difficulty faced here. Even if we read those quotation marks as a kind of phenomenological *epochē*, putting in parentheses or quotation marks the status of the empirical, the “natural attitude,” little has changed. The Kantian symbolic is still the substitution of one absence (of content) for another. The substitution that should permit judgement to take place, the substitution that would allow philosophy to overcome the gap between it and the world and to engage itself in the world as a truly critical philosophy and thus become political in a readily apparent way, is denied both object and its symbolic substitute. The symbolic, far from overcoming philosophy’s lack, replaces that lack with another. The symbolic would deny philosophy its title as critical philosophy rather than making such a philosophy possible. Thus, the conditional form that closes Lyotard’s analysis: “another, ‘equally empirical’ intuition which in sum would permit a validation of the Idea if it were a concept of understanding.” This other intuition, then, *would permit* a validation, *would permit* judgement, if it were a concept of understanding. But, perhaps it does not go without saying, it is not.

Lyotard’s rephrasing of what appears little more than an explication or elaboration of Kant’s understanding shifts the terms of that explication, in fact conforming more closely to what would be a traditional economy of the symbol that would make judgement possible: “Autrement dit, on présente à la phrase non cognitive (descriptive, mais dialectique) un ‘comme si’ référent, un référent qui serait le sien si la phrase était cognitive.” [In other words, an “as if” referent, a referent that would belong to it if the phrase were cognitive, is presented to the noncognitive (descriptive, but dialectical) phrase].

Thus, Lyotard seemingly gets the Kantian symbolic right, says what he had wanted to say in the previous sentence but, despite ironic quotation marks, somehow could not, that is, that critical philosophy continues to judge even in the absence of an empirical case by acting as if that empirical case existed. If we substitute this sentence for the previous one, all is apparently remedied, the lack

or absence in the symbolic system recuperated by another substitution, signalled by “in other words,” in which one sentence could take the place of another, overcome its lack of, or faulty, content, in short, function as a symbol. The initial difficulty of such a gesture is clear from the fact that such a purportedly symbolic substitution could never lay claim to that title, for the “content” of the “referents” being exchanged are radically at odds, such that one could never be the symbol for the other in the sense described by the passage. It is as if Lyotard could not adequately describe (we might say “symbolize”) symbolic substitution, and only finds an adequate description (symbol) when he turns to the “‘as if’ referent.” The difficulty is not only his, however, since the argument he puts forth is faithful to the resources offered by Kant’s thought. The conception of the “as if” is Kantian, to be sure, but it intervenes here as an “in other words,” as another way of saying the same thing, which is to say as the same that is, however, already other.

If we follow Kant’s thought, however, and understand the symbol as representing the means by which philosophy can become truly critical, then it would be a mistake to read the substitution of one absence for another as the failure of symbolic economy or of critical philosophy. Philosophy’s lack of an empirical case that could be presented directly, that is, its very separation from “the world,” is transformed into an engagement “in the world” by means of the analogical substitution. The analogy or symbol does not facilitate this transformation, making philosophy properly philosophical for the first time, however, by overcoming the lack of an empirical referent. Rather, it substitutes one absence for another (“another, ‘equally empirical’ intuition”), or an “as if” referent for an absent referent, one referent that is “as if” a referent for another that is not a referent at all. Since this symbolic movement is the necessary condition of critical philosophy, the only means by which philosophy can conform to its Idea, we might describe the “as if” as the minimal condition of all philosophy, but also of the political, as such. What this means is that the nature of critical philosophy’s engagement in the world must be other than one that could be validated by an intuitable referent. Philosophy’s referent must be something other than an empirical referent that could be grasped in an act of intuition.

It is here that the constitutive role of the political in the Kantian system becomes evident. For critical philosophy, lacking an empirical referent to validate itself, must still provide an analogy that would permit such a validating judgement. Thus, the phrase that presides over what Lyotard presents as the political according to Kant, that might define the possibility of a philosophy of the political: “The philosophical phrase according to Kant is an analogue of the political phrase according to Kant.” The analogical relation between philosophy

and the political would thus make the political the fulfilment of philosophy.¹⁰ In order for philosophy to earn its title, it must have recourse to a symbol of itself, and that symbol is the political. As the “as if” referent of philosophy, the political allows philosophy to enter the world, to operate “*like* an external critique” rather than “confining itself miserably to internal critique” (25).¹¹ According to the logic of this substitution, we might expect the political to function as the empirical case the philosophical lacks, so that philosophy can continue to make judgements. This can hardly be the case, however, not only because of all we have seen concerning the nature of this symbolic economy, but because the political, even as analogue of philosophy, must itself be critical. The political, that is, is an analogue of philosophy in that both in their respective domains establish the condition of possibility of knowledge. Like philosophy, the political is the domain of critical phrases that, according to their definition, cannot have an intuitable object. In short, the entire development concerning philosophy’s need of an “as if” referent to become truly philosophical holds for the political as well.

What might have appeared to be a lapse in the Kantian conception of symbolic substitution (or at least Lyotard’s reading of it), the replacement of one absent content by another, is hardly that, therefore, but rather the logical development of the analogy that opened and guides Kant’s thought. Philosophy finds a symbol for itself in the political, we might say, because the political is as lacking in an empirical referent that could be subject to an act of presentation as is philosophy. Philosophy acts as if it were political in order to become philosophy in the first place, which is to say, in order to become philosophy in the world. Reciprocally, the political acts as if it were philosophical, and thus critical, such that it can provide the analogy for the philosophical in the first place. On the most fundamental level, then, philosophy always depends upon something “outside” itself that can act as if it were philosophy for philosophy, in turn, to act as something other than an internal critique.

The acting as if that permits the movement from inside to outside, from philosophy to the political (and from the political to philosophy), thus describes the analogous relation that constitutes a mutual pretension to the status of criticism. Cathy Caruth’s contention that in the Kantian conception of the symbolic “what remains after the symbol has symbolized itself is always another term that is not contained within the symbolic structure” is born out here in exemplary fashion.¹² For the “as if” must precede both critical philosophy and the political. In this case, the term not contained in the symbolic structure is the symbol itself; the “as if” will always precede and exceed particular relations. At this point, this may simply mean that the conception of symbolic analogy must

be larger than the individual terms to be symbolized within its structure. However, it is not that two modes of potentially critical inquiry, each capable of being represented, find their symbol in each other and thereby achieve truly critical status. Rather, symbolic analogy, the “as if,” is an originary mode of presentation that grounds all subsequent symbolic substitutions as well as the political and philosophy as such. A mode of presentation (*présentation, Darstellung*), it operates as an originary setting or placing there, a literal *Darstellung*, that inaugurates, creates the opening for, posits critical philosophy and the political.

The excessive nature of the symbolic relation between philosophy and the political will in fact be worked out in terms that correspond with some precision to Caruth’s description of the Kantian symbolic in other texts. For Caruth writes that as a result of the term that cannot be contained within the symbolic structure, examples are generated, “not ‘empirical’ examples, but examples in the argument, linguistic examples, which would always eventually take the form of a narrative” (83). Indeed, as long as the political is conceived of as the “as if” referent of philosophy it can never be an empirical example, but must remain, strictly speaking, an example in the argument, linguistic. The political, then, might be called the fiction of philosophy, but given their analogical relation, philosophy must also be the fiction of the political.¹³ This is not to deny either philosophy or the political its reality. Conventional distinctions between the real and fiction no longer hold here, for the “as if” can be reduced to neither one nor the other.¹⁴ Critical philosophy as such will be constituted by the necessary fiction that it is political and this fiction is what will in fact allow it *to become* political. Fictioning, the “as if,” permits the self-affirmation and self-fulfilment of philosophy as such. Philosophy becomes political, philosophy-in-the-world, if at all, by means of the fiction that it is political.

The linguistic example this relation represents does not fail to become a narrative, as Caruth predicts. In fact, this may well be part of the import of that now-famous story told by Kant in the opening pages of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. There, Kant tells of how the dogmatism that once reigned in metaphysics gave way to Lockean empiricism, which, in turn, was overtaken by the Enlightenment. What separates this final stage from the previous ones in the history of metaphysics and what keeps it from itself becoming a dogmatism is that there reason seeks self-knowledge, notably through the institution of a tribunal that assures it of the legitimacy of its own pretensions to knowledge. This tribunal is nothing other than the *Critique of Pure Reason*.¹⁵

Lyotard rightly states that Kant “symbolise souvent l’activité critique comme celle d’un tribunal ou d’un juge” [often symbolizes critical activity as that of a tribunal or a judge] (17). Yet if this is true, it cannot be in that the

narrative Kant relates would be the symbolic content that renders “l'événement de la critique . . . présentable” [the event of critique . . . presentable] (29).¹⁶ For this would be an understanding of the symbol and of the event of critique foreign to what actually takes place in Kant's text. Rather, if Kant symbolizes critical activity as that of a judge in this narrative, it is because the “as if” is always understood as a kind of fiction. The symbol becomes fiction, *récit*; conceived of as an “as if” referent, the symbol is the nascent form of narrative. Thus, what is told in this symbol of critical activity is how the law at once works according to the law and institutes the law itself.¹⁷ This is the story of the self-institution of the law; and as such it is the story of the activity of the symbol itself no less than it is of critical activity. For in telling the story of this institution of the law by the law (we might just as well say of the political by the political), the narrative retells what the story of the “as if” referent, the story of how the symbol performs the originary positing or *Darstellung* of critical philosophy and the political.¹⁸

Still, it is by no means clear that a full development of what kind of an understanding of philosophy and the political this analogy produces is ever worked out, in Kant's oeuvre, to be sure, but no less so in Lyotard's reading of it. Nor has the linguistic nature of the relation been adequately accounted for. The beginning of an answer might well be presented in the Argument that opens *Enthusiasm*.

(L)'un et l'autre ont à juger sans avoir la règle du jugement, à la différence du juridico-politique. . . . Autrement dit: de même que le critique, chez Kant, ne doit pas prêter à doctrine (mais à critique), de même il ne doit pas avoir de doctrine de l'historico-politique. La relation est même peut-être plus qu'une affinité, une analogie: le critique (toujours au sens kantien) est peut-être le politique dans l'univers des phrases philosophiques, et le politique peut-être (au sens kantien) le critique dans l'univers des phrases socio-historiques.

[(D)iffering from the juridico-political, both have to judge without having the rule of judgment. . . . In other words, just as the critical, in Kant, must not give rise to doctrine (but to critique), so too there must be no doctrine of the historico-political. The relation is perhaps even *more* than an affinity, an analogy: the critical (still in the Kantian sense) is perhaps the political in the universe of philosophical phrases, and the political (in the Kantian sense) perhaps the critical in the universe of socio-historical phrases.](11, emphasis added)

The insistence upon the word *analogy* in the first chapter should preclude any naive use of the term here. The relation between philosophy and the political is thus presented as a relation that is more than analogy. This “more” seemingly

designates a more intimate relation than that signified by a mere analogy, a relation in which criticism not only acts as if it were the political but *is* the political within a certain domain (and vice versa). Understood in these terms, analogy takes the form of, or can be represented by, a system of representation. Analogy, that is, could be expressed in terms of simile, such that the political and the critical operate *like* one another, judging without a rule. Now, however, “more” describes the functioning of analogy as more than an analogical thinking in terms of similarity, which might do little to change the system of representation. The simile is deepened, we might say, so that it can now be expressed in the form of metaphor: “the critical is the political.”

Lyotard’s representation of the relation is at odds with the description of analogy that functions precisely because the relation between the political and the critical in a Kantian sense reformulates the terms of a traditional understanding of representation. There, analogy is no longer understood in terms of proximity in which judgments of Ideas, lacking intuitable object, seek an intuitable symbol for their Ideas, which they reflect upon as if it were the Idea itself in order to reach a judgment. Moreover, the thinking of the excess of the relation here must also mean that this particular relation cannot be contained by relational, analogical thinking. The relation between philosophy and the political must always exceed the thinking of analogy, such that their relation can no longer be represented symbolically. The relation between them will at once presuppose and be represented by the “as if,” by the symbolic, on one hand, and exceed that very presupposition and representation, never be fully explained or represented by its symbol, on the other. According to the logic of this “more,” the analogy is both a deepened, intensified relation, a more intimate relation, and more than an analogy. The very movement toward a more intimate relation signalled by the “more” also breaks out of that relation. It is precisely in becoming *more* of a relation, an intensified relation, that the relation becomes *more than* a relation, exceeds the thinking of the relation. As long as the relation between the critical and the political is understood as a kind of hyperanalogy, a relation more than analogy in that it is more of the same, more similar than analogy expresses, the politicality of the critical will always refer the critical back to itself: the critical is the political, that is, a certain kind of critique.¹⁹

It would seem that Lyotard’s characterization of the political here can respond neither to his own development in the pages that follow nor to what would be a Kantian conception of the political. For the political, in order to judge Ideas, which by definition can have no presentable empirical case, must have recourse to an “as if” referent, a symbolic analogy. And since its own Idea, the Idea of the political, is included among these Ideas, the political must find

its analogy in philosophy or the critical. The Idea of the political (or the critical) will always be the Idea that cannot be accounted for in a hyper-analogical relation in which the critical *is* the political, the political the critical. As the “as if,” however, analogy will always be in excess of a conception of analogy as an affinity between two terms. Thus, the analogy at issue here is always more than an analogy, more than one analogy, producing a multiplicity of possible symbols, analogies, and so forth. This begins to explain why for Lyotard there is no longer a single end toward which humanity is oriented but a multiplicity of ends. The relation between the political and philosophy is therefore more than an analogy not least because an understanding of representation as simile and metaphor can no longer represent that relation. This relation will always exceed such an understanding of representation, precisely because the political can never be accounted for in it. For while the analogical relation between the political and philosophy as we have seen it described apparently binds the two in a self-closing and self-fulfilling relation, within that relation philosophy always depends upon the political as its symbol, that as which philosophy can act. In order for philosophy to find its symbol and become critical, it depends upon the political, which must reciprocally act as if it were philosophy. What at once grounds and allows the ostensible closure of the relation, then, is this acting “as if” of symbolic analogy. This analogy must always be more than, exceed, the analogical terms it brings into relation, and must exceed the relation between them that takes the form of a self-fulfilling, closed relation. Analogy is thus what at once gives the relation the appearance of closure and what will never be fully contained by that relation or representable in terms of a traditional understanding of representation as expressed by a casual use of the term *analogy*.

The conception of the political as the “as if” referent of philosophy, as a fiction, that is, as linguistic, means that the political can never be reduced to a determinate politics of any description, for the political can never have an intuitable, empirical referent, not even a set of concepts that could be put into practice and that could be called “politics.” It is the very linguistic nature of the political that resists all (mis)appropriation by a political program that could somehow claim fidelity to the essence or Idea of politics, the political itself.²⁰ But this is not simply to reduce the political to a mere play of language either. For it is precisely in becoming fully symbolic that the relation between the political and philosophy can no longer be contained by symbolic structure or representation. This is where Lyotard’s deployment of the resources offered by Kant’s thought, however faithful to that thought, offers the possibility of a reconceptualized political. It is by no means evident, however, that Lyotard himself fully explores the implications of that rethinking, in *Enthusiasm* at

least.²¹ For it is in the description of the relation between philosophy and the political as more than an affinity, that point at which the political is said to be philosophy, philosophy the political, that the political acquires its peculiar power.

If the fictionality of the political refused its appropriation to any politics, here that same linguistic status, just where it is intensified to express a fully symbolic interlacing, is in excess of the symbol. Since it is the symbol that will always be more than a symbol, the “as if,” the fictionality of the political, ensures that the political can also never be reduced to or appropriated for a system of representation, even the very symbolic structure that provides its founding moment or definition. This, then, would be a conception of the political that would resist the intentional control of political subjects and their programs by means of its fictionality or linguisticity, but that also resists the intentionality of a linguistic structure such as the symbol. The political will therefore be radically indeterminate, exploding the very structure in which it is postulated. Defined as a symbol, but a symbol that is more than a symbol, exceeding its own definition, the concept of the political would necessarily include the rupturing of its own conceptuality. This is why it is by no means certain that there could ever be either a concept or a philosophy of the political. The political would be not only the symbol of philosophy but the resistance to the attempt to philosophize—the political itself.



One of the effects of the rethinking of the political as analogous to critical philosophy, we have seen, is to withdraw it from any grounds outside of itself. Any political action, indeed any action in general, cannot be judged on the basis of an empirical model, for instance, nor can it be founded on a notion of the subject as the ground for judgement itself. Thus, what the rethinking of history and the political in terms of the “as if” will ultimately demand is a rethinking and re-translation of the imperative that for Kant governs the possibility of just action. Yet such a rethinking leads not to an abandonment of political and ethical responsibility, but rather to a radicalized understanding of it. As Thomas Keenan puts it, “[R]esponsibility is not a moment of security or of cognitive certainty. Quite to the contrary: the only responsibility worthy of the name comes with the removal of grounds, the withdrawal of the rules or the knowledge on which we might rely to make our decisions for us. No grounds means no alibis, no elsewhere to which we might refer the instance of our decision.”²²

It follows, then, that Lyotard’s reading of Kant will refigure not only the political but his most important thinking on ethics, as well as his consideration

of history. This will mean, to be sure, rethinking nothing less than that imperative that rules over Kant's ethical thought. In the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, for example, Kant describes how an imperative, if it is to be universal and categorical, must not be contingent upon anything like a goal to be reached if the imperative is followed ("Do unto others as you would have others do unto you" would not qualify). Rather than being intended towards a determinate end, the imperative expresses a relation of *Gesetzmäßigkeit*, an accordance to the law. If an action that is apparently motivated by the laws of nature is also possible according to one's will, to freedom, the conditions of the categorical imperative have been met. Rather than the law itself, then, rather than a rule, it is this thinking of relation, the accordance to the law, that makes the passage from theory to practice and from nature to freedom possible. Translating this rule will amount to retranslating the very status of history.²³

C'est le *type* de la législation qui guide formellement la maxime de la volonté dans la formulation de l'impératif catégorique, et aussi dans l'évaluation de l'action juste. Il faut donc bien entendre le *so daß* du *Handelt so daß* de l'impératif catégorique comme un *comme si* plutôt que comme un *de sorte que*: car l'universalité ne peut pas être effectivement conclue de la maxime, mais seulement présentée indirectement à l'évaluation qui en est faite.

[The *type* of legislation formally guides the maxim of the will in the formulation of the categorical imperative and also in the evaluation of just action. We must therefore understand the *so daß* [so that] of the *Handelt so daß* [Act so that] of the categorical imperative as an *as if* more than as a *so that*. For universality cannot actually be concluded from the maxim, but only presented indirectly to the evaluation that is made of it.] (39–40)

How are we to understand this rereading of the very cornerstone of the practical in Kant's philosophy? Lyotard's argument reads like the statement of a truth too long overlooked, like an assertion that Kant's text means "as if" and not "so that" and that this meaning is unavoidable. But this appearance of merely stating, asserting, describing what should follow naturally from his exposition of the passage made by judgement is not the least of what is disconcerting in Lyotard's argument. For he does not merely state that the "so that" is really an "as if," but demands an understanding of it as such: "We *must* therefore understand . . ." It would at this point be quite easy, and perhaps altogether legitimate, to accuse Lyotard of mixing different kinds of phrases in precisely the manner that he says one must not mix language genres: he slides here from the descriptive into the prescriptive, prescribing a reading of the categorical imperative that takes on the appearance of a description.²⁴ Lyotard's reading is

actually an imperative, the imperative of the categorical imperative. Yet even as an imperative, its force is to put into question the categorical imperative, for it reformulates the universality of the relation expressed in the *so that*, making it an utterly contingent and indeterminate “as if.”

Like the political, this imperative is thoroughly linguistic, and not merely because it mixes language genres, or because it dictates what amounts to a retranslation of Kant, but because it is as imperative that it seeks to disrupt the imperative. Now, it is as if there could be a link between the individual and the universal, between nature and liberty. Lyotard’s retranslation of Kant does not simply overcome the imperative mode but rather disrupts what in Kant appears to be a determined relation between the distinct realms. Lyotard, however, calls not for the necessity of just action, not for what clearly could be seen as a historical event; rather, his is an injunction for a *reading* of that imperative. Lyotard’s imperative calls for a reading and even a retranslation of Kant that would render that determinate relation indeterminate. According to Lyotard’s reading, Kant’s imperative says one thing but *must* mean another. What it says, in Kant’s own words and their translation into French and English, is:

Handle so, daß die Maxime deines Willens jederzeit zugleich als Prinzip einer allgemeinen Gesetzgebung gelten könne.²⁵

Agis de telle sorte que la maxime de ta volonté puisse toujours valoir en même temps comme principe d’une législation universelle.²⁶

Act so that the maxim of your will can always at the same time be valid as a universal legislation.

But what the categorical imperative must mean, according to Lyotard, is:

Agis comme si la maxime de ta volonté puisse toujours valoir en même temps comme principe d’une législation universelle.

Handle als ob die Maxime deines Willens jederzeit zugleich als Prinzip einer allgemeinen Gesetzgebung gelten könne.

Act as if the maxim of your will can always at the same time be valid as a universal legislation.

If I invert the order of the passages here, it is because, following Lyotard, Kant’s own German would have to be retranslated into German (perhaps Kant should have written in French) in order to say what his own thought means. If Lyotard feels obliged to phrase his reading of Kant in the form of an imperative, it is clearly because Kant criticism has not read the “so daß” as a “comme si.” Lyotard’s imperative is enunciated precisely because it has been, and can continue to be, broken.²⁷ His imperative seeks to rewrite the history of Kant

criticism, which is to rewrite the history of a certain understanding of history. He is not the first to propose such a retranslation, the very kind of translation that no self-respecting translator would undertake, however. Kant's own multiple phrasings and rephrasings of the categorical imperative attest to much the same practice.

Lyotard does not, however, remove the grounds for an evaluation of just action.²⁸ Rather, he makes the relation that controls that action indeterminate. His reading of Kant leaves the possibility of a relation between the individual and universal, but now the link is a "comme si" rather than a "so daß." In order for the categorical imperative as Lyotard understands it to be respected, one cannot act so that there is an adherence to the universal law, but rather as if such an adherence were taking place. This acting "as if," this acting that defines the possibility of just acting, then, posits the universal. In fact, this positing might already be read in Kant's formulation of reflective judgement as the derivative of a rule or universal for a particular case according to the structure of purposiveness. The determined relation Lyotard disrupts, then, was never fully that. More important, though, Lyotard's formulation highlights how a continual acting as if there were a possibility of a relation to the universal in fact posits the universal. What is not accounted for in this conception of history is the imperative that makes the rereading of history and thus also the rethinking of the relation to the universal possible. Lyotard's own imperative ("We must therefore understand") cannot be accounted for in such a conception of history, for it dictates a determined linguistic relation, a relation between two sets of signifiers ("so that" and "as if") linked by understanding (*entendre*). Lyotard's imperative, that is, calls for the absolute necessity of reading the "so that" as an "as if" if the history of Kant criticism is to be interrupted and rewritten, if a conception of history is to be rethought in terms of a continual *production* of a history oriented toward an indeterminate future and a positing of a relation to the universal. Lyotard's imperative seeks to determine an indeterminate relation and as such remains radically at odds with the (conception of) history he would inaugurate.

What would appear to be a merely linguistic relation, the relation between two languages and between possible translations of a single term ("so daß" read as "comme si" or "de sorte que") thus acquires the status of historical revision—the revision of the writing of a certain history and of a conception of history. The relation between history and the (interpretable, translatable) sign is not simply that of the anteriority and priority of the historical, then; rather, it describes a relation in which a modification of that which is secondary, later (representation, the sign) has the unforeseen and unconventional effect of modifying that which is prior and primary (history, the concept).

This is precisely what takes place in Kant’s understanding of history as the continual progression of the human species toward the best, in fact, toward nothing less than perpetual peace. Given this understanding of history in terms of an orientation toward the future, no direct presentation of a history of progress is possible. Rather than something that is given to intuition (*ein Gegebenes*), an *indication* of progress is called for. The *Begebenheit* that fulfills this requirement is characterized by an indeterminate temporal relation:

[C]ette *Begebenheit* qui se livre dans l’histoire humaine indique une cause dont l’occurrence de l’effet reste non déterminée (*unbestimmt*) à l’égard du temps (*in Ansehung der Zeit*): on reconnaît la clause d’indépendance de la causalité par liberté par rapport aux séries diachroniques du monde mécanique. Cette causalité peut intervenir n’importe quand. . . . Car c’est à ce prix qu’on pourrait alors étendre la possibilité d’intervention de cette cause aussi au passé et au futur.

[(T)his *Begebenheit* that is given in human history indicates a cause the occurrence of whose effect remains undetermined (*unbestimmt*) in relation to time (*in Ansehung der Zeit*): we recognize the clause of the independence of causality through freedom in relation to the diachronic series of the mechanical world. This causality can intervene at any time. . . . For it is at this price that the possibility of the intervention of this cause could be extended to the past as well as the future.] (55–6)

A *Begebenheit*, as sign of history, liberates the historical from diachronic causality. Historical causality, for Kant, emerges less as a matter of a series of events arranged in a temporal sequence, such that one leads to the other as its author or cause, than it does as a question of intervention. The *Begebenheit* opens up the possibility that the cause of progress may intervene from either the past or the future. It opens up a temporal relation in which history is no longer limited to a conventional conception of causality, but rather in which the cause may be as yet to come. The *Begebenheit* is thus that which comes between as a sort of mediation, though not in any conventionally dialectical sense. Rather, the intervention of the *Begebenheit* is the entering-into, the coming-to, *history itself*; it is historical intervention in the strictest sense. For historical intervention is not merely the intervention (of an agent, for example) in history, but rather the intervention of history into history, history coming to historical status. Kant’s conception of history thus discloses the very conditions according to which history becomes historical. This takes place only when historical causality is made a field open to intervention from past, present, and future.

While Lyotard’s reading of Kant traces how, as a result of the reformulation of history in terms of indeterminate temporal relations, the cause is simply an

intervention into time, either past or future (56), he continues to outline a much more literal intervention or coming-between: “[L]a *Begebenheit* ne doit pas être elle-même la cause du progrès, mais seulement l’indice du progrès, un *Geschichtszeichen*” [(T)he *Begebenheit* must not itself be the cause of progress, but only the sign of progress, a *Geschichtszeichen* (sign of history)] (56).

What intervenes is not the cause itself, then, but its sign (*Zeichen*). The *Begebenheit* functions as the sign rather than the cause of progress, presenting as well as remembering and prognosticating history. As the sign of history, the *Begebenheit* comes between (without endangering the movement between) cause and progress and between history and its perception. The cause is an intervention into indeterminate temporal relations, but here it is clear that while the *Begebenheit* is distinguished from the cause, it nonetheless partakes of a far more literal intervention, an *inter-venir*, a coming-between that allows both cause and progress to be perceived as such.

The *Begebenheit*, as the sign of history, therefore represents a nondialectical form of mediation or coming-between. It allows the crossing of the abyss separating cause and progress without sublating it. And even as a *sign of history*, the *Begebenheit* determines the status of that of which it is a sign—history—thus reformulating what amounts to a conventional understanding of the sign, representation, history, and their relation. The historico-political “n’a pas de réalité, en tant que tel” [has no reality as such] (45), is a “‘comme si’ objet” (57). It is derealized, an “‘as if’ object,” because that which has a reality, that is, “[c]e pour le concept de quoi l’on peut présenter des intuitions, ce sont seulement les phénomènes, tous conditionnés et conditionnants, dont la série, qui n’est elle-même jamais donnée, constitue l’histoire, même pas naturelle, mais seulement cosmologique, de l’humanité” [(t)hat for which intuitions can be presented are simply phenomena, all conditioned and conditioning, whose series, which itself is never given, constitutes the history of humanity, which is not even natural but only cosmological] (45). The “as if” is thus disclosed as what might be termed the minimal condition of history. History is an open-ended, undetermined series which by definition must remain not only untotaled (and untotalizable) but unavailable to intuition, an analogue to the sublime. The undetermined and derealized status of the historical as fixed by a *Begebenheit* does not, however, render it a mere fiction in any conventional sense. Rather, the derealization of history as a possible object of intuition demands the intervention of the *Begebenheit*, the sign of history. The very possibility of any recognition, not to mention judgement, of history entails its coming into relation with a sign, with (re)presentation. The effect of this relation is to displace the place of history, to relocate history, so that it rests not only on the historical scene, but also in the “sentiment

des spectateurs obscurs et lointains (la salle de l'histoire) qui les regardent, les entendent, et qui distinguent dans le bruit et la fureur des *res gestae* ce qui est juste et ce qui ne l'est pas" [feeling of the obscure and distant spectators (the theatre of history) who watch [historical events], hear them, and who distinguish in the noise and furor of the *res gestae* what is and is not just] (59). For Kant the enthusiasm of the spectators of the French Revolution, though they are not immediately implicated in it, constitutes just such a sign.²⁹

What determines this enthusiasm as a sign of history is its status as a "modality of the feeling of the sublime" (59). The feeling of the sublime results from the inability to supply a presentation for an object, thus causing the experience of powerlessness and marking the turn to the Idea of humanity. The enthusiasm of those witnessing the French Revolution from a somewhat comfortable distance (a necessary condition of the sublime) as a sign of history thus equally marks the shift from the given object to the Idea of humanity in an exemplary fashion. For while the view of Mont Blanc or crossing the Alps, to take two off-hand examples, may occasion the feeling of the sublime, the French Revolution, turning us toward the still, sad music of humanity, would seem even more likely to stir such a sentiment: its goals, after all, were ostensibly intended toward such an Idea as expressed in the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. And yet to follow Kant's conception of the sublime closely, neither the supposed goals of the Revolution nor the Revolution itself can be credited with the qualities that are ultimately placed not on the historical scene but in the audience. That is, the purported goals of the Revolution (which are in some sense humanitarian or humanist) are not the source of the feeling turned toward the Idea of humanity. The exemplarity of the French Revolution as an object producing the feeling of the sublime thus cannot be located in its adherence to the idea of humanity. If the Revolution is the source of the feeling of the sublime, it is rather because both it and its guiding principles are the objects before which presentation fails. The Revolution can be the source of a sublime sentiment only on this condition, meaning that the turn to the Idea of humanity that takes place in the feeling of the sublime arises from a failure to present that same Idea.

The unstated similarity between Kant's conception of the French Revolution and Lyotard's conception of postmodernity thus lies in the asymmetric positioning of the Idea of humanity. It is the Idea for which an adequate presentation cannot be found and which nevertheless leads to the feeling for that same Idea. Consequently, an incommensurability, an asymmetry, exists not only within this idea but in the very possibility of presentation. Enthusiasm, the sign of history, discloses a fundamental incommensurability in all presentation

as well as the destination/determination (*Bestimmung*) of the subject. Our *Bestimmung* (this “our” needing to be put into question³⁰) is to have to produce a presentation of the unrepresentable; it is to be subject to an excess, to exceed all that can be presented, this excess acting as if presentation of the unrepresentable were possible.

The apparent failure of presentation, however, is what we have seen lead to the turn to the feeling of the Idea of humanity. Enthusiasm thus discloses a certain universality, that of humanity. This is also why the positioning of the sign of history not on the historical scene but in the audience is crucial: in this way the historical is freed not only from the (potentially dangerous) passions of the historical actors, but from an overly determinate and limited scope with the potential to become truly international and cosmopolitan (*weltbürgerlich*). The status of the sign of history, however, the *Begebenheit* that is the enthusiasm of the “spectators” of the Revolution, is not determined by the fact or even the possibility of such a universality in itself. Rather, what makes a sign a sign of history for Kant is its affirmation that humanity is progressing toward the best. The sign of history is therefore already determined, perhaps even overdetermined: it is any such affirmation of progress. All that is now needed is a sign of this sign. The enthusiasm of the spectators of the Revolution fulfills this criterion because, Lyotard insists, it is an extreme, even excessive, form of the sublime:

[L]e sublime constitue une “comme si” présentation . . . de l’Idée de moralité, là où pourtant elle ne peut être présentée, dans l’expérience. C’est ainsi que le sublime est un signe. Ce signe n’est qu’indicateur d’une causalité libre, mais il a pourtant valeur de “preuve” pour la phrase qui affirme le progrès, puisqu’il faut que l’humanité spectatrice ait déjà progressé dans la culture pour pouvoir faire ce signe, par sa “manière de penser” la Révolution. Ce signe est le progrès dans son état présent . . . alors que les sociétés civiles ne sont pas, tant s’en faut, proches du régime républicain ni les Etats de leur fédération mondiale.

[(T)he sublime constitutes an “as if” presentation . . . of the Idea of morality where, however, it cannot be presented, in experience. It is thus that the sublime is a sign. This sign is only an indication of a free causality; however, it has the value of “proof” for the phrase that affirms progress, since the spectating humanity must already have progressed in culture, through its “manner of thinking” the Revolution, in order to be able to make this sign. This sign is progress in its present state . . . while civil societies are not close (far from it) to either the republican regime or the States of their world federation.] (75)

What ultimately takes place in Kant is a displacement not merely of the sign of history from the historical scene, from world-historical events and their

agents to their perception by an audience, but a displacement of *history itself* from one to the other. This displacement takes place here because of a change in the status of the sign. At first, the sublime, enthusiasm, is a mere indication that nonetheless carries all the force of a proof that the spectators have progressed in their way of thinking the Revolution. This sign, however, then quickly becomes this progress in the mode of the present (“This sign is progress in its present state”). This sign as indication of progress becomes a modality of that progress itself and as such is no longer a sign of history so much as it *is history itself*. Thus, the enthusiasm that serves as an “as if” presentation of the Idea of civil and even cosmopolitan society also undergoes a transformation. It is no longer an “as if” presentation that enthusiasm supplies, no longer an indication of progress, no longer as if progress, historicity, could be affirmed. Rather, following the logic of the progression in Lyotard’s passage, the “as if” history becomes the “is” history. The sublime, enthusiasm, the *salle*, the spectators, are already history and not “merely” its sign, because the sign of history has become history itself.

It therefore follows naturally that one of these spectators, an apparent commentator and nothing more, must also change in status to become a component of the sign and of history itself: “Si ce signe peut être discerné par la pensée kantienne, c’est qu’elle même n’en est pas seulement une lecture, mais une composante” [If this sign can be discerned by Kant’s thought, it is because it itself is not only a reading of the sign but a component] (75).

What can it mean that the distinction between history, its sign, and the reading of that sign is collapsed here? This is, to be sure, a necessary consequence of a reflexive understanding of history in terms of an aesthetic that shifts the scene of history from the scene to the audience, opening the way for a further displacement in which the reading of the sign is also a component of that sign. Kant doubles, repeats, reflects the enthusiasm of the spectators of the Revolution, his assertion that progress is on its inevitable march reflecting their own belief in such progress. Not only the reading but the very perception of the sign of history as a sign collapses all difference between the reading of the sign and the sign itself, between the sign and that of which it is the sign.

Such a view of spectating is hardly surprising, given that we are dealing with Kant. Who better than Kant, after all, to speak for the historical significance of a certain mode of perception, Kant, who could, if one is to believe him, see everything from home?

Eine große Stadt, der Mittelpunkt eines Reichs, in welchem sich die Landescollegia der Regierung desselben befinden, die eine Universität (zur Kultur der Wissenschaften) und dabei noch die Lage zum Teehandel hat, welche durch Flüsse aus dem Inneren des Landes sowohl, als auch mit

angränzenden entlegenen Ländern von verschiedenen Sprachen and Sitten einen Verkehr begünstigt,—eine solche Stadt, wie etwa Königsberg am Pregelflusse, kann schon für einen schicklichen Platz zu Erweiterung sowohl der Menschenkenntniß als auch der Weltkenntniß genommen werden, wo diese, auch ohne zu reifen, erworben werden kann.

A large city like Königsberg on the river Pregel, the capital of a state, where the representative National Assembly of the government resides, a city with a university (for the cultivation of the sciences), a city also favored by its location for maritime commerce, and which, by way of rivers, has the advantages of commerce both with the interior of the country as well as with neighboring countries of different languages and customs, can well be taken as an appropriate place for enlarging one's knowledge of people as well as of the world at large, where such knowledge can be acquired even without travel.³¹

As much as he would displace history from the stage of historical events to the sentiment of those viewing them, Kant would relocate it precisely in Königsberg, in Kant's residence, from where, needless to say, one can see everything. Kant need never leave Königsberg, then, from where his views on humankind can emerge as a sign of cultural progress insofar as they are that very progress.

As long as history is understood in terms of an orientation toward an end, something like progress, and as long as the aptitude for this end (what Kant calls "culture") is itself a sign of history, that is, as long as history is understood reflexively, the perception of the sign must itself always be a sign. The very recognition of the sign (the spectators' enthusiasm at the prospect of progress) must always be a sign (of the commentator's ability to discern progress). And the sign is itself progress (in the aptitude for progress). Accordingly, the perception of the sign of history is a sign (of itself), which *is* history. What Lyotard has called Kant's critique of history can no longer be considered merely as a critique but is itself the sign of history, which is to say, *is* history. In the terms he develops, displacing the sign of history to a kind of aesthetic of reception and then making that sign itself a component of history, commentary, the critique of history, will itself always be historical. A reflexive understanding of history carries with it the privilege and burden of implicating itself in history, of requiring that it account for its own history in a rigorous way, of historicizing itself.

An excessive, an extreme form of the sublime; an "as if" history that becomes history itself: in Lyotard's reading of Kant symbolic substitution presides over the entire thinking of history and the political. Given the nature of this excess, it should come as no surprise that the "as if" will reach beyond Kant to take up a determinative role in Lyotard's work, will reach beyond the Enlighten-

ment to provide the definition of a certain postmodernism: “[L]e politique kantien me paraît au plus près de ce qu’aujourd’hui nous pouvons entendre par, je dirais tout bêtement, le politique” [(T)he Kantian political seems to me closest to what, today, we can understand by, to put it quite simply, the political] (105). But the difference between then and now is precisely a kind of excess. The sign of history, now, is stirred not by a single end, but by the Idea of several ends or even by the heterogeneous Ideas of ends (108). The sign of history, now as opposed to then, is a “new kind of sublime.”

This new sublime, this excessive *Begebenheit* intended toward numerous ends, means that the political, today, is the “as if” referent of the Kantian political, with all that this analogical relation supposes. Today’s conception of the political will always be “as if” an Enlightenment conception of the political. It is the beyond, the more than, the excess that serves as the referent that the Enlightenment conception of the political lacked, and which is necessary if that conception is to assume its critical rigor. But this also means that the postmodern must exceed the Kantian political, must never be fully contained by it:

[C]ette histoire politique, il faudrait désormais la juger *comme si* elle avait fait un pas de plus dans le progrès, c’est-à-dire dans la culture de l’habileté et de la volonté. Car ce n’est pas seulement l’Idée d’une fin qui s’indiquerait dans notre sentiment, mais déjà l’Idée que cette fin consiste dans la formation et l’exploration libre des Idées, que cette fin est le commencement de l’infini des finalités hétérogènes. Tout ce qui ne satisfait pas à cette fission de la fin, tout ce qui se présente comme “réalisation” d’une fin unique, ce qui est le cas de la phrase de *la* politique, est senti comme n’étant pas à la mesure de, *angemessen*, pas “affine avec,” *abgezielt*, la capacité infinie des phrases qui se livre dans le sentiment qui suscite cette fission.

[(F)rom now on we would have to judge this political history *as if* it had made another step in progress, that is, in the culture of aptitude and will. For it is not only the Idea of *an* end that would be indicated in our feeling, but already the Idea that this end consists in the formation and free exploration of Ideas, that this end is the beginning of the infinity of heterogeneous finalities. Everything that does not satisfy the fission of the end, everything that presents itself as the “realization” of a single end, which is the case of the phrase of *politics* [*la politique*], is felt as not being suited to, *angemessen*, not “in accordance with,” *abgezielt*, the infinite capacity of phrases that is given in the feeling that arouses this fission.] (109)

We might suspect that, in accordance with the structure of historical repetition, that is, the repetition of a conceptualization of history, Lyotard here repeats Kant’s gesture, remarking the postmodern as a sign of progress and thus as a sign of history. The only difference between now and then, between Lyotard

and Kant, between the postmodern and the Enlightenment, would then be that the progress the postmodern signals is not a determinate and totalizing end such as a conception of humanity or freedom, but rather the recognition that the end is but the beginning of an infinity of ends. The end would thus be exploded, divided, and multiplied. It would interrupt the totalizing movement toward a telos. Such a conception of the postmodern and the political would conform more or less to both Lyotard's apparent intentions and much criticism of his work.³²

What is somewhat disconcerting in such a reading, however, is nothing less than the "as if" and the sign of history. A new Lyotardian imperative can hardly escape notice here: "We would have to judge this political history *as if* it had made another step in progress." While there is something intuitively appealing (with all the attendant difficulties of the appeal of and to intuition) in the multiplication of ends and the rupture of totalization and the promise of a certain pluralism, just precisely why postmodern political history would have to be judged as if it were a step in the right direction ought, perhaps, to be considered. Why does Lyotard feel obliged to oblige us to see the postmodern, his conception of the political, thus? What does it mean that without this final imperative the very conception of the postmodern and of the political as Lyotard develops them might lose all their force? Why the insistence upon progress and teleology, be it a teleology whose telos is multiplied? Given this insistence, have things changed all that much between then and now, between the Enlightenment and the postmodern? And finally, how are we to read the "as if" here? For this much seems clear: we *must* read the "as if."

Lyotard justifies his "imperative" with all the simplicity and authority of the word *car*, "for." One must read postmodern political history in terms of progress, for it opens up an infinity of heterogeneous ends. Thus, despite the disruption of the totalizing movement toward a single end by the multiplication of ends, Lyotard's own argument moves toward an ineluctable end. What we cannot avoid, and what his argument never accounts for, is the necessity of this end, the multiplication of ends. Lyotard's conception of the political, that is, is no less determined by an end, which is in effect the idea of heterogeneity, infinity, multiplicity. This end presides over his conception of the political from beginning to end and effectively condemns all that does not conform to it to a corrupted and inferior status. Thus, all mere politics, historical practices in the most common sense, which intend themselves toward a single potentially realizable end rather than to an indeterminable multiplicity of ends that cannot be submitted to the control of any intention, are seen by Lyotard as perversions of the political both in *Enthusiasm* and elsewhere. His end is now the end of the

(single, unified, totalizing) end, an end in the structure and movement of his argument, but no longer an end conceived as a final conceptual resolution. An end that is not the end. A simple conception of the multiplication of the telos, a kind of conceptual pluralism, can never adequately describe this end.

Again, what is troubling about this end is that it is willed rather than legitimated or derived from the analysis of the political that precedes it. The end is, in effect, placed there (*dar-gestellt*), and it is placed there, posited, as that which will justify a reading of the postmodern political condition as if it were a step in progress. The infinity of ends is the given, the *Gegebenes*, that makes a reading of the postmodern and the political as history possible. It is not only as if the political history related signalled some form of progress, but as if an infinity of ends could be read as progress. This final “as if,” which Lyotard does not write, is the “as if” he must not write. For in the place of this “as if,” he would place a *for*, with all the appearance of a self-evident logical argument it carries. Lyotard, that is, tries to argue for the necessity of the multiplication of ends (“we would have to . . . for . . .”), but within the terms of his own argument there is no necessity, no imperative, but rather an “as if” . . . As in the case of Kant, Lyotard’s own argument is a sign of history, which is to say that it *is* history insofar as history conceived as progress can only be as if . . . history. This does not weaken Lyotard’s conception of the political or simply catch him in a contradiction so much as it bears out the constitutive force of the “as if.” Lyotard’s oversight, if it is one, is to attempt to escape the “as if” that put his very argument into motion, to attempt to transform the indeterminacy of an “as if” into an *is* or a *for*. As if . . .

For Lyotard’s criticism to live up to its name, for it to be political in the full sense that Kant’s text makes available to him, and to us, it would have to follow this “as if” rigorously. A political criticism would be that mode of questioning that, whether or not it moves toward a determinate end, can never take that end, even if it is the multiplication of ends, as its end. The relation between the particular and the universal, between the phenomenal and its rule, between the text and its theorization, would now be that of an indeterminate, though constitutive, fiction—the “as if.” This is the nonimperative, the fictional, critical imperative, that articulates the necessity that criticism follow its object in the mode of the “as if” rather than that of a determined and determining rule. Following this (non)imperative throughout the chapters that follow will mean reading historical imperatives that will be played out, again and again, as their own transgression, as the imperative interruption of the very mode of the imperative, and as the transgressive crossings that will emerge as the borders of history and language.