

## Realms Without Totality: Lyotard's Post, Rancièresque, and the Strange Tools of Paralogy

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*Abstract: This essay posits tensions in art, education, and politics by using philosophical discourse to suggest that the way to create transformative events for social change is to understand Lyotard's diagnosis of the current age and Rancière's call to critical art practice. By proposing new strategies and tactics such as 'post-art' and 'strange tools', the author tries to demonstrate in the text the indirect approaches advocated by Lyotard and Rancière in tackling the current post-political world.*

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### Introduction: A Note on the Notion of 'Post,' the Productivity of 'Anti,' & Performing a New 'Critical'

*Post*

“A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant.”  
– Jean-François Lyotard (Lyotard, 1992, p. 79)

Given the sun has apparently set on postmodernism, with those final rays of twilight having vanished not that long ago as we entered this third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, questions must be asked: What has this dark night of post-postmodernism thrust upon us? What does this 'post' post era pontificate? How should we understand a notion of 'post' within a steady trickle of dispatched buzz words like post-politics, post-education, and post-art?

I suggest we start at one of the beginnings of postmodernism – the milieu of Jean François Lyotard. We seem to forget in our age of amnesia the prescient nature of Lyotard's work with suggesting postmodernism as a productive notion. His 1979 book, *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (translated in 1984 into English *The Postmodernism Condition: A Report on Knowledge*), should be read with reverence for those of us interested in how our controlling society wields the power of algorithms, networks, and information, thus establishing those technological (techno) conditions for our 'modern' world. In connection to that work, we must also pay attention in particular to his letter/essay from 1982: *Réponse à la question: qu'est-ce que le postmoderne?* (translated into English in 1983 as: *Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?*), for it is in that letter that the opening quote is sourced above.

That quote points to Lyotard's overall program of re-referencing the term 'post'. Lyotard's investigation reveals for him the function of 'post' is in a sense its opposite. It is not reserving a place for 'after' as it would connote, but instead becomes a placeholder for the 'after' which a 'before *and* after' happen spatially (before – event (now) – after). That space creates a moment that is simply not 'now' – or the 'after,' a space that can be possibly in front *and/or* behind a phenomena, event, etc., temporality. In other words, the 'constant nascent state' of phenomena is one of flux, chaos, or 'un-named phenomena' that, through the process of 'modernity' (in this case), becomes tame, labeled, intelligible 'things.' If we never step in the same river twice, then we must remember that when we step into it, we create ripples that mark our disturbance in space-time. These marks we see, measure,

name, ‘tame,’ etc., and feel temporally. We have here a description of a *process* of making things familiar, which is not just in the ‘modern era,’ but a function of the entire process of the human (and most likely the hominin) endeavor of navigating reality. Lyotard is simply pointing out that modernism’s ‘post’ or its ‘after’ can be understood instead as really a return to a state of ‘before,’ as well. Thus we have the non-linear ‘before [event] after’ in which ‘post’ is both the before and after of events. This recognition of the before *and* after is the ‘nascent state’ of ‘post,’ which in turn can be described as a state of constant unraveling of reality constructions which characterized the age of postmodernism. Furthermore, this spatial-temporal phenomena of ‘post’ will come in this essay to reveal the killer app of its function - *the making of the familiar strange*.

Leaving that idea aside for a moment, Lyotard’s work to reinscribe ‘post’ can now be properly understood as his predictions about the computerization of society, the performativity of power as its legitimation and verification, how language games dominate discourse, and how the job of education is to perform a continual loop of training instead of knowledge production (among other things), have in some sense all come to pass. These were the ways he described the ‘taming of things’ in our era, and postmodernism was a way to point out the strangeness unfolding all over knowledge production discourses which was questioning and unravelling the modern state of the world. The ‘post’ of postmodernism did indeed reopen the nascent state and allow the sun to set on modernity, but also gifted us a method of making the familiar strange, a needed method for our times of peril.

This method is the most interesting aspect of Lyotard’s work as it relates to the functionality implied within ‘post.’ This is explored explicitly with Kantian verve in the letter/essay from 1982: *Réponse à la question: qu’est-ce que le postmoderne?* (translated into English in 1983 as: *Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?*) from which we started this introduction. Again the quote points to the way Lyotard frames postmodernism as just explored. Let us dive deeper into the ramifications of Lyotard’s construction of the functioning of ‘post.’ For him, discourses like science, modernity, and even knowledge itself (epistemology), have all turned into ‘controlled categories’ legitimated in ‘the modern’ drive for measurement and assessment. When rethinking the ‘constant nascent state’ of a phenomena, we might now say something like ‘modernity happened to postmodernity,’ (because ‘post’ is now both before *and/or* after), or ‘modernity created a system of discourse we called science, law, economics, etc.’ These discourses of modernity all interrupted the natural function of knowledge production, articulation, and dissemination. In recent history, it was this function of ‘post’ which rethought society, education, punishment, knowledge, etc. into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These postmodern discourses addressing those domains of knowledge where in the Lyotardian sense actually a return to a ‘natural function’ of which ‘post’ is grounding discourse ‘back and/or after’, showing the multiplicity from which we tamed knowledge into modernity in the first place. We have returned to the river of knowledge—the uninterrupted flowing of water—or as Lyotard (1992) puts in the end of the essay, “a realm without totality.” The totalizing function of modernity is the function ‘post’ seeks to interrupt and is a process we can witness to inform the making strange required for new inquiries.

In our current educational and political impasses, we must evoke the manic verve of ‘post’ again to make strange the function of politics, art, education, aesthetics, etc. It is in that function of ‘post’ that we can allow *realms without totality* to return before post-postmodernity makes explicit demands—re-totalizing realms of knowledge production. Thus politics (as post-politics), art (as post-art), education (as post-education), etc., all function from a place of ‘post’ today which seeks to find the before/after—the remnants of the multiplicity that allowed for domains of knowledge to function without the demands of a discourse closed off through totalizing power. It can be intimated that post-politics, post-art, and post-education are all lost in the sea of the demands of a techno-society, that rather than falling back into natural worlds of the ‘postmodern condition,’ have instead accelerated into a world of ever more ‘modernity’ in terms of societies of control, algorithmic functions, and

simulations. I seek a seance for the *realms without totality* to create a new dawn for politics, art, and education.

### *Anti*

The word ‘anti’ in front of a named discourse is interesting. For example, anti-art, anti-philosophy, and anti-politics have all claimed to have a productive capacity. Let’s start with anti-art. The anti-art which was connected to Dada and Surrealist performances produced legendary artists and art moments. We can point to Marcel Duchamp’s ‘fountain’ of 1917 or to the Surrealist’s yelling at priests in the streets of Paris in the 1920’s (see Benjamin Peret) as moments of anti-art in a real sense. These artists were not using the typical techniques or ‘discourse-approved method’ to make artwork. Instead, they were using different tactics, making *strange*, and calling it artwork. The productive part comes when we, from our historical vantage point, can see these anti-art moments producing movements within art discourse that led to novel work. In fact, the Duchampian means of production, his ‘fabrication strategy’, has in a sense become the default setting for all conceptual-contemporary art today. Anti-art was a way artists made familiar tropes in art strange, and in that process sparked new methods and tactics to make art events happen that transformed peoples’ experiences.

Anti-philosophy is another productive maneuver that includes philosophers and their works in much the same way as anti-art. Anti-philosophy, according to Boris Groys in his book *Introducing Antiphilosophy* (2012), suggests an important way to think about the productive capacity of philosophy found ‘outside’ philosophy. When Duchamp in his 1913 notebook asked “Can one make art that is not art?”, he announced the foundational dynamism for anti-art. My own work within anti-philosophy stages the Duchampian art question for philosophy. In an echo to Duchamp’s question, I ask, “Can one do philosophy that is not philosophy?” Exploring this question, I have engaged in several art-philosophical gestures which make philosophy strange, including the installation called *The Habermas Machine* (Rolling, 2013), which attempts to create the conditions (using visual artifacts that are in essence an art installation) for philosophy to happen without writing. I would argue the default setting for doing philosophy since Plato has been writing and to create the conditions to return to philosophy without writing (the before and after of ‘post’) by using what is called post-art practice. Before we explore post-art, let us return to anti-philosophy. Pushing writing beyond philosophy’s ability to recognize itself, to ‘make the familiar strange’, is what Alva Noë calls a strange tool (Noë, 2015). Strange tools are important in thinking about the productive capacity for both anti-art and anti-philosophy. Anti-philosophy, like art, has a long history of practitioners. People like Friedrich Nietzsche and Jacques Derrida are but two examples that point to anti-philosophical practices running their course and making philosophy shake its foundational familiarities in a productive way.

While the ‘anti’ prefix of anti-art and anti-philosophy have in a sense a clear productive mission as either new art practices, strange tools, etc., the ‘anti’ prefix for anti-politics seems to make clear that any productive compacity that politics engendered is rendered impossible. Much like the Orwellian “reduction of words in use” found in the novel *1984* (Orwell, 1949), counter to anti-art and anti-philosophy, anti-politics makes something other than politics productive. Politics, if it is viewed as *the productive power of groups of people for the betterment of those people* is still in play, but the type of politics we have created in the West focusing on collectivity, democracy, ethics, and the imperfect reflection of ‘the means of the many’ has seemingly faded with the emergence of modernity’s march to the cult of the self. We must admit the word itself, ‘politics’, today has been replaced by other functions for the productive power of groups of people. The concept of group and people in the Orwellian sense has fallen victim to a sleight of hand, maneuvering our notion of politics to the idea of people in the singular. People in many ways now mean individuals, and groups or collectives are, as in the phrase attributed to Mao’s last wife Jiang Qing, ‘units of one.’ An anti-politics (or perhaps later we can join

to post-politics) has grown into the explicit use of power for particular people who are able to wield their interests *over* democracy, collectivity, ethics, etc. In what one might call our current moment, we have in effect moved into a domain in which the idea of political solutions to problems is not even considered (the realm of post-politics). We have instead rolled over our collective action problems, wicked problems, etc. to the business community and/or corporations. Anti-politics does indeed serve as a productive moment, not for the betterment of a polis, but for the production of the impossibility for collective change. Anti-politics is a politics which denies a critical mass or even a ‘collection of the polis’ to make decisions. Anti-politics results in a productive capacity that destroys collective will in favor of individualism. This might function in anti-art and anti-philosophy, which can be productive in individual senses, but for politics this production inverts and prevents a better ‘politics’ from emerging because there is never a critical mass of more than one.

### *Critical*

“Critical Art is an art that aims to produce a new perception of the world, and therefore create a commitment to its transformation. This schema, very simple in appearance, is actually the conjunction of three processes. First, the production of a sensory form of ‘strangeness’; second, the development of an awareness of the reason for that strangeness; and third, a mobilization of individuals as a result of that awareness.”

- Jacques Rancière (Rancière, 2015, p. 150)

The convergence of post, anti, and critical occurs in the seeking strange tools to clairvoyantly announce the *realm without totality*. We have in understanding ‘post’ and ‘anti’ a making strange function that is joined with being ‘critical.’ To speak of *critical art* today seems to fall within the failure of *critical theory* to expand beyond the initiated group of scholars from Europe and inform a *critical mass* within the masses to form movements and institutions for change. Critical theory as a philosophical school might have failed in its mission, but succeeded in inserting new ideas and ways of thinking into many discourses. Indeed, it made strange many things, but the biggest flaw was in the political. Where is the *critical politics* of reality transformation that was promised to materialize and out of the Frankfurt School’s critical theories rhetoric of fire? Secondly, where is the critical art to produce new perceptions and “create commitments” to those reality transformations Rancière (2015) seeks?

Here we have an impasse that seems to say there is no critical art today, there is no critical theory today, there is no critical mass today, and there is no critical politics today. As we have implicitly alluded to and will make explicit soon, post-politics is the milieu of this nihilism—the anxiety of our age in which our multiverse of selves forms a cult of actions in social media, or the virtual world disguised as actions in the material world. In other words, in engaging in today’s post-politics, we mistake an online protest for actual transformative power, our curated Facebook profile as our life, and Amazon’s algorithmic architecture of persuasion freedom of choice. Coke or Pepsi is still sugar water that rots your teeth. For all of the promises of freedom, choice, ‘just do it,’ ‘be you,’ etc., when we actually think of these presentations of how to be, the opposite seems to be happening. It seems the protests and movements create victories in the fractalized world of Twitter, Facebook, etc., but in the real world things are still the same—but with a different name. Homeless are unhoused people, urban youth are under resourced, drug addicts are chemically dependent, etc. While these rhetorical moves are important, as they can change perception, we must ask: do they attack the fundamental causes of these issues? It seems critical has turned into a rhetorical dance of wokeness and sentimentality, which avoids the tough nature of asking who is complicit in the evils of the world? The critical protests and movements of the present era and the nature of post-political limbo of real world actions form a kind of shield from real politics—a real politics that shapes power structures of society.

We protest one issue here, vote there, and go home and watch the internet present us with algorithmic reality everywhere.

Turning critical back to art, we must seek the Rancièrian drive towards transformations. Art, in this post-political world, must reconsider its status in discourse as a handmaiden for capitalism. Art, like social media, exemplifies the false promise of emancipation through the means of consumption, not of stuff, but of ideas, that lead to the red pill. The “rebel sell”, so poignantly exposed by Heath & Potter’s (2005) book, is the mechanism by which artists are silenced into the world capital—not loudly banging the drums of transformation. Indeed, even anti-art can no longer function as it had been because of the forces mustered by the post-postmodern era, and the transformation of capitalism is already underway into something else. Yanis Varoufakis (2021) calls this “techno-feudalism”. This strange new economic model works in different ways than neo-liberal capitalism. Without the space to examine this new iteration of exploitation in detail, we can simplify and say techno-feudalism is the idea that capitalism has transformed into something new, hence critical theory, which aimed at defeating capitalism will not work. Its war machine was ready for a different battle. Post-critical suggests the opportunity for strange new tactics and strategies to imagine ways to combat the new forms of economic organization for global societies. These new forces of techno-feudalism, what we might call ‘surveillance capitalism,’ algorithmic reality, social media quagmires, architectures of persuasion, etc., have moved art and what has been previously labeled anti-art into its grasp. Contemporary art today has been captured by the forces of modern algorithmic reality that sees the fate of the artist before the artist even does. We no longer have anti-art as all anti-art is now contained within to possibilities of artistic production; we instead we must turn to a post-critical set of tools to combat techno-feudalism.

Given these pivotal turns in the nature of politics, art, and educational discourse, what are artists to do? How does understanding ‘post,’ ‘anti,’ and ‘critical’ now inform a discourse around post-art, post-politics, and strange tools? How do we teach artists in the age of post-politics and post-art to be post-critical ‘political’ actors? This essay seeks to present four glancing blows toward building the strange tools needed to undergo a world which seemingly wants to overcome itself rather than undergo its multi-versal spender. I suggest that adding *Rancièresque*, post-politics, post-art, and strange tools together forms the beginning of a program of undergoing the present techno-feudalist age in order to make the *realms without totality* rise with the new day’s sun.

## 0. From the Ignorant School Master to Ignorant Artist... Introducing *Rancièresque*

In Jacques Rancière’s 1987 book *Le Maître ignorant: Cinq leçons sur l’émancipation intellectuelle* (translated in 1991 as *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*), the author sets out a case for the role of education. Rancière advocates for a Socratic and pragmatic (liken to American Pragmatism) approach in which the teacher ‘emancipates’ the student’s mind, but does not ‘teach’—as in making the student dependent on the banked knowledge of the instructor (Rancière, 1991). For Rancière, because learning ideally takes place in a sort of ‘ignorance of a system’, an openness to unexpected outcomes is possible. This is exemplified in the Platonic dialogue *Meno*, in which Socrates teaches a student complex mathematics without the student knowing any systems other than how to count (Plato, 2002).

It would be interesting enough if Rancière was advocating for a Socratic educative system, but he goes one step further and also states the teacher must be ignorant like the student. In sum, the ignorant school master is a person who teaches a subject they themselves do not know. This changes the role of the teacher in terms of the subject matter expertise in favor of methods of curiosity, puzzlement, and discovery in conjunction with the student. Much like Socrates, who famously claimed to know nothing, the ignorant teacher knows nothing and instead practices the way to knowing in

inquiry with an Other. The ignorance of Socrates is in that he allows the event of education to emerge from the encounter with an Other. This is much like the productive capacity of ‘post’ examined earlier. We make strange a phenomena, resist the systems of thought, stay ‘ignorant,’ and let the event emerge trajectories of knowledge. The knowledge production in this sense preserves the complexity and resists reductionism (as in science). Education is knowledge production in paralogy and ignorance, rather than scientific reductionism and modernity’s thrust for measurement and labeling. Here we might even say Rancière is announcing post-education.

Post-education as framed from a Rancièrian mode here is an emancipatory practice. It emancipates one from rigid educational trajectories established in the West, especially modernity. We leave the banking system of education (Freire, 2014) or factory model which favors rote learning in favor of a paralogical educative practice. In Lyotard’s (1984) philosophy, the term paralogy means a flood of good ideas that are inspired by conversation, ineffable experiences, and untamed phenomena that lead to strange and novel things. We will soon suggest that paralogy is the engine of post-art’s mission to develop strange tools to encounter events that transform human contexts. Returning to Rancière, one might also say he is after a ‘universal teaching,’ a paralogical way one can be educated ontologically (which just might be the hominin species killer app). This means as we encounter events in life, if we are ignorant, we will be open to a newness and able to learn things without having it being ‘explained’ (a la John Dewey and American Pragmatism). This post-educative method is incorporated into our being or could be seen as our being. By ‘explained’, we mean put into categories of “foreclosing realms”—that activity Lyotard (1984) warned us modernity was doing to knowledge. We need to stay ignorant in that way—ignorant in order not to foreclose the possibilities of experience.

Let us now turn from ignorant school masters to how that mechanism of post-education can map onto what we will call ignorant artists. The ignorant artist, like the ignorant school master, teaches without explaining (or without purely rational functions). The ignorant artist, like the ignorant school master, resists the role of master of knowledge and instead posits ‘directions to experience knowledge’ (like a Sol LeWitt drawing or Marcel Duchamp’s ‘Experimental Set-ups’). The point is not control or to control an educational encounter (as in techno—scientific rationality) but to allow the event to emerge and unfold. This, I would argue, has in a sense always been art’s knowledge imparting function, and should be pursued with vigor (not rationality) or in ‘ignorance’ of any rationalizing function that results in the closing down of Lyotardian realms of possibilities. Under this set of conditions, the role of the ignorant artist is to maintain the capacity art has for transformation (what I will suggest is post-art).

In conclusion, what Rancière refers to as art’s critical function can only be held open in ignorance. Rancièresque refers to these conditions in which post-critical art (or post-art) holds open the realms without totality as the emancipatory potential of art. This requires a new nexus of politics and education to force art back into its ‘post’ condition. Art education can use Rancièresque as a description of pedagogy and goals that seek to find ‘post-art moments.’ Thus, post-education is the pedagogical function/effect of education in this way: humans will be free in the Rousseau-ian sense—‘free from the chains of society’ and the systems (systemics) of the world if only they have ignorant teachers. Given the current world of post-politics, contemporary art, and aesthetic-political education, we will trouble the notion of what the ‘natural state’ (post) of these things is in order to support a thesis presented by Jacques Rancière, that the role of (critical art) and thus post-art-education would be to mobilize individuals for social change.

This leads to some questions:

Q. What should *be* art’s function vs. what *is* art’s function?

Q. How do we conduct art, education, and politics ‘in ignorance’?

*Conjecture: We need to further explore Rancièresque in terms of post-politics, post-art, and strange tools.*

### 1. The Nexus of Anti and Post-Politics

“Today’s predominant mode of politics is post-political bio-politics- an awesome example of theoretical jargon which, however, can easily be unpacked: “post-political” is a politics which claims to leave behind old ideological struggles and instead focus on expert management and administration, while ‘bio-politics’ designates the regulation of the security and welfare of human lives as its primary goal.”

- Slavoj Žižek (Žižek, 2008, p.40)

‘Post’ in post-politics as framed here by Slavoj Žižek is not in a sense the post-politics that Lyotard might have formulated. While ‘post’ in a Lyotardian sense would be seeking a ‘before and after’ of politics to allow for a multiplicity of possibilities to emerge, for Žižek, post-politics seems to function more like an anti-politics that seeks to deny any way for politics to form in the first place. Remember we mentioned anti-politics—unlike anti-art or anti-philosoph—seems to have a productive capacity in a different sense. Anti-politics does not even seek political solutions to problems and instead finds the corporation or economic dogma to run the show, so it might be a different leap to make from an anti-art formula that seeks to advance art in some sense to anti-politics, which seeks to cease the gears of politics completely. Anti/post-politics in the Žižekian sense claims to break political discourse. The anti-political ‘break’ in politics, however, does not find a productive ground for transforming society. We find ‘in the break’ (Moten, 2003) a politics that will never return to a productive capacity for the many. It instead creates a *differend* (Lyotard, 1988). A *differend* is when the language games used in one discourse transferred to another do not adequately make that transfer work and instead colonize the new discourse with the meanings from the other one. Here we find the problem Lyotard seeks to avoid in most of his projects—namely the ‘naming over another.’ This totalizing practice is found especially in science dominating over all others. We find in the breaking of politics perhaps the ‘before and after’ Lyotard might have surmised, leading to post-politics but also creating a *differend*. This event ruptures the way post, anti, and critical can position politics for transformation and instead continually deny that capacity from the political.

Given this, we can proceed with a nihilistic position for both anti-politics and post-politics (anti/post-politics). For Žižek, in the anti/post-political (and bio-political), the political is not repressed but rather foreclosed; astonishingly, this nexus does not allow power to enter politics but maintains its functions to actively deny political power. Unfortunately in the United States, right wing and increasingly neo-liberal left wing political actors are good at anti/post-politics. These ‘bad-faith’ actors (politicians) are actively trying to deny politics via weakening democracy at the expense of corporations, strengthening the wealthy via tax cuts and favorable policies that combine with how politicians are funded (bribed), weakening voting access, destroying the media’s role as truth investigators, and denying the particular will of their constituents (popular programs like Medicare for all, etc. are denied the polis). Most importantly, however, in anti/post-politics *reality is manipulated and shaped into anything* via technology and media power, meaning ‘manufacturing consent’ is no longer politics but its opposite (conspiracy theories, misinformation, multiple truths, fake news, deep fakes, etc.). This is the nexus of anti-politics and post-politics. In destroying the possibility for politics, we also discover that we must break reality. It is the nascent state of techno-feudalism.

Reality ‘in the break’ is manipulated and shaped into anything via technology and media power. Reality is improvised or created as need, like ‘just in time’ manufacturing. As Moten (2013) argues, when we find breaks in reality, improvisation (or aesthetic paralogy) fills the breaks. This can be positive as in the black radical traditions in the United States, Lyotard’s paralogy, and this essay’s call to realms without totality, but I would argue the filling of the breaks with reality can become a rush to

‘just in time manufacturing consent.’ In the classic study of media and culture, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (2011) proposed that the reality is ‘manufactured’ to create the appearance of the consent of the ruled. There is much in this thesis which we cannot expose here, but it can be said that this process Chomsky described from the 20<sup>th</sup> century has shifted in our current times to reflect an anti/post political power shift that leads to techno-feudalism.

One example of the current way reality and anti/post-politics function is found in the workings of the political technologist Vladislav Surkov. The architect of ‘Putin’s political realities,’ Surkov is from the avant-garde theater world and advertising. Like his anti/post-political program, his biography is part of his technique to deny political formations as you cannot find one story, but many (even on Wikipedia) about his origins. The anti/post-political program is successful and currently being deployed in many contexts. We have entered a fractal world of anti/post-political events that have taken the place of what we would have—a Lyotardian post-political moment which seeks to reveal as the before/after of politics, the way humans mobilize and organize for change. Instead this Lyotardian strategy is hijacked to disallow politics from even being considered. We are functionally unable to consider politics in what might be viewed as a ‘fractal reality.’

The anti/post-political strategy to make fractal reality and fractal citizens is as follows: 1) undermine citizens’ perception of the world; 2) a citizen is therefore never sure what is happening (enter post-truth); 3) the real power is in manipulating realities (power is in aesthetic functions and their receptions in ‘reality bubbles’ etc.); 4) any ‘opposition’ is confused and unable to mobilize because the issues, tactics, strategies, and foci are confused, changed, the same, different, etc. There is always a moving target for political ire and organizing in made not possible with multiple systems and access points being unequitable; 5) making fractal reality is a power that is not able to be defined in/as politics, but is now always already found elsewhere (in anti/post-politics). Hence, the inability to change the world in critical ways—as criticality itself is compromised (Kline & Holland, 2020)—and new functions of reality (fractal) have emerged victorious (Baudrillard, 2008).

In sum, anti/post-politics is about shifting realities, not ‘making sense’ of realities. This would at first seem to fit right into Lyotard’s notion that the ‘post’ condition would not allow reality to totalize events, but we must make a distinction between not totalizing reality and not allowing reality. If making sense no longer makes sense—‘facts’ are not needed to wield power, and cutting off the old ways of political change through enlightenment and collective actions organized around factual issues people want changed no longer are part of politics, then we must invent new politics, not deny its existence. We must intervene in the third focus if the real power is in manipulating realities. Anti-post politics teaches us to move into this realm and push back, making new realities that tackle the seemingly impossible questions, one example being posed by Mark Fisher (2009) on capitalism realism: how to imagine a world without capitalism.

This leads to more questions:

Q. What does the ignorant artist do in the era of anti/post-politics?

Q. How can the nexus of anti/post-politics turn into a transformative practice?

*Conjecture: We are not taking seriously the nexus of anti/post-politics, and thus the development of strange tools within the milieu of post-art is continually delayed and unable to rattle reality into new trajectories.*



## 2. Introducing Post-Art



Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917, replica 1964

Post-art is art that is trying to make the familiar strange (a strange tool). Anti-art as mentioned above in the Duchampian sense is now familiar. So much so that contemporary art has become predictable in many ways as if a Duchampian algorithm had formed from his fabrication methods over a hundred years ago. Much like capitalism, we seemingly cannot escape making art in the ways prescribed by it. Post-art is a description of the state of art that is seeking the 'after' of art in both the 'before and after' a la the functioning of Lyotard's 'post' posited earlier. This aspect of post-art's transformative mission, in the place of critical art in the Rancièrian sense, becomes a pedagogical imperative of its mission.

In order to undergo post-art, one must already understand the pedagogical nature all things called art possess. All art is pedagogical, and therefore all art is educative in nature, meaning art education, or aesthetic education, is needed in order to transform the post-art condition into Lyotard's (1984) productive dreams of evoking *realms without totality*. Following the Lyotardian productive idea for the sense of 'post,' the 'post' in post-art is just that. We must understand, however, when proposing post-art, or its provenance so to speak, that we are examining the before and after (post) of art discourse. We can define art as a hominin (human) endeavor to make objects and/or experience in the world that open the space for realms without totality. Artists would be makers of realities in which our human condition is transformed into new ways of making meaning itself. This art process is one that reveals itself in many ways and forms. Art objects can be made of seemingly anything, and art experience can be foregrounded in almost any event. For us here, we can simply attach certain discursive descriptions to art while knowing non-discursivity might be a better avenue to understand post-art. That is the opening of this section's purpose, to pose the image of Duchamp's fountain from 1964 (replica of the 1917 one) as the opening 'quotation' of the section.

Evoking the realm without totality is a goal of post-art, and here we have a *differend* between words and art that is fundamental to understanding the power of art or aesthetic experiences in life. We say things like, 'A picture is worth a thousand words' or 'I know it when I see it' to demonstrate in common ways how the discursive words fail to capture the meaning fields of the nondiscursive. We can begin here with this fundamental issue and proceed to build the case for post-art and the need for a post-art discourse to transform human experiences in politics and education beyond modernity and even the discursive methods we relied upon to totalize reality.

Post-art discourse has many advocates, even if they do not call what they are doing post-art. For example, Han Belting's work (1994) suggests a pre-art or the before of art was a time when people

in the West sought images rather than art to consume. Arthur Danto's work, *The End of Art*, follows the role the exhaustion of the Duchampian conceptual anti-art method has caused and sees art as descending into a sort of maze of thought over material (Danto, 2014). David Joselit's (2013) book *After Art* speaks to a post-art found in contemporary practices that seek to unravel how art is made and discussed in the internet age. Graham Harman's (2019) work on 'triple O' (Object Orientated Ontology—OOO) also creates a place for post-art to emerge by rethinking the role objects play in aesthetic political discourse. Perhaps Santiago Zabala's (2017) text *Why only Art Can Save Us* is the most direct in seeing the connection between post-art and political transformative power. With these examples, we can build a case for the post-art discourse and begin to create a research project (arts-based research) to build tactics and strategies to push our meaning-making machines into new transformative domains. Without the space to expand all of these post-art inclined arguments and texts, we can simply move to think about art education and what types of artists we are reproducing—ones that continue to become masters or ones that are ignorant (à la Rancière).

This leads to even more questions:

Q. What does an Aesthetic Education look like in today's post-political realm?

Q. What do we do with and when do we create realms without totality?

*Conjecture: We have not fully realized the power of creating a post-art discourse can have in transforming the practices artists engage in and how that engagement can transform political realities and power.*

### 3. Strange Tools of Paralogy

"Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of authority; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy."

- Jean-François Lyotard (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxv)

A strange tool is an idea coined by Alva Noë in his 2015 book *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature*. In that text, Noë is seeking a function for art and philosophy that is very similar to critical art proposed by Rancière. This also aligns with the Lyotardian ideas about the productive functioning of 'post' and the paralogical events that are found in the 'ignorance of discourse.' This ignorant approach, what I have called the *Rancièr-esque*, is the approach to engage the pedagogical function of post-art and spark "the inventor's paralogy" (Lyotard, 1984). In order to arrive here, I have gone through the role of post, anti, and critical. I have introduced *Rancièr-esque* and why anti/post-politics must be addressed as the current plane of transformative projects. I explored the complex anti/post-political discourse, which is best tackled by evoking the spirit of post-art in order to have a 'real' productive capacity for art-making to transform social experiences. This leads to positing the wielding of strange tools as the method for 'paralogy.'

As Noë (2015) establishes in his text, art—or now better put post-art—is a strange tool. Post-art is pedagogical in the *Rancièr-esque* sense. As such, post-art 'teaches without explaining', or as demonstrated in the previous section, art does, or art is a nondiscursive event that shows one in a pedagogical way rather than a writing one. I would argue the critical art that Rancière is referring to in the quote from the introduction section is a 'strange tool.' We learn from strange tools (art), and this learning is done not like the formal modernist education (the banking system), but indirectly in much the same way Rancière (1991) advocates in the Ignorant Schoolmaster. Art education should produce *Rancièr-esque* 'ignorant artists' who make strange tools.

In a nutshell, strange tools, rather than make the strange familiar (as in the scientific method), makes the familiar strange. In this process, post-art is also a knowledge-imparting function of human experiences. This connects to the ideas from Lyotard's postmodern condition. As he states, "True knowledge, in this perspective, is always indirect knowledge; it is composed of reported statements that are incorporated into the metanarrative of a subject that guarantees their legitimacy" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 35). Indirect knowledge—or ignorant *Rancièresque* knowledge—building is found in strange tools. These tools of post-art seek to educate in the *Rancièresque*. They seek to address the anti/post-political *differend* and use post-art's aesthetic transformative potential to engage in social change.

Social change is a difficult event. How does it happen? When does it happen? How do we know it has happened? Given the examination thus far, we can point to the ideas from *Rancièresque*, anti/post-politics, post-art, and especially strange tools. We as human beings constantly underestimate the power one aesthetic experience can have on the human psyche and material neurological condition. We now understand from a neurological perspective the role experience has in changing the physical and predictive capacity of the brain (Eagleman, 2020). The experiences we have every day affect our ability to cope and change in the world. This means that because of the plasticity of the brain, transformation is possible. Transformation in the form of aesthetic experiences or experiences which spark wonderment or novel moments are very powerful. These aesthetic moments are those that are unique and affect us in ways we perhaps can't even verbalize. They are ineffable and as such connect to the notion of 'post' sketched out in this essay. These moments transform us, and we should seek tools to further these experiences as artistic practice.

Why don't artists do this? Why are they not using strange tools to chase the paralogy of transformative experiences for social change? We perform transformations as they have been constructed in the modern era (as a commodity) instead of actually becoming transformed. This performance of transformation is the target of *Rancièresque*, post-art, and strange tools. Performing transformations without understanding the totalizing discourse that is found in anti/post-politics is a misaligned practice, a *differend*. We need strange tools to become transformed.

This leads to even more questions:

Q. How do we as artists build new 'machines' or strange tools to allow for paralogical events to happen?

Q. How can we use 'aesthetic moments' to build even better strange tools for transformation?

*Conjecture: We are ignorant of 'aesthetic power'—the events of paralogy and the strange tools needed to transform ourselves. We must engage in making strange tools that enter the realms without totality to imagine new worlds.*

### **Conclusion: Lyotard's Paralogy**

"...the reserve of knowledge – language's reserve of possible utterances – is inexhaustible. This sketches the outline of a politics that would respect both the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown."

- Jean-François Lyotard (Lyotard, 1984, p. 67)

Lyotard has been the sage for our journey in seeking to put on the table various tensions with regard to politics, art, education, and the difficulty in social transformation. It is worth ending this essay recalling Lyotard's obstacles to transformation. First off, the 'computerization' of society has come to pass, but instead of governments in charge of this process and legitimation system, it has been grabbed by corporations. Do we even doubt who decides what knowledge is and the systems we access it is not in the hands of governments but private corporations? The other aspect of Lyotard is the choice he presents between *functional* (positivistic) knowledge or *critical* (reflexive—hermeneutic)

knowledge. Are we pretending that we even have a choice? The darkness of functional knowledge has overcome even a recovery effort for a critical reflexive moment—we are now neuro-wired into functional life. The algorithmic world Lyotard imagined has also come to pass. We are in the world of language games whose programming language is from the algorithms of the internet, social media, or simply the filter bubbles we find ourselves in.

These algorithmic functions are language games, and as such reducible to human narrative functions and effects. Remember Lyotard is combining the function of knowledge production with the function of the state, and we should give him an update and say this hold if we understand, almost 40 years later, that the state has succumbed to the corporation, which is leading to a techno-feudalistic moment. The corporation is what is tied up with knowledge production and what we should aim to attack with our strange tools and post-art events.

Knowledge production within a corporate model is still able to function only with legitimation structures. These structures in our age are “Balkanized”, reduced and related to the “cult of the self” (Hedges, 2009). We have conspiracy theories instead of reality, and as a result the role of science itself is no longer able to guarantee its function of knowledge outside its discourse narrative (Lyotard, 1984). The meta-narrative of science has fallen, and the multiverse of the minor narrative—or the multiverse of the self—is the legitimation of our age. The performativity of the scientific discourse is no longer pulling in the audiences. Much like a Baroque Opera with the appreciation of the performance reduced to a few ‘fans,’ our reality is fractal-ized and unable to assemble itself in the ways previously imagined (Kline & Holland, 2020). Truth needs new modes of explication. Truth needs strange tools; otherwise it will continue to hold onto the pursuit of truth in ways that are unable to be networked into the experience of society. This is perhaps the fundamental *differend* between how we experience the world and the world itself (the ontic-ontological tension) (Lyotard, 1988). The present milieu seems to have society view knowledge as a quaint exercise, but instead we find truth in a football match, kayfabe politics, or ‘what feels right’ to us.

Earlier in this essay, I stated that given these pivotal turning points in the nature of our age or politics, art, and educational discourses, we need strange tools. This essay was a demonstration of the *Rancièr-esque*, as I strove to suggest possibilities, ruminate on tensions, and allow for the reader to wander into wonder about the difficulty facing educationalists and specifically art educationalists to engage in meaningful possibilities for transformative strategies and tactics for social change. Thus the four-folded entries I have posited here—*Rancièr-esque*, Post-Politics, Post-Art, and the Strange Tools of Paralogy—all point back to the role aesthetic experience can have in transformation of people and in turn societies. I would like to leave this text through an evocation of Oscar Wilde. He suggests that instead of “art imitating life”, we should follow the dictum that “life imitates art” (Wilde, 1891). We must seek art as strange tools in order to allow a Wildean multiverse to unfold for the invention of new forms of life in order to experience realms without totality.

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