Reading/Study Guide:  
Lytotard

*The Postmodern Condition*

I. The Method and the Social Bond (Introduction, Chs. 1-5)
   
A. What is involved in Lyotard’s focus on the “pragmatic aspect” of language? How does he analyze this by looking at the way different sorts of utterances place their sender/addressor, referent, and addressee?

B. What does Lyotard mean by a “language game”? (10)

C. What does Lyotard propose as a postmodern perspective on the nature of the social bond? (Ch. 5)

II. The Pragmatics of Narrative and Scientific Discourse (Chs. 6-7)

A. Narrative (Ch. 5)

1. How does narrative define a society’s “criteria of competence”? (20)

2. How does narrative lend itself to “a great variety of language games”? (20)

3. What, for Lyotard, authorizes the transmission of a narrative, it’s telling (or better) re-telling? (20-21)

4. What is narrative’s effect on time such that Lyotard concludes, “a collectivity that takes narrative as its key form of competence has no need to remember the past”? (22)

5. What does Lyotard mean in stating that “a culture that gives precedence to the narrative form doubtless has no . . . need for special procedures to authorize its narratives . . .”? (22)

B. Science (Ch. 6)

1. How does scientific discourse position its sender, addressee, and referent? (23-24)

2. Why does Lyotard conclude (on p. 26) that “It is therefore impossible to judge the existence or validity of narrative knowledge on the basis of scientific knowledge and vice versa: the relevant criteria are different.”?
3. Why does Lyotard believe the scientific questioning of the validity of narrative (“the demand for legitimation”) fuels “the entire history of cultural imperialism from the dawn of Western civilization”? (27)

III. Narratives of Legitimation and the De-Legitimation (Chs. 8-10)
   A. Why does Lyotard claim, “Scientific knowledge cannot know and make known that it is the true knowledge without resorting to the other, narrative, kind of knowledge, which from its point of view is no knowledge at all.”? (29)
   B. What is the “more political” narrative of legitimation Lyotard discusses in Ch. 9? In what ways does it resemble the story Kant tells in “What is Enlightenment”? (Ch. 9)
   C. How does the “demand for legitimation” in science fuel “a process of delegitimation”? (39)
   D. What does Lyotard mean when he states, “The social subject itself seems to dissolve in this dissemination of language games. The social bond is linguistic, but is not woven with a single thread.”? (40)

IV. Performativity and Paralogy (Chs. 11-14)
   A. What does Lyotard mean by “performativity” and how does it provide a “de facto legitimation” (47) of scientific discourse?
   B. What does Lyotard mean by “paralogy” and how does he believe it can constitute a form of legitimation for scientific discourse? (Ch. 14)
   C. How is performativity, for Lyotard, a form of terror? What does Lyotard mean by “terror”? (63-64)
   D. How does Lyotard propose to generalize the idea of the legitimation of scientific discourse by paralogy to society as a whole? (“What is the relation between the antimodel of the pragmatics of science and society?” 64)
   E. What are the two assumptions Habermas makes in conceiving legitimation in terms of a “search for universal consensus” that Lyotard finds unacceptable? What does he believe they are unacceptable? (65-66)
   F. How does Lyotard propose to “arrive at an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus?” (66) What are the “two steps” (66) he discusses that
are necessary to this project?

*Just Gaming*

V. First Day

A. In what way is writing subject to discussion? In what way is a book like a ‘bottle cast into the waves’? (3-9)

B. Modernity and Experimentation (9-14)

1. How does Lyotard distinguish modernity from classicism? (9)

2. Why is “experimentation” “what is at stake in artistic language today”? (10)

C. Judgement without Criteria (14-18)

1. How, in modernity, are we called upon to “judge without criteria”? (14)

2. How does Lyotard define “paganism”? (16) How does it call for an exercise of imagination that is “a power to invent criteria”? (17) What is the relation what he is discussing as paganism in this book and what he discussed as postmodernism in *The Postmodern Condition*?

VI. Second Day

A. The Platonic Position (19-22)

1. How does paganism appear, for Thebaud, to be inconsistent with justice? (19)

2. How does Lyotard define the Platonic conception of justice?

3. What is the ‘paradox’ (21) which Lyotard finds in the Platonic problematic? (21-22)

B. The Modern Position (23-37)

1. How does Lyotard understand the conception of justice which links it to autonomy? In what way is it different from the Platonic conception? (23-25)
2. How does Lyotard distinguish the modern conception of justice as autonomy from his own proposed pagan conception (30-33)

3. What is the relation between paganism and narrative? (33-36)

C. The Jewish (Levinasian) Position (37-42)

1. How, for the Jewish (Levinasian) position, are we “obligated before any freedom”? (37)

2. What does it mean to say that I cannot put myself in the place of the one issuing prescriptions? (39)

3. How, for the Jewish (Levinasian) position, must we ‘do before we understand”? (41)

D. The Pagan Position (41-43)

1. What does Lyotard mean when he speaks of “the same moderation, the same ruse” which he observes at work in narrative pragmatics? (41)

2. How is the pagus a “place of ceaseless negotiations and ruses”? (43)

VII. Fourth and Fifth Days

A. How does Lyotard characterize paganism as “the acceptance of the fact that one can play several games . . . And to play moves means precisely to develop ruses, to set the imagination to work”? (61) How does this connect with what we discussed as “paralogy” in The Postmodern Condition?

B. War and Absolute Injustice (66-72)

1. What does Lyotard mean when he writes, “Absolute injustice would occur if the pragmatics of obligation, that is, the possibility of continuing to play the game of the just, were excluded. That is what is unjust. Not the opposite of the just, but that which prohibits that the question of the just and the unjust be, and remain, raised”? (66-67)

2. How does what Lyotard describe as “war” raise a distinctive problem for our capacity to judge? (67-69)

3. How can you judge “if you do not have a representation of what justice ought to be”? (69)
4. How does Lyotard relate justice to an idea of “‘the whole of reasonable beings’ or the preservation of the possibility of the prescriptive game’”? (70) (Note: much of Lyotard’s discussion from here on will presuppose some acquaintance with Kant’s philosophy. I will try to fill you in on some of the broad themes Lyotard is presupposing here in class. So, if you’re not terribly well familiar with Kant, just do the best you can with the readings and hopefully we can get a bit clearer about things in class.)

5. Why does Lyotard believe that one of the basic rules of the prescriptive game is “that the position of sender must remain empty. No one may put herself or himself there; no one may be the authority”? (72) And, of course, what precisely does this imply for his discussion of justice?

C. The Philosophy of Opinion and the Kantian notion of the Idea (73-84)

1. What does Lyotard see as the main problem of what he calls the philosophy of opinion as regards justice? (74)

2. How does the Kantian notion of justice as an Idea guide us “without, in the end, really guiding us, that is, without telling us what is just”? (77)

VIII. Seventh Day

A. How is the idea of justice, for Lyotard, an idea of “the multiplicity of language games”? (95)

B. How is the idea of justice, for Lyotard, focused on a critique of “pleonexia” or “excess”? (97)

C. How is justice inconsistent with “wanting to achieve the unity of the community”? (97)

D. How does Lyotard conceive of the relation between what he calls the “multiplicity of justices” and the “justice of multiplicity”? How is the justice of multiplicity “assured, paradoxically enough, by a prescriptive of universal value”? (100)

IX. The Differend (xi, #s 12, 190, 210-217)

A. Differends and Litigation (xi, #12)

1. How does Lyotard distinguish what he calls a “differend” from a “litigation”? (“Title”, xi)
2. How does a differend divest the plaintiff of “the means to argue” and makes the plaintiff, for that reason, “a victim”? (#12)

B. The Differend and Democratic Politics (#s 190, 210-217)

1. How is the differend exposed in “the deliberative politics of modern democracies”? (#210)

2. How is deliberation not itself a genre of discourse but “a concatenation of genres”? (#217)


A. In what way is democracy, for Lefort, “an adventure whose outcome is unpredictable”? (37)

B. What does Lefort mean when he writes, “The division between legitimate and illegitimate is not materialized within the social sphere; it is simply removed from the realm of certainty, now that no one can take the place of the supreme judge.” (39) Can you see any connection here between this idea of Lefort’s and Lyotard’s idea that the pragmatics of the prescriptive game demands “that the position of sender must remain empty. No one may put herself or himself there; no one may be the authority” (Just Gaming, 72)

C. How does Lefort see the basic human rights achieved in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (rights to liberty, expression, and movement) as “indissociable from the birth of the democratic debate” (39)?

D. Though these basic rights (discussed above in B) are indissociable from the democratic debate, why does Lefort believe “they cannot be constrained by a definition; and we therefore cannot agree on any universal basis as to what conforms or does not conform to the letter of the spirit of those rights”? (40) How is this point connected with his earlier point that our most basic right is the “right to the questioning of right”? (38)

E. What does Lefort mean when he describes a democratic public space as “a space . . . which is always indeterminate, has the virtue of belonging to no one”? (41)