## Postmodernism in Literature Dr. Merin Simi Raj Department of Humanities and Social Science Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

## Lecture - 6a Lyotard's Postmodern Condition: Challenging Metanarratives

Hello everyone. Morning and welcome to yet another session of the NPTEL course postmodernism in literature. In today's session and in continuation with our discussion of Lyotard's takes the postmodern condition, but we surely looking at how Lyotard intervenes in a culture driven by grand narratives and also how he children's is the ideology of the dominant regime which also multiplies or knowledge.

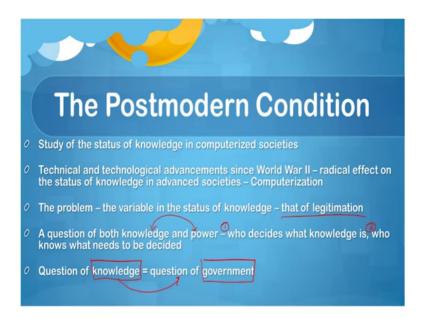
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In the course of his discussion having laid of the context for the need to talk about the postmodern condition in advanced societies, particularly, the computerized societies Lyotard says this is what the postmodern world is all about most people have lost the nostalgia for the lost, narrative it in no way follows that they are reduced to barbarity what saves them from it is their knowledge that legitimation can only spring from their own linguistic practice and communicational interaction science smiling into its pure at every other belief has taught them the harsh austerity of realism.

So, at multiple levels Lyotard's discussion is also a historical understanding of the postmodern condition where he well locates postmodernism as a departure from the methods of realism and also from the methods and the idea celebrated by modernity.

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And modernism to recall some promises that Lyotard tasks Lyotard talks about the postmodern condition is the study of the status of knowledge in advanced computerized a societies, he also reminds us that this is a term the postmodern is a term, which is being currently used in the 1970s in the western context. And he also talks about the technical and technological advancements since the Second World War and how they all had a radical effect on the status of knowledge in advanced societies and he particularly draws their attention to the process of computerization and here he chooses to focus on one particular problem.

Now, one variable in the status of knowledge, which is that of legitimation and how Lyotard differs in his approach towards the idea of legitimation from that of hey mamas who spoke about the crisis of legitimation is something that we shall be taking a look at the end of this lecture. And in the course of this discussion Lyotard also reminds us that there is a connection between the knowledge and power and this is also this is also a question of a hierarchical relationship where and in which there are two questions which emerges are very pertinent. One who decides what knowledge is and secondly, who questions what needs to be decided. And well even when we set out to seek an answer

for these questions, we also to always set the question of knowledge is intermittently connected to the question of government. So, there is a very different kind of relationship which gets established over here in the postmodern condition, where knowledge gets quite intimately connected with these systems of government. So, knowledge also moves beyond the realm of a truth beyond the realm of first seeking truth and it moves into a question of our government, where it is also under particular kinds of governments and particular kinds of control. And Lyotard this road talk about knowledge in a very general term.

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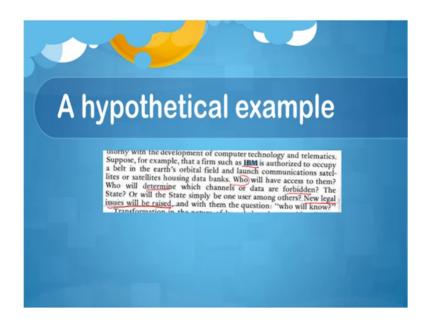
He focuses on one particular thing with his science. He reminds us how science is tightly interwoven with government and administration the information it in the computerized age and there is also reason that he provides for this is also, because enormous amounts of capital and installations are needed for researching the contemporary information age in the computerized age. And this particularly is a problem as he points or right at the outset of the essay a problem that is a fraud whether modern advanced societies which are also computerized.

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And this leads us to this question what exactly is a legitimate knowledge and he also gives us an example of digital databases quoting the example from IBM, which we shall be shortly taking well. And he talked while talking about digital databases, he asked who decides what knowledge is worth storing who has access, who will determine what kind of data is forbidden; is it the state or is the state reduced to being just one among the many uses. And these are some of the questions Lyotards tells us that we needs to engage with in the post, because the idea of knowledge the idea of control over information control over knowledge has a radically changed. And it is not just about a person or a set of people pursuing the idea of truth, but it has also been part of governments and big corporate agencies and he gives this example of IBM when he talks about

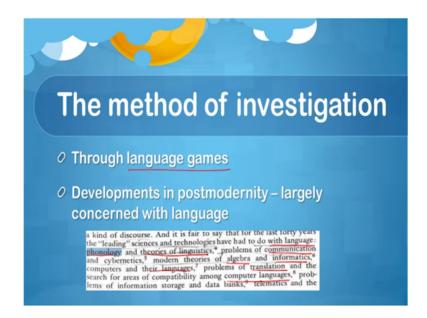
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Suppose for example, that affirms it is IBM is authorized to occupy a belt in the earth's orbital field and launch communications satellites or satellites housing data banks who will have the access to them who will determine which channels or data are forbidden the state or will the state simply be one user among others new legal issues will be raised.

So, this is something extremely important that we need to be attention to in the postmodern age when the systems of knowledge the systems of hierarchies change there are also new questions and new challenges being posed leading us to important need to engage with engage with noble legal questions and le noble ways of engaging with particular problems and finding solutions this entire process Lyotard undertakes through a particular method of inside investigation and that is primarily through language games.

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And here is where we find a very typical postmodern mind at work when we read Lyotards the postmortem condition. He is bringing in the methods he is bringing in our concepts and aspects from various disciplines and he is bringing them together to engage with the idea that other con the contrasting and the paradoxical ideas of postmodernism and here he talks about developments in post modernity and he shows us how these developments are largely concerned with language in his own words.

It is fair to say that for the last forty years the leading scientists and technologies have had to do with language phonology and theories of linguistics problems of communication and cybernetics modern theories of algebra and informatics computers and their line which is problems of translation and the search for areas of compatibility among computer languages problems of information storage and data banks so on and so forth.

And here something needs to be highlighted with a particular focus that language ceases to be understood in a very conventional sense it also becomes a kind of development that the postmodern societies are more concerned about here Lyotard is also making a very unconventional comparison across disciplines such as linguistics of philosophy and also the technology and the science is there are three observations at Lyotard goes on to make in terms of the language games.

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Firstly, the rules of language games do not carry with them their own legitimation. Secondly, if there are no rules there is no game and moves are utterances that do not follow rules are not part of the particular game. Thirdly every utterance is a move in a game and this needs to be read in continuation with one of the first things a Lyotard talks about in his work that postmodernism is also something that alters a game rules of every discipline in the contemporary and here with the mixing of philosophy with concepts and methods from other discipline he is also on display are very characteristic trait of modernism in his very own approach in his very own method of investigation into the postmodern condition.

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And there are various implications which are connected with these identifications of language games with the development of postmodernity one of those include the examination of the political and epistemological aspects of knowledge which Lyotard also seeks to undertaking this work he also then illustrates, how the nature of the social bond also has changed because acid when the nature of knowledge changes as and when the games as in when the language games associated with doing science changes because as in when the language rules associated with various aspects of knowledge undergo a change social bond also undergoes a practical change.

Because social bond is also composed of language most do earlier Lyotard talks at length in determining how the language rules are at work and how these games play a very determinal rolling in identifying particular kinds of knowledge systems and also the underlying hierarchies he also then leads us to the major point of his discussion which is also; what is at stake in the character of modern science, even when the discussion pertains to a rather broad in use area such as knowledge and language games and the gentle idea of a post modernity in the contemporary Lyotard always narrows down the discussion to the character of modern science.

And this is also something that he identifies it to be at stake in the postmodern age under the postmodern condition under the changing systems of knowledge in the computerized societies and here he also seeks to make a distinction between two kinds of knowledge which is narrative knowledge and scientific knowledge and this distinction is based on the kind of legitimation that both of these systems of knowledge seek and in the case of narrative knowledge there is no recourse to legitimation on the other hand, scientific knowledge seeks legitimation by scientific criteria.

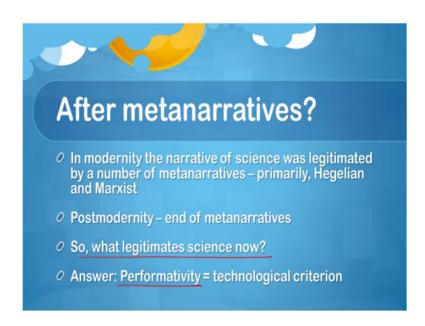
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So, there are these two systems which he identifies and the distinguished and the distinction of one from the other is made on the basis of what kind of legitimation is required; what kind of legitimation is needed or not needed and here in this process Lyotard also reminds us how eventually the dominance of scientific knowledge over narrative knowledge has also become the order of the day especially with the wake of modernity the promise of progress that maternity had provided to the modern world was also an offshoot of the dominance of scientific knowledge over narrative knowledge.

So, in some sense, we can even it would not be wrong to say that Lyotards work could be seen as a defence of narrative knowledge from the increasing dominance of scientific knowledge, there are a number of critics who had a problem with this kind distinction and also with the kind of promises that Lyotard have puts head put forward, but nevertheless it also becomes quite a seminal the understanding of the postmodern condition especially since the binary is where drawn and promoted from the modernist period always Lyotards takes also gives us a very brief points towards how in modernity the narrative of science was legitimated by a number from metanarratives.

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Primarily the Hegelian in the Marxist out frameworks and here it is useful to recall art and time and again, how the incredibility toward metanarratives becoming useful in talking about the various ways in which the postmodern period departs from the modernist period and of postmodernity celebrates the end of metal narratives, if we are call to display and incredibly toward mental narratives, what legitimate the signs know and this is a question and that dominates most of the discussions in latter part of Lyotard's work and given that science is a system of knowledge which always seeks some kind of legitimation or the other.

It becomes imperative to identify a new system of legitimation once the metanarratives are put to an end once a metanarratives are displaced once our distrust towards the metanarratives have been developed and the answer Lyotard gives is performativity and performativity in that sense becomes a technological criteria for legitimating science and legitimating the various activities which are labelled as science and interestingly there is a crisis which is inherent in this act of performativity

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Once, we identify a different kind of legitimation process root in performativity in with the with respect to science there is a crisis which is inherent in it because legitimation by performativity according to Lyotard our it is against the interests of research here it is important to note that Lyotard is not prioritizing.

Ah the element of truth the truth value which is associated with the disciplines of science he is not trying to invoke the metanarratives of modernity to legitimate research either. On the other hand, he is trying to see the role of research as a production of ideas and he also feels that when one privileges performativity as one of the mores of legitimating a science, it is also in some form of the other barring this various kinds of productions of ideas because performativity terrorizes the production of ideas.

So, it does not become of fruitful method of a fruitful kind of legitimation in after the metanarratism have been displaced the alternative Lyotard says lies in paralogy para means beyond and para lodging that sense means beyond toward against an established way of reasoning. So, by calling to move beyond the ideas of can beyond the traditional ideas of reason Lyotard is arguing that the alternate a legitimatise method for science perhaps lies in moving beyond all kinds of rational and reason based activities associated with science and here in it is in this context that Lyotard also associates postmodern science with the search for instabilities.

And he says there are there are several advantages for identifying for locating an alternative in para logy because also satisfies the desire for justice and also the desire for the unknown and Lyotards lead the perfect kind of are doing sciences perhaps are coming together of the desire for justice and also the desire for unknown without privileging.

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One of the other and the advantages of paralogy also tries of very well within incredulity towards metanarratives that Lyotard talks about right and the out stuff as a work and this he also feels would lead to the emergence of the possibility of the emergence of new and hybrid our disciplines performativity. Since it will terrorize the production of ideas will not encourage the passive encourage newer possibilities encourage the emergence of a hybrid disciplines and this happens because there is no connection to the old epistemic traditions.

Because paralogy is a beyond reason beyond all established conventions of reason and hence it is not bound to work according to the old epistemic traditions and there is more freedom available here and there is also more there is also more hybrid ways of engaging.

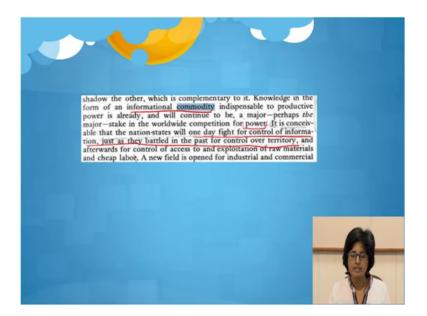
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Introducing ideas as a corollary to the dismay this discussion is about legitimating the science legitimating various systems of knowledge Lyotard then focuses on the current perception of knowledge as a commodity as a saleable commodity because of the production of knowledge in the postmodern age in computerized advanced society this is no longer considered as an aspiration to truth and there is also been a market shift in that sense from whether it is true or not towards how useful let us it useful or not.

So, this use value which would also be a scene perhaps in parallel with the idea of performativity in legitimating science this idea of use a value becomes also one of the parameters of judging or valuing knowledge and here we also find that the emphasis of knowledge has shifted from the ends of human action to its means and this is something that he has to see it is very strictly back the postmodern age with the postmodern condition and this is certainly departure from the modernist ideas and from the ideologies related to modernity

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And in his own words knowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power is already and will continue to be a major, perhaps the major stake in the worldwide competition for power it is conceivable that the nation states will one day fight for control of information just as they battle in the past for control over territory and afterwards for control of access to and exploitation of raw materials and cheap.

So, here he is not discounting the possibility of a nation states Beijing Walls with I one and another fought fight for control of information this nexus that Lyotard in defies between knowledge and power do it does have very serious implications for the future of the world.

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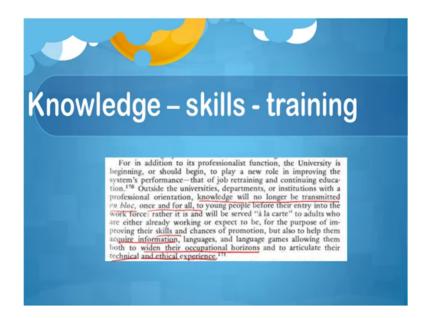


And this is also because knowledge is being increasingly identified with the various elements of control production of knowledge is increasingly being influenced by a technological model, just like during the industrial revolution knowledge enter the economic equation and became a force for production for the first time in the postmodern age.

In the age of post modernity, we find that knowledge becomes a central force of production it also becomes an economic a factor and in that sense control of information is not just a matter of power it not just a matter of control of knowledge it is also a matter related to the economy of the of various nation states and here there is a there is a kind of relationship that Lyotard identifies in the postmodern period between knowledge and power the various forms of exercising control and eventually how all of this is connected to the economic factor as well, this sort of a seemingly bizarre connection that Lyotard makes and they leave nineteen seventies in interestingly it has become almost like the order of the day a few decades from them.

And ow, it is no long it no longer seems as an impossible kind of a proposition when we go back to Lyotard look at the various ways in which he talks about knowledge power control and economic factors associated with it.

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He also draws their attention to how knowledge has been reduced to particular kinds of skills and also the kind of training and attributed in relation to that in his own words knowledge will no longer be transmitted on block once and for all to young people, before the entry into workforce, rather, it is and will be served a la carte to adults, who are either already working or expect to be for the purpose of improving their skills and chances of promotion, but also to help them acquire information languages and language games allowing them both to widen their occupational horizons and to articulate their technical and ethical experience.

The kind of functions knowledge had within a university space the kind of transmission that knowledge had within a within a university space within particular kinds of departments and institutions have also become Tormenta called radical change, but this is something that we can relate with in a better way looking back at Lyotard from the contemporary.

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The English translation the English version of postmodern condition which came out in 1984 also had an appendix title what is postmodernism and here Lyotard also talks essentially about the importance of Avant Garde art and talk tells us how modern art presents the unpresentable as a missing content within a beautiful form whereas, postmodern art puts forward the unpresentable by forgoing beautiful form itself denying the consensus of taste in country and terms and he also gives the example of Marcel Proust and James Joyce is examples of postmodern art and in this appendix what is postmodernism is also drawing a parallel across various kinds of sciences and also the idea of Avant Garde art.

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And in his own words, those are ideas which no presentation is possible therefore, the impart no knowledge about reality or experience they also prevent the free union of the faculties which give rise to the sentiment of the beautiful and they present the formation and the stabilization of taste, they can be said to be unpresentable.

So, in some sense, Lyotards work as a celebration of the displacement of the metanarratives and also in terms of art a celebration of the presentation of unpresentable ideas. So, unlike the modern unlike the modernist or form of art in which the unpresentable was seen as a lack unlike the modernist at times in the postmodern times the presentation of the unpresentable seems to require no particular form and there is also no burden of reality which is being imposed on to this presentation of the unpresentable.

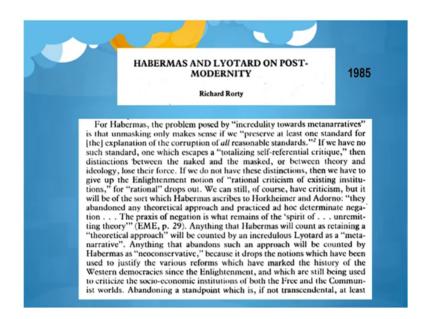
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And in this context it is also important to very briefly take a look at the idea of legitimation which Habermas presented in nineteen seventy three many critics have pointed out that Lyotard's work could be see could be read in opposition to Habermas ideas of legitimation Habermas spoke about legitimation as a series of crisis tendencies within capitalist societies and he also illustrated how these different kinds of crises make it impossible to maintain political stability through consent alone and the focus of his work on was on the contradictions and conflicts between the logic of capitalist accumulation and the popular pressures that democratic politics unleash on the other. In other words, it was about the pursuit of profit versus demands of social welfare and equality which in term also challenged this stability of particular nation states.

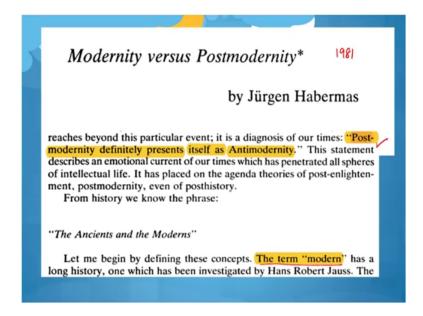
So, in that sense Habermas located the absence of legitimation the challenge is upon legitimation as a crisis as something that needs to be a result much in contradiction to what later Lyotard writes about.

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So, based on these are contrast of ideas a number of works have been published where researchers of time where a theorists have tried to locate the difference is the departure at the points of departure between Habermas and lyptard on post modernity and one of the most quoted essays in this aspect is Richard Rorty's, but Richard Rorty is 1985 essay Habermas and Lyotard on postmodernity.

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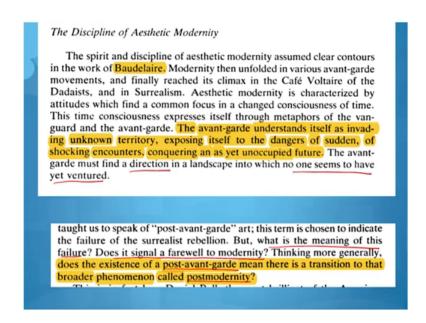


And Habermas also has written an essay in 1981 title modernity was a post modernity which also had an alternate title modernity an incomplete project quite often the not in

the context of Lyotard's definition of the postmodern and as incredibly toward metanarratives the idea is proposed by Habermas about the about modernity being an incomplete a project has been discussed and in this essay modernity versus a post modernity.

Habermas begins to give an example an illustration from the contemporary times and he talks about how postmodern presents itself as anti modernity and with this statement of negation. He goes on to define the term modern in historical and intellectual our context he talks about the various kinds of definitions attributed to the term modern including the including the romantic notion of the modern including the enlightenment idea of the modern.

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He continues to situate the term modern with a focus on the changing definitions and the changing scheme of things and eventually he begins to talk about the discipline of aesthetic modernity and with putting the example of Baudelaire and in this context he also engages with the term Avant Garde and says the Avant Garde understands itself as invading unknown territory exposing itself to the dangers of sudden of shocking encounters conquering an as yet unoccupied future.

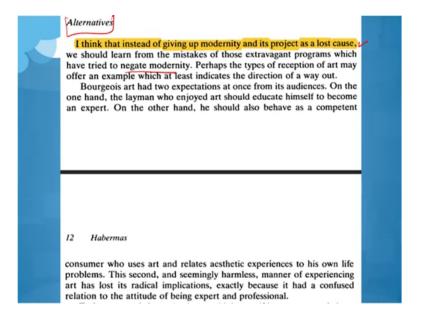
The Avant Aarde must find a direction of in a landscape into which no one seems to have yet ventured and he continues to and dwelling upon the idea of the Avant Garde as in continuation with illustration that he began talking about in the beginning of the essay

where he also talks about how certain Avant Garde projects all also manifesting a number of anti-modern are qualities and he continues to are dwell upon the idea of the Avant Garde and draws are attention to what is the meaning of this failure that is a signal of farewell to modernity.

And here Habermas also shows his discomfort in moving away from the idea of modernity because according to him the existence of a because according to him the pro project of modernity is I am not yet finished thinking more generally does the existence of a post Avant Garde mean there is a transition to that what brought a phenomenon called post mortality.

So, just because a particular kinds of movements are there particular kinds of art forms are there calling in for the need to be labelled them as Avant Garde Habermas asking whether there is a need to move beyond modernity whether there is a need to a signal a farewell to modernity and move to the broader aspect the broader phenomenon called post modernity.

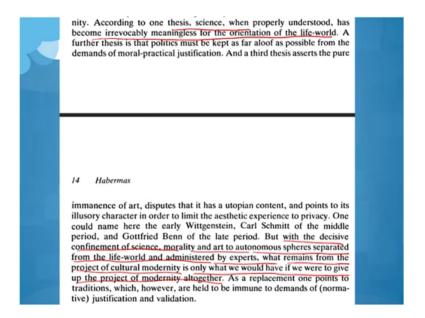
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And he rather categorically then states I think that instead of giving up modernity and its project as a lost cause we should learn from the mistakes of those extravagant programs which have tried to negate modernity perhaps the types of reception of art may offer an example which at least indicates the direction of our way out and he talks about is two different ways in which one could begin to talk about alternative alternatives when one

begins to move away from the project of modernity and certainly for Habermas giving up on modernity is not the only option.

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And there could be other alternatives that one could figure out by engaging with Avant Garde art which has departed from the idea of modernity in some form of the other and here we also wonder whether Habermas directly in conversation the Lyotard when he says according to one thesis science and properly understood has become irrevocably meaningless.

For the orientation of the life world a further thesis is that politics must be kept as far aloof as possible from the demands of moral practical justification and a third thesis asserts that the pure imminence of our disputes that it has a utopian content and points to its illusory character in order to limit the aesthetic experience to privacy and he also towards the end of his essays, but with that the size of confinement of science morality and art to autonomous spheres separated from the life world and administered by experts what remains from the project of cultural modernity is only what we could have if we were to give up the project of modernity altogether.

So, throughout this essay we also get this impression that Habermas is not in favour of giving up on the project of modernity, but he calls for the he calls inferring need to engage with alternatives rather than moving into the broader area of post modernity

which he also thinks is the stance of anti modernity without giving the fair chance which was accorded to modernity in the first place.

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But the respective of the various kinds of discussions that one could continue to have on the in credulity toward metanarratives and also the prices of legitimation Tyotards perhaps, we could say has the last word over here and he continues to call for a break with the tradition of the tradition of the modern because also trying to read Lyotards and Habermas work together we can also find Lyotard's opposition to the Habermas ideas when he says the modern project of realizing universal universality has not been a bad not forgotten, but destroyed liquidated.

So, unlike what Habermas proposes to give some more time for the project of modernity to get completed rather than moving away rather than entirely abandoning it to wait for the project of modernity to reach its completion Lyotard feel sad nobody had abandoned or forgotten the project, but it on it by itself it got destroyed and liquidated. So, there is an inevitability to move towards the postmodern condition because the sciences the systems of knowledge has already begun to do.

So, and there is no going back from these computerized systems of knowledge from these kinds of carbon insists with these kinds of control over information which has taken over advanced societies and Lyotard's essay Lyotards work ends or whether there is not let us wage a war on totality. Let us be witnesses to the unpresentable let us activate the differences and save the honour of the name.

So, this is something very important the last word that Lyotard has over here is very important because in the continuing discussions about postmodernism and the various manifestations of postmodernism in different forms of arts texts and other contexts we would see that there is a war which is being a waste on the ideas of totality on the claims of totalizing explanations and experiences and also, there is a tendency to present the unpresentable tendency to celebrate and record in document the unpresentable and also to activate the differences and engage with them rather than ignoring them were overlooking that.

So, to some up in today's lecture we have taken and look at the ways in which Lyotard talks about the changing notions of knowledge especially in the context of infidelity toward metanarratives and we also seen how he departs from the other ideas of legitimation put forward by Habermas and also the other notion is about the departure from modernity that Habermas and other critics talk about and this also I believe has laid a foundation to talk about the other critics of postmodernism.

And from the next lecture onwards and in the next session, we shall be engaging with the ideas of a hyper reality put forward by Baudrillard, we will also be taking a look at how there is a continued how continuity could be built in these various discussions in the context of postmodernism articulated by different theorists from different disciplinary paradigms that is all we have for today.

Thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you in the next session.