

Introduction

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The Postmodern in *Les Immatériaux*

In 1985, the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, together with the design theorist Thierry Chaput, curated the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. He had accepted an invitation by the *Minister for Culture* and the *Center for Industrial Creation (CCI)*. Six years after Lyotard's report on *The Postmodern Condition* (1979),¹ the exhibition demonstrated the hypothesis which he had described in the report. The objects and artworks shown expressed his observations of what was happening in domains such as art, science and philosophy, under the new condition of communication technologies. Lyotard's report is considered to be a response to another report by Simon Nora and Alain Minc, in the 1970s, which proposed the "computerisation of society"². Nora and Minc's project led to the development of the French *Minitel* system. According to Lyotard, the new "post-modern" condition demanded a new sensibility, as he stated in the principle proposition for the exhibition: "The insecurity, the loss of identity, the crisis is not expressed only in economy and the social, but also in the domains of the sensibility, of the knowledge and the power of man (futility, life, death), the modes of life (in relation to work, to habits, to food, ... etc.)."³ A constant return to the postmodern condition became a general method of Lyotard's philosophical thinking to go beyond the modern imagination, and guided the construction of the exhibition which was, in his own words, a "manifestation", a "non-exhibition".

1 Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979).

2 Charlie Gere, *Art, Time and Technology* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), p. 139.

3 *Les Immatériaux* catalogue, *Album* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 1985), p. 26.

The title of the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* demonstrates a form of resistance against the modern conception of materiality. The original title for the project that the CCI had initiated already in 1981, before Lyotard got involved in 1983, was *Création et matériaux nouveaux*. This title was changed several times: *Matériau et création*, *Matériaux nouveaux et création*, *La Matière dans tous ses états*, before it was finally announced to the public as *Les Immatériaux*.⁴ The etymological root *mât* refers to making by hand, to measure, to construct. The moderns since Descartes conceive a dualism and hence an opposition between the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*; the thinking mind becomes the foundation of knowledge and also the judge of what is real. As Lyotard wrote: "In the tradition of modernity, the relation of the human with materials is fixed by the Cartesian programme: to become master and possessor of nature. A free will imposes its ends to the given sense data to divert them away from their natural sense. It will determine their end with the help of language which allows it to articulate what is possible (a project) and to impose it upon what is real (matter)."⁵

Hence Lyotard considered that a title such as *matériaux nouveaux* would only perpetuate the modern conception, while using the prefix *im-* could introduce a moment of self-reflection: "The exhibition [*manifestation*] entitled *Les Immatériaux* has the purpose of presenting [*faire sentir*] how much this relation is altered by the fact of new materials. In this extended sense, the new materials are not only new materials, they interrogate an idea of the human who works, who projects, who remembers: of an author."⁶ The immaterial is fundamentally material. The point was not to appreciate the new materiality brought by the telecommunication technologies, but rather to question the relation between man and his desire to become the master of matter. The aim of calling it "immaterial", like the designation of the "postmodern", was to liberate man from the modern paradigm, and to release material from the prison of the industrial revolution.

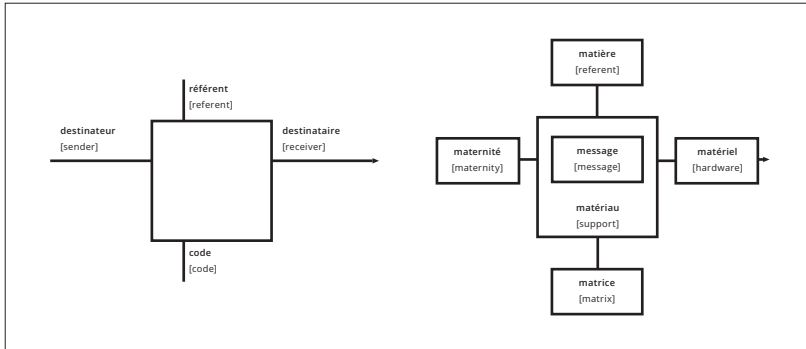
At the time, Lyotard had just finished writing *Le Différend*, a book dedicated to the philosophy of Kant and Wittgenstein, in which Lyotard wanted to re-read the history of philosophy according to what was called the *linguistic turn*.⁷ The *differend* refers to an unresolved conflict due to the lack of rules or metanarratives which are common to two different systems of discourse. We should also recognise that language was always at the centre of his thoughts, as was already evident since his PhD thesis, which was later published as

4 Antony Hudek, "From Over- to Sub-Exposure: The Anamnesis of *Les Immatériaux*", in this volume, p. 72.

5 *Les Immatériaux* catalogue, *Album* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 1985), p. 16.

6 Ibid.

7 Jean-François Lyotard, *Le Différend* (Paris: Minuit, 1983).



[Figure 1] Communication diagram (Source: *Petit Journal*, 28 March–15 July 1985, Paris, p. 2. Centre Pompidou, MNAM, Bibliothèque Kandinsky).

Discours, Figure (1971).⁸ The question of language was hence fundamental to Lyotard's conceptualisation of this exhibition, especially since telecommunication technology had created a new materiality of language between senders and receivers; or more fundamentally, it served as the basis of the postmodern turn. The conception of language as a tool also characterises modernity, because "modernity presupposes that everything speaks, this means that so long as we can connect to it, capture it, translate it and interpret it, there is no fundamental difference between data and a phrase; there is no fundamental difference between a phenomenon of displacement in an electromagnetic spectrum and a logical proposition".⁹ But it is also such an equivalence that allows Lyotard to develop an ontology of the material or immaterial according to a model of telecommunication: *matériau*/medium, *matériel*/receiver (*destinataire*), *maternité*/emitter (*destinateur*), *matière*/referent, and *matrice*/code [Figure 1]. The new materiality was mapped onto the model of telecommunication. The objects and artworks in the exhibition, as well as the 60 sites at which they were presented, were also classified and ordered according to these five categories.

Art and Science in Question

Lyotard compared the displacement of the electromagnetic spectrum and logical propositions, and continued: "given this fact, in this face-to-face relation to a universe that is his to dominate – a heroic relation, I would say – in order to make himself the master of it, man must become something else entirely: the human subject becomes no longer a subject but, I would say, one case among others, albeit a case which retains this privilege, until proven otherwise

8 Jean-François Lyotard, *Discours, Figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971), translated into English by Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon, Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

9 From Lyotard's report, "Après six mois de travail"; see this volume, p. 33.

(which is extremely improbable)".¹⁰ It was clear to the curatorial team that technology was not the cause of a rupture, but rather the sign of the decline of the figure of the modern, and that at the same time technology made this modern project reflect upon itself, and destabilise itself.¹¹ In Lyotard's words, technology places humanity once again in a condition of childhood, of immaturity. This reference to immaturity is in direct contrast to what Kant defined as the project of the Enlightenment, namely to overcome the condition of *Unmündigkeit*.

Unmündigkeit, however, is not opposed to maturity; rather it is opposed to authority, or more precisely, to the authority that legislates as the sole voice. Scientific knowledge has been such an authority, which not only demythologises the universe, but also has a demoralising impact upon what Lyotard calls the problem of legitimation.¹² The postmodern also questions a certain hegemony of authority and hence radically opens up the way that knowledge is acquired and narrated. The arrival of the postmodern demands a sensitivity to the material conditions, at the same time as it gives us a new sensibility of living. In the 1980s and '90s, we saw the celebration of the postmodern, as a liberation from the shackles of rules, codes, oppositions, and especially of the modern; a celebration which was evident in almost all domains listed in the exhibition: alimentation, perfume, architecture, urbanism, art, astrophysics and physics, biology and genetics, writing, habitat, mathematics, money, music, theatre, dance etc. The setting of the exhibition is probably the best illustration of this. It presents us with a labyrinth in which every object is at once familiar and strange. Envisaging the construction of the exhibition space, Lyotard proposed to go back to an idea of Denis Diderot who, when reviewing the paintings of Claude Joseph Vernet in the 1767 Salon, presented them not as pictures to be viewed following the traditional logic of the division of gallery space, but rather described them as real sites, in the form of disorientations of space.

The exhibition arose from an effort to move the concept of the postmodern outside of books and to find its support in other objects, such as scientific, industrial and art objects. This approach reflected a global vision, without referring specifically to social and economic aspects.¹³ The exhibited objects tended to bring in new forms of thinking that would call the modern into ques-

10 Ibid.

11 "Deuxième état des immatériaux", Archive of Centre Pompidou, March 1984.

12 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 6–9.

13 According to the testimony of member of the curatorial team Chantel Noël, from "La Règle du Jeu: Matérialiser *Les Immatériaux* – Entretien avec l'équipe du C.C.I.", in *Modernes, et après? "Les Immatériaux"*, ed. Élie Théofilakis (Paris: Édition Autrement, 1985). This distance from social and economic aspects was however disputed between the team members in the interview.

tion. In quantum mechanics, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle claims that we cannot know the location and speed of a particle simultaneously. Speed and location are two important concepts in classical mechanics, since it is the displacement of location and duration that gives us velocity and acceleration. The presence of particles can now only be imagined in terms of probabilities. This involves both a mathematical reduction as well as a dematerialisation of objects in our universe, including stars, galaxies, bodies and mind. For example, the first seconds of the birth of the universe are represented by means of a quantifiable model with which we can explain the genesis of the cosmos, as if there were human subjects who witnessed the process.

We might say that the cosmic mystery has changed through the discovery of the "immaterial". The universe is no longer either a stable mechanical model or a perfect self-organising organism. We can not only observe the movement of the stellar bodies, but also witness their birth and death. What does such a change in scientific discovery mean? In the minutes of a meeting of the curatorial team from 20th March 1984 dedicated to this topic¹⁴ there is a testimony from the astrophysicist Michel Cassé, one of the participants of the exhibition: "Why is the universe so equivocal? Why is the rate of expansion as it is? If it was different, we wouldn't be here interrogating ourselves: a universe more dense would shut itself down before all appearance of life. The miraculous coincidences, are they not inevitable in every universe that shelter a conscious observer?"

The art objects in the exhibition pose similar questions and affirm the uncertainty brought about by new techniques. These objects remain, in a certain sense, instrumental in demonstrating Lyotard's vision of the post-modern. More than anything, *Les Immatériaux* performed the disappearance of the body, both in the presentation of the objects and in the audience's experience. The new body and mind materialise in the form of codes. At the entrance there was an Egyptian bas-relief sculpture, followed by a long and dark corridor. Visitors had to wear headphones and listen to the soundtrack, playing different programmes of spoken texts in 26 different zones throughout the exhibition space. After passing through the corridor, one entered the *Théâtre du non-corps* dedicated to Samuel Beckett, which showed five dioramas installed by Beckett's set designer, Jean-Claude Fall. There was no actor, or rather there were actors without bodies: the first direct reflection upon the modern gaze. From here began five different, intersecting paths, with more than 60 sites. For example, corresponding to the category *Matériau*, the site entitled *Deuxième peau* showed different types of grafts made of pork skins, cultivated skins, and artificial skins. Another site, entitled *L'ange*, displayed a large photograph of Annegret Soltau's *Schwanger* (1978), which shows the artist's body in different stages of a pregnancy.

14 Document from the Archive of Centre Pompidou.

In the category *Matrice*, the site called *Jeu d'échecs* showed the heuristics of a chess game with computers; codes were everywhere, even machines that calculated the statistics of visitors. Through the lens of technical objects, visitors would confront the limit of their own bodies, and the complexity of the universe. In the category *Materiel*, for instance, there was a documentary film about the birth and death of stars projected on a big screen.

For Lyotard, the most fundamental aspect of the transformations mapped in *Les Immatériaux* is language. In a documentary about the exhibition titled *Octave au pays des immatériaux*, Lyotard concluded the film by saying that "language is the most immaterial system that material has succeeded in forming" [*le langage est le système le plus immatériel que la matière ait réussi à former*]. In fact, we can probably understand that the coding of materials brings them closer and closer to the form of messages. Hence after passing along the five categories of objects and artworks, the exhibition displays another set of works in a space entitled *Labyrinthe du langage*, dedicated to Jorge Luis Borges. Not only the materiality of writing has changed, but also its form of presentation, the way it is written.

The art historian Charlie Gere has observed that the artistic programme of the exhibition "was not just a reflection of Lyotard's own taste, but an expression of his strongly held belief that only such work could properly express or invoke the sublime."¹⁵ What would be the sublime that this exhibition sought after? On this point, Lyotard returned to the aesthetic judgement of Kant, especially the feeling of the sublime. Kant defines the sublime as "the mere capacity of thinking which evidences a faculty of mind transcending every standard of the senses."¹⁶ Like aesthetic judgement, the sense feeling is not subsumed by any concept; but unlike aesthetic judgement, it involves the imagination and reason instead of the understanding and the imagination. We can speculate that the exhibition put the sublime itself into question, for the sublime is no longer only a question of aesthetics but also a question of politics, one that is deeply grounded in culture and history. Clement Greenberg saw modernism as a response to what he called "the romantic crisis" around the mid-19th century.¹⁷ Since then modernism has not ceased to be self-critical. In contrast, the postmodern – especially Lyotard's reading of Kant's reflective judgement – resonates with the work of the early Romantics such as Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling. We may say that, for Lyotard, what the postmodern responds to is precisely the belief or the illusion of the stable and self-critical figure of the human. Lyotard makes a strong distinction between situation

15 Gere, *Art, Time and Technology*, p. 147.

16 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith and Nicolas Walker (Oxford University Press, 2007), §25, p. 81.

17 Clement Greenberg, "Modern and Postmodern", *Arts*, 54, No.6 (February 1980), www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/postmodernism.html.

and presentation (*Darstellung*).¹⁸ Art as presentation or as re-presentation is restricted, for Lyotard, to the understanding of Kant's first *Critique*. The sublime must manifest itself as contradiction, or conflict between the imagination and reason. On one hand, the imagination confronts its limit to represent that which it cannot present; on the other hand, reason has to violate the interdict that it itself poses of not going beyond the concepts of sensible intuition.¹⁹ The sublime is not about conformity (to concepts), but rather contradiction arises at the moment of here and now as an event (*Ereignis*) in the sense of Heidegger, or more precisely in the question: *arrive-t-il?*²⁰ In relation to this supposition, the following is crucial for our inquiry: Lyotard's discourse on the sublime did not concern so much whether technology-based art can give us the sublime or not. Instead, we should re-situate the whole discourse of the postmodern and Lyotard's ambivalent feeling about technology and its relation to postmodernity. Lyotard posed the question of the relationship between art and technology at the end of a lecture entitled "*Something like: communication... without communication*":

The question raised by the new technologies in connection to their relation to art is that of the here-and-now. What does "here" mean on the phone, on television, at the receiver of an electronic telescope? And the "now"? Does not the "tele-" element necessarily obscure the presence, the "here-and-now" of the forms and their "carnal" reception? What is a place, a moment, not anchored in the immediate "suffering" of what *happens [arrive]*. Is a computer in any way here and now? Can anything *happen [arriver]* with it? Can anything happen to it?²¹

Matter and Sentiment

Here we can see doubts and questions in the face of rapid technological development and industrialisation. In the article "*Logos and Techne, or Telegraphy*", published in the collection *L'Inhuman* (1988), Lyotard wrote: "The question of a hegemonic teleculture on a world scale is already posed."²² This doubt of Lyotard concerning the relation between the postmodern and technologies also results in its critique. From the 1990s up to today, we can locate different efforts that try to situate the postmodern in a large historical perspective in order to find a way out of the melancholia accompanied by the liberation.

- 18 Élise Marrou, "De Lyotard à Wittgenstein: un différend? Anthropocentrisme et acosmisme", in *Lyotard à Nanterre* (Klincksieck, 2010).
- 19 Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 55.
- 20 Jean-François Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde", in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 93.
- 21 Jean-François Lyotard, "Something like: communication... without communication", in *The Inhuman*, p. 118 (translation modified).
- 22 Jean-François Lyotard, "*Logos and Techne, or Telegraphy*", in *The Inhuman*, p. 50.

According to the analysis of art historian Nicolas Bourriaud, the postmodern is the epoch of melancholia. Taking up the theory of German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, Bourriaud proposed that this melancholia comes from disillusionment with the superabundance of energy and resources and the power of conquest, especially the energy crisis in 1973 and the end of the 30 glorious years (1945–75) in France. Bourriaud proposed what he calls “the Altermodern” as the successor to the Postmodern, an epoch in which everyone is uprooted from their proper culture and becomes a nomad, a *homo viator*.²³ It seems to us that this figure still falls squarely within the discourse of the postmodern, however. In fact reflection on the melancholia of the postmodern was addressed by Lyotard during the preparation of this exhibition, in a document entitled *Deuxième état des immatériaux*, dated March 1984. According to this document, the exhibition wanted to reflect in its *mise en scène* the melancholia brought by the failure of Europe’s and America’s extension of the Enlightenment project. This distance from an enlightened, bright and transparent society created a sorrow (*chagrin*) among their people.²⁴

With the project of the present publication, 30 years after *Les Immatériaux* and 35 years after the appearance of the *La Condition postmoderne*, we wanted to investigate what has been happening in the wake of their epochal hypotheses and observations; or more precisely, what has been happening to the question of the postmodern. No doubt, many things have happened. The social, economic and political conditions have changed, and so have the technological conditions. Digital technology perpetuates the modern desire for control and mastery through networks, databases, algorithms and simulations. Digital technology, which was once the figure instead of the ground, slowly becomes the ground of governance, communication, and scientific research methods. It seems to have not only challenged the epistemes of science and art, but also their epistemologies. At the time of *Les Immatériaux*, the World Wide Web had not yet appeared, *Minitels* were the main computational devices in the exhibition, and some projects actually faltered because the curatorial team had difficulties in finding a sufficiently powerful server. One of the most significant projects in the *Labyrinthe du langage* was *Épreuves d’écriture*, a collaborative online writing project which resulted in the second catalogue of the exhibition. It invited 26 writers, including philosophers and social scientists such as Jacques Derrida, Bruno Latour, François Chatelet, Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Isabelle Stengers and Dan Sperber, to contribute commentaries on 50 keywords [Figure 2]. Over the course of two months, the participants wrote small entries for each keyword, and at the same time criticised, or commented upon, the entries and comments of others. During the exhibition, the visitors could use five *Minitel* terminals

23 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Altermodern* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009).

24 “Deuxième état des immatériaux”, p. 4.



[Figure 2] François Chatelet with the Olivetti computer used for the *Épreuves d'écriture* writing experiment (Source: Centre Pompidou, MNAM, Bibliothèque Kandinsky).

connected to a central server to access the entries either by keywords or by the names of the authors. This was probably one of the earliest collective and networked writing experiences, presented to the public when the computer was not yet popular.

In art, we have since witnessed the rise and fall of new media art. On the one hand we observe more and more intensive interdisciplinary collaboration with science and technologies; on the other hand, art, design and technology are converging under the force of the culture industry. In science, simulation has overturned the established epistemology, since scientific experiments – the fundamental research method proposed by Francis Bacon – now demand collaboration with computer simulations. In 2013 the Nobel prize for chemistry went to Martin Karplus, Michael Levitt and Arieh Warshel, who since the 1970s have devoted themselves to the development of molecular dynamics simulations. In the humanities, we have observed the rise of a new, heavily funded discipline – digital humanities – coinciding, after the concept of the *inhuman* proposed by Lyotard in 1986, with discourses on the post-human, cyborgs, non-human, object-oriented philosophy, and so on. In light of the transformation brought by telecommunications technologies, we want to revisit Lyotard's hypothesis of the destabilisation of the concept of the modern. Where is this concept of the human going after the *post-*, the beyond? Should we not demand a new way of orientation after mastery and

disorientation, perhaps an orientation that imposes neither a will to mastery nor the misery of turbulence?

Reorientation: 30 Years after *Les Immatériaux*

If we can summarise the Modern as the will to mastery, and the Postmodern as a celebration of disorientation, we propose that we should proceed to a re-orientation which avoids both mastery and disorientation. Orientation is necessarily anamnesis – that is to say, a recollection of what is past – in the minds, in cultural objects, and in a new cartography. The initiative of conducting a research project 30 years after *Les Immatériaux* is not only to pay homage to it, and to understand its significance in historical perspective (in terms of art and theory), but also to reflect upon the transformation of “postmodern culture”.

Politics. As for “disorientation”, the first sense of the word destroys order, rules and roots; a second sense concerns the Orient and the Occident, a geopolitical and cultural development under globalisation, supported by technologies. Countries outside Europe, such as China, which are believed to have never experienced modernity, suddenly had to adapt to the postmodern discourse. How could we reassess this, 30 years later? If we need to rediscover the sentiment, then the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan since late 2001, the credit crunch in 2008, and the *Arab Spring* in 2011, have brought melancholia to an end. Instead we can probably identify a new sentiment in what Franco Berardi has conceptualised as a “state of panic”. This panic comes not only from social and economic conditions, but also from the networks of transmission: images and sounds of suicide attacks directly reach our eyes through fibre cables; the figures of stock exchange rates are instantly updated on the screens of our smartphones, tablets, and computers; moreover, we are faced with the national surveillance schemes on telecommunication channels, and the proliferation of cyber-attacks. Re-orientation demands a new vision of the conflicts between values and cultures, as well as a new geopolitical order, which in turn calls for a new form of legitimacy.

Aesthetics. We observe that social, economic and political conditions have reversed the promise of the postmodern. Think, for example, of Henry Lefebvre’s postmodernist critique of Le Corbusier’s functionalism and the desire to control in architectural and urban forms: “The street contains functions that were overlooked by Le Corbusier: the informative function, the symbolic function, the ludic function. The street is a place to play and learn. The street is disorder.”²⁵ Today the disorder of the street becomes

25 Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 18.

what Richard Florida pinpoints as the “creative city”.²⁶ Thus, the postmodern critique becomes a tool of neoliberal discourse. According to Fredric Jameson, the postmodern follows the logic of late capitalism, in a continuation of the culture industry critiqued by Adorno and Horkheimer.²⁷ The disorientation once celebrated as liberation can now be conceived as a source of sorrow. The long-lasting *post-* comes and must come to its end.

Knowledge: The telecommunications technologies embody a model of communication which is more interactive than ever. Within this new configuration, the legitimacy of knowledge is firstly challenged by top-down authoritarian legislation. The development of the digital has pervaded every aspect of our daily life, yesterday’s *Minitels* have been replaced by personal computers, pads and smartphones. Theorisation, as the editor of the *Wired Magazine* Chris Anderson provocatively claimed, is coming to an end, since big data will make it “obsolete”. What is rendered obsolete, however, is not only any kind of narrative – whether “grand narratives” or “micro-narratives” – but also any attempt at setting up hypotheses, constructing models and conducting proofs, as they had been practised by science since the time of Francis Bacon.²⁸

In recent years we have seen new titles such as Hypermodern, Supermodern and Altermodern, which try to address the new condition after the post-modern. In contrast, we believe that, in order to articulate this new phase, a more historical and geopolitical dimension of the modern must be tackled, and that a new imagination is required. In autumn 2013 the Centre Pompidou hosted – on its 5th floor, where *Les Immatériaux* had also been held – an exhibition entitled *Plural Modernities 1905–1970*. This historical recognition of *Plural Modernities*, though it affirmed cultural heterogeneity, seemed indifferent to the concept of the modern itself, and to what happened after the post-modern; to the sensibility produced by the material conditions, which not only affect the way we look at the present, but also the past – i.e., world history. The past loses its power when it can no longer contribute to the here and now; hence we feel the need to carry out an anamnesis of *Les Immatériaux*.

26 Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

27 See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), and Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectics of the Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1979).

28 Chris Anderson, “The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete”; online: archive.wired.com/science/discoveries/magazine/16-07/pb_theory.

Structure of the Book

This book is divided into three parts. The first part, “Document”, offers the first publication of the transcript of a report which Lyotard addressed – probably to his colleagues – in the spring of 1984. The text does not have an original title, which is why it is referred to according to its first words, “After six months of work” (*Après six mois de travail*). In this text, Lyotard speaks about conceptual, theoretical and practical considerations regarding the preparations for the exhibition. It not only offers interesting insights into the evolution of the guiding conceptual principles of *Les Immatériaux*, which were subsequently translated into curatorial and scenographic decisions, but also highlights the need to historicise the exhibition and its preparatory phase, which had already begun in 1981 with extensive research by Chaput and his team. This preparatory phase included a first conceptual sketch provided by Lyotard in August 1983, which was then pinpointed by the report first translated into English here – a report whose opening words already point us to the transitory, evolutionary work that would eventually lead to the exhibition.

The second part of the book focuses on the artistic programme of *Les Immatériaux* and contains texts by art historians and artists who discuss various aspects of the historical significance of *Les Immatériaux*. In the 2000s, three art historians conducted extensive research into the background and context of the exhibition: Francesca Gallo, Antony Hudek, and Antonia Wunderlich. We have included a text by Hudek here, which offers a detailed analysis of the main parameters of the exhibition, and homes in on the relationship of its artistic and philosophical programmes. Hudek also contextualises *Les Immatériaux* in relation to contemporaneous developments in conceptual and postmodern art.

Francesca Gallo has contributed a new text in which she highlights the selection of some contemporary artists for the exhibition, especially some female artists in whose work the notion of “the immaterial” features in a particularly pertinent manner. Gallo also suggests that more recent internet-based artworks continue the line of questioning communication and materiality first proposed in the exhibition.²⁹

29 We had originally also planned to include a chapter from German art historian Antonia Wunderlich’s book about *Les Immatériaux* entitled *Der Philosoph im Museum* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2008), in which she describes the “Phénoménologie de la visite” in great detail, offering a most comprehensive account of what could actually be seen and experienced in the exhibition. Wunderlich puts together a site-by-site description of the exhibition, drawing on the catalogues as well as reviews, interviews and other statements by members of the audience, journalists and team members. Regrettably, the translation and reprint of this 150-page text, which is currently only available in German, were impossible to realise for the present volume; it will, however, no doubt be an important source for any future research on *Les Immatériaux*.

The French art historian Thierry Dufrène contributes the hypothesis that, by analogy with the conception of the “*immaterial*”, the exhibition also implicitly proposed a concept of the “*immodern*”, which would not be the negation but rather a specific inflection of the modern. Dufrène situates the immodern as the ontology of interaction, juxtaposing the modern (subject) and postmodern (crisis).

The artist Jean-Louis Boissier has contributed two texts. One is an interview conducted by Andreas Broeckmann in which Boissier speaks about the historical context in which *Les Immatériaux* was realised. Importantly, he provides insights into the curatorial and production process which do not belittle Lyotard’s role and impact on the project, yet which underscore the importance of the contributions of Thierry Chaput, Philippe Délis, the team of the CCI, as well as the dozens of other cooperation partners and participants.

The impression that it is historically untenable to speak of *Les Immatériaux* as “Lyotard’s exhibition” was confirmed by Lyotard himself when, in the 1984 report included in this volume, he repeatedly spoke about the team and the consensual way of working. Even in the opening sentence of the report, Lyotard refers to “the question of installation as we have collectively thought it through”. With regard to the catalogue and what would become the “Album”, documenting the preparations of *Les Immatériaux*, Lyotard acknowledged that this volume would also “include the team’s working texts spanning almost two years”, thus going back long before he himself joined the project. Lyotard recounts that when he suggested some changes to the spatial layout of the exhibition, “this proposition was rejected unanimously by the team almost without discussion, without any argument – fundamentally rejected, as if the team understood that we could not get to the root of this problem of postmodern space through a rapid, controlled spatial layout of a plan for the exhibition.”³⁰ Elsewhere in the report, speaking about the adaptation of the concept of the postmodern to the exhibition space, Lyotard pointed to the consensus within the planning team: “If now I take this barely sketched-out model and transport it to the case of the exhibition, asking myself, therefore, what a postmodern exhibition corresponding to the metropolis or to the nebula of conurbation could be, then I am indeed obliged – *and this is what we have all concluded* – we are obliged to refuse the traditional *dispositif* of the gallery and the salon – that is to say, the *dispositif* which opposes, for example, rooms and the corresponding corridors, habitats and lines of circulation.”³¹ In this passage, Lyotard expands the authorial subject of the exhibition by

30 Lyotard 1984, in this volume, p. 29, 63, and 55, respectively.

31 In this volume, p. 58 (emphasis added).

pointing to the organising team, indicating that the exhibition as a whole was such a collective effort.³²

Boissier's second contribution is a case study on the interactive installation *Le Bus*, which he and his students at the University Paris 8 produced for *Les Immatériaux*. The text is not only a detailed account of the project and of the conditions under which it came about, but it also exemplifies how the items and artworks on display in the exhibition each had a history before and after *Les Immatériaux*. The text indicates how a detailed historical account of the exhibition project as a whole will have to place a focus on many, if not each of the individual objects and their producers, and the research that went into them, in order to provide a full picture of what *Les Immatériaux* meant in the broader context of art, science and theory, and the correspondences between them.

The third part of the book contains six reflections on the philosophical questions posed by Lyotard and present in the exhibition, especially with regard to the concept of anamnesis. Two former students of Lyotard's, Bernard Stiegler and Anne-Elisabeth Setjen, provide both an anamnesis of Lyotard's exhibition and of their personal exchanges with him. In her contribution, Setjen explores the relation between *Les Immatériaux* and Lyotard's reading of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement*. *Les Immatériaux* demonstrates Kant's concept of reflective judgement, not only in the exhibition itself, but also for its students, visitors, etc. It is in light of the *différend* that the reflective judgement becomes autonomous in search of the *sensus communis*, or what she refers as the *transcendentaux*. The postmodern, Setjen shows, can be read as the reincarnation of Kant's sublime, as well as an act of resistance against the "too human" modern.

In contrast, Bernard Stiegler criticises Lyotard for having ignored the shadow of the sublime. According to Stiegler, Lyotard didn't see the relation between *techné* and the sublime (the product of the imagination and reason) in a profound way, and hence ignored a political economy of the immaterial which has become more and more determined by industry. Stiegler goes back to his early work *Technics and Time 3*, in which he developed the concept of the fourth synthesis of the understanding, as a critique of Kant's three syntheses: namely, apprehension in intuition, reproduction in the imagination, and recognition in a concept. The fourth synthesis is the exteriorised memory or the tertiary retention, which conditions the other three. If one follows Kant in saying that the faculties of the understanding, judgement and reason are built upon one another, then there is also a relation between the sublime

32 In a future, more extensive research effort, the contributions of the participating individuals and groups, and the chronology of their interactions, will have to be etched into relief.

and techné. Stiegler shows that Lyotard's interpretation of Kant lacks the pharmacological critique which becomes urgent in our time.

Yui Hui's and Charlie Gere's texts offer two different readings of anamnesis in relation to the exhibition. Situating the question of the Other in Lyotard's writings before and after the exhibition – *The Differend* (1983) and *The Inhuman* (1988) – Hui's text poses the question: Is the postmodern merely a European project? The exhibition, for Lyotard, was an occasion to reflect on a new metaphysics, one that distances itself from the modern. During the preparation of the exhibition, Lyotard saw the possibility of locating such a metaphysics in Spinoza or in the Japanese Zen Buddhist Dôgen. Lyotard posed the intriguing question of whether the new technologies might give rise to the possibility of achieving a form of anamnesis which he called "passage". Lyotard elaborated on his concept with reference to Freud's concept of *Durcharbeiten*, as well as to Dôgen's concept of "the clear mirror". Hui's text addresses Lyotard's question by reflecting on the differences between the conceptions of *techné* and anamnesis in the philosophical West and East, and suggests pushing Lyotard's question in the direction of a programme of re-orientation in the global context.

Gere's text proposes to understand the exhibition, and especially the use of the headphones and their soundtrack, as an anamnesis of the Holocaust. Reflecting on Lyotard's writing on the hyphen in the expression "Judeo-Christian", and on Giorgio Agamben's critique of Derrida's project of deconstruction as a "thwarted messianism" of "infinite deferment", Gere proposes that writing has sublated the difference between Judaism and Christianity, and hence necessitates the repression and forgetting of the former by the latter. Gere points out the references to Auschwitz in *Les Immatériaux* and suggests that the use of the soundtrack and headphones can be interpreted as an anamnesis of the lost voice of God in philosophy as "*gramma*".

In their texts, Robin Mackay, and Daniel Birnbaum and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, explore the political dimension of *Les Immatériaux* as resistance. Mackay provides a rich contextualisation of the exhibition within the politics of the Centre Georges Pompidou, as well the role of the Centre Pompidou in the development of the culture industry in France. He also offers an accelerationist reading of Lyotard's exhibition as a critique of Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams's 2013 *Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics*, which suggests that the acceleration of capital and technologies will speed up capitalism, as well as lead to its self-destruction. Mackay proposes that Lyotard recognised the double effect of such acceleration. It intensifies the inquietude of the human subject in losing its role as master in the postmodern epoch (the first sense of the inhuman), but also leads to its hyper-exploitation (the second sense of the inhuman) without emancipation. Instead, Mackay considers *Les Immatériaux* as a laboratory for a third way out.

Birnbaum and Wallenstein provide another reading of the resistance of *Les Immatériaux* by offering speculations about a sequel exhibition that Lyotard mentioned in his seminars (provisionally entitled *Résistances*), which was never realised but which would supposedly have conceived resistance in terms of “noise, distortion, and the dimension of experience that resists both consciousness and language”. Birnbaum and Wallenstein’s text aims to reconstruct this notion of resistance by going back to Lyotard’s earlier writings on concepts such as touching, event and passibility. Birnbaum and Wallenstein also locate the concept of resistance in Lyotard’s writings on aesthetics, and in his interpretations of the work of Karel Appel, Sam Francis and others. Their text resonates with those of Hui and Sejten on Lyotard’s search for a concept of anamnesis that would break from the traditional conception of the relation between technology and memory.

This book derives from a research project that began in the summer of 2013 at the Leuphana University of Lüneburg. The aim of the project has from its outset been to provide an historical account of both the art and theory of this mysterious exhibition, *Les Immatériaux*, 30 years after its occurrence. Given the significance of *Les Immatériaux*, this publication is only the beginning of a reconstruction of the epochal transformation of these past decades. We would like to thank Leuphana University and our colleagues at the Centre for Digital Cultures for the opportunity to work on this important project, especially Claus Pias, Timon Beyes, Tina Ebner, Mathias Fuchs, Erich Hörl and Andreas Bernard, who have provided valuable support throughout the last two years. The funding of our work was provided through the *Hybrid Publishing Lab* and the research group on *Art and Civic Media* in the *EU Innovation Incubator* project of Leuphana University. In Paris, our research has been made possible by the Centre Pompidou and its staff, where Nicolas Roche, Didier Schulmann, Jean Charlier and Jean-Philippe Bonilli were more than helpful in giving us access to the resources in the Archives. We are also grateful for instructive conversations with Jean-Louis Boissier, Thierry Dufrière, Anne-Marie Duguet and Bernard Stiegler. At Meson Press, Mercedes Bunz, Marcus Burckhardt and Andreas Kirchner have made the publication possible. We would like to extend special thanks to Madame Dolores Lyotard for generously granting us the copyrights of the unedited text of Jean-François Lyotard, and to Robin Mackay for the translations from the French. We also would like to thank Damian Veal and Thomas Munz for their diligence in correcting and cleaning up the manuscript. Last but not least, we would like to thank the authors for their contributions and discussions. Together, we will take it from here.