A black différend: Biko in conversation with Lyotard

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Why does philosophy fight over words? The realities of the class struggle are ‘represented’ by ‘ideas’ which are ‘represented’ by words. In scientific and philosophical reasoning, the words (concepts, categories) are ‘instruments’ of knowledge. But in political, ideological and philosophical struggle, the words are also weapons, explosives or tranquillizers and poisons. (24)

For if philosophy’s birth was induced by the first science in human history, this happened in Greece, in a class society, and knowing how just far class exploitation’s effects may stretch, we should not be astonished that these effects, too, took a form which is classical in class societies, in which the ruling classes *denegate* the fact that they rule, the form of a philosophical denegation of philosophy’s domination by politics. (66)


1. The Differend and its political dispositif

According to Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) himself, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, is the only philosophical book he ever wrote and published.¹ *The Differend* [*Le Différend*] is a dense text – the most difficult work in Lyotard’s opus – and it has several formal layers which make it hard to understand even to philosophy scholars - Derrida speaks of a “mad complexity” in relation to this book.²

Jean-François Lyotard defines the concept of differend as follows: “[a]s distinguished from a litigation [*litige*], a differend [*différend*] would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments.”³ A litigation in Lyotard’s universe can always be resolved because both parties assume their mutual claims as legitimate. In this sense, the “damage” [*dommage*] of a litigation can be quantified and ruled out since both parties share and agree

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on the same judging criteria. As such, the philosophical form that best illustrates the presupposition of mutual recognition at work in a litigation is ‘dialogue.’ A “wrong” [tort], which structures a differend, is produced when the plaintiff does not own one or more genres of discourse she ought to use to prove the wrong. Or again, there is a wrong every time a plaintiff has been deprived of one or more genres of discourse to prove in court the injustice she suffered.

The book opening thesis, what gives to it a tragic tone, states that when it comes to a decision about the legitimacy between two conflicting claims, we find ourselves in a position in which “a universal rule of judgment between heterogeneous genres is lacking in general.”

A specific end determines a specific genre of discourse, which in turn organises the phrase regimen rules. Phrases and sentences are positioned by phrase regimen rules, whatever the end may be – ethical, cognitive, logical or narrative. An end sets up its own argumentative chains, employing phrases which are easily linked together as they arise and remain in the chosen genre of discourse. Within the same genre of discourse, a conflict on how to link on phrases is tempered as they serve the same end, the very same master. But the moment a phrase has been linked to the previous one, it always carries in itself the possibility of a differend, as the arbitrariness of parataxis is the backbone of what we name Lyotard’s agonistic atomism:

In the absence of a phrase regimen or of a genre of discourse that enjoys a universal authority to decide, does not the linkage (whichever one it is) necessarily wrong the regimens or genres whose possible phrases remain unactualized?

Genres of discourse are simply political decisions on how to link phrases and sentences. In this sense, politics becomes the problematic conflict of how phrases have been linked, of how to do it. In The Differend, phrasal linkage is an ontological necessity, and it implies an agonistic politics as its unavoidable consequence. In order to prove the normative legitimacy of a phrase within Lyotard’s agonistic atomism, we should change the specific genre of that phrase and then use the genre of validation:

Validation is a genre of discourse, not a phrase regimen. No phrase is able to be validated from inside its own regimen: a descriptive is validated cognitively only by recourse to an ostensive (And here is the case). A prescriptive is validated juridically or politically by a normative (It is a norm that . . . ), ethnically by a feeling (tied to the You ought to), etc.

Validation, that is a norming judgment or, better, a legitimising judgment, instead of reconciling the political dispute, it increases the conflicts it should supposedly neutralise. This happens because validation operates by using a power that does not come from the previous phrase, much less from the genre of discourse it comes from. The conflict between a prescriptive phrase and a cognitive one is deep-rooted, according to Lyotard, “simply

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5 Lyotard, The Differend, page 12.
because a referent is established as real it does not follow that one ought to say or do something in regard to it.”

The empty, deaf space between phrases is the field from which any differend comes. In the Lyotardian phrasal dispositif every phrase “presents” its phrasal “universe” – this presentation outlines itself against the void from where every phrase comes from. More specifically, every phrasal atom produces its own universe and, as such, every phrasal atom produces its own differend. Lyotard bases the universal and permanent synchronicity of his agonistic atomism on a transcendental paradox: the phrasal atoms do not take place in a prior linguistic universe. Therefore, the ontological, phrasal irrefutability becomes the corollary of a linguistic occurrence which every time comes from nothing. This paradox in Lyotard seeks to make permanent the general agonism between atoms, between phrases. In this sense, the atomistic conflict turns out to be inevitable even among phrases whose conflict of legitimacy (the differend) would be relieved had they linked in their own genre of discourse. Lyotard cannot do otherwise since it is only via this paradox (one phrase/atom, one universe) that the differend is kept as the untranscendal horizon of his philosophy. This transcendental move (a paradoxical yet highly fecund move) allows Lyotard to refuse a general objection we might raise: the possibility of attenuating the differend of a single phrase/atom into litigation in case it were to happen within its own genre of discourse. But in Lyotardian terms, such objection is misleading as it tries to neutralise the structural lack of legitimacy that every linkage presents. In addition, that objection seems to be satisfied by the operative tension that genres of discourse carry out on phrases:

Genres of discourse determine stakes, they submit phrases from different regimens to a single finality: the question, the example, the argument, the narration, the exclamation are in forensic rhetoric the heterogeneous means of persuade. It does not follow that differends between phrases should be eliminated. Taking any one of these phrases, another genre of discourse can inscribe it into another finality. Genres of discourse do nothing more than shift the differend from the level of regimens to that of ends. - But because several linkages are possible does that necessarily imply that there is a differend between them? - Yes it does, because only one of them can happen (be "actualized") at a time.

The dispute about the legitimacy of the genre of discourse employed to connect phrasal regimens and phrasal atoms is virtually the same: The Differend has shown on the theme of

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7 Lyotard, The Differend, page 30. Representational realism produces a dilemma when one has to bear witness to a wrong (page 28): “[l]et us admit your hypothesis, that the wrong comes from the damages not being expressed in the language common to the tribunal and the other party, and that this gives birth to a differend. But how can you judge that there is a differend, when according to this hypothesis, the referent of the victim’s phrase is not the object of a cognition properly termed. How can you even affirm that such a situation exists? Because there are witnesses to it? But why do you grant credence to their testimony when they cannot, by hypothesis, establish the reality of what they affirm? Either the differend has an established reality for its object and it is not a differend but a litigation, or, if the object has no established reality, the differend has no object, and there is simply no differend. - So speaks positivism. It confuses reality and referent. Now, in many phrase families, the referent is not at all presented as real: O'er all the hilltops/ is peace, 2 X 2 = 4, Get out, At that time, he took the path toward . . . , That's very beautiful. This does not prevent these phrases from taking place. (But is to take place the same thing as to be real?).”

8 Lyotard, The Differend, page 49.
proper names. Any linguistic happening calls for a decision on what name or genre of discourse should be used to link it. Thus, when that decision has been made, it necessarily does wrong to what it excludes from the “actuality” field. Delegitimation is the unseen laterality of a political decision about what name should be used and which genre should be put into effect in order to give face and directions to phrases. Politics becomes the problem of the *enchaînement* (concatenation) of phrases as their delegitimation may happen at any connection. Moreover, Lyotard’s agonistic atomism could not be atomistic had it not been an untranscendental field of conflict between phrases. Phrases in *The Differend* emerge from nothing: “[p]hrasing takes place in the lack of being of that about which there is a phrase.” An atomism that presents *toujours déjà* a clash in every emergence of phrase:

‘encounter’ (...), it is your phrase that presents it. It presents it as being there before all phrases. The condition of the encounter is not this universe, but the phrase in which you present it. (...) Regarding this universe, it can just as easily be said that it is the effect of the encounter as its condition (the two expressions are equivalent). [...] For *And a phrase* to be necessary signifies that the absence of a phrase (a silence, etc.) or the absence of a linkage (the beginning, the end, disorder, nothingness, etc.) are also phrases. What distinguishes these particular phrases from others? Equivocality, feeling, ‘wishes’ (exclamation), etc.

On the other hand, Lyotard’s agonistic atomism would not be agonistic without a phrasal conflict that is unavoidable in itself: “contact is necessary (...), it is necessary to link onto a phrase that happens (be it by a silence, which is a phrase). (...) How to link is contingent.”

Regarding a phrase, or what Lyotard calls “the undoubted,” we only know that it presents one or more universes, whereby the instances it enables (the referent, the addressee, and the sense), are always subjected to equivocity. Any metalanguage, even the one employed by Lyotard in *The Differend*, works on phrases understood as definitions or “occurrences” already neutralised in their happening qua phrases. The first “*présentation*” or originary “*occurrence*” always needs another phrase to be isolated, explained or defined. This linguistic act is what deprives the first phrase of her “*actualité*” (actuality) as first event-phrase, a phrase that in order to happen has necessarily eclipsed every other possible phrase. The metalinguistic request of *reading* a phrase according to the definitional code is legitimate; but, for this reason, it orders logical and cognitive regimens as privileged. Thus, Lyotard explains: “you command me to link onto it

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9 In the paragraphs §§42-45 Lyotard discusses the phrasal kinetics of vengeance. He writes (page 30): “Since one is not able to obtain reparation, one cries out for vengeance. – This is still psychology or socio-psychology. In any case, it is to accept unquestioningly that a teleological principle regulates the passage from one genre of discourse (the cognitive) to another (the phrase of the Idea). But what proof do we have that there is a principle of compensation between genres of discourse? Can it be said that since I don’t succeed in demonstrating this, then it is necessary that I be able to tell it? To begin with, the referent is not the same when the phrase referring to it is not from the same family. The damages are not the wrong, the property to be demonstrated is not the event to be told, and I understand this even in the case when they bear the same name.”


11 Lyotard, *The Differend*, page 28 and 68.

with a metalinguistic definitional phrase. You have the right to do so. But know that you are making a command.”\(^{13}\)

What genre should be privileged to «enchèiner» then? Here is politics. Politics understood as a judgment of opportunity on the specific linkage chosen against any other – a judgment put forward in the general absence of legitimacy. Each decision on how to link and sort phrases out can follow a rule, but these decisions rest on a constant void of legitimacy – how to judge then? Not to mention ambiguous phrases and phrases that “co-present several universes.” Lyotard asks us: “Which is the pertinent linkage?”\(^{14}\) Here is politics, again.

No genre can mirror better than others a supposed essence of language – not even idiolect since a private language avoids the prerequisites to make real what it utters or expresses.\(^ {15}\) Genres of discourse are “stakes” that rank what phrase regimen should be linked. Genres of discourse operate according to opportunity or lack of it. In particular, genres of discourse employ phrase regimens as means, and in this regard Lyotard states that: “[t]eleology begins with genres of discourse, not with phrases.”\(^ {16}\) A phrase-atom can always be linked to another one, and for this reason it can always be ranked in a phrase regimen as its primal happening is unpresentable. Phrasing means linking according to a set of rules employed by a specific phrase regimen which in turn is operated by the genre of discourse chosen. It is for this reason that there will always be differend. What needs to be emphasized here is that every phrase regimen (cognitive, prescriptive, evaluative, descriptive etc) is incommensurable to another in Lyotard’s philosophy of language. Every phrase regimen “presents” a (phrase) universe in a way that is heterogeneous and untranslatable to any other phrase regimen that has been employed or that has been neglected. The Differend’s “general agonistics” works on how genres of discourse use and merge together one or more incommensurable phrase regimens in order to achieve their purposes. In this sense, genres of discourse link and connect regimens and phrases in every possible way to be successful and “win”. Genres of discourse need to defeat every other conflicting genre, so they bend, “seduce” and move phrases and phrases’ four instances according to the best tactics to achieve their ends. The shift from human beings to genres of discourse puts Lyotard in an anti-humanistic framework. And when it comes to articulating the hegemonic relations between genres of discourse, phrase regimens and phrase, Lyotard’s anti-humanism emanates its magnetic and structuralist force:

Our ‘intentions’ are tensions (to link in a certain way) exerted by genres upon the addressors and addressees of phrases, upon their referents, and upon their senses. We believe that we want to persuade, to seduce, to convince, to be upright, to cause to believe, or to cause to question, but this is because a genre of discourse, whether dialectical, erotic, didactic, ethical, rhetorical, or

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\(^{13}\) Lyotard, The Differend, page 69.

\(^{14}\) Lyotard, The Differend, pages 80-81.

\(^{15}\) In Lyotard idiolect basically means unconscious but it would take us too fare to discuss here Lyotard’s aporetic and phrasal reading of Sigmund Freud’s works on body, repression and language. See for instance J-F Lyotard, Discourse, Figure; Heidegger and “the jews” as well as his long articles “Figure foreclosed,” “Emma” and “Voice”.

\(^{16}\) Lyotard, The Differend, page 84.
“ironic,” imposes its mode of linking onto “our” phrase and onto “us.” There is no reason to call these tensions intentions or wills, except for the vanity of ascribing to our account what is due to occurrence and to the differend it arouses between ways of linking onto it.\textsuperscript{17}

The political exclusion we observed operating with both proper names and phrasal atoms is the same with genres of discourse. In this sense, the legitimacy of a genre, when it ranks instances, phrases and phrase regimens, rests on a differend among genres – on a general differend. Every linkage takes place excluding every other possible one. There is no neutrality in linking, ever.\textsuperscript{18} Phrase regimes group up rules to create and then rank phrases according to their particular ways. On the other hand, genres of discourse create specific “modes of linking” to achieve their strategies – whether or not these strategies may observe the regional borders of the phrasal regimens. In Lyotard’s terms, the utilitarian view of language as a tool is secondary and subordinated to what continuously springs from the phrasal dispositif, that is an endless phrasal occurrence. It is only because the atom-phrases can be indefinitely linked that humans, in a Lyotardian account, perceive themselves as owners of language.

The negative principle of the book – the absence of a “universal rule of judgment between heterogeneous genres” – has one main consequence: there is neither a genre of genres nor a “supreme genre.” On this regard, Lyotard explicitly recalls Bertrand Russell’s analyses on metalanguage.\textsuperscript{19} What follows is that politics in Lyotard’s philosophy cannot be the first genre:

Were politics a genre and were that genre to pretend to that supreme status, its vanity would be quickly revealed. Politics, however, is the threat of the differend. It is not a genre, it is the multiplicity of genres, the diversity of ends, and par excellence the question of linkage. It plunges into the emptiness where “it happens that . . .” It is, if you will, the state of language, but it is not a language. Politics consists in the fact that language is not a language, but phrases, or that Being is not Being, but \textit{There is}’s. It is tantamount to Being \textit{à même l’être} which is not. It is one of its names.\textsuperscript{20}

Politics in Lyotard is the place where the differends reproduce themselves. In particular, politics is the act linking and, at the same time, the decision to tie atom-phrases together. In other words, politics is the act of judging how to pass through the vacuum between one atom-phrase and another. Since every linkage takes a particular shape and structure, it necessarily implies a wrong to any other neglected linkage. In Lyotard’s agonistic atomism, each act of linking results from a decision and, as such, every linkage is produced by a political judgment: “Everything is political if politics is the possibility of the differend on the

\textsuperscript{17} Lyotard, \textit{The Differend}, page 136.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid}: “The multiplicity of stakes, on a par with the multiplicity of genres, turns every linkage into a kind of ‘victory’ of one of them over the others. These others remain neglected, forgotten, or repressed possibilities. There is no need to adduce some will or some intention to describe that. It suffices to pay attention to this: there is only one phrase ‘at a time’ (\textit{à la fois}).”

\textsuperscript{19} See Lyotard, \textit{The Differend}, page 138.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid}. 
occasion of the slightest linkage.” As we saw, politics is not a genre. Politics cannot claim to be a genre because it is only the functional dimension of every linkage, an agonistic feature that always already takes place in the social. The agonistic dimension of politics in Lyotard is a direct result of the paradoxical and untranscendental nature of the social. The nexus between language, politics and sociality marks the concept of différend. As soon as an atom-phrase appears, it is structurally social because of its four instances, that is its linguistic hooks (addressee, addressee, referent and sense). The social is already implicated in every atom-phrase and in its relative linkage. A phrasal universe is social ab initio as it calls for alterity through its four instances – this is the reason why sociality is untranscendental. As Lyotard explains: “[a] ‘deduction’ of the social presupposes the social. (...) The social is always presupposed because it is presented or copresented within the slightest phrase.” How should we judge what allows to judge without presupposing it? Without prejudging and prejudicing it? The untranscendental dimension of the social epitomises how genres work and clash with each other. Consequently, politics is the articulating field of judgments on how to tie and untie phrases according to the end pursued. When we investigate the social as a permanent presupposition, we approach the object and subject of a “meta-differend:”

the social is the referent (the universe of a prior phrase taken as the referent of a subsequent phrase) of a judgment to be always done over again. It is a “case” pled contradictorily before a tribunal. And in this “case,” the nature of the tribunal that must pronounce upon the case is itself the object of a differend.

It is precisely here that Lyotard is somehow forced to make the paradoxical dimension of the differend into the general feature of (a conflicting) sociality. If the “presentation” or “occurrence” is always already “presented”, if a political presupposition is the only way of showing the phrasal void, then a permanent conflict among the neglected phrase-atoms become endless – the differend is a transcendental condition.

Lyotard politicizes the transcendental repression of what has not been chosen to be phrased, he makes it the fabric of the social. As such, the transcendental repression becomes the presupposition of the social. This is where we think The Differend shows its philosophical center, the core of its political dispositif. The square elevated differend epitomised by the social – and the constant delegitimation it implies – is what Lyotard discusses in his book when he examines how Plato constructed his Dialogues and argumentations. Plato constructs his philosophical machinery to neutralise the sophists’ logologos who had transformed Parmenides’ ontology into a confutation and “impious” discourse. In Lyotardian terms, first generation sophists (Gorgias and Protagoras) phrased the Parmenides’ revelation-discourse, imposing upon both addressee and addressee to “argue” the “reality” of the referents at stake (Being, gods, truth etc). First in Plato and then in Aristotle, the stake becomes the implementation of a normative dispositif to reach a preliminary consensus on what is knowable. This move was a necessary step to start working on and guarantee the subsequent regional referents. Lyotard reads Plato’s

21 Lyotard, The Differend, page 139.
22 Ibid.
23 Lyotard, The Differend, page 140.
dialogues as efforts to demonstrate the validity of “homologia” (homology) through “dialegesthai” (discussing). Plato wants to demonstrate both the possibility and validity of a consensus achieved through asking for and giving reasons between two interlocutors. But beyond two speakers, in Plato’s dialogues a third speaker, understood as external to the discussion, has been excluded. The third speaker, as acceptable external witness, cannot take any decision. As Lyotard writes:

The third party, the witness, turns out therefore to be impugned: the only acceptable testimony about the referent is that of those who, in disputing over the referent, pass all of the testimony about it through the sieve of refutation.\(^{24}\)

Plato’s first move to discredit the third, which turns to be a preliminary move to indefinitely exclude the third, is delegitimising the sophistic agonistics – a particular genre of dialectic discourse in Ancient Greece that always took place in public and therefore before third parties (politicians, judges or public audience). Here is one of Plato’s imposed presuppositions: one must always be admitted and accepted in advance to join a Platonic dialogue. According to Lyotard, Platonic Academy is a (metaphoric) admittance and elective place. If you are admitted to Academy, then you are part of a philosophical dialogue whose initial structure is Platonic. Admission requires that one is (being) part of the same kind and genre:

Alexander Aphrodisiensis calls koinologia the consensus on method: if the theses are to be identical at the end, it is then necessary that the idioms at least of the two parties and the use they make of them be common right from the start. Imagine a candidate for the dialogue who would be a bumpkin, or a fool, or a trickster. He would have to be eliminated.\(^{25}\)

There is a second imposed presupposition to produce Platonic homologia: right after the third has been excluded, the interlocutor ought to be selected. There can only be a litigation (litige) amongst those is in conversation; there can never be a différend amongst them.

As an instantiation of this Platonic eugenics on consensus, Lyotard discusses some key sections of The Sophists and The Laws. In these two works the necessity of selection becomes a ventriloquism of the impresentable. Materialists (soil’s friends) are like sophists (contrasting arguments’ friends) and they are not allowed in the Academy, unless, as Lyotard states, there is a previous act “of attracting and of taming those recalcitrant ones who don’t want to dialogue. The simulated dialogue serves to lure them in.”\(^{26}\) The “good mimesis” (good imitation) in Plato’s written dialogues is needed to domesticate, and thus writing becomes hunting expertise, capture ability and ventriloquism. Lyotard connects these Platonic tactics to the concept of metalepsis, elaborated by the French narratologist Gérard Genette. In sum, Genette’s metalepsis is a process by which an author sets up several fictitious interlocutors in the diegetic levels of her work in order to produce an

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\(^{24}\) Lyotard, The Differend, page 23.


\(^{26}\) Ibid.
identification effect between characters and audience. This metalepsis process aims to suspend narrative factitiousness. According to Lyotard, *Theaetetus* is the most powerful Platonic metalepsis. *Theaetetus*’ pattern starts with Plato who materially wrote the dialogue, then one of the characters recalls the content of a previous conversation in which one of the characters evokes another dialogical exchange and ventriloquises other speakers. Incidentally, Plato never positions himself as the first addressee. What happens in this Russian doll of simulation is that among the metalepsis levels the initial differend between agonistics and consensus withers away to the point of becoming undetectable. The more it becomes imperceptible, the better Plato’s metalepsis works out – as in Althusser’s theory of ideology. Plato’s metalepsis workings are named by Lyotard “operators of narrative distanciation.” In this way, whoever reads Plato is never admitted to dispute “the agreement concerning the rule of the dialogue, whose principal rule is that the agreement concerning the referent ought to be obtained for ourselves by ourselves.”

The third and last exclusion in the Platonic homologic dispositif concerns the reader, who is being assimilated to materialists, sophists, kids, the demented or women. No third party is in fact admitted to take part in the Platonic dialogue when it comes to reach consensus on the means to decide how to produce the dialogue referent. In such Platonic politics of obliviousness, the founding delegitimation must be forgotten and repressed in order to set up the first authentic philosophy of dialogue. And when an interlocutor has been admitted, it is fictitious, a straw man. However, what Plato cannot hide in his homologic dispositif is the paradox of the social, the meta-differend both on the nature of the tribunal and procedures employed to settle the dispute between agonistics and consensus, between sophistry and philosophy. On this matter Lyotard appropriately clarifies that:

> To stick to this, the differend would only perpetuate itself, becoming a son of meta-differend, a differend about the way to regulate the differend about the way to establish reality. On this score, the principle of agonistics, far from being eliminated, still prevails. It is in order to defuse the threat of this recurrence that “Plato” stages the metalepsis of the partner, which is perhaps the kernel of pedagogy.\(^\text{28}\)

Plato in The Differend is shown hiding the meta-differend – the place from which he starts; and, in order to achieve his strategy, he portrays general agonistics within his dialogues as a mere option among others, an opportunity always already defeated as previously neutralised. We are not very far here from the Derridean reading of the Platonic pharmakon, a pharmakon prepared in the dialogue backrooms by Plato to discredit writing.\(^\text{29}\) But every pharmakon, following the cast-iron structure of supplementary, does not do anything else than amplifies the disease it is supposed to cure. In regard to general agonistics, we observe in Lyotard the exact opposite of what Plato does: the meta-differend

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remains the untranscendental horizon that nurtures the different politics of delegitimation at work in every concatenation.

What Lyotard gives us in The Differend is constructivism that ceaselessly turns over itself; against its own inevitable phrasal “bridging” (pontage) because his philosophy is politically conscious of what implies the act of linking between heterogeneous phrases, phrase regimens, genres of discourse, claims etc. A presentation-phrase is always a negation and repression of what actuality means in relation to the all the possible phrases that have been excluded and dismissed. The concept of différend is a revolt of the excluded against judicial, philosophical realism put forward by a specific possibility that has become the only actual being and thus it endlessly discredits, delegitimises and make one forget the emergence and coming back of those repressed possibilities. Such repressed possibilities have no other choice but to resort to the feeling of differend in Lyotard’s philosophy – or to use a silence that rejects any realism. Here is the Lyotardian politics of delegitimation. Lyotard’s phrasal agonistic constructivism that does not move forward in any direction as it is in fact completely absorbed in the differend between actuality and possibility. This primal differend is the original place of the Lyotardian (unlimited) politics of delegitimation. It is this differend between actuality and possibility that always recurs in every historical pre-judging on what names should be chosen. In particular, it is in this primal differend of a “politics of resistance” which structures Lyotard’s agonistic atomism. A “politics of resistance” carried out by oppressed groups who suffered wrongs is the only kind of politics Lyotard would approve.

In conclusion, politics in The Differend becomes delegitimising resistance. However, if this, on the one hand, means that philosophy is a powerful tool, on the other hand, it only has a one-dimensional modality. Terms like ideology or hegemony, for instance, only occur once or twice throughout the book – always in a general, equivocal or undefined sense. Therefore, a radical philosophy of language, such as Lyotard’s, restricts itself to a frontal conflict between phrases. More specifically, it cannot make use and count on an analysis of the ideological apparatuses. It is satisfied by some kind of autonomy and independence of the phrasal. Lyotard’s philosophy of language is unable to link both the economic and superstructural origin of what allowed specific phrases to emerge or wither away.

2. Biko’s dream

The relationship between my paper, my perspective, and that of Dr Alloggio’s is, at best curios, at worst bizarre. Dr. Alloggio’s paper is about politics, linguistically and materially. Insofar as it is about that, it is about concrete, material conditions, in a concrete, material society.
Many, myself included, would view it as grappling with real issues; the kind of issues white, middle-class males should shy away from.

Top of the food chain, what need do they have to be grappling with real issues? They should be giving themselves over to the study of the stars or, at least, to the Spear of the Nation, its execution and meaning: whether it should have been drawn in brighter colors, and whether said colors tell us more about the artists than his subject matter. Truly, what need do they have to be dealing with real issues when the entire world is at their service: if not their loving mothers, then their long-suffering girlfriends, if not both loving mother and girlfriend, in different ways of course. We do not even speak of his father, his pater: is it not through his efforts that the world is so secure for him?

If this particular white, petti-bourgeois, heterosexual is sufficiently enlightened, and is descended from a liberal line, then the chances are high that both his mother and girlfriend are also hard at work gazing at the Spear. They will, we all hope, still make time for their duties to him. But, we all understand, some of those duties, the non-essentials, say, like keeping his flat clean, and his laundry laundered, or his moustache waxed, these must be taken over by someone else. These duties, we are quite certain, will not accomplish themselves. The white male, his mother, and his girlfriend must be left with enough time to right the wrongs of the world.

My paper, on the other hand, is about dreams. Since these dreams are transgressive, transcending the boundary between sleeping and waking, and frequently making a mockery of the very notion of a distinction between waking and sleeping, I shall call them imaginations. With this notion I have moved from something that happens to me, dreams, to something that I induce, something that I call up at will. But, as if this will to blur boundaries is not enough of a failing, it gets worse. The imaginations in this paper are not even mine, nor of this time, nor of this concrete, material society I live in. They are Biko’s dreams or, since I’m in for a penny, his imaginations. Some reports indicate that Biko sometimes called himself, tongue in cheek, she hastens to point out, ‘unyana womntu’, on account of his isiXhosa name, Bantubonke. So, not only is this paper about someone else’s imaginations, they are about the imaginations of an individual who harbored delusions of grandeur. If this escapism does not mark me as what I am, a non-white, non-man, driven to insanity by the material conditions that produce him, then nothing will. I am, of course, quite grateful to those who have dedicated their livelihood to rescuing me. Or would have

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30 Or that! Well, either one really.
31 Bazali bam! These words, ‘my parents’, punctuate many a public speaker’s performance in the communities I come from. In the mouth of a seasoned speaker, especially the religious, charismatic, brimstone and fire kind, these words function as a refrain, just like the beat of a house song.
32 Drum roll!
33 Son of Man. Although it could have been modeled on the prophet Ezekiel, his god frequently addressed the prophet as ‘son of man’, it was primarily a reference to the Christ, a white, middle-class, male par excellence.
understood myself as grateful, had I the capability. I doubt that insanity lends itself to rationality.

In my defense, perhaps the only plausible defense I can give, the imaginary-I in Biko’s dream is so much more interesting than the I who is writing this paper, in this concrete, material reality I find myself in. I say, ‘find myself’ because, in my utter insanity I imagine that Biko’s dream is reality too. Or, more precisely, I believe that this concrete, material reality is a dream too. (Even) More precisely, I believe that the concrete, material reality I find myself in now is but the imagination of the white, colonizing, male. If my insanity has been established, even if it is just by my stipulation, I will assign this belief to Biko i.e. I hold this imaginary34 belief because I am conscious of being in Biko’s dream, and it is a feature of Biko’s dream that it presents itself as reality too. But, of course, I could simply be mistaking my insanity for consciousness, in which case, bazali bam! any and every taint that comes from holding this position must be attributed to me, and not Biko. I cannot stress this enough, Biko is like the virgin Mary, passing through every position about him without being affected by it. He, Biko, remains pure Idea. Or, in keeping with my insanity, Biko has, by his physical death, passed beyond Existence into the metaphysical Void, beyond Form.

But I digress. I am like the charismatic preachers in the communities I come from to whom structured theme is an encumbrance, a thing to be accepted for the sake of appearance, and to be discarded as soon as the ‘spirit’ takes over. I could have, of course, likened my digression to jazz, and given myself access to the concept of improvisation. Improvisation, I suspect, has higher intellectual standing as a concept than ‘the spirit’ does. But then, the taint of my insanity, however marginal, might have rubbed off on jazz and its practitioners. Neither ‘jazz’, nor its practitioners would have thanked me for that.

Back to Biko’s dream! You now know that I am in that dream, as I am in the colonizer’s dream too. Think of this doubling of me as a theater production, a cosmic play put on for the amusement of the gods. In one part I play the part of a non-white. In another part, perhaps even inside the first play, I play the part of the black. This, I believe, is the most interesting meaning of Nietzsche’s phrase ‘semblance of a semblance’, in The Birth of Tragedy. Indeed, I believe, should you miss the fact that, from a certain point in The Birth, the setting is no longer just semblance, but the semblance of a semblance, then you are most likely to forget that, “the reality in which we live and have our being...this reality too is a semblance” (15, emphasis mine). Later, when he says, in Beyond Good and Evil,

it is beginning to dawn on five or six brains that physics too is only an interpretation and arrangement of the world (according to ourselves! if I may say so) and not an explanation of the world (15, emphasis mine),

34 Note that ‘imaginary’ is not, here, used as an adjective of the belief, it is rather a description of the thing believed i.e. the world.
these words have the same meaning as that earlier observation. Like a director of a play, or a movie if you like, our best and brightest minds only offer us one out of many possible ways the world could be. Older and wiser, Nietzsche no longer mentions the fact that empirical reality is just a semblance, and that this is the reason why the world is an interpretation, even to physicists.

Take, for example, Nietzsche’s Euripides. I say Nietzsche’s because, outside The Birth, I have no knowledge of Euripides, nor have I, to be honest, sought any. Still, it is thanks to Euripides that “people from everyday life pushed their way out of the audience and on to the stage” (55). On stage, though, the common person, a member of the great unwashed, “saw and heard his double” (56). Nietzsche, a fan of the ‘pomp’ of the older tragic presentations, thinks of the Euripidean stage as a ‘mirror’, but one that is “painfully true to life, reproducing conscientiously even the lines nature had drawn badly” (55). The common people, though, were much ‘delighted’ by their appearance on stage, impressed by the fact that, there, “they knew how to speak so well”. Because of their delight in the double on stage, the great unwashed began to “take lessons in oratory from Euripides” (56). If the ordinary people in the audience did not quite speak like the double on stage, the ordinary people wanted to speak like the double on stage. And so, rightly so,

Aristophanes’ Euripides praises himself...If the broad mass now philosophizes, conducts trials, and administers land and property with unheard-of cleverness, then this was his achievement, the successful result of the wisdom he had injected into the people (56, emphasis mine).

If Biko had a problem, and if the black consciousness philosophy was ever a response to a problem, then this Euripides-like production of the non-white, the African in particular, was it. The non-white, Biko argued, is “produc[ed] at the output end of [a] machine [,] a kind of man who is man only in form” (Biko 28, emphasis mine). This problem of the produced-to-be-only-form man is “the first truth, bitter as it may seem”. The first truth, or FT for short, is also to be “acknowledged before we can start on any program designed to change the status quo” (29, all emphasis mine). In other words, before any change in the world, change in the person to effect that change needs to occur. The doubles on stage might speak well, but they speak well as constructed by Euripides, a man “who felt himself superior to the mass” (58). Even as they learnt to speak well, they allowed themselves to be framed: the pitch of the voice, the posture to adopt, the correct outcome to be striving for. Instead of being an agent for change, the double is a better refined product, a better appearance of an appearance. On stage, unlike in real life, the double flows directly from a ‘superior’ mind. With the double, the mass immediately sees the benefits of expressing themselves correctly, how one word rather than its synonym better expresses a point, and how a pause

35 Can it be one of those Hollywood blockbusters? The ones that are just too stupid, and outrageous, and so removed from ‘reality’, but make obscene amounts of money because everyone went to see them? Please?
at the right moment emphasizes rather than diminish a point. Biko describes a similar occurrence in the reality of the non-white as ‘coincidence’:

Thus, even those whites who see much wrong with the system make it their business to control the response of the blacks to the provocation...it appears to us as too much of a coincidence that liberals - few as they are – should not only be determining the *modus operandi* of those blacks who oppose the system, but also leading it, in spite of their involvement in the system. To us it seems that their role spells out the totality of the white power structure – the fact that though whites are our problem, it is still other whites who want to tell us how to deal with that problem (89).

But what is the FT, what is this thing that trumps *any* action, *any* doing on our part to eradicate poverty, or send our kids to better schools, or marry whomsoever we wish? To understand the FT, I argue, we must grapple with its central concept, form. The difficulty with form is that, though it organizes the concrete and material, it is not itself located in the concrete and material. And so, though we can point at concrete examples of poverty, and thereby match the concept to an object, we cannot do the same with form, since it makes it possible for us to see something. Form is like the eye that sees a great deal, but cannot see itself seeing.

Form, as Biko uses it, is contrasted with, and even opposed to, content. And so, the form-only man is also described as “a[n empty] shell, a shadow of man... [a] people who have lost their personality” (29). In its strong sense, the form-only person has no content of their own; in a weaker sense, the form-only person has content that is so shaped that whatever content they have or had disappears in the shaping. Consider here, for a moment, an important distinction taught to potential analytic philosophers, the valid-sound distinction in argument. Validity has to do with the form of an argument, and soundness with the truth of it. Unless an argument is valid, the potential philosopher is discouraged from proceeding to the truth of the argument. In other words, getting the form of an argument right takes precedence over the truth of it, otherwise we could fail to grasp the argument, let alone its truth.

Let us illustrate this technical point by thinking about causes and effects. Let us agree that a cause always precedes an effect. Any statement, or argument, in which the effect precedes the cause calls for a second, careful look. If, for example, it rains, then the grass will be wet. Of course, for the purposes of the example, we must imagine that the grass is not covered, or water-proof, or the rain dry, whatever that means. The rain is the cause, the wet grass the effect i.e. the rain causes the grass to be wet. Now, we can easily move from the rain to the wet grass: if it is raining, I can assume the grass is either wet, or being wetted. But we cannot, without some further restrictions and conditions, move back from a wet patch of grass to the rain. So, we cannot start from the wet patch of grass and say the cause of it is the rain. We cannot do this even when it is raining; the most we can say under those
conditions is that the rain is one of the causes of the wet rain, because something else might be wetting the grass at the same time as the rain. Now, of course, we can go through this exercise every time we have a cause and effect story, or we can formularize the relationship between cause and effect by abstracting from the actual, individual cases. If the latter, if we formularize, then we do not have to inspect each case, to see if the cause preceded the effect, we correctly impose the form of this relationship between causes and effects.

Now, imagine that a person, Madol Anzima, is telling you about an experience of his. Madol Anzima experienced a nasty shock when he saw, in the mirror, a huge and purple bruise on his forehead. He cannot remember what happened. Indeed, he is quite certain nothing happened, the bruise is too huge and purple for its cause not to have consciously registered. Madol, a level headed kind of guy, not at all prone to flights of fancy, now suggests that the cause of the purple bruise is yet to come: the bruise came before the punch, or kick, or whatever, that caused it. You sympathize, but feel it your duty to disagree. The cause, you insist, must come before the effect. He, quite reasonably, points out that you were not there, and he was, and he is telling you nothing has yet happened to him to cause the bruise. And so, perhaps, he will sit going to a morning bash out, since he would rather the cause strike him at home, and not at the bash. You say the cause must be sought in the past, and not in the future: causes precede effects. He invokes John. S. Mbiti, and his notion of an African time. You walk out. When Africans invoke other Africans to defend their theoretical positions, you know the madness has reached intolerable levels.

See the point of form, though: even though you were not there, and Madol was, and even though the experience is his, not yours, and even though you have no access to the actual, concrete happenings responsible for the bruise, you know that he is just wrong because the form in which he structures his (telling of an experience) is incorrect. Until he gets that right, the form of the relationship between causes and effects, we cannot make sense of Madol Anzima’s experience. But, further, until he gets form right, his experience makes no sense.

If we understand FT, the first truth, as a black consciousness philosophical principle, then we might have some ground for locating its demands in imagination. Philosophical practice, after all, often transports problems in the concrete to the abstract, to enable it to, as Senghor has remarked, fix a raptor’s eye on it. In the concrete, BC activists have to act as they insert themselves into various dreams and nightmares. But here before any action, FT demands that the non-white see, and acknowledge this most serious of problems: he is form only. Like Paul of the bible, who asserts that, before any salvation can happen, the sinner must accept that all have sinned, and just by being born, fall short of the glory of God, the non-white is an invalid form, a fallacy, in relation to the positive and correct form that is the white. What about the white, is he more than just form? No, he or she is not, the

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36 Do you see, dear reader? Please say you do, or nod, even just a slight dip of your head will do.
37 Hade san!
white is as only-form as the non-white is. The only, but crucial difference between the two is that the white is produced to be positive form.

In Biko’s imagination, the non-white steps out of form into nothingness. In the movie, The Matrix, the freed men and women chose, and then swallowed a pill. Biko has a bitter pill of his own, the FT: you are nothing if not formed. But if whiteness is form par excellence, Biko is not going to oppose that. It is why he argues that, “Non-whites do exist and will continue to exist and will continue to exist for quite a long time” (48). If, he argues, a person’s aspiration is whiteness, but they are unable to reach that goal, then they are non-white. At first it seems as if that argument applies to designated non-whites only. But this is to undermine the role of form. All can fail to be white, and become non-white. If you, dear Reader, think that whiteness is natural to some, and not so to others, you have missed the fact that whiteness is a product of the same machine that produces non-whiteness. The designated white must constantly show himself to be white, and that takes rigorous rehearsal sessions: in schools, in jobs, in language use, in neighborhoods. Can you, dear Reader, imagine the absolute shame of being designated white and being poor, or inarticulate, or uneducated, or, in a word, ill-formed? Perhaps. But can you imagine being all these things without striving, with all your might, against them? The instinct to universalize, to make everyone into the same image, and to judge all by the same standard is only incidentally about the other. Primarily it is about the self, and the ideal it is striving for, and how easily that goal can slip away.

Having accepted the FT, a person has one of two choices: either continue becoming white, or stop becoming white. If the latter, if a person stops becoming white, that person is black. I say is, instead of become because being black is just to be unformed.