

Jean-François Lyotard
 The Differend: Phrases in Dispute

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their ability to speak. Let's suppose that they keep quiet under threat. A contrary ability needs to be presupposed if the threat is to have an effect, since this threat bears upon the hypothesis of the opposite case, the one in which the survivors would speak. But how could a threat work when it is exerted upon something (here, the eventuality that the survivors will speak) which does not currently exist? What is threatened? This is said to be the life, or happiness, etc., of the one who would speak. But the one who *would* speak (an unreal, conditional state) has no life, no happiness, etc., which can be threatened, since one is oneself unreal or conditional as long as one has not spoken, — if indeed it is that I am never but the addressor of a current phrase.

16. What is subject to threats is not an identifiable individual, but the ability to speak or to keep quiet. This ability is threatened with destruction. There are two means to achieve this: making it impossible to speak, making it impossible to keep quiet. These two means are compatible: it is made impossible for x to speak about this (through incarceration, for example); it is made impossible for him or her to keep quiet about that (through torture, for example). The ability is destroyed as an ability: x may speak about this *and* keep quiet about that, but he or she ceases to be able *either* to speak *or* not to speak about this or about that. The threat ("If you were to tell (signify) this, it would be your last phrase" or, "If you were to keep quiet about that, it would be your last silence") is only a threat because the ability to speak or not to speak is identified with x 's existence.

17. The paradox of the last phrase (or of the last silence), which is also the paradox of the series, should give x not the vertigo of what cannot be phrased (which is also called the fear of death), but rather the irrefutable conviction that phrasing is endless. For a phrase to be the last one, another one is needed to declare it, and it is then not the last one. At the least, the paradox should give x both this vertigo and this conviction. — Never mind that the last phrase is the last one that x says! — No, it is the last one that has x as its direct or "current" addressor.

18. It should be said that addressor and addressee are instances, either marked or unmarked, presented by a phrase. The latter is not a message passing from an addressor to an addressee both of whom are independent of it (Lawler, 1977). They are situated in the universe the phrase presents, as are its referent and its sense. " X 's phrase, *my* phrase, *your* silence": do *we*, identifiable individuals, x , y , speak phrases or make silences, in the sense that we would be their authors? Or is it that phrases or silences take place (happen, come to pass), presenting universes in which individuals x , y , you, me are situated as the addressors of these phrases or silences? And if this is so, at the price of what misunderstanding can a threat exerted against x threaten "his" or "her" phrase?

19. To say that x can be threatened for what he or she might say or keep quiet is to presuppose that one is free to use language or not and therefore that this free-

15. It would be absurd to suppose that human beings "endowed with language" cannot speak in the strict sense, as is the case for stones. Necessity would signify here: they do not speak because they are threatened with the worst in the case that they would speak, or when in general a direct or indirect attempt is made against

dom to use can be revoked by a threat. This is not false, it is a way of talking about language, humanity, and their interrelations which obeys the rules of the family of certain cognitive phrases (the human sciences). The phrase, "Under threat, under torture, in conditions of incarceration, in conditions of 'sensory deprivation,' etc., the linguistic behavior of a human being can be dictated to him or to her," is a well-formed phrase, and examples can, alas, be presented for which the scientist can say: here are some cases of it. But the human and linguistic sciences are like the juries of labor arbitration boards.

20. Just as these juries presuppose that the opponents they are supposed to judge are in possession of something they exchange, so do the human and linguistic sciences presuppose that the human beings they are supposed to know are in possession of something they communicate. And the powers that be (ideological, political, religious, police, etc.) presuppose that the human beings they are supposed to guide, or at least control, are in possession of something they communicate. Communication is the exchange of messages, exchange the communication of goods. The instances of communication like those of exchange are definable only in terms of property or propriety [*propriété*]: the propriety of information, analogous to the propriety of uses. And just as the flow of uses can be controlled, so can the flow of information. As a perverse use is repressed, a dangerous bit of information is banned. As a need is diverted and a motivation created, an addressor is led to say something other than what he or she was going to say. The problem of language, thus posited in terms of communication, leads to that of the needs and beliefs of interlocutors. The linguist becomes an expert before the communication arbitration board. The essential problem he or she has to regulate is that of sense as a unit of exchange independent of the needs and beliefs of interlocutors. Similarly, for the economist, the problem is that of the value of goods and services as units independent of the demands and offers of economic partners.

21. Would you say that interlocutors are victims of the science and politics of language understood as communication to the same extent that the worker is transformed into a victim through the assimilation of his or her labor-power to a commodity? Must it be imagined that there exists a "phrase-power," analogous to labor-power, and which cannot find a way to express itself in the idiom of this science and this politics? — Whatever this power might be, the parallel must be broken right away. It can be conceived that work is something other than the exchange of a commodity, and an idiom other than that of the labor arbitrator must be found in order to express it. It can be conceived that language is something other than the communication of a bit of information, and an idiom other than that of the human and linguistic sciences is needed in order to express it. This is where the parallel ends: in the case of language, recourse is made to another family of phrases; but in the case of work, recourse is not made to another family of work, recourse is still made to another family of phrases. The same goes for every

differend buried in litigation, no matter what the subject matter. To give the differend its due is to institute new addressees, new addressors, new significations, and new referents in order for the wrong to find an expression and for the plaintiff to cease being a victim. This requires new rules for the formation and linking of phrases. No one doubts that language is capable of admitting these new phrase families or new genres of discourse. Every wrong ought to be able to be put into phrases. A new competence (or "prudence") must be found.

22. The differend is the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be. This state includes silence, which is a negative phrase, but it also calls upon phrases which are in principle possible. This state is signaled by what one ordinarily calls a feeling: "One cannot find the words," etc. A lot of searching must be done to find new rules for forming and linking phrases that are able to express the differend disclosed by the feeling, unless one wants this differend to be smothered right away in a litigation and for the alarm sounded by the feeling to have been useless. What is at stake in a literature, in a philosophy, in a politics perhaps, is to bear witness to differends by finding idioms for them.

23. In the differend, something "asks" to be put into phrases, and suffers from the wrong of not being able to be put into phrases right away. This is when the human beings who thought they could use language as an instrument of communication learn through the feeling of pain which accompanies silence (and of pleasure which accompanies the invention of a new idiom), that they are summoned by language, not to augment to their profit the quantity of information communicable through existing idioms, but to recognize that what remains to be phrased exceeds what they can presently phrase, and that they must be allowed to institute idioms which do not yet exist.

24. It is possible then that the survivors do not speak even though they are not threatened in their ability to speak should they speak later. The socio-linguist, the psycho-linguist, the bio-linguist seek the reasons, the passions, the interests, the context for these silences. Let us first seek their logic. We find that they are substitutes for phrases. They come in the place of phrases during a conversation, during an interrogation, during a debate, during the *talking* of a psychoanalytic session, during a confession, during a critical review, during a metaphysical exposition. The phrase replaced by silence would be a negative one. Negated by it is at least one of the four instances that constitute a phrase universe: the addressee, the referent, the sense, the addressor. The negative phrase that the silence implies could be formulated respectively: *This case does not fall within your competence, This case does not exist, It cannot be signified, It does not fall within my competence.* A single silence could be formulated by several of these phrases. — Moreover, these negative formulations, which deny the ability of the referent, the ad-

dressor, the addressee and the sense to be presented in the current idiom, do not point to the other idiom in which these instances could be presented.

25. It should be said by way of simplification that a phrase presents what it is about, the case, *in pragma*, which is its referent; what is signified about the case, the sense, *der Sinn*; that to which or addressed to which this is signified about the case, the addressee; that "through" which or in the name of which this is signified about the case, the addressor. The disposition of a phrase universe consists in the situating of these instances in relation to each other. A phrase may entail several referents, several senses, several addressees, several addressors. Each of these four instances may be marked in the phrase or not (Fabri and Sbisa, 1980).

26. Silence does not indicate which instance is denied, it signals the denial of one or more of the instances. The survivors remain silent, and it can be understood 1) that the situation in question (the case) is not the addressee's business (he or she lacks the competence, or he or she is not worthy of being spoken to about it, etc.); or 2) that it never took place (this is what Faurisson understands); or 3) that there is nothing to say about it (the situation is senseless, inexpressible); or 4) that it is not the survivors' business to be talking about it (they are not worthy, etc.). Or, several of these negations together.

27. The silence of the survivors does not necessarily testify in favor of the non-existence of gas chambers, as Faurisson believes or pretends to believe. It can just as well testify against the addressee's authority (we are not answerable to Faurisson), against the authority of the witness him- or herself (we, the rescued, do not have the authority to speak about it), finally against language's ability to signify gas chambers (an inexpressible absurdity). If one wishes to establish the existence of gas chambers, the four silent negations must be withdrawn: There were no gas chambers, were there? Yes, there were. — But even if there were, that cannot be formulated, can it? Yes, it can. — But even if it can be formulated, there is no one, at least, who has the authority to formulate it, and no one with the authority to hear it (it is not communicable), is there? Yes, there is.