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Nostalgia and shrinkage: Philosophy and culture under post-postmodern conditions

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As stated in the first sentence of the book the core preoccupation of Jean-François Lyotard's seminal 1979 essay *La Condition Postmoderne* concerned the 'conditions of knowledge in the most developed societies' (cf Jameson, 1991; Peters, 2008). These, Lyotard proposed, were subject to a process of tectonic (I introduce this term to differentiate more ephemeral*volatile from more fundamental*stable conceptual and normative registers in Strandbrink, 2017) epistemological de-legitimation. Modernist modes of coherence, legibility and authority had thus been superseded by dispersed, multifarious, and less-than-authoritative configurations of knowledge. In this contribution, Lyotard gave philosophical voice to the same dismantling and renewal of old-order-making that had characterised politics in and outside of philosophy, education and culture since the mid-1960s. What ensued?

Epistemological postmodernisation clearly involves pluralisation and hybridisation of social knowledge and thinking. In the wake of Lyotard's and others' work established rationalist-modernist tenets of methodology, authority, convergence, centeredness, and subjectivity can no longer claim natural precedence. But to what territory has this renewal taken us and the culture and epistemology of 'the most developed societies', as the critical postmodern steam has all but spent itself—perhaps in the manner of the runaway supersonic train Blaine the Mono which transports the gunslinger and his crew across a barren world only to suicide at the final stop in the third of Stephen King's seven novels (1991) about *The Dark Tower*? On Lyotard's view cultural and methodological modernism were utopian, with a strong affinity for affirmative and propositional reasoning. Although goals varied, being active in means-ends schemes was a core premise of social, ideological and scholarly legitimacy. Under postmodern conditions the circulation of this meta-narrative ceases, unsettling and disturbing received imaginaries of equality, liberty, reason, autonomy, justice, history, authority and progress. Does the demise of postmodernism imply a return to utopian thinking? If so: what are today's culturally entrenched, truly communal goals and do emerging reconfigurations of epistemological and cultural spaces only involve 'developed' societies, as argued by Lyotard? (This is clearly implausible. Prevailing notions and distributions of 'development' have also undergone tectonic change since the 1970s–1980s.)

In short: first, we are located and know fair well where that location is (*affirmation*). Second, we enjoy the luxury of being dislocated from this place but are surprised to not understand our new bearings (*transgression*). Third, we crave reconnection but fail to identify constructive strategies for dealing with the hyper-diverse forms, values, demands, restrictions or epistemic regimes active in and between the complex hybrid normative*cultural palettes of a lateral-tribal-global world (*nostalgia*). Taken seriously, the postmodern mode of enunciation thus both produced and filled a philosophical, cultural, normative and cognitive void. This void lingers and still craves refilling. But the structure of *the-need-and-its-fulfilment* is obsolete. To envisage the emerging conditions of knowledge requires moving beyond the critical habit of decomposing cultural-epistemological formats. One strategy of replacement is to become the

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cynical 'realist'. Another, more edifying and optimistic, is to associate epistemology to value ranges, orbits and equilibria that for transparent reasons resonate within ourselves and the communities we inhabit.

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Peter Strandbrink is an associate professor in political science (PhD from Stockholm University 1999). He specialises in political philosophy, democratic theory, civic–normative–education, political culture, political ideas and political epistemology. He is a former faculty dean and has been a guest professor at universities in South Africa, Poland, Italy and South Korea. His recent work appears in *Religion, State & Society*; *Education, Citizenship & Social Justice*; *Tidskrift för Politisk Filosofi*; *Educational Philosophy & Theory*; *Democratic Theory*; and *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*. He is the main editor of *Crossings and crosses*. *Religions, education, and borders in Northern Europe* (De Gruyter, 2015), the author of *Civic Education and Liberal Democracy. Making post-normative citizens in normative political spaces* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), and has published numerous other works in English and Swedish. He is currently preparing a book manuscript on political–theoretical concepts for publication in 2019.

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