

## Introduction

MINIMA MEMORIA

### *Kent Still*

The witness is a traitor.  
—Jean-François Lyotard,  
*The Inhuman*

The last words of Jean-François Lyotard's *The Inhuman*,<sup>1</sup> which serve as an epigraph to this introduction, are a rejection neither of any particular testimony, nor of testimony in general. They are an alert to the plurality of ways in which the singularity of an event may be eclipsed in the very testimony to it: the representation of an event can foreclose other ways of linking with it, attention paid to one event may cast a plurality of others into oblivion, and attentiveness to different events may obscure the singularity of each.

But attentiveness to such difficulties is not a pretext for not trying. Just because one is not—and cannot be—up to the task does not mean one is off the hook. Nor are the last words of *The Inhuman*—"The witness is a traitor"—the last words on the matter. In the words of "The Survivor," written shortly thereafter: "The witness is always a poor witness, a traitor. But he does, after all, still bear witness."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Lyotard's writings are themselves testimonies, which is not to say that he lapses into a pious self-assurance, failing to heed his own warnings. For were one to take the last line of *The Inhuman* in its harshest sense—as a charge against a particular witness—the traitor in question would be none other than Lyotard

himself. That line impugns the entire chain of phrases that lead up to it, acknowledging that they too are exposed to the difficulties to which they attest. The peculiar strength of his writings, however, resides precisely in this exposure.

Such exposure is not the end of testimony, but rather its infancy, the infancy of thought itself, of the multiple modes in which testimony is rendered:

Differences between the fine arts proceed from differences between . . . the various ways, all contingent, the body has been threatened by nullity, of being anesthetized: deaf, color-blind, bedridden, etc. Aesthetics is phobic, it *arises* from anesthesia, belonging to it, recovering from it. You sing *for* not hearing, you paint *for* not seeing, you dance *for* being paralyzed. In each of these arts, the tiniest phrase is equivalent to a remission of pain.<sup>3</sup>

The event's resistance to memory motivates testimony in all its multiple forms. But, once attested, especially by works that take on the appearance of maturity and mastery, the event's resistance to determination risks being forgotten. The last line of *The Inhuman*, then, is both a reminder that mastery is imposture and a call for writings—in a maximally broad sense, including not only the phrases of articulated discourse, but also the gestures made in the media of the various arts—that attest to the event's resistance to determination, the “minimal, but intractable condition” of testimony.<sup>4</sup>

Let us call them *minima memoria*, these testimonies regarding the precariousness of testimony, these exposures of thought to what it cannot think. For they are *memoria*, reports, testimonies to events. They are, however, *minimal* ones. They do not present a grander, because more complete or adequate, representation of events. Nor do they claim to bring an end to the obligation to bear witness. Instead, they are all the more exposed: doubly so, attesting to their own shortcomings, and thereby the interminability of the obligation to bear witness. Yet, through their precariousness, they put forward, in their own representations, a stronger sense of what remains unrepresentable.

Alerts to the event's resistance to determination may be heard in Lyotard's earliest writings, even those that are, perhaps, too early, such as his 1948 response to Karl Jaspers's *The Question of German Guilt*, written while still a student, which must be reevaluated in relation to the shifts in his

thought that would come later.<sup>5</sup> While commending Jasper for responding to the questions raised by the events of World War II, questions that Lyotard himself will return to time and again over the next half century, perhaps most notably in *The Differend's* discussion of "Auschwitz" (in quotation marks, so as to highlight the metonym of that proper name which has come to stand for the erasure of proper names),<sup>6</sup> Lyotard, even in that early essay, questions what he calls the "philosopher's confidence" in the ability to attain "salvation" through "self-awareness," challenging the effectiveness of "reflection upon the past as past" (*PW*, 131).

The problem with "reflection upon the past as past" is that it treats the past *as past*, treating the event in question as finished and already possessing a fully determinate (or, at least, fully determinable) meaning. Such a conception, of course, facilitates the attempt to break with that past and to inaugurate a new era, as well as the attempt "to tie the two together, to rely on the former to prepare for the latter" (*PW*, 133), which may amount to the same thing as breaking with the past, since it defines the epoch to come in terms of its determinate negation, or sublation, of the event that came before. In so doing, reflection upon the past *as past* forgets that the event retains a peculiar and insistent "presence" that was never fully present and determinate even when it was supposedly "the present." As Lyotard puts it in a later text, "what happens is always deferred and distanced right off the bat. . . . being forgotten is part of what it is" (*PF*, 168). Its meaning may be belatedly determined, by subsequent attempts to represent it. But, even then, what happened is, in a sense, still happening, still not yet determinate, awaiting and resisting further determination, due to an indeterminate "presence" that remains. Since this indeterminate "presence" was never inscribed in memory in the first place and hence cannot, strictly speaking, be forgotten, Lyotard calls it "unforgettable." This unforgettable "presence," however, is forgotten in a plurality of ways, reflection upon the past simply *as past* being one way of forgetting the unforgettable in the very act of remembering.

Such alerts resound throughout Lyotard's later writings, even those that are, perhaps, too late, like the posthumously published *The Confession of Augustine*.<sup>7</sup> Having long argued that Augustine's account of time—temporal order as determined from the fixed perspective of one's present consciousness—props up philosophy's confidence in reflection upon the past as past,<sup>8</sup> Lyotard nevertheless notes, in that posthumous work, that

there are passages in the *Confessions* in which that confidence is stripped away and a different tone, vulnerable and exposed, can be heard. Of the visitation of God, Augustine writes: “where that light shineth into my soul there no space can receive, where that voice soundeth there no time is taken.”<sup>9</sup> What, Lyotard asks, could be memorized of an event “that abolishes the natural conditions of perception and therefore cannot be perceived as an event?” (*CA*, 6). The upshot is that the event around which the narrative of the *Confessions* is supposed to be organized, then, cannot be situated in a determinate time-order—and hence cannot be situated in that narrative.

Such alerts can also be heard in Lyotard’s most famous work, *The Postmodern Condition*,<sup>10</sup> although the polemics to which it gave rise threaten to deafen one to them. For citations of its Introduction’s oft-quoted definition of postmodern as a state of “incredulity toward metanarratives” often omit Lyotard’s important qualification of that definition, which, when quoted in full, reads: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives” (*PC*, xxiv). Lyotard, in short, acknowledges that such a definition remains too simple and must be complicated, lest it be taken for yet another attempt to inaugurate a new epoch that breaks from that past. Indeed, throughout that book and his later writings, Lyotard presents the postmodern not as a determinate temporal epoch, but as a mode of relating to—or recounting—events.

The postmodern, Lyotard contends, is already “undoubtedly part of the modern” (*PC*, 79). As he puts it, “the postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself,” that which “denies itself the solace of good forms . . . in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable” (*PC*, 81). This attempt to throw out of sync the chronology—first modern, then postmodern—widely presumed to orient the distinction between the two is itself emblematic of a “postmodern” temporality: denying itself the solace of a neat chronological order, so as to impart a stronger sense of how the singularity of events are occluded when treated as if they neatly fit within the linear progression of a temporal process with a discrete beginning and end.

By contrast, the modern views events within all-encompassing frames. In his *Critique of Judgment*,<sup>11</sup> Kant claims that the “ultimate purpose” of nature is to produce a “culture” that allows humanity’s rational capacity to develop, which in turn allows humanity to prescribe itself a “final purpose” (*C3*, 431), an end in itself, which, for Kant, consists in

respect for the Moral Law. Kant's narrative, then, concludes when its addressee (humanity) enters that narrative as its hero, much as the Marxist metanarrative ends with its addressee (again, humanity, in the role of the proletariat) taking the stage.

Lyotard, however, calls attention to how even those narratives concede that the event around which they are organized (for the Enlightenment, the realization of humanity's moral reasoning, for Marxism, the realization of a classless society) is not presentable—not yet anyway. Both the modern and the postmodern, then, acknowledge that something exceeds representation. The modern, however, “allows the unrepresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents” (*PC*, 81), posited at the end of the narrative, as the determinate goal to which recounted events are to lead. In such set-ups, it is a reassuring Idea that remains unrepresentable. The postmodern, by contrast, attests to the extent to which the singular, contingent, and far from ideal events of history retain a remainder that cannot be appropriated into such edifying metanarratives.

Yet, further complicating any simple chronological ordering of the modern and the postmodern, Lyotard speaks of “rewriting modernity,” citing passages in works such as Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, especially its Analytic of the Sublime, which acknowledge the resistance of events to determination. Considering objects so large that aesthetic comprehension in one intuition—i.e., in one representation—is impossible, Kant argues that, in such cases, it is not any one glance or representation of the object, nor even attempts at a progressive sequence of representations, that is sublime. Instead, what is sublime is the feeling that something exceeds representation. For Lyotard, this passage attests that events resist determination, even the seemingly minimal requirement of determination in time (what Kant calls “the form of inner sense”). In the First *Critique*, Kant argued that temporal ordering is performed by the transcendental “I”; the subject synthesizes, or links, one event with the following in a “progression,” a synthesis which is said to be a condition of the possibility of any experience whatsoever. By contrast, in the Third *Critique*, Kant grants that the attempt to comprehend intuitively such large objects involves “a regression that in turns cancels the condition of time” (*C3*, 258–59), which he describes as a “violence to the inner sense” (*C3*, 259). But, in lieu of being inscribed within the progression of linked events constitutive of the form of inner sense, the feeling of the sublime cannot be said to be an “experience” and hence cannot be treated simply “as past,” which is why Kant

concludes that the sublime is capable only of a “negative presentation,”<sup>12</sup> signaled by the feeling that something exceeds representation.

Lyotard’s emphasis on “rewriting modernity” demonstrates that his critique of the grand narratives of modernity and his call for “little narratives” (*petit récits*) is not an anti-modern throwback, a valorization of the stories that particular communities like to tell about themselves. Quite the contrary, in *The Postmodern Condition*, *petit récits* are defined as attesting to “singularities” and “incommensurabilities” (*PC*, 60), as establishing not communal consensus, but “dissension” (*PC*, 61). Such a definition is elaborated by the examples that Lyotard offers of such *petit récits*: unexpected scientific developments, which, while they may not seem to be narratives at all, nevertheless fulfill the function of such “little narratives” to the extent that they throw into question the assumptions of previous explanatory models (see *PC*, 53–67). From within the genre of scientific explanation, these *petit récits* would mark the extent to which events resist explanation by pre-existing explanatory schemas. Likewise, on such a definition, the Kantian sublime would itself be a *petit récit*. The relation of little narratives to the grand narratives, then, would be analogous to the way in which the postmodern may be read as already inscribed in the modern. Such little narratives would mark, from within, those moments when grand narratives implode, collapsing in on themselves.

In contrast, the stories communities tell about themselves—which establish communal identity by excluding others—threaten to further the forgetting of the singularity of events, constituting a danger that is at least as grave as the universal pretensions of the grand narratives.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, *The Postmodern Condition* argues that at stake in the narratives of particular communities is the formation (*Bildung*) of identity and the establishment of a “consensus” that “constitutes the culture of a people” (*PC*, 19). Neither *grand* nor *petit*, the term “normal” imposes itself here: for those narratives impose a set of norms by means of which identity and consensus are established, albeit without the universal pretensions of modernity. In the latter, the aimed-at consensus establishes the “emancipation” of “humanity as a collective (universal) subject” (*PC*, 66), whereas, in the former, it provides “customs” (a “know-how”) making it possible “to distinguish one who knows from one who doesn’t (the foreigner, the child)” (*PC*, 19). Because modernity’s universal metanarratives and a particular community’s normative stories both aim at consensus, both must be differentiated from *petit récits*, which aim at “‘inventing’ counter-examples” (*PC*, 54) that attest to the singularity of events.

The relation between *petit récits* with traditional narratives, however, is as complicated as that between the modern and the postmodern. Consider Lyotard's discussion, in *The Postmodern Condition*, of the child, who, not yet knowing the culture and its narratives, is said not to belong to that culture (at least, not yet). Narratives, however, will be addressed to the child, providing knowledge of the practices of that culture; they "recount what could be called positive or negative apprenticeships (*Bildungen*): in other words, the successes or failures greeting the hero's undertakings" (PC, 20). By identifying with the hero, the addressee (the child) enters the community and becomes an addressor, telling that narrative to others. Such narratives endeavor to fix a determinate meaning upon an event and to establish the identity of the community charged with saving the memory of the event. And, if education and remembrance are consequently tainted with the threat of ideology, attempts to resist ideology are, no doubt, similarly threatened, since a *petit récit* must be formulated in a particular language embedded with cultural meanings and presuppositions.

If Lyotard nevertheless calls for *petit récits*, it is not due to a confidence in the ability to break with the past, but to a childlike resiliency, proceeding *as if* it were still possible to attest to the forgetting perpetuated in such narrative set-ups. Indeed, this "as if" may be essential to narrative, which involves imagination, and which suggests that there might yet be resources for imaginative rewritings. For if *petit récits* are, in a manner analogous to the inscription of the postmodern within the modern, undoubtedly part of the culture formed by the narratives of particular communities; they must also involve a rewriting that attests, from within, to the indeterminacy of events in their singularity and other possible ways of linking with those singular events. Such rewriting, however, requires effort, obliging one to navigate the semantic field, attentive to the drives and tractions of sedimented meanings and presuppositions. It requires labor, nearly in the sense of obstetrics, as if attempting to give birth to an infant—in the etymological sense of *in-fans*, that which does not speak. In contrast to the notion of *Bildung*, which aims to produce a child with "know-how," confidently equipped with rules governing how to link one phrase to the next, the *petit récit* would transmit to its addressee an uncertainty regarding the linking of one phrase with the next, an uncertainty that conveys a stronger sense of the indeterminacy of the event to be narrated.

Lyotard's testimonies themselves take on narrative forms, as well as a multiplicity of other forms of representation: the argumentative discourse

of philosophy, psychoanalytical writing, commentaries on literary and visual works of art, even the organization of museum exhibits, as in the case of *Les immatériaux*, the exhibition that he co-organized for the Centre Georges Pompidou. Through a rewriting of those forms of representation that strive to save memory by imposing a determinate meaning and identity upon what happens, Lyotard tries to inscribe the unforgettable “presence” of the event in precisely those forms of representation that prompt the forgetting of that “presence.” The resistance to the forgetting induced by both the universal narratives of modernity and the particular narratives that communities tell themselves, then, can hardly presume to break with narrative, consigning such set-ups to the past as past. Instead, the task is one of rewriting them, working through them, in an interminable anamnesis that tries to put forward a stronger sense of the unrepresentable:

One must, certainly, inscribe in words, in images. One cannot escape the necessity of representing. It would be sin itself to believe oneself safe and sound. But it is one thing to do it in view of saving the memory, and quite another to try to preserve the remainder, the unforgettable forgotten, in writing.<sup>14</sup>

*Petit récits, minima memoria*—these do not involve a renouncement of representation in general or of narrative in particular (for it is not clear that such a renouncement would even be possible). But they do require the effort of experiments in representation, each time trying to inscribe the unforgettable forgotten within the forms that occlude it.

The contributors to this volume have taken up that challenge. Indeed, their essays are gathered together under the title of *minima memoria*, so as to highlight the ways in which each essay may be read as a response to Lyotard’s call for *petit récits* and rewritings of modernity, attempts to preserve the remainder, the unforgettable forgotten, in writing.

Many of these essays were originally written for a colloquium held a little over a year after the death of Jean-François Lyotard. But I would urge readers not to assume that the volume’s sub-title, with its invocation of a “wake,” refers to a determinate period of time set aside for mourning. For the literary “wake” constitutes a distinct genre, one which attempts to establish a privileged viewpoint on an author’s *corpus*, and to prescribe rules for future readings. It thereby facilitates a forgetting of the singularity of events, the forgetting of what—in a life, or, for that matter, a writing—keeps eluding such determinate representations. In short, it is

the type of posthumous literary reception most ill suited to the philosopher of the postmodern, precisely the type of memorialistic forgetting that Lyotard—in life, and in writing—relentlessly resisted.

A passage from one of Lyotard's last works touches on such issues. It is important, at the outset, to note that the work in question, *Signed, Malraux*,<sup>15</sup> presents itself as nothing less than a biography of André Malraux, and, as such, is a model of the way Lyotard attempts to inscribe a testimony to the unforgettable forgotten in those genres that seem to most occlude the singularity of the event, its indeterminate "presence." And Lyotard's attempt to inscribe in the biographical genre a testimony to what escapes narration is only shortly underway when he launches into a discussion of the posthumous literary reception of Malraux's works, including, it should be understood, *Signed, Malraux* itself. The passage in question begins rather matter-of-factly with the reporting of a matter of fact, namely, that "*Man's Hope* was placed on the program for the *agrégation* in literature four years after the author's death" (*SM*, 25). To which Lyotard adds: "But, with one final shove, that author had the time to parry the gesture that would embalm him" (*SM*, 25).

Why does Lyotard describe the inclusion of *Man's Fate* among the works upon which all French students seeking higher education would be tested as an "embalming"? In effect, it produces a market for interpretations that try to wrap up (*emballer*) an author's work for those seeking a reliable and definitive guide that provides rules for future readings—readings that would pass the test, as it were. Such attempts at authoritative interpretations attempt to fix the *corpus* in a static condition, a fixing assumed to be preservative, assuring the fabled literary immortality. Yet, by providing authoritative rules for reading, it assures instead that the work will not have been read—and not because such commentaries are often taken as alternatives to reading works on which one might be tested. More importantly, it is because reading involves questioning and judging how one phrase links with another. To read means returning to a state of *infancy*, like a child who does not yet know how to read, for whom the question of how to link phrases remains open. Predetermined rules for fixing links between phrases occlude that feeling of infancy: when approaching a work equipped with such rules, one need not read—that is, question and judge how one phrase links with another—because one is confident that one already knows what is at stake in the linking of phrases. In contrast,

Lyotard attempts to reopen the question of how to link phrases and, in so doing, to return readers to that unstable state and instant of infancy.

As for his “final shove,” Lyotard finds it in a text Malraux wrote shortly before his death. In the epilogue to a volume where various contributors gave diverse assessments of his works, Malraux writes: “What should we call books like this one which we see more and more frequently these days? . . . Let us call them *colloquia*” (*SM*, 25). Here are Lyotard’s remarks on Malraux’s comments:

Now, as “resolutely as Cubism broke with Leonardo’s perspective,” this genre breaks both with the erudite monograph and with the exhaustive biography. No representation. Assemblages, instead, of clippings taken either from an oeuvre or a life and mounted as a “picture” that imposes stylistic silence upon discourse. Malraux, after Braque, will repeat that “the most important thing in a picture is what cannot be said.” Argued theses and “serious” biography aim to circumscribe their subject; the “colloquium’s” Cubist ellipses will protect his breakaway. (*SM*, 25)

Perhaps, then, resources for opening up the question of reading instead of foreclosing it may be found in the more minimal requirements of the “colloquium” essay, requirements that, from the perspective of an attempt at a totalizing discourse, would be a liability, a vulnerability even. For the limited length of the “colloquium” essay forbids the pretense of saying it all, and imposes a more colloquial, even idiomatic, style of discourse. Instead of attempting to circumscribe the whole of an author’s thought, contributors are constrained to cutting out bits and pieces, linking them up to present a striking picture, one published alongside other such collages. Impossible perspectives of the same thing are thereby presented, as in Cubist pictures. It is, then, precisely the “colloquium’s” constraints that make possible its “breakaways,” its escape from the demand for a complete and authoritative representation, from the fantasy of a totalizing master discourse. In the tensions between its impossible perspectives, the traces of these breakaways may be detected, like so many indexes, pointing to “what cannot be said.”

Indeed, Lyotard, after Malraux, suggests that the most important thing in a “colloquium” is the way in which, like a picture, it may impose a “stylistic silence” on the attempt at a complete discourse, thereby attesting to “what cannot be said.” “No representation,” he said also. But the very fact that he *said* it betrays that it is through representation and discourse that this “stylistic silence” occurs. To stick with the analogy with

Cubism, it is precisely through representation—albeit a proliferation of impossible representations of the same thing—that the Cubists’ best-known break with the fixed and univocal view of “Leonardo’s perspective” occurs. This proliferation of representations, however, does not constitute a more complete and coherent representation. Instead of becoming more fixed and determined, the picture begins to move, to break away. It is as if the opening of an “ellipsis,” or a silence, were occurring in the heart of representation.

What Lyotard calls the “ellipsis” should not be confused with the absent object or missing content to which the picture would allude, according to a classic semiotic schema in which a present object refers to an absent one. The “ellipsis” does not occur as an absence, but as a “presence” that may be felt in the tension between the different perspectives that are represented. Neither absent from representation nor present in any determinate representation, it is an indeterminate “presence” that happens in the ebb and flow between determinate representations, in the drift or passage between them. In the trace of that passage, this indeterminate “presence” may be felt, provided that one is alert to the tensions between the determinate representations.

In defense of the “colloquium,” Lyotard suggests that commentaries themselves may be like pictures: if, by presenting impossible representations of the same thing, they impose a “stylistic silence” on the attempt at a complete discourse and, in so doing, provide the occasion for an affect that attests to this elliptical and indeterminate presence. Now, this volume tries to be just such a “colloquium,” an ensemble of pictures, presenting multiple perspectives of the same “thing”: the writings of Jean-François Lyotard. The ellipsis does not merely occur between the diverse pictures of Lyotard that the different contributors present but also, and more importantly, in each essay, insofar as each contributor brings out the different drives and tractions in Lyotard’s work, goes to the sites of tension in Lyotard’s work that the terms such as *differend*, *affect*, and *infancy* mark.

Thus, although Jacques Derrida, Rodolphe Gasché, Dorota Glowacka, Ewa Płonowska Ziarek, and Gérard Sfez all approach *The Differend* from different angles and thereby present multiple perspectives on that work, each of their essays brings out the incommensurable discourses operative in *The Differend* itself. And the account that Sfez renders of the works after *The Differend*, which he describes as “the second philosophy of the differend,” differs from the approach taken by Claire Nouvet, who, for her

part, accents the import that Lyotard's later supplements to *The Differend* have for psychoanalytical writing as a form of testimony. Each of them, however, traces the resistances that affect poses to articulation and writing. Analogously, what Lyotard calls infancy—in the sense of *in-fans*, which does not speak—would seem to resist articulation. Christopher Fynsk, Avital Ronell, and Geoffrey Bennington, each in his or her own singular way, attest to the inherent difficulties posed by a philosophical articulation of childhood and the rather unsettling effect that infancy will have on any attempt to do so. And, although Philippe Bonnefis, Michael Naas, and Bennington emphasize different aspects of Lyotard's late writings on Malraux, each confronts what is perhaps the central problem broached in those works: how can writing—by definition, reiterable—possibly offer resistance to what Lyotard calls *la redite*, translated as “the Redundant One,” a term that conveys a sense of palpable uselessness of narrating singular events as finding their causes (be they psychological, cultural, etc.) in what had already come before, a set-up that often characterizes autobiography and other forms of commentary, such as the “wake.”

Much as what Lyotard finds most important about Cubist pictures is the indeterminate “presence” to be felt in the ebb and flow between their multiple representations, what matters in the following discussions is precisely the tensions that they bring out between different discourses, or, for that matter, between discourse and that which does not let itself be articulated (affect, infancy), or between “the Redundant One” and the singular event. What emerges, then, is not a narrative of the life and work of Jean-François Lyotard but a stronger sense of the tensions, drifts, and displacements that traverse his work, its various currents and tractions. Consider, for example, Lyotard's description of his *Driftworks*, an English anthology of essays from the late 1960s and early 1970s: “Driftworks in the plural, for the question is not of leaving one shore, but several, simultaneously; what is at work is not one current, pushing and tugging but different drives and tractions.”<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the best-known instance of such a figure is to be found in *The Differend*, in which Lyotard discusses Kant's division of the “field of philosophy” into distinct domains and territories, including his famous identification of the “immense gulf” that separates the domains of theoretical and practical philosophy. In place of Kant's “field,” Lyotard proposes the figure of “a milieu—this would be the sea—the Archipelagos or primary sea as the Aegean was once called” (*D*, 131), a figure which opens Michael Naas's essay. The different genres of discourses—codifying

rules for linking phrases, and, thereby, for representing events—would be islands that have emerged from the sea. The sea and its shifting currents does not only separate the various islands, it also allows one to peregrinate from one island to the other and, thereby, to map out their differences.<sup>17</sup> From which it follows that any maplike chart of differences between different discourses, which gives the sense of being above the fray, is only derived from that original drift. The “critical watchman,” then, is immersed in the milieu, adrift, navigating different discourses, unable to pretend to judge from on high.

Perhaps the most important thing in the writings of Jean-François Lyotard, then, is not the multiple islands of discourses that he visits, but the passages he traces between them. The contributors to this volume have taken the risk of navigating the archipelago of Lyotard’s work, each contributor, in his or her own singular way, taking the chance of retracing Lyotard’s tracings and, in so doing, of charting new and unpredictable passages, breaking away to new vistas. They have indeed taken up the challenge of writing “in the wake of Jean-François Lyotard” in the English meaning of the expression “in the wake of,” that is, in the trace of the passage of something through water.

In their own retracing of Lyotard’s difficult tracings, they have lent an ear to the call for a critical “wakefulness” that resounds throughout his writings, a wakefulness that resists the forgetting induced by the more traditional genre of the literary or philosophical “wake.” In *The Differend*, Lyotard notes Kant’s contention that philosophy must be forever “alert” (Lyotard’s term is *éveil*, Kant’s *rege*), on guard against those who would attempt to bring philosophical debate to an end by lulling philosophers into a dogmatic slumber.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Lyotard claims that justice requires such “wakefulness.”<sup>19</sup> Whenever a phrase occurs, the question of how to link with it arises. And, given that there is no overarching and universal discourse, the critical watchman must be alert to the ways in which the hegemony of certain traditional ways of representing events occludes others. But justice also requires that one be alert enough not to lapse into a pious assurance in one’s own discourse, critical enough not to let critique turn into doctrine, as if one were not also immersed in those difficult waters.

The essays in this volume immerse themselves in Lyotard’s writings, alert to the plurality of different passages with their diverse pulls and tractions, alert to the trace of such passages, alert also to the critical “effort” that such tracing requires, an “effort” which, for Lyotard, may be the only

“legacy,” as can be heard in this remark on Adami’s drawings, his drawing of rowers in particular: “Rowing is like drawing, one makes one’s trace harshly in whatever waters; and the trace erases itself. Nothing will be disembarked on the shores of the next generation, but the effort of having traced.”<sup>20</sup> Through these different and critical retracings of Lyotard’s peregrinations, what is being transmitted, then, is not only a series of determinate pictures or memoirs of the works of Jean-François Lyotard but, more importantly, a feeling of the singular “effort,” of the singular “gesture” that was made throughout this work in so many modes and voices, a gesture that necessarily retracts itself, in an insistent ellipsis, from the work to which it gives rise. Much as the trace of a passage through water is faced with oblivion, the gesture that his writings make against oblivion is itself precarious, passing. Yet, precisely in its fleeting fragility, it conveys a stronger sense of precariousness, serving as an all the more strident alert, calling out for further traces, more *minima memoria*. In the ebb and flow between the different representations of his writings, the indeterminate “presence” of the elliptical gesture that bore the name of “Jean-François Lyotard” may still, at least, be felt.