

Lyotard and *us*¹

Jacques Derrida

When, surviving, and henceforth deprived of the possibility of speaking *to* the friend, himself, one is condemned to merely speaking *about* him, about what he was, thought, wrote, still, it is about *him* that one should speak.

It is of *him* we mean to speak, solely of him, on his side only. But how can the survivor speak in friendship about the friend, without a ‘we’ slipping in indecently, incessantly? without a ‘we’ even demanding, in the name of friendship, to be heard, precisely? For to silence or to forbid the ‘we’ would be to enact another, no less serious, violence. The injustice would be at least as great as that of still saying ‘we’.

Who can ever dare a ‘we’ without trembling? Who can ever sign a ‘we’ – in English, a ‘we subject’ in the nominative, or an ‘us’, in the accusative or the dative? In French, they are the same ‘nous’, even when the second is the object of the first: ‘nous nous’ – yes, oui, nous nous sommes rencontrés, nous nous sommes parlé, écrit, nous nous sommes entendus, nous nous sommes accordés – ou non. We met (each other), we spoke, wrote (to one-another), we loved (one another), we agreed (with each other) – or not. To sign a ‘we’, an ‘us’ may already seem impossible, far too weighty or light, always illegitimate amongst the living. And how much more so in the case of a survivor speaking about a friend? Unless some experience of ‘surviving’ gives *us*, beyond life and death, what it only can give, give to the ‘we’, yes, namely its first vocation, its sense, or its origin. Its thought perhaps, thinking itself.

When, at the last minute still, I was asked about a title for this paper, I was roaming around the French and English words ‘we’, ‘nous’, ‘oui, nous’, ‘yes, we’, but somebody in me could not, nor probably wanted to, stop the movement. I found it impossible to uphold the firm authority flaunted by any title, even those as short as two words, for example ‘yes, we’. I shall not propose any title here. I have none. But you know very well that the ‘nous’, the ‘we’ was one of the most serious stakes in Jean-François Lyotard’s thought, particularly in *The Differend*. Let us do as if for us the title had to be missing, even if ‘Lyotard and *us*’, for instance, does not suggest the most unjust sentence – a sentence to risk, face, or foil.

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‘There shall be no mourning’, Jean-François Lyotard once wrote, ‘Il n’y aura pas de deuil’.

This was about ten years ago.

I would never dare to say, despite the few clues to be given in a moment, that he wrote this sentence for me. But it is certain that he addressed it to us.

That day, in the singular place in which he published this sentence, he was pretending without pretending. This place was a philosophy journal. Perhaps was he then pretending to pretend. He was both pretending to be addressing me and pretending to be addressing another, some other, maybe any other. Perhaps you, perhaps us. Nobody will ever be able to ascertain it beyond a doubt. It was *as if*, in addressing me, he addressed someone else, or as if, addressing anybody, he also shared with me that ‘there shall be no mourning’.

He wrote then what had to be written, and how it had to be written, so that the identity of the destination remained elusive, so that the address to any particular place could never be *proven*, what is considered proven, not even by the one who signed it, nor could it ever be publicly declared, or manifest enough on its own, or ascertained conclusively through the process of a determining theoretical judgment. In doing so, he asked publicly, in full light, and practically, but with reference to mourning, the question of the Enlightenment or the question about the Enlightenment, namely – in that Kantian space he has plowed, furrowed, sowed again – the question of rational language and of its destination in the public space.

‘There shall be no mourning’, it was thus like a drifting aphorism, a sentence delivered, abandoned, body and soul exposed to an absolute dispersal. If the tense of the verb in ‘there shall be no mourning’ is clearly future, nothing in what comes before or after the sentence allows one to decide whether the grammar of this future is that of a description or of a prescription. Nothing allows one to decide between, on the one hand, the prediction: ‘it will be thus’ (there will be no mourning, no mourning will take place, above all, it shan’t be projected, there will be no sign or work of mourning), and, on the other hand, the command or the prohibition of an implicit imperative, the prescription: ‘it must be thus’, ‘there should, there must be no mourning’ (no sign or work of concerted mourning, of instituted commemoration), or even the normative wish: ‘it would be better if there were no mourning’. Wouldn’t the institution of mourning run the risk of sealing the forgetting? Of protecting against memory instead of preserving it?

These hypotheses will forever remain open: is it a prediction or a prescription, an order, a prohibition, or a wish? What is more, each ‘as if’ in these hypotheses are further hanging on the turn of a negation. One must first have passed through mourning, through the meaning of the word ‘mourning’, in the enduring of mourning that is appropriate to its sense, according to the very vision of what it will or must be, one must first cross this threshold and understand the meaning of what a genuine mourning would or should be, what meaning it may have, in order to, afterwards or thereupon, but in a second moment, be able to give to mourning or the meaning

of mourning a negative sense, to give it a ‘no’. Mourning, there shall not be. There shall be *none of the* mourning, as the French syntax states, ‘il n’y aura *pas de deuil*’, where the phrase ‘none of the’, opening onto the threshold of death and mourning, troubles anew the meaning of this extraordinary sentence: of the mourning, there shall be none, none at all, neither a little nor much, neither in part nor in whole, however little, but also, since of mourning there shall be none, there shan’t be *the* mourning itself. Period.

But is there ever mourning, any mourning? Does a mourning exist? Is it ever present? The very authority of the assertion, ‘there shall be no mourning’, can even, in its decontextualized loneliness, lead one to think that Jean-François also meant to expose it to an analytical question. What in the end is said, what is meant to be said, in thus asserting, in a suspended sentence, ‘there shall be no mourning’?

The impossibility of assigning any one single addressee to this sentence, is at the same time the probably calculated impossibility to determine its context, including the sense or the referent of the statement – which, in fact, *earlier* than a discourse, *before* being stated, forms and leaves a trace. No border is given, no shore to land, to ground this sentence. Later I will say what was the context, or, at least the apparent or manifest context of this reserved but public and published declaration. Yet, even as I give further surface information about the subject, this context will by no means become filled out, or even able to be filled out, through and through secured at its borders.

Let us dream then: ‘There shall be no mourning’ could have been an Apocalyptic repetition, the hidden or playful citation of Saint John’s Apocalypse; ‘*ultra non erit [...] luctus/ouk estai eti [...] penthos*’: ‘God shall wipe all tears from their eyes. Death shall be no more. Neither mourning, nor cries or pain shall be, for the first universe (the first things of the world) has vanished (*quia prima abierunt/oti ta prota apelthan*)’. This echo of the Apocalypse (*ultra non erit luctus [...] /ouk estai eti penthos [...]*) is infinitely far from exhausting J.F.’s words, but this echo cannot not accompany, like a forerunning double, like an elusive memory, this ‘there shall be no mourning’. One could say this spectral echo roams around like a robber of the Apocalypse, it conspires in the wind of this sentence, it comes back to haunt our reading, it fore-breathes like the aura of this ‘there shall be no mourning’, which nevertheless J.F. will have signed. J.F. alone.

Earlier, I mentioned the unsecurable hypothesis that this ‘there shall be no mourning’ may not be a constative but a normative or prescriptive sentence. Yet normative and prescriptive are not the same thing. *The Differend* offers us the means to distinguish them.² Speaking about the ‘Us’ after Auschwitz, J.F.L. insists once more on the heterogeneity of sentences, more particularly here, on the subtle difference between a normative sentence and a prescriptive one. Whereas the normative sentence ‘resembles a performative one’ and in itself, by itself, in its immanence, ‘effects the legitimation of the obligation as it formulates it’, the prescriptive sentence requires another sentence, one more: and this further sentence is left to the addressee, the reader in this case; it is left to him or her, thus to us, to follow up, even if it is, as it is said elsewhere, with a ‘last sentence’. J.F.L. continues: ‘This is why it is commonly

said that an obligation requires the freedom of the one it applies to'. And he adds – I picture him with a malicious smile as he writes this remark about the freedom of the obligee, playing with quotation marks – ‘This is a “grammatical remark” [notice the quotation marks], it concerns the follow-up sentence required by an ethical sentence’. If the ethical sentence ‘there shall be no mourning’ is taken as an obligation, it thus implies, in a quasi-grammatical way, that another sentence coming from some addressee must respond to it. A sentence which it already fore-called.

I would have followed this last recommendation, let myself be led by such an ‘obligation’, had the sentence ‘there shall be no mourning’ been determinable as a constative, normative *or* prescriptive sentence, or if its addressee were identifiable, either internally or externally. Yet, not only is this not the case, but this sentence, unlike any other example of normative or prescriptive sentences given by J.F.L., contains no personal pronoun. ‘There shall be no mourning’ is an impersonal sentence, without a singular I or a singular you [*tu*], without a plural we or a plural you [*vous*], without a he or a she or a they. This grammar sets it apart from all the other examples given in *The Differend* concerning the analysis to which I have just referred.

This sentence without a truly personal pronoun, I thus couldn’t have known how to take it when, about ten years ago, in an issue of *La Revue Philosophique*, J.F.L. pretended to be addressing me by pretending not to address me – or anybody or nobody. As if mourning had to take place, in advance, with respect to the addressee of the sentence stating ‘there shall be no mourning’. The reader must mourn the desire to know to whom this sentence is destined, addressed, and above all, with respect to the possibility of being, he or she, or us, its addressee. Readability bears this mourning: a sentence must be readable, it must be able to become readable, up to a point, without the reader – he or she, or any other place of reading – being able to secure its ultimate instance of destination. No doubt, this mourning carries the first and terrible condition of any and all reading.

Today, I do not know any better, I still do not know how to read a sentence which I cannot leave aside either. I cannot stop looking at it. It holds me, it won’t let me go, even as it doesn’t need me as addressee or inheritor, precisely as it is meant to do or go without me faster than it goes through me. I will thus circle around, return to these five words [seven in French] whose twirls won’t be chained up, whose chain won’t be locked or lodged into any constraining enough context, as if it forever risked – a risk calculated by J.F.L. - being destined to dispersal, dissipation, or even to an undecidability such that the mourning it speaks about immediately turns to the mute mumbling of those five words. This sentence takes itself beyond itself, it holds back or withdraws, one can neither understand it nor leave it unheeded, neither decipher it nor misunderstand it altogether, neither keep it nor lose it, neither inside nor outside. It is this sentence itself, the phrasing of this unclassifiable phrase, drifting far from the categories analyzed by its author, which one feels to be mourning, precisely as it tells us, phrasing it: of me, there shall be no mourning. Of me, it says, of me, the phrasing of the sentence says, you will not be done mourning. You shan’t, by any means, organize the mourning, nor, worse yet, the work of mourning. And

of course ‘no mourning’, left to itself, can mean the endless impossibility of mourning, the inconsolable, the unrepairable which no work of mourning will ever mend.

But the ‘no mourning’ can also, in the same way, oppose testimony, testifying, protestation or contestation, to the very idea of a testament, to the hypothesis of mourning, which, unfortunately, as we know, always has a negative side, one that is at the same time laborious, guilt-ridden and narcissistic, reactive, turned toward melancholia, if not envy. And when it turns into celebration, or wake, the risk is highest.

Despite all I have just said, and still stand behind, about the absence of a definite addressee for a sentence that was above all not addressed to me, in a context in which it may nevertheless have seemed to be, I couldn’t stay clear of a temptation. The temptation to imagine J.F.L., one day in 1990, betting that the sentence ‘there shall be no mourning’ which he wrote as he read it, which I then read in a particular mode in 1990, that this sentence, someday, in due time, one of the two of us (but which one?) would re-read it, in the same way and differently, privately and in public. For this sentence was published. It remains public even if it is not certain that its public character exhausts it and that it doesn’t hide a crypt forever buried within. As if, published, it still remained absolutely secret, private or clandestine – three modes (secret, private, clandestine) that have to be carefully distinguished. I don’t mean that this sentence is testamental. I take all sentences to have a virtually testamental character, but I wouldn’t rush to give this one, because it says something about the death of the author, any specificity as a last will, the instructions of a mortal, even less of somebody dying. Rather, it tells us something about the testamental – perhaps that what the most faithful inheritance demands is the absence of testament. In this respect, it again says, it dictates another ‘there shall be no mourning’. The duty toward the beloved or the friend would be to neither go into, nor be done, mourning him or her.

I will now, but temporarily, leave aside this puzzling sentence. It will thus keep its reserve. I leave it behind for a while, with the odd feeling that it was, one day, entrusted to me, intensely, directly, immediately addressed to me, yet leaving me with no right on it, especially not the right of the addressee. He who signed it is still looking at me with an attention at once watchful and distracted.

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Reading Jean-François Lyotard, re-reading him intensely today, I believe I can discern a question that keeps a strange, uncanny spell for him, a power which some might rush to call organizing, a force I also believe to be radically disruptive. If I were to call it subversive, it would not be to overuse an easy word, but to describe in its *tropic* literality (tropic, meaning whirling, like the twirl of a turning or a torment) a movement that revolves, evolves, revolutionizes, overturns – as any subversion should. The effect of this question isn’t one that radiates infinitely from a thinking center, rather, if one insists on keeping to a centre, it would have to be that of a whirlwind, of a chasm open like a mute eye or glance, *mute* as J.F. liked to say about

music, an eye of silence, even as it summons speech and commands so many words bustling at the opening of the mouth. Like the eye of a storm.

This vertiginous question, this thought like the ‘eye of a storm’, wouldn’t be that of evil, not even that of radical evil. Worse, it would be that of the worst. A question which some may deem not only Apocalyptic, but altogether infernal. And the eye of the storm, the hyperbola of the worst probably isn’t foreign, in its excessive motion, in the violence of its wind, to what pulls from beneath the sentence ‘there shall be no mourning’, making it spin onto itself. That there be no mourning, is that bad? is that good? is it better? Or else, is it worse yet than mourning, like a mourning without the mourning of mourning?

Twice at least, the thought of the worst is mentioned, quickly, in *The Differend*. First in a passage citing Adorno: ‘Death in the Camps is a new kind of horror: since Auschwitz, to be afraid of death means to be afraid of something *worse* than death’.³ I underline the word ‘worse’, this comparative that so easily turns into a hyperbolic superlative. There is worse than radical evil, but there is nothing worse than the worst. There would then be something worse than death; or in any case, some experience, insofar as it takes one further than death and hurts more, would be disproportionate to what comes too easily after death, namely mourning. A little further, the worse appears a second time, and once again, in relation to the survivors of Auschwitz, the impossibility of bearing witness, of saying ‘we’, of speaking in the ‘first person plural’; J.F. wonders at that point: ‘Is it a matter of a dispersal *worse* than the Diaspora, that of sentences?’⁴ This would seem to imply that the dispersal of the Diaspora is only half-bad; it is barely a dispersal – and dispersal in itself isn’t absolute evil. Because it is given a proper name, or even a national name, this historical name, *Diaspora*, interrupts absolute dispersal. The Jews of the Diaspora form, or believe they form, a community of the Diaspora, they are gathered together by this principle of dispersal, the originary exile, the promise, the idea of a return, Jerusalem, if not Israel, etc. Whereas the dispersal of sentences is an evil worse than evil since what they forever lack – and this is the very point of *The Differend* – is the very horizon of a consensual sense, of a translatability, of a possible ‘to translate’ (I use the infinitive form here for a reason that will become clear in a moment). What is lacking in this dispersal of sentences, in this evil worse than evil, is the horizon, or even the hope of their very dispersal ever receiving a common sense. What is inscribed in this worse, apparently, is the differend as everlasting difference between the wrong [*tor!*] and the (terms of the) litigation [*litige*], for example. But, as we will see, there may be something worse yet than this worse.

It is not certain that the ‘worse’ is a thing, some thing. That it ever appears, ever is presently present, essentially, substantially, like something that ‘is’. One can thus doubt that it belongs within an ontological questioning, but nevertheless, I shan’t refrain from asking, to pretend to begin: ‘What is the worse, the worst? Does it mean anything else, and worse, than evil?’⁵

First, for reasons I leave for later, I wanted to frame the old word ‘*mourning*’ within a few sentences.

As if I were citing it – but I just cited it and will cite it again.

There come moments when, as *mourning* demands, one feels obliged to declare one's debts. We feel we owe to duty the duty to tell what we owe to the friend. Yet the consciousness of such a duty may seem unbearable and inadmissible. Unbearable for me, as I believe it would also have been for J.F.L. Unbearable, without a doubt, unworthy of the very thing it means to give itself to unconditionally, the unconditional perhaps always having to endure the trial of death.⁶ Inadmissible, not because one would have problems recognizing one's debts or one's duty as indebted, but simply insofar as, in declaring them in such a manner, particularly when time is short, one may seem to put an end to them, to calculate what they amount to, pretending to then be able to tell them, to measure them and thus to limit them, or more seriously yet, to be able to settle them in the very act of exposing them. In and of itself, the recognition of a debt is enough to seem to annul it in a denial. The recognizing consciousness, any consciousness in fact, perhaps falls into such sacrificial denial: consciousness in general perhaps is the sacrificial and mournful denial of the sacrifice that it mourns. This may be why there must not be, there will not be mourning.

I also wanted, for reasons that may become clear later, to frame the old word 'keep' [*garder*] inside a sentence.

As if I were citing it – and I will cite it.

For the debt that binds me to J.F.L., I know it to be somehow incalculable, I am conscious of this and want it so. I unconditionally reaffirm it, all the while wondering in a sort of despair, why an unconditional engagement only binds to death, to the one, he or she, to whom death has happened, as if the unconditional still depended on absolute death, if there ever is any, death without mourning: another interpretation of 'there shall be no mourning'. Of the debt, then, I shan't even begin to speak, to inventory it, whether with respect to friendship, to philosophy, or to that which, tying friendship to philosophy, will have *kept us* together, J.F. and I (kept us together without synchrony, without symmetry, without reciprocity, according to a reaffirmed dispersal), in so many places and in so many times that their very outlines remain for me uncircumscribed. I don't have the capacity, here, of my own memory, (nor) to go through the places, the occasions, the people, the texts, the thoughts, the words which, knowingly or not, will have *kept us* together, to this day, together apart, together dispersed into the night, together invisible one for the other, to the point that this being-together is not even secure anymore, even though we were sure of it, I am sure, *we* were together, but sure with what is neither an assuredness nor the security of a certainty, nor even a gathering [*un ensemble*] (those gathered are never together, for the gathered, the totality which it names, the set, is the first destruction of what the adverb *together* [*ensemble*] may mean: those who are to be together must absolutely not be gathered in any sort of set). But sure to be together outside of any namable set, *we* were so, even before having decided to, and sure of it with a *faith*, a sort of faith, which we perhaps agreed on, according to which we did go together. A faith, because, as with all those I like to call my best friends, J.F. too remains for me, in a certain way, forever unknown and infinitely secret.

I have just framed the old word '*faith*' [*foi*] inside a few sentences for reasons which will probably become clear later.

As if I were citing it – and I will be citing it.

In order to free myself, and you as well, from the narcissistic pathos which such a situation, the exhibition of such an 'us', opens onto, I was dreaming of at last being capable of another choice. I was dreaming of escaping from genres in general, and in particular, two genres of discourse – and two unbearable, unbearably presumptuous ways of saying 'us'. On one side I wanted to stay clear of the expected homage to J.F.L.'s work as thinker, an homage taking the form of a philosophical contribution belonging in one of the numerous conferences in which *we* took part together, J.F. and me, in so many places, towns, countries (and in the very place in which this talk was first delivered, the Collège International de Philosophie which remains so dear to me for being, since its origin, desired, inhabited, shared *with him*, like further away places, such as one house, in particular, on the Pacific Wall). Such homage taking the form of a philosophical contribution, I do not feel up to today, and Lyotard's oeuvre does not need me for that. But on the other hand, I also wanted to stay away from a homage in the form of a personal testimony, always somewhat appropriating, always threatening to give in to an indecent way of saying 'us', or worse: 'me', when precisely the first wish is to let Jean-François speak, to read and cite him, him alone, staying back, and yet without leaving him alone as he is left to speak, which would amount to another way of abandoning him. A double injunction, then, self-contradictory and merciless. How to leave him alone without abandoning him? How to, without further treason, disavow the act of narcissistic remembrance so full of memories to cry or make cry about? I have just framed these words 'cry', 'make cry', [*pleurer, faire pleurer*⁷] for reasons that will become clear later.

As if I were citing them – and I will cite them.

With a mind set to give into neither of these two genres, into neither of these two 'us', hurrying to get away from them, knowing nevertheless that both will catch up with me at every instant, resigned to struggle with this fate, to fail in front of it, in order to, at the very least, try to understand it, if not think it, I had first considered taking up again a conversation *with* J.F., addressing him as if he were here; and let me emphasize that it is *as* if he were here, in me, close to me, in his name, without in the least meaning to fool anybody with this 'as if', bearing in mind that he is not here, but that, despite their different modalities, qualities and necessities, between these two incompatible but equally irrefutable propositions (there, he is here and he is not here, in his name and beyond his name), there are no possible transactions. And what I would have wished to discover and invent at the same time, was the most just language, the finest one, beyond the concept, in order to do more than describe or analyse without complacency, the most concretely, in the most sensitive manner, this very thing, namely that J.F. is here, that he speaks to us, he sees us, hears us, responds, and this we can know, feel it and say it without disparaging any truth of what is called life, death, presence, absence. And nothing better attests to this than the fact that I want to speak *to* him here, not knowing whether I should

address him with the French *'vous'* as I always did, or as *'tu'* – which will take me some time yet.

Later, perhaps.

This very time, this time to-come is perhaps the attestation I am talking about. And the question I ask myself trembling, after him, is about a certain right, always improbable, i.e., resisting proof, if not faith – a certain right to say *'nous'*, *'us'*, *'we'*. As we will hear, J.F. sketches a sort of answer to this question, but it is neither easy nor ready-made.

So, I had thought about taking up again an interrupted conversation, the strangest of all. All of our conversations were odd as well as cut short, and as a matter of fact, all dialogues are finite, nothing is less infinite than a dialogue, and that is why one is never done with the interruption of dialogues, or, as he preferred to call them, of *'discussions'*. I had thus thought I could pursue, as if within myself but having you as witnesses, a conversation that had ended not with J.F.'s death but much before, for no other reason than that which cuts short all finite speech. So I had thought I could take it up again perhaps in order to declare, among much else, a debt nobody would have thought about, not even J.F., not even myself until today. For so many other debts that tie us together, you do not need me, they are readable in published texts.

So I wanted to follow a thread of memory. And a particular memory waiting for what could, one day to come, come to memory. What guided me then, more or less obscurely, was an intertwining of motifs whose economy I came to see as necessary when I perceived that most of the threads of the sentence *'there shall be no mourning'* were silently braided in it. First, the thread of singularity, of the event and of the destination – of the *'to whom it happens'* –, then the thread of repetition, that is, of the intrinsic iterability of the sentence which divides the destination, suspends it on the trace between presence and absence, beyond both, with an iterability which, as it divides its destination, splits up singularity: as soon as a sentence is iterable, i.e., right away, it can break loose from its context and lose the singularity of its destinal address. In advance, a technical machinery deprives it of the unicity of occurrence and destination. The inextricably entangled braiding of these threads (the machine, repetition, chance and the loss of destinal singularity), I would like to entrust it to you along with this memory. An easier choice, one more smiling, more modest, more in keeping with the adolescent modesty which always, and from both sides, marked our friendship. This modesty was characterized by one trait which was not in fact so assured, and left open its destinal singularity. I mean the fact that in a circle of old friends (in particular in the Collège) where almost everybody addressed the others with the friendly or familiar French form *'tu'*,⁸ we have always shunned doing so by some kind of unspoken agreement. Whereas we both said *'tu'* to most of our common friends, who had been doing so among themselves and thus with us too for an indeterminable time (in particular Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, but others as well), J.F. and I, throughout the decades, did not avoid, but were careful *not to say 'tu' to each other*. This may have meant something else, even setting aside the innate difficulty I have using this form of address, to a greater degree,

certainly, than J.F.. This could have implied a simple polite distance, or even a sort of neutralization of intimate singularity, of private intimacy into the plural and proper quasi-generality of the formal 'you'. No, on the contrary: if it somehow showed a respect that also keeps its proper distance, the exceptional character of this 'you' gave it a sort of transgressive value, like the use of a secret code reserved for us only. And in fact, one day, somebody in the Collège International wondered about it in front of us ('How's that, after so many years, you still address each other using *'vous'*, nobody else does so here!' – or something of the sort). I can still hear J.F. respond first, protesting with the smile I would like to imitate and which you know well, articulating what I held right away to be a truth, one I was grateful he saw and stated so well: 'No, he said, leave us that, this "*vous*" belongs solely to us, it is our sign of recognition, our secret language'. And I approved in silence. Henceforth it was as if the formal 'you' between us had become an elective privilege: 'we reserve the "you" for ourselves, us, we say "you" to each other, it is our shared anachronism, our exception from time'. From then on, this 'you' between us belonged to another language, as if it marked the path, in a grammatical contraband or in contradistinction with expected uses, for the idiomatic sign, the *shibboleth* of a hidden intimacy, clandestine, coded, reserved, quietly held back, unspoken.

Among so many other signs of this happy complicity, eloquent signs as quiet as winks, I would also like to recall the moments when J.F. mocked me, pretending to speak for himself and to imitate the French-Algerian accent that he heard or pretended to hear in my voice, precisely because, as you know, he too had had an Algerian moment. It is rather late that I learned about the odd love he shared with me for the one I always tend to place back in his native Algeria: Saint Augustine. We were, in the time of these two memories, according to a fifteen century anachronism, something like adoptive natives of the same Algeria.

But if I recall what was said and left unsaid, in the unsaid '*tu*', it is because the text out of which I extracted the sentence 'there shall be no mourning', puts back the behind-the-scene '*tu*' and '*vous*' on stage. The sentence appears in the section 'Mourning' of a text entitled 'Notes du Traducteur', 'Translator's Notes', in the special issue of a journal which was, as they say – dare I say it? – 'devoted' to me.⁹ In it, J.F. plays at responding to texts which I had, upon his request, written in 1984 for the great exhibition 'Les Immatériaux'.

Instead of saying more about, for instance, the calculated randomness of this exhibition and the chance J.F.'s invitation opened for me, namely the perfect machinic occasion to learn, despite my previous reluctance, to use a word processing machine – thus setting on a dependence which lasts to this day –, I would rather talk about this, instead of the great narratives about major debts, this apparently minor debt which J.F. perhaps never knew of, he about whom I never knew if he used a typewriter or, more importantly, a computer. This debt first seems technical or machinic, but because of its techno-machinic effacement of singularity and thus of destinal unicity, you will see very soon its essential link with the sentence I had to begin with, the one which had already surrounded and taken over me, 'there shall be no mourning'. And so, I am coming back to the great question of the '*tu*' address. We always used the formal 'you' between us, but in the serial text I had written for

Les Immatériaux (a text which was supposed to define a series of words, motifs, concepts which had been selected by J.F., and this, on a computer network, in the course of a more or less virtual discussion on early Olivetti computers with J.F.'s 26 guests – producing a body of texts later published under the title *Épreuves d'Écriture*), I, myself, had played with a 'tu' devoid of assignable addressee, taking away from the chance reader the possibility to decide whether that 'tu' singularly addressed the receiving or reading instance, that is, whoever, in the public space of publication, happened to read it, or instead, what is altogether different, altogether other, this or that particular private if not cryptic addressee – the point of all these both sophisticated and naive procedures being, among others, to upset, sometimes frighten, at the limit, the limit itself, all borders, for instance those between private and public, singular and general or universal, intimate or inner and outer, etc. In doing so, I had pretended to challenge whosoever was addressed by this *tu* to translate the idiomatic phrasing of many of my sentences, to translate it into another language (interlinguistic translation, in Jakobson's terms), or even to translate it into the same language (intralinguistic translation), or even into another system of signs (music or painting, for instance: intersemiotic translation). Accordingly, after this or that sentence which I considered untranslatable, and after a period, I would regularly add the infinitive form of the ironic order or the imperative challenge: 'traduire'/'translate'. This challenge (to translate, which, if my memory is correct, was in fact one of the words in the selected vocabulary), J.F. pretended to take up some five or six years later, in the text from which I took the 'there shall be no mourning'. The text as a whole, many of you know it well, I am sure, is thus entitled 'Translator's Notes'. In it, rather than translating, J.F. seriously plays at imagining the notes of a virtual translator. He does so under four headings which I will only mention, leaving you to read these eight pages worth centuries of Talmudic commentary. The four headings are: 'Déjouer'/'To foil', 'Encore'/'Still', 'Toi'/'You', and 'Deuil'/'Mourning'. And right from the first sentence of the first heading, 'To foil', right from the *incipit*, J.F. plays, displays, foils, and enacts the great scene of the 'tu' and the 'you', of the 'being-to-tu' and the 'being-yours' [*l'être à 'tu' et à 'toi'*]. He addresses *me* as '*vous*' (I suppose – probably rather uncautiously, for the reasons I mentioned – that he pretends to respond to me and feigns to be speaking to me – such is, at least, the law of the genre and the contractual agreement of the text). Right from the first sentence, then, he addresses me with the formal 'you', leaving for the two later parts of the text entitled 'Translator's Notes', the move to the 'tu'. The first sentence, then:

'Your fear (you have left me the you, good measure, agreed) in the large and the small, of becoming captive'.

Before going back to the question of the worse, of the 'worse than death', toward which all the work of mourning tends (when the work of mourning seeks neither to save from death nor to deny death, but to save from a 'worse than death'), I would like to follow in this eight page text what leads from the first part, 'To foil', to the fourth, 'Mourning', through the second, 'Still', and third, 'You'. I will only follow the main steps of this path, for doing it justice would require an infinite analysis of the tight interplay of citations, quotation marks, responses, turns, elliptical questions, etc. Here are only a few white pebbles to lead us from the scene of the '*vous*' and '*toi*' to the scene of mourning, in order to then come back to what *The Differend* will

already have told us concerning a certain ‘we’, a ‘we’ that is difficult to think, a certain ‘we’ from after Auschwitz, a ‘thinking we’, neither the one pertaining to what Lyotard calls ‘the beautiful death’, nor that which endures in Auschwitz as, in his words, ‘worse than death’. This *we*, perhaps the last one, or the one before last, is neither that of the ‘beautiful death’ nor worse than death, but a posthumous one, in a very particular sense of the word. In a passage I will read in a moment, J.F.L. says: ‘We, are “we”/“ourselves” (not) only posthumous’. [‘Nous, ne sommes “nous” que posthumes’.]

My white pebbles are only or mostly citations. I will cite J.F., and when he cites me in the citation, as if to playfully add translation notes, I will make that little two-fingered gesture which mimics quotations marks. What comes between my white pebbles (which you may think of as either those left by Tom Thumb to mark his path, or those left as tokens besides graves by Central European Jews), I leave unspoken [*tu*], I leave you to read or re-read on your own this extraordinary work of interwoven writing, this more than sublime text.

Four times, then. According to the rhythm he chose to divide these ‘Translator’s Notes’.

1. *First time*, in ‘To foil’, that of a *ductus*, one could say. I select this passage, in which one is given to expect, as it were, *between* the leading-through, *transduction* of translation and *seduction*, the move from the formal or plural *vous* to the informal and singular *tu*, and later from a certain ‘*tu*’ to a certain ‘*us*’.

He writes:

The untranslatable leaves something to ‘transduce’, something still to be translated. ‘Whether we expect this or that, in the end or in the coming’, the ‘essential’ is not there, but in ‘you and I expecting, waiting for, each other or ourselves, in the end, or expecting the coming’. Not in the tongue into which we come, the tongue of destination, but ‘in the tongue of our country’. (I differ this ‘you and I’.) To be expecting, or to be waiting, each-other or oneself, or something else? How to translate this foil, this un-play? In the language in which it is written? You resist being captured thanks to the sole love of the captivating tongue. As it catches with its amphiboles, you mark them. To seduce it.

2. The *second time* would be properly time, the time of time. Without waiting any longer for the move to the singular and familiar ‘*toi*’, this moment announces it in, I would say, a more cutting manner. I excerpt a few lines from ‘Still’, the title of this second moment, by cutting even more brutally. By cutting, and yet you will hear a certain ‘with you and me, it’s decisive, cutting’ which concludes with respect to a certain ‘*us*’ produced by the mirror which J.F. claims to put in front of ‘*us*’ both:

You give me your voice, your vote (*Voice*). But you have nothing to give. Only suspense. I try suspense [...] You smile. Another one who will have gotten it wrong, or fooled himself. You look at me looking

at your gaze in the mirror I offer you (*Mirror*). I run in/to *Time* to see if your desire to bend (make bend) the matrix lacks. [...] Yet, you declare your ‘feeling’, your revolt or your ruse: there is simultaneity beyond all temporal deferments. There is some ‘full speed’, some near-infinite speed (*ibid.*), creating synchronies, political contemporaneities for instance, even ‘vile’ ones, but above all, the saved, absolute ‘at the same time’ of a being-together outside of networks, as a dyad that is free of the other (*Mirror*). That is ‘*toi*’, ‘you’, I’m back to this point.

The importance of telephone for this speed. [...] loving caress, diligent too. I wonder if the full speed, your ‘empty certainty’ (*Simultaneity*) of possible simultaneity, so to speak removed from différance, stolen from all un-, all dis-, is to be taken as a free-ness or a frankness, the freedom at least expected by the captive of delays and postponements, or else, something like the pushing over or through of desire by itself, the effacement of its still, a ruse of patience simulating absolute impatience. The resolution, It decides, cuts. With you and me, it’s decisive, cutting.

3. Entitled ‘*Toi*’, the *third time* thus cuts; and if its title is, directly, if I may say so, ‘*toi*’/‘you’, it does all it can to avoid, as you will hear, a ‘thesis on the *toi*’. In the few lines which I shouldn’t have the right to isolate thus, I wanted to underscore the motif of simulation and simulacra, the question of right (‘right to address the other as “*tu*”’), and above all the unexpected coming of a ‘we’ as ‘posthumous we’, which, I think, shouldn’t be taken to mean only the testamental post-mortem, but in which should already transpire the humus, the soil, the humid earth, humility, the human and the inhuman, the buried and inhumed, which will resonate at the end of the text, in what will be the fourth time and last act.

J.F. writes:

Frankness or simulation: the opposition should be foiled, un- or displayed. To simulate suffering shows one suffers from the infinite possibility of simulation (*Simulation*). [...] I mean: none of them could be you, *toi*. ‘Does one have the right to address the other as ‘*tu*’?’ (*Right*). [...] You are the one who signs, you only, ‘these words which I address to you only and which you nevertheless sign, of which you are the addressee, he would say: the mother’ (*Sense*) [...] With you, ‘I want to take the time, my whole time’ (*Speed*), you who ‘tells me how things are, time and weather, *if you see what I mean* [in English in the text]’ (*Time*).

‘There is immortality between you and I, who we will see die’ (*Immortality*). To translate, but you were translating yourself (?) ‘The essential [is] that you and I expect, wait for, each other or ourselves, in the end, or expect the coming, in the tongue of our country’ (*Translate*). To translate again. I try. But I’m afraid of pushing it, of pushing you and pushing myself to a thesis of and on the *toi* [...] ‘We will see each other or ourselves die’. You will see me and I will see

you die. Or else: dying will happen to the two of us together and we will know it together. The shore...

And later (but I suffer much of not being able, because of time, to read everything, so as to rush toward a certain 'posthumous we'):

I pause at this '*toi et moi*', 'you and me' which you dissect [...] because your own body and my own body, which neither you nor I can reach, get there, we won't get there, manage, we will reach, happen to the other body. It would be another country. Obscure? Sinking? To translate. Where we won't see each other, or ourselves, or the two of us together. Where we will only see each other, or ourselves sink, become blinded, un-writing, be left to the translators and those who guide across borders. We, are 'we', or 'ourselves' (not) only posthumous. You and I expect it, or ourselves, or we there. Not that the tongue will ever sink, or become obscure. It is on the boat of all transits. But it is its image in me. [...] You sign this desire, with my signature?

4. It is in the last breath of this text, in the *fourth time*, entitled 'Mourning', that one can find both the words I said, in the beginning, I would cite: 'mourning', 'keep', 'cry', 'faith', and the sentence that is now slightly more, but still not totally, re-contextualizable: 'there shall be no mourning', keeping silent, mute, and lying in the ground between humus, inhuman and inhumed. I tear a few more bits from this mourning lament.

J.F. writes:

'A sign from you, my quotidian tongue. That for which I cry. To translate' (*Sign*). Already translated: you make me cry, I cry after you, I will always cry until the arrival. There shall be no mourning. Memory will be preserved. 'My chances: that the sole form of unhappiness be to lose rather than preserve memory [...] [...] It is not because of this supposed loss that I cry, but for and after your own presence, the tongue, never deserted. Which will always have taken place while I will have written, out of place. This distance leaves room and time for tears. [...] You are asked: 'We will erase evil'. (ibid.) The evil of writing, but damages only calls for litigation and decision, not forgiveness, which escapes rules and settlements. Forgiveness forgives the wrong alone. But it is not a gesture and makes no gestures. Forgiveness 'already has let it [the wrong] erase itself, of itself: what I call writing'. (ibid.) This is why there is no clue, no proof for it. As I write, you wrong me and I forgive you, but it won't ever be proven, even by my tears. As you haunt my writing, without sainthood asking anything, I do you wrong. Do you forgive me? Who will prove it? Mute. [...] This is why there is this distance, 'melancholia', a wrong exceeding declared forgiveness, consummated and consumed in writing. Of which you have no need. This is why mourning is never

over, the fire never put out. It is vain to count on settling with your unseizeability through incineration [...] through the burning of writing in an immediate fire and by the ashen signature. Satirizing this signarizing. Ashes are still matter. I sign in humus. Of the inhuman, I bear witness inhumed. Perjuring witnesses. 'I only like faith, or rather, in faith, its irreligious experience'.

I still do not know how to interpret these words through, in, and despite the dispersal of sentences which he claims is worse than the Diaspora. My own fragmentary citations will only have made it worse. I do not know how to interpret the 'there shall be no mourning', now followed at a distance by the sentence: 'this is why mourning is never over, the fire never put out'. The impossibility to interpret, decide about or dispose of these sentences comes no doubt from their radical, irreversible dispersal, as well as their ever-undetermined addressee, public or not. These 'Translator's Notes' have the remarkable status of a response. They mean to breathe through and through with the 'yes' of the response, thus in reference to a certain 'we', but with a response that has no assignable or demonstrable addressee. However, this impossibility to interpret, which is not a hermeneutical powerlessness, I do not consider it an evil. It is also the chance of reading. It says, outside any destination, the very destiny of mourning. It offers for *thinking* this destiny, properly for thinking, if that is possible, better than an interpretative decision or an assignable destination would.

For if, to bolster myself in this deciphering, I tried to find some help in *The Differend*, written a decade before these 'Translator's Notes' which are themselves about a decade old, I can find all the necessary premises for a thinking of this destiny without destination. And sometimes, particularly where the topic is 'us', 'you' and 'I'. *The Differend* already brought into play the very wording of these 'Translator's Notes', thus confirming yet again that these *Notes*, and their 'there shall be no mourning', cannot be confined to their context or apparent destination.

Hence, in closing, I come back to the three occurrences of the 'worse' that I mentioned in beginning:

1. Adorno's statement: 'since Auschwitz, to be afraid of death means to be afraid of something worse than death';¹⁰

2. Lyotard's sentence commenting on it, 18 pages further, which says of the death sentence in Auschwitz: 'Thus this death must be killed, and that is what is worse than death. For if death can be annihilated, it is because there is nothing to be put to death. Not even the name "Jew"';¹¹

3. and between these two occurrences, this third one: 'Is it a matter of a dispersal worse than the Diaspora, that of sentences?'¹² There is indeed another name for the worse, for the 'worse than death', but when, in first preparing this intervention, I read the title chosen by Jean-Luc Nancy, 'D'une fin à l'infini' ['From an end to the endless' / 'About an endless end'], I thought he was likely to speak about a sentence which I will thus only cite: 'Death would not be quite the worst, if it isn't the end

as such, but merely the end of the finite and the revelation of the infinite. Worse than this magical death then, would be death without reversal, the end as such, including the end of the infinite'.¹³

In all these pages, offering powerful readings of Hegel and Adorno, but above all, meditations about Auschwitz, about the impossible possibility of bearing witness, about survival and the 'we', a 'we' that may, as Lyotard says so well, go beyond what he calls a 'transcendental illusion' for which the 'we' would be a 'vehicle'¹⁴ – these pages, then, oppose to the law of the magical death, that is, the 'beautiful death', the *exception* of Auschwitz.

And in both cases, I will venture to say, *il n'y a pas, il n'y aura pas de deuil*, there is no, there shall be no, mourning. But in either of these cases, for diametrically opposed reasons. What Lyotard calls the 'beautiful death' or the 'magical death', is the one that is given sense, and takes it as an order aimed at an addressee. And it is a beautiful death because the order given to a dying or mortal addressee, this verdict addressed to him, means that this death makes sense because it is preferable; and since it is preferable, it is as if it didn't take place and thus requires no mourning. This is the case, Lyotard says, when the private authority of the family, the political authority of the state or the party, the authority of religion, give its members, that is, its identifiable addressees, the order to die the preferable death, the order to prefer death: 'Die rather than escape' (Socrates in prison) (in the background are the analyses of the *Apology* and the *Menexenus* in 'La Notice de Platon', often with reference to Nicole Loraux's works); 'Die rather than be enslaved' (during the Commune); 'Die rather than be defeated' (whether at Thermopyles or Stalingrad).

This beautiful death, I would say, in the end, does not take place, for the very reason that it has, or pretends to keep, some sense, directed as it is by an end that goes beyond it, by an economy, be it that of sacrifice – 'Die in order that...', and you shall not die. And Lyotard concludes: 'Such is the Athenian "beautiful death", trading the finite for the infinite, the *eschaton* for the *telos*, for the "Die so as not to die"'.¹⁵

But 'This is not the case in "Auschwitz"' Lyotard states, carefully – and with good reason – putting within quotation marks this name that also names the 'extinction of the name',¹⁵ but which of course – and this is an enormous problem which I leave open here – can only play its role of absolute exception if it loses the quotation marks that make it a metonymical or exemplary name, and as such not exceptional, holding the place for other possible 'Auschwitz'. At any rate, 'Auschwitz' would be an exception to the law of the 'beautiful death'. This is indicated in sequence 157, precisely entitled 'Exception', and beginning with: "'Auschwitz' is the prohibition of the "beautiful death"". An exception, first because the victim is not the one to whom the order is addressed – and let me mark in passing that all the deaths in question here are always deaths following an order, 'Die', which means that none of these deaths (beautiful or not) are natural, as one says of illnesses, supposing that an illness is ever natural. Here, the choice, if I may use this word precisely where there is no more choice, is between 'Die, I decree so' and 'Let him die, I decree so' or 'Let I die, he decrees so'. Both of these deaths, which are no more natural than any other, are also forms of putting to death, ordered deaths, whether we are talking about

Socrates, Athenian soldiers, the Second World War, or Auschwitz. But between these two deaths, these two 'Die', the heterogeneity is absolute; and as a result, 'Auschwitz' cannot be turned into a 'beautiful death', or a sacrificial holocaust in which the Jewish people replaces Isaac on Mount Moriah, except through an abuse of rhetoric. 'Rhetoric' is Lyotard's word as he analyses these terrifying hypotheses in the paragraphs (161, 170) about Abraham, which I wish I could have meditated at more length here.

All along these pages about *The Result*, about the 'after Auschwitz', about the witness, the third party, the survivor, about the immense question of the 'we', about the two 'Die', the two orders to die and the two orders which say 'Die', that of the beautiful death and that of 'Auschwitz', in all of these pages, mourning does not come up. 'Mourning' does not take place, and the word 'mourning' has no place. As if the sentence 'there shall be no mourning' had already been heard, and heeded in its extreme consequence. I wouldn't swear that 'mourning' never appears in the whole book, but if it does, at least it isn't in the passages dealing with death, the beautiful death, or the death that is worse than death. The word and the concept 'death' appear twice in the index ('death', 'beautiful death'), but 'mourning' not a single time. If there is no place for mourning, if mourning has no place in these two ordered deaths, it is for diametrically opposed reasons. In the 'beautiful death', it is because the death makes sense: it accomplishes a life full of sense, it finds its dialectical self-overtaking [*relève, aufheben*] in this sense. In the case of 'Auschwitz', on the contrary, 'worse than death', the very extinction of the very name forbids mourning, given that this murder of the name constitutes the very sense of the order 'die', or 'let him die', or even 'let I die'. In both of these orders, 'die', the 'there shall be no mourning' is implicitly so radical that the word 'mourning' needs not be uttered. Which would lead us to believe that when it is uttered, we may perhaps, probably indeed, be in another case, where mourning is at least possible enough that it can be set aside by the 'there shall be no mourning'.

I would like to inscribe here, in the programmatic name of a reflection to come, a reference to two of J.F.L.'s remarks, apparently quite distant one from the other,¹⁶ which, without referring to mourning, give us much to think about concerning the empty place left to mourning in *The Differend* and about what is worse than death. It is as if – this, at least will be the hypothesis of my reading – mourning implied either a litigation concerning damages, or else some kind of wrong, that is, a differend. Without litigation or differend, there can be no mourning. In a way, then, what is worse than death, and worse than non-mourning, is that there not even be a differend. As if what is 'worse than death' was what comes, if not to erase, at least to lateralize or subordinate the nevertheless unerasable limit between the wrong and damages, the differend and the litigation: an alternative or an alternating which, as you know, sets the rhythm, the pulse, the heartbeat of this great book, *The Differend*.

I take the risk of sketching this hypothesis about mourning based on what Lyotard himself says, without mentioning mourning, about a certain duel, or even a divorce between 'Auschwitz' and 'Israel'. In establishing damages that can be repaired, in thinking it can translate the wrong into damages and the differend into a litigation,

which is and remains impossible, it is as if Israel had meant to complete its mourning. In doing so, the state of Israel would have sought to signify the mourning of Auschwitz, precisely where mourning has no sense. All I can do here is juxtapose these two series of statements from *The Differend*:

1. 'Auschwitz' first:

Between the SS and the Jew there is *not even* a differend, because there is not even a common idiom (that of a tribunal) in which damages could at least be formulated, even in the place of a wrong. Thus, a trial, even a parodic one, is not needed. (This isn't the case in the case of the Communists.) The Jewish utterance did not take place. [I emphasize 'not even'.]

2. Now Israel, the state which bears or takes this name, signifying something like the mournful mis-understanding of this truth, namely, the absence of a common idiom and the impossibility to translate a wrong into damages. Some seventy pages earlier, one can read:

In creating the state of Israel, the survivors turned the wrong into damages and the differend into a litigation; they put an end to the silence to which they were condemned, by beginning to speak in the common idiom of public international right and authorized politics. But the reality of the wrong caused in Auschwitz [no quotation marks here] remained then and remains now to be established, and it cannot be because the wrong is such that it cannot be established by consensus.

I now want to recall something apparently and massively evident: the absence of the word 'mourning', the alternative between the 'beautiful death' and the exception of the 'worse than death', have all been linked to an institution of *ordered* death, to some imperious verdict: 'die', 'let him die', or 'let I die'. Should we deduce from this that mourning, the experience of mourning or even only the hypothesis and the naming of mourning – if only to state 'there shall be no mourning' –, are then reserved for the endurance of a death which, if never natural, would nevertheless not be murder, nor the terrifying consequence of some order to die, given to the other or to oneself? Yes, of course, and this is precisely what we are discussing tonight. Whether we accept it or not, whether we endure it or not, whether we name it or not, mourning here does not follow an order to die. If it does indeed, hypothetically, follow an order, a wish, a prayer, a demand, a desire, it would rather be, tonight still, a 'do not die' or a 'let him not die'. And the 'there shall be no mourning' would thereby be heard as a response or an echo: to some 'do not die', 'let him not die'. To be in mourning, on the contrary, and even more so, to organize mourning, always runs the risk of confirming the order or the wish ('die', 'be dead', 'stay dead', 'let you die, be or remain in death'). (However, let this not ever make us forget that what *comes* to us, *affects* us, at the death of the friend, goes beyond the order, the wish, the promise even, as well as any performative project. As does any event deserving the name).

But this ‘do not die’, which nothing will silence, even as it shan’t be heard, even as it may forego mourning, we know it is threatened from all sides: threatened by the ‘beautiful death’ itself, with its consoling image, like the figure of a life which was indeed fulfilled, successful, full of accomplishments and traces left for generations, generous with so much sense and work in the service of thinking, of loved ones, of humanity, etc.; but just as much threatened by the always open risk of a ‘worse than death’, on the brink of the disguised extinction of the name. For, as we know well, there are a thousand ways for a name to vanish: it can lose itself where there couldn’t even be a differend, as in the ‘not even a differend’ I just recalled. The name can also vanish, in another per-version of the worse, precisely as it preserves itself, because of what or who preserves it, or – as it is said in *Signé Malraux*, in that last chapter entitled ‘*Témoign*’/‘Witness’ – precisely when ‘the names remain’,¹⁷ when remains ‘the signature from beyond the grave, as always, the only one’.¹⁸ Names preserve, watch over, but these spectral guards always remain as threatened as they are threatening: ‘The desire to avenge looms around names’, as *The Differend* says,¹⁹ on the same page as the passage about Israel I cited earlier. Consequently, is this threat ‘worse than death’? Would the ‘worse than death’ be this, and the worse than the worst? Worse than the worst: the threat of contamination between all these deaths, and all the aspects possibly taken, denyingly, by the mourning of mourning ?

This is why, in his ‘Translator’s Notes’, J.F. linked with so much perspicuity his reflection on mourning to the question of wrong and forgiveness. In front of the threat of equivocation, forever pressing and necessary, between all these orders of death, we are all, we, Jean-François’ friends, in the impossible – some may even say, unforgivable – situation of the third party, of these surviving we’s, who must survive not only death, but also the disappearance or the disqualification of the ‘witness’, of a certain ‘we’ and a certain ‘third’.

As if to pretend concluding, I will then read an extraordinary passage, the passage to hyperbola of *The Differend*, in the apparently furtive moment in which, so to speak, J.F.L. signs his book by giving us to think what may perhaps here be thought, the very thinking of thought. It is also, precisely, the moment of the jump toward a thinking ‘we’ which signs, seals, leaves its seal and its legacy, goes on to survive beyond all the ‘we’s’ that it demystifies. This ‘we’, then, the only one, in the end, to have inspired me tonight and prompted all I say and address to J.F., to those who love him, to those whom he loves, this ‘we’, the fact that Lyotard puts it almost always (besides this or that exception) within quotation marks does not neutralize it either. It only tears it away from the cowardly easiness of so many other ‘we’s’ and gives to think what should be called reflection, the reflexive thinking of an impossibility. What happens when one thinks and reflects on an impossibility? Is it possible? For instance, very close to the experience of the worse, any day when it becomes nearly impossible to distinguish between a wrong and damages, between differend and litigation? Does this experience of the impossible become possible? What possibility for another *we* can we foresee through the impossibility of the *we*? and even through the ‘affirmation of nothingness’?

Here is the passage to the hyperbola of the ‘we’, it comes at the end of sequence 158, entitled ‘The third party?’, in the course of a powerful reflection on the

coexistence of two secrets and the troubling equivalence from the third to the fourth party. These pages deserve a close analysis I cannot provide here. As you will hear, this thinking *we* is *presupposed* by critique, by the preserving over-taking or disappearance of all the other *we*'s. In it, rhetoric develops an 'objection' attributed to the 'speculative'. But it is unclear whether the speculative gains or loses from it, keeps or loses its mind. This thinking *we* survives beyond all the *we*'s it thinks. As such, it does indeed seem to be like a Hegelian presupposition (*Voraussetzung*), like a speculative *we*. But does it not also survive this survival? Does it not survive as survival itself, in a subtle and infinitesimal excess of thinking? Does it not rather think the speculative, before it thinks in a speculative mode? Some chance to risk, a beautiful one, on the brink of death. With or 'without result' ('Without result' is the title of the following sequence, I wish I could follow it step by step). Let us listen:

But the third party is there, the speculative objects. The dispersal without witnesses that 'we' have characterized as the extinction of the third needed to be expressed by a third. That *we* [in italics, while most of the other 'we' are within quotation marks] has vanished at Auschwitz, 'we', at least, have said it. There is no passage from the deportee's phrase universe to the SS's phrase universe. In order to affirm this, however, we needed to affirm one universe and then the other, as if 'we' were first the SS and then the deportee. In doing this, 'we' effected what 'we' were looking for, namely, a we [this time, neither italics nor quotation marks]. In looking for it, this we was looking for itself. Thus it is expressed at the end of the movement as it had effected itself since the beginning. For, without the presupposition of this permanence of a thinking 'we', there would have been no movement of research at all. This we is by no means the totalization of the I's, the you's [*tu*], and the he's at play under the name 'Auschwitz', as indeed this name designates the impossibility of such a totalization. Rather, it is the reflective movement of this impossibility, that is, dispersal coming to self-consciousness, dialectically self-overtaken out of annihilation and into the affirmation of nothingness. The we composed at least of *I* who write and *you* who read.

There it is. Running the risk of what *The Differend* calls the 'last sentence',²⁰ this is what I wanted to say. Perhaps I was still speculating.

Doing so, would I have ceased addressing you?

Addressing 'us'?

Would I be abusing fiction or desire if I told Jean-François, here and now, still not daring to address him as *tu*, as if it were the first time in my life, keeping to the *vous*, keeping him, faithfully, alive in our 'you' – this is, Jean-François, I tell myself, what, today, I wanted to try to tell you.

Translated by Boris Belay

¹ This title was chosen after this talk was first given; it was originally delivered without a title.

² *Le Différend* (Paris: Édition de Minuit, 1983), 141-43. [In English: *The Différend: Phrases in Dispute*, Georges Van Den Abbeele (trans.) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988). Here, this translation is modified throughout.]

³ Lyotard, *Le Différend*, 132.

⁴ Lyotard, *Le Différend*, 146.

⁵ I once heard my friend Serge Margel ask a similar question but in the context of another space of thinking and set of references. Cf. 'Les dénominations orphiques de la survivance...'; *L'Animal Autobiographique* (Paris: Galilée, 1999), p.441.

⁶ Outline of the argument I was not able to spell out during the lecture: death obliges, in this respect, it would thus amount to the other original name of absolute obligation. Unconditional engagement only binds to the one who ('who', rather than 'which'), from the place of death, becomes both the absent origin and the destination of the obligation: absolute, unconditional, unnegotiable, beyond any transaction. Absence without return would then open onto the unconditional. Terrifying. Terror. This would be the meaning of 'God is dead', the tying of the name of God, place of the unconditional, to death. A desperate conclusion, perhaps: the unconditional (which I distinguish from the sovereign, even if the distinction remains improbable) signifies the death of the dead, death without mourning: there shall be no mourning. One is under an unconditional obligation only toward the dead. One can always negotiate conditions with the living. Upon death,

rupture of the symmetry: truth, impossibility to pretend anymore. But does one ever deal with the dead? Who could swear so? The impossible death perhaps means this: that the living conditions everything.

⁷ The French verb *pleurer*, in its intransitive form, means either to cry or to weep, but it can be used transitively [*pleurer quelqu'un*] to denote mourning. [Translator's note].

⁸ This familiar second person singular form, as well as the interplay it sets with its formal equivalent '*vous*', is altogether unknown to the English language. It would be very poorly translated by the archaic 'thou' which, now essentially used to address God, runs the risk of being heard as the exact opposite, as more-than-formal. Two derived French verbs, 'tutoyer' and 'vouvoyer' (saying *tu* or *vous* to address somebody), are used in the context of what often becomes a very thorny question of respect toward the addressee. [Translator's note].

⁹ *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger*, 2 (avril-juin 1990); special issue on Derrida edited by Catherine Malabou.

¹⁰ Lyotard, *Le Différend*, 132.

¹¹ Lyotard, *Le Différend*, 150.

¹² Lyotard, *Le Différend*, 146.

¹³ Lyotard, *Le Différend*, 134.

¹⁴ Lyotard, *Le Différend*, 148.

¹⁵ Lyotard, *Le Différend*, 151.

¹⁶ Lyotard, *Le Différend*, 157 and 90.

¹⁷ *Signé Malraux* (Paris: Grasset, 1996), p.326.

¹⁸ *Signé Malraux*, p.329.

¹⁹ Lyotard, *Le Différend*, 90.

²⁰ Lyotard, *Le Différend*, 27.

Thirty-three years and countless books after *Of Grammatology*, **Jacques Derrida** hardly needs an introduction to a scholarly audience. Now officially retired from teaching duties, he has, if anything, increased the pace of his publications and talks. Many of his recent texts are written in homage to his friends, the list of whom is enough to mark his place in contemporary French thought: Emmanuel Lévinas, Maurice Blanchot, Hélène Cixous, Sarah Kofman, Jean-Luc Nancy, ... and, of course, Jean-François Lyotard.

Boris Belay translates from/to English a) if the texts seem worth his while, and/or b) if he needs the money, and/or c) if he has nothing better to write, and/or d) if his wonderful editor friends have the patience to bear with him. Otherwise, well... he does have a life.