

Bare Exteriority:
Philosophy of the Image and the Image of Philosophy in
Martin Heidegger and Maurice Blanchot

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(trans. Millay Hyatt)

"L'image, la dépouille"
Blanchot

I

"Philosophy would henceforth forever be our companion, at day, at night, even by losing her name, by becoming literature, scholarship, non-knowledge, or by standing aside. She would be the unavowable friend in whom we respect – love – that which would not permit us to become close to her, all the while giving us to believe there is nothing awake in us, nothing vigilant unto sleep, that is not due to her difficult friendship."¹ In a late text entitled *Our Clandestine Companion* Maurice Blanchot testifies his at once intimate and conflict-ridden relationship to philosophy. If philosophy must be considered as Blanchot's unavowable, mostly nameless and faceless companion; Blanchot's restrained presence in turn was not less decisive as a dialogue partner for French post-Heideggerian philosophy (Levi-

nas, Foucault, Derrida, Nancy). In order to apprehend the intricate design left by the weaving shuttle going back and forth in this infinite interchange, I will focus on what could be the common and nonetheless dividing membrane between them: the question of the *image*. On the one hand, Blanchot's theory of the imaginary has recently received particular attention;² on the other hand, the question of the image – which has long remained external to the main philosophical discourse – could prove to be the very thread of Ariadne which leads to the heart of the self-representation of philosophy. In his recent work *Au fond des images*, Jean-Luc Nancy has established that Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics rests on a questioning of the status of the image as finitude.³ In this essay I follow the intuition that Blanchot's writing itself is not only indebted to Heidegger's thought, but that his reflection on the image reveals striking similarities to those of the German philosopher.⁴ In the following two sections, Heidegger's (II) and Blanchot's (III) interpretations of the image will be outlined so as to bring forth the common motif of their considerations: the image as the Latin *imago*, as the death mask. In the final section of the essay (IV), I shall argue that the question of the image thus enables us to approach the border which both unites and separates Heidegger and Blanchot. This border between philosophy and literature, around which the writings of both revolve, is the question of exteriority, beyond any representational thinking. As I will try to show, however, exteriority is conceived in Heidegger and Blanchot in two similar, but nevertheless radically opposed ways: the faint, but decisive difference between *laying patent* ("freilegen") and *laying bare* ("dépouiller").

II

In 1926, *Undying Faces*, a book of photographs of over a hundred death masks of famous personalities from the Renaissance to the First World War – from Brunelleschi to Frank Wedekind, from Schiller to Wagner and Nietzsche – was published in Berlin by Ernst Benkard.⁵ The experience of the massive scale of death in the trenches overshadowed the entire decade of the 1920s, and it is in this decade that a vague desire to endow the phenomenon of death with a meaning transcending its historical circumstances came to be expressed. Despite, or precisely as a result, of the newly emerging culture of remembrance, expressed in the symbolic war memorials erected in small towns all across Germany after the war, there was a sense of unease about accepting death as an anonymous fact. In the death masks of outstanding historical figures, the wounded Weimar Republic not only lent death a singular countenance, but was also able to

found a new beginning upon the rubble of the past. Benkard's book, which by 1935 had gone into its nineteenth printing and had been translated into English and other languages, formed only the prelude to a series of publications – including Richard Langer's *Totenmasken (Death Masks)*⁶ in the following year and especially Egon Friedell's famous *Das letzte Gesicht (The last Face)*⁷ in 1929 – whose far-reaching effects on its time are testified to by numerous writers such as Céline, Canetti, Aragon and Nabokov.

In Strasbourg in 1926, that same year, Blanchot met the young Emmanuel Levinas, who would introduce him to the philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, and with whom he would forge a life-long friendship (for Derrida, "this friendship was like grace; it remains like a blessing of that time,"⁸ a time from which the only verifiable photograph of Blanchot remains). In that year thus, Heidegger held a series of lectures in Marburg. The way in which he intended to undertake his project of "laying patent" (*Freilegung*)⁹ Western philosophy was already beginning to emerge in his interpretation of Kant the same year. In the stronghold of Neo-Kantianism dominating Germany at the time, Heidegger sought to lift the epistemological character of philosophy out of its foundations by bringing forth from under the epistemological mask that had been forced upon him a different Kant. In the second part of the lecture series, *Logic: The Essence of Truth*,¹⁰ whose core idea would form the basis of his subsequent book on Kant, Heidegger demonstrated how the problem of metaphysics in Kant is to be posed, wherein the problem lies, and how the "perishing" (*Verendung*) of metaphysics is anticipated in Kantian thought.

As is well known, Heidegger considers the chapter on schematism, held to be an "insignificant addendum" by Neo-Kantianism, as the connective hinge not only of the entire structure of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but of the three *Critiques* overall. The imagination, which guarantees the synthesis of the manifold of perception with the concept of the understanding, is for Heidegger at the same time the anchoring of a metaphysics of presence of the re-presented (*Vor-gestelltes*) – but also the vanishing point where temporality constantly postpones the present-at-hand (*Vor-Handenes*), and finite *Dasein* goes beyond itself due to the temporal structure of the synthesis. The sensation provoked by this radical reinterpretation during the 1929 Davos dispute with Ernst Cassirer is also well known, and Levinas, who was there, gave Blanchot a thorough report upon his return. For Heidegger, imagination, defined by Kant as "exhibitio originaria,"¹¹ precipitates a thinking inseparable from the history of Western metaphysics of representation (*Vorstellung*) adequately produced by a subjectivity to itself, but also, as Heidegger argues in Davos, of "a presentation [*Darstellung*], a free giving [*Sichgeben*]." ¹²

Let us pause for a moment and clarify what is at stake. On the one hand, the analysis of the “schema-image” is to make explicit the essence of the metaphysics of presence, as it is constructed on the adequation model of truth from within and without. On the other hand, another conception of truth is to be brought forth from beneath this structure, which Kant’s characterisation of imagination as “*exhibitio originaria*” literally grasps as “original self-offering.” According to Heidegger, these two opposing conceptions of truth – for the question of truth is at the heart of the Marburg lecture series – are so entwined in Kant, that they require, first of all, a philosophical hermeneutics, which Heidegger also renders as “the art of outlaying (*Auslegen*).” In his laying-patent (*freilegend*) interpretation, an unknown image emerges from the concept of imagination as the power to represent what is already given; an image that was not visible before and now discloses itself of its own accord. This new image of Kant no longer resembles him – this is the accusation of the Neo-Kantians. Or is it possible that Kant no longer resembles his own image?

The decisive move in Heidegger’s interpretation accordingly lies in his extraction of the problem of the image from a treatment of the epistemological capacity: the focus shifts from the problem of representation (*Vorstellung*) to the problem of presentation (*Darstellung*). In the question of presentation, the schema-image has to be understood as a mode of depiction. Heidegger’s interpretation of Kant was so radical that, as Nancy stresses, the example he used to explicate his characterisation of the schema-image as depiction was hardly noticed amidst the debate on whether his reinterpretation was even admissible or whether it did not utterly distort Kant.¹³ Instead of making do with an arbitrary example (in other contexts he refers to landscapes or photography), Heidegger here cites a case that at first glance seems anything but self-evident: “A particular mode of depiction is also for example the death mask.”¹⁴

We have to assume that Heidegger, like most of his contemporaries, came across the phenomenon of the death masks for the first time in Benckard’s *Undying Faces*. The masks stored in the Schiller archive in Marbach are contained in the book, including several authors crucial for Heidegger. Not least among these was Nietzsche, although his mask was the version reshaped by his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche in an attempt to correct the disfigurement caused by his disease. The most lasting impression on Heidegger seems to have been left by the death mask of Pascal, which he cites as a concrete illustration of a death mask. Why employ this strange example of a death mask for the problem of presentation as depiction?

The first answer is obvious. The death mask is constructed by making

a physical mould of the face and can thus be seen as an objective adequation of the dead person's features. By means of this depiction, "which itself can be depicted, copied or photographed," I can "see through the photograph of the depiction directly at that which is primarily represented, that which is meant, namely the countenance of the dead person itself, the dead man himself."¹⁵ The death mask exerts an extraordinary *effet de réel*, which not only causes the observer to look past the material composition and perceive what is depicted as something real, but the "perishing" of *Dasein* itself is verified by the viewer's gaze as it imbues the dead with life. But what does the death mask really represent? How can it, being tied to the most contingent circumstance (the expression a face assumes in the instant of death), sum up a person's general aspect or even his personality? Blaise Pascal's death mask seems to have struck many of Benkard's readers as it demonstrates the domination of the spirit over physical suffering. Nothing of the intense pain the 39-year old endured is visible in Pascal's mask, it has transcended physical contingency and represents faith in salvation. Elias Canetti, who discovered Benkard's book in Budapest, observes in his diary in 1927 that the photograph of Pascal's death mask is not a picture of Pascal, but a picture for something else: "Here pain has reached its culmination, has found its long sought after meaning. Pain that is to remain thought is not capable of more."¹⁶ Not the empirically suffering Pascal, but the concept of pain is sensualised by the picture. Thanks to a dissimilar similarity between a living person and his face frozen in death, room is made for a different understanding of the image. Heidegger writes: "Here a concept of the image appears that differs from the concept of the image qua depiction."¹⁷ Heidegger is thus able to show how the death mask is exemplary in its ability to explain the method of schematism, since it appears in a space between empirical sensory diversity and a rational unity of concepts.

The initial anxiety caused by the death mask therefore becomes a tactical element in the argumentative chain of proof and marks its uncanniness. The Pascal example is missing from the Kant book. Is this oversight on the part of the thinker of being-toward-death intentional or not? The question remains open. The fact is that Heidegger prematurely closes the abyss torn open by his example.

III

When Heidegger's publisher Günther Neske edited a Festschrift on the occasion of Heidegger's 70th birthday, Blanchot included an excerpt from *Awaiting Oblivion*. From this fragmentary, genre-exploding dialogue, in

which Heidegger's thought unmistakably shimmers through, Blanchot extracts a fragment and offers it back to Heidegger like a reflecting prism. Although their motives initially resemble each other, and although Heidegger's themes seem recognizable in Blanchot's fragment, the text obstructs reflection and forces the reader onto another, opaque and image-less surface. The mysterious point around which *Awaiting Oblivion* revolves is the expectation of a revelation, reminding us of Heidegger's *aletheia*, of a truth that forges a path across the river of forgetting, across *Lethe*, out of the darkness into the bright light (*phos*) of the revealed phenomenon (*phainesthai*). But the longer one follows the feverishly recursive writing in *Awaiting Oblivion*, the clearer it becomes that the imminent revelation will never occur, since it is always *imminent*. A symbol for this is Lazarus' resurrection, which Blanchot a few years prior had advanced in *The Space of Literature*.

Every reading is a desperate desire for illumination, an attempt to bring hidden meaning to light, just as Christ called upon Lazarus: *Lazare, veni foras*, Lazarus, come forth – and knock over your tombstone. “To knock over the stone seems to be the mission of reading: to make it transparent, to dissolve it with the penetration of the gaze, which, in a burst, goes beyond it” (EL 257). To read an author would thus mean to move obstacles out of the way (Blanchot refers to “excavation”), to “lay patent” (*freilegen*) the path so that it can “outlay” (*auslegen*, literally to disclose or to interpret) itself. Blanchot seems to approach Heidegger in this thinking of the outside, but it is precisely here where he – subtly, but no less radically – turns away from him. In reading, he writes, there is “a vertiginous moment that resembles the irrational movement in which we try to open our already closed eyes to life” (EL 257). The desire to read something that is not there to read, to see something that is not there to see, has to be understood as the *madness of the day*. Now the thaumaturgic effect of reading does not, according to Blanchot, consist in the least in the “cadaveric emptiness” being awakened to life and throwing off its “well-woven bands” (EL 257), but rather in the fact that even after the stone has been pushed aside, the grave remains closed, or, like Kafka's gate to the law, has been open all along. It is not a mystery that clears itself up but the experience of an impenetrable bareness that has always been present. As Blanchot writes in the fragment from *Awaiting Oblivion*: “[T]he presence ... was, on the contrary, stripped of mystery to the point that it laid the mystery bare without dis-covering it.”¹⁸ Not a mystery that reveals itself, but the laying bare of absent self-evidence. Blanchot continues elsewhere, “such is the character proper to this ‘opening’ that is reading: Only that which is most tightly closed opens; only that which is of the greatest opacity is transparent” (EL

258). The gravestone (*sema*) is not the sign (*sema*) for the dead body (*soma*) lying behind it, which comes forth to return to new life and meaning. The referential structure of meaning itself is crushed on the naked surface of the tombstone. Lazarus does not come outside; he already *is* the *foras*, the outside, the exteriority of meaning absolved of its finitude. The gravestone is no longer a sign of passage, no longer a promise of insight, but a radical closure, the closure of the finite. In the mute other, my own potential is deprived of power. While “in the light of day” we may always try to begin again, always try to penetrate things once more, we suddenly come up against a wall or a face that keeps us in its spell and throws us back on our radical passivity:

If we stare at a face, at a corner of a wall, do we not abandon ourselves to what we see, are we not at its mercy, without power before this strangely mute and passive presence? It's true, but it is because what we are staring at has collapsed into its own image, because the image has returned to this ground of impotence into which everything relapses. (*EL* 343)

Being caught in the fascination of the image is based on the precedence of the *there is* before every *I can*. The experience of this presence, which holds one captive without itself ever being tangible, is the experience of the literary. Only because the image deprives doing of its power can we speak of literature as the space of images. This is why, at the end of the introduction to *The Space of Literature*, Blanchot narrows the question of literature to the question of the image – just as Heidegger once narrowed the question of the metaphysics of presence to the question of the image. The differences however are striking. Where Heidegger saw the creative imagination as the possibility of rescuing philosophy from *The Age of the World Picture*,¹⁹ in which the world has become a mere image, Blanchot demands that this reversal in poetic space be even more radical. Where Heidegger thinks he hears the setting-to-work of truth in art, Blanchot sees art as the experience of errancy.

What happens to the image in literary language? The notion of the figurativeness of poetic language is easily misunderstood. Poetry does not create metaphors or allegories; to be precise, poetry does not, in Blanchot's view, contain a single image. It is rather the world that has become an image in poetry (cf. *LV* 25). The images of poetic language do not refer to any outside, rather they are their own exteriority, an image of the image,

an image of language (and not a pictorial language), or an imagined language, a language no one speaks, that is, a language that speaks itself from its own absence, just as the image appears upon

the absence of the thing; a language that is directed at the shadow of events, not at their reality, by the fact that the words that express them are not signs but images, images of words and words in which things become images. (EL 32)

But does one not run the risk when making language into its own image of repeating the old notion that the image comes “after the thing”? The appendix to *The Space of Literature* entitled “Two Versions of the Imaginary” takes up this problem: “‘After’ signifies that the thing has to distance itself before it can be seized again” (EL 343). By insisting on the becoming-image of the thing, Blanchot continues Heidegger’s notion of the distance that undermines the *stans* of standing face-to-face. But for Heidegger the distance (*Entfernung*) is temporary, since it is always already *Ent-Fernung*, the abolition of distance (*Ferne*). For Blanchot on the other hand, “distance is here at the heart of the matter” (EL 343). The thing that we “seize in the living movement of a performance of comprehension” is, by virtue of becoming an image, made into “the unseizable, the inactual, the impassive, not the same thing at a distance but that thing as distance” (EL 343). The image is not a living representative of something momentarily absent, but a “recurrence of that which does not return” (EL 343). Elsewhere Blanchot makes use of Bachelard’s distinction (borrowed from Minkowski) between the *resonance* and the *resounding* of the image.²⁰ The image can never be an echo of what is known (resonance), but on the contrary effects a stepping outside of itself (resounding) (EI 470). Against this background it becomes clear why Blanchot gives as an example of his concept of the image something that is considerably removed from the way it is commonly understood. It is an example that strongly reminds us of Heidegger.

“The image, the bare corpse” (EL 343) – the image is the corpse (*la dépouille*), bared (*dépouillé*). The corpse is not an image Blanchot introduces in order to illustrate his concept, rather his example undoes the understanding of the image itself: “The image, at first glance, does not resemble the cadaver, but it could be that the cadaveric strangeness is also that of the image” (EL 344). The experience is uncanny as, literally, the suspension of the familiar. The dead person is there and at the same time neither down here nor up there, neither here nor anywhere else: “The cadaveric presence establishes a relation between here and nowhere” (EL 344). While the sight of the corpse de-places the viewer, the corpse remains irrevocably *here*. Only grudgingly is the corpse moved somewhere else; the dead person monopolizes the space, and fills it with his absence. Although the corpse has approached the condition of a thing as much as possible – it is spread out on the death bed, prepared – and although the dead person has become pure passivity, he seems to have absolute free-

dom of movement and the ability to paralyse the power of the living. At the site of death all everyday activities cease. Just as a damaged tool becomes an image of itself because it no longer disappears into utility and thus can *appear* as itself for the first time, so the dead person is an image of himself – an image in which the impossibility-of-work (*désœuvrement*) of the image *appears*. The appearance of the damaged (*abîmé*) is unbearable because it tears open an abyss (*abîme*): Behind the appearance there is nothing left to hark back to. One cannot tarry in the bare exteriority of the damaged one, but every promise of a place beyond it is denied. The corpse troubles the home (*la demeure*), because to remain (*demeurer*) in the abode is no longer permitted. The corpse is uncanny since the dead has no place; the appearance of the dead is a visitation (*Heimsuchung*), and no here can be a home any longer. Blanchot writes: “the cadaver may be peacefully laying in state, but it is still everywhere in the room and in the house” (*EL* 348), just as in Poe’s *The Fall of the House of Usher*,²¹ where the dead roams around, takes away the breath of the living and condemns the house to ruin. Unable to remain in its own place, the cadaver is errant (*irrit*). Everything about the corpse is restless, wandering (*irrend*), erroneous (*irrig*). The concept of errancy (*Irre*) is shared by both Blanchot and Heidegger. Heidegger employs it in *Of the Essence of Truth* in order to emphasize that the search for truth always implies a wandering (*Irren*) in error (*Irrtum*).²² Blanchot on the other hand raises erring to the truth of the image, to the truth of literature. Literature does not create a place for us to stay, instead we always find ourselves on its shores, at its edge.

The sight of the corpse breaks through the relation of similarity – I cannot recognize the deceased in that frozen, mask-like face. Paradoxically however, the deceased returns at the very moment the interpersonal relationship is severed, and begins “to resemble himself” (*EL* 346). But is ‘himself’ not the wrong expression? Would it not be better to say ‘similar to who he was while alive’? Yet Blanchot means exactly what he says. Not until the dead person becomes an impersonal, anonymous neuter does he come to resemble himself. At the moment the self resembles itself, it moves into the dangerous zone of the neuter, where it is lost (*verirrt*) in itself like its own spirit, a ghost, a *revenant* that survives itself and only continues to have an effect in its own return.²³ The perishing of human existence, bared in the corpse, thus does not mark an existential caesura, but a continuous postponement of the end. Against “certain contemporary philosophies” (by this designation Blanchot always means Heidegger), which see in the finitude of existence the possibility of understanding and the self-resolution of truth – “as if the choice between death as the possibility of understanding and death as the horror of impossibility also had to be the

choice between sterile truth and the verbosity of the non-true" (EL 351) – death for Blanchot is never the end, but rather the impossibility of the end and thus of all "resolution." Death is unavoidable and yet unapproachable, in the face of death "I do not die, I am deprived of the power of dying, in death one dies and one does not cease dying" (EL 202). Death constantly remains something external without ever becoming an authentic experience. The image would then be another name for exteriority, and exteriority another name for the image.

IV

Wherein then does the image as exteriority differ from Heidegger's concept of the image? In Heidegger's analyses of Kant, his decisive move is to oppose the metaphysics of presence, which culminates in the representation for a self (or a representation of a self for itself), with the temporality of the imagination. (The Kant book, which combines the temporal dimension of *Dasein* with the hermeneutics of the historical tradition, should therefore not be seen as a preparatory work to *Being and Time*, but as the announced but never completed second part of the magnum opus). The example of the death mask allows Heidegger to break through the notion of adequation, according to which the representation resembles the represented. The countenance of the dead person reveals something irretrievably distant, which is nevertheless given to me. The structure of this "self-engendering" (*sichzeitigenden*) giving is essentially a temporal structure, diametrically opposed to the immediacy of the present. From "something is present [to me]" to "something is given" (*es gibt*), Heidegger transforms egology into a phenomenology of anonymously appearing being. That which is hidden and distant actually becomes present with the event of givenness (*es gibt*), in that the event is not only "current events" but an actual en-owning (*Er-eignis*). At the sight of the death mask, *Dasein* comes into itself as finite existence.

At first glance, Blanchot seems to revert to the metaphysics of presence castigated by Heidegger. Nothing appears on the countenance of the dead person; it rather represents the end of every appearance and the return to the irrevocable immanence of a naked presence. The presence Blanchot is aiming at however hardly resembles the traditional idea of representation: It is not a presence a subject has at his disposal because he produced it himself (*pro ducere*, to place in front of oneself), but nor is it a Heideggerian coming-into-the-present of a distance as the here and now of a given. In Blanchot's writing nothing is ever "given," there persists rather something like an insistence of un-giveability. The corpse is not given, but

im-mediate in that it cannot appear as a medium.

No one has more thoroughly gauged the profound rift that divides the – in many ways akin – figures of Heidegger and Blanchot, than the person who himself always stood between the two: Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas was able to show that Heidegger and Blanchot first differ in the position they each give to exteriority. Heidegger discovered that with an issue “external” to the classical philosophical discourse (the problem of the image) he was able to unhinge the Western tradition. If representation is based on immediacy, then the event of giving introduces a constitutive *distance* into thinking. Except that Heidegger’s thinking, as subversive as it appears, remains for Levinas subject to a thinking of domination. The appearance, as distant as it may be, as much as it removes me from myself, remains an appearance *for me*: “By appearing, the most foreign stranger, the strangest thing, already gives power something to hold onto, and submits itself to me.”²⁴ Despite all its distance, Heidegger’s thinking remains a thinking of *staying*.

Blanchot on the other hand does not remove exteriority to an elsewhere, but withdraws it from any localizability. This is why Levinas sees Blanchot as the thinker of the nomadic *par excellence*, for whom literature is less an exile than an exhibition of man’s basic disposition in an exiled existence. The “Heideggerian universe,” which remains a foundational thinking regardless of the late Heidegger’s assertions, becomes “uprooted” in Blanchot.²⁵ What is left is a nomadic, “placeless sojourn” in the desert, a sojourning where the difference between night and day becomes blurred. The literary work does not dis-cover the truth, but on the contrary lays bare an essential darkness, the darkness of errancy. As Blanchot writes, “before the obscurity of which art reminds us, just as before death, the ‘I’ as the support of power dissolves into an anonymous ‘one’ on an earth of peregrination.”²⁶ This exteriority, into which the reader is abducted, is no longer the reverse of an inside; it is not a night that belongs to and follows upon a day, but a “second night” (*EL* 220-4), totally detached from any illumination. In this second night – the space of the “second death” and of the corpse’s double – truth no longer develops in the dark, rather the darkness itself turns out to be that which no longer shines. Michel Foucault, who first summed up Blanchot’s writing as a “thought of the outside,” also read this movement as a disempowerment of the classical thinking of the image. The thought of the outside “must no longer be a power that tirelessly produces images and makes them shine, but rather a power that undoes them, that lessens their overload.”²⁷

Heidegger and Blanchot’s diagnoses would thus initially seem to be related (denunciations of an age of the depicting world image), but their

proposals turn out to be antinomically opposed. In that very year in which Blanchot adjoins a fragment from *Awaiting Oblivion* to Heidegger's *Festschrift*, he publishes the article "The End of Philosophy" in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*.²⁸ Every movement of transgression necessarily hypostatizes what it tries to overcome, missing real exteriority. Transcending metaphysics thus becomes a movement of its preservation. "The truth is: we don't want to lose anything."²⁹ In such a perspective, Heidegger is the last representative of such a preserving thought. The discovery of the death masks became for Heidegger a starting point from which to bring forth an unseen life from under the frozen image of the past. Blanchot on the other hand strove to reach the point at which all image production, all imagination is brought to a stop.

In Benkard's book, Heidegger is struck by Pascal's death mask, in which perception separates itself from similarity in order to move closer to the concept (of fear, of pain). Blanchot, on the other hand, is riveted by the death mask with which Benkard concludes his book: the only anonymous mask, of a young girl drowned in the Seine, the so-called *Unknown Girl from the Seine*. In one of his last writings Blanchot mentions that he had hanging over his desk in Èze in the south of France this photograph of the impersonal and yet so immediately moving countenance of death.³⁰ The unknown girl reflects neither the universal concept nor any personal individuality into Blanchot's writing of the blank neuter, this neuter Blanchot had discovered in his university thesis on the philosophy of the sceptics. In ancient scepticism, the equivalence (*isosthenia*) of the forces leads to the zero-point of neither-nor (*ne...uter*), in which the forces neutralize each other and can neither be said (*dire*) nor contradicted (*contredire*). All that is left is destitution (*dédire*) of discourse itself.

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NOTES

¹ Maurice Blanchot, "Notre compagne clandestine", in *Textes pour Emmanuel Lévinas*, ed. F. Laruelle (Paris : Jean-Michel Place 1980), pp. 79-87, here p. 80. My English translation differs slightly from the translation by David Allison: "A clandestine companion", in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard E. Cohen (Albany: SUNY Press), p. 42.

² Cf. Georges Didi-Huberman, "De ressemblance à ressemblance," in *Maurice Blanchot: Récits critiques*, eds. C. Bident and P. Vilar (Paris: Farrago/Scheer, 2004), pp. 143-67. Raymond Bellour, "L'image", in *ibid*, pp. 133-42. Manola Antonioli,

- "Imaginaire et mimésis" in *L'Écriture de Maurice Blanchot: Fiction et théorie* (Paris: Kimé, 1999), pp. 70-94. Laure Himy, "Imaginaire", *Maurice Blanchot: La solitude habitée* (Paris: Bertrand-Lacoste, 1997), pp. 22-35. Annelise Schulte-Nordholt, "L'écriture, expérience de l'imaginaire", *Maurice Blanchot: L'écriture comme expérience du dehors* (Geneva: Droz, 1995), pp. 193-225.
- ³ Jean-Luc Nancy, "L'imagination masque", *Au fond des images* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), pp. 147-79.
- ⁴ This parallel has been highlighted by Nancy himself in a footnote to *Au fond*, p. 168.
- ⁵ Ernst Benckard, *Das ewige Antlitz: Eine Sammlung von Totenmasken*, with a foreword by G. Kolbe (Berlin: Frankfurter Verlängsanstalt, 1926) [Engl. edition: *Undying faces. A collection of death masks from the 15th century to the present day* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929)].
- ⁶ Richard Langer, *Totenmasken* (Leipzig: Thieme, 1927).
- ⁷ Egon Friedell, *Das letzte Gesicht*, ed. E. Schaeffer (Leipzig-Düsseldorf: Orell Füssli, 1929).
- ⁸ Jacques Derrida, "Lui laisser le dernier mot", *Magazine littéraire*, 424 (October 2003).
- ⁹ We deliberately translate "Freilegung" (the hermeneutical effort to let the phenomenon come out into its plenitude) with *laying patent* to emphasize the difference with Blanchot's *laying bare* ("dépouiller").
- ¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Logik: Die Frage nach der Wahrheit, Gesamtausgabe* vol. 21, 1925/26 (Frankfurt/M: Klostermann, 1995) All translations of Heidegger as well as Blanchot are mine.
- ¹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Victor Lyle Dowdell, rev. Hans H. Rudnick (London and Amsterdam: Southern Illinois U. P., 1978), § 28.
- ¹² Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik, Gesamtausgabe* vol. 3 (Frankfurt/M: Klostermann, 1991), p. 280.
- ¹³ Nancy, *Au fond*, p. 164 ff.
- ¹⁴ Heidegger, *Logik*, p. 361.
- ¹⁵ Heidegger, *Logik*, p. 361.
- ¹⁶ Elias Canetti, *Die Fackel im Ohr: Lebensgeschichte 1921-1931* (Munich-Vienna: Hanser, 1980), p. 273, my translation.
- ¹⁷ Heidegger, *Logik*, p. 362.
- ¹⁸ Blanchot, "L'attente", in *Martin Heidegger zum siebzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. G. Neske (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959), p. 224.
- ¹⁹ Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture", in *The Question Concerning Technology and other Essays*, trans. W. Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).
- ²⁰ Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace* (Paris: PUF, 1957), p. 2.
- ²¹ Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, 1839, *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. T. O. Mabbot, vol. I, *Tales* (Cambridge: Belknap Press,

1978).

²² Heidegger, "Vom Wesen der Wahrheit" (1931/32), in *Wegmarken, Gesamtausgabe* vol. 9 (Frankfurt/M: Klostermann, 1967), pp. 177-203.

²³ Cf. Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante: Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: Minuit, 2002).

²⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Sur Maurice Blanchot* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1975), p. 13.

²⁵ Levinas, *Blanchot*, p. 25.

²⁶ Levinas, *Blanchot*, p. 22.

²⁷ Michel Foucault, "The Thought from Outside," in *Foucault/Blanchot*, ed. J. Mehlman and B. Massumi (New York: Zone Books, 1990), p. 23.

²⁸ Blanchot, "La fin de la philosophie", *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 81 (1959), pp. 286-98.

²⁹ Blanchot, "La fin de la philosophie", p. 297.

³⁰ Blanchot, *Une voix venue d'ailleurs* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), p.15. One could ask whether the *Inconnue de la Seine* was the model for the photography of the drowned girl shown to Sorge (another Heideggerian name!), the protagonist of *Le Très-Haut* (TH 41).