
INTRODUCTION

In 1971 Maurice Blanchot published a major collection of essays regrouped and, in some cases, revised, under the title *L'Entretien infini*. *L'Entretien infini* announces the project of “une parole plurielle,” “plural speech” and puts the project into practise in its use of numerous strategies to introduce multiplicity into writing—the dialogue, the fragment, multiple typefaces—all forms of disruption, interruption and discontinuity. The fragmentary is the one of these forms that Blanchot develops the furthest in the two works that follow *L'Entretien infini*: *The Step Not Beyond*, published in French in 1973, and *The Writing of the Disaster*, published in 1980 (English translation by Ann Smock, University of Nebraska Press, 1986). To understand the place of *The Step Not Beyond* in Blanchot’s work, we must see it as the culmination of a long development in Blanchot’s thought centering around three major ideas: the fragment, the neuter, and the Eternal Return. This development can be traced through *L'Entretien infini*, particularly in such essays as “Sur un changement d’époque: l’exigence du retour,” “Nietzsche et l’écriture fragmentaire” and “Parole de fragment.” *The Writing of the Disaster* follows *The Step Not Beyond* in its use of the fragment and of different typefaces. Blanchot’s use of the fragment is part of the overall project of *L'Entretien infini* to find a language that is truly multiple and that does not attempt to achieve closure.

Blanchot’s first use of the fragmentary in a full-length work is in *L'Attente l’oubli* (1962), another pivotal text in his work as a whole. It is at once the first full-length fragmentary work and the last that can be characterized as fiction. What

distinguishes Blanchot's use of the fragment in *L'Attente l'oubli* from his more developed use of it in *The Step Not Beyond* and *The Writing of the Disaster* is that its use in the later texts seems to arise out of a much more marked necessity in his own thought resulting from his readings of Nietzsche, and particularly of the idea of the Eternal Return.

The fragment is, in the first place, a challenge to unified, systematic thought. Françoise Collin notes in her preface to the second edition of *Maurice Blanchot et la question de l'écriture*,

Since the first edition of this book [1971] there have been displacements of themes and of forms in the work of Maurice Blanchot, but not ruptures. Thus, reflection has taken the place of fiction, and has gone further and further away from commentary without moving away from dialogue. It has developed itself more and more in the form of the fragment—in the form of the archipelago—thus affirming all the more its resistance to totality and the system.¹

Roger Laporte also remarks a change in Blanchot's writing beginning with *L'Attente l'oubli* and finding its achievement in *Le pas au-delà*. He writes,

L'Attente l'oubli, a transitional work, marks the end of the novels and récits . . . Thus begins a third epoch marked by the publication of two major works: *Le pas au-delà* . . . and *L'écriture du désastre*. . . In the same work alternate texts called "fictional" (but fictional in a sense that no longer has anything to do with the novelistic), texts printed in italics, and the texts in which literature—before I would have said "writing"—with its dramas, its stakes, its intrigue, its enigmas, bares itself . . . —task not vain, but impossible, as if in literature there were very little question of literature, but always of something else.²

As Laporte points out, both *The Step Not Beyond* and *The Writing of the Disaster*, while primarily theoretical fragmentary texts, have elements of fiction as well, disrupting the disruptiveness of the fragmentary even further in using multiple typefaces and multiple voices. We will see that in *The Step Not Beyond* there is a kind of *récit* that goes on within the

italicized fragments. Thus, the mixing of genres that has always characterized Blanchot's work and made it impossible to categorize continues and is further radicalized in the later texts. It is in this sense that the fragmentary texts mark a shift, but not a rupture, in Blanchot's work, as remarked by both Collin and Laporte.

If there is agreement that a change takes place in Blanchot's writing, what brings about this change? From Blanchot's own notes to the essays on Nietzsche in *L'Entretien infini*, we know that he was very much influenced by several works on Nietzsche that appeared in France in the 1960s and '70s, as well as by the writings of Jacques Derrida. Blanchot writes in a footnote at the end of "Nietzsche et l'écriture fragmentaire": "These pages are written in the margins of several recent works of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Eugen Fink, Jean Granier, and of several essays by Jacques Derrida collected under the title *Writing and Difference*."³ Another name that he mentions elsewhere as being very important in his understanding of the Eternal Return is that of Pierre Klossowski.

In the essay "Nietzsche et l'écriture fragmentaire," Blanchot explores the place of the fragment in Nietzsche's thought, as well as Nietzsche's relationship to Hegel and to traditional philosophy. Blanchot sees two contradictory tendencies in Nietzsche's thought: one toward, the other away from, systematization. While Gilles Deleuze, in *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, sees Nietzsche's relation to Hegel as oppositional, Blanchot emphasizes the necessity of the hegelian system for Nietzsche and views the ambiguity of Nietzsche's position regarding totality as the result of the impossibility of thinking apart from the system. Nietzsche's use of the fragment and the aphorism, even while attempting to oppose hegelian dialectics, represents for Blanchot a recognition that the hegelian whole has been completed. It is after the completion of the whole, in the "beyond" of philosophy, that fragmentary writing takes place.

The fragmentary does not precede the whole, but takes place *outside* the whole and after it. When Nietzsche affirms: "*Nothing exists outside the whole*" even if he means to

lessen our guilty particularity and to reject judgement, measure, negation, it is still true that he thus affirms the question of the whole as the only tenable one and thus restores the idea of totality. Dialectics, the system, thought as thought of wholeness, are given back their rights, founding philosophy as completed discourse. But when he says, "*It seems important to me that one get rid of the whole, of unity, . . . we must smash the universe to pieces, lose our respect for the Whole*", then he enters the space of the fragmentary and takes the risk of a thought that is no longer guaranteed by unity.⁴

What does it mean for fragmentary writing to come *after* the whole, that is, after the completion of time as history? Blanchot writes in *The Writing of the Disaster*, "If [fragmentary writing] claims that its time comes only after the whole—at least ideally—has been completed, this is because that time is never sure, but is the absence of time. . . ." ⁵ To understand the "after" of "after the whole", we must examine Blanchot's idea of the Eternal Return and the enormous consequences that result from it for him.

In the essay "Sur un changement d'époque: l'exigence du retour," ⁶ Blanchot gives a brief catalogue of various commentators' responses to the Eternal Return, among them those of Heidegger, Georges Bataille and Pierre Klossowski. For Heidegger, the Eternal Return and the will to power are the two central ideas in Nietzsche's thought and are completely dependent on one another. This relation is summed up, in a somewhat banalized form, in Nietzsche's famous "Will it if you can will to live it eternally", in which what seems to be at stake in the Eternal Return is the future as it is contained in the present moment.

For both Bataille and Klossowski, what is essential in the revelation of the Eternal Return is the revelation itself rather than what results from it. According to Blanchot, Bataille faulted Nietzsche for having tried to develop what was really a mystic experience into a scientific doctrine. Klossowski, on the other hand, poses the question of how a doctrine of the Eternal Return is even possible if the experience of it destroys the subject in whom it occurs and marks a rupture in thought and

in time. This question has great implications for Blanchot, as he writes, "The question is developed in all its rigor, its breadth, and its authority by Pierre Klossowski. It is not only Nietzsche who receives new justice from this investigation, but through it, what is decided is a change so radical that we are incapable of mastering it, or even of suffering it."⁷

In Blanchot's understanding of the Eternal Return, the loss of identity of the subject occupies a central place. In *The Step Not Beyond* he develops at length the relation of the neuter, or neutral, to fragmentary writing and the Eternal Return. The essential feature of the neuter in Blanchot's overall critique of the idea of presence as all is its displacement of the subject in writing, which ultimately displaces the whole notion of the subject as the locus of self-presence. Beginning from the neuter, Blanchot displaces first the subject, then identity in general, and finally the present itself.

The neuter, or what Blanchot calls in *The Step Not Beyond* *le "il"*, the "he/it," taking the place of the subject in writing, detaches it from any relation to unity, displacing this relation in substituting for the I, always attached to a place, the he/it which is without place. The he/it can never be a speaking subject, can never have the presence of an I. The neuter displaces the subject as a rule of identity by introducing rupture into the idea of the self as presence and self-presence. If the he/it can substitute for any I, then the I is not full, living presence, but only "a canonic abbreviation for a rule of identity." Blanchot asks: if he/it replaces the I, does it not become only another I, still determined by identity? Or does it, on the other hand, put itself in dialectical opposition to the One, "therefore including itself conveniently in the whole"? The neuter maintains the law of identity unless, Blanchot answers,

. . . he/it, specified as the indeterminate term in order that the self in turn might determine itself as the major determinant, the never-subjected subject, is the very *relation* of the self to the other, in this sense: infinite or discontinuous, in this sense: relation always in displacement and in displacement in regard to itself, displacement also of that which would be without place. (SNB,5)

In this relation the I is forced to accept itself, “not only as hypothetical, even fictional, but as a canonic abbreviation, representing the law of the same, fractured in advance . . .” (SNB,6)

The Eternal Return of the Same says that the same will return to the same. If the same is always displaced in relation to itself, however, there is no place to which it could return. The same, in the form of the self, occurs as present to itself, but, in Blanchot’s formulation of the return, there is no present in which the self could be present. It is in this sense that Blanchot’s thought of the return is radical in its departure from that of other commentators. What is terrifying about the Eternal Return is not that what I live now I will live eternally, but that there is not, and never has been, any now in which to live anything.

To think the Eternal Return, one must think time as an infinite recurrence of finitude, but if the return is eternal, the circulation it brings about is never circulation of the same—a full present—but only repetition without origin. The law of the return tells us that in the future will recur what has occurred, not in the present, but in the past, since everything that can happen has already happened. The infinity supposed by the return is not the eternity of the full present, but the infinity of rupture that the lack of the present introduces into time. Blanchot writes,

The law of the return supposing that “everything” would come again, seems to take time as completed: the circle out of circulation of all circles; but, in as much as it breaks the ring in its middle, it proposes a time not uncompleted, a time, on the contrary, finite, except in the present point that alone we think we hold, and that, lacking, introduces rupture into infinity, making us live as in a state of perpetual death. (SNB,12)

The impossibility of thinking the Eternal Return arises from the necessity of thinking time as both finite and infinite in order to think it. One must think time as completed in order to think the Eternal Return. However, if time can only realize itself in the fullness of presence, time can never be

completed if the present is lacking. The circulation of the return becomes a circulation of a rupture always contained in the time of the circulation—an absent moment that creates a supplement of time. The completed time of Hegel gets recirculated in Nietzsche's Eternal Return, but in that very circulation it can never be thought of as fully realized. When Blanchot says that Nietzsche can only come after Hegel, but that "it is always before and always after Hegel that he comes and that he comes again," he expresses the complete paradox of the Eternal Return.

Nietzsche, (if his name serves to name the law of the Eternal Return) and Hegel (if his name invites us to think presence as all and the all as presence) allow us to sketch a mythology: Nietzsche can only come after Hegel, but it is always before and always after Hegel that he comes and comes again. Before: since, even though it is thought as absolute, presence has never gathered in itself the realized totality of knowledge; presence knows itself . . . only as a present unsatisfied practically, unreconciled with presence as all; thus is not Hegel only a pseudo-Hegel? And Nietzsche always comes after because the law he brings supposes the completion of time as present and in this completion its absolute destruction, such that the Eternal Return . . . freeing the future of any present and the past of any presence, shatters thought up to this infinite affirmation: in the future will return infinitely what in no form and never could be present, in the same way that, in the past, that which in the past never belonged in any form to the present has returned (SNB,22)

What is left of time when the present is taken out of it? We would seem to be left with one time that repeats itself over and over—not two modalities of time that repeat and anticipate one another, but only one. Yet we cannot think past and future as identical without presence. The future, in repeating the past, is never identical to it, says Blanchot, "even if they are the same." Past and future are not interchangeable, but disjunct.

The Eternal Return marks time as ruptured and leaves the point of rupture unbridged and unbridgeable. It intro-

duces a time that disrupts all of thought's tendencies to unity and totalization. Fragmentary writing, as discontinuous and disruptive, corresponds to this time and responds to the demand of the return. The relation of fragmentary writing to the whole becomes clearer in the context of the Eternal Return. Fragmentary writing occurs when knowledge becomes uncertain of itself, when the past cannot become present to consciousness. While it should know everything, because everything that can happen has already happened, it can know nothing actually. As Walter Benjamin observes in comparing mechanized labor to gambling, in any repetitive act, knowledge and experience are useless, since one can learn nothing from one throw of the dice or one turn of the machine to the next. When the future repeats the past without the intermediary of the present, the past becomes useless for knowledge. Knowledge takes on the structure of the phrase repeated several times in *The Step Not Beyond*: "I don't know, but I have the feeling that I am going to have known," spoken both in the future and in the past, as both a prophecy and a memory (I remembered this phrase: "I don't know, but have the feeling that I am going to have known."), but never as present knowledge.

The rupture of the present created by the Eternal Return frees writing from any dependence on speech as presence by destroying the foundation that presence would supposedly provide for it. Without this foundation, it no longer plays the role of follower to speech. Writing responds to the demand of the return because, as Blanchot has insisted throughout his theoretical work, writing never begins, but is always beginning again. The time of the Eternal Return is the time of writing, which will be read in the future and will have been written in the past.

The demand of the return would then be the demand of a time without present, time that would also be that of writing, future time, past time, which the radical disjunction of one from the other, even if they are the same, keeps from identifying other than as the difference repetition brings. (SNB,16)

Blanchot moves, through his thinking of the Eternal Return, towards an idea of writing as difference. The Eternal Return is repetition, not of the same, but of difference, a point which Gilles Deleuze makes quite explicitly: “. . . identity in the eternal return does not designate the nature of what comes again, but, on the contrary, the fact of coming again for that which differs.”⁸ Blanchot has, since his earliest writings, repeated the idea that writing is repetition without origin. Through the Eternal Return he arrives at the idea of repetition as the repetition of difference, and of writing as difference. Blanchot writes in “Nietzsche et l’écriture fragmentaire”:

One can suppose that if thought in Nietzsche needed force conceived as “*play of forces and waves of forces*” to think plurality and to think difference . . . this is because it supports the suspicion that difference is movement, or, more exactly, that it determines the time and the becoming in which it inscribes itself, as the Eternal Return would make us think that difference is experienced as repetition and that repetition is difference. Difference is not an intemporal rule, the fixity of law. It is . . . space in as much as it “*spaces itself and disseminates itself*” and time: not the directed homogeneity of becoming, but becoming when “*it scands itself, signifies itself*”, interrupts itself, and, in this interruption, does not continue, but dis-continues itself; from which we must conclude that difference, play of time and space, is the silent play of relations . . . that regulates writing, which is to affirm bravely that difference, essentially, writes.⁹

Blanchot’s references to the writings of Jacques Derrida are evident here. Blanchot uses certain Derridean ideas to make his own thought more precise, as we will see in his use of the notion of the trace in *The Step Not Beyond*. While he uses many of the same terms as Derrida, there are marked divergences in his use of them.

Without going through the whole history of the notion of the trace as it is used first by Emmanuel Levinas and then by Derrida,¹⁰ let us look briefly at what Levinas and Derrida define the trace to be. Levinas defines the trace in “The Trace of the Other” as the trace of “. . . that which properly speaking

has never been there, of what is always past.”¹¹ The trace in Levinas is related quite specifically to a transcendent being, to an other who is absolutely other. It is Levinas’ trace which, “reconciled to a Heideggerian intention” signifies for Derrida “. . . the undermining of an ontology which, in its innermost course, has determined the meaning of being as presence and the meaning of language as speech.”¹²

In the essay “Différance,” Derrida articulates the relationship of the trace to the arche–trace and of the arche–trace to the impossibility of an originary presence. What is constitutive of the trace for Derrida, as for Levinas, is its erasure. While Derrida poses the problem of how anything could ever have been present in an originary way through the trace and the arche–trace, Blanchot approaches the impossibility of an originary presence through the Eternal Return and places the trace within the time of the return. Blanchot introduces the trace thus:

Effaced before being written. If the word trace can be admitted, it is as the index that would indicate as erased what was, however, never traced. All our writing . . . would be this: the anxious search for what was never written in the present, but in a past to come. (SNB,17)

The trace signifies for Blanchot, as for Derrida, the lack of an origin, because the trace never refers back to an original marking. Blanchot distinguishes the trace from the mark.

. . . writing marks, but does not leave marks. More precisely, there is between mark and traces such a difference that it almost accounts for the equivocal nature of writing. Writing marks and leaves traces, but the traces do not depend on the mark, and, at the limit, are not in relation to it. (SNB,53)

While Roger Laporte hazards the suggestion that the mark in Blanchot, the trace in Levinas, and the arche–trace in Derrida all refer to the same thing,¹³ it is hard to read this in Blanchot’s use of the terms “mark” and “trace”. When he says, for instance,

The mark, it is to be missing from the present and to make the present lack. And the trace, being always traces, does

not refer to any initial presence that would still be there as remainder or vestige, there where it has disappeared. (SNB,54)

there is nothing of Derrida's idea of the trace as constitutive of the present. What Blanchot really insists on in his use of the trace is the idea of writing as effacement, as opposed to the traditional idea that writing preserves what would otherwise disappear. He begins his discussion of the trace with the haunting claim, "Everything will efface itself, everything must efface itself."¹⁴ In fact, it seems that one of the aims of the fragmentary is to make writing efface itself all the more definitively. The lack of continuity between the past and the future means a forgetting that writing, rather than preserving anything against it, only exacerbates.

Writing is not destined to leave traces, but to erase, by traces, all traces, to disappear in the fragmentary space of writing more definitely than one disappears in the tomb . . . (SNB,50)

One of the uses of the idea of the trace to which Derrida refers, in addition to Levinas' and Nietzsche's, is Freud's. For Freud, the trace is the mark of difference as it can be seen by the existence of memory. For Blanchot, the trace seems to have more to do with forgetting than with remembering, ". . . as if between past and future, the absence of present ruled in the simplified form of forgetfulness." (SNB,16)

The trace takes on a particular significance in *The Step Not Beyond* when seen in its relation to the *pas* of the title *Le pas au-delà*, which refers to a whole series of ideas common in Blanchot's thought: the thought of the limit, prohibition and transgression, the negation of negation, which Derrida analyzes in his essay "Pas". The trace is at once tracing and effacement, the *pas* at once prohibition and transgression. Blanchot writes in *The Writing of the Disaster*, "Passivity, passion, past, *pas* (at once negation and the trace or movement of an advance), this semantic play gives us the slippage of meaning, but nothing that we could trust as an answer that would satisfy us."¹⁵ In "Pas," Derrida looks at the dissemination and in-

terrelation of two words in Blanchot's work: *viens* and *pas*. He focuses on the dissemination of the *pas* in the title *Le pas au-delà*, the work going by that name, and Blanchot's work as a whole (the word or the sound "pas" appears in several of Blanchot's titles: *Faux pas*, *Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas*, *L'Espace littéraire*, *La part du feu*).

Derrida asks, speaking of the title, "How would you translate this displacement, this play of words and of things, I mean, into another language?"¹⁶ The *pas* presents problems in translation not only because its meaning is double and its use in the phrase *le pas au-delà* ambiguous, but also because, as Derrida points out, the play is not just a play of words, but of words and things. The possibilities for translating the whole title are actually quadruple, since both *pas* and *au-delà* can be taken either as nouns or adverbs (*pas* is both a step and part of the negative adverb *ne-pas*; *au-delà* means "beyond," but also occurs as "l'au-delà," the beyond); the meaning of the entire phrase changes depending on the semantic function of each of its parts. However one chooses to translate *pas*, it is impossible to preserve the two meanings *at once*, although the simultaneity of meanings in the same word is important in preserving the sense of prohibition and transgression occurring at the same time. As the trace is effaced as it is written, so the *pas* both creates and erases the limit in its crossing. This is perhaps even more clear in the use of the phrase *faux pas* (false step) and its homonym *faut pas* (do not, you must not). Because of the double meaning of *pas*, every step becomes a false step.

The phrase *le pas au-delà* appears within the text both as *le pas au-delà* and as *le "pas au-delà,"* the first seeming to refer to the step, and the second to its injunction. However, as Derrida points out, one can never tell exactly what the quotation marks in the phrase *le "pas au-delà"* refer to, nor when this phrase is being cited even where there are no quotation marks. The relation between signifier and signified is very ambiguous—is what is signified in *le "pas au-delà"* a phrase or a thing?—made doubly ambiguous both by the quotation marks and by the definite article, which makes the prohibi-

tion *pas au-delà* (not beyond, do not go beyond) into a substantive.

Derrida warns against taking the *pas* only in its function of negating, even if this is understood to be non-dialectical. Among several reasons he gives for not doing so, the most important is that:

. . . in isolating . . . the logical or semantic function of the *ne-pas*, in separating it . . . both from the semantic of the "pas" of walking and from the non-semantic (contaminations, anomalies, delirium, etc.) one forbids oneself all that leads the problematic of logic, of dialectic, of meaning, the being of the entity (philosophy and its *pas au-delà*, thought) towards a coming of the event (as distancing of the near) [Ereignis, Entfernung, Enteignis] "before" which philosophy and its *pas au-delà*, thought, forces itself, without ever succeeding, to close itself.¹⁷

Philosophy demands a beyond, a point of totalization, of completion and closure. The *pas* does not simply negate such a possibility, but puts into question the possibility of negation necessary for closure to be accomplished. How can this *pas* ever produce closure if it sets up a limit to be crossed even in prohibiting its crossing?

The step beyond is never completed, or, if it is completed, is never beyond. Transgression never really transgresses, but only calls for another limit.

The circle of the law is this: there must be a crossing in order for there to be a limit, but only the limit, in as much as uncrossable, summons to cross, affirms the desire (the false step) that has always already, through an unforeseeable movement, crossed the line. (SNB,24)

Transgression cannot be accomplished because there is no present in which the prohibition against crossing the limit could be pronounced or in which the crossing itself could take place. Blanchot in fact suggests that the present is nothing but this line to be crossed. The strange structure of the *pas*, of prohibition and transgression, must be placed within the time

of the Eternal Return. The law presupposes a trinary time in which the prohibition is first pronounced, then recognized, then broken. As the time of the return lacks this temporal structure, the prohibition does not precede the transgression, but occurs simultaneously with it and works in such a way as to efface the limits imposed by a time structured by the present.

The transgression that is never accomplished is, primarily, dying. Blanchot looks at the kinds of prohibition that exist against dying and the kind of transgression that dying represents. Dying is a transgression against and out of time, because there is no time for dying. Dying can never be completed because it lacks the solidity of an event. It does not occur through any decisiveness or action, but only through the most passive passivity. Dying, like writing, cannot take place in the present because the limit that dying represents cannot be situated. Not only is dying in the present forbidden, but the present, as prohibited, is what prevents dying from taking place.

. . . one could affirm: it is forbidden to die *in the present*.—
“Which means also: the present does not die and there is no present for dying. It is the present that would in some way pronounce the prohibition.” . . . —“Thus a time without present would be ‘affirmed’ according to the demand of the return.”—“This is why even transgression does not accomplish itself.” (SNB,107–108)

The prohibition can never be broken by a transgressive act, which would only affirm the prohibitiveness of the prohibition. Instead it is only through the most passive passivity that the prohibition would lose its prohibitive force. Dying is the step/not beyond that is never accomplished, that one seeks to accomplish in the other, dying in the other's death. The *pas au-delà* transforms the *pas* of negation into the *pas* of patience, passion, and passivity, taking its power of negation away through the powerlessness of the unaccomplished. The *pas* of the completely passive is transgressive without accomplishing anything. Pure passivity is what is least allowed. We seek passivity in the other, by dying in the place of the other.

Dying in the other sets us free from ourselves, but does not change our relation to dying, which is anonymous, intransitive, disappropriating, and therefore without relation to any I, be it mine or the other's.

Passivity, patience, passion open the relation to the other in refusing the *pas* of the negative.

Patience opens me entirely, all the way to a passivity that is the *pas* of the utterly passive, and that has therefore abandoned the level of life where *passive* would simply be the opposite of active.¹⁸

Dying in the other is never accomplished, yet the attempt to reach the other in his death makes me in some way responsible for that death. Blanchot returns to this theme in a later work, *La communauté inavouable*, where he writes,

To maintain myself present in proximity to the other who distances himself definitively in dying, to take upon myself the death of the other as the only death that concerns me, this is what places me outside myself and is the only separation that can open me, in its impossibility, to the Open of a community.¹⁹

The relation to the other is the main focus of the italicized fragments of *The Step Not Beyond*, in which two unnamed figures speak to one another about some anonymous and very indefinite others whose approach they await. Their wait for these others is a figure for the approach of their own deaths, or death, since they attempt to die in one another's place. When "they"—these others—finally arrive, there is no time for this event, as there is no time for dying, although death has all time at its disposal. The attempt to reach the other, to die in his death, is the attempt to "go beyond." If we cannot accomplish this it is because we are never passive enough. The passivity of dying is itself a "beyond," beyond negativity and always beyond us. The limit it poses is effaced in dying itself.

When one of the figures of the italicized fragments finally dies, it is as if nothing had happened. "*He was so calm in dying that he seemed, before dying, already dead, after and forever, still alive . . . thus having effaced the limit at the mo-*

ment in which it is it that effaces.” (SNB,137) This event, however uneventful, nevertheless provides the basis for an appeal to the ethical. Whether one can take responsibility for another’s death, what it means to live or die for others, whether death is light or heavy—all of these are questions that are given meaning only by the erasure of death as a limit. All of the meaning that we give to such questions is given by the anticipation of the event of dying, and not by the event (or non-event) itself. It is only when dying is understood as the limit that is effaced “at the moment in which it is it that effaces,” that there can be an appeal to an ethics that is not weighty, that does not give death a gravity it does not have, that does not pose death as the ultimate prohibition.

NOTES

1. Françoise Collin, *Maurice Blanchot et la question de l'écriture*, Preface to the second edition, Gallimard, 1986, p. 7

2. Roger Laporte, *Maurice Blanchot: L'Ancien, l'effroyablement ancien*, Fata Morgana, 1987, note 15, p. 66

3. Maurice Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*, Gallimard, 1969, note, p. 255

4. Op. cit., p. 229

5. Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, translated by Ann Smock, University of Nebraska, 1986, pp. 59–60

6. Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*, pp. 394–418

7. Op. cit., p. 408

8. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, P.U.F., 1962, pp. 54–55

9. Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*, p. 242

10. For a discussion of the trace in Derrida and Levinas, and of Derrida’s relation to Levinas, see Robert Bernasconi, “The Trace of Levinas in Derrida” in *Derrida and Différance*, edited by David Wood and Robert Bernasconi, Northwestern University, 1988. For a detailed discussion of Derrida’s use of the trace and the archetrace see also Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, Harvard University Press, pp. 186–194

11. Emmanuel Levinas, “The Trace of the Other”, in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, edited by Mark Taylor, University of Chicago, 1986, p. 358

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12. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Spivak, Johns Hopkins, 1976, p. 7
 13. Laporte, *Maurice Blanchot: L'Ancien, l'effroyablement ancien*, note 19, p. 73
 14. This is the subject of a recent essay by Roger Laporte in the special issue of *Lignes* on Blanchot. See Laporte, "Tout doit s'effacer, tout s'effacera" in *Lignes*, no. 11, September 1990
 15. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, p. 16
 16. Derrida, *Parages*, Galilée, 1986, p. 53
 17. Ibid.
 18. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, p. 13
 19. Blanchot, *La communauté inavouable*, Editions de Minuit, 1983, p. 21