

## Editor's Introduction: Cenography

*When shall that true poet arise who, disdainng the trivialities of text,  
shall give the world a book of verse consisting entirely of margin?*

— Kenneth Grahame<sup>1</sup>

The book you are holding is an edition of Maurice Blanchot's *L'Espace littéraire*, although not a word of Blanchot's text remains.<sup>2</sup> Every page of his book has been assiduously erased by Nick Thurston. At the same time, Thurston has preserved his own marginalia, reset in the face and fonts of the original text. That distance between his reset notes and the original text, in fact, is immediately announced by his title, and part of its play; typographically, a "remove" denotes both the number of point sizes by which a side note is smaller than the main text, as well as the note itself. This book is therefore technically a work of zero remove, in which there are only removes.

Removed, the source is everything, and nothing. *Point de source*, as Jacques Derrida might write: point of origin, and absence of origin. Blanchot himself will ask: "Qu'en est-il de ce point?"<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, no longer clearly tied to particular passages in *The Space of Literature*, Thurston's glosses and scholia now gesture more toward the space of literature in general, to the page as a substrate of inscription, and they invoke the long history of reading practices that are inextricably bound to the physical dimensions of writing's material forms. The activity of reading *as* writing — acts of correction, commentary, censorship, contradiction, and all manner of dangerous supplements — is as old as writing itself, but the species of annotation recognizable to us as marginalia only materialized in the middle ages, with the increased sense of the codex page as a space for a visual text, rather than a score or cue for vocal performance.<sup>4</sup> The margins of the page have always been a funda-

mental part of the phenomenology of the codex, since they are the primary site of the reader's physical interaction with the book. Readers typically manipulate a book at the margin, holding it open, adjusting its position, keeping a place with the index finger, turning pages, 'thumbing' through. Reserved for the activities of the reader's body, the frame around the text block further encourages the reader's active participation by providing an uninked space ideal for writing entries keyed to particular printed passages. The margin of the page invites a written record of the ongoing dialogue that constitutes all reading.

The politics of that dialogue are complicated from the beginning. The annotator always has the last word, as it were, but whatever the force of that final say it always remains, quite literally, marginal. Indeed, our sense of the margin in social terms traces directly back to the space of the page, with an etymology originating in the term for the border of a writing tablet or a book. As Michael Camille observes, "the word 'margin' — from the Latin *margoinis*, meaning edge, border, frontier — only became current with the wider availability of writing."<sup>5</sup> Moreover, from the very beginning the margin has always harbored a sense of writing; the word ultimately derives from the same Indo-European base as *mark*, relating the margin not only to boundaries but also to memorials, traces, and inscriptions.

Marginal inscriptions, in all senses of the word, have had a long literary history, and Thurston's book is only one remove from a number of other works in several genres, from the collections of unsynthesized scholarly commentaries known since the Renaissance as *adversaria scripta* to the many modern editions of marginal annotations published as literary collections in their own right, including well known examples by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Horace Walpole, Hester Lynch (Thrale) Piozzi, Charles Darwin, and E. A. Poe.<sup>6</sup> Transforming manuscript into print, such publications place an emphasis on the distribution of writing, taking advantage of mass print production to disseminate once putatively private and occasional inscriptions as established public texts, ready to receive their own annotations in turn. However, since it is published as an artists book, *Reading the Remove of Literature* may be closer to more aestheticized versions of the genre, such as William Blake's annotations to Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses* and Emanuel Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Divine Providence*; separated from the sources that pro-

voked them and taken on their own, Blake's marginalia read like nothing so much as one of his best poems. One might also recall Susan Howe's poem "Melville's Marginalia," based in part on the marginal notations to her copy of Wilson Walker Cowen's eponymous 1965 Harvard dissertation.<sup>7</sup> For all the affinities, Thurston's book is set apart from these works by its distinctive layout. With a spatial design based on the pages of the originally annotated book, Thurston's edition recalls Roland McHugh's *Annotations to Finnegans Wake*, in which entries are keyed to passages in Joyce's book by their position on the page (and which reads on its own like a post-modern novel). Moreover, with the notes arrayed around the evacuated text block of Blanchot's book, *Reading the Remove of Literature* takes its place in a small but remarkable group of artists' books that purport to present footnotes to absent texts, offering largely blank pages and notes keyed to empty space.<sup>8</sup> But the central texts which those books claim to annotate are almost always fictional; *Reading the Remove of Literature* distinguishes itself — *point de source* — by removing an actual text.

In this respect, the closest analogue to Thurston's book may be Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing*. Which is just that. Rauschenberg had persuaded the reluctant Willem de Kooning to give him a drawing which he could then erase. Executed in 1953, it restages an exemplary Dadaist performance in which André Breton erased the lines of a picture as soon as Francis Picabia could draw them. Following their antics, which emphasized the theatricality of the performance and the absurdity of its negating activity, no visual documentation was retained. In contrast, the product of Rauschenberg's activity has been carefully preserved. To be sure, Rauschenberg's work is also best remembered for its audacious conceptual gesture, but the details of the resulting object are even more instructive. The erased drawing is far from simply a blank sheet of paper. As Rauschenberg left it, the surface bears traces of ink and crayon, with a shadow of de Kooning's drawing still clearly visible. Indeed, the work insists on the originating conceptual gesture by documenting not its accomplishment, but its incompleteness (a more accurate title, following the model of Robert Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed*, would be *Partially Erased de Kooning Drawing*).

In one of the vignettes he liked to repeat, Rauschenberg's friend John Cage recalls: "One day when I was studying with Schoenberg, he pointed out the eraser on his pencil and said, 'This end is more important than the other.'"<sup>9</sup> Although the lesson is ostensibly one of aesthetic economy, Cage might also have been thinking of Rauschenberg's work, where the eraser is not only more important than the lead, but also quite similar. Above all, Rauschenberg's work reveals that erasure is itself a kind of drawing. The sheet is both smoothed and scuffed with the rich *faktura* of the erasers' abrasion across the thin skin of the paper's pored and mole-flecked flesh. As Rauschenberg must have realized, the very act of removing the pigments from de Kooning's sketch resulted in new markings, and so the attempt to eliminate the image creates a bind: further erasing the vestiges of de Kooning's drawing would only result in an increasingly visible surface inscription. Like his 1951 *White Paintings*, Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning* thus reminds the viewer that there are no real absences, only replacements: of one layer by another, *pli selon pli*, precessions of opacities and cancellations of competing materials, each with their own revelations and supersessions in turn.

Cage makes the same point when he formulates the fundamental of lesson of his infamous composition "4'33" (a work inspired, not coincidentally, by Rauschenberg's *White Paintings*): "there is no such thing as silence." Take away one sound, and there are always others — fainter, or more nuanced and neutral, or simply so regular that they have merged into the background. Eliminate those fainter sounds and you only open onto yet others in turn: the barely perceptible shimmer of electrical circuits; the ambient hums that inhabit rooms even before we do; the respiration of space. Continue all the way to the threshold of hearing itself. The tympanic membrane and the organ of Corti resonate with amplitudes approaching the diameter of a hydrogen atom; if the human ear were more sensitive by even a degree we would hear the crash of atoms colliding in their erratic Brownian sweeps, the constant din of fluctuations in molecular density. But even if we could listen in a vacuum, free from the imperceptible white noise of molecular space, we would still be awash in sound. As long as we are alive we never escape the systolic waves of the hematic ocean tiding in the nautilus turns of the ear.<sup>10</sup>

With figural language that evokes both Cage's dictum and Rauschenberg's white canvases, Michel Foucault argues that Blanchot's writing lays "bare what precedes all speech, what underlies all silence: the continuous streaming of language. [...] A language not resolved by any silence: any interruption is only a white stain on its seamless sheet."<sup>11</sup> Although Foucault is making a more general point about Blanchot's later philosophy, Blanchot himself suggests a similar regression, "a relation always in displacement," in a striking passage from the final chapter his 1948 novel *Le Très Haut*.<sup>12</sup> Casting the possibility of silence into doubt, or at the very least redefining its essence as a series of shunted noises, the passage describes "the hallucinated noises in a silent room": "tout contre moi, un bruit intermittent, de sable coulant et s'écoulant, un halètement ralenti à l'extrême, comme si quelqu'un avait été là, respirant, s'empêchant de respirer, caché juste contre moi [hard against me, an intermittent noise, of sand shifting and flowing over itself, a panting in extreme slow motion, as if someone had been there, breathing, preventing himself from breathing, hidden right there next to me]."<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere, defending language against the accusation of being "un ressassement interminable de paroles, au lieu du silence qu'il visait à atteindre [an interminable resifting of words, instead of the silence it wanted to achieve]," Blanchot asserts that language's "ressassement sans terme de mots sans contenu [...] est justement le nature profonde du silence qui parle jusque dans le mutisme, qui est parole vide de paroles, écho toujours parlant au milieu du silence [endless resifting of words without content [...] is precisely the profound nature of a silence that talks even in its dumbness, a silence that is speech empty of words, an echo speaking on and on in the midst of silence]."<sup>14</sup>

Shifting and sifting, implied and explicit, the figure of sand underlies Blanchot's sense of silence with a logic that returns us to both the *Erased de Kooning Drawing* and *Reading the Remove of Literature*. *Le sable* [sand], with its abrasive, pumicing ability to sponge, is an instrument of erasure, and the verb [*sabler*] has the same meaning in French as in English: to smooth, to rub out. At the same time, *sable* also denotes the color black, the wraps of mourning, the color of writing ink. Erasing and revealing, *l'écriture sable* and *l'écriture sablée* — a black writing and a sanded writing — each suggest a third term that encompasses both the erasure of writing

and its recovery. Like the stifled breath behind the shifting sands in *Le Très Haut*, both phrases whisper behind *l'écriture s'ablée*: a writing recovered by carefully washing paper or parchment, a palimpsest revealed (or revealing itself). As Émile Littré's *Dictionnaire de la langue française* records:

**ablué, ée** / a-blu-é ée / *part. passé*. Parchemin ablué.  
**abluer** / a-blu-é ée / *v. a.* Terme technique. Laver, passer légèrement une liqueur préparée avec de la noix de galle sur du parchemin ou du papier, pour faire revivre l'écriture.

A palimpsest always enacts a doubled play of concealment and revelation, erasing one text to inscribe another and then suppressing the latter to display the first. The palimpsest obstructs to make a view possible. Appropriately, the word means both a document that has been erased as well as one on which writing appears, and it records that doubling etymologically. "Palimpsest," from the classical Latin *palimpsestus* [paper or parchment which has been written on again], derives from the Hellenistic Greek *παλιμψηστος* [scraped again] and *παλιμψηστων* [a parchment from which writing has been erased], which in turn ultimately derive from the ancient Greek *παλιν* [again] plus *ψηστος*, from the verb "to sand." Here Blanchot's verbal doubling explains itself. The marked repetition of "sable coulant et s'écoulant" not only mimes the doubled layering of sounds described in the passage, but it also encrypts a palimpsest — literally, "to re-sand," "to sand again" — as the literary analogue of the silence that reveals sound, the breathing that both masks and permits speech. Bringing into view by erasing, the palimpsest is a *parchemin ablué*: writing that has undergone both a cleansing removal and a restoration. Ablution, that restorative cleansing or cleaning of a surface, here attracts its near twin "ablation," another word associated, as it happens, with sand. "Ablation" can of course denote any removal, as in the surgical excision of a body part, but it most commonly refers to removal of the surface layer of an object by sanding, or sometimes, specifically, the removal of sand itself (as by wind).

In English, the route is slightly different, but the destination is the same. "Sand," according to the first listing in the *Oxford English*

*Dictionary*, deriving directly from the Old Teutonic *sandjan* [to send], denotes "the action of sending; that which is sent, a message." Balanced between its verbal and nominative senses — between removing and delivering, erasing and communicating — "sand," like "palimpsest," encompasses both the emission of a message and its omission. Metonymically, "sand" also denotes the bank or a river, or the sea shore, the marge or margin, as when Keats writes: "Along the margin-sand large foot-marks went."<sup>15</sup> Recording the footprints of his reading, sand, in the sense of margin, is precisely what Thurston has allowed to remain among his other removes. Which brings us back to Rauschenberg.

As with *Reading the Remove of Literature*, the margins of the *Erased de Kooning Drawing* are far from parerga. To begin with, those margins are the site of inscription: a hand-lettered label (drawn by Jasper Johns, no less) that both mimes and mocks museological conventions: "ERASED DE KOONING DRAWING/ ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG/ 1953." The label announces that the work appearing above it is not merely a very faint drawing, or a half-erased sketch abandoned by the famous artist and raised to the status of framed display. More importantly, the label — itself a species of unsigned drawing — also provides the signature and countersignature necessary for the central drawing to have its conceptual force, putting into play the series of reversals that motivates the project. Beyond the label, the picture frame is no less telling. Neither superfluous nor merely decorative, the frame contrasts with the pristine surface of the archival matte and rhymes with the distressed surface of the drawing paper. The frame's delicate overlay of gold leaf has been abraded in places to let a dark dried-blood red show through, and that paint itself in places has been chipped away. Like the erased drawing within, the frame figures a history of application and removal. Nor am I alone in considering the frame an integral part of the work; on the back of the *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, among the collage of institutional accession and loan stickers, a hand-lettered warning, in black marker, reads: "DO NOT REMOVE/ DRAWING FROM FRAME./ FRAME IS PART OF DRAWING."

The frame is equally a part of Thurston's book. Although he eliminates all of Blanchot's writing with a "blind vigilance," he scrupulously retains the frame of Blanchot's *book*, replicating the dimensions of its borders and respecting the running header and

pagination.<sup>16</sup> As Blanchot writes, in seeming anticipation of this unforeseen edition of his work: "the act of writing is related to the absence of the work, but is invested in the Work as book."<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the status of the frame is central, as it were, to Blanchot's understanding of literature itself; in *Literature and the Right to Death* he writes:

la littérature ne se borne pas à retrouver à l'intérieur ce qu'elle a voulu abandonner sur le seul. Car ce qu'elle trouve, comme étant l'intérieur, c'est le dehors qui, d'issue qu'il était, s'est changé en impossibilité de sortir — et comme étant l'obscurité de l'existence, c'est l'être du jour qui, de lumière explicatrice et créatrice de sens, est devenu le harcèlement de ce qu'un ne peut s'empêcher de comprendre et la hantise étouffante d'une raison sans principe, sans commencement, dont on ne peut rendre raison.

literature does not confine itself to rediscovering in the interior what it tried to leave behind on the threshold. Because what it finds, as the interior, is the outside which has been changed from the outlet it once was into the impossibility of going out — and what it finds as the darkness of existence is the being of day which has been changed from explicatory light, creative of meaning, into the aggravation of what one cannot prevent oneself from understanding, and the stifling obsession of a reason without principle, without any beginning, which one cannot account for.<sup>18</sup>

Margins and centers are a recurrent topic in Blanchot's writing, and one could quote any number of equally evocative passages, but picking up on the word "rediscovering" in the quotation above I want to cite just one other. Describing the "enclosed space" of an infinitely regressive dynamic of reading and writing, Blanchot explains:

La solitude de l'œuvre — l'œuvre d'art, l'œuvre littéraire — nous découvre une solitude plus essentielle.

[...] Celui qui écrit l'œuvre est mis à part, celui qui l'a écrite est congédié.

In the solitude of the work — the work of art, the literary work — we discover a more essential solitude [...] the person who is writing the work is thrust to one side, the person who has written the work is dismissed."<sup>19</sup>

"Discover," "thrust to one side," "dismissed" — each shares the same definition: *remove*. Reading, for Blanchot, is indeed the remove of literature, and so the thrust of Thurston's title is doubly descriptive, pointing equally to his method and his source.

Absence, silence, blankness, blindness, concealment, displacement, effacement, the outside, the void.... *Reading the Remove of Literature* might seem to be an illustrated edition of *L'Espace littéraire*, or a work of concrete poetry visually picturing Blanchot's signature lexicon, or simply his titles: *The Space of Literature*; *The Absence of the Book*; *The Disappearance of Literature*. Replace the indefinite "work" in passage from Blanchot with the titles of the specific works under consideration here, and the argument proceeds flawlessly, following "a deviation in which the *Remove of Literature* disappears into the absence of *The Space of Literature*, but in which the absence of text always escapes the more it reduces itself to being nothing but the Work that has always disappeared already."<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Thurston's procedure recalls any number of quite specific passages from Blanchot's writings: "to write is to produce the absence of the work (worklessness, unworking [*désœuvrement*]"); "by turning itself into an inability to reveal anything, literature is attempting to become the revelation of what revelation destroys"; "a hole-word, hollowed out in its center by a hole, a hole in which all the other words should have been buried" [...]; a neutral voice that speaks the work from out of this place without a place, where the work is silent."<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the form of *Reading the Remove of Literature* would seem to describe not only Blanchot's language, but also the language of his critics and explicators: "The description accumulates endless baroque ellipses around whatever it is circling, endlessly expanding upon the eclipse of its center. Its sole excuse for existence is that whatever it revolves around, whatever supports it, is lacking."<sup>22</sup>

Again, the examples of such moments are far too numerous to catalogue, but their ubiquity is not enough to justify the relentlessness of Thurston's procedure, which as mere illustration — carried on for hundreds of pages — would be excessive, or farcical, or so literal as to constitute a satire of Blanchot's rhetoric, if not itself. "It is enough to say: abyss, and satire of the abyss," as Derrida begins his meditation around the idea of the frame, going on to explain: "opening with the *satis*, the *enough* (inside and outside, above and below, to left and right), satire, farce on the edge of excess."<sup>23</sup>

*Reading the Remove of Literature* avoids that farce by actively enacting Blanchot's text, rather than merely picturing it. That activity is classically deconstructive. On the one hand, the marginalia is only marginalia *as such* (rather than merely some writing set in an unusual centrifugal layout) because of its relation to the main text, which in turn is able to be designated as the "main" text (rather than merely one part of a parallel column) only because of the status of the marginalia which gives it precedence. On the other hand, and at the very same time, *without* that central text the writing remaining in the margins loses the indexical force that true marginalia (as distinguished from commentary) requires. So even though it has been removed, the abstract force of the central text must still remain in order for us to recognize the peripheral text as marginalia. As "negation asserting itself," the body of the text thus takes on an "indeterminate, elusive existence in which nothing appears, the heart of depth without appearance [...] meaning detached from its conditions, separated from its movements, wandering like an empty power, the simple inability to cease to be."<sup>24</sup> Conversely, although it remains quite visibly and concretely present on the peripheries of the page, the abstract force of the marginal text is nonetheless lost, unable to attain the status of marginalia without the presence of the central text. The text printed in *Reading the Remove of Literature* both is and is not marginalia.

Blanchot repeatedly formulates this kind of contradiction: "nothing that was visible, nothing that was invisible... that non-absent absence."<sup>25</sup> For him, such suspensions constitute the "Neuter" (etymologically from the classical Latin *neuter*, composed of *ne* [not] and *uter* [either]: neither of two, not one nor the other). Non-generic, in the sense of being neither within nor outside of a particular class, the notes in *Reading the Remove of Literature* are

Neuter in terms of their genre; they are neither properly marginalia nor entirely freed to be some other genre. But they are Neuter in terms of their activity as well. "The Neuter," in Blanchot's explanation, is "the gentle prohibition against dying, there where, from threshold to threshold, eye without gaze, silence carries us into the proximity of the distant. Word still to be spoken beyond the living and the dead, testifying for the absence of attestation."<sup>26</sup> An activity rather than a category, the Neuter is a "movement of writing," or what Foucault recognizes as "the movement of attraction and the withdrawal of the companion" [...] "opening onto a neutral space."<sup>27</sup> Attracting and withdrawing from one another, the erased text and the marginal notes describe a neutral space. The essence of the one depends on the disappearance of the other, which cancels the status of the first at the very moment that it has defined the other. Each term is inescapably bound to its relation with the other and yet unable to establish the necessary relation with that other term: neither some genre (marginalia) nor another, neither some thing (text on the page) nor nothing (since it continues to exert its defining force). The text, as Blanchot might see it, stands in "a relation of non-identification with itself."<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, *Reading the Remove of Literature* presents its textual elements in "a relation in which the unknown would be affirmed, made manifest, even exhibited: disclosed — and under what aspect? — precisely in that which keeps it unknown. In this relation, then, the unknown would be disclosed in that which leaves it under cover."<sup>29</sup>

For Blanchot, such neutral, recursive, paradoxical movement defines the workings of language in general. Fundamentally an activity of negation, language functions, if it functions at all, only to the degree that it cancels in a series of *mise-en-abîme* reversals. Language takes away in order to give, negating the referent in order to give us the word, erasing the word in order to summon the concept; language "suppresses," "annihilates," "absents," distances.<sup>30</sup> Language, in short, *removes*. By removing Blanchot's text, Thurston paradoxically gives us Blanchot's work; he presents rather than absents language — its essence, the defining move of its operation — in Blanchot's understanding. In *Reading the Remove of Literature* we "experience to what extent one can follow a text and at the same time lose it."<sup>31</sup> The book proffers the gift of theft. Which is as much as any work of literature, in Blanchot's definition, can do:

Qui veut lui faire exprimer davantage, ne trouve rien, trouve qu'elle n'exprime rien. Celui qui vit dans la dépendance de l'œuvre, soit pour l'écrire, soit pour la lire, appartient à la solitude de ce qui n'exprime que le mot être: mot que la langage abrite en le dissimulant ou fait apparaître en disparaissant dans le vide silencieux de l'œuvre.

Anyone who tries to make it express more finds nothing, finds that it expresses nothing. Anyone who lives in dependence of the work, whether because he is writing it or reading it, belongs to the solitude of something that expresses only the word *being*: a word that the language protects by hiding it or that the language causes to appear by disappearing into the silent void of the work.<sup>32</sup>

Absence, silence, blankness, effacement, the void.... Blanchot's signature lexicon is also a kind of signature proper. Although it seems to have escaped notice, Roland Barthes hints at the connection in the chapter of *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* on "writing and silence." Following a parenthetical reference to Blanchot and the appropriation of his vocabulary to define a "terme neutre ou terme-zéro [neutral term, or zero element]," Barthes proposes the designation of "une écriture blanche" (the play is obscured in the standard English translation, which renders the phrase as "colourless writing").<sup>33</sup> To blanch [*blanchir*], of course, means to whiten, but the word resonates further with Thurston's suppression of Blanchot's text and its replacement by the white space of the page. To blanch is also "to give a fair appearance to by artifice or suppression"; to omit; to turn something aside; to shirk; to withhold what is expected or due. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites a line from William Warner's *Albion's England* that brings these senses together in bibliographic terms: "But so obscurely hath beene blancht of good workes elsewhere done."<sup>34</sup> *Blancher*, accordingly, designates someone who causes a thing to turn aside, a perverter, an obstructer. Countersigning Blanchot's text, Thurston also forges his name. Whiteness, witness: the proper genre for *Reading the Remove of Literature* may be portraiture.<sup>35</sup>

Or *memento mori*. From the Renaissance on, "remove" has meant to assassinate, to author a death — "most violent Author Of his owne iust remoue," as Shakespeare puts it — and death haunts this present *Remove*.<sup>36</sup> "Margin," recall, has its origin in inscription and memorial, in the "grave," in both senses of the word. And the center contained by that memorial space echoes darkly; in the context of his extended reflections on death, "centre," in Blanchot, always suggests its near homophone: *cendres* [ashes]. Moreover, like the English "bleached," *blanchir* is a word idiomatically associated with the skeletal. The *Littre* illustrates "blanchoyer [to have a white reflection]" with the couplet: "L'on voit avec horreur d'antiques ossements / Blanchoyer à travers de pompeux ornements [One saw with horror the ancient bones/ gleaming white through gaudy ornaments]." Which should help illuminate the hypogramme undersigning the proper name of the author removed from this book: the phonic skeleton of "Blanchot" disarticulates to "os blanches [bleached bones]."

*Point de source*: in this evacuated tome, this tomb, the body of the text has been removed. *Reading the Remove of Literature* presents us with "the gift of the poem as the offering from a tomb which could be, for all one will ever know, a cenotaph."<sup>37</sup> For Blanchot, this is always the case with language: "Quand nous parlons, nous nous appuyons à un tombeau, et ce vide du tombeau est ce qui fait la vérité du langage, mais en même temps le vide est réalité et la mort se fait être [when we speak, we are leaning on a tomb, and the void of that tomb is what makes language true, but at the same time void is reality and death becomes being]."<sup>38</sup> All inscription, for Blanchot, is a "cenographic writing, a writing that nothing fulfills and yet that is the utter fulfillment of writing."<sup>39</sup> But even without such explicit statements, language and literature would be, for Blanchot, fundamentally bound up with death. Every word, following his text, remains. To follow a text, and to lose it: with the marginalia re-engraved the body of the text disinterred, *Reading the Remove of Literature* is a fitting cenotaph, a proper grave, leaving the clear dawn of the mourning of the night — "*l'autre nuit*," the sable night — to come.<sup>40</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Kenneth Grahame: "Marginalia," *Pagan Papers* (London: John Lane/The Bodley Head, 1898).
- <sup>2</sup> *L'Espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955) was translated into English as *The Space of Literature* by Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982); the present text is based on this translation.
- <sup>3</sup> *L'espace littéraire*, 51.
- <sup>4</sup> Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Harvard U. P., 1992): 18.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, 21. Punctuation slightly modified.
- <sup>6</sup> *Adversaria* denotes, literally, what is written on one side of a sheet of paper. Relevant to the current project, however, the phrase also carries unintended suggestion of a writing turned toward or against itself. For a general introduction to the subject of marginalia, see H. J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing In Books* (New Haven: Yale U. P., 2001).
- <sup>7</sup> Susan Howe: "Melville's Marginalia," *The Nonconformist's Memorial* (NY: New Directions, 1993). Susan Howe Papers, MSS 0201, Series 3, Subsection F. Mandeville Special Collections Library, University of California at San Diego, Archive for New Poetry. Cowen's two volume work was reprinted as part of the Harvard Dissertations in American and English Literature series (NY: Garland, 1987).
- <sup>8</sup> For an overview of this genre, see my essay, "Textual Prostheses," *Comparative Literature* 57: 1 (Winter, 2005): 1-24.
- <sup>9</sup> John Cage, "Indeterminacy," *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage* (Middletown: Wesleyan U. P., 1961): 270.
- <sup>10</sup> Although the veracity of the story is doubtful, Cage claimed to have learned this lesson when he heard the low percussive sound of his heart beat in what was otherwise the perfectly soundproof space of an anechoic chamber. See *Silence*, 8. For skepticism about the story, see Branden W. Joseph, "White on White," *Critical Inquiry* 27 (Autumn 2000): 105-106.
- <sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault: "Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside," translated by Brian Massumi, *Foucault / Blanchot* (NY: Zone Books, 1987): 54.
- <sup>12</sup> Maurice Blanchot: *Le Pas au-delà* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973): 12-13.
- <sup>13</sup> Allan Stoekl: *Politics, Writing, Mutilation: The Cases of Bataille, Blanchot, Rousset, Leiris, and Ponge* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1985): 31; Maurice Blanchot: *Le Très-Haut* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948): 233.
- <sup>14</sup> Maurice Blanchot: "La Littérature et le droit a la mort," *La Part du feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949): 320; translated by Lydia Davis as "Literature and the Right to Death," *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader: Fiction and Literary Essays* (Barrytown: Station Hill, 1999): 387.
- <sup>15</sup> *Hyperion* I.15.
- <sup>16</sup> Blanchot, "Literature and the Right to Death," 387; see *La Part du feu*, 320.
- <sup>17</sup> Maurice Blanchot: "The Absence of the Book," trans. Susan Hanson, *The Infinite Conversation* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1993): 424.
- <sup>18</sup> Blanchot, "La Littérature et le droit," 320; "Literature and the Right to Death," 387.
- <sup>19</sup> Blanchot, *L'espace Littéraire*, 9-10; translation by Lydia Davis, *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*, 401.
- <sup>20</sup> Blanchot, "The Absence of the Book," translation by Lydia Davis, *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*, 473.
- <sup>21</sup> Blanchot, *Infinite Conversation*, 424; "Literature and the Right to Death," 384; *Infinite Conversation*, 385.
- <sup>22</sup> Denis Hollier, "Poetry ... up to Z," *Yale French Studies* 81 (1992): 65-66. Cf. "But like all production, that of the abyss came to saturate what it hollows out" (Jacques Derrida: *The Truth In Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod [Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1987]: 33).
- <sup>23</sup> Derrida, *Truth*, 17.
- <sup>24</sup> Blanchot, "Literature and the Right to Death," 387; see *La Part du feu*, 319-20. As Derrida puts it, the central text is now "both potent and impotent, potent to its very impotence, all potential in its unequalness to itself. Everything here resounds and echoes in the dynamic sublime" (*The Instant of My Death / Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg [Stanford: Stanford U. P., 2000]: 146).
- <sup>25</sup> Blanchot, "Absence," *The Station Hill Reader*, 471.
- <sup>26</sup> Blanchot, *Le Pas au delà*, 107; translated by Lycette Nelson as *The Step Not Beyond* (Buffalo: SUNY Press, 1992): 76-77.
- <sup>27</sup> Blanchot, *Infinite Conversation*, 168; Foucault, "Thought From the Outside," 54.
- <sup>28</sup> Blanchot, *Infinite Conversation*, 384.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, 422.
- <sup>30</sup> Maurice Blanchot: *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford U. P., 1995): 322.
- <sup>31</sup> Maurice Blanchot: *Lautréamont et Sade*, second edition (Paris: Minuit, 1963): 59.
- <sup>32</sup> Blanchot; *L'espace littéraire*, 11; translation from *The Station Hill Reader*, 402.
- <sup>33</sup> Roland Barthes: *Œuvres Complètes*, Vol. I: 218; translated by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith as *Writing Degree Zero* (NY: Hill and Wang, 1968): 78.
- <sup>34</sup> William Warner: *Albion's England, The third time corrected* (1592): VII. xxxix. 193.



- <sup>35</sup> "Blanchot," in French, is the name for a kind of bird, *une pie-grièche*, an ashen shrike, both harassing antagonist and prey to the white owl, which is also its phonic "negative" (in the photographic sense): *chouette blanche*. Blanchot, *chouette blanche*: the owl of Minerva, pale in the sable night. Although he claims to have read him "at a great remove" [*fort loin*] (see *La Littérature et le droit à la mort*, note 1), Blanchot was never far from Hegel. The "shrike" is also the language of the owl, an idiomatic association that stretches back centuries: "shrykyng of these owlys," as Chaucer puts it in his *Troilus*. In Shakespeare, "shriek" is always associated with owls rather than other animals (cf. Ronald Bates, "Shakespeare's 'The Phoenix and Turtle,'" *Shakespeare Quarterly* Vol. VI [1955]: 19-30), and in the context of fearful ill-omens of death and madness (see, for examples, *Julius Caesar* I.iii.26-8; 3 *Henry VI* V. vi.44; *Macbeth* II.ii.3; *Richard II* III.iii.183; *Venus and Adonis* 1.531). Death and madness: *this insane game of writing*, as Blanchot quotes Stéphane Mallarmé (*Infinite Conversation*, 422), reading poetry as philosophy and philosophy as an endless description of literary writing. Taken literally, the cry defined by the shrike is an utterance on the margin of rational language; taken figuratively, we might read it as the speech of the familiar of the goddess of intellect: the most rational of language, a philosophical literature.
- <sup>36</sup> *Hamlet* IV.v.81
- <sup>37</sup> Jacques Derrida: *Monolingualism of the Other, or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford U. P., 1998): 83.
- <sup>38</sup> Blanchot, "Literature and the Right to Death," 391-2.
- <sup>39</sup> Hollier, "Poetry," 66.
- <sup>40</sup> Maurice Blanchot: "Le regard d'Orphée," in *L'espace Littéraire*, 227.