

The Measure of the Outside

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❖ *La pression de la ville: de toutes parts. Les maisons ne sont pas là pour qu'on y demeure, mais pour qu'il y ait des rues et, dans les rues, le mouvement incessant de la ville.*¹

Of the over two hundred and fifty fragments from *L'attente l'oubli*, few prove as remote from its predominant themes as the passage above. The setting of Blanchot's work is not the city, but a long and narrow hotel room: inside, a man and woman engage one another, each undertaking a series of measures in order to "make it so that she can speak to him."² Thoughts and depictions of the exterior are therefore altogether rare: only a single other fragment, for example, makes use of the word *ville* (AO 12/AwO 5). It is true, the theme of movement is central to *L'attente l'oubli*, and the range of words relating to movement extensive.³ The term "pressure" is also elsewhere employed: Blanchot writes of the act of waiting, for instance, as simultaneously exerting and not exerting "the same continuous pressure" as space (AO 24/AwO 14). This passage alone, however, sheds little light on the "pressure" of the city. In its rhetorical construction, the fragment evinces a logical austerity that affirms its autonomy: P (houses) in order that Q (streets), and Q in order that R (movement), where "movement," presumably, is a way of shaping and organizing the "pressure" that mounts from all sides. Closed, complete, the fragment would seem to defy ascrip-

tion. The man of *L'attente l'oubli* is a writer and, it seems, the sometime first-person narrator of the work, but is it to a consciousness *properly his* that one could ascribe this thought?

A fragment thus detached solicits its readers not merely with a sense of inscrutability, but, potentially, with a tone of dogmatism or gratuity.⁴ Against the threat of both possibilities, and in line with the tone of other passages in *L'attente l'oubli*, let me suggest that the “city” fragment registers with a tone of surprise or discovery. For despite its seeming autonomy, the passage does not so much proceed from a detached consciousness as it appears as an event for thought. The result of such an event is that, as a written artefact, the fragment is less an accomplished form than the initial tracing or sketching of a thought the full scope of which is as yet unappreciable. The tone of surprise or discovery, on the scenario I am outlining, preserves the eventfulness of the encounter, i.e., thought’s confrontation with a limit beyond which it cannot go – though it is precisely towards this “beyond” that it remains directed. If correct, this description would defeat a perception of the passage as closed or complete, and would entail, on the contrary, not merely a sense of thought’s openness, but of its forced or constrained exposure. The eventfulness of this exposure lives on in the tone of the fragment.⁵

The passage, of course, describes an important characteristic of the city, i.e., its arrangement with a view to incessant movement. Yet in its materiality, in its tone of surprise or discovery, the fragment solicits us with an intelligibility the scope and force of which are irreducible to (though never wholly separate from) the content of its words. The distinction is essential, for if with respect to other passages the fragment shares little in the way of *content*, the material force of its *tone* will yet serve in relating it not only to other passages, but to what one can refer to broadly as the workings of *L'attente l'oubli*. This paper will be concerned to explain those workings, specifically as they touch upon the status of the surprise in *L'attente l'oubli*. What exactly, for Blanchot, is set forth in a surprise? How is it set forth, i.e. what are the possible vehicles or modalities of a surprise? Who is the possible recipient or even addressee of a surprise?

Providing an account of the surprise, and specifically, of the *human voice* as the privileged vehicle of surprise, I will be a position to indicate if not who is speaking in the fragment above, then at least why it should register with the eventful tone of a discovery or surprising intuition, and why, additionally, this tone is significant with respect to the meaning of the passage. That meaning turns on Blanchot’s concept of the outside (*le dehors*), to which I will return at length.

In the course of this interpretation, I will provide an expansive account

of Blanchot's concerns with the unexpected (*l'inattendu*). For in order to address the surprise character of the "city" fragment and therefore its character as eventful, one need as well understand Blanchot's account of the surprise (of the event, the unexpected) and why, in particular, the surprise "presencing" of another human being entails a force of exposure that solicits *in its recipient* a singular if impersonal someone (*quelqu'un*; *Il* in Blanchot's sense of the word) who, if "he" cannot assume the event of the other, can yet stand before and acknowledge the other in "his" constrained exposure. Indeed, for Blanchot, the ethical human relation stages itself as a relation of surprise, a rapport in which the other *who is already here* yet turns to me as someone unexpected. The ethical obligation towards the other is, correlatively, that of "clearing a path" so that, in dialogue, the other may reach me not as someone in particular or as someone I know, but as someone unexpected. Let me briefly develop this thought.

L'attente l'oubli marks a significant moment in Blanchot's work largely because it features the emergence of two new forms of writing: the fragment and the dialogue. Dialogue as form, for Blanchot, wavers between two possible directions. It threatens first to "politicize" itself – and this in a number of ways. The "dictatorial" voice, for example, may speak so vociferously, and at such length and at such volume, as to effectively abolish voices of dissent: the conditions of dialogue, in short, may become perverted in the privileging of one voice alone. A dialogue may veer as well into an interrogation, where the interrogator will question his interlocutor so as to force the other to speak, so as to extract a confession.⁶ Both positions presuppose dialogue only in order to abolish it, and both, furthermore, operate according to an exclusionary paradigm of day and night. The dictator understands his words as the unique source of light, those of others as an undesirable darkness. The interrogator, for his part, seeks a conversion in his interogatee: a movement from secrecy to revelation, from the night of the subject's soul to the daylight of public exposure. The retaliatory threat to one's interrogator is silence, i.e. the refusal to speak. Silence, of course, is just the given condition of he who "engages" the dictator. In all cases, dialogue is threatened with its own collapse.

The alternative for Blanchot is that "making room" so as to afford the other not only an open place from which to speak, but an open place towards which to speak. This "giving place" prepares for a welcoming of the other as someone unexpected. In his silent staging of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, Blanchot will often employ the phrase *frayer un chemin*, to clear a path: Orpheus is said, presumably in his song and ascent, to clear a path for Eurydice (AO 59/AwO 39, 61/41 112/79 121/85).⁷ Correlatively, a central (if not the central) question of *L'attente l'oubli* can be formulated as

follows: how, from within the circumstances of the world, is one to clear a path (*frayer un chemin*) for the unexpected (*l'inattendu*)? The unexpected, it will be seen, is but the singular "presencing" of the human being when various features of the human – the voice, the face, the nomadic body – are articulated in conjunction with, or as an adjustment or reference to, the outside. In addition to this opening, introductory section, this paper will thus feature (a) an account of the voice as surprise, which will serve in situating (b) an extended reading of the "city" fragment. Each of these latter sections will be principally concerned with the figure of someone, *quelqu'un*, as a surprise encounter (e.g. the voice of the other, an event for thought) that never reaches me in particular but only someone in me, *quelqu'un en moi*. To prepare for this set of readings, a consideration of various critical essays published during the writing of *L'attente l'oubli* (approximately 1957-62) will provide greater evidence for privileging the figure of "clearing a path," and further, greater evidence for supporting the claim that the impersonal, singular "presencing" of the human being is *the* vehicle, for Blanchot, of the unexpected.

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Leslie Hill has noted that something of a first stage of *L'attente l'oubli* was published in 1959, in a collection of essays honoring Heidegger on his seventieth birthday. Entitled "L'attente," these few pages are important for any reading of the final work.⁸ Yet as one reads Blanchot's critical essays of the late 1950's and early 1960's, it becomes soon apparent that references to the dominant themes of *L'attente l'oubli* are present in many different contexts. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that Blanchot's extended article on Simone Weil (1957), which features a remarkable digression on attentiveness, waiting, and the unexpected, first afforded him the opportunity to take these themes into consideration.⁹ In line with this date, Christophe Bident has suggested that *L'attente l'oubli* can be read as a companion piece to Blanchot's *Le dernier homme*, also published in 1957, and a side-by-side study would support his contention.¹⁰ An exhaustive catalogue of cross-references between *L'attente l'oubli* and Blanchot's critical essays from years 1957-62 surpasses the scope of this paper, not to mention my privileged points of interest. I would, however, like to turn to a small number of passages from those essays in order to prepare for my later reading of *L'attente l'oubli*.

During the 1950's, Blanchot is not alone in reading Heidegger intensely. Levinas publishes at least four important essays during that decade in which his critique of Heidegger becomes ever sharper and Blanchot was not indifferent to this confrontation. A passage from "La philosophie et

l'idée de l'infini" (first published in 1957) is particularly striking for its reference to what Levinas calls *un exister païen* (a pagan existing) – a term which, in *Totalité et Infini*, will be recast as *des "états d'âme" païens*.¹¹ Dasein's comprehension of being, according to Levinas, entails a subordination of the other (*autrui*) to the same, and it is thereby that Heidegger's ontology in *Being and Time* repeats the oldest gesture of Western thought: the face to face encounter with the other is never direct but rather always mediated by a third term (in Heidegger's case: being) that obfuscates the alterity of the other. Yet, at a specific moment in the essay, the terms of Levinas' criticisms come to surpass their strictly *philosophical* content as the claims of history prove unavoidable. Note, in the following passage, the ambiguity in Levinas' thought directly following his parenthetical remark; the content that develops thereafter is not strictly philosophical in its claims and seems only to reinforce his bracketed reference to National Socialism.

L'ontologie heideggerienne subordonne le rapport avec l'Autre à la relation avec le Neutre qu'est l'Être et, par là, elle continue à exalter la volonté de puissance dont Autrui seul peut ébranler la légitimité et troubler la bonne conscience. Quand Heidegger signale l'oubli de l'Être voilé par les diverses réalités qu'il éclaire, oubli dont se rendrait coupable la philosophie issue de Socrate, lorsqu'il déplore l'orientation de l'intelligence vers la technique, il maintient un régime de puissance plus inhumain que le machinisme et qui n'a peut-être pas la même source que lui. (Il n'est pas sur que le national-socialisme provienne de la réification mécaniste des hommes et qu'il ne repose pas sur un enracinement paysan et une adoration féodale des hommes asservis pour les maîtres et seigneurs qui les commandent.) Il s'agit d'une existence qui s'accepte comme naturelle, pour qui sa place au soleil, son sol, son *lieu* orientent toute signification. Il s'agit d'un exister païen. L'Être l'ordonne bâtisseur et cultivateur, au sein d'un paysage familier, sur une terre maternelle. Anonyme, Neutre, il l'ordonne éthiquement indifférent et comme une liberté héroïque, étrangère à toute culpabilité à l'égard d'Autrui.¹²

It is difficult to say definitively whether Blanchot was familiar with this passage; however, as his references to Levinas in *L'entretien infini* indicate, he was well familiar with *Totalité et Infini*, and, as noted, Levinas speaks there as well of "a pagan existing." When one considers that, during the writing of *L'attente l'oubli*, Blanchot was reading Heidegger intensely, and reading Levinas as intensely as well, and when one further considers his heightened interest in Jewish thought beginning precisely during the middle to late 1950's, it is admissible to hear in the following passage a reference to

Levinas and, thereby, a related critique of Heidegger.

Si le judaïsme est destiné à prendre un sens pour nous, c'est bien en montrant qu'il faut, en tout temps, être prêt à se mettre en route, parce que sortir (aller au dehors) est l'exigence à laquelle l'on ne peut se soustraire si l'on veut maintenir la possibilité d'un rapport de justice. Exigence d'arrachement, affirmation de la vérité nomade. C'est par là qu'il tranche sur le paganisme (sur tout paganisme): être païen, c'est se fixer, se fichier en terre en quelque sorte, s'établir par un pacte avec la permanence qui autorise le séjour et que certifie la certitude du sol. Le nomadisme répond à un rapport que la possession ne contente pas. Chaque fois que l'homme juif nous fait signe dans l'histoire, c'est par l'appel d'un mouvement.¹³

Être païen is certainly a calculated term, as it counters directly the title of Blanchot's essay: *être juif*. This opposition is a narrower version of Blanchot's greater concern with the term *lieu*, place. Where does the Jewish nomad engage with "place"? The answer is capital for Blanchot: *dans la parole*, in dialogue, in the exchange of words. If the question of *form* is to guide any reading of *L'attente l'oubli*, then one must acknowledge the dual nature of Blanchot's work: clearly a series of fragments, it is inseparably a series of dialogues as well. Against the demands of rhetoric that call for a conjunction of speech and place (where place – *lieu* – can be defined as either rhetorical cliché, figure, *lieu commun*, etc., or as the historical ground or soil from which one speaks), *L'attente l'oubli* is an examination of the possibility of speech when speech must issue forth in and with an experience of placelessness. Blanchot seeks to guard against the dual threats that one be forced to speak (as in an interrogation) or that one retreat into complete silence. In addition to examining at length the dialogic rapport between the woman and man of *L'attente l'oubli*, I will claim that the "city" fragment echoes Blanchot's criticism of paganism and his correlative favoring of what is a broadly Jewish emphasis on movement and nomadism.

As mentioned, it is already in Blanchot's 1957 essay on Simone Weil that one can read a brief meditation on attention and waiting (*l'attention et l'attente*) as well as an important remark on the unexpected (*l'inattendu*). In addition to these remarks, it contains an interesting digression on the problem of creation, one which will allow for expanding on the idea of the unexpected or unforeseen. Blanchot draws parallels between Weil and the sixteenth century Jewish thinker Isaac Luria, specifically with respect to their related accounts of God's creation and abandonment of the world. How does God simultaneously create and abandon the world?

Dieu, en créant le monde, ne pose pas quelque chose de plus, mais

d'abord quelque chose de moins. L'Être infini est nécessairement tout. Pour que le monde soit, il faut que, cessant d'être tout, il lui fasse place, par un mouvement de recul, de retrait, et en 'abandonnant comme une région à l'intérieur de lui-même, une sorte d'espace mystique.'¹⁴ En d'autres termes, le problème essentiel de la création, c'est le problème du néant. Non pas comment quelque chose est créée de rien, mais comment rien est créé, afin qu'à partir de lui il y ait *lieu* à quelque chose.¹⁵

As infinite, God is necessarily everything (*nécessairement tout*), and therefore, in order to create a world, God's initial move must not be the positing of something more but of something less (*quelque chose de moins*). Creation thus touches on the problem of nothingness (*le problème du néant*), as the central problem of creation turns not on how something is created out of nothing, but rather how nothing is created in order that there come to be a place (*un lieu*) for something. It is not incidental that the problem of "lessness" (or of positing something less) should return in *L'attente l'oubli*, the relevant passage of which will be examined below. For the moment, let it be suggested that the act of clearing a path for the unexpected can be clarified with this related account of breaking a whole (*un tout*) in order that, in the resultant emptiness or nothingness, something may come to be or *take place*.

The unexpected, it will be seen, is not inaugural in character: it "presences" less as a new world, than as an interruption of the present. Further, the vehicles or modalities of the unexpected are always *material* or *earthly* in character: *l'inattendu* assumes shape in the matters of this world, never through a divine or transcendent intervention. As previously indicated, the unexpected is but the singular "presencing" of the human being when the human articulates itself in and with, in and against a certain experience of "placelessness." In answering to, and in speaking from this placelessness, the human – the voice and face especially – cannot but *intone* (or *envisage*) its relation to the outside.¹⁶ In his essay "Être Juif," published in the same year as *L'attente l'oubli*, Blanchot offers a powerful example of the human presence as the unexpected *par excellence*. There, he writes of Jacob's encounter with his older brother Esau, and how this encounter is particularly striking for the younger man given his recent struggle with *le partenaire de la Nuit*.¹⁷ His words in that context are well known (I quote Blanchot's text directly): *J'ai vu Élohim face à face et j'ai eu la vie sauve*. Upon his encounter with Esau, he says: *Si j'ai trouvé grâce à tes yeux, tu accepteras mon présent de ma main, puisque j'ai vu ta face comme on voit la face d'Élohim, et tu m'as agréé*. And Blanchot to mark the following distinction:

Jacob ne dit pas à Esaü: “Je viens de voir Dieu comme je te vois,” mais: “Je te vois comme on voit Dieu,” ce qui confirme que la merveille (la surprise privilégiée) est bien la présence humaine, cette Présence Autre qu’est Autrui, non moins inaccessible, séparé et distant que l’Invisible lui-même; ce qui confirme aussi ce qu’à de terrible une telle rencontre dont l’issue ne saurait être que l’agrément ou la mort. Qui voit Dieu est en danger de mourir. Qui rencontre Autrui ne peut se rapporter à lui que par la violence mortelle ou par le don de la parole en son accueil.¹⁸

The “privileged surprise,” here, is not the presence of God, but a human presence: a Presence that is Other and whom the Other is (*la présence humaine, cette Présence Autre qu’est Autrui*). This encounter with what Blanchot relatedly calls *un homme sans horizon* entails a problem of *reception* the solution to which is one of two alternatives: speak or kill (*la violence mortelle* or *le don de la parole en son accueil*). The alternative “speak or kill” does not appear in *L’attente l’oubli*, yet the work does feature a series of dichotomies that repeat the alternative all while displacing it; a point to be considered in due time.¹⁹

Before turning to an account of the human voice as surprise, I will close with a last reference to Blanchot’s critical essays, in particular his 1962 essay “L’homme de la rue” which, in *L’entretien infini*, appears as “La parole quotidienne.” The experience of everyday life, Blanchot notes, is essentially bound to “those admirable deserts that are world-cities” (*ces admirables déserts que sont les villes mondiales*). The street, in particular, is the privileged site of the quotidian; the place where everyday life “publishes itself” or “renders itself public.” In a parenthetical note, Blanchot remarks:

dans la rue, lorsqu’on se rencontre, c’est toujours avec surprise et comme par erreur; c’est qu’on ne s’y reconnaît pas; il faut, pour aller au-devant l’un de l’autre, s’arracher d’abord à une existence sans identité.²⁰

Against the broadly rhetorical demand that a message or personal identity always speak *from a place*, the street lays out the desert ground from which to speak as one anonymous person to another. Blanchot’s peculiar reference in *L’attente l’oubli* to the incessant movement of the city clearly resonates with his thoughts here. Let it be suggested that the “long and narrow” hotel room of *L’attente l’oubli* mimics something of the length and distance that is characteristic not only of the corridors of the hotel, but of the streets outside. Inside that room, dialogue is “the place” – the opened path – where the woman and man meet one another, just as one would meet another in the street: by surprise.

The Human Voice as Surprise

In *L'attente l'oubli*, a significant episode of surprise or discovery is recounted in the opening passage of the work, prior to the denoted series of fragments. Recall that Blanchot opens *L'attente l'oubli* with a scene of writing; precisely, a scene where the movement of writing is arrested, and which, in its arrest, summons the writer before a certain "here." "Ici, et sur cette phrase qui lui était peut-être aussi destinée, il fut contraint de s'arrêter. C'est presque en l'écoutant parler qu'il avait rédigé ces notes. Il entendait encore sa voix en écrivant."²¹ Blanchot does not indicate in the opening sequence why the man writes, yet his difficulties in so doing can be better appreciated if, on the basis of other moments in the work, one were to determine the "narrative reasons" that trigger his writing, and why the interruption that opens the work prepares for the moment of surprise later in that sequence.

If there is a narrative to this work, i.e., a set of interrelated events that could situate her speaking and his writing, it is not only continuously interrupted, but also presented in an order foreign to linear chronology. This temporal ambiguity renders problematic any attempt to situate a 'before' and 'after,' or to separate an event from its repetition. Deliberate on the part of Blanchot, this ambiguity is calculated so as to render indeterminate whether the key phrase of the text ("Make it so that I can speak to you") precedes her speaking or follows it as a demand to help her speak anew. The resultant sense of circularity, resonance, and repetition renders difficult any attempt to "flatten" the work's fragments into a linear sequence. I will return to this ambiguity shortly, and mention it now so as to acknowledge the impossibility of definitely determining how and when their "story" begins.

As indicated in a late fragment, it is perhaps part of the culture of the hotel to pass from room to room, and the narrator is not reticent with respect to the possibility that sex is the pretext for their encounter (AO 91/AwO 62-3). In a later passage that repeats and condenses previous moments in *L'attente l'oubli*, the narrator tells, if only obliquely, of the man's decision to begin writing and to do so after such an encounter. The passage is worth quoting in full:

❖ Elle se redressa légèrement, s'appuyant de biais sur sa main. Elle était alors près de la cloison et semblait se élever au-dessus de leurs deux corps étendus, les regardant tous deux et disant d'une voix qui le surprit pas sa froide netteté: "Je voudrais vous parler. Quand pourrais-je le faire?" – "Pouvez-vous passer la nuit ici?" – "Oui." – "Pouvez-vous demeurer dès à présent?" – "Oui."

Alors il écoute ce “oui,” se demandant si elle l’a vraiment prononcé (il est si transparent qu’il laisse passer ce qu’elle dit et jusqu’à ce mot même,) elle se renverse comme déjà délivrée et en prenant soin de ne pas mettre entre eux de distance.

Il l’attire, attiré par l’attrait en son mouvement encore inaccompli. Mais tandis qu’elle se soulève en celle qu’il touche, et bien qu’il sache qu’elle glisse, qu’elle tombe, figure immobile, il ne cesse de lui frayer un chemin et de la conduire, allant de l’avant et elle serrée contre lui d’un mouvement qui les confond.

Elle parle, parlée plutôt que parlant, comme si sa propre parole la traversait vivante et la transformait douloureusement en l’espace d’une autre parole, toujours interrompue, sans vie.

Et assurément, quand à la lumière du matin – sans doute viennent-ils de s’éveiller ensemble –, il l’entend demander avec élan: “Est-ce que j’aurais parlé sans arrêt?” il ne doute pas d’être invité à prendre possession, en cette seule phrase, de tout ce qu’elle lui a dit durant la nuit.²²

In addition to noting that her expressing “everything” is more important for Blanchot than the piecemeal enumeration of details, and that the man begins writing in an effort to restore her own words, two additional details are worth commenting upon. First, the chiasmic inclination between the woman and man: each is now attracted to the other less in terms of a possible sexual rapport that in a rapport of dialogue, the animating principle of which is “incompletion” or the “as-yet-unaccomplished.”²³ Each is inclined less towards a definitive other than towards an unaccomplished (and perhaps irreducible) openness in the other. A pair of key phrases signal how this dialogic, chiasmic inclination is set into play: *frayer un chemin* and *aller de l’avant*. If she is to speak, the man must somehow clear a path for her to do so; he must proceed ahead of her, just as Orpheus with his song proceeds ahead of Eurydice. What can this mean concretely? As a related passage indicates, the man is bidden to find the words that would allow the woman to begin speaking: “Il devait la précéder et toujours aller de l’avant, sans être assuré d’être jamais suivi d’elle. Ce qu’elle avait à lui dire, il était tenu de découvrir d’abord les mots avec lesquels elle pourrait ensuite le lui faire entendre. Ils marchaient ainsi, immobiles à l’intérieur du mouvement.”²⁴ The correlative (if contrary) demand is that he *not* speak, but merely attempt to hear. To quote her words: “Je ne vous demande pas de parler: entendre, seulement entendre,” as if the man in *simply hearing* could delimit between them the space necessary for her speaking to begin.²⁵ In each case, the question is one of inclination, of inclining the other with a non-aggressive gesture that would signal one’s proximity, where proximity

indicates a paradoxical relation of nearness and distance.

Secondly, the man begins writing in order to “take possession ... of everything she had said to him during the night.” Passages elsewhere indicate that she had forgotten what she had said, and the passage above gives an indication as to why that may have been. When she speaks, she is “spoken rather than speaking,” as if her words could serve as the locus for a seemingly foreign voice that is “always interrupted, [and] without life.” Though the following claim would require an essay of its own, let it be suggested that her speaking is akin to writing, that the *parole parlante* that animates and exhausts her *parole parlée* is none but than the dead letter of writing. Following Plato, Blanchot elsewhere refers to writing as a *parole de l'oubli*, a term that similarly appears in *L'attente l'oubli*.²⁶ Though formulated in speech, her words are more akin to writing as it evinces itself in the absence of an animating speaker, in the absence even an animated face, for as the narrator notes, her face was strangely passionless and disengaged as she spoke (AO 10, 17/AwO 3-4, 9). If upon waking the woman cannot remember her words, the reason is that she never stood behind them, never endowed them with the interpretive authority of a speaking subject (AO 27-8/AwO 16).

The man begins writing in order to “take possession” of her words, yet as the opening sequence indicates, she does not recognize who in his words is speaking. Her reaction is disparaging and even damning: Who speaks, who is speaking? (*Qui parle? Qui parle donc?*) This moment of non-recognition, together with her forgetting what she had said in the night, point up the ambiguity of her demand, “Make it so that I can speak to you.” Because one cannot determine whether the demand either *precedes* the night in which she talks ceaselessly and says “everything,” or *follows* upon his inability to assume her words in transcribing them, one can anticipate an endless circle in which her speaking and forgetting, along with his related attempt to transcribe her words, i.e., to rewrite her “writing,” would repeat itself infinitely as, on every occasion, she would fail to recognize her words in his. Should he succeed in helping her speak to him (again, through the alternatives of finding the appropriate words or of simply hearing), her words would threaten once more to appear as writing, i.e., as always already forgotten. As no one can interrogate a piece of writing, i.e. make it speak in order for it to justify itself, she would be bidden, once more, to repeat her initial demand: Make it so that I can speak to you. Blanchot’s interlocutors seem destined to eternally repeating the same solicitations, and this with no guarantee of ever establishing common ground.

For if the possible common ground is just the writing that transpires under her near dictation, it should come as no surprise to hear the woman,

in the opening sequence, accuse the man of “faithlessness” with respect to her words. He nearly abandons the task when, near the end of the passage, a “surprising thought” (*pensée surprenante*) occurs to him. He retrieves the pages and begins to write, less under her dictation than in a flash of insight. I quote the full final paragraph, where a written transcription of the man’s surprising thought is preserved. This passage concludes the opening sequence of *L’attente l’oubli*, after which begins the series of denoted fragments.

Il ne put s’empêcher, tandis qu’il réunissait les feuillets – et maintenant elle le surveillait d’un regard curieux – de se sentir lié à elle par cet échec. Il ne comprenait pas bien pourquoi. Il l’avait comme touchée à travers le vide, il l’avait vue un instant. Quand? Tout à l’heure. Il avait vue qui elle était. Cela ne l’encourageait pas, cela mettait plutôt le point final à tout. “Soit, se dit-il, si tu ne veux pas je renonce.” Il renonçait, mais sur une parole d’intimité qui, il est vrai, ne s’adressait pas directement à elle, encore moins à son secret. Il avait visé autre chose qui lui était plus familier, qu’il connaissait et avec quoi il semblait avoir vécu dans une joyeuse liberté. Il fut *étonné de découvrir* que c’était peut-être sa voix. C’est cette voix qui lui était confiée. *Quelle pensée surprenante!* Il reprit les feuillets et écrivit: “C’est la voix qui t’est confiée, et non pas ce qu’elle dit. Ce qu’elle dit, les secrets que tu recueilles et que tu transcris pour les faire valoir, tu dois les ramener doucement, malgré leur tentative de séduction, vers le silence qui tu as d’abord puisé en eux.” Elle lui demanda ce qu’il venait d’écrire. Mais c’était quelque chose qu’elle ne devait pas entendre, qu’ils ne devaient pas entendre ensemble.²⁷

Between them, an encounter had taken place and it had taken place principally for him: he had touched her through an emptiness, he had seen her for an instant: an Orphic glance of the eye. The exemplary aspect of the encounter is its seeming irretrievability. For “when” was it that had he seen her? “Before; or, just a while ago” (*Tout à l’heure*). The event defies dating, and therefore defies among the most minimal requirements for inscription, namely, timing: the “when” of an occurrence. How to retrieve it? At a point of impasse, and because she herself “does not want to,” he abdicates: *si tu ne veux pas, je renonce*. Note the mutual release of both wills: she herself “does not want to” (though it is unclear what she objects to) and he in turn renounces as well. At precisely this point, and with “a note of intimacy” (*une parole d’intimité*), he hits upon something elemental: it is not her words (and even less her secret) to which he should attend, but her voice. That her voice is confided to him, it is this that he is “stunned to discover,” a dis-

covery that leads him to begin writing anew. If they are to communicate, he is no longer to write “what she says”; he must instead bring her words back to the silence that he had first drawn (*puiser*) from them. For it is only in and against this silence that there comes to emerge the voice as voice, i.e. the spoken word when the semantic charge of language is made to yield the merely vocal. But who can hear this, let alone write it? Who, in other words, does the voice solicit?

A simpler question: what, in this passage, *does* he write? A fragment that can be considered the first in *L'attente l'oubli*: “It is the voice that is confided to you, not what it says.” As the first fragment of the text, it is notable for its eventfulness, for its *happening* to him much as a surprise or discovery can be said to happen to someone. In terms of both its positioning and tone, the passage invites the possibility that further fragments, even those without context, should similarly register with a tone of surprise or discovery. Such is my contention with respect to the “city” fragment, to which I will turn in the following section. For the moment, let it be noted that his self-applied injunction regarding her voice is barely illuminating with respect as to how he is to proceed as well as to what he, and she with him, aim to achieve. He knows simply that it is her voice to which he must attend. The conclusion of the passage offers, however, an interesting clue as to how communication might take place between them. In remarking the man’s refusal to share his words with her, the narrator notes that this was something they “should not hear together.” As Blanchot’s ensuing descriptions of her speaking indicate, both parties will have to speak to and hear one another in the mode of separation or distance; more precisely, in the mode of a deferred speaking that never resolves itself into a synchronic, mutually verifiable meaning.

* * *

The relation of voice to surprise is thematized at greater length in a late fragment of *L'attente l'oubli*, where, once more, it arises in a context of renunciation and abdication. It is the woman who initiates the following exchange:

❖ “Qu’est-ce qui vous surprend dans ces mots? Ils sont simples.” –
 “Je crois que je m’étais fait à l’idée que vous parleriez pas. Vous n’aviez encore rien dit jusqu’ici, et il n’y avait rien à dire non plus.”²⁸

As is his pattern, Blanchot withholds the content of “her words” in order to prioritize the event of speech, which, as event, runs counter to the man’s expectations, he having resigned himself to her silence. She would not speak for she had as yet said nothing, and there was nothing to say. Yet

her words are clearly surprising, and the woman is compelled to ask why that may be, when, to her mind, they are not complicated or extravagant but “simple.” As the passage continues, Blanchot shifts her emphasis from message to medium (though, again, the message was never disclosed):

– “Et vous pensiez que les choses, au point où elles en étaient venues, se retireraient et ne s’exprimeraient pas? Qu’y a-t-il, dans cette voix, de plus inattendu que dans tout ce qui est arrivé et dont vous avez aisément tiré parti?” – ‘Rien de plus. Seulement un peu moins. Il y a – c’est la part de cette voix – tout à coup moins qu’il n’y avait: c’est en cela que consiste la surprise.’²⁹

Her words may be “simple,” but their eventfulness owes less to their putatively simple meaning than to the presence of her voice. Questioning him, she asks what is it *in* this voice that is “more unexpected” (*plus inattendu*) than in all that had happened previously. He counters: the matter concerns not the “more” of the voice, but the way in which it is somehow “less.” He contests not its unexpectedness, only its being something “more.” “Suddenly there is less than there had been before: the surprise consists of this.” The things (*les choses*) between them – their relation, the things that had happened to them, even the objects around them – are, as he acknowledges, simple, just as her words are simple. But he immediately asserts that there is “une autre simplicité qui est comme affirmée dans la voix. Quelque chose change.”³⁰ Suddenly, the voice is *here*, and it is here in the “less-ness” of the world, in the retreat (*le recul*) of all things from their worldly meaning.

Previously, I quoted from Blanchot’s 1957 article on Simone Weil in part because it features his earliest writing on attention, waiting, and the unexpected. There, in line with Isaac Luria, Blanchot characterizes the problem of creation in terms very similar to the passage above, namely, as a question of “less-ness”: “God, in creating the world, does not posit (*pose*) something more, but first something less,” the purpose of which is to “make room” (*faire place*) for an as yet inexistent world. The problem of creation, in other words, is “not how something is created from nothing, but how nothing is created, in order that ... there be *place* for something (or, in order that *place* be [given] for something).” In *L’attente l’oubli*, dialogue, and with it the initial appeal of the voice, does not first produce or deliver a message, but it emerges in and with the “less-ness” of the world in order that place be given to both a speaker and an addressee whose positions as speakers are thereby secured, but whose personal and social identities are suspended. The voice, to be sure, is not “nothing” in the religious or philosophical sense of *le néant*, as Blanchot’s concluding paragraph indicates,

it is “the element of divulgation” that relates two speakers without necessarily relating two identities. Note the repeated correlation of voice and surprise:

Que la voix tout à coup soit placée là, chose parmi d'autres, n'ajoutant que l'élément de divulgation dont même une rencontre aussi simple ne semble pouvoir se passer, cette brusque apparition le surprend, et tandis qu'elle parle d'une manière presque directe, se mettant tout entière dans chaque parole et ne gardant aucune réserve pour rien dire de plus, elle a déjà gagné d'autres niveaux où elle est prête à se faire entendre ou bien s'est déjà nécessairement exprimée, remplissant dans le temps, en avant, en arrière, tout le vide, comme dans la pièce tout le silence, malgré sa faible capacité, tantôt en retrait, tantôt en dehors, toujours éloignée et toujours proche, cherchant et précisant, comme si être précise était la principale sauvegarde de cette voix qui dit, avec un peu de froideur: “Je voudrais vous parler.”³¹

Once more, Blanchot's terms recall his brief reference to Luria from 1957.³² Here, the emptiness of time, and the silence of the room, signal the retreat or “less-ness” of the world from out of which the voice emerges as a “startling appearance” (*brusque apparition*). It carries as yet no message, but in the “less-ness” of the world adds only “the element of divulgation” which, the narrator notes, even the simplest encounter cannot do without. The voice summons without yet summoning someone in particular, and the man's repeated renunciations are indicative of the self-negation necessary to assuming one's allotted “place” in a dialogue the precise terms of which have yet to be established. Though it is described as “a thing among things,” its materiality or its presence is hardly akin to the customary stability of things. For while the voice is strangely *here*, it is also nowhere in particular: retreating, outside, distant and near, struggling for precision, struggling, it seems, to overcome its own character as a separate thing and thus struggling to coincide precisely, without remainder, with the most literal of demands: I would like to speak to you. The force of the phrase, *Je voudrais vous parler*, as with the related injunction, *Faites en sorte que je puisse vous parler*, is to be found in this delay, or non-coincidence, between speaking and speaking. In her demand to speak, a voice speaks without speaking just yet, and one senses that if the voice could signify, it would disappear as voice. Instead, it comes forth as a *reserve* that is yet nowhere hidden, for, once more, it is here as a thing among things. The event of the voice is just the event of this reserve: a delay in “presencing” that accounts for its character as “retreating, outside, distant and near.” To be sure, the

woman speaks – and perhaps hers are the words that, at the beginning of the fragment, are so simple as to prove utterly surprising. Yet the intervallic character of her speaking, its staggered being, *its eventfulness*, even as it lays down “the element of divulgation” between two people, yet precludes a meaningful transfer from taking place. In this delay, the voice calls to an addressee – calls *for* an addressee – to help it speak again *and* for the first time.

* * *

Her voice is unexpected, surprising in its emergence. Is it something *new*? The voice does not prove surprising for its newness, but for its sudden “here-ness” in the suspension of worldly meaning, for its being laid bare in a plea behind which there stands as yet no culturally or socially identifiable speaker, and which appeals to an as yet unidentifiable addressee. If the voice is eventful, and if an event is the taking-place of a staggered, intervallic presence – something akin to a deferral in time, a curve in space, a speaking that does not speak – then the voice in Blanchot does not emerge as new, but as the “now/not yet” presencing of a reality that has always already been here, and which, in the retreat of the world, suddenly presences in its reserve (its delay, its non-coincidence, etc.). The emergence of the voice, its eventful presencing, turns on the possibility of “clearing a path” so as to leave or make room for another who is already here, so that he or she may yet appear unexpectedly, as by surprise. To cast this thought as a demand, we can ask: how is one to clear a path (to secure, as it were, the “less-ness” of the world) so as to invite the unexpected voice of another, and how, correlatively, is one to speak so as to reach the other as a distance? The event of the voice in *L’attente l’oubli* establishes a spectral, simultaneously face-to-face and oblique positioning of two speakers, each inclined towards the other as if inclined to cross a distance – and this without knowing to whom one is already speaking, or to whom one is already listening. This “already” marks the temporal ambiguity of the voice, i.e. the dual positioning of a speaker to whom one cannot yet listen, and of an addressee to whom one has not yet spoken, each of whom is *already* inclined towards the other by virtue of the voice as eventful presence-reserve or as “the element of divulgation” without which no rapport could be established.

Abdication, renunciation, self-negation, waiting, forgetting and so on, are terms that signal the quieting of the world in oneself, and in this quieting, the forsaking of all third terms (Levinas’ *Neutre*) that mediate between self and another. Quieting the world in oneself, one not only becomes unassumable for the other; the other, in the presence of a forgotten being,

correlatively loses the power to say I. Writes Blanchot: "Celui qui oubliant s'efface de nous en cet oubli efface aussi en nous le pouvoir personnel de nous souvenir; alors s'éveille le souvenir impersonnel, le souvenir sans personne qui nous tient lieu d'oubli."³³ Coping with this form of quieting is difficult for the man of *L'attente l'oubli*, as it demands, in Blanchot's well-known terms, a passage from *Je* to *Il*, from me to someone or to no one in particular. At one such moment in the text, it is exactly with her demand in mind that he seeks to capitulate, not realizing that such a capitulation is necessary to hearing her speak.

❖ Quand elle commença à chercher des expressions pour lui dire: "Vous ne le saurez jamais. Vous ne me ferez jamais parler. Jamais vous n'apprendrez pourquoi je suis ici avec vous", c'est alors, dans le mouvement véhément qui lui permettait d'être une voix passionnée, tout en restant un corps immobile et impassible, qu'il l'entendit lui demander tout à coup, sans même changer le registre de sa voix et peut-être même sans changer ses paroles: "Fais en sorte que je puisse te parler." Il ne pourrait plus jamais oublier cette prière.

Pendant des jours, il avait lutté contre elle, par des mots, par des silences. "Non, je ne suis pas celui que vous voudriez que je sois." Sur quoi, longtemps après, elle intervenait: "Et qui seriez-vous, si vous l'étiez?" Comme, par une sorte de réserve et peut-être par une difficulté plus grave, il ne voulait pas le préciser, elle concluait triomphalement: "Vous voyez, vous ne pouvez pas le dire, encore moins le nier."³⁴

More precisely here than on any other occasion in *L'attente l'oubli*, Blanchot *situates* the key phrase of the work (*Fais en sorte...*) and, in so doing, reveals the simultaneous precariousness and potential violence of dialogue. I say *violence* in order to underscore the threat that their dialogue may veer into an interrogation, into the will to make the other speak, *faire parler*, and *precariousness* to underscore the fragile, initial communicability of the human voice prior to its resolution as message. In the place of a semantically oriented exchange, the force of her demand is such as to institute between her and her interlocutor a rapport that forestalls (a) the threat of interrogation and which yet, against (b) her own correlative threat of silence or withdrawal, sustains something of (c) a spectral, impersonal, deferred dialogue. Further, it is the voice as voice that charts a path between, on the one hand, the interrogative demand that the other speak aloud, as if in public and under oath, and, on the other, the correlative retreat into silence as the refusal of such a demand. In terms that are broadly Blanchot's, the voice eschews both the intelligibility of the day and the irreparable solitude of the

night, and it thereby, as will be seen, skirts an entire series of binary oppositions that have traditionally in the West served in measuring the putative intelligibility of natural and cultural phenomena.

In the first paragraph of the passage above, Blanchot's narrator offers a split view of the woman's demand. First, in an unusual use of direct discourse, the narrator quotes the inward thoughts she seeks to express, yet in a second moment he outwardly relays those thoughts in terms far different from their initial formulation. The discrepancy here between thought and expression can be observed on two levels. At the level of meaning, the woman seeks to tell the man that he will never make her speak (*Vous ne me ferez jamais parler*) or explain her presence, though her actual words express, it would seem, the exact opposite: *Fais en sorte que je puisse te parler*. At the level of address, she shifts from the formal *vous* to the personal *tu*, simultaneously suspending the codified, potentially authoritative distance between two formal speakers and attempting, in its place, to address him as a singular *tu*. Yet the narrator also maintains that in searching to formulate her thoughts (again, thoughts stable enough to be quoted), she arrives at what must be considered an equivalent rendering, namely, the key phrase of *L'attente l'oubli*: "Make it so that I can speak to you." This latter formulation is thus something of a translation of her thoughts as they are initially formulated. Yet how is one to account for both her decision to refuse dialogue and her pleading for it to begin? How does a single expression align, and seemingly equate, moments as disparate as these: You will never make me speak, Make it so that I can speak to you?

In a work whose central "actions" involve the act of forgetting, the concluding sentence of the first paragraph is certainly telling: *Il ne pourrait plus jamais oublier cette prière*. Her plea, her prayer resists forgetting and, judging from the terms of the following paragraph, this resistance borders on the intolerable. With words and silences, the man "fights" against her but neither option proves effective. He renounces once again ("*Non je suis pas celui que vous voudriez que je sois*"), never anticipating that his renunciation is indispensable to the possibility of her speaking. Unable to explain who "he" (*celui*) needs to be; unable to explain who might be the possible addressee of the demand "Make so that I can speak to you," he is left disarmed against her "triumphant conclusion," the terms of which are deeply important in *L'attente l'oubli*. Her triumph: "*Vous voyez, vous ne pouvez pas le dire, encore moins le nier*." Blanchot, in his refusal to elaborate on the 'object' of the direct object pronoun (*le*), shifts our attention to the verbs in her sentence: *dire* and *nier*, which, as expressed together, inspire the following query: are there features of the world that cannot be taken up in speech but that can even less be denied or negated?

To my count, Blanchot offers seven versions of this dichotomy in *L'attente l'oubli*, all which turn on the dual impossibility of full assumption on the one hand, and full negation on the other. In each case, one is faced with a rapport (or object of rapport) the reality of which lends itself neither to the light of day, nor to the muteness of night. In addition to the dual impossibility of *dire* and *nier*, Blanchot's reader is invited to consider the following versions of this same impossibility.

With respect to her own "presence," the woman evinces neither doubt nor faith. From the text: *Il lui semble qu'elle ne doute pas plus de sa présence qu'elle n'y ajoute foi. Peut-être parce qu'elle ne doute pas, elle ne croit pas.* (AO 41/AwO 26: "It seems to him that she does not doubt her presence anymore than she invests it with faith. Perhaps because she does not doubt, she does not believe.")

Faced (as always) with either an impossible or unspecific demand, the man attempts to refuse. And yet: *ce qu'il avait refusé était toujours devant lui, étranger à son consentement, afin d'être étranger à son refus.* (AO 59/AwO 40: "what he had refused was still before him, unknown to his consent so as to be unknown to his refusal.")

The woman and man are repeatedly said to be bound together by a force of attraction, though, with respect to the precise nature of this force, the narrator is constrained to equivocate: *Ce qui attire, c'est la force de la proximité qui tient sous l'attrait, sans jamais s'épuiser en présence et jamais se dissiper en absence.* (AO 88/AwO 60-1: "What attracts is the force of proximity that holds under attraction, without ever being exhausted in presence or dissipated in absence.")

The act of waiting is described as *[une] entrée dans un rapport qui n'est pas d'accueil, ni d'exclusion.* (AO 102/AwO 71: "The entering into a relation that neither welcomes nor excludes.")

The interval between the visible and the sayable is cast as a "rupture" *qui ne se laisse pas apercevoir ni vraiment dénoncée.* (AO 106/AwO 74-5: "that does not let itself be perceived nor truly denounced.")

Finally, let me quote in full the earliest example of such a dual impossibility.

❖ Ce n'est pas une fiction, bien qu'il ne soit pas capable de prononcer à propos de tout cela le mot de vérité. Quelque chose lui est arrivé, et il ne peut dire que ce soit vrai, ni le contraire. Plus tard, il pensa que l'événement consistait dans cette manière de n'être ni

vrai ni faux.³⁵

Again, the query: are there features of the world that defy the predicates of truth and falsehood; features of our perceptual landscape that can be neither perceived nor denounced; rapports with an other that neither welcome nor exclude; forces of proximity (of relation, of community) that neither exhaust themselves into presence nor dissipate into absence; demands to which one can neither consent nor refuse; realities – including one’s own reality – that can be neither doubted nor believed in? Does the *eventfulness* of such features, such realities, turn precisely on their dual resistance to day and night, to the intelligibility of speech and to the correlative intelligibility of negation?

Despite their simplicity, the verbs *dire* and *nier* are burdened with a host of conceptual meanings and it is therefore fair to translate her thought more liberally, asking: are there objects of experience, elements even of humanity, that can be neither represented nor destroyed – and that, perhaps, cannot be represented precisely because they cannot, in the initial movement of comprehension, be negated or destroyed? Are there features of the world, of the human, that resist the transformative power of human production, even the mimetic powers of human artistry? The man of *L’attente l’oubli* cannot imitate or perform who he needs to be (there is no model of “he (*celui*) whom she would like him to be”), but he also cannot deny that there is someone in him – an anonymous *quelqu’un* – to whom she would like to speak, *to whom she is speaking* and at precisely *this point of impossibility* when he is incapable of expressing who ‘someone’ is. The fact that the man cannot express or say who he must be in order to help her, does not invalidate the experience that there is someone in him who *appears*, however obliquely, at precisely this moment of failure. To ask: who is this someone, is to ask: who is the addressee of this passionate voice? If the position of the addressee, here, can be neither assumed nor denied, then perhaps the voice itself is also of an order that defeats the dual intelligibilities of speaking and negating. Let me rephrase this last thought in the following terms. While the biological organs that facilitate speech may die, may be killed or destroyed, it is yet not clear that the voice with its “element of divulgation” can similarly be negated. Dialogue, if it cannot proceed at the level of message, may nonetheless proceed in the deferred, spectral mode of a voice that speaks without speaking, that declares itself eventfully, i.e. in the staggered time of “now/not yet,” and that thereby summons an addressee who is simultaneously a singular *tu* and no one in particular. Against the dialectic of day and night, of interrogation and the refusal to speak, the woman and man of *L’attente l’oubli* speak in and through the reserve of the voice that summons, in each of their beings, an

impersonal someone who, by dint of this very impersonality, can neither speak nor answer in the name of (or as an instance of) any preceding source of authority.

The Measure of the Outside

The intelligibility of the fragment concerning “the pressure of the city” is to be first approached via the materiality of its tone. A thematic or conceptual reading of *L’attente l’oubli* is not to be discounted; on the contrary, the work operates with a series of terms whose thematic or conceptual force may never stabilize into definitive meanings, but whose operative possibilities are renewed from fragment to fragment. Variations permeate the terms of waiting, attentiveness, forgetting, etc., and such variations are ceaselessly proposed and contested, repeated and refined in the give-and-take of dialogue, and in the fitful movement from fragment to fragment. This open network of echoes and resonances is interrupted when one considers the peculiarity of the “city” fragment, as it neither continues nor contests any particular theme or concept already in play. Blanchot’s decision to include it signals the threat of either dogmatism or gratuity: a voice that speaks dictatorially, on the one hand, or carelessly, on the other. To counter this troublesome autonomy, I claim that the “city” fragment solicits us with a tone of surprise that can be heard in other moments of the work, notably in the opening sequence. There, Blanchot describes the man’s “surprising thought” that he need attend to the woman’s voice as opposed to the content of her speech. Later fragments describe her voice itself as a source of surprise. On the strength of this association, I have argued that the voice in *L’attente l’oubli* serves as a source of communicability without which dialogue could not begin, and that its character as a surprise solicits an addressee without soliciting a specific person. Startling, dispossessing, and yet *delimiting*, the voice as surprise summons one to a position in dialogue the terms and direction of which are as yet undecided. The “city” fragment bespeaks such a surprise encounter, and its tone is equally, therefore, one of a surprise or discovery. Unlike dialogue, the fragment does not position two interlocutors across from one another, and therefore its speaker is not directly responding to a previously articulated claim. Yet if this passage betrays a sense of surprise, then the structure of response is not altogether eliminated. The tone indicates that something here is given to thought; that the fragment is less a conclusion proceeding from a thinking subject than the initial tracing of a thought first emerging in reflection, and emerging for a subject as yet unprepared to assume its full scope.

The following pages feature an extended reading of the fragment, by

which one should understand not a conclusive interpretation, but an expansion of its immediate claims. In line with Blanchot's account of the voice as addressed not to me but to someone in me, the "city" fragment, and quite literally, the thinking or writing of it, emerges from and for a writing subject in whom the world has fallen quiet. In this sense, it would be exemplary less of the overall meaning of *L'attente l'oubli* than of its workings as developed in the dialogue between the two speakers. Those workings, once more, aim to secure the conditions necessary for her to speak to him. Because her speaking (or demands to speak) do not principally consist in delivering a message or expressing a thought, but in speaking in such a way as to withhold a message, the woman aims first and foremost to secure *in her interlocutor* the position of "an addressee in general," of an addressee as no one in particular. She solicits the man of *L'attente l'oubli* not as a universal subject, but as the anonymous, singular recipient of a plea for which he cannot but assume responsibility, though such an assumption repeatedly bears on him as an impossible demand. Hers, as we have seen, is an address that seeks to make its way to an other, and his is the burden of clearing a path, of lessening the world, so as to ensure that this address to reach him – and reach him, one should note, neither in the clarity of public discourse, nor in the ineffable voice of a radically singular subject. Her voice is to reach *someone in him*, and I suggest that the "city" fragment, its thinking and writing, similarly demands that *someone in him* prove accessible, i.e., lessened of the weight of the world, that this thought may so reach him. In its tone, in its materiality, the fragment *preserves* the constraining, delimiting moment of surprise or exposure when thought is addressed, as with the woman's voice, from without.

* * *

To turn to the fragment:

❖ La pression de la ville: de toutes parts. Les maisons ne sont pas là pour qu'on y demeure, mais qu'il y ait des rues et, dans les rues, le mouvement incessant de la ville.

To offer an initial reading: The houses and the city itself are constructed not for the sake of an interior life, but in order to lend a measure to the outside. The term "measure" appears on several occasions in *L'attente l'oubli* and I use it analogously to Blanchot's reference "not [to] the measure that limits, but [to] the measure that measures in reserving the unlimited (*non pas la mesure qui limite, mais la mesure qui mesure en réservant l'illimité*)" (AO 74/AwO 50; trans. modified). In the relevant passage, Blanchot writes of the "infinity" opened in every question. The essence of the answer, of the

response that is solicited by every question, is not to close this infinity, but somehow to “measure it” in reserving it as infinite. A response does not so much answer a question, as it answers to the infinity that is first opened in the question. A similar responsiveness animates the construction of the city which, in its construction, seeks to measure – to answer to, not to defeat – a sense of exteriority that Blanchot terms the outside, *le dehors*.

The term “outside” is admittedly far less frequently used in *L’attente l’oubli* than in other works by Blanchot. In one instance, he writes of the man’s coming into contact with the woman’s “proximity,” and in her proximity, with the outside, *le dehors* (AO 87/AwO 60). Although it is important to retain a sense of the outside that refers to the exterior places and streets of the city, it is clear that Blanchot’s use of the term entails a more radical understanding of the term, one that does not turn on the dichotomy of interior-exterior. The outside, in Blanchot’s sense, is not approachable as a place or an object is said to be approachable. One suffers the outside as an intrusion that evacuates the self of its worldly bearings, such that the outside registers not only as a communication from without, but one’s own passionate communicability with and *within* the outside. Is there an ontological priority to the outside, one that allows for the claim that it is foundational with respect to our worldly experience? Yes and no. The outside is to be understood as what, with respect to all worldly experience, *comes first* – without, however, attributing to this “first” the powers of a foundation. For in no sense is the outside (or an experience of the outside) to be considered the grounding possibility of further possibilities in the world. In order to make good on the claim that the outside be considered as *what comes first*, consider the following passage in which Blanchot writes of waiting as an act that progressively dispossesses the waiting subject of the object awaited.

L’attente solitaire, qui était en nous et maintenant passée au dehors, attente de nous sans nous, nous forçant à attendre. D’abord l’intimité, d’abord l’ignorance de l’intimité, d’abord le côté à côté d’instant s’ignorant, se touchant et sans rapport.³⁶

If waiting opens a rapport of intimacy (presumably with the object awaited), it yet proceeds in such a way as to eliminate this intimacy, opening he who waits to the ignorance of intimacy, opening this ignorance in turn to an experience of time as dispersed and undone. When I speak of the outside as *what comes first*, I have in mind Blanchot’s stunning description of a “first” instance that opens onto a previous “first” that opens itself onto a “first” that is not accessible apart from this movement of progressive openings in which a “first” instance yields to another, and this other yielding in turn. The

outside is just this retreat of the world in oneself, a movement from a first to first to first that ultimately opens onto an originary (but in no sense grounding) experience that registers passionately as the dispersion of time.

To claim that the city of Blanchot's fragment is constructed so as to lend a measure to the outside, is to claim that the city stages *an act of recollection* or, equivalently, *an act of acknowledgement*. Recall, here, the claim that the city is akin to a *response* that seeks to measure the outside. Measure, and not restore, for the outside does not participate in any economy of loss and redemption. As what comes first, the outside is already here, always accompanying the present: though it can be occluded in the thickness of everyday life, it cannot be destroyed, nor for that matter produced. Merely measured: traced, articulated, exposed. The question that I take Blanchot to be asking here is: How is one to give a figure to this experience without occluding it in so doing?

* * *

The houses of Blanchot's city are constructed not for the sake of an interior life, but for the sake of the streets that are hollowed out and cast forth in the space between buildings. The "pressure" that mounts from all sides is oriented towards the exterior, channeled into a circuit of corridors that organize and lend a shape to this pressure. By virtue of this pressure, the city maintains a peak of movement: the circulation of bodies is "incessant." Unthought or at least expressed in Blanchot's words is the insight that *there is always someone outside*.

To expand on these claims, the houses – and with them presumably, the apartments and hotels – are constructed not for the sake of an interior life, but in order to establish a relation to the outside. Between a sedimentary impulse that registers as "pagan," and the contrary, broadly "Jewish" impulse towards movement, the city fosters the latter option in order to recall or to acknowledge an experience of the outside that simultaneously precedes and presently accompanies the city. The memory of the city, the memory that the city displays or exhibits to its own inhabitants, is a memory of the desert, the only adequate "memorial" for which it is not a political monument or sacred ritual, but the open-ended movement that circulates ceaselessly in its streets. If this thought is correct, then one must ask: what is the nature of the desert, i.e. of the outside in Blanchot's sense of the term, such that only an open-ended movement should prove adequate to measuring it? For whom, secondly, does the city exhibit this memory, if, unlike a memorial or religious ceremony, it is addressed neither to the citizen nor to the believer? Is not the thought itself that *there is always someone outside* an event comparable to the woman's voice, i.e. a communica-

tive instance whose force is apparent neither to the public citizen nor to private individual, but to he who is only *someone* himself? I will turn to the nature of the outside as “indestructible” below, but would first like to analyze the terms of the urban landscape that ceaselessly orients its citizens towards the exterior.

Again, there are houses for the sake of streets, as if the streets as exterior spaces followed upon and proved to be dependent upon the initial creation of a set of interior spaces. The streets result from the construction of houses; they do not precede them. At best, one might say that they appear simultaneously as the negative correlate of the positive spaces inside. Against this description, and in line with the thought that the outside is *what comes first*, the progression from house to street to permanent movement suggests a progression akin to the act of waiting as it is described above: as a “first” instance that yields to a more primordial first, and this first yielding in turn to the outside as the dispersion of time. The houses are first, we can say, because the streets themselves are first, because prior to both the houses and the streets, a sense of exteriority plays itself out in the dispersal of time, an exteriority the measure of which is to be had only with the ceaseless movement of the city’s inhabitants.³⁷ This description more accurately captures Blanchot’s claim that the houses are constructed not for the sake of remaining inside, but in order to orient their inhabitants towards the exterior – the outside itself (the desert in Blanchot’s sense) being recollected or acknowledged in this very orientation. Thus, though the outside is never to be enfolded in human culture, the latter can open itself so as to outwardly reference it, and in so referencing it, it can refuse or forestall the threat that human culture resolve itself in perfect immanence.

By virtue of its ceaselessness, the movement of the city exceeds the timed (or “time-able”) displacement that an individual may carry out in moving from here to there. The usefulness of coordinates, of discrete points in space, is called into question once one acknowledges that the city’s movement is of a qualitatively different order than that which carries an individual from A to B. How then to qualify it? First, it is constitutively incomplete, of an order foreign to accomplishment. This characteristic recalls other moments of *L’attente l’oubli*, for what is one to conclude with respect to such “actions” as waiting, attentiveness, and forgetting if not that they operate within an order foreign to accomplishment? Like the city’s movement, they are divested of ends and objects, and one can generally assert that action in *L’attente l’oubli* is neither proprietary nor anticipatory in its essence. No thought better exemplifies this claim than that Blanchot’s houses are constructed for the sake of leaving, and of leaving behind perhaps the dearest of human properties: the home, the interior, the place of dwelling.

Secondly, a social *agent* waits for (or is attentive to), and is therefore a *social* agent by virtue of his or her involvement in a network of worldly meaning. Yet when waiting is divested of its object, and when the city's movement knows no "where-to," who could assume such a movement as properly his? Anonymity *appears* in the citizen body when its actions exceed or divest themselves of all local goals. He who sustains this anonymity is only ever *someone*, and because the movement of the city is incessant (persistent *and* foreign to accomplishment), there is always *someone* outside.

Correlatively, the outside in the radical sense can be infinitely practiced or exposed; such is the entailed correlative to the thought that the movement of the city is, and must be, incessant. The thought that only an open-ended, un-accomplishable movement can espouse the outside merits an extended explanation. If the outside is always already here, preceding and indeed conditioning the achievements of human culture, then cultural immanence is impossible. A world seemingly made over through the forces of human production may yet yield, as with the city's movement, an excess that cannot be enfolded within worldly meaning. Put differently, immanence is never ultimate because the outside *cannot be destroyed*, is of an order irreducible to destruction, negation, assumption, redemption, etc. When the human, furthermore, articulates itself as an exposure or susceptibility to the outside, it is *immortal*. Immortal are those features of the human – the voice, the face, the nomadic body – that are irreducible to human signification, yet which display or give themselves publicly, literally, and anonymously in their vulnerability to the outside. The voice as voice, not as meaning; the face as face, not as figure, are the elemental, first features of human being whose most salient feature is that they cannot be produced, but simply exposed or laid bare.

* * *

*La voix ... le retentissement d'un espace ouvert sur le dehors.*³⁸

Because there is always someone outside, Someone always is, and in the figure of Someone, the Outside is measured: traced, articulated, exposed, etc. As the Outside does not participate in an economy of loss and redemption; as it lends itself to neither destruction nor representation, it remains foreign to the sentiments of longing and grieving, foreign to the feeling of nostalgia. Lack is not a predicate of that which is indestructibly here. If there is grief in Blanchot, it is for those elements lost to the demands of the day, demands that prevail less against the night than against those immortal features of the world that step forth as a reserve or interval

in presencing: the voice, the face, Someone as the non-figural figure of the Outside.

Against the demand that one either convert to the light of day, or exile oneself in the muteness of solitude, the voice signals the staggered, inter-vallic event of dialogue making its way to Someone. He who is bidden to answer assumes a correlative and seemingly impossible responsibility: that of lessening the world in himself so as to clear a path for someone who is *already here, already speaking* and, in so clearing a path, bidding her to come as unexpected.

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NOTES

- ¹ AO 19/AwO 32: "The pressure of the city: from all parts. The houses are not there so that people can live in them, but rather so that there can be streets and, in the streets, the city's incessant movement." (In the ensuing pages, I will quote directly from the French in the body of the paper, and will provide the available translations in a note. I will indicate when diverging from the available translations.)
- ² Her demand is addressed in formal and informal terms: 'Faites en sorte que je puisse vous parler.' 'Fais en sorte que je puisse te parler.' I follow Ann Smock in translating the phrase as: 'Make it so that I can speak to you.' See Ann Smock, *What is There to Say?* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), p. 4. Readers familiar with Smock's book will readily recognize my indebtedness to many of her thoughts and formulations; I gladly acknowledge her influence on this paper.
- ³ In what can be considered a possible reference to the city, the man compares the woman to "a crowd" (*une foule*) and to "a multitude" (*une multitude*), appreciating in her "a sort of abstract weakness [that is] unable of presenting itself otherwise than in the empty form of a very great number" (*une sorte de faiblesse abstraite, incapable de se présenter autrement que sous la forme vide d'un très grand nombre*; AO 31, translation mine). Indeed, the woman's very being is a locus of movement as her "presence" is said to be simultaneously advancing and retreating, evincing a certain "slippage" (*glissement*) that never quite stabilizes. None of these terms, however, is especially illuminating with respect to the "city" fragment and its depiction of the city's incessant movement.
- ⁴ I borrow the distinction between "dogmatism" and "gratuity" from Pierre Garrigues. See the first chapter, "Phénoménologie du Fragment," in his *Poétiques du Fragment* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1995), pp. 23-138.
- ⁵ Though Blanchot himself employs the term *exposer* (AO 69/AwO 47, 72/49, 104/72), the concept is today largely associated with the philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy. I do not cite Nancy in this paper, but I gladly acknowledge the importance of his work (and of this concept especially) both in the following pages and for my

thinking of Blanchot in general. A recent work in particular, *A l'écoute*, resonates with many of the points developed below, specifically Blanchot's account of "listening in general" and that of "the voice as writing." Nancy's remarks on the irreducible vocal element of writing – and on *le sens* generally speaking – nicely capture Blanchot's characterization of the voice as the a-signifying "element of divulgation" without which, as will be shown, no being-with could take place. "Le sens, s'il y en a, lorsqu'il y en a, n'est jamais un sens neutre, incolore ou aphone: même écrit, il a une voix – et c'est aussi le sens contemporain du mot 'écrire,' peut-être en musique comme en littérature. 'Écrire' dans son concept moderne élaboré depuis Proust, Adorno, Benjamin, et jusqu'à Blanchot, à Barthes et à l'archi-écriture' de Derrida, ce n'est pas autre chose que faire résonner le sens au-delà de la signification, ou au-delà de lui-même. C'est *vocaliser* un sens qui prétendait, pour une pensée classique, rester sourd et muet, entente détimbré de soi dans le silence d'une *consonne* sans résonance." J-L. Nancy, *A l'écoute* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2002), p. 67. To borrow Nancy's terms and to anticipate my later position: In opposition to both the "consonance" of a universal voice (one that speaks for all) and the equally closed "consonance" of a particular voice (one that speaks, impossibly it would seem, without reference to the world), Blanchot will privilege the staggered, intervallic "resonance" of the voice which, already resonating in the speaker's own being, "re-sounds" (sounds anew) in its addressee prior to resolving itself in meaning or significance. Such a resounding is correlative to a surprise occurrence, i.e. to an exposure which, in exposing one to the outside (to the voice as the measure of the outside), exposes the outside as well.

⁶ For Blanchot's account of the dictator, see LV 299-300. On dialogue as the threat of interrogation, see the many references in *L'attente l'oubli*, but also DH 73, 76.

⁷ Gregg translates as "marking out a path." As will be indicated below, phrases related to "clearing a path" include *aller de l'avant* (AO 40/AwO 26, 85/58-9, 95/66) and *marcher en avant* (AO 59/AwO 39).

⁸ Leslie Hill, "A Fragmentary Demand", in *The Power of Contestation: Perspectives on Maurice Blanchot*, eds. K. Hart and G. Hartman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), pp. 101-20. "L'attente," first published in *Botteghe oscure*, n° 22, 1958, can be found in *Martin Heidegger zum siebzigsten Geburtstag* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959), pp. 217-24.

⁹ See "L'affirmation (le désir, le malheur)" EI 176-7/IC 121.

¹⁰ Christophe Bident, *Maurice Blanchot: Partenaire Invisible, Essai Biographique* (Seysssel: Editions Champs Vallon, 1998), p. 427.

¹¹ Emmanuel Levinas, "La philosophie et l'idée de l'infini", in *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (Paris: Vrin, 2001). This essay was originally published in *Revue de Métaphysique et Morale*, 1957, n°. 3, pp. 241-253. See also *Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* [1961] (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), p. 17.

¹² Levinas, "La philosophie et l'idée de l'infini," pp. 236-7. Alphonso Lingis is the translator of "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity," in Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998). The relevant passage occurs on pp. 52-3: "Heideggerian ontology subordinates the relation with the other to the relation with the neuter, Being, and it thus continues to

exalt the will to power, whose legitimacy the other alone can unsettle, trouble good conscience. When Heidegger calls attention to the forgetting of being, veiled by the diverse realities it illuminates, a forgetting for which the philosophy developed from Socrates on would be guilty, when he deplores the orientation of the intellect towards technology, he maintains a regime of power more inhuman than mechanism (and which perhaps does not have the same source as it; it is not sure that National Socialism arises from the mechanist reification of men, and that it does not rest on peasant enrootedness and a feudal adoration of subjugated men for the masters and lords who command them.) This is an existence which takes itself to natural, for whom its place in the sun, its ground, its site, orient all signification – a pagan *existing*. Being directs it building and cultivating, in the midst of a familiar landscape, on a maternal earth. Anonymous, neuter, it directs it, ethically indifferent, as a heroic freedom, foreign to all guilt with regard to the other.”

¹³ *EI 183/IC 125*: “If Judaism is destined to take on a meaning for us, it is indeed by showing that, at whatever time, one must be ready to set out, because to go out (to step outside) is the exigency from which one cannot escape if one wants to maintain the possibility of a just relation. The exigency of uprooting; the affirmation of nomadic truth. In this Judaism stands in contrast to paganism (all paganism). To be pagan is to be fixed, to plant oneself in the earth, as it were, to establish oneself through a pact with permanence that authorizes sojourn and is certified by certainty in the land. Nomadism answers to a relation that possession cannot satisfy. Each time Jewish man makes a sign to us across history it is by the summons of a movement.” Blanchot makes a direct reference to “Heideggerian paganism” in “[La Gravité du projet...].” See *Écrits politiques: Guerre d’Algérie, Mai 68, etc., 1958-1993* (Paris: Éditions Lignes & Manifestes, 2003), p. 66. In the same context, and clearly preoccupied with the opposition of fixity and movement, Blanchot notes: “La vérité est nomade.” See Levinas, *Sur Maurice Blanchot* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1975), for further references to this theme.

¹⁴ Blanchot here is citing Gerschom Scholem’s *Les grands courants de la mystique juive*.

¹⁵ *EI 169/IC 116*: “In creating the world God does not set forth something more, but, first of all, something less. Infinite Being is necessarily everything. In order that there be the world, he would have to cease being the whole and make a place for it through a movement of withdrawal, of retreat, and in “abandoning a kind of region within himself, a sort of mystical space.” In other words, the essential problem of creation is the problem of nothingness. Not how something can be created out of nothing, but how nothing can be created in order that, on the basis of nothing, something can take place.”

¹⁶ Though the face (*le visage*) as measure of the outside is certainly present in *L’attente l’oubli* (see for instance *AO 55/AwO 37, 57/38, 96/67*), a more extensive use of the term is to be found in the second part of *DH* as well as in a related essay, “La parole prophétique,” from *LV*, p. 117. In *DH*, for instance, Blanchot writes: “Visage, visage de l’attente, pourtant soustrait à l’attendu, l’inattendu de toute attente, imprévisible certitude,” a passage remarkable for its use of waiting (*l’attente*) and the unexpected (*l’inattendu*). (*DH 146*: “The face, the face of waiting, yet withdrawn from the awaited, the unexpected of all waiting, unforeseeable certitude.” Translation mine.)

- ¹⁷ “L’indestructible I: Être Juif,” in *EI* 188/ *IC* 128.
- ¹⁸ *EI* 188-9/*IC* 129: “Jacob does not say to Esau ‘I just saw God as I see you’ but ‘I see you as one sees God,’ which confirms the suggestion that the marvel (the privileged surprise) is indeed human presence, this Other Presence that is *Autrui* – no less inaccessible, separate, and distant than the Invisible himself. It also confirms the terrible character of such an encounter, whose outcome could only be approbation or death. Whoever sees God risks his life. Whoever encounters the Other can relate to him only through mortal violence or through the gift of speech by receiving him.”
- ¹⁹ For an account of the irreducible injunction to “speak or kill,” see Chapter 2 in Smock, *What is There To Say?*
- ²⁰ *EI* 363/*IC* 243: “When we meet someone on the street it comes always by surprise and as though by mistake, for we do not recognize ourselves there; in order to go forth and meet another one must first tear oneself away from an existence without identity.”
- ²¹ *AO* 7/*AwO* 1: “Here, and on this sentence that was perhaps also addressed to him, he was obliged to stop. It was almost while listening to her speak that he had written these notes. He heard her voice still as he wrote” (trans. slightly modified).
- ²² *AO* 112-3/*AwO* 78-9: “She sat up slightly, leaning to the side on her hand. She was then next to the wall and seemed to rise above their two reclining bodies, looking at both of them and saying in a voice whose cold clearness surprised him: ‘I would like to speak to you. When could I do that?’ – ‘Can you spend the night here?’ – ‘Yes.’ – ‘Can you stay as of now?’ – ‘Yes.’ / While he listens to this ‘yes,’ wondering if she really pronounced it (it is so transparent that it lets what she says, including this very word, pass through), she leans back as if she were already set free, while taking care not to put any distance between them. / He attracts her, attracted by the attraction in her as yet unaccomplished movement. But while she rises up in the one he is touching, and although he knows she is slipping, falling, a motionless figure, he does not stop clearing a path for her and leading her, pressing forward, as she holds on to him tightly in a movement that renders them indistinguishable. / She speaks, spoken rather than speaking, as if her own speech passed through her alive and painfully transformed her into the space of another kind of speech, always interrupted, lifeless. / And most certainly, when in the morning light – undoubtedly they have just awakened together – he hears her ask fervently, ‘Could I have spoken without stopping?’ he does not doubt being invited to take possession, in this single sentence, of everything that she said to him during the night” (trans. slightly modified).
- ²³ I borrow “chiasitic” from Smock, *What is There to Say?* p. 22.
- ²⁴ *AO* 40/*AwO* 26: “He was supposed to precede her and to always take the lead, without any assurance of ever being followed by her. He was obliged first to discover the words with which she could then make him hear what she had to say to him. They proceeded in this way, motionless within movement.”
- ²⁵ *AO* 16/*AwO* 5: “I am not asking you to speak: to hear, only to hear.”
- ²⁶ Blanchot’s discussion of the *Phaedrus* takes place in “La bête de Lascaux,” an essay on Char originally published in 1958 and reprinted in *Une voix venue*

d'ailleurs (Paris: Gallimard, 2002). See in particular pp. 51-5. On *la parole d'oubli* in AO/AwO, see 51/34.

- ²⁷ AO 9-10/AwO 3, emphasis mine: "While he gathered together the sheets of paper – and now she was watching him through curious eyes – he could not help feeling that he was bound to her by this failure. He did not understand very well why. It was as if he had touched her across the void; he had seen her for an instant. When? A few minutes ago. He had seen who she was. That did not encourage him; it suggested rather the final end to everything. 'All right,' he said to himself, 'if you do not want to, I renounce.' He was giving up, but on a note of intimacy, in an utterance that, it is true, was not addressed directly to her, less still to her secret. He had been aiming for something else that was more familiar to him, that he knew and with which he had seemed to live in joyous freedom. He was *stunned to discover* that it was perhaps her voice. It is the voice that was entrusted to him. *What a surprising thought!* He picked up the sheets of paper and wrote, 'It is her voice that is entrusted to you, not what she says. What she says, the secrets that you collect and transcribe so as to give them their due, you must lead them gently, in spite of their attempt to seduce, toward the silence that you first drew out of them.' She asked him what he had just written. But it was something that she must not hear, that they must not hear together" (trans. slightly modified).
- ²⁸ AO 98/AwO 68: "'What in these words surprises you? They are simple.' – 'I think that I had gotten used to the idea that you would not speak. You still hadn't said anything so far, and there wasn't anything to say, either.'"
- ²⁹ AO 98/AwO 68: "– 'And you thought that things had gotten to the point where they would withdraw and not be expressed? What is it in this voice that was more unexpected than anything that happened and that you profited from so easily?' – 'Nothing more. Only a little less. There is – this is the voice's role – suddenly less than there was: this is what the surprise consists of.'"
- ³⁰ AO 99/AwO 69: "another simplicity that is somehow affirmed in the voice. Something is changing."
- ³¹ AO 99/AwO 69: "That the voice is all of sudden placed here, one thing among others, adding only the element of divulgation that even such a simple encounter does not seem to be able to do without, this abrupt appearance surprises him, and while she speaks in an almost direct manner, putting herself completely into each word and keeping nothing in reserve so as to say nothing more, she has already acceded to other levels where she is ready to make herself heard or has already necessarily expressed herself, filling in time, ahead, behind, the entire void, as she fills all the silence in the room, in spite of her weak ability, which is sometimes withdrawn, sometimes outside, always distant and always near, searching and specifying, as if being precise were the principal safeguard of this voice that says, somewhat coldly, 'I would like to speak to you'" (trans. slightly modified).
- ³² Blanchot's concerns with "less-ness" and emptiness are not limited, of course, to this mention of Luria in the Weil article. The terms are broadly associated with the poetics of Mallarmé for Blanchot, and can be encountered elsewhere in his fiction. See for instance the narrator's description of Nathalie in *L'arrêt de mort*, 91: "Je ne peux cependant pas dire qu'elle fût un visage parmi d'autres: elle était moins que toutes les autres, c'était là sa particularité, et ce moins, quand j'y songe, est une

anomalie vraiment étrange, une surprise, un phénomène angoissant, qui aurait pu m'éclairer si j'y avais été sensible et que pourtant j'entrevois quelquefois, pensant à cet être si rare que je négligeais pour tant d'autres." In my translation: "I cannot say however that she was a face among others: she was less than all the others, this itself was her particularity, and this 'less-ness,' when I think about it, is a truly strange anomaly, a surprise, an anguishing phenomenon, that could have enlightened me if I had been sensitive to it and which yet I could sometimes glimpse, thinking about that being who was so rare and who I neglected for so many others."

- ³³ AO 57-8/AwO 38: "He who, forgetting, effaces himself from us in this forgetting effaces in us the personal power of remembering ourselves; thereupon awakens an impersonal remembrance, a personless remembrance that takes the place of forgetting in us" (trans. modified).
- ³⁴ AO 44/AwO 28: "When she began to look for expression to say to him, 'You will never know. You will never make me speak. You will never learn why I am here with you,' it was then, in the vehement movement that allowed her to be an impassionate voice while remaining a motionless and impassive body, that he heard her suddenly ask him, without even changing the register of her voice and perhaps even without changing her words: 'Make so that I can speak to you.' He would never again be able to forget this plea. / For days he had struggled against her, through words, through silences: 'No, I am not the one you would like me to be.' About which, must later, she objected: 'And who would you be if you were?' Since he did not want to give a specific reply, because of a kind of reservation or perhaps some more serious difficulty, she concluded triumphantly, 'You see, you cannot say it, let alone deny it.'"
- ³⁵ AO 11-2/AwO 4: "It is not a fiction, although he is incapable of pronouncing the word truth in connection with all of that. Something happened to him, and he can say neither that it was true, nor the contrary. Later, he thought that the event consisted in this manner of being neither true nor false."
- ³⁶ AO 24/AwO 14: "Solitary waiting that was within us and has now passed to the outside, waiting for ourselves without ourselves, forcing us to wait outside our own waiting, leaving us nothing more to wait. At first, intimacy, at first, the ignorance of intimacy, at first, instants unaware of each other existing side by side, touching and unconcerned with each other."
- ³⁷ An analogous movement from a first to a more primordial first and so on, can be seen in the following passage: "Les mots que porte la parole que porte la voix que retient l'attente" (AO 101/AwO 71: "The words carried by speech carried by the voice restrained by waiting."). This single sentence echoes the man's writing in the opening sequence as he attempts to forego his initial relation with her words, in order to pay heed to her voice, in order ultimately to access the silence he first heard in her words.
- ³⁸ EI 386/IC 258: "The voice ... the reverberation of a *space* opening onto the *outside*."