

## Narcissus



### *In Search of a Method*

To follow the haunt of Maurice Blanchot, the stage whisper of his voice—in citation, implied citation, unto the silent citation as when before God, prayerfully (as the present writing)—the important thing is the work: a movement toward conversation. To trace the ghost is not yet dialogue but invocation of the signature that lurks, singularly and universally, of Blanchot, the companion who stands apart from me. Duplicity is doubled: it isn't certain that there is only one.

These things the whisper might have conveyed. But the vocalization comes through a mask, a per-sona, and that belongs to Derrida. His inaugural study of mimetics unveils the voice that philosophy mimes by use of language (“meaning is use”), together with an entire field of mimetography disseminated across thought of all kinds, in particular, that which follows. Accordingly, to understand Blanchot's voice through a performance of ventriloquism seems apt. How else to study voice than to try the other's on, lip synch it, impersonate and take it to be a character role? Blanchot's voice needs to be provoked into writing the text, if only as imposture, mockery, or travesty of same. It would then call attention to a manner of vociferation that the author's living laryngeal vocality was unable to provide. Besides, repetition trumps one-time-only presentation. The rerun shows defects and excesses in a splendor that the premiere masks. Besides, if live voice is understood *nachtraglich*, then the written voice is anterior.

In a mimetic text, production, co-production, or giving production to outsourcing is accomplished through citations, borrowings, remixes, recitations, *recits* of other texts, texts where the writing has been leavened

by reading—in every tense—in a looking-glass exchange which is epochal (*epoche*, arrest or suspension.) The intertextuality of the document attests to the fact that no text can exist in isolation: the “all in the all.” As if in a Leibnizean universe, each monadic text contains holographically a replica of every textual monad. However the metaphysics, mimetics cares about reuse of material. The miming force relates directly to itself in repeats and doubles that return by detour to the place where, circling around to itself once again, it catches up with the selfsame circulation. Said otherwise, impoverishment of writing is contagious and afflicts choice of theme, vocabulary, style, and reading—an echo can only repeat the already said. Reading plays a lead role in the mimed event: not mere reading skills—a quick spell-check or test for grammaticality—but the more significant fact that reading changes the meaning. A text is susceptible to an exterior intelligence that penetrates its interior and becomes interior to it. Reader is companion to writer and the two are bound in a complex and ambivalent bond.

Why a mimetic text? First, it imitates voices of other texts. It recites in their voice. Second, it concerns the image and the imaginary that dissimulates absence. The image belongs to an earlier *episteme* when resemblance ruled over representation and the sign. The image is essentially a resemblance. Resemblance is self-reflexive. Resemblance in this case has to resemble itself. The text presents a prolonged absorption into the imaginary, exhumed in a series of inscriptions made to give it voice.

One branch of mimetics, of special interest to the present study, is ventriloquism. This is to speak the part of the dumb one who then puts it in writing, inscribing words as though spoken; the counterfactual will bear deep scrutiny. There is a sending or throwing of voice to another who appears to speak it. The thrown voice voices for the double, voices the double in grasping what the voice would be like—an imagination. But thrown voice is an imitation of a mute one to which the voice is thrown; it imitates its own imagination of that one, an imagining of the imagination which it resembles. One could say: it is imitation of an image and how it intransitively impersonates. It imitates the imaged voice when it voices phonetically and syntactically. It must follow rules of each.

The thrown voice, therefore, is always a second and not an original. The original voice is one’s everyday version when one ventriloquates. The thrown voice lacks originality, is of derivative status, if any, and always already is a copy—in fact, a copy of a copy, low down in Plato’s canonical ordering: a simulacrum. The original voice, following Levinas, must be capable of sincerity, voicing without deception. Here, voice is lure, transgressive by nature.

The text, in addition, is polyvocal, both in a logical and a progressive sense. It moves from a restricted mime of a single voice—Blanchot’s—and

working with material received, spreads wings of self-consciousness and opens to voices that contest in advance the very inquiry they are in the midst of performing. To enter the general economy of mimetics goes some distance toward the presentation of a verbal text, in Levinas's sense of the word.<sup>1</sup>

### The Alchemical Dream: Narcissism Is Being Killed

That forgetfulness exists: this remains to be proved.

—Nietzsche

If there were a protocol for murder, it would be possible to embrace the transgressive point of view offered by the neuter. It first would be necessary to access the outside, engage the *pas au-delà*, and move beyond dazzling, dialectizable thought. Murder then would be a ritual one, sacrificial in nature, in which an absolute prohibition would have been suspended. In effect, death of a commitment to logocentrism that dwells within the house of being would have been accomplished. The entity would be “the child within,” the child-Narcissus, whose desire constitutes (in a god-like way) the entirety of being-in-the-world and motivates the agon of affirmation and negation.<sup>2</sup>

The protocol is not difficult to state. It belongs to a lucidity preserved by a subterranean history, an arcana: “Putrefaction precedes the generation of every new form in existence.”<sup>3</sup> The killing of kid-Narcissus proceeds by marrying him to his beloved image, the figure reflected to his fascinated gaze with the same lustral magnetism that emanates from his eyes. The blissful union is preserved by sealing the two, image and living presence, together and separate from the founded world. As they unite, a new mode, a new voice, is born—that of the neuter itself, the *ipse* (does it have one?), risen from the cloistered condition. Child-Narcissus and his beloved merge, image and animate being, to yield the hybrid half-breed: the neuter. That which arises from the tomb, the secret encryption, has never before appeared; its utter novelty is radical such that it cannot be *as such*. Its appearance is a gap, a hiatus, in the otherwise smooth function of *Simgebung*, the meaning-making mechanism that produces the world. Killing the child engenders the adult capable of living neither passively nor actively but outside life altogether.

The story is of dying (not death), but with an irony—the coupling joins the living to the non-living. The marriage insures that death is impossible. “You can’t kill a dead man.” In the death sought by Serge Leclair, it is necessary again and again to kill the child-Narcissus in order to produce the voice.<sup>4</sup> The achievement is never accomplished because of the extraordinary

insistence that exercises power over the not yet as well as the to come—and is joined to the most ancient and immemorial. The murder both no longer takes place and has never yet. In death's failure, Narcissus must exist dying the agony of an unfruitful (unconsummated) union with the beloved image, while the limpid pool changes with the seasons and the ages and epochs of humankind. The child-Narcissus must accept eternal dying, surviving the very sacrifice that inaugurates the creative advance of voice. He, like the compulsive, is free only to repeat the protocol, the confinement within the hermetically sealed space; the failure to emerge as an alterity marks him as a "being without being," an eternal thing. The accomplishment, moreover, falls short of what death would have wrought and institutes an illegible cipher in the non-place between living and dead, presence and absence. His unnatural attraction—to the inanimate and nonorganic, a mere play of light upon a surface—marks the child-Narcissus as unable to catch up with death, or alternatively, prone to overshoot it. The inconstancy that belongs to the *mi-lieu* is why he is so cherished. His figure, "unnatural" desire, is a portal to the step not beyond, *pas au-delà*.

The failure—like Orpheus's—should not be determinative since he—unlike Orpheus—is granted more than one chance to comply with protocol. Like Orpheus, though for different reasons, the undertaking is doomed from the onset. Orpheus's could not be won because he sought the impossible: to bring to daylight's dialectic a silhouette of nocturnal opacity. He wanted to replace the obscure object of his love with the known and knowable and to uphold the work of song, *poiesis*, to the world. But Eurydice was not graspable as a shade, image of life that is non-living, and hence Orpheus's glance backward—transgressing the law he had signed and to which he had been assigned—was a reflex, unavoidable as a blink in sudden light, bound to the contradictory terms of the arrangement with Hades. With Narcissus, it is different. The beloved image, it is true, does not belong to the world of the living any more than the dead Eurydice did. But with Narcissus, no law forbids repetition and in fact, repetition is his law. To end the death of the image, to bring life to it through the magic of an embodied embrace, he begins a vigil at the pool's edge. Leaning ever more closely without decreasing the separateness, never de-distancing (*Ent-fernung*), he weds his gaze to that of the other's, is sequestered within the interweaving, and would be eventually recast in the neuter, neither himself nor the reflection, nor strictly speaking a mix of both.<sup>5</sup>

In the account is a displacement of the narrative. Tradition in Ovid has it that the child Narcissus is unable to narrow the separation between himself and the mirrored image. His intense longing for union is matched by that in the gaze that returns his. Put the other way, that gaze, the image looking back to the source of sight, the living being, gains an independence

and sees Narcissus like itself, inert and immobilized by a surfeit of feeling. It is the excess that expresses the lack that must be other than copy, repetition, or simulation. The image owns a "superior" viewpoint that recognizes life as the event of recalcitrance. Life gets in the way of death, thwarts its arrival, finds its measure in death's nonarrival, and embraces the *conatus* that signs death away, relegates it to impossibility, and heeds the eternal drum of dying whose percussion will never have fallen silent. The image knows life as event, a fastness that withstands figuration, image, narrative, that prevents the frail fall into the unmarked grave. It is an advent that must be fixed, in the specific sclerosis before life can breathe its last and become other than itself. The story of Narcissus is about the transmutation of the event, from impredicable to categorial, along the lines of the performance staged in child-Narcissus's ritual murder. The *élan vital*, the life-force, must be reduced to a standstill and survivorship ended. This means that Narcissus's love must be consummated and a new entity conceived. Life minimalized to image must surrender a last breath and rest on nothing, the nothing. In the radical displacement of tradition, Narcissus loses everything including his capability to die and be done. He becomes other than himself and other to the image of himself. If, in the ill-success of the killing, Narcissus were to behold *himself* in the water, he would fall out of love, cease being an object of fascination, transgress the law no longer, and return to the world as scion of a rich and famous household. This too is impossible since at that very moment Narcissus leans closest to the limpidity, he is at the maximum of self-absorption, of obscurity to the interior that is his signature, and most lost to appearance. At that moment in his demi-divinity, he is most fully human.

Significantly, the sacrificial killing is syntactically signified in a present progressive, "A child is being killed." The act can be inscribed only insofar as it progresses without progress toward a completion that, unachieved, is no less incomplete than it would ever be. It never departs from being ongoing, going on without coming to a limit, border, or shoreline. This is an infinite present (an infinitive), distinct from the *nunc stans* of theology, rather the perpetual return of deferral, the backwater eddying of Dasein's entanglement (*Verfängnis*). The French language has a further subtlety: the progressive construction of *venir*, to come, is rich in allusions of nearing, welcoming, inviting, approaching. It engages, as Derrida examines at length, the *da-fort* interchange, the movement that extends from presence to absence and back again.<sup>6</sup> The semblance of a shared space breeds an unlawful crossing of borders that do not predate the forbidden encroachment; the action (of killing) can advance only by removal of its instruments, which is to say, desire. The child being killed must of necessity continually survive a murder that yields no corpse. Narcissus, like Orpheus, is a figure of the gods and their peculiar immortality. He lives in the debacle of his own demise because his

immortality is irrevocable. The killing consumes the present in such a way that nothing can come of it; or alternatively, the present is so distended that no end can be done. There is nothing to come and because of this, the ritual that would summon the next intelligence (beyond the opposition of death and deathless) is inoperative. Could one say that Blanchot himself is the recipient of such a gift? That his work, the *oeuvre*, attempts to repay this (as he says in a late *recit*) “injustice”? That work is the repeated affirmation of the sacrifice or its actual enactment?

Once retold to include the protagonist’s murder, the Narcissus myth has an unexpected consequence. Ritual conjunction of the living with an image of the living produces an entity distinct from life and image as well as from any resemblance to life (or image)—the neuter. The neuter is not a category added to language or an attribute of the world; it can be given voice only in a suitably inflected grammar unknown to a transcendental ego. It resounds as a distinct linguistic mode in that it does no work in the making of sense and disseminates its inoperability throughout linguisticity in general: *desoeuvrement*.<sup>7</sup> A neuter statement stands in need of infinite qualifiers to repair the unserviceability. That infinity “names” the neuter, which otherwise remains hidden in the very name. Undermining disclosure, the neuter is concealed from the world whose order assumes a relation with there above, sidereal space. When the astral link is broken (although unknown), there are consequences: the *far* cannot be made *near*, cannot come close, cannot await the *to-come*. The mark, for Blanchot, of *désastre*, a ruptured linkage between life here below and “life” on the plane of the starry heavens, is “errant disarray, and yet the imperceptible but intense suddenness of the outside, as an irresistible or unforeseen resolve which would come to us from beyond the confines of decision” (WD, 4). Its entry (non-entry of the dysrelation) into human affairs would attest to the dying (of life, of desire) that is the intrigue of the neuter voice, if it were equipped to bear the attestation. Between Narcissus and his image, moreover, there exists an incongruence. In a mirror (as Kant knew) if the left is to correspond to the right, the figure must be flipped through another dimension. The other space (other than space) is the neuter. Can one say that the myth’s impossible death rehearses the impossible genesis of neutrality?

In the killing, ritual marriage, and entombment, child-Narcissus never recognizes the image as of himself (itself). In this regard, the account diverges from Ovid’s telling (and Lacan’s adaptation where the mirror-stage inaugurates the scene of narcissistic impulse). That the image (of erotic fascination) is an other (not the same) transforms the nature of the conjunction; otherwise, his lust remains self-love, *amour propre*, the same conjoined to itself forever destined to remain the same, that is, impossible to conjoin because already conjoint. The transmutation is strange in how a

living being is attracted to an inanimate image, groundless and without origin. The estrangement stems from a fascination that welcomes an image as image, not as semblance of life. Living Narcissus falls in love with the watery figure not because it looks like him, with his bright eyes and curling hair, but because it only *looks* living but is really other than alive, neither life nor death, because it is like nothing else. The shimmering face attracts with an absent presence, a surface not bounded by the law of the world—resemblance—but in a different way unbounded by the lawlessness outside, beyond the impossible step over the border.<sup>8</sup> Here, Narcissus is less perceptive than Orpheus, who recognizes the obscure object as Eurydice; Orpheus knows the *Als Struktur*. For Narcissus, it is enough to love a stranger, to lack understanding, and to be lured by attraction. It is almost enough that the other return his gaze, that the image fix its sight with avidity on him. The look from the other beyond life is returned to his life with the addition of nothing, and having been seen, Narcissus (Blanchot writes) “dissolves in the immobile dissolution of the imaginary . . . losing a life he does not have” (WD, 126). The killing cannot proceed until Narcissus takes his eyes off his beloved. As long as Narcissus holds to an identity of his own, it cannot be replaced by the image and he is absolved of surrendering life to the non-living.<sup>9</sup>

The image, furthermore, may be non-dead but properly speaking neither living nor dead. Living dead? A human, Blanchot says, is not so much made in the image (of God) as unmade, returned to the elemental horizon which is the un-de-distanced nearness of things, and thus rendered far from an incarnate self. Narcissus’s love underscores a distance from interiority that defines childhood; nothing can be near. The child reaches to touch the world only to discover it is out of reach; once touched, the world is no longer palpable. The haptic self that would feel this or that ceases to exist; the child has no credence in the soul. Attraction to the otherworldly stirs fear and dread of dissolution. The “ancient fear” is associated with the living dead, underworld crypts, and voices that speak in the neuter. Narcissus is a naive hero to the extent that he suffers that apprehension and does not waver in the interval while fascination attenuates, while the child is being killed. If it did fluctuate, the murder would have been committed and the advent of the neuter forestalled; Narcissus would have retained the power as a living being to give love a discursive voice.

Nevertheless if attraction persists while the child is being killed, the withdrawal that institutes a new economy or an-economy would not take place. Once no longer active, Narcissus is gifted with a passivity beyond the opposition of active-passive. A passivity radical enough to foster Narcissus’s erotic surrender to the image, to wed it, and to become other than himself and other than the other. To accept a passivity of such a degree is impossible

even to a demigod, and by reason of an impossible acceptance the new Narcissus, transmuted or transubstantiated, comes into being. The passivity unmakes the child as it marks the trembling between alternatives (near/far, present/absent, living/dead, day/night). Entropic and gray, it vacillates and is unresolved in restlessness. It dissembles life, a remarkable breathtaking beauty haloing the scene. The magnetism of a space that cannot support the projected world spawns dreams of life; Blanchot remarks how inspiration—breathing in the second night—weaves oneiric tableaux. Unearthly dreams as when the mortal coil has been sloughed: dreams beyond earth and conquest. Utter passivity, in Ovid's version, has the child-Narcissus fatefully turned into a flower.

Does killing kid-Narcissus transgress the law that forbids annihilation of desire, a particular desire, erotic-self-love, or of auto-eroticism? Desire can only mutate, never die and be gone. Transgression is internally linked to desire, to ensure that satisfaction does occur “by posing a new and always higher law, which made of this infinite passage from the law to its transgression and from this transgression to another law the only infraction that upheld the eternity of his desire” (SNB, 24). The absented desire inaugurates the disaster in which resounds an incessant reference to origin, desire's link to sidereal space. Its would-be eradication (the ideal of Stoic *ataraxia*) signals a breakdown in the relation to there above, and thence come the death camps, Holocaust, Hiroshima, genocide, ethnic cleansing.<sup>10</sup> Flaccid desire moves under the guide of indifferent values. The breakdown is tantamount to refusal of remembrance, preservation of the event of awakened life as event.<sup>11</sup> Refusal: that forgetting that falls away from a living memory (*mnesis*) and submissively gives over to dying. “The disaster is related to forgetfulness—forgetfulness without memory, the motionless retreat of what has not been treated—the immemorial, perhaps” (WD, 3). This is a rich statement and will call for a deeper analysis. For now, Narcissus has been relieved of ardor, passion, and his flesh, and rendered a thing of fascination for an image that mirrors his love. Can it be said that he is guilty of forgetting—himself, the *who*—in endless dying of reference, as if the thing dissolved as soon as the word appeared? That he is so undone by forgetting as to cease to be, and yet bypasses not being? The abdication of care (*Sorge*) yields unconcern or insouciance that conditions writing (of/in) the neuter voice.

Desire killed is desire renewed and the absence of desire is yet desire but in the form of despondence, depletion, or detumescence—on the way to non-desire. Like the child whose death perpetually nullifies coming (*viens!*), desire can be animated only through dying when it lingers in the throes of non-arrival: the repetition of desire's narrative.<sup>12</sup> To desire to kill desire: this too could be non-desire, a desire for the self-killing of desire (in turn repression of desire or desire's wanting to repress itself). A *desire is being*



*killed* would be an alternate title to Leclair's text. Narcissus's relation to his own desire must be viewed through the admonition against suicide and the overreaching of self-mastery into the realm of utter passivity.<sup>13</sup> He must necessarily defer eliminating desire and instead attend its attenuation with absolute patience. Doing nothing: non-desire.

Narcissus's desire, moreover, is expended without limit in fascination; the subject subsides unto forgetting, falling outside itself, first lured then mesmerized into a passivity. The polymorphous perversity of all desire has a potential for flaccidity and insouciance. Forgetting himself, Narcissus remains poor, destitute, and powerless—on the way to patience. No wonder he fails to recognize the image as his own; the event of self-recognition has removed itself beyond erasure, toward erasure of the mark of erasure.<sup>14</sup> The movement passes from the advent of awakened life to a profaned and unfinished dying. But the child is not there, he has abandoned *Jemeingkeit*. Narcissus has forsaken the lot of victims of ritual murder, since by tradition, the chosen needs to be a subject of sacrifice, a supplicant. As soon as passivity mounts and subjecthood wanes, the ceremonial knife must be dropped. Wakefulness is the warrant of a sacrificial death. When a command from on high corresponds to an act here below, the stars play out their stories in the human heart. But Narcissus sleeps like the apostles in Gethsemane, and, therefore, is no candidate for the killing, the writing, the struggle of the logos, and being(-in-the-world) itself.

Consider desire more narrowly, as autoeroticism. Again, passivity and forgetting take Narcissus's gaze outward toward an object of fascination. Not the image as himself because he fails (by divine decree) to recognize himself in it, nor the image as image, in its immateriality and groundlessness, Narcissus loves (by divine decree) only an other that is himself. He does not know himself whom he loves. He has withdrawn from the interiority of the corporeal mass in a movement toward the impassible place between organism and mirage. Within the flesh, he is moved by the object-cause of desire and it is for this earthly impulse that he strives; but that is neither the shimmering reflection nor the pulsing tissue. Well before the *conjunctio* that transmutes ignorance to unearthly wisdom, dying to autoeroticism, Narcissus already has engaged the *pas au-delà* and crossed to the outside.<sup>15</sup> Narcissus inherits the capability of the neuter voice and participates in the neuter, its lack of power and possibility, through the legacy of the gaze. Then the disaster has taken place without happening but "leaving everything intact." Since no event eventuates (an eventual other does), it leaves no memory trace of it.

The infatuation of kid-Narcissus inscribes a break in the relation between above and below, "the starry heaven above and the moral law within." What cannot be held in memory and remembrance establishes the

rupture with other dysrelations: near/far, presence/absence, in/out, life/death. The cosmic nature of interruption, its dissemination throughout language, the ruin of expression: reverberations echo without an originary sounding. One could say that “relation” has been shattered, hence any citation re-cites the blow and augments fragmentation. Language disrupted and displaced, “cored,” fails to work for truth, but is insistently language, perhaps the very language that dissimulates the giving of voice to reality. Language that suffers diversion, cannot seem to find itself, is slack in intentionality, and remains preoccupied, is language that falls short of functionality and slips into uncanniness.<sup>16</sup> Like the disaster, the weakness is unexperienced. Like the disaster, it “is what escapes the very possibility of experience—it is the limit of writing” (WD, 7). Its weak force enters into this very writing, the disastrous remembrance that necessarily breaks under the light giddiness of forgetting. It is not an affair outside the text. It is not the case that killing the child rectifies or reduces the *fatum* that is Narcissus’s destiny. The force that waits patiently or is patience itself far exceeds his or anyone’s desire. It is constantly on the verge of installing a relation of the third kind, a relation that exempts itself from relating its terms (Levinas would say, “absolves”).

After entombment, the conjunction produces a hybrid, neither image nor living being, but one who lives on and remembers. What is kept in memory Blanchot calls “something like a presentiment—remembrance of the disaster which would be the gentlest want of foresight” (WD, 6). The small gap ineluctably disrupts wakeful solitude. The gentleness is in excess and leaves a faint, almost illegible mark; there is nothing to remark but a slight disorientation toward projects. In this sense, Narcissus’s transmutation is the disaster’s perfection, a slight insinuation always already having infiltrated thought.<sup>17</sup> Beforehand, need is confusion, lack is disarray, and a sense of cosmic immensity has given way to “stress on minutiae” (WD, 3). If wakeful sovereignty is possible, so would be the arrest of the disaster; then powerlessness no longer a threat, the disaster would be neutralized. But arrest is an excess of activity that swallows the primal passivity of the outside to interiorize it. The arrest would be feckless, the arrest of an immobility, always already arrested. There is no defense against the disaster.

The salient want of foresight (*Vorsicht*) recalls the Heideggerian *Entschlossenheit*, resoluteness.<sup>18</sup> It is the “presentiment” that draws together the two texts—*Being and Time* and *The Writing of the Disaster*—as two thoughts on memory that turn from one another. Heidegger’s reinvestment of sovereignty through a recognition of the lack (*Mangel*) looks toward remembrance. Blanchot’s intuition follows the expenditure and depletion unto the point where the master is forsaken by all mastery. To guard against the incessant slippage of Dasein into the neutral impersonal form of *das Man*, decisiveness, for Heidegger, must be in play. The leveling of the event

of being coincides with the dimming of disclosure. The aperture of truth, *aletheia* (whose essence—against forgetting—is the revocation of amnesia) shuts. With closure, the present no longer exists. Attestation, contaminated by refusal and eviscerated by dissimulation, is no longer reliable. The witness who, in singularity, stands apart from the temporal flow (“vulgar time”) is reabsorbed into generality and predication—gentle thought. That unique activity, presencing, is simultaneously consigned to language and condemned to dying. One look at Narcissus, before the child in him gazes out, can recognize a “natural” self-containment. In the presence of presence, he follows a law that demarks a possible frontier, with greater or lesser definition, within which existence is given. There, an originary openness measures availability to forces that gather unto being. The burden of remembrance carries the moment (*is it*) and is, however, always already weighted with forgetting’s void, imminence, non-relation, and unsurpassingness. Narcissus remembers the verge of oblivion as the gaze issues from him, clandestinely withdrawn, as he pulls back to regain sovereign interiority.

*Entschlossenheit* is the fundamental position of care, the essence of Dasein. The English translation misses the main point in Heidegger’s choice of terms. The German comes from *schliessen*, to shut, as though passivity were a seepage that could be remedied through appropriate action. The word is related to *Schloss*, castle, reminiscent of Eckhart’s idea of a safe haven, moated and unassailable, of divine presence. It is cognate to *Erschliessen*, disclosure, in the key elucidation of truth. *Entschlossenheit* is a decisive closing to the outside of the event of being (*Ereignis*), a damming within of the force of remembrance, amounting to an *epoche* or reduction. An emphatic double negation, one cannot not do. Resoluteness renders sovereignty irreducible since without it forgetting (*vergessen*) would ruin things, including the power to speak of ruin. So inscribed, the approach of forgetting, nearing without leaving off distance, is marked with a call to responsibility, always already the enunciation of Dasein’s freedom. The preliminary call of conscience “watches without sleep” in a twilight sovereignty threatened by nighttime entanglement (*Verfängnis*). The “gentlest” want of foresight is unavoidable and names a particular stance of Dasein—not wanting a conscience: refusal.<sup>19</sup> Only the obligatory, that which correlates with one’s ownmost potentiality, can trump avoidance; here Heidegger sides both with Kant on duty and Husserl on intentional correlation. *Entschlossenheit* safeguards what is closest (“ownmost”) to interiority, the possibility of return, recurrence, repetition. Foresight translates into anticipation (*Vorlaufen*) in the struggle against *lethe*. The lack in it necessitates *Verfallen*.

Child-Narcissus’s fascination turns responsibility on its head. Fascination, paralysis, inertia, passivity, dispossession by being possessed (possession in the passive): a chain marks evisceration of the will. “*Drifting without*

*shoreline*” (SNB, 64). Blanchot’s principal category should not be viewed as an advance on willing, abnegated and molded in the image of the divine, a nod toward *Gelassenheit*, *apatheia*, or absorption in God. An access to presence would not empty Narcissus of determination but heighten it. Release-ment is activity, albeit receptive, not the void of purpose. For that, the *ergon* must be extirpated and the child left in lassitude, rudderless without desire, the “child being killed.” As the image takes possession of interiority, voluntary impulses are crippled. Work (*ergon*) becomes inoperability, *desoeuvrement*. He has passed to the exterior (allowed to pass) and responsibility withdrawn. Surreptitiously the inoperative condition has been in force since before the first sighting of the beloved, at the very petard of resoluteness. Analogous to Orpheus’s retrieval of Eurydice, the murder of narcissism is doomed before its onset. Eurydice cannot be grasped as dark image and Narcissus cannot relate responsibly to an other that lacks identity, distinctness, and existence—radical alterity. Responsible to no one, least of all the contradictions within, he is condemned to writing. Here is an indication of a relation between writing and narcissism: writing continually inscribes the summons as well as that for which one’s dying to desire is summoned.

Responsibility’s other, the other of responsibility, is dative, not genitive. In Narcissus’s case, this means to respond to the image, love for which dispossesses him. The passive possessive opens a language of estrangement. As responsibility immobilizes action without altering the imperative, suspended indefinitely prior to discharge, the distress of inertia roils conscience—“bad conscience”—and leaves Narcissus troubled and ineffectual. Seduced by the image’s gaze that automates auto-eroticism, he can never be gratified by pleasure or duty: the horns of a Kantian dilemma and without the where-withal to resolve its conflict. Although thwarted by an impossible response (responsible to the impossible), he is nonetheless not irresponsible. The other of responsibility, the dispersed possibility of responsiveness, ceases to be confined to night that would forbid the power of responsibility. It could be said that revocation of that power is the other, or that it “others” all possibility. Revocation as the other to invocation. Narcissus is left selfless, a troubled subjectivity, cored and decentered, yet paradoxically undone by inscription that is obsessive. On the verge of being stripped of name, falling into an anonymity that never arrives, he provides a site for conversion. There, words demark the absence of experience. Responsibility is mimed by a linguistic capability as language veers toward nominalism. “Name the possible, respond to the impossible.”

### The Dream’s End

The alchemical dream, kid-Narcissus’s being killed, confabulates an equivocation. It purports to join the two lovers, living being with image, and from

the conjunction engender a new immortality, a half-breed not subject to earthly law or “vulgar” time. Such an account would be what writing has to offer. Under one hypothesis, the ordeal places a seal on the destruction of narcissism per se, thereby eviscerating the return, that is, to remembrance, sovereignty, and the dialectic. Absolute passivity is the remainder. Its excessive nature infiltrates interiority, the citadel of *Entschlossenheit*, neutralizing any activity opposed to immobility.

Phenomenologically, the event that identifies intentionality with life concomitantly delineates the field of possibility and power. A chronically enfeebled purpose, a dying increasingly thwarted at each step, a non-arrival at completion: a state of unassayable turbulence (*Wirbel*). Dying, however, does not take the place of life since it offers no alternative (non-living, inorganic, dead) and cannot since it occupies no place in the present. Dying supplies no supplement; it will not supplementally replace living. It is an empty categorial ineffectual in predicating a being; its usage is that of (Blanchot says in another context) a canonical abbreviation.<sup>20</sup> It is the remarking of a totality whose absence is so global that it makes no difference to what survives (it withdraws difference with it).

Ovid remembers the second hypothesis, the alternative reading of the alchemical dream, when (in a late embellishment of the myth) he states the other part of the gods’ condemnation of Narcissus (prophesied by Tiresias): to “turn him away from himself.” To let narcissism perish is to root out narcissistic desire, specifically, the desire to not see oneself, to blind oneself to oneself as well as other privations of self-affection, self-consciousness, or self-knowledge. “Vulgar” narcissism is the counterimpulse to the Socratic care for the soul (*melete tou thanatou*) that calls for dropping pretense in favor of forthrightness and sincerity. Narcissism installs attachment to the world, concern with appropriation, accumulation of capital, and aggrandizement of power. From an analytic view, it would manifest as temptation (*Versucherisckheit*) of such impulses.<sup>21</sup> Incapable of self-seeing, narcissistic desire fares no better in seeing the other as self (self as other) and yet the implicit rejection of alterity would seek to annul the difference. Blind to self as self, without sight of the other as other, vision gives impetus to xenophobia, expeditions of conquest, pernicious rivalries, and competitive animus. Extirpation of narcissistic desire coincides with restoration of sight or sightedness (*Sicht, Sichtlichkeit*) as well as bearing witness. It would constitute the eminent return to a life that simultaneously reinstates past and future, for which “present” is much more than a canonical abbreviation. Presence, mastery, ownmost potentiality, I: these are capital gains of renunciation (if it is that)—as expenditure of infatuation. As the eye of fascination closes, the seepage of *Sicht* to the outside together with the projection of the desired image is arrested. The event of being is returned to the how of its becoming. In anticipation of the death of desire (*Vorlaufen zum Tode*),

the reflection of the pool would cease to trump Narcissus's renewal through the alchemical marriage. Once again he would forgo death by dwelling in the disaster, that is, by dying.

That is not all. Narcissus who desires to not see himself as object, instead sees not as object but as a cloud, nimbus, or pixilated visage: the invisible when brought to sight. The invisible hides by being seen as indecipherable, blurred, broken, scratched, ripped, written over, encrypted, or partially erased. In shadow, bright or dim, behind corners, over hills: its blindness inscribes its mutilated appearance. Toward where do Narcissus's eyes turn to look away from himself, to suffer the lack of an image of his appearance, a nonappearance? This can be said, that he is given to see a certain nonappearance of himself, a manifest void of interiority.<sup>22</sup> Narcissus's gaze is on the invisible—faced away from subjectivity. His gaze is the recursive object of his gaze. It is his meeting with alterity.<sup>23</sup> He does not see his visible self (illuminated by sun or *lumen naturale*) but his invisible self that is incapable of being an object. Unable to stand over and against it, de-distance, and accomplish the reduction, he does not *not* see it but sees the transparency that encloses it. Narcissus takes invisibility in through the gaze of fascination as it unfolds empty space that "contains" all images, auto-affectations of primal forces—while lost to the eyes that reflect his. This is a potent arrest of the law that had held him reversed, delineated, and cast aside. It frees him to an invisible neutrality. He is lost to the interior that he could have found (by some counterfactual) had he turned around, so that when he does, he sees no one. He identifies with the absence then and there, a "one or it—il," and finds the possibility of return "to himself" expired. He—"a borrowed, happenstance singularity"—is freed to that which has no escape (WD, 18).

Can it be said that Narcissus has "advanced" toward self-understanding by relinquishing the gift of sight? Blinded by narcissism's desire to not see itself, he sees what cannot be seen, nothing. But the nothing is not abyssal, is not the *Nichtheit* of panic attacks and bad conscience. When intransitive, vision sees the possibility of visual experience, the "a priori conditions" that regulate the transcendental object that conditions the being of light (*Lichtung*). The nonobjectified vision abandons the play of traditional perceptual forms and sustains the emerging form itself as explored in painterly experimentation from impressionism and pointillism on. At the same time, Narcissus's sacrifice that leaves him *sichtlos* also leaves the visual field without a center by which to order the deconstructed forms. Loss of the "I think" that must accompany a possible sighting means that he lacks the means to say, "I see this," but only, "That, there." The transcendental unity of apperception has been jettisoned, and although real blindness sees through to the absence of ground, Narcissus is not in possession of that experience.

Naïveté prevents a new vision of how the subject is left out of the picture. He who gains the invisible and its enigmatic interweaving with the sighted world gains no new grasp on things but serves its errancy.

Unlike Tiresias (or Oedipus), Narcissus's blindness grants no prophetic powers or second sight. Sacrifice of vision does not open to a future (future anterior) but to a time not privileged by presence: the immemorial or "most ancient." The invisible is not a giant display case of things once seen or awaiting seeing, static, immobile under God's eye. Deprived of the condition of visibility—which remains (however transiently) in some place—the facticity of the invisible never dwells anywhere (*Aufenthaltlosigkeit*). Narcissus blind-gazes endlessly across depths, abundantly traceless, unnamable, an amorphous presence of the voice that retains the patience of passivity but no order and no inscription. That it long since lost memory of fascination's thing does not slow a search in which nothing is sought. Its unquestioning character is inertia bereft of the essential lack from which questions arise. Correlative to the same naïveté that overlooks the noncongruence of self with self, the indifference seeps into the interior. Narcissus is incapable of suffering inquiry and becoming adult. The neuter voice has inoculated him with intransitive impotency, a vaccine against senescence. Henceforth, Narcissus shall remain *puer*, child-Narcissus. Never will he grow old. Long live the Kid.

Vision without object, immune to the law of identity, respect and propriety, of beings in the world, non-focal, diffuse, without borders, aperspectival. An ontic consciousness without the onus of *verfallen*. For Heidegger, falling prey, which means having "fallen *away from itself*," is identification with the world.<sup>24</sup> Narcissus's sight, however, is no longer of the world. Having passed, bypassed, or surpassed, by way of the *pas au-delà* (is there a "way"?), beyond proper limits of presence, vision is not disclosive but shot through with an unrehabilitative *lethe* so devoid of memory that it is forever ineligible to become *aletheia*.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps an untruth too closely linked with truth to become other than errancy. Blind seeing, moreover, is not so much auto-affective as hetero-affective. That it arises unmediated from an alterity makes it resemble the *intuitus creatrix* that Kant reserves for the deity; hence the many allusions to negative theology. They are beside the point. The entire visual apparatus that Blanchot utilizes to illumine the "second version" of an image differs from a model for the ocular function that requires minimal sensory input, some "outer sense." The ab-ocularity has to do with mundane forgetting.

When Narcissus sees without seeing himself, blind seeing, *Sicht* does not take place in a heedfully circumspect manner that links meaning to use (*Vorhandenheit*). The being of the question (Heidegger would say) is absent. Properly speaking, attribution of the first person singular pronoun is deferred in favor of the third person impersonal, one or it, the French *il*—Blanchot

dubs it “narrative voice.” The narrator: one (it) who (which) is putting in writing the thought of narcissistic desire, on the stage of transcription, who (which) is performing the venerable role of scribe, Anubis in the Egyptian. To write is to be blind to both the sun and inner light and to be attuned to neither, joining by disjuncture each sight to the neutral, the third that neither wants nor waits. It is to recall interiority to the mortality of writing that inscribes the passing of what passes away, the dying (impulse, force, power), senescence or aging (what is re-begun); and, moreover, to abide for no reason, “without a why,” to participate in the event of repetition, the repeat eventuation of the event, without needing to make sense, abandoning the *Sinngebung*. It is to honor repetition of the headlong plunge of Narcissus into the oculus of the image.

Infatuated, Narcissus doesn’t perceive an image at all, but a faceless swirl traced by an equally formless reflection. He is lured into the cataract by a gaze that cannot let go of his—or of itself. In this case, delirium follows, and the haunts of suicides: Ausable Falls, Golden Gate Bridge. Madness upon leaving the shelter of dialectical discourse and entering the precinct of the neuter voice.<sup>26</sup> Narcissus’s fascination passes through the portal of a defaced face, a face of the invisible tracing an absent presence vigilant to his passage. The look is a gift given without expenditure, for he who has nothing is dispossessed of the damp spark of initiative. Not given, the gaze remains occluded, behind tensed forms and intentional consciousness, before an impasse guarded like Kafka’s door of the law. Its forfeit of intentionality, however, does not merit assignation of a nonintentional consciousness (as in Levinas or Merleau-Ponty); the depth to which it plays is not the unconscious either, a reserve furrowed by gratuitous desire. Absorbed by the inhuman—and inhuman violence that will be abated only by the second violence, the language of being—the gaze is drawn forth, extending the languor without deposit as it roils, desire imaged as both its unsustainable cause and its unattainable gratification.

Where the two would cross (but do not), the sightless look of Narcissus and the ab-ocularity of the deep, there is recognition in neither the one of the other nor the other of the one. Mutual nonrecognition calls dissimulation into play. The scene, de-scribed by the still-life, *nature morte*, that the painter (Cézanne, for instance) captures to render the gaze pictorial. Narcissus is the figure in the mirror that doesn’t self-remember. What is specular in the look that doesn’t see himself is that there is no *amour propre*. The one he loves is alien. On the threshold of recognition, the mirror scene resembles the elation felt in his heart, and that he believes felt also in his beloved’s heart—as if a complete mirror-transference had taken place and he now lived the life of a looking-glass creature through Alice’s looking-glass. The risk in the (failed) chiasmus is that the mirror



is untrue, the remembrance remembers only the forgetting.<sup>27</sup> It illuminates with nondisclosure while it traces the extinction of being, the cataclysm that leaves everything intact because it changes nothing at all. The defective mirror or mirror defect: a trope for the transcendental. Yes, the doubling, the *moi-même* of “is” instantiates a new interiority, renewed being and will, and ontological weight assembled by resolve. The potent mastery and ecstatic time is a totality in spite of transgression of its laws, anarchy that evokes the repeated explosion of form and continual deformation that follows laws of travesty and derision. The mirror that reflects twice, once with the image of being, once de-imaging the same; once child-Narcissus, once the specter. Is it safe to say that Narcissus sees neither, but a space of errancy? That, were he to speak, he would give voice to the neuter?

Seen otherwise, the (non)crossing of the two gazes, image and being, aligns each askew to the other, neither in relation nor in dysrelation. Strangely, each is unable to be nonintentional since intentionality flexes even in latency and is expended on the other’s uncanny absence. Such a chiasmus invites nomadic singularities to the site (sight), and they cluster round. It must also be that the tonality is revealingly heightened so Narcissus’s gaze verges on confession, prayerful in mood and stance. He is disclosed as weak, unmindful, and entangled in the dread of anonymity.<sup>28</sup> As one prone to transgression done in excess.

The analysis of the gaze relates thus to forgetting: forgetting the desire not to be self-seen is a double negative that would recoup remembrance. The confession that forgives concealment is a call from one’s patrimony to serve. To unwork the desire is to render it inoperative, dysfunctional, inefficacious, ill-accomplished, and poor in spirit. Forgetting is the holy drug *moly*, Hermes’s anodyne that clarifies the need to remember. Need is not desire and not moved to excess. The weakness of need is contested by robust desire, which is a sign of balance of good health.<sup>29</sup> This sounds like the “active oblivion” of Nietzsche, in which forgetting delimits dialectics where things enjoy the safety and wisdom provided by ecstatic time. Time allows for the abatement of suffering. Forgetting opens the passage to a surrender to the neuter voice where time bypasses the present. Here, time has no lapses, does not elapse, and neither accentuates nor ameliorates the ordeal of experience, *erleben* or *erfahren*. This means: time is incapable of bearing a mark, hence nothing to be remembered. The immemorial: the reserve that forgetting leeches. In this case, forgetting absconds with Narcissus’s desire and clears the way to the reduction.

In the other case, killing child-Narcissus would weaken or eradicate desire *tout court* as well as gratification, the primary impetus of intentionality. It would result in a deformation of serviceability, that is to say, its ontic relevance. To deny caring for things that satisfy—self-sacrifice—opens to the

need to be (*Selbstzusein*) and the experience of the lack (*Mangel*). The turn from the world, its collapse, would usher in deep anxieties that contextualize the advent of being and its specific responsibility. Here, the challenge of paralysis makes for strange bedfellows. Is there a homology between the Stoic *ataraxia* and the “ancient dread” whose mantra Blanchot repeats in the voice of the neuter? The incessancy and inefficacy of murder, moreover, make the dangerous repression apparent. A partially disabled, wounded, or debilitated narcissism yields a train of specters to supplement the beloved image. They recapitulate the history of a repeated homicide, its story in symptoms and representations that belong to the unarticulated (suppressed) portion of the myth. Ovid’s allusion to the unconscious becomes evident in Narcissus’s declamation, “Possession dispossessed me.”

### Dream Vision

Taken to the exterior through his eyes, Narcissus has always already turned from his subjectivity. Beyond it, through the desire to see, the scopic drive (*Schaulust*), he exemplifies the imminence of concupiscence. He would at each moment say, with Augustine, “Finally I must confess how I am tempted through the eye. . . . The eyes delight in beautiful shapes of different sorts and bright and attractive colors. I would not have these things take possession of my soul. Let God possess it.”<sup>30</sup> To mortify such desire, to kill child-Narcissus, is to introduce blindness . . . or second sight. Augustine: “I resist the allurements of the eye for fear that as I walk upon your path, my feet may be caught in a trap. Instead, I raise my invisible eyes to you so that you may save my feet from the snare.”<sup>31</sup> But the object of “invisible eyes” is ambiguous. Augustine would have it the holy and divine, but hasn’t Narcissus inverted the greed of vision into the insouciance with which he beholds the nothing? Distinctly or indistinctly, the image, anchored ironically in the indeterminate, floats on the void. Its lure mingles with a freedom from concern, an abandon of ontic and ontological commitment alike, lingering on shores neither bordered nor unbordered, where there is a languid engagement with the *pas au-delà*. To drop consideration (relation with the sidereal), he looks past shape and color (figments of the world) toward where they have been annexed to grey indecisiveness. What is seen has no counterpart in reality, represents no thing, and is marked by a haunting self-resemblance, a nod to semblance (*Schein*) as such. The sight, moreover, does not illuminate another world, more or less beautiful than that of “beautiful shapes,” where one might conquer a longing by the familiar route of appropriation. Vision entrained in the neuter voice is second sight.

It is not, however, the clairvoyance of either Augustine’s God’s-eye vision of omnitemporality or Tiresias’s of the future. To end concupiscent

desire is to culture a blindness, or better, a neutrality with regard to the object of sight. Otherwise it degrades to *Gerede*, curiosity as distraction. The excess of *Gerede* infects all senses since their knowledge is modeled on vision.<sup>32</sup> To not identify with the appropriative mission of desire—to be available for a relation with that which is absolved of relation, God, the One—is to effract the sidereal connection, source of astral force and the call to sovereignty. This blindness sees but in(to) the neuter. Its vision is subject to an other time not constituted (unmarked and unremembered) because its sheer transparency evades disclosure. In the neuter, the subject sees at the limit, the horizon necessary for disclosure and itself impossible to be disclosed; the encounter with impossibility. If this time exists, it evades history. It can appropriate no site, as if it were “slipped in” between instants of recordable time, an *entre-temps*, a meanwhile that belongs to an alternative temporal movement whose lawfulness differs from “vulgar” time. An aporetic time, never dwelling anywhere (*jemen sich aufhalten*), unsettling, disintegrative, oblivious of presence, “dreadful.”

First sight, narcissistic in focus, sees things that snare it in order to snare them. More precisely, it sees by virtue of the signifier that designates the appropriation. Dialectical language (since Hegel), directed by identity or nonidentity, would operate the apparatus of sight in a “heedfully circumspect” manner to make out what is near at hand. By contrast, sight allied with the neuter voice (second sight) gives way to imprecision, indeterminacy, ambiguity, amphiboly, equivocity, and the multiple, all refractions of the ne-uter. The object of desire has absconded and taken on an obscure dimensionality that undoes self-identity. The essence of concupiscence is clandestinity, the secret tryst under cover of dark. This is the case with Narcissus’s infatuation. His eyes’ ravishment by a beautiful thing, an exemplary play of seduction, seems provoked by a well-lit image but in fact the focus has grown distracted, toward the unlit and hidden—a defocus. The other in turn is deprived of a “there,” an indistinct survivor of the ambiguity: Is it any more than a figment? The night of essential solitude does not sustain a penetrating discernment; it preserves the secrecy of the beloved, an identity cloaked in desire. The *who* in neutral vision is dispersed and cannot be gathered unto a thing, named or nameable. To say Narcissus loves himself and himself alone overlooks the impossible depth that he would cross in order to achieve union. The secret in neuter vision of “primary narcissism,” its force of concupiscence, survives the exhibition because it is faceless, labile, and infinitely malleable. If he could enunciate, it would be an “impeded speech,” and the object of infatuation still undiscerned (SNB, 85).<sup>33</sup>

Concupiscence, excessively desirous, calls forth the other, the “clandestine companion” who is neither there nor not there (*celui qui ne m’accompagnait pas*).<sup>34</sup> Under that condition, giving voice takes place in

a language other than the one presently inscribed and whose vociferation would require “that it stressed and cut off every word”—that is to say, whose enunciation, emphases, and articulation work against signification as known (SNB, 85). Since linguistic handiness no longer provides mastery of objectively present, serviceable items, to speak is to be “tested by the risky words that we had intentionally pronounced about them: *dangerous* words, words of the blind” (SNB, 79). The danger in abandoning nomination and naming then blocks disclosure of *what* is said in order to unveil a world. Voice is a dysfunction that enunciates de-nomination, unnamings—perhaps the “verbal” in Levinas—but especially a language of discretion, excessively hesitant when it comes to revelation. Conversing with his clandestine beloved, Narcissus’s speech is “most open in its obliqueness, through interruption always persisting, always calling upon detour, and thus holding us as though in suspense between the visible and the invisible, or on the hither side of both” (IC, 31). Blind in the sense of a blind alley: no exit, terminus, or destination. Blind also in the sense of bearing no witness to events, divulgence of which would satisfy idle chatter, rumor, and curiosity (*Neugier*)—double blindness both discreet and protective. To be clear on what blind words protect: forgetting. Why speak of it? “‘You torment yourself in speaking.’—‘If not, I would torment myself in not speaking.’” (SNB, 91).

The clandestine companion repeats a simple question, “Are you writing?” Obligated to answer in the negative, the reader is primed to wonder whether it is a call back to Narcissus from his fatuous languor, to retract his focus to the still-blank parchment. Or whether it is directed at Ovid who transgresses the deep law (like Homer, like Orpheus) by averting his gaze (blinding his vision) in order to uphold “the eternity of his desire” and write within the invagination that is myth. In both cases, the language of clandestinity by which Narcissus converses with the image and speaks forgetting of forgetting is that of writing—which is not to say, written. The language of “the language of writing” both is and is not the language presently inscribed. The other language resounds as neuter *through* the sounding of this language, the one at hand, the other, in the rhythm determined in spacing. It writes *differance*. It writes what is there by virtue of being elsewhere—not there—in the deployment of current usage, exemplary of linguistically available options. The language of the other is destined to write in the only language at hand, everydayness, since the other “language” “is inaccessible only insofar as every mode of acceding is foreign to it” (IC, 245). Its writing performs an erasure of the trace and is nothing other than effacement. It puts into question the fact of citation; what is to be written has always already been written. If there is a totality (or quasi-totality) of language (arche-language), it would encompass what is possible to be written; it defines that possibility as such. As if there were a book of creation,