

**“Counter-time”:**

## **A Non-dialectical Temporality in the Works of Maurice Blanchot**

**Zoltán Popovics**

Maurice Blanchot's works characterise time as something which is “without present, without presence [*sans présent, sans présence*]” (EL 26). This temporality is not constituted by the passing of the moments. This temporality is not a successive, irreversible line of passing presents. That is why this time is called “counter-time [*contretemps*]” or “dead time [*temps mort*].”<sup>1</sup> This immobile, in-actual, non-moving, always postponed time is neither the temporality of everyday life, nor the time concept of philosophy. For Blanchot this time is the “time of narration [*temps du récit*]” (AC 98), the time of the “narrative voice [*voix narrative*]” (EI 566). According to Blanchot this counter-time is par excellence the time of literature, the time of art. But how can it be possible? How and where can the temporality of “the absence of time [*J'absence de temps*]”<sup>2</sup> be possible?

At first, most evidently writing (*écriture*) is that in which there is nobody behind the words. In the written text, Blanchot emphasises, there is nobody who can explain the text, who can explain the meaning of a written text.<sup>3</sup> We know at least since Plato that, in contrast with the conversation, the author is missing from the written words, just as the exact manifestation of a meaning is missing too.<sup>4</sup> So the written text is not the presentation or even the re-presentation of a meaning, and it is not the representation of the intention of an author either. That is why for Blanchot the text is character-

ised by a fundamental absence: the absent meaning and the absent author. This double absence of the written word is called the "prophetic speech [*parole prophétique*]" or "sacred speech [*parole sacrée*]" in the works of Blanchot. Because like the prophecies, like the sacred texts the real speaker and the real sense of the speech remain hidden in these words. Somebody, usually a god, speaks through the prophet and through his text, a god who stays away, who keeps the secret of his words. So the text – and par excellence the poetic text – is primarily not a manifestation, a presentation or a presence of something (of a meaning, of a sense, of an intention, of an author or of a lived experience etc.), this is only a "presence of absence [*présence de l'absence*]" (EL 26):<sup>5</sup> *the presence of the absent meaning, the presence of the absent author*. In Blanchot's description, the literary text or the written text is covering and obscuring its own origin, the meaning and the writer. This text is showing up only the absence of its origin and the absence of its explanation or aims. Therefore, the literature is "neutral [*neutre*]" and "impersonal [*impersonnelle*]," Blanchot says. But how can we experience the absence? How can any non-presence be experienced? How can something be experienced if it does not exist? This paradox of the "presence of absence" is the domain of literature, the space of literature for Blanchot.

For Blanchot this "counter-time" is not the "negation [*négation*]" of time. The absence of time, the "dead time" does not mean that time does not exist at all. Because this time does not rest upon the contradiction, the exclusion, nor the dialectical negation. As Blanchot writes, "the time of the absence of time is not dialectical [*Le temps de l'absence de temps n'est pas dialectique*]" (EL 26).<sup>6</sup> But what does this *non-dialectical time* mean? Every negation supposes something that is negated. So the negation looks like this: "non-A." Where "non-A" negates and excludes "A," where "non-A" contradicts "A" and vice versa. Or where "non-A" exists, there is not "A," etc. Therefore, if the counter-time were dialectical, it would not be time, it would be non-time. The dialectics also supposes that the contradiction and the negation between "A" and "non-A" can be reconciled, because they have a common ground, the "A." Or the "non-A" can be deduced from the "A." So there is a possible third element which is the reconciliation of "A" and "non-A." This is the Hegelian sublation (*Aufhebung*). According to Blanchot in contrast with the dialectics there is no third type of time which can mediate between time and counter-time. That is why counter-time has never been called the negation of time or the inexistence of time by Blanchot. So the dead or counter-time cannot be interpreted as a non-time. There is no negation between time and counter-time, there is a non-dialectical connection between them.

But in Blanchot's description time itself presupposes a dialectical relationship. If one thinks that the past or the future is a negation or non-existence of the present, it is a dialectical relationship. For Blanchot the vulgar time concept rests on this dialectical negation too.<sup>7</sup> In this time concept the presence and the absence negate, exclude and contradict each other. Consequently the "*presence of absence*" is possible only when there is *not a dialectical negation* – contradiction, exclusion – between the presence and the absence. Blanchot would like to talk about a time, a so-called counter-time that is not a dialectical negation of time, about a time in which there is no dialectical negation. Inside this time there is no negation between presence and absence, or among the parts of the time (among present, past and future), as there is no negation outside this time, between the time and the counter-time. That is to say, *the counter-time is a non-dialectical time*. So the presence of the absent meaning or the absent author can be thought and experienced only from a non-dialectical time. But there is another consequence of this non-dialectical counter-time. The absence of the meaning and the absence of the author do not mean that there is no meaning of a text or there is no author of texts. If we suppose this, we think dialectically. Blanchot does not want to think dialectically. But how can this non-dialectical relationship be described? How can we think non-dialectically?

In the works of Maurice Blanchot this "non-dialectical [*non-dialectique*]" relationship is the "contestatation [*contestatation*]" (cf. *El* 231). The contestation means unsettling, doubting, questioning or contending in Blanchot's texts. He writes about the time of the absence of time: here "the contradictions do not exclude each other and do not reconcile each other either [*Les contradictions ne s'y excluent pas, ne s'y concilient pas*]" (*EL* 27). He writes the same about the non-dialectical contestation: it "ignores the contradictions [*ignore les contradictions*]," here "the opposition does not oppose but juxtaposes [*l'opposition n'oppose pas, mais juxtapose*]" (*El* 231). It means that the contestation substitutes the dialectical negation – i.e., the contradictions, exclusions and oppositions – with juxtaposition. The negation is always subordination, because "non-A" is deduced from an "A," because the purpose of negation is the surpassing of negation, the reconciliation or *Aufhebung*. The juxtaposition makes every negation impossible, for it makes the subordination impossible. So *the contestation is juxtaposition*. Here the negation and the consequence of negation, the reconciliation are impossible together. So contestation is not a negation, nor is it its dialectical reconciliation.

The juxtaposition makes two opposite, contradictory and exclusive variations possible at the same time. In the negation there is only "A" or

there is only "non-A." In the contestation there are "A" and "non-A" together. Or more precisely, in the contestation there is not "non-A," there is only a "B" which is not the opposite of "A." The contestation is the suspension – not the denial, nor the solution – of the dialectical negation. This non-dialectical contestation is the *incertitude*, the *indecision* of the "and." Incertitude where the presence and the absence are possible together, where the "presence of absence" is possible. Here the absence is not the opposition of the presence, the absence and the presence are juxtaposed. Or when we cannot decide between the presence and the absence. When the presence and the absence are co-ordinated. So *the counter-time is not the negation but the contestation of the time*. It does not eliminate but makes time and temporality uncertain. Consequently, the "without present, without presence" *does not eliminate the present and the presence, it rather makes them uncertain*.

According to Blanchot the contestation is not a negation but an *affirmation*. Blanchot follows Nietzsche when he uses the affirmation instead of the Hegelian, dialectical negation. Foucault and Derrida emphasise that it must be understood as a "double affirmation [*double affirmation*]."<sup>8</sup> A double "yes" for two opposite possibilities, by which the opposites become non-opposite and they transform into a juxtaposition. It says the same affirmation, the same "yes" for both the existence and the non-existence. The counter-time is that time which says "yes" for the presence and for the absence too. So *the counter-time is a non-dialectical double affirmation of time. The double affirmation of the presence and the absence*. It is the contestation of the certainty of time, the contestation of a sure present and a sure absent. The counter-time is an uncertain mixture of the presence and the absence. It is not a non-time as well as it is not an eternity, the counter time is only an uncertain, contested time. Where we cannot distinguish the time and the non-time, the present and the past, the present and the future form each other; where the presence and the absence are inseparable. It is a co-ordinative temporality, far from the subordination of the dialectical negation.

For Blanchot the contestation is "*without relationship [sans rapport]*" (EI 231),<sup>9</sup> the contested things are without relationship. This means that there is no common ground, or even a common ground cannot be determined among the contested things, in the contestation. Blanchot writes: there is "an empty undetermined that does not separate, does not reunite them [*blanc indéterminé qui ne les sépare pas, ne les réunit pas*]" (EI 231). In contrast to this the dialectics presupposes an absolute – and therefore common – ground by which we can compare things and enounce a statement (saying "A") or a negation (saying "non-A"). This common ground,

centre or rule makes a connection and a comparison possible. This common ground makes a whole or a system from the contingent parts or fragments. It puts every part of a system into its own place through comparison with the others. Without this fundament we cannot state, nor can we negate anything about the parts, because they cannot find each other in the same space, in the same relationship which is essential for the comparison. Here we cannot define the relationship between the parts. They are not separated, nor are they united, because without a relationship we cannot talk about separation or reconciliation. Here we cannot define whether something is opposite or not. So there are only parts or even *fragments without a whole* in the space of the contestation. In order to be precise these fragments without relationship are not preceded, are not followed by a whole.

Therefore the contestation is “without relationship” or it has contested uncertain relationships only. Otherwise we have to say a double “yes,” a double affirmation for every fragment of this missing relationship and missing whole. After all this “relationship without relationship” is the contestation or the double affirmation itself. So *the counter-time is the time without relationship. Without relationship between the presence and the absence, without relationship among the present, past, future. Without the wholeness of a dialectical time. But this “without” does not mean “no,” it is not a non-relationship but – without a common ground – it much more means the possibility of several probable relationships.*<sup>10</sup> Here the opposite connections are unknown, as the reunited reconciled connections are unknown too. This is the double affirmation of every possible relationship. *The counter-time is the double or even “multiple and pluralist” affirmation of several possible temporal relationships.*<sup>11</sup> Blanchot underlines that there cannot be any kind of “simultaneity [*simultanéité*]” or “succession [*succes-sion*]” in the contestation (*El* 231). Because any well arranged relationship – like the simultaneity and the succession – presupposes a whole that the contestation contends and makes uncertain. So the counter time is several possible temporalities but not *one* time.

The time without relationship is a time without a whole. This time is made of disconnected elements and lacking overall coherence, for instance lacking simultaneity or succession. So *the counter-time is a fragmented or interrupted time*, as Blanchot says. It is characterised by the “*interruption* [*interruption*],” the interruption of time. The interruption of the wholeness of time. From Plato to Husserl, philosophy supposes that time is a kind of unity or whole which makes a coherent order from the temporal elements, from the present, past and future. So time is the dialectical reconciliation of the temporal elements. In the end, there is no irreducible interruption in this time. That is why it is a dialectical time. Here time is a system under the

terms of dialectics. But Blanchot and Bataille – and after them Derrida and Deleuze also – speak about an “irreducible difference [*irréductible différence*]” or an *irreducible “interruption”* within time.<sup>12</sup> Without a preceded or followed whole the interruption provides irreconcilable parts, parts without relationship, parts without negation, where the parts are contested. Here the interruptions or the differences of the temporal fragment are irreducible. Otherwise for one fragment the other fragment is the “Other [*Autrui*],” an “outside [*dehors*]” to which there is not access, whose alterity is irremediable.<sup>13</sup> In this time, the absence and the presence can be together without any reconciliation or opposition among their irreducible differences. In this time the present, past and future can be together, can be mixed in a never united temporality. Consequently, this counter-time is an *irreducibly interrupted fragmented time*. *The temporality of the “dehors”* for Blanchot, the temporality of the “absolute other [*absolument autre*]” for Lévinas.

The space of literature is a place where the absence reigns: the absence of the reality, the absence of the exact meaning, the absence of the subject who would be able to guarantee the sense of the text. That is why one might suppose that the purpose of dealing with literature – as reading or writing – is the more perfect elimination of the absence: the elimination of the absent meaning, the elimination of the absent sense of the author, the realisation of an absent reality. Here the time of literature would be the movement of the elimination of these absences, a movement from absence to presence. But Blanchot emphasises that literature does not lead from somewhere to somewhere. It is not a place from which the absence can be eliminated and can be substituted with a pure or purer presence. The literary cannot be replaced by a better and cleaner non-literary reality. The space of literature is *the space of the irrecoverable and irreducible absence*. But this absence is not a perfect absence, it is only a “presence of the absence,” the literary presentation of the absence. If somebody managed to eliminate absence from literature, it would not be a better literature, it would not be a literature, it would be non-literature only, as Blanchot writes (*LV* 273). Therefore the space of literature is the space of the contestation. Where presence and the present are contested, mixed with absence and non-present. Where time itself is also uncertain, unequivocal, or contested. Actually it is not a dead time but a dying time, it is much more a *living but dying time*. It is not a non-time, it is only a counter-time or even a *contesting-time*.

Blanchot writes: “The time of the absence of time is without present, without presence [*Le temps de l’absence de temps est sans présent, sans présence*]” (*EL* 26). But because this counter-time is a non-dialectical time it is a “presence without present [*présence sans présent*]” or a “non-present

presence [*présence non présente*].”<sup>14</sup> This temporality contains a present or a presence but contests them. To be precise, the counter time contests the actuality – the *hic et nunc* – of a presence only. In one word this time is “a time without present [*un temps sans présent*]” or an “inactual [*inactuel*]” time (*PD* 33, 36; *EL* 27). The time without present, the inactual time can be described as a kind of past or a kind of future. The past is a presence but without a present, the future is also a presence without present. Blanchot often writes about a past or a future when he criticises the actuality of time, or when he talks about the time of literature.<sup>15</sup> But what kind of past or future is it?

The past contains a present but this presence is inactual, a passed presence. The future’s presence is also without a present, it is a coming present. So it seems that the contested present would be the past or the future. But Blanchot insists that the contested time is *neither a passed present, nor a coming present*. If the counter-time is a kind of past or a kind of future, it cannot be the past or the future of the everyday life, it cannot be a passed or a coming present. If this time could contain a centre from which the past and the future could be deduced as a negation, this time would be dialectical. So a non-dialectical past or future cannot hold a precedent or subsequent present in itself. That is why Blanchot says: “This ‘without present’ nevertheless does not refer to a past [*Ce ‘sans présent’ ne renvoie cependant pas à un passé*]” (*EL* 26). Inasmuch as something “which is without present” that “is not even a past” but something which “has never happened, never been at first.”<sup>16</sup> Consequently, *the counter time is a past or a future, but this past is not a passed present, just as this future is not a coming present*. Here presence is not the centre of this time. The presence is not the dialectical core – the absolute – of time.

So the dead time is “always already passed [*toujours déjà passé*]” and “always yet to come [*toujours encore à venir*].”<sup>17</sup> Here the past is not preceded by a present, as the future is not proceeded by a present. This past is not a “retention,” this future is not a “pretension” of the presence.<sup>18</sup> In this time the past has always already passed and the future is always yet to come. This temporality is an eternal past and/or an infinite futurity.<sup>19</sup> Because it has never started in a present, so it will never finish in a present too. In this time there is an irreducible rupture, a never sublated interruption or a never mediated difference: *the absent present, the absence of the present*. Here the present of the presence for ever “not yet [*pas encore*]” and “no longer [*ne plus*]” happened, or even “already [*déjà*]” and “not yet [*pas encore*]” happened.<sup>20</sup> For this past and this future are left for ever undone and un-lived. Here the eternity is in their undone-ness and un-lived-ness, i.e., in their absence. So *this past and this future are always present in their ab-*

sence. Blanchot writes: "always present and always absent ... present in its absence [*toujours présent et toujours absent ... présent en son absence*]" (EI 144). So this past and this future is the presence of absence, the "presence-absence [*présence-absence*]" (EI 145). Consequently, the "deus absconditus [*dieu caché*]" of the present can be described by a never happening past, by a never succeeding future. Where the eternity will never again mean an "always and for ever present presence." This always passed, never coming but yet eternity is the counter-time.

If Blanchot would like to describe this temporality in brief, he says: "except the present [*sauf le présent*]" (PD 27). So this counter-time does not have an identical whole, there is no centre by which a whole can be made from this time. Because its absence – even if it always subsists – cannot elaborate a whole: the absence can always be altered for it does not have any positive form or appearance. Its absence is the absence of the whole, the absence of the present that has got an identity. That is why this absence can sometimes be seen as a past, sometimes as a future, that is why this past is not a past, this future is not a future literally. Blanchot writes:

to-come has always already passed, past is always yet to come, where the third instance, the instance of the presence is excluded, would exclude every possibility of the identical [*avenir toujours déjà passé, passé toujours encore à venir, d'où la troisième instance, l'instant de la présence, s'excluant, exclurait tout possibilité identique*]. (PD 21)

Consequently the counter-time always consists only of the absence of the present, the absence of that third instance, the instance of that presence in which the identity is possible. Here – without the identity of the present – *the past and the futurity are "indifferent."* They have got a common property: the absence of the present. Blanchot says:

in this sense, future and past are indifferent since both are without present [*en ce sens, futur, passé sont voués à l'indifférence, puisque l'un et l'autre sans présent*]. (ED 40)

The past and futurity are indifferent in the absence of the present, however they are also different, because *that in which they are indifferent is the source of every difference: the absence of the identity of the present.* So this "indifference" does not mean sameness or identity. Since for every identity the present is a must. The present of the presence is the appearance that is essential for an identity. The present is the realisation of something, so it is the realisation of the identity too. The present means clarity



and transparency which is a fundamental requirement for identity. After all the present is par excellence the instance of the identity, the instance of the reflection, the identity of the “A = A” in the dialectics. So the indifference of the absence is an “indifferent difference [*différence indifférente*]” as Blanchot underlines (AO 104, EI 566). The counter-time is identical only in its difference. So its absence not only is an absence but a presence too. The presence means the un-identity of its absence. *The “presence-absence” is its un-identical identity.* This is the “counter-” in this time.

In this temporality the excessive contestation of presence appears as an eternal past, as an infinite futurity. The counter-time is a non-identical mixture of the past and the future, where the present is shown up only – in a for ever passed past, in a never coming futurity – as an absence of the presence. This indifferently different mixture of the counter-time is a “past-futurity [*passé-avenir*]” for Blanchot (PD 22).<sup>21</sup> So the counter-time is a kind of repetition (*répétition / ressassement*), the iteration or recurrence of a never identical absence. That is why this temporality cannot be an irreversible succession, a linear progression. Consequently, the repetitive, un-identical counter-time is neither a rectilinear, successive-irreversible, nor a kairological time. But when we say “always” or “never” on this time, these universal quantifiers suppose the presence itself, or even every present in which the “always” and the “never” can be said. Or rather I should have said: “almost always” or “almost never.” This “almost” (*presque*) means that there is not any kind of present that makes something certain (cf. EI 346). The “almost” pertains to the absence itself, to the absent presence. So the counter-time is a time but only almost. This is the contestation of time, the contestation of temporality.

Blanchot’s writings almost always talk about an absence. The past and the future are also a kind of absence, the absence of the present. The presence of the past and futurity are only a modified, imperfect presence, from which the present is absent. This is the “presence without present” for Blanchot. So here the presence is only “the presence of absence,” the presence of the absent present. It is a “presence-absence.” But one usually thinks that if something is absent, it was present or it will be able to be present, so the absence is the absence of a present, the absence of a real, actual, individual present. This absence can be eliminated. There is the possibility of the present in every absence, here the absence is a passed presence or a coming presence only. So here the absence is thought from the present. But Blanchot talks about another kind of absence. This absence is the “outside [*dehors*].”<sup>22</sup> The “outside” is an *irreducible absence*, an “absolute other” for the present. It would be an absolute “exteriority [*Äußerlichkeit*]” for Hegel.<sup>23</sup> Here the present has “always already passed” and it is

"always yet to come." This absence is not a modification of the present, this absence cannot be thought from the present. Here the absence is not the negation of the presence. According to Blanchot the absence of the present – the "without present" – is the absence of every concrete present. This is the absence of the presence itself, the "without presence." Or more precisely this absence keeps the presence but makes every actual present impossible: this is the eternal past and the infinite futurity. So it is a "presence without present." Here the presence is only the "presence of absence," the presence of the absent presents. From this absence the absence is irreducible. This absence will never be able to become a pure presence or present. The absence will never be sublated. Consequently this time, *the counter-time is the temporality of the irreducible absence: the time of the "dehors."*

The absence of the literary space means the absence of the speaking subject and the absence of a certain sense. But according to Blanchot this irreducible absence means much more. The irremediable absence talks about *the impossibility of the "representation [représentation]"* for Blanchot (EL 38). The literary word is unable to re-present a meaning or anything else, because it contains an irreducible – and therefore unrepresentable – absence, an absence that contests every present. The absence of the author and the exact sense is the consequence of this unrepresentability. But Blanchot's texts say even more about the absence. Blanchot writes that the absence is the source of every word. Blanchot emphasises that an absence – i.e., a silence – speaks in every word. Or even the absence makes our every sign possible. The "absence [absence]" or the "silence [silence]" is the origin of the words, this never representable absence gives the "meaning [signification]" of words (PF 46, 38-9; cf. EL 44-6). Language, or a word can speak only because it refers to an Other, to an object or a meaning that is different from our spoken or written words, to something that does not appear directly, that is absent. Consequently, "the primary absence [*l'absence première*]," "silence [silence]" is "the possibility of our understanding [*la possibilité de notre entente*]," "the possibility itself of our words [*la possibilité même de nos paroles*]" (PF 77, 302, EL 55-6). So "this emptiness is our sense itself [*ce vide est leur sens même*]" (PF 302). If somebody managed to eliminate this emptiness, this absence from the words, so that a perfect representation were true, there would not be words at all. Our words do not present or represent anything, they present an absence only, they are the "presence of absence." *This "presence-absence" is what we call words.*<sup>24</sup> Thus our words or signs contain and present an irreducible absence, the "outside [*dehors*]," the "unknown [*inconnu*]" itself. That is why Blanchot writes: "it is the silence that speaks [*c'est silence qui*

parle]” (LV 297).<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the temporality of the absence, the time of the outside is the *time of our words*. This is the *counter-time*.

It is the absent present to which every possible word refers as its always exterior meaning. So our words are the “*presence without present*,” a presence that has never been and will never be present: an eternal past, an infinite futurity. The temporality of the “*always already passed*” and “*always yet to come*” is our words, language itself. Or, even more precisely, *the temporality of the spoken or written words, the temporality of the language is the counter-time*. That is the reason why Blanchot calls this temporality the “time of narration [*temps du récit*]” (LV 22). This temporality is the time of the operation of text or “*récit*.” Here the “*récit*” means much more than a simple narration; “*récit*,” for Blanchot, signifies almost all kinds of texts, almost all texts as Derrida shows.<sup>26</sup> This time is not the temporality of the narrative text only, the “time of the *récit*” also characterises poetics for Blanchot. So *the counter-time is the time of the “récit.”* This *récit* without a present has never started, will never be able to finish. But it does not mean that the literal text does not have a starting or finishing point physically, but at its first or last moment the literal text always already presupposed an earlier and a latter absence, an irreducible absence which always goes before and after it. So this *récit* has always already started and will never be completed.<sup>27</sup> This *récit*, the *récit* of the absence, the *récit* of the silence “has always already been said [*a toujours été déjà dit*]”: it is “interminable, ceaseless [*interminable, incessant*],” Blanchot writes (EL 56, 20-1). Consequently, *the counter-time is the temporality of the infinite conversation (l’entretien infini)*.

If an irreducible absence makes the words and the meaning possible, then these words, the meaning of these words cannot be unequivocal. The unknown outside, the never known absence allows the sense but not a concrete, exact sense. It is the possibility and the inevitable *contestation* of every meaning at the same time. Blanchot writes about the absence, about the outside: it is “without signification but calling the depth of every possible sense [*sans signification, mais appelant la profondeur de tout sens possible*].” So this “presence-absence [*présence-absence*],” Blanchot continues, is “the attraction and the fascination of the Sirens [*l’attrait et la fascination des Sirènes*]” (LV 23). This “every possible sense” is the contestation of the sense, the contestation of the unequivocal presence of the sense. The “every possible sense” is an attraction toward a never realisable absent otherness, toward the sense. Like the sirens, the absence makes the possibility, but only the possibility of a presence. This never realisable presence of the sirens is the meaning.<sup>28</sup> Here the meaning is definitely possible but unrealisable. According to Blanchot the meaning is by definition a kind

of absence but an appearing absence: a presence-absence.

For Blanchot all words are based on absence but only the literary word shows the basis of the words: the absence, the outside, the depth of all possible words. In the ambiguity of literature we can experience the irreducible outside, the absent meaning, that is – at the same time – the possibility of every meaning. *In the ambiguity of the literary space we experience the absent present of every possible sense, the presence-absence of every possible meaning.* Here absence is not only an absence but a presence too. Here absence is presented. Absence can only be presented through the impossibility of presence. Through an unfinished becoming presence that makes the presence possible and impossible at the same time. Through a presentation that could not be achieved, but the impossibility is appearing through this presentation. "By the failure [*par l'échec*]" of presentation. (cf. *Fp* 10-1, 18). The ambiguous meaning is the failure of presentation. The possibility of presentation that remains only a possibility by its failure. So in the space of literature the unrealisable but possible present is the meaning – just like in language itself – but in this space the absence of the presence is much more evident. The absence is underlined by the pluralistic impossibility of the evident meaning. Consequently here, *in the "plural speech [*parole plurielle*]" of literature we experience the counter-time.* The time without present. In the ambiguity of the literature the counter-time appears.

For Blanchot this is the "unqualified Saying [*Dire inqualifiable*]" (*AC* 97-8; cf. *ED* 98). The unqualified Saying does not say something, it says the saying itself. It says the possibility of every possible saying, it says the opportunity of every word: the absence. The irreducible absence. The absence, which transforms the presence into an absence, into an irreducible absent presence. But here the absence is not only an absence. Silence is not only silence. Silence is the possibility of every word. So here the absence of silence is not a pure absence: it is a "presence-absence." An absence that is presented. A silence that is speaking. It is "the depth of every possible sense." It is the meaning itself. So the "unqualified Saying" does not say one meaning but it talks about every possible meaning. For Blanchot this is the "narrative voice [*voix narrative*]" (*AC* 97-8). The narrative voice is not a voice of somebody, of a narrator or of a narrated subject or text. It talks about telling itself but despite of this the narrative voice actually does not say anything, does not tell a story, does not say any concrete meaning at all. Because it talks about only the contested, unqualified meaning. About a possible meaning. This meaning is absent, but presented in its absence. This meaning is the absent present of the literary word. The eternal ambiguity of the literary space. So *the temporality of our words* –

that can only be experienced in literature – *is the counter-time*.<sup>29</sup> In sum, *counter-time is the temporality of the “unqualified Saying,” the temporality of the “narrative voice.” The time of literature.*

The unqualified narrative voice of literature does not communicate something, its meaning is not a concrete sense, as Blanchot underlines. Its meaning is the talking about the meaning itself, about every possible sense. So the space of literature is a meta-narrative: it talks about itself. So this language, the language of literature cannot be spoken by anybody. For it is a language of the language itself, a language about the possibilities of our word. Blanchot writes: it is a “language that nobody speaks, it is speaking itself / writing itself [*langage que personne ne parle, c’est-à-dire qui se parle / s’écrit*]” (EL 32, 21; EL 19, 20, 21, 24). But it does not mean that this language has got an identity. The absence that speaks itself as literature does not have any identity, because it is “out of presence [*à l’écart de la présence*],” “out of every present [*à l’écart de tout présent*],” so out of the origin of the identity (AO 137; EI 45).<sup>30</sup> Consequently, if the space of literature does not say or communicate something – a meaning, or anything else apart from the literature – and neither does it talk about itself as an identity, the literary space will say: “*noli me legere*” (EL 17). “Do not read me!” – literature says to us. Because the narrative voice does not have any concrete meaning. Nevertheless it has got meaning, but this meaning does not appear in a present, does not concretise in any present. This “*noli me legere*” means the contestation of every literary text. The contestation of the dialectical wholeness of the text, the contestation of the dialectical mediation, of an absolute mediation of the meaning of the literary text. The contestation of the present as the dialectical centre of time. So *counter-time is the temporality of a self-speaking literature, the temporality of the “noli me legere.” A temporality of a non-dialectical space of literature.*

*University of Pécs, Department of Aesthetics*  
*popovics\_zoltan@freemail.hu*

#### NOTES

This article was written with the support of the Hungarian National Research Fund (OTKA – T37298).

<sup>1</sup> For “counter-time” see ED 27 and Blanchot, “Anacrouse,” *Une voix venue d’ailleurs* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), pp. 29-44; for “dead time” see EL 27, CQ 70, 152, LV 270, AC throughout.

<sup>2</sup> EL 26, AO 99; cf. “the time of the absence of time [*le temps de l’absence de*

temps]” (EL 26).

- <sup>3</sup> Cf. Blanchot, “Le bête de Lascaux,” *Une voix venue d’ailleurs*, pp. 51-67.
- <sup>4</sup> Derrida interprets Plato’s Phaedrus from the viewpoint of writing as Blanchot did. See Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967).
- <sup>5</sup> Cf. John Gregg, *Maurice Blanchot and the Literature of Transgression* (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 1994), p. 23.
- <sup>6</sup> Cf. Michel Foucault, “La pensée du dehors,” *Dits et écrits 1954-1988, I-I.I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 1: 523.
- <sup>7</sup> He describes every “simultaneity [*simultanéité*]” and every “succession [*succession*]” as a dialectical relationship (EI 231).
- <sup>8</sup> Derrida, *Parages* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), pp. 92, 59, 278, 140; Foucault, “Theatrum Philosophicum,” *Dits et écrits 1954-1988*, 2: 75-99; and Foucault “Préface à la transgression”, in *ibid*, 1: 233-50.
- <sup>9</sup> Here Blanchot applies the concept of the “relationship without relationship [*rapport sans rapport*]” by Lévinas.
- <sup>10</sup> Cf. Derrida about the “pas” in *Parages*.
- <sup>11</sup> Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and the Philosophy* (New York: Columbia U. P., 1983), p. 17.
- <sup>12</sup> EI 90, 115; Georges Bataille, *L’expérience intérieure* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), p. 111, and *L’érotisme* (Paris: Minuit, 1995) p. 19; Derrida, “La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines,” *L’écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), p. 428.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf. Lévinas, Emmanuel, *Totalité et infini* (Paris: Kluwer Academic, 1996), pp. 73-6; EI 109-11.
- <sup>14</sup> AO 98, EI 98; EI 563, A 248; cf. “presence without presence [*présence sans présence*]” (EI 291).
- <sup>15</sup> Cf. Derrida’s critique of “the metaphysics of the present [*la métaphysique de la présence*]” (*De la grammatologie*, p. 73).
- <sup>16</sup> “Ce qui est sans présent ... n’est même pas là comme ayant été ... n’a jamais eu lieu, jamais une première fois” (EL 26); cf. “a past that has never been lived in present [*d’un passé qui n’aurait jamais été vécu au présent*]” (CI 37).
- <sup>17</sup> PD 21, LV 18, EI 238. Blanchot also uses “always already [*toujours déjà*]” (LV 18, PD 80, AO 122, ED 7, 10, 16, 29-30).
- <sup>18</sup> Cf. Edmund Husserl, “Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtsein”, *Husserliana X*. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966); cf. Lévinas, “La servante et son maître: À propos de ‘L’attente l’oubli’”, *Critique*, 229 (juin 1966), p. 519
- <sup>19</sup> Blanchot writes about “the eternity in past [*l’éternité au passé*]” (DH 118) and “an infinite past [*un passé infini*]” (CQ 46). For him the eternal, never coming futurity is the “*avenir*.”
- <sup>20</sup> AC 86, CQ 117; cf. Lévinas, *Totalité et infini*, pp. 46-7, 230-1; cf. Thomas Trezise, *Into the Breach* (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 1990), p. 37; Joseph Libertson, *Proximity* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), p. 37.

- <sup>21</sup> Cf. the infinite distance in the closeness of “proximity [*proximité*]” for Lévinas (*ED* 14).
- <sup>22</sup> Blanchot binds the “always already passed [*toujours déjà passé*]” and the “outside [*dehors*]” (*ED* 10, 16, 7, 29-30.). Blanchot writes about the “without present [*san presentē*]”; “this being has always already been outside [*c’est être toujours déjà au-dehors*]” (*LV* 111).
- <sup>23</sup> Of course in the system of Hegel there is not an absolute irreducible exteriority that cannot be sublated. Blanchot, Lévinas and Foucault also use the “exteriority [*extériorité*]” as the synonym of the “*dehors*” when they criticise the dialectics.
- <sup>24</sup> Cf. *EL* 45; cf. “From Mallarmé we know that the word is the manifested inexistence of what it designates [*On savait bien depuis Mallarmé que le mot est l’inexistence manifeste de ce qu’il désigne*]” (Foucault, “La pensée du dehors”, p. 537); and cf. Gregg, *Literature of Transgression*, pp. 19, 29.
- <sup>25</sup> Cf. “this silence makes us speak [*ce silence qui nous fait parler*]” (*PF* 77); “a silence from which it [the speech] can really speak [*un silence à partir duquel elle peut vraiment parler*]” (*LV* 300); “The silence, this absence is all the force to speak (that is itself our power to give a sense, to separate ourselves from the things in order to signify them) [*Le silence, cette absence qui est toute la vertu de parler (qui est elle-même notre pouvoir de donner un sens, de nous séparer des choses pour les signifier)*]” (*PF* 42).
- <sup>26</sup> Cf. Derrida, “La loi du genre,” in *Parages*.
- <sup>27</sup> Cf. “the speech ... has always already spoken as a speech always yet to come [*la parole qui ... a toujours déjà parlé comme parole toujours encore à venir*]” (*EI* 238).
- <sup>28</sup> Cf. Foucault, “La pensée du dehors”, p. 526.
- <sup>29</sup> Cf. Derrida’s opinion about the temporality of words in “Différance,” *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972).
- <sup>30</sup> Cf. “what speaks is no longer itself [*ce qui parle n’est plus lui-même*]” (*EL* 22, 23).