

De-Signing The City: Where lies the Art of it?

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Abstract

Detours and Disasters: Signing the City Otherwise

In the path of Maurice Blanchot's thinking comprehension can lead to disaster. What is it to not comprehend? Where would this lead us? In the first instance, no doubt to a kind of disaster zone as a site of nostalgia, of representation—we hope, however, to drift otherwise. What does Blanchot really mean by disaster? In this presentation we would like to take a series of random drifts starting with the thinking of Giuliana Bruno and her notion of architectural sites of transition as a new geography of modernity that she describes as a phenomenon of transition or mobility as a form of “cinematics” which articulate an essence of *new* architectures. Her *essence* of thinking is in the distillation of relations between spatial perception (of motion etc) and emotion (space becomes interiorized communities as emotion). Another drift takes us in another direction amongst the discourses on non-place (Marc Augé) which we would like to link to a kind of stasis in (e)motion and will apply such analysis to our own reflections on some cinematic engagements which resonate across our thinking of contemporary sites of (non)stasis (or what we might suggest as a movement of non-movement – Augé's space becomes exteriorized communities and nullified).

Our aim is to drift to a question of Blanchot's *Unavowable Community* as an experience of impossibilities of community's existence, its dissolution. It is a *community* that does not become another subject or identity or puts itself into dialectical opposition to the One. His community is the site of “the never-subjected subject, the very *relation* of the self to the other, in this sense: infinite or discontinuous, in this sense: relation always in displacement and in displacement in regard to itself, displacement also of that which would be without place.” (*The Step Not Beyond*). This dissolution that the *community* of the neuter suggests elaborates Blanchot's unworking (*désœuvrement*). *The Unavowable Community*, (neuter, radical passivity, non-place etc) Blanchot asks, in the name of the *community*, whether it is better to remain silent on what has been almost impossible to speak of without default, that is, its contemporaneous purpose. In responding, Blanchot gives and obliges his reader to not answering and at that very moment to not remaining silent. But, rather, to choose words exactly that discover a politico-ethical poetics: “That [it] does not permit us to lose interest in the present time which, by opening unknown spaces of freedom, make us responsible for new relationships, always threatened, always hoped for, between what we call work, *oeuvre*, and what we call unworking, *désœuvrement*” (*The Unavowable Community*).

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TITLE: POSED SOLITUDE: A POETICS OF COMMUNITY

Introduction

A number of preliminary remarks are needed before I proceed into the heart of this paper's aim, which is to trace the temporality of Maurice Blanchot's poetics or what I have named his *politico-ethical poetics* as a community that signs itself otherwise; a community I find that has some correspondence to Marc Augé's *non-place*. But, firstly, this paper's structure differs from that advertised in the abstract. Rather than a drift that starts with Guliano Bruno's space as an

interiorized community as emotion and moves on through Marc Augé's space as exteriorized communities and nullified in order to lead to an understanding of how we locate Maurice Blanchot's the non-localisable community that speaks within and through his *political-ethical poetics*, we move otherwise: Let me just pause for a minute to quote from my abstract so that you may have a better sense of this unknown site of Blanchot's *Unavowable Community*:

Blanchot asks, in the name of the *community*, whether it is better to remain silent on what has been almost impossible to speak of without default, that is, its contemporaneous purpose. In responding, Blanchot gives and obliges his reader to not answering and at that very moment to not remaining silent. But, rather, to choose words exactly that discover a politico-ethical poetics: "That [it] does not permit us to lose interest in the present time which, by opening unknown spaces of freedom, make us responsible for new relationships, always threatened, always hoped for, between what we call work, *oeuvre*, and what we call unworking, *désœuvrement*" (*The Unavowable Community*).

Part of the aim of this paper is to unpack this quote whereby relations between Blanchot's poetics and temporality, sites of the unknown and ethics, work and worklessness activate a relation of self to the other as his *unavowable or dissolute community*. I would suggest here that those exacting words that open up unknown spaces of freedom that make us responsible for new relationships come from the place of the other. An other I suggest is within us already in the sense of a Levinasian and Derridean ethics; that comes before us and reduces the self to an infinite otherwise knowing of-its-self. So let us assume for expedience sake for the time of this presentation that both Emmanuel Levinas's ethics and Jacques Derrida's impossible or unconditional gift underpins the thinking through this paper. These words that come from the place of otherness, are exacting in their strangeness and we do not choose them in the sense of a rational and predetermined choice but rather they speak us. In this paper, I aim to show that these words are more than spoken or written and can be contextualized further as the incomplete or infinite artwork (Blanchot's worklessness) as Blanchot's community via our reading of Augé as moments of posturing that occur through an excess of self. I, will of course, return to this notion of excess and the pose in my corresponding of Augé's thinking to Blanchot's poetics.

So rather than the above drift from Bruno, Augé to Blanchot, I want to begin on the site of Blanchot's *Unavowable Community* and work through his *politico-ethical poetics* as a way of entering into the system of his thought that suggests, or rather performs, literature as an ethics for a care of the present or contemporary. From the abovementioned I suggest it is an unknown-present or rather Blanchot's *politico-ethical poetics* opens up the unknown present conditioned by a temporality that operates between what he names work (*oeuvre*) and unworking (*désœuvrement*). I have chosen this angle of approach as opposed to the above drift primarily to spend more time, to slow-things down a little, to pay heed to Blanchot's exacting words chosen for a discovery of literature's politico-ethical poetics. Indeed, this paper is concerned with time; a *temporality of ethics* that is activated through relations of work and worklessness activated in and through *political-ethical poetics* that may account for pacing of today's paper. Blanchot's writing is the scattering of the work and of community in a movement of worklessness, which we shall return to in an address of genre. If by the end of this paper it leaves you with little effect; a sense of this radical passivity, that the paper has not worked in its incomplete state, then perhaps I have succeeded in my efforts. Nothing about this statement needs further explanation except, perhaps, to suggest this paper works in its unworking of propositional thought.

The paper does not dispose of Bruno's thinking but rather it becomes more marginal and it is intended to grow further into the more developed extended version of this paper. Marc Augé's

work is today touched on more explicitly in terms of a correspondence made between Blanchot's *Unavowable Community* as community displaced in the ethical relation between self and other. Augé's *non-place* suggests a dissolution of community with respect to Modernity's self abandoned as a loss of individuality in relation to what he describes as the phenomenon of Supermodernity (since the 1980s) characterized by his three figures of excess: Time, Space and Subjectivity. Particularly important for our concerns is this figure of the individual alone who has fewer opportunities for a notion of community as one of collective exchange. In this loss of collective-identifications, Augé suggests a critical gap in the subject is opened up between a self and self-observing-self, which he describes as a self-observing solitude or posed solitude. But let us first find our bearings here through the significance for Blanchot on relations between solitude and literature.

Blanchot's thinking on solitude, which begins his meditation on literature, shifts from the solitude of the writer in his early thought to the solitude of the work in his later writings. That is, solitude exists in the essential solitude of the work of language that is removed from the solitude of the writer alone. Or rather in language what is to remain silent is the solitude of the writer. The paradox here is that it is in language that the solitude of the writer is expressed i.e. not alone in language. Blanchot insists on this double bind where he, as I quote him, "is not free to be alone without expressing the fact that he is alone" (from *Gaze of Orpheus*, 4). I will come to equate this relation between freedom to be alone in forms of solitudinal-self-expression with Augé's self-posed solitude of non-place that he suggests is not alone but on our own with the nothing. Blanchot's solitude can only be expressed by means of that which precisely denies solitude: language. The law of writing therefore is privation whereby its other is absence and so solitude is only solitude in relation to its otherness: Blanchot continues to suggest by this paradox that, to quote him, "a person who writes is committed to writing by the silence and the privation of language that have stricken him" (*Gaze of Orpheus*, 5).

To summarise this point on solitude; the condition of possibility for literature is a certain silence (what Blanchot also describes as the nothing), the silence of solitude, whereby the writer has *nothing* to express. This nothing as the writer's silent solitude is the source of literature that we come to know as the *unavowable community* or what I come to equate with the *simple facticity of being riveted to existence without an exit* (Blanchot's *essential night*; *essential solitude*) but driven by an insatiable desire for the origin of the artwork: As Blanchot suggests, "having nothing to write, of having no means of writing it, and of being forced by an extreme necessity to keep writing it" (*Gaze of Orpheus*, 5). The radical incompleteness of the artwork (literature), its worklessness, is its source and thus preserves the possibility of literature whereby this incompleteness prevents the artist standing back from their work and saying, as Blanchot suggests in the *Gaze of Orpheus*, 'at last it is finished, at last there is nothing' (GO 20).

In the opening quote to this paper, Blanchot suggests a *radical otherwise knowing of community* in a performance of a *political-ethical-poetics* that gives the unconditional relation to the other. In a similar sense of an unworking community in the condition of posed-solitude, Augé believes is a location for new ways of being social. I would want to correspond Augé's potential social; posed-solitude, here with Blanchot's *political-ethical poetics* whereby Augé's gap becomes the potential translation into the opening of unknown spaces of freedom that make us responsible for new relationships. Augé's gap thereby becomes a self-performed spatio-temporal ethical-poetics.

Whilst I have not spent anytime truly unpacking Augé's work, the aforementioned is in order that you should have a much better sense of this paper's system with respect to how it is activating our panel's theme: *De-Signing The City: Where lies the Art of it?* And indeed, the broader thematic of the conference: Global Arts/Local Knowledge. That is to say, our city here is that of the

community as the Blanchotian experience of impossibilities of community's existence, its dissolution and its correspondence to Augé's non-place. And in excavating this site of community the art of it lies in the literary-philosophico gesture of Blanchot's *political-ethical poetics*. A radical gesture that I hope will bring proximity to an ethics of a self that is radically opened by the other within ourself; unknowable but which via Augé's analysis would want to know somehow come into closer contact evidenced by self performed abandoned by any sensus communis. Alongside Blanchot we would suggest this radical other within us breaks from any knowing but perhaps, manifests in the poetics of a self-performed yet unknowable where the performance is possible only by its saying nothing yet necessity to keep on expressing itself as we discussed earlier in terms of Blanchot's and Augé's silent solitude. Lastly, in terms of the binary of local and global we have opted to deconstruct this notion via Augé's non-place as a place that is innocent of borders whereby collective relations of identity dissolve either via the transitory locales that set up sites of solitude (collective solitude) without isolation; we are not alone, but we don't disturb. And another kind of non-place he describes as liminal or disconnected sites (gray zones)¹ that don't properly belong to place. More of both of these non-places Augé suggests are being produced today. In terms of supermodernity's non-places any notion of global and local dissolves and becomes unworkable.

Time of the Récit: a political-ethical-poetics

“every story is a travel story — a spatial practice — for this reason, spatial practices concern everyday tactics.” (Michel de Certeau, from ‘Spatial Stories’ in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984: 115)

I discover my being in the vertiginous abyss where it is not, an absence, an absence where it sets itself like a god, I am not and I endure. An inexorable future stretches forth infinitely for this suppressed being ... Here is the night. The darkness hides nothing. (Maurice Blanchot, *Thomas The Obscure*, p. 104)

Is Augé's solitude Blanchot's? Is the self-performing or posed solitude of the individual who is now “witness”² to their loss of community as collective engaged in an ethics? How is Augé's

¹ "Grey zones" are spaces or places of alterity. They could be Michel Foucault's 'heterotopias', or Marc Augé's 'non-places', or Edward Soja's 'thirdspace' (just to name a few) [1]. They exist as real spaces and places we know and are also new spaces created by the use of technology. See Michel Foucault, "Heterotopias", in Neil Leach (ed.), **Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory** (London: Routledge, 1997); Marc Augé, **Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity** (London: Verso, 1995); and Edward Soja, **Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places** (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

² The notion of witness here is not an act of self-consciousness rather it is a performative utterance with the prosthetics of the subject caught up in archiving, recording, rehearsing, re-telling, sendings and receivings of ourselves; our futures. It is a time-out-of-joint where the present experience defers in the rehearsal of ourselves alone, in solitude but not isolated; a type of collectivity without isolation. In the non-places we are not alone but we don't disturb people. These performative utterances that Augé suggest occur via the prosthetics of the subject caught up in archiving etc recall the way we are with technological devices in spaces; cell-phones, MP3 players (Ipods etc), laptops, digital cameras etc. In his books *Non-Places: An Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1992/1995) Augé cites many examples of spaces of a transitory and waiting nature delving into the way we occupy ourselves in these spaces and the gap that opens up between ourselves and observing ourselves. In the way we travel with our digital cameras we document not only the destinations but the waiting spaces. Augé suggests that this overly mediated activity

individual with others? In the posed solitude are we engaged in a kind of poetics that can be sited as ethical and political? Does this posed-solitude implicate a form of narcissism that would return the subject to a metaphysics of presence? This series of questions, some more explicit than others have been running through the course of this paper so far. And, yet I would like to pursue them further in the context of Blanchot's *récit* as a practice of his poetics (a saying otherwise) that can come to demonstrate more poignantly my concerns.

Augé's Self—Posed Solitude

Let me first approach this context of poetic practice by giving a stronger sense or context to what *Augé* might mean by posed-solitude that is produced by a subject witness to their loss of community. The notion of witness here is not an act of self-consciousness as in the subject witness to proof but rather it is a subject of testimony. Testimony here as posed-solitude becomes a performative utterance through prosthetics of a subjectivity caught up in archiving, recording, rehearsing, re-telling, sendings and receivings of ourselves; our futures. It is a time-out-of-joint where the present experience defers in the rehearsal of ourselves alone, in solitude but not isolated; a type of collectivity without isolation. In non-places we are not alone but we don't disturb people. As *Augé* suggests these performative utterances that occur via the prosthetics of the subject caught up in archiving etc are activated through how we are in spaces with our technological devices; cell-phones, MP3 players (Ipods etc), laptops, digital cameras etc. In his book *Non-Places: An Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1992/1995) *Augé* cites an array of spaces productive of a transitory and waiting nature. In our being in non-places *Augé* critically observes a gap that opens up between a self and a self-observing-self. The experience of travel is the example that he nominates for a deeper engagement into this observation. For instance, through the provision of excessive memory in digital cameras the documentation of our travel extends further into a self-securing activity that can produce images of ourselves and spaces en-route as much as the destinations we travel to. *Augé* suggests that this overly mediated activity of experiencing place produces an engagement where we are today more-than-ever engaged in a heightened process of rehearsal and retelling for the future. That is, we have projected ourselves into a future of our telling of the journey encountered, as in "this will be great for the future" archive. As I say, this future retelling is not new as it has existed for sometime even before the advent of photography and I am thinking here of the art of portraiture painting. However, *Augé's* point is it is more heightened and further is a documentation of the self, *by* the self in and as posed-solitude. In this context let me pose more carefully the question of this future that lies between the gap of a self and a self-observing-self. This time-out-of-joint to use a Derridean expression, is for *Augé* a temporality of a double gap of an uncertainty for the future that is both excessively predetermined or predestined and never arrived at. Or to put it another way an arrival at the destination before even having taken the journey, an arrival that defers and differs from that which was imagined once. This is the temporality of Jacques Derrida's *différance* and Blanchot's *récit*.

Récit: Fragments and Steps (pas, step—not): The Madness of the Day

With what time I have left I would like to focus, albeit briefly, on particularly two of Blanchot's writings; the first formally a *récit* that hints at an end to all such formality in *The Madness of the*

of experiencing place produces an engagement where we are more than ever engaged in a process of rehearsal and retelling whereby we have projected ourselves into the future of our telling the journey encountered. "This will be great for the future". But what is this future? It is this gap between ourselves and observing ourselves that marks for *Augé* a double gap of an uncertainty for the future that is also so predetermined or predestined. Or to put it another way an arrival at the destination before even having taken the journey; an arrival that defers and differs from that which was imagined once. This is the temporality of Jacques Derrida's *différance* and Blanchot's *Not—Yet*.

Day. And the second; a form of criticism in *The Gaze of Orpheus*. What is this end to formality? The movement *roman* to *récit* appears initially in his two versions of *Thomas the Obscure* to the refinement and eventual disappearance of the *récit*; what is called in *The Madness of the Day*, the *pas de récit* (the one step more/no more of the tale), when Blanchot stops writing “fiction” altogether (or so it seems). Both Blanchot’s fiction and criticism reach a point where they undergo fragmentation and pass into one another, something that can be seen particularly acutely in *The Writing of The Disaster* (fp 1980). I would suggest that we would want to read Blanchot’s work as a movement toward a kind of transcendence of the distinction between fiction and criticism and form and content implicit in both genres. And further see it as the production of literature as its own theory and whose genre of expression is the fragment. This fragmentary position transcends comprehension in its refusal and produces an alterity irreducible to presentation or cognition, an alterity that can variously be named with terms already mentioned as in *absence, the essential night, community, silent-solitude, radical passivity* and *worklessness*. In an improper fashion then we suggest that Blanchot’s *récit* is a site for excavating Augé’s temporality of a double gap of an uncertainty for the future that is both excessively predetermined or predestined and never arrived — a site of the *unavowable community* that performs a temporality of ethics as Derrida’s *différance* or time-out-of-joint.

Let us trace this temporality as the performative utterance that hides itself as it witnesses itself as an archive for its re-telling of a story; a future-passed (or future-anterior), Blanchot’s *pas* or step—not. What Blanchot has elsewhere described as the *Yes yes*³ as a performative utterance that implicitly marks out its temporal logic of a return to the point of departure only to find it has shifted, moved on as the demand for understanding, conceptualization, comprehension, possession of meaning would *have it*.

Blanchot’s *récit* activates a space of literature where time breaks and another order of time *takes* not in the sense of a taking for mastery, possession or centrality for comprehension. But rather, a temporality of *taking* that expresses Blanchot’s writerly concern in the “form” of the *récit* as an exhaustion around the mere condition of possibility of narrative and in this same moment its impossibility. In *The Madness of the Day* the narrator recounts, that is, he gives *us* the possibility of narrative; a story of his existence that does not add up to those who see him otherwise. The other as Law of reason cannot understand why this man has ended up where he has, when he had so much promise. A promise that lay in the task of story-telling and yet contradictorily for these representatives of the Law, they cannot understand why a man who has such ability in telling cannot recount an orderly narrative of his own existence. Likewise the protagonist/narrator confesses this is beyond his capacity: “I had to acknowledge that I was not capable of forming a story out of these events. I had lost the sense of the story.” (Blanchot: *The Madness of the Day*, The Station Hill Reader, 199) Blanchot’s protagonist/narrator activates the impossible-possibility of narrative by frustrating the story; in starting it over-again at the end. That is to suggest narrative is a recounting of experience that knows the experience only through a retelling. Here, Augé’s self-posed-solitude is not far from such an experience. All narratives are a rehearsal, an archiving, a retelling, a repetition as iteration. Narrative impossibility (and possibility) is in its “recounting facts that he [the writer] remembers”. The remembrance is another story in terms of why he might be retelling at all, which I have linked earlier, and aim to make stronger, to an insatiable desire for the source of the artwork as worklessness: The radical incompleteness of the artwork (literature), its worklessness, is its source and thus preserves the possibility of literature whereby this incompleteness prevents the artist standing back from their work and saying, ‘at last it is finished, at last there is nothing’ (GO 20).

Blanchot's *récit* enters into the space of literature where no more stories happen as they depart from their sense. This space of literature or Blanchot's ethico-political-poetics between the possibility and impossibility of narrative or *récit* activates this relation between work and unworking. The temporal logic (or madness) of Blanchot's *pas* (step—not) is of the story “of what never happens,” or the impossible narration that is the whole story of the non-story of Blanchot's *récit*. This temporal *pas* (step-not) is conditioned by the impossibility for the narrative to continue too rapidly in order to give into the demands of a metaphysics of presence; into the clear and direct light of day.⁴

Time of Excess: Supermodernity and the Gaze of Orpheus

⁴ We hint here at Maurice Blanchot's, “Madness of the Day,” op. cit., pp. 189-200. This short *récit* has been discussed by Derrida extensively in “The Law of Genre,” and also in “Living On • Borderlines,” in relation to Blanchot's *Death Sentence*. What for Derrida is hidden, we have suggested already, is the temporal gift of the not-yet, the Law's hiddenness as abyssal difference in the story “of what never happens.” We have alluded to the impossible narration that is the whole story of the non-story of Blanchot's *récit*, his “The Madness of the Day.”¹ The law in Blanchot's story appears as a *feminine* “silhouette” that is neither a man nor a woman and is a companion to the quasi-narrator who is before the law. What is impossible to narrate is the story of the law, an impossible story recounted and demanded by the law's representatives (policemen, judges, doctors). The story recounted, that is “put forward,” as appearance, to the representatives is on the impossibility of recounting as correctness, as presence, and hence its impossibility. Derrida suggests this union of an *impossible story* or story as the *impossibility of possibility* is where literature begins. It is made impossible before the representatives of the Law (“language is the elementary medium of the Law”).¹ This is the union bringing together an “I/We” of the “remarkable truth” of truth as more adventurous and risky. At that point it would be a truth without end, abyssal, as random drift. Yet, more significantly, it is the “I/We” not of its representatives, but of the law *herself* who, throughout a *récit*, forms a couple with me, with the “I” of the narrative voice.¹ Further, as we know not *what* or *who* the law *is*, as in the neutrality of its non-gendering, the law opens up the impossible “atopology” that annuls oppositions:

The law is silent, and of it nothing is said to us. Nothing, only its name, its common name and nothing else. In German it is capitalized, like a proper name. We do not know what it is, who it is, where it is. Is it a thing, a person, a discourse, a voice, a document, or simply a nothing that incessantly defers access to itself, thus forbidding *itself* in order thereby to become something or someone?¹

“Before the Law,” op. cit., p. 206. However, “the fictitious nature of this ultimate story which robs us of every event, of this pure story, or story without story, has as much to do with philosophy, science, or psychoanalysis as with literature.” (ibid.). “The Law of Genre,” op. cit., p. 249. The law is being made by both the “I” and “We” coming to light in the madness of the day where the one who brings forth law to the light of day is given by the “I” of the writer as also “author of the law.” (ibid., p. 250.) This union's singular act is eventing before institutional, academic law engenders the law: “There is no general device. In some situations you have to behave in a very conservative way, in tough conservative ways, to maintain, and at the same time or the day after to do exactly the contrary.” (“Women in the Beehive,” op. cit., p. 155.) But also: “He who engenders her, he, her mother who no longer knows how to say “I” or to keep memory intact. I am the mother of law, behold my daughter's madness. It is also the madness of the day, for day, the word *day* in its disseminal abyss, is law, the law of the law. My daughter's madness is to want to be born—like anybody and nobody [*comme personne*]. Whereas she remains a “silhouette,” a shadow, a profile, her face never in view.” (“The Law of Genre,” op. cit., p. 250.) For Derrida, the temporal gift of the “Not-Yet” (the Law's hiddenness as abyssal difference in the story “of what never happens,” or the impossible narration that is the whole story of the non-story of Blanchot's *récit* or “The Madness of the Day”) is an affirmative excess and not a sacrifice. (ibid.) This hiddenness as abyssal difference (interminable *différance*) as the affirmative quality of the Law, we will come to name as the madness of the law. And it will be her who comes.

And, it is precisely the temporality of starting over, or perhaps, of never starting in the mark of deferral that marks out the terrain of *Augé's* new way of being social within his phenomenon of Supermodernity. A terrain that locates excess in the posed-solitude of a being-with-ourselves otherwise. As suggested earlier *Augé* Supermodernity located as a time beginning since 1980s, is marked by excess in the three figures of time, space and subjectivity. Let me give a very brief and un-theorised summary of these three figures of excess:

time

Time he suggests is excessive in the sense that we are now experiencing more events with more frequency as more people exist in increasingly mediated societies. We are drowning in events, which fill our time in an intensive way. We live longer which means there is an increase in the generations alive at the same time whereby history is at our heels in the sense that we experience first hand those people who have been through historic events (wars etc) increasingly so. *Augé* suggests we have a difficulty with time in the sense that with an excess of meaning time contracts; there is a density of the present.

space

In the same way time is experienced, space too is multiplied whereby we experience spaces through a variety of ways not only mediated but also scaled and multiplied in the different perspectives we have of a space. The cultural significance *Augé* suggests lies in the distinction between cultures who would have created myth, religion, cosmology etc to make sense of their world and those new-technologies which give us super-human access to kinds (techno-scientific) of knowing the world. He argues we have a lack of mythology in the world due to the excessive mediation of the world, which explains too much. Our facility to view the world via multiple spatio-temporal registers drains a kind of questioning that is perhaps more primordial.

subjectivity

It is particularly the third figure of subjectivity that we are most concerned with here as previously discussed with respect to *Augé's* critical observation of a subjectivity in excess that is productive of a double gap between the self and self-observing-solitude and the posed-solitude as a performance or what I'm suggesting here as a possible poetics of solitude. That in fact this loss of *sensus-communis* has produced an excess of belonging-not-belonging in the space of rehearsal, retelling, archiving, being-alone-with-oneself. A belonging-not-belonging we would want to call a poetics of the self-in-ruin or in Blanchotian terms the site of the *unavowable community* of "the never-subjected subject as the very relation of the self to the other": in this sense infinite or discontinuous, in this sense: relation always in displacement and in displacement in regard to itself, displacement also of that which would be without place (non-place).

In a form of conclusion what I'm trying to suggest is that the excess of our subjectivity as encountered through *Augé* maps out a relation between the self and other-to-our-self revealed via the techno-prosthetic epoch of supermodernity. A self-posed-in solitude that marks an excessive desire, or rather as Blanchot would suggest, desire is the condition of excess; always in excess of law. It is through Blanchot's criticism *The Gaze of Orpheus* that we locate this self-posed solitude that marks *Augé's* double-gap between a self-observing-solitude and a self-posed or perhaps possessed by it by what we shall come to know as the source of the artwork; the origin of community as anxiety (a productive force). Here desire and angst are the most productive forces for work and worklessness.⁵

⁵ Writing engages a movement towards the nothingness opened by the experience of dread or anxiety. Literature is an attempt at saying nothing; dread is nothing that can be expressed and yet the only thing that causes me to desire expression, writing is useless and yet nothing is more serious. We must return to the theme of solitude to make clear that Blanchot's freedom or autonomy of the writer in the privation of language "is not free to be alone without expressing the fact that he is alone" (from *Gaze of Orpheus*, 4) is

Writing engages a movement towards the nothingness opened by the experience of dread or anxiety. Literature is an attempt at saying nothing; dread is nothing that can be expressed and yet the only thing that causes me to desire expression, writing is useless and yet nothing is more serious. We must return to the theme of solitude to make clear that Blanchot's freedom or autonomy of the writer in the privation of language "is not free to be alone without expressing the fact that he is alone" (from *Gaze of Orpheus*, 4) is an autonomy that can never achieve complete self-identity through the alterity of the artwork. Blanchot makes the distinction between essential solitude and the solitude in the world (*Space of Literature*, 251-53). Essential solitude is not the worldly, artistic solitude as in the mythic artists alone. Such solitude for Blanchot is existential solipsism, which is self-relation or self-communion. Rather, the essential solitude is that of the Work, a solitude upon which the writer is dependent but to which he necessarily has a self-deceptive relationship, mistaking the Work for the Book he writes etc. This is in short a totalized view of the artwork. This is what is at stake in *The Gaze of Orpheus* between law of the artwork and the lawlessness of desire that exceeds this totalisation of Work. What is clearly mistaken in Orpheus' *gaze* is the relation between the work and the capital W-Work as a totalized form. To skip rather rapidly over the story: It is — the moment when Orpheus turns around to look at Eurydice in the night, as the night he transgresses the law (of the underworld) through the movement of desire. Desire as I've suggested for Blanchot is always in excess of the law. Orpheus' desire is not to see Eurydice in the daylight, in the beauty of a completed aesthetic form that has submitted to the passage by way of the law of concealment, but rather to see her in the night, as the hear of the night prior to daylight, 'her body closed, her face sealed' (GO 100). Orpheus does not want to make the invisible visible, but rather (and impossibly) to see the invisible as invisible. Orpheus' 'mistake', as it were, lies in the nature of his desire, which desires to see Eurydice when he is only destined to *sing* about her. He loses her through his desire and is forced to forgo both his art — his song — and his dream of a happy life. The paradox of Orpheus' situation is that if he did not turn his gaze on Eurydice he would be betraying his desire and thus would cease to be an artist. Thus, the desire which destroys his art is also its source.

The ambiguous zone of source and destruction or the work's failure by now should be easy to locate with Blanchot's notion of work and worklessness. *Orpheus' gaze* traces out this ambiguity that we have attempted to locate or at least open up in the space of *Augé's* double-gap between a self-observing-solitude and a self-posed or perhaps possessed. In what possesses the self in this excessive zone of retelling, rehearsal, acting-out of self is the gaze of the other from which our poetic-desire is sourced and exceeds ourselves. And further, what drives us to keep producing "new" work whether this be the constant retelling of ourselves in our posed-solitude, is what Blanchot terms *community* or the "other night" that is "a dying stronger than death in our self riveted to existence. This energy and desire of worklessness or 'the other night' always works against the law of metaphysical truth fueled by energy of the lawlessness of writing's desire as primodality of difference. Blanchot's *le mourir* (or other night) is the stronger night that gives the origin of the writer's experience in the impossible experience to control one's death. Rather this origin is something stronger than death, namely the simple facticity of being riveted to

an autonomy that can never achieve complete self-identity through the alterity of the artwork. Blanchot makes the distinction between essential solitude and the solitude in the world (*Space of Literature*, 251-53). Essential solitude is not the worldly, artistic solitude as in the mythic artists alone. Such solitude for Blanchot is existential solipsism, which is self-relation or self-communion. Rather, the essential solitude is that of the Work, a solitude upon which the writer is dependent but to which he necessarily has a self-deceptive relationship, mistaking the Work for the Book he writes etc. This is in short is a totalized view of the artwork. This is what is at stake in *The Gaze of Orpheus* between law of the artwork and the lawlessness of desire that exceeds this totalisation of Work:

existence without an exit. The desire that governs Blanchot's work, and what I have tried to express in *Augé's* self-posed-solitude, has its source elsewhere from the dialectical movement of self-consciousness. This experience of *le mourir*, the essential night, where one cannot find a position is the experience of the *other* as source of *nothing*.

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1. "Grey zones" are spaces or places of alterity. They could be Michel Foucault's 'heterotopias', or Marc Augé's 'non-places', or Edward Soja's 'thirdspace' (just to name a few) [1]. They exist as real spaces and places we know and are also new spaces created by the use of technology. See Michel Foucault, "Heterotopias", in Neil Leach (ed.), **Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory** (London: Routledge, 1997); Marc Augé, **Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity** (London: Verso, 1995); and Edward Soja, **Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places** (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

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