

is constitutively permeated by negativity. Likewise, the booklet reveals that it is only reading which “makes the work become a work,” and not because it produces or adds anything, but because, “It lets be what is.”² It is through reading that the work, otherwise in itself interminable, is allowed to be, and given back to itself.

So arises within the space of the book a ‘communication’ in Blanchot’s terminology (cf. ch. “Communication and the Work”) about and in the space of literature, whereby we as its readers, especially with regards to the many empty brackets and circles (the latter reminiscent of speech bubbles), can’t even be sure of what’s missing: Was there once a word of Blanchot’s text or of Thurston’s commentary? And anyway, what does it matter who’s speaking? Blanchot was convinced that the author must be released from a work in order for the work to live: “He who writes the work is set aside; he who has written it is dismissed.”³ But the author and reader disappear in the service of the work: “The reader is himself always fundamentally anonymous. He is any reader, none in particular, unique but transparent. He does not add his name to the book (as our fathers did long ago); rather, he erases every name from it by his nameless presence.”⁴ It’s only logical that Kristen Mueller also strikes through her name as it’s added to the authors’ list.

¹ Ann Smock even had thought of proposing as a title for her translation of Blanchot’s work “Literature’s Remove”. See Ann Smock: Translator’s Introduction, in: Maurice Blanchot: *The Space of Literature*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, London 1989, p. 11.

² Both quotes: Blanchot, p. 194.

³ Blanchot, p. 21.

⁴ Blanchot, p. 193.

A response to
Partially Removing the Remove of Literature
by Annette Gilbert

Upon reading the booklet's jacket text and learning that it is an erasure of Nick Thurston's book *Reading the Remove of Literature*, you might have asked if a more apt title for the work isn't actually *Partially Removing Reading the Remove of Literature*. For what is actually being 'removed' here?

Let's take a closer look, beginning with the front cover. The booklet's underlying premise could hardly be visualised in a more succinct and immediate manner than is done so here. It imitates, in black and white, the front cover of *Reading the Remove of Literature*, which documented Thurston's personal reading experience of the English translation of Maurice Blanchot's *L'Espace littéraire* (*The Space of Literature*). It did so by posing as an almost exact replica of Blanchot's book, with one major difference: only Thurston's annotations, absent of the text they commented upon, were printed inside. Turning back to the front cover of the booklet, we see that two letters of the title have gone missing: 'Reading' has lost its 'ad'. But the space they've left behind isn't vacant, three letters – 'mov' – have insinuated themselves into 'Re ing's' remains, by way of a teasingly small arrow positioned just below the void, pointing upwards and into it. Three letters replace two – already implying that Mueller's 'translation' (now the third in a row following Blanchot's 1955 original, as page three of the booklet reveals) isn't simply a reduction of its predecessors, but rather, an enrichment upon them.

The ambiguity of the 'remove' referred to in both Thurston and Mueller's titles is very much in line with issues central to Blanchot's writing¹: Does it refer here to a distancing, in the sense of a transposition from one to another ('removed') site – or to a deletion? In any case, this removal is only an extraction, from which something is left behind, as is made clear by the addition of the word 'Partially' to the title, by way of a second arrow directing it into position before all others. Moving inside, we see that the distance (*Entfernung*) or deletion (*Entfernung*) refers to only part of Thurston's annotations – his verbal language.

This leaves the non-verbal, diagrammatic traces of Thurston's reading in place on the page, most prominently in the form of lines and arrows which, despite having been previously transformed by Thurston from hand-drawn annotations into the vector lines of standardized print, hasn't succeeded in driving the feeling of individuality and spontaneity inherent to handwriting from their computerized surfaces. The distillation of these seemingly 'inarticulate' traces, achieved by printing all of the non-verbal annotations from a given chapter on a single page, leads to surprisingly compelling, even fascinating results. Not only is the intensity of the cognitive/intellectual work expired over the course of reading while armed with a pen or pencil, ink or graphite at the ready, laid bare, but also the elaborateness, efficiency, and

aesthetic of the hand-written annotation form, as developed and refined over centuries of written culture, is pushed to the fore, leading one to reconsider a form which, facing the age of digital texts and e-books, is perhaps threatened with being lost forever – despite the uncomfortable, imprecise, and even downright clumsy commentary functions of the new media.

In contrast to Thurston's book, in which the annotations often gather in the pages' margins and gutters, when not running off them all together (as seen on the book's fore edge, stained with flecks of ink alluding to the markings cut off within), in Mueller's booklet the annotations are not only at their densest in the page's center, but nothing is cut off. Thurston's non-verbal annotations, and the only remaining words from Blanchot's book – each section's running title, reprinted at the top of the page representing each chapter or appendix – are bordered by a whiteness, the whiteness Thurston's traces are embedded in and surrounded by, and so enclosed within the void, the absence, from which, according to Blanchot, literature emerges.

Blanchot's erstwhile quest into the space of literature may be no better epitomized in Mueller's rendition than through its countless arrows, bound to one location while referring to another, from a 'here' to a 'there' (or rather, from a 'there' to a 'here'?). They even hold the honor of gracing the booklet's front cover, where they, for the first and only time, aid the reader in reading, in piecing together words on the page. Once inside, not only are they stripped of the words they once referred to, but they often overlap – to the point of obstruction or in cohesive emphasis (but of what?) – or contradict – pointing across the page in opposing directions or directly at one another – finally indicating only the circular journey that is the search for the space of literature. We find them, together with the other lines and markings crowding the page, circling and encircling the book's white space in their attempts to do just what is spelled out in the second chapter's title, here situated at the head of the page as the running title: "Approaching Literature's Space".

The running title at the top of each page, an otherwise inconspicuous element in most books, becomes unusually communicative when positioned as the only readable text on the page. It alone becomes charged with the task of signalling to the reader what Blanchot once sought in writing to sketch out, and Thurston sought via his annotative reading to come to terms with. From their positions they radiate immense force, seeming to comment directly, even uncannily (as exemplified above), on the chaotic demonstration swarming the space above, beneath, and beside them. In this respect, the title *Partially Removing the Remove of Literature* is appropriate, as the work does, through its double negation (remove of the remove), resurrect the negated, now (re) occupying the book's space. As once conceptualized by Blanchot, the booklet