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| Blanchot, Maurice (1907-2003) |
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| Maurice Blanchot was one of Europe’s most influential essayists, theorists and experimental fiction writers. Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas, notably, represent the major theorists of the second half of the last century who are indebted to Blanchot’s highly original – if not enigmatic – oeuvre. Throughout his life, Blanchot sought to minimize his status as a public figure and at times isolated himself from friends and colleagues. Blanchot’s modernism emphasizes the radical singularity of the artist’s production: the work of art completely thwarts all attempts to subsume it according to some pre-established universal category or identity. For Blanchot, *écriture* – art in its most indeterminate form – is an expression not of an author who actively and deliberately conceives and creates; rather, it is a reflection of an experience of radical passivity, the futile and always incomplete struggle with mortal existence. The work of art abandons the artist, the poet, the writer, to a state of permanent dislocation and exile. The nomadic nature of the artist’s experience testifies – in accentuated form – to the subject in general. Blanchot speaks famously of *la communauté inavouable* - the unavow-able or unworkable character of the community that is to come. Though this idea might suggest paralysis, it also speaks to the futility of all totalitarian aspirations. The radical heterogeneity of existence entails the inexhaustibility of humanity’s personal, social and political endeavours. |
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| Born in the small hamlet of Quain in Eastern France, Maurice Blanchot would establish himself as one of Europe’s most influential essayists, theorists and experimental fiction writers. Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas, notably, represent the major theorists of the second half of the last century who are indebted to Blanchot’s highly original – if not enigmatic – oeuvre. Throughout his life, Blanchot sought to minimize his status as a public figure and at times isolated himself from friends and colleagues. Blanchot’s modernism emphasizes the radical singularity of the artist’s production: the work of art completely thwarts all attempts to subsume it according to some pre-established universal category or identity. For Blanchot, *écriture* – art in its most indeterminate form – is an expression not of an author who actively and deliberately conceives and creates; rather, it is a reflection of an experience of radical passivity, the futile and always incomplete struggle with mortal existence. The work of art abandons the artist, the poet, the writer, to a state of permanent dislocation and exile. The nomadic nature of the artist’s experience testifies – in accentuated form – to the subject in general. Blanchot speaks famously of *la communauté inavouable* - the unavow-able or unworkable character of the community that is to come. Though this idea might suggest paralysis, it also speaks to the futility of all totalitarian aspirations. The radical heterogeneity of existence entails the inexhaustibility of humanity’s personal, social and political endeavours. List of Works Blanchot, Maurice (1955) *L’Éspace littéraire*, Paris: Gallimard, trans. A. Smock as *The Space of Literature*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982.  ------ (1971) *L’Amitiè*, trans. E. Rottenberg as *Friendship*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.  ------ (1983) *La Communauté inavouable*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, trans. P. Joris as *The Unavowable Community*, Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1988. |
| Further reading:  (Bruns)  (Kevin and Hartman)  (Ungar) |