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Counter-Quotation: The Defiance of Poetic Tradition in Paul Celan and Osip Mandelstam

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation concentrates on problems of quotation, tradition, and translation in the poetry of Paul Celan and Osip Mandelstam. While examining the nature of poetic inheritance, Celan often refers to Russian poetry and, in particular, to Osip Mandelstam, who, in his turn, understands poetry as an essentially dialogic process. Both for Celan and for Mandelstam, every new poem is an utterance within a poetic conversation. Nowhere is the dialectic of newness and tradition better exemplified than in the act of quotation, both direct and indirect. For this reason, I begin my dissertation with a chapter discussing Celan's idea of quotation as "encounter" in poetic dialogue. Celan welcomes the understanding of poetry as conversation and yet also indicates the limits to which the act of welcoming can be reciprocated. This limit is contained in the so-called "counter-word" (Gegenwort). In my second chapter, I turn to Celan's own encounters with Osip Mandelstam concerning the act or event of "breathturn" (Atemwende), which is a translation and transformation of Mandelstam's poetics of breathing, as it unfolds in his *Voronezh Notebooks*. The problem of stopping and re-starting breath becomes, as I argue, a way of reconceiving both the content and the idea of tradition. In my concluding chapter, I analyze Celan's own adaptations of Osip Mandelstam's poetry through the theory of translation as an encounter that defies tradition while at the same time making a new tradition possible. Throughout my thesis, I discuss the degree to which Celan's intense engagement with his "conversation partners" can be considered paradigmatic of the poetic encounter as such.

Abbreviations.

BPh = Celan, Paul. La bibliothèque philosophique, Paris: Éditions Rue d'Ulm, ENS, 2004.

BWGL = Paul Celan – Gisèle Celan-Lestrangé, Briefwechsel, herausg. Bertrand Badiou, übersetzt von Eugen Helmlé, Memmingen: Suhrkamp, 2001.

GN = Celan, Paul. Gedichte aus dem Nachlaß, herausg. Bertrand Badiou et al, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997.

GW, followed by the volume number = Paul Celan, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000.

HTS = Hölderlin, Theoretische Schriften, Philosophische Bibliothek 509, herausg. Johann Kreuzer, Hamburg: Meiner, 1998.

KA = Die Gedichte. Kommentierte Ausgabe, ed. Barbara Wiedemann, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003.

LTA = Celan, Paul, Lichtzwang, Tübinger Ausgabe, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001: 49.

MKR = Celan, Paul, 'Mikrolithen sinds, Steinchen.' Die Prosa aus dem Nachlaß, ed. Bertrand Badiou and Barbara Wiedemann, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005.

MN1 = Манделъштам, Надежда, Воспоминания, Москва: Согласие, 1999 [Mandelstam, Nadezhda, Memoires, Moscow: Soglasie, 1999].

MN2 = Манделъштам, Надежда, Вторая книга, Москва: Согласие, 1999 [Mandelstam, Nadezhda, Book Two, Moscow: Soglasie, 1999].

MTA = Celan, Paul, Der Meridian. Endfassung, Vorstufen, Materialien, Tübinger Ausgabe, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999.

NTA = Celan, Paul, Die Niemandrose. Vorstufen, Textgenese, Endfassung, bearbeitet von Heino Schull, Tübingen: Suhrkamp, 1996.

OM, followed by the volume number = Манделъштам, Осип, Собрание сочинений в четырёх томах, ред. Г.П.Струве и Б.А.Филлипов, Москва: Terra, 1991 [Mandelstam, Osip, Collected Works in Four Volumes, ed. G.P.Struve i B.A.Fillipov, Moskva: Terra, 1991].

WB, followed by the volume number = Benjamin, Walter, Gesammelte Schriften in sieben Bänden, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

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Introduction

Я нахожу [запечатанную бутылку] в песке, прочитываю письмо, узнаю дату события, последнюю волю погибшего. Я имел право сделать это. Я не распечатал чужого письма. Письмо, запечатанное в бутылке, адресовано тому, кто найдёт её. Нашёл я. Значит, я и есть таинственный адресат. (ОМ1 235)

[I find {a sealed bottle} in the sand, read the letter, learn the date of the event and the last will of the dead. I had my right to do so. I didn't open someone else's¹ letter. The letter sealed in the bottle is addressed to the person who finds it. I found it. Therefore, I am that mysterious addressee.]²

Aber das Gedicht spricht ja! Es bleibt seiner Daten eingedenk, aber – es spricht. Gewiß, es spricht immer nur in seiner eigenen, allereigensten Sache.

Aber ich denke – und dieser Gedanke kann Sie jetzt kaum überraschen –, ich denke, daß es von jeher zu den Hoffnungen des Gedichts gehört, gerade auf diese Weise auch in *fremder* – nein, dieses Wort kann ich jetzt nicht mehr gebrauchen – gerade auf diese Weise *in eines Anderen Sache* zu sprechen – wer weiß, vielleicht in eines *ganz Anderen* Sache. (MTA 8)

These two poetological statements, the first from Osip Mandelstam's "О собеседнике [On the Conversation Partner]" and the second from Paul Celan's *Der Meridian* constitute the point of departure for the following study. Both statements, each in its own idiom, define the poetic tradition and poetry in general as an essentially dialogical process. The poet does not so much create a message as he responds to the message of an other, whom Mandelstam calls the "conversation partner" ("собеседник") and Celan "an altogether other" ("ein ganz Anderer"). Mandelstam's and Celan's definitions of the structure of poetry as conversation, however, do not converge. Mandelstam's conversation partner speaks from the past, and the poet's response to his conversation partner is a projection into the future, a text written for a prospective reader. The

¹ "Chuzhoy" is not easily translated into English, as it is semantically close to German "fremd" and may mean "a stranger" but also "belonging to someone else."

² All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

poet defines himself in relation to an inherited text coming from the past, he relies on a future reader who will enter into an analogous relationship with his poem. The temporality of Mandelstam's poem is, thus, defined both in relation to the past and to the future. This structure perpetuates a poetic tradition which, by means of transformation, continues a "dialogue" with authors long dead and addresses authors to come. This dialogical process, however, cannot be understood as a continuous linear progression. Mandelstam uses the image of a letter sealed in a bottle and thrown into the sea to depict the delay that is formative for the structure of this dialogue. The image of the message in the bottle makes clear that not just any act of reading can lead to the recognition that the poet as the reader is indeed the "mysterious addressee [тайнственный адресат]" of the inherited text. There is only one criterion by which the poet can discern whether he is the intended "conversation partner," his astonishment: "The air of poetry is the unexpected [Воздух стиха есть неожиданное]" (OM1 237). This astonishment calls forth the poet's response and thus ensures the continuation of the poetic tradition. The poet who sees himself as contributing to the tradition hopes that his poetry will address a future reader who will, in turn, be astounded by his predecessor's work. This structure of request and response as well as the transformation of tradition in poetry are based not so much on kinship – unlike the gradual development of a poetic genre, a literary form or a national literature – as on an affinity between the poet's own idiom and the inherited text. To find this affinity is the poet's task.

For Celan, the poem is not so much a conversation with an other as a speech directed towards and for the sake of this other: "Aber ich denke – und dieser Gedanke kann Sie jetzt kaum überraschen –, ich denke, daß es von jeher zu den Hoffnungen des Gedichts gehört, gerade auf diese Weise auch in *fremder* – nein, dieses Wort kann ich jetzt nicht mehr gebrauchen –

gerade auf diese Weise *in eines Anderen Sache* zu sprechen." The poem does not so much address an other as it finds a way of speaking that presupposes an other who is not known to the poet, a reader, listener, or speaker who is "ein ganz Anderer vielleicht." Unlike Mandelstam, for whom poetry as conversation starts with astonishment about a poem coming from the past, Celan says that this thought – that the poet speaks always for an other precisely because he speaks for himself – "kann Sie jetzt kaum überraschen." The poet speaks for and to someone unknown, and since this other remains unknown, there is no astonishment in his relation to the other. But how is it possible to speak for an other while speaking in one's own, individual idiom? Would this not mean that the poet just speaks to himself, leaving no possibility of participation by a potential listener? Celan's structure of poetic conversation doesn't presuppose any secure answer: he can neither claim to be the only conversation partner meant by a poem coming from the past nor can he project his own poem into the future with the certitude that a reader will fully understand him one day. His understanding of poetry as conversation relies, however, on the hope that this speaking for an other can be preserved in the poem and will remain readable in the future. This "other" – even if Celan calls him "ein ganz Anderer vielleicht" – is not a stranger ("fremd") but rather someone who, like the poet himself, can approach the poem as not fully disclosable, for whom the poem stays spoken in the language of an "other." Celan's poetic conversation is moved not so much by astonishment as by the desire to be able to communicate with an other, even if something will necessarily remain unknowable for the reader as for the poet.

While Mandelstam conceives of poetic conversation as a risky undertaking because there is never a guarantee that the poem will find a conversation partner in the future it addresses, Celan sees the impossibility of an ultimate answer to the request posed in the poem as a

structural necessity. The utopia of fulfillment, however, remains the poem's hope – the hope for unreserved understanding between the speaker and the listener or reader. This constitutes the greatest affinity between the two poetics: both Mandelstam and Celan think of poetry as the work of hope, essentially utopian and yet necessary for an understanding between individual speakers and individual languages. There can be no absolute poem, Celan says, but there is "diese[r] unerhörte Anspruch" in each individual poem (MTA 10), the demand (*Anspruch*) to be understood without reservation. The task of the poet is communicability and yet the limit of this communicability is precisely an incommunicable rest which makes this very unlimited communicability impossible. The poem must stay open for any "other," even for an imaginary "other" ("ein ganz Anderer"), who is – unlike the poem which cannot claim to be absolute – perfect, "ganz." This "unheard-of demand" of the poem, which seeks restless communicability, can communicate itself only as a silent remainder, as something which is perhaps present in the poem but never expressed directly. "Unerhört" should be understood here, among its other meanings, in the literal sense of "not heard." Something stays unheard in the poem and allows for "die Begegnung" (MTA 9), the poetic encounter between the poet and the listener, the speaker and the respondent, the reader and the text that is being read, the encounter in which poetry as conversation acquires its shape (*Gestalt*, MTA 3). The listener to whom the poem speaks is thus "jemand, der zugegen ist ... und nicht richtiginhört" (ibid), someone who doesn't claim to have understood completely. Conversely, the poem speaks only in so far as something remains unspoken, inarticulate, a "singbarer Rest" (GW2 36).³ This inherent silence in the poem as well

³ In "Sonnette an Orpheus," R.M. Rilke sketches a similar relation between silence, music and language: "Du wußtest noch die Stelle, wo die Leier / sich tönend hob —; die unerhörte Mitte" (Rilke 2, 272). The lyre as the instrument of poetry is comparable with the poetic technics which Celan calls "die Kunst" as opposed to "Dichtung"

as the "dumbness" of the listener allows the poem to remain the topos for the encounter with an indefinable other.

Both Mandelstam and Celan thus write in response to an other and for an other. How does this proposition – articulated in their poetological essays – shape their own poetical texts (if indeed does)? Does this undertaking – Mandelstam's speaking to a conversation partner and Celan's speaking "in eines ganz Anderen Sache" – require specific rhetorical means or figures of speech? The two obvious means of referring and responding to texts coming from the past are quotation and translation and, indeed, both Celan's and Mandelstam's work is replete with references, allusions and quotations.⁴ But beyond being purely rhetorical figures necessary for framing a dialogue with the text of an other, quotation is for both poets the fundamental figure of poetic tradition. In his "Conversation about Dante,"⁵ Mandelstam calls quotation "упоминательная клавиатура [a recollecting keyboard,]" which allows the poet to approach the texts of poets who are long dead as if they were his living companions (OM2 368). Quotations in Mandelstam's poetry serve the purpose of remembering the past and, beyond that, of establishing the presence of his own poem in relation to and distinction from it. In his *Meridian* essay, Celan develops the concept of the "counter-word" ("Gegenwort"), which stands not so much for

in the *Meridian*. Orpheus's hand no longer touches the strings of the lyre but the music resounds like wind in an Aeolian harp. This detachment of the lyre from the artist's hand points to the silence that permeates all poetry as its unheard medium, its "unerhörte Mitte," the medium which cannot be expressed in the words of poetry directly. For an interpretation of the "unerhörte Mitte" in Rilke cf. Martin Heidegger's "Wozu Dichter" (Heidegger 2003, 279 ff.)

⁴ Mandelstam's references to Greek and Roman Antiquity have been the object of many studies, most notably, Kiril Taranovsky and Omri Ronen have analyses of the intertextuality in Mandelstam's poetry. The role of quotation in Celan's work have been discussed so often that it seems impossible to compile even a short list of important contributions. Perhaps the most representative volume of essays exploring problems (and partially expressing frustration) with Celan's use of quotations is *Datum und Zitat bei Paul Celan*, ed. Chaim Shoham und Bernd Witte, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 1987. Helmut Müller-Sievers in his study entitled "On the Way to Quotation: Paul Celan's Meridian Speech" discusses Celan's encounter with Büchner and makes a number of important observations about quotation as exemplifying universality and singularity in poetic texts.

⁵ Mandelstam's early encounter with Dante (around 1915) and his later obsession with this poet, which is documented in this essay, "Conversation about Dante" (1930), are discussed in the third chapter of the present study.

quotation as for "counter-quotation." With this "counter-quotation," the poet remembers the past but does not so much continue history as give it a shape in his own text. To explicate his notion of the "Gegenwort," Celan retells the story of Camille's death in Büchner's *Dantons Tod* and calls this death the "Triumph von 'Puppe' und 'Draht,'" an "iambic death" played out according to the rules of drama and of history (MTA 3). These rules require the death of the hero on stage as well as the death of the revolutionary in history, and they are, like rules of grammar, repeatable and ever-recurring. Celan calls these automatisms "die Kunst" and tries to find an impulse in poetry that would act counter to this mechanical repetition. This impulse – which he calls "Dichtung" – comes in *Dantons Tod* from someone whom he calls "kunstblind," from Lucile who, in the face of Camille's death, suddenly cries out: "Es lebe der König!" Celan calls her cry a "Gegenwort":

Es ist das Gegenwort, das den 'Draht' zerreißt, das Wort, das sich nicht mehr von den 'Eckstehern und Paradegäulen' der Geschichte bückt, es ist ein Akt der Freiheit. Es ist ein Schritt. (ibid)

Lucile quotes the royalist motto but her quotation acts counter to this same motto, as it breaks out of history and makes the deaths of her friends and the very events of the revolution appear absurd. Lucile's "vive le roi" distorts the seamless continuation of history and, rather than fulfilling the pattern of a tragic drama, emphasizes the irreducible singularity, which Celan calls "für die Gegenwart des Menschlichen zeugende Majestät des Absurden" (MTA 3).⁶ Lucile's quotation/counter-quotation is neither a call for the restoration of monarchy nor a cry of despair in the face of the hero's death. Her *Gegenwort* is the affirmation of *Gegenwart*, of the moment when the historical events she is witnessing are summed up in one exclamation. Her "counter-

⁶ For a thorough discussion of the question of human individuality, majesty, and sovereignty in regard to Lucile's counter-word in Celan's essay, cf. Derrida 2005, 108-34.

word" is not of her own invention and she speaks, as it were, beside herself, in self-forgetfulness. "Vive le roi" is thus not so much spoken by Lucile – or Büchner – as by the historical event and by the dramatic representation of the revolution. Paradoxically, in Celan's description, the movement against "die Kunst" comes from the midst of "die Kunst" itself: Lucile – who cries out her counter-word entirely "automatically" – breaks the automatism of the rules of drama.

This episode, perhaps, hints at what Celan means when he speaks of "ein ganz Anderer" to whom his poetry is addressed. This "other" is someone – or something – in the encounter with whom the poem will find resistance, just as dramatic representation in Büchner's play finds resistance in Lucile's counter-quotation. The poem's hope ("eine Hoffnung des Gedichts") is to encounter resistance in the language of an other, which would defy "die Kunst" and let "Dichtung" of the poem appear. The encounter with this "other" cannot be calculated by the poet, and precisely for this reason his poem remains open to such an encounter.

Celan rarely identifies sources for the quotations in his poetry, and, unlike in Mandelstam, these sources are not easily reconstructible. This elimination of traces, however, is compensated for by the extreme care with which Celan documents his reading in his notes and remarks on the margins of books. These notes provide the basis for the likely sources of the quotations in his poetry but the identification of the source still does not necessarily lead to an unambiguous clarification of the role which individual quotations play in his poems. As much as this role varies from poem to poem, there is one common function that they all share: quotations usually indicate a problem; they point to a certain consternation which Celan encounters when he reads the text he quotes. Quotations can point to an affinity or, on the contrary, a disagreement Celan discovers in regard to the quoted text, but they never merge with his own text. Quotations

stay separate, even if they are not marked with quotation marks in the body of the text; Celan conceives of quotations as "Fremdkörper" (MTA 156). For him, they are "splinters" which disturb the completeness of the poem's shape and thus call attention to this shape as if by contrast.

A further and perhaps more striking means of approaching the text of an other in one's own writing is translation. Both Mandelstam and Celan translated poetry and prose, and Celan's translations amount to about a half of the volume of texts he ever produced. Ironically, both poets – for whom the preservation of otherness in poetry was an ethical task – faced accusations of plagiarism as translators. It is perhaps even more ironic that the misunderstanding that led to the plagiarism charges against Mandelstam concerned his editorial work on a translation of *Eulenspiegel*, a masterpiece of irony. It is also ironic that the accusations of plagiarism against Celan – who was always mindful of his poetic encounters as essential "Daten," dates that established the temporality of his own poetry⁷ – came from someone who faked dates to support her case.⁸ But there is also irony inherent to the work of the translator, since translation, to use Walter Benjamin's formulation, is "das einzig mögliche Grund, 'Dasselbe' wiederholt zu sagen" (WB4 9). Is it still possible to preserve the language of an other as a "Fremdkörper" in one's own idiom while translating? Celan recognizes in Mandelstam the poet with whose texts he can enter into a "Begegnung," a poetic encounter. He dedicates a volume of his poems, *Niemandrose*, to

⁷ Jacques Derrida analyzes the "madness of the date" in Celan's poetry in his "Schibboleth pour Paul Celan." The date of a poetic encounter which documents a singular event is "mad" because it recurs in annual cycles. This clash between the uniqueness of an encounter and the return of the date is the core of Derrida's study.

⁸ Claire Goll accused Celan of plagiarizing the work of her husband Yvan, whose French poems Celan translated into German. After her husband's death, Claire Goll made many ill-founded changes while preparing his unpublished texts for publication. Among other changes, she counterfeited the dates of Goll's poems so she could support her charges against Celan. She would assign a poem with an earlier date in order to make it appear to have been written before Celan's "Sand aus den Urnen," the book she alleged plagiarized Goll's metaphors and expressions. Cf. Goll-Affäre 187-98.

Mandelstam's memory and continues to refer to Mandelstam in his later texts. Most importantly, Celan translates Mandelstam into German and writes an essay for a radio broadcast containing a small selection of his translations. This essay was given the simple title, "Die Dichtung Ossip Mandelstamms," by the editor of the radio program against Celan's wishes. The title he initially proposed was "Die Freiheit, die da dämmert," a quotation from a poem by Mandelstam. Remarkably, Celan "translates" even Mandelstam's name into German: he calls him "Mandelstamm," literally "the trunk of an almond tree," using the same image in one of the poems included in *Niemand'srose*, "Eine Gauner- und Ganovenweise." With this extreme approximation to the poet to whose language he still wishes to relate as to the language of an "other," Celan assigns himself the difficult task of keeping distance from someone very close without appropriating his individuality and without generalizing the singularity of their encounter. Celan's notion of the poetic encounter – of which his encounter with Mandelstam is a striking example – is balanced between the universality implied in any speech addressed to an other and the singularity of the dates (*Daten*) of such an encounter.

I. Encounter

1. "Elargissez l'Art": Quotation and Bounds of Poetry

Wir führen das Gespräch mit der Sprache – trotz und mit all den 'Sprechern.'
Paul Celan

A reader who approaches the poem from the perspective of a quasi-neutral observer does not encounter the poem, the poem does not happen for him as an event. In the encounter of reading a transformation of the reader's self takes place, and precisely this change bears witness to the event. Metaphor – not in the sense of a rhetoric figure not rarely used by Celan himself, but in the literal sense of transport – amounts to a failed encounter.

-i- Metapher, d.i. mitunter nur ein (Hilfs)wort [eine (Not)lüge] im Munde derer, ~~deren~~ ~~Augen~~ die über das Gedicht hinweg und in den Spiegel gucken; es ist Selbstübertragung, Selbsttransport, Selbstbeförderung. (MTA 157)

In the notion of the encounter, the position of the reader is shifted from the independent outside to the middle of the event: the reader not as much reconstructs the meaning of the poem as creates it. Moreover, the event does not even come to be, unless one undertakes the reading in the first place. Thus, an attempt to make an objective statement about the poem from the position of an entirely unrelated observer must fail, since such reading only reiterates what is already known beforehand. It is "self-transport," since the reader fails to expose himself to the poem: his

application of a ready set of formal judgments does not open a possibility of reading. The true reading, for Celan, demands from the reader to take stance to the poem, to make sense of it, to interpret it. Interpretation translates poetry, in opposite to mere observation that translates only itself. In other words, there is reading and "reading," as the following fragment emphasizes:

Buchstäblichkeit des Gesagten, Wort Gewordenen. – Aber die Interpreten: sie wollen es nicht Wort haben, bauen ihr Gerede davor und dahinter, zerreden das Zitierte, Heraufbeschworene, Gegenwärtige mit Hilfe von Zitaten. Auf sichtbaren und unsichtbaren Gänsefüßchen kommen sie daher: Schönheit ist ihnen nicht Wahrheit, sie ist ihnen der anders wiederholbare Schnörkel am eigenen Namenszug. Auf solchen Schnörkel finden sie dann auch den 'Reim'. (MTA 187)

Rather than presenting an attack on interpretation of poetry in general – to which Celan was, at the very least, not altogether averse⁹ – this passage addresses and rejects a certain kind of it. In the passage above, two kinds of quotation are distinguished: the quotation identical with "Dichtung" and the quotation as repetition that merely serves the self-transport of the interpreter. The quotation as "Dichtung" actualizes the quoted text, becomes "gegenwärtig" as it unfolds anew; while the "quotation" is only dubious doubletalk ("Gerede"), a double of quotation which operates with "quotations" without adding to the realm of "Dichtung." From this perspective, all quotation marks necessarily appear as scare quotes as they designate writer's distance to the text drawn upon. Precisely this – taking distance from the text – is, for Celan, the essence of doubletalk, of "Doppelzüngigkeit,"¹⁰ which has no place in the singular language of "Dichtung." For Celan, "Dichtung" is one indivisible realm that can be extended but cannot be owned by the writer. If a writer uses quotation marks only to claim and delimit his own territory, he thus acts

⁹ In the last year of his life, as his skepticism towards literary criticism was certainly no less intense than at the time when he was working on the *Meridian*, he nevertheless emphatically invited Peter Szondi to publish an interpretation of his poetry, to which wish Szondi responded with his *Celan-Studies*.

¹⁰ GW3 175

against "Dichtung." Quotations, and also auto-quotations, serve Celan as orientation marks for what he calls "die Toposforschung" (MTA 10) in poetry, for the meridian-like journeys through encounters with other authors and literary figures in which the individual language of the poet is exposed and transformed by these encounters.

In the *Meridian*, there is a fixed point which designates both the departure and the arrival. This point is announced with a question about the bounds of art. The question is proposed twice in the text, once in the beginning and once toward the end, both times with a motto in French: "Elargissez l'Art!" In the first case Celan quotes this appeal from Büchner's *Lenz* as the paradigm of *Naturalismus*: "[das] literarisch so ergiebige 'Elargissez l'Art' Merciers" (MTA 4). He abandons the impartial, literary-historical view in the second case and faces the question directly, as if it were a question posed to him:

Meine Damen und Herren, ich bin am Ende – ich bin wieder am Anfang.

Elargissez l'Art! Diese Frage tritt, mit ihrer alten, mit ihrer neuen Unheimlichkeit, an uns heran. Ich bin mit ihr zu Büchner gegangen – ich habe sie dort wiederzufinden geglaubt.

Ich hatte auch eine Antwort bereit, ein "Lucilesches" Gegenwort, ich wollte etwas entgegensetzen, mit einem Widerspruch dasein:

Die Kunst erweitern?

Nein. Sondern geh mit der Kunst in deine allereigenste Enge. Und setze dich frei. Ich bin, auch hier, in Ihrer Gegenwart, diesen Weg gegangen. Es war ein Kreis. (MTA 10-11)

Celan's answer – this decisive "no" – to the expansion of poetry is less obvious than one may conclude from reading this passage. Should such expansion be understood as enrichment of poetic language by means of reference to uncommonplace sources and fields, then Celan seems to contradict himself, for this was his own – much commented upon, particularly on the example of his allusions to the fields of botany and geology – practice. This rejection of what seems to be

an essential quality of his own writing reminds of Celan's words on a different, yet in some sense parallel occasion. In 1961, Celan participated in a questionnaire organized by *Librairie Flinker* concerning the issue of bilingualism. In his answer, Celan makes an assertion:

An Zweisprachigkeit in der Dichtung glaube ich nicht. Doppelzüngigkeit – ja, das gibt es, auch in diversen zeitgenössischen Wortkünsten bzw. –kunststücken, zumal in solchen, die sich, in freudiger Übereinstimmung mit dem jeweiligen Kulturkonsum, genauso polyglott wie polychrom zu etablieren wissen.

Dichtung – das ist das schicksalhaft Einmalige der Sprache [...] also nicht das Zweimalige. (GW3 175)

Thus, poetry must be written in only one language. This statement is quite surprising considering that Celan spoke at least three languages and wrote poems in at least two of them. In fact, all his poetic practice testifies against such limitation.¹¹ Apparently, he deliberately misses the point. This short text is a diversion: deviating from the issue of bilingualism, it reflects on the same question as does the *Meridian* speech – the question of poetry and its bounds. Poetry distinguishes itself from artificiality (*die Wortkünsten*) with its being bound to a singular event that takes place in language.

Poetry, Celan insists, is, like fate, selective and captures the singular "once" ("das Einmalige") in language. Language here must be understood in its fullest, broadest sense, as the sheer means of communication and thus free from subdivisions into national or professional languages. In fact, Celan presupposes bilingualism, or rather, multilingualism instead of rejecting it. Poetry starts with the "expansion of art" – that is, with a challenge to limits of language, with excursions, so to say, into the dictionaries – yet this is not where poetry arrives. Its destination,

¹¹ Giorgio Agamben reflects on Celan's response to Flinker in his book *Idea of Prose*. According to his interpretation, Celan refers to "a unique, absent language" which is "not one language". He writes: "There is, in fact, an experience of language that forever presupposes words – in which we speak, so to say, as if we already had words for the word, as if we always had a language before having one (the language which we speak is never unique, but always double, triple, caught up in the infinite recession of meta-languages)" (Agamben 48).

according to the Meridian essay, is "die allereigenste Enge," the most intrinsic closeness, precisely the opposite of expansion. Only through expanding, exploring and exposing itself does the poem arrive at the moment of independence and sets itself free. The openness as the essential quality of poetry is captured in the formula which Celan notes in 1969, about a year before his death: "La poésie ne s'impose plus, elle s'expose" (GW3 181). Exposure warrants the poem's singularity, its "once", the opposite of which is imposture and doublespeak, "Doppelzüngigkeit." Ultimate contraction, intrinsic closeness of the poem result from its being exposed: the poem's meridian journey is exploration of the limits of its own resistance.

These considerations inevitably raise the question: what does the poem expose itself to and what does it resist against? What does it need to withstand in order to learn its own limits and thus to arrive at its unique voice? To answer these questions, Celan engages the notion of the encounter ("Begegnung") that is possible through poetry. Rather than referring to conversation or dialogue, Celan chooses "encounter," with the unmistakable emphasis on resistance this word entails. It appears that the singular voice of the poem can be learned first in distinguishing it from other and others' voices. Speaking against an other's speech implies a confrontation with or an approximation to the quoted text, an encounter in which the poem not so much imposes as exposes and thus affirms itself by differentiation.

One such encounter, namely with Büchner, as he mentions in the *Meridian* speech, takes place in his prose fragment "Gespräch in Gebirg," which is, at the same time, a story of an actual if planned, yet missed encounter with Theodor Adorno in Engadin. Another encounter with Büchner Celan finds, retrospectively, in the line "Komm auf den Händen zu uns" from his poem "Stimmen" (*Sprachgitter*) which he composed before re-reading Büchner's *Lenz* in preparation to

writing his Büchner prize speech. Büchner's Lenz, who walks on his head, strikes Celan as familiar from his own writing. What Celan calls an encounter is a way of reading that is by no means neutral and does not aim at objectivity; nor is such reading an appropriation for the reader's purposes. The line, "Komm auf den Händen zu uns," stands along with Büchner's Lenz upside-down: it quotes – rather than repeats – this gesture.

In the notes to his Meridian-essay, Celan defines the poetic ("das Dichterische") as "der Ort, die im Dunkel verwehenden Anführungsstriche" (MTA 63). The poem is, thus, a space where quotation ceases to be such: the text quoted and the text quoting intersect in a singular moment of encounter. This does not mean that the author who quotes agrees upon a certain meaning uttered in the quotation; rather, the meaning of such intersection is created blindly, *im Dunkeln*, that is, beyond the scope of both texts. Unlike quotation for a purpose of strengthening one's argument, the poetic encounter ("Begegnung") is not planned: poetry is "fatefully singular" ("einmalig schicksalhaft") in the same sense as is a fortuitous encounter. Such quotation is an event in language of poetry which is beyond quotation; it is an unrepeatable event in language.

In a passage related to the fragment quoted above, Celan refers to Danton's last words in Büchner's play: " – Köpfe, die sich im Staube küssen - - Lob den [--] Anführungszeichen! Wirklichkeit des Jenseits!" (MTA 183) Celan refers here to the fact that Danton's last words in Büchner's play are a quotation from Louis-Adolphe Thiers's *Histoire de la Révolution Française*. The line in *Dantons Tod* quotes the historical Danton: "DANTON *zum Henker* Willst du grausamer sein als der Tod? Kannst du verhindern, daß unsere Köpfe sich auf dem Boden des Korbes küssen?" (Büchner 76) The quotation marks, which Celan refers to in the quotation above and which are "blown away" in Büchner's play, demarcate more than works of the two

authors; they demarcate life from death. Here, poetry ("Dichtung") captures the gesture of a brotherly kiss which survives decapitation of its actors. First in Thiers's account and subsequently in Büchner's play, this gesture gains a reality beyond this world, "Wirklichkeit des Jenseits," detached from the immediate events and inaccessible for the speaker. The gesture of the brotherly kiss, as it were, needs to be severed from the speaker by the quotation marks to become meaningful. The speaker has no access to the event he describes, though he stands in the middle of this event. It takes a writer ("Dichter") to register his words and to carry them over to the reality of writing ("Dichtung"). Danton's last words had perhaps stayed unrepeatable and unrecognizable, if Thiers would not quote them and if Büchner would not subsequently incorporate them in his play.

Having become "Dichtung" in Büchner's play, Danton's words cease to be a quotation – as they were in the historical account – and thus free themselves from the quotation marks. Yet precisely this renders them quotable again. Celan's "Lob den Anführungszeichen" is, in a sense, an attack on quotation; more precisely, on the manner of quotation, in which the quoted text is a mere replication of words and cannot claim actuality of an event. Danton's words, on the contrary, become actualized in "Dichtung" because only in them the event of his decapitation can be experienced, by readers and by himself. For Danton, uttering these words is the only possible way to bear witness to his own death. In this sense, poetry can extend into the beyond ("Jenseits"). Thus Celan writes in his notes to the *Meridian*:

Die Lippen, die hier sprechen, haben, wie die Dantons – vergessen wir nicht, wohin es mit ihm geht [– er gewandt ist –] Augen. Sie haben wahrgenommen und gesehen; sie wissen, was sie sagen. (MTA 159)

Celan attempts to ascertain poetry as the language of "once," which resists repetition. Danton's last words borrow their finality from death and reach beyond it with the brotherly kiss that cannot be experienced by its actors. Rather than describing, Danton "quotes" the event of his death: his lips "have eyes" in order to bear this witness. The praise of the quotation marks is thus the praise of the poetry as the eyewitness in the absence of speaker. The quotation marks coincide with the cutting edge of the guillotine blade: poetry takes place "beyond" the real event. Danton's last words are not merely a turn of speech ("Wendung"), rather they represent – at least, such is their intention – the turn of the event itself ("wohin er gewandt ist," in the quotation below). *Dichtung* not only claims a reality that extends beyond the physical existence but moreover becomes its ultimate formulation. Every turn of speech, according to this notion of poetry, means to be unique in testifying to a "once," to a singular event. This is the sense of the following fragment for the *Meridian* speech:

Es gibt kein Wort, ~~[das] keine Wendung~~ ^{d{ie}}as, ~~nicht im über~~
 ausgesprochen, nicht den übertragenen Sinn mitbrächte; im Gedicht
meinen die Worte ~~im~~ unübertragbar zu sein. (ibid.)

Certainly, Celan realizes that poetry cannot operate with absolutely unique language and that any expression in language inevitably is a "turn of speech," a metaphor; yet what matters, is the intention to treat words in such a way as if they constitute a singular, unrepeatable reality. In order to render words not arbitrarily transportable ("übertragbar"), the poem needs to make them its own ("meinen" alludes also to "mein" in this context), capturing the immediate event and defining it as the unrepeatable. Precisely for the sake of objectivity the poet must appropriate the words he uses in his writing, thus taking stance to the event he addresses: otherwise his testimony is not true as he fails to become involved in what he describes.

Furthermore, this fragment ought to be read against the biographic background which involves the issue of metaphors and is extremely significant for the *Meridian* essay in the whole. Since the publication of the notes to the *Meridian* and the materials of the so-called Goll-affair, it became clear that one of Celan's main concerns in his *Meridian* speech was the refutation of public accusations in plagiarism as well as in the dubious opacity of his poetic "metaphors." On the one hand, Claire Goll accused Celan of copying Yvan Goll's technique of genitive metaphor. Among other "plagiarisms," she charged Celan with appropriating Goll's expression "Le Moulin de la Mort" (*Les Cercles Magiques*, 1951) in his poem "Spät und Tief," where Celan uses the expression "die Mühlen des Todes" (*Sand aus den Urnen*, 1948).¹² On the other hand, Hans E. Holthusen referred to the same words as "eine künstliche und daher gänzlich tote Metapher" and "eine in X-Beliebigkeiten schwelgende Genitivmetapher" in his reviews of Celan's poetry.¹³ Thus, Celan had to repel the allegation of his words being on the one hand, a plagiarism – that is, an unauthorized quotation – and on the other hand, a far-fetched esoteric mannerism.

Characteristically, both claims are more than obviously counterfeit: Goll's poem appeared three years later than Celan's; and Holthusen (as Peter Szondi suggests, deliberately) forgets that "die Mühlen des Todes" is almost exactly the title of a documentary about Auschwitz that was shown in all cinemas of the post-war Germany and, moreover, a phrase from Adolf Eichmann's vocabulary.¹⁴ Celan refutes Holthusen's argument insisting that he refers to "something real"

¹² Claire Goll: "Der Rundbrief," in Wiedemann, Barbara (herausg.), *Goll-Affäre*, 187.

¹³ In his article in *Merkur* (1954), in Hans Bender's anthology *Mein Gedicht ist mein Messer* and, later on, in his review of *Niemand'srose* in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (May 2, 1964). Holthusen's articles are partially reprinted in *Goll-Affäre* 207-208.

¹⁴ Under the title of "Die Todesmühlen" (1945), a documentary about death camps was produced and shown in all German cinemas on the initiative of the Office of Military Government for Germany/United States (cf. Szondi 165-168). In 1964 Peter Szondi wrote a letter to the editor of the FAZ in response to Holthusen's review of *Niemand'srose* (typoscript in Szondi, Peter, *Briefe*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993: 162-163):

("etwas Konkretes")¹⁵ which becomes inscribed into his poem. This example explicates that the question of metaphor coincides with the problem of quotation: Celan uses a turn of speech which had gone through a number of utterances and has acquired, as it were, a history of quotation marks. The quotation finds its way into Celan's poem in a manner that is analogous to Büchner's *Dantons Tod*. While Louis-Adolphe Thiers puts the words uttered by the historical Danton into quotation marks, Büchner removes the punctuation transforming the quotation into "Dichtung," for which procedure Celan develops his notion of poetry as "die im Dunkeln verwehenden Einführungszeichen." In "Spät und Tief," the expression "die Mühlen des Todes" appears without quotation marks so that this designation of the death camps becomes an inseparable part of the text. The expression bears the impressions of Eichmann's macabre "scare quotes" as well as the inversion of this rhetoric in the title of the documentary. With the elimination of quotes, Celan's poem calls upon the reader with the task to recognize the quotation and to take stance to what it entails. Yet it would be wrong to draw the conclusion that Celan views quotation as a means of sustaining a uniform meaning. His critique aims at such employment of quotation, in which the speaker differentiates his own voice from the voice of the other, moreover – engages quotation unequivocally with the purpose of making this differentiation clearly perceived, thus

Sehr geehrter Herr Dr. Michaelis,
 nach einem Bericht der FAZ vom 13. Mai wurde in dem Frankfurter Prozess gegen Eichmanns Stellvertreter in Budapest, Hermann Krumei, von der Anklage als Eichmanns Ausspruch der Satz zitiert: "wenn ich in drei Tagen nichts aus Istanbul erfahren habe, lasse ich die Mühle in Auschwitz arbeiten."
 Hans E. Holthusen aber, der eins ebenfalls die SS-Uniform trug, darf im Literaturblatt der FAZ (vom 2. Mai 1964) behaupten, der Ausdruck "Mühlen des Todes" sei bei Paul Celan das Zeichen einer "Vorliebe für das 'surrealistische', in X-Beliebigkeiten schwebende Genitivmetapher" gewesen. Diese Koinzidenz ist kein Zufall: weder beim Dichter, dem der einstige Euphemismus noch gegenwärtig ist, noch beim Kritiker, der die Erinnerung an das, was gewesen ist, durch den Vorwurf der Beliebigkeit zu vereiteln trachtet.
 Ich wäre sehr betroffen, wenn Sie sich weigerten, diese Richtigstellung als Lesebrief zu publizieren.
 Mit freundlichen Grüßen

Ihr [signature]

¹⁵ Celan's letter to W. Jens, September 5th, 1960

insisting upon the other's otherness even before experiencing it. In such an exchange of voices, the speaker takes control over its heterogeneity, with the only outcome of self-affirmation, or, to use Celan's word, self-transport, "Selbstübertragung". Repudiating such controlled heterogeneity in quotation, Celan reformulates his statement uttered in the response to Flinker: there is only one language in "Dichtung." Quotation that aims at preserving the writer's distance from what he quotes is as ambidextrous as the poems that Celan, in his letter to Flinker, calls "polyglott wie polychrom." The many-voicedness reveals itself as a means – a transport – for one voice and one self. In case one quotes for the purpose of un-relation to the text, one, as it were, uses the other voice to make his own voice better heard. The artifice of such accord Celan calls the "Reim," rhyme in quotes, a metaphor of rhyme, which has little to do with "Dichtung."

For Celan, objective treatment of quotation is neither achievable nor desirable, whether one aims at objectivity or merely pretends to. Already the carrying over of text accomplished in quotation reveals an intention and thus excludes objectivity. Whenever Celan quotes, he puts explicit emphasis on transformation. "Dichtung," as singularity of the poem, emerges in the rupture between the quoted text and the text of the poem itself. Thus quotation – as testimony of encounter ("Begegnung") in reading – is a counter-word, a "Gegenwort" as a token of "Gegenwart" (MTA 10-11; cited above). In fact, the very question about the borders of art with which the Meridian starts out – "Elargissez l'Art!" – is an elaborately improper quotation. In his speech, Celan ascribes this quotation directly to Mercier¹⁶, though it originates in a monograph on Lenz by the Russian scholar M.N.Rozanov who uses this sentence as an epigraph to the chapter on Mercier. The sentence – of Rozanov's own invention – is a formula for Mercier's

¹⁶ "[das] literarisch so ergiebige[s] 'Elargissez l'Art' Merciers" (MTA 4)

stance toward literature. But this formula, beyond what it says, radiates its own idea – expand the art! – with means beyond, or rather, underneath its semantic meaning. The Russian scholar writing about the German writer formulates a quasi-quotation for expressing the expansion of literature in French: the figure of the sentence is more urgent than its literal sense, by the same logic as, according to Celan, "im Chiasmus ist [...] das Kreuz näher als im Thema 'Kreuz'" (MTA 112). The encounter of the three languages – Russian, the language of the author and of Lenz' last abode; German, the language of Büchner's writings, and French, the language of Mercier and, more importantly, of the revolution – results in a singular figure that has the expressive strength of quotation, with its excess of signification. This peculiar constellation allows Celan to quote the motto as a capsule of Büchner's writings and, by the same token, as the paradigm of the "Dichtung" in general.

In one of many senses, the "Meridian journey" is a report of reading this sentence, "Elargissez l'Art." It appears, at first, in the guise of quotation, as a "literary productive" ("literarisch ergiebig") description of Büchner's work. Yet in the course of the essay, the sentence frees itself from the quotes (significantly, in the first instance Celan puts the sentence into quotation marks while dropping them in the second¹⁷) and frees itself as "Dichtung." Although this passage has been already quoted above, it is indispensable to re-read it:

Elargissez l'Art![...]

Die Kunst erweitern?

Nein. Sondern geh mit der Kunst in deine allereigenste Enge. Und setze dich frei. Ich bin, auch hier, in Ihrer Gegenwart, diesen Weg gegangen. Es war ein Kreis. (MTA 11)

¹⁷ Cf. MTA 4; MTA 10.

At this moment in the text, the tension in the quasi-quotation is released as it re-appears unprotected: not anymore a reference or an allusion, but the reformulation of the question on the bounds of poetry. Setting itself free, the quotation exposes itself ("La poésie [...] s'expose") to the openness of being read, again, as a part of the original work rather than in the security behind the quotation marks. The "ownest restraint" of the poet is the challenge of opening the quotation to the immediate reading. The danger of this procedure – of which Celan is at all times aware - is two-fold: on the one hand, the poet runs the risk of assimilating the quotation to the degree of its becoming unrecognizable as quotation; on the other hand, if it stays recognizable while only the source is suppressed, the quotation may return not as "Dichtung" but as its malignant double: as plagiarism.

Significantly, the bitterest disappointments were brought to Celan by accusations of precisely the two offenses he was so acutely sensitive about – the plagiarism and the hermetic obscurity of allusions. In the sketches to the *Meridian*, Celan attempted to explain his treatment of quotation as "Dichtung" with the emphatic insistence upon the immediate – in contrast to the mediated, "metaphoric" – reading of quotation:

Zitate sind etwas anderes als Fremde Körper, die wir, medial und damit in Mittelpunkte gestellt, auf uns zuströmen fühlen; es sind – ~~der~~ ~~hi~~ Friede dem Mitzitierten – Fremdkörper schlechthin. – (MTA 156)

In this formulation, Celan's argument stays essentially the same: if one leaves the quotation outside one's own writing, behind quotation marks – one uses quotation for the sake of self-confirmation, and this turning back to oneself is carried out by the "metaphor" as self-transport ("Selbstübertragung," MTA 157) In this passage, Celan himself employs a metaphor that hinges on the difference of "Fremde Körper" and "Fremdkörper": if one positions oneself in the middle

of the stream of other, of others' bodies, not as much the stream as the limits of one's own body become perceptible; if one, in contrast, opens up to the foreign bodies inside, they become invisible to others, yet one's own body is changed. While "Fremde Körper" invoke the notion of sexuality, or at least sensuality of human bodies, "Fremdkörper" gain in immediacy: the distance is abolished, yet the foreignness is at its acutest. "Fremdkörper," unlike "Fremde Körper," is one word and thus not two, to cite Celan on the issue of bilingualism.

Furthermore, the shift from "Fremde Körper" to "Fremdkörper" is a shift from the clearly anthropomorphous to the experience of an alien substance: "Fremdkörper" reach into the bounds of one's own body without integrating into it. Celan's metaphor itself is disturbed here by a foreign body: "Friede dem Mitzitierten" is a transformed quotation of Büchner's famous "Friede den Hütten." Not only does this insertion disrupt the transport of the metaphor; replacing a part of the quotation with the word "quotation" – more precisely, "the quoted with" ("das Mitzitierte") – it opens an endless perspective of quotation within quotation. Precisely this perspective is "the place of blown away quotation marks,"¹⁸ the u-topos of the one language of "Dichtung." Quotation disturbs the transport of metaphor so that the metaphor remains incomplete, and its mimetic task unaccomplished. As in the chiasmus the figure of the cross is more immediate than in the theme of "the cross," Celan says, so here the opacity of "Dichtung" is made more immediate by the foreign body of quotation which is incorporated into the metaphor thematizing the "foreign body." Celan's assertion that the chiasmus communicates the idea of cross better than any description renders the semantic content auxiliary and by necessity ekphrastic. Since Celan seeks to avoid allusions and references to a "theme," such as "cross" with its virtually

¹⁸ MTA 63

unavoidable Christian connotations, quotation, for him, not so much establishes a continuation of a certain theme as opens the very possibility of the poetic encounter.

In the final version of the *Meridian*, Celan suppresses the fragment regarding the "foreign bodies," yet the idea of quotation as an abyss of opacity in the poem is expressed with the same mean, if in a more opaque way:

Meine Damen und Herren, es ist heute gang und gäbe, der Dichtung ihre 'Opazität' vorzuwerfen. – Erlauben Sie mir, an dieser Stelle unvermittelt – aber hat sich hier nicht jäh etwas aufgetan? -, erlauben Sie mir, hier ein Wort von Pascal zu zitieren, ein Wort, das ich vor einiger Zeit bei Leo Shestov¹⁹ gelesen habe: 'Ne nous reprochez pas le manque de clarté puisque nous en faisons profession!' – Das ist, glaube ich, wenn nicht die kongenitale, so doch wohl die der Dichtung um einer Begegnung willen aus einer – vielleicht selbstentworfenen – Ferne oder Fremde zugeordnete Dunkelheit. (MTA 7)

The Pascal fragment finds its way into the passage via Shestov and tears the writing open: the opacity of this opening is, for Celan, the constitutive darkness of "Dichtung." He says, something opens itself ("hat sich aufgetan"²⁰) in the text with the sudden and immediate ("unvermittelt") quotation. Yet the quotation is, on the contrary, *mediated* through Shestov as well as through the two languages, Russian and French. What stays not mediated, are the implications that make Celan quote Pascal by the detour through Shestov. One could speculate on what these implications are and find ways to elucidate them, but it is more important to recognize the opacity arising from their explicit concealment. Thus the quotation builds an opaque chasm in this passage, more opaque than its literal meaning. Rather than broadening, Celan's quotations

¹⁹ Shestov quotes Pascal's sentence in a number of places: *На весах Иова [In Job's Balances]*, *Откровения смерти [Revelations of Death]* and *Potestas Clavium*. Celan owned all of these books in French translation. In the *Meridian*, he quotes the sentence with some slight changes.

²⁰ Cf. "Etwas war da hineingeraten [in Mandelstamms Gedichte]" ("Die Dichtung Ossip Mandelstamms," MTA 215). Celan quotes Zinaïda Hippus's essay on Valerii Briusov, redirecting her words from Briusov to Mandelstam. Cf. also MTA 88.

confine the poetry to a singular encounter in which the poem, one finite poem, suddenly gapes into the infinity of "Dichtung."

2. The Meridian journey and "die Odysee des Geistes"

*И, покинув корабль, натрудивший в морях полотно,
Одиссей возвратился, пространством и временем полный.*

*[And, after leaving the ship that had yielded much canvas at sea,
Odysseus returned, full with space and time.]
Osip Mandelstam*

Celan's assertion that the figure of cross is more immediate in chiasmus than in its descriptive representations accentuates the rhetorical structure as the carrying element for semantic content. The immediate content of language, for Celan, are the figures, "das Bildhafte"²¹ – be it a genitive metaphor, or a chiasmus – which are recognizable prior to the figural meaning whose bearers they are. Rhetoric devices are a part of what Celan in his *Meridian* essay calls "die Kunst": the purely technical, even mechanical counterpart of the "Dichtung." Among artificialities of "die Kunst" belong, for example, the tropes ("die Tropen").²² In the entirety of the elaborate metaphor, which the *Meridian* essay is from the viewpoint of its rhetoric structure (that is, from the viewpoint of "die Kunst") the tropes represent an image that brings together the literary device (tropes) with a "terrestrial" location (tropics), thus expressing the figural meaning of the metaphor of the meridian, which – like language, Celan says – is immaterial, yet earthly.²³ In the *Meridian*, Celan attempts to situate the language

²¹ In a sketch for the *Meridian* Celan subsums "Metapher, Bild, etc." under "Bildhaftes" (MTA 107)

²² Cf. "Das Gedicht wäre somit der Ort, wo alle Tropen und Metaphern ad absurdum geführt werden wollen" (MTA 10); "das Gedicht mit seinen Bildern und Tropen" (ibid.), "etwas [...] sogar die Tropen Durchkreuzendes [=der Meridian]" (MTA 11)

²³ Cf. MTA 12

on the intersection of the rhetoric and the author's voice and breath²⁴: of "die Kunst" and "Dichtung." In the sketches, this polarization is expressed explicitly:

Artistik und Wortkunst – das mag etwas Abendländisch-Abendfüllendes für sich haben. Dichtung ist {etwas anderes; Dichtung.} herzgraue, {{sublunarisches}, {himmel- und herzgraue} {herz- und himmelgraue} atemdurchwachsene Sprache in der Zeit. (MTA 201)

The entire "plot" of the *Meridian* relies on a dialectics of "die Kunst" and "Dichtung," which are set from the beginning as the opposing movements in the process of the poem's emergence. "Die Kunst," rather artifice than art, is exemplified in Büchner's automatons (MTA 2) and Medusa's head (MTA 5): automatons embody the endless repeatability of the poetic forms and Medusa – the "preservative" intent to freeze movement, both of which is, for Celan, "das Unheimliche"²⁵ of the art and derives from its mechanical essence. In contrast to "die Kunst," "Dichtung" relies on the poet's voice, which is always one of a kind, individual by nature. The very first line, after the address to the public, announces the word "die Kunst": "Die Kunst, das

²⁴ "Stimme" and "Atem" represent the individual writer in the *Meridian*, as well as in the radio essay about Mandelstam. Especially crucial becomes the word "Atemwende" which represents the poem's fall into silence ("Neigung zum Verstummen," MTA 8) and which Celan takes over from Mandelstam's "задыхание" ("Восьмистишия," OM1 198). Cf. Lucile's perception of language as "das Personhafte" (MTA 3) and also the chart in the notes to the *Meridian* in which "Stimme" is linked to "Person" (MTA 191).

²⁵ Celan's notion of "das Unheimliche" is reminiscent of both Freud's notion of the uncanny and to Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin's hymn "Der Ister." Celan's understanding of "das Unheimliche" as repetition compulsion (Büchner's automatons) and return of the undead (Medusa's head) converges with Freud's analysis. On the other hand, the countermovement that originates in the conflict of *Kunst*, i.e. of "das Unheimliche," and *Dichtung* brings to mind Heidegger's notion of *Gegenwärtigkeit* and its relation to *das Unheimliche*. In the context of the present study, it is important to note that both Celan and Freud allude to Schelling's definition of "das Unheimliche." In his essay, Freud quotes Schelling: "unheimlich ist alles, was ein Geheimnis, im Verborgenen bleiben sollte und hervorgetreten ist" (Freud 235), and Celan refers to Schelling as he situates the poetic encounter (*die Begegnung*) in the secret (*Geheimnis*, s. below). Yet, unlike Freud, whose notion of the uncanny is deduced exclusively from the analysis of the Romantics, Celan sees the paradigm of *das Unheimliche* in Büchner's writings. In this manner, Celan significantly changes the emphasis: in comparison to Hoffmann's "The Sandman," in Büchner's prose *das Unheimliche* is much more *heimlich* in both Freudian senses of the word – more familiar and better hidden under the guise of the *Naturalismus*. Thomas Schestag points out that Celan's choice of the meridian as the central image for his Büchner prize speech is influenced by Heidegger's essay "Zur Seinsfrage," whose initial title was "Über 'die Linie'" which designated the zero meridian. In his interpretation of Celan's meridian Schestag uses the word "gegenwärtig" in a somewhat Heideggerian sense, without explicitly naming Heidegger on this. (Cf. Schestag, Thomas, *buk*, Munich: Boer, 1994, 5-7)

ist, Sie erinnern sich, ein marionettenhaftes, jambisch-fünfüßiges [...] Wesen" (MTA 2). In the opening sentences of the following four passages, "die Kunst" repeatedly returns:

- [1] Die Kunst, das ist, Sie erinnern sich [...]
- [2] Die Kunst kommt wieder.
- [3] Und sie kommt – die Kunst [...]
- [4] Die Kunst, meine Damen und Herren [...]
- [5] Aber es gibt, wenn von der Kunst die Rede ist [...] (MTA 2-3)

Yet something resists against the force of "die Kunst": "Es kommt etwas dazwischen" (MTA 2). This "etwas" is expressed in Lucile's counter-word (*Gegenwort*), "Es lebe der König!" which epitomizes "Dichtung": "Das, meine Damen und Herren, hat keinen ein für allemal feststehenden Namen, aber ich glaube, es ist...die Dichtung" (MTA 4). Lucile is "art-blind" ("die Kunstblinde," MTA 3), and her counter-word is essentially non-metaphoric, non-mimetic in the context of Büchner's play, according to Celan's reading. As *Dantons Tod* reaches its climax, irresistibly drawn toward the execution of the actors by the mechanics of the drama – as much as the course of the revolution – Lucile's line resounds with a stark dissonance that disrupts the play. In the inconsistency of Lucile's utterance, language is suddenly reduced to the mere act of speaking, of speaking against the rhythm and rhyme of the Medusean, repetitive art.

Her counter-word runs against the course of action, against the flow of dramatic presentation but also against its own sense: the counter-word speaks against itself, against its semantic and rhetoric content; it quotes and counter-quotes itself. Yet in its formal appearance her line keeps, along with its grammatical consistency, a rhyme and rhythm in the plot. "Es lebe der König!" as the monarchist slogan is not entirely out of context; in other words, it is not nonsense in all its absurdity and senselessness: "Gehuldigt wird hier der für die Gegenwart des Menschlichen zeugenden Majestät des Absurden" (MTA 3). While nonsense would be an escape

from the forceful transport of "die Kunst," the counter-word acts against it in its own medium and with its own means.

The counter-word thus stands in invisible quotation marks – "Es lebe der König!" is, in regard to its formal aspect, a quotation: repetition of others' words. But quotation as a device belongs under the formalities of "die Kunst." When Celan, as discussed above, warns against quotations that undo the quoted ("zerreden das Zitierte mit Hilfe von Zitaten"), he distinguishes between quotation as "die Kunst," i.e. as a device for incorporation of indirect speech in the text, and quotation as "Dichtung," i.e. as an act of distancing oneself from the sense for the sake of reaching beyond formalities of language, of making one's voice heard, as in the case with Lucile's counter-word - "hier haben wir Büchners Stimme gehört" (MTA 5). The mechanical rhythm and rhyme of "die Kunst" produces its "schnarrenden Ton" (ibid.), counter to which the poet's voice resounds. The counter-word is not grammatically formless as such; yet it is pronounced from a distance to its formal content which is kept intact and which, in this case, is just the medium for the speaker's voice and breath. "Das Bildhafte" of language becomes a means for "das Personhafte," "die Kunst" – the bearer of "Dichtung."

For a while, "die Kunst" and "Dichtung" seem to walk the same path: "Dichtung [hat] doch den Weg der Kunst zu gehen" (MTA 6), yet "Dichtung" walks the way of "die Kunst" in the opposite direction: "Dann wäre die Kunst die von der Dichtung zurückzulegende Weg" (ibid.) Eventually, this path leads to a seeming resolution in the poem: neither "die Kunst" nor "Dichtung," but "das Gedicht." The poem comes into being precisely at the same moment as "die Kunst" and "Dichtung" cease to be: "Dichtung," from exposure to "die Kunst," is out of breath, the voice of the poet is reduced to "Atempause," or "Atemwende"; "die Kunst" reveals that even

its mechanisms are perhaps exhaustable: "vielleicht schrumpft gerade hier das Medusenhaupt, vielleicht versagen gerade hier die Automaten" (MTA 7); and, finally, the poem, "das Gedicht," reveals itself: "Vielleicht ist das Gedicht von da her es selbst...und kann nun, auf diese kunstlose, kunst-freie Weise, seine anderen Wege, also auch die Wege der Kunst gehen – wieder und wieder gehen" (MTA 8). Here Celan, for the first time in the essay, uses the word "poem," "Gedicht" – the poem as a finite artwork, rather than "poetry" or "art," which emerges in its final form marked by its date and from this date on speaks in its own voice (MTA 8). In the notes to the *Meridian*, the collision of the mechanicity of "die Kunst" and the voice of "Dichtung" in the poem resolves in a half mechanical, half vocal effect of the timbre:

Das Anklingen der Sprache (als Ganzes) im Gedicht. – [→ Timbre =
= Unübertragbare] (MTA 187)

Timbre pertains to voice as much as to instrument. It is "das Stimmhaft-Stimmlose" (MTA 145, 146) in the poem, or "[das] Vibrato der Worte" (ibid.), which makes the poem, with and despite its tropes and metaphors, unrepeatably, "unübertragbar." Timbre gives the poem its accomplished form, so that the whole of language resounds in one particular text. Thus the poem ("das Gedicht") emerges as the product of movement of "die Kunst" and the countermovement of "Dichtung." The "plot" of the *Meridian* is a story of an encounter between "die Kunst" and "Dichtung," with an apparent eventual resolution in "das Gedicht." While "Dichtung" is unaccountable in its lack of form, and "die Kunst" endlessly reiterable, the present perfect tense of the prefix "ge-" in "das Gedicht" points at its existence in time, its being present and

accomplished, so that "das Gedicht," unlike "Dichtung," acquires a "here and now,"²⁶ a "singular, punctual presence,"²⁷ which Celan assigns with a date, its "20. Jänner" (MTA 11).

The resolution of "die Kunst" and "Dichtung" in the poem is the end of the *Meridian* journey. The point of arrival coincides with the point of departure, yet something has changed in the course of the journey: "Ich bin... mir selbst begegnet" (MTA 11). From a point of view, the *Meridian* appears as a story of the poet's finding himself, going out from an "I" and arriving at the same, yet transformed "I" in the end – the paradigmatic story of the Romantics. It seems to be a story of a poem coming into being and the enigma of its self-identity.

Except that "etwas kommt dazwischen": "I" have not *found* myself, "I" have *encountered* myself. The ends do not meet, the journey cannot be suspended, and the identity does not become a whole. The language that resounds in its entirety in the timbre of the poem is a tremble, in which a voice falls into silence. Only the falling into silence of the poem finds its way into the final version of the *Meridian* speech; the timbre – the poem's hope – stays hidden in the unpublished fragments. In the final version, the poem gives up the hope, "verhofft" – and hopes against hope (MTA 8):

Niemand kann sagen, wie lange die Atempause – das Verhoffen und der Gedanke – noch fortwährt. Das 'Geschwinde', das schon immer 'draußen' war, hat an Geschwindigkeit gewonnen [...]

Gewiß, das Gedicht – das Gedicht heute – zeigt, und das hat, glaube ich, denn doch nur mittelbar mit den – nicht zu unterschätzenden – Schwierigkeiten der Wortwahl, dem rapideren Gefälle der Syntax oder dem wacheren Sinn für die Ellypse – zu tun, - das Gedicht zeigt, das ist unverkennbar, eine starke Neigung zum Verstummen. (ibid.)

²⁶ "Hier und Jetzt des Gedichts" (MTA 9)

²⁷ "einmalige, punktuelle Gegenwart" (MTA 9)

"Das Geschwinde" – another quote from Büchner to describe the mechanical moving force of "die Kunst" – threatens to overpower the poetry altogether. The paratactic syntax of this fragment itself is such an acceleration of the transport of "die Kunst." The poem's existence is by no means secured with its emergence. Its existence is just a punctual, singular break in the prevailing movement on the circular orbit from the point of departure to the point of arrival, from "A" to "A," from "I" to "I." To capture this break, to be evidence of it is the hope of the poem.

Telling the story of the poem's emergence and of its self-identity Celan must face Friedrich Schelling's reflections on the work of art. In his notes to the Meridian, Celan mentions Schelling by name several times, although mostly via other authors,²⁸ and many of his further reflections on poem, without mentioning him explicitly, trace back to Schelling. Most remarkably, Celan refers to Schelling in a passage on the encounter:

-i- Das Gedicht ist offen; erst ~~in der~~ [durch die] Begegnung, - die ein Geheimnis bleibt – nähert es sich wieder dem Verborgenen, aus dem es kommt. Darin gleicht es der Natur. – In den – In ~~den Schicksalen~~ [der Schicksalssekunde] des Gedichts wiederholt sich die "Odyssee des Geistes."

Die Schicksalssekunde des Gedichts erinnert dich an die "Odyssee des Geistes." (MTA 140)

In these lines, Celan alludes to the concluding chapter of Schelling's *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, in which the relation of poem to nature is addressed:

Wenn die ästhetische Anschauung nur die objektiv gewordene transzendente ist, so versteht sich von selbst, daß die Kunst das einzige wahre und ewige Organon zugleich und Dokument der Philosophie sei, welches immer und fortwährend aufs neue beurkundet, was die Philosophie äußerlich nicht darstellen kann, nämlich das Bewußtlose im Handeln und Produzieren, und seine ursprüngliche Identität mit dem Bewußten. Die Kunst ist eben deswegen dem Philosophen das Höchste, weil sie ihm das Allerheiligste gleichsam öffnet, wo in ewiger und ursprünglicher Vereinigung gleichsam in einer

²⁸ E.g., MTA 205: PC quotes an essay by Lukács; MTA 210: essay by Oskar Becker. Becker's essay, which for the most part discusses Schelling's aesthetics is particularly present in Celan's notes.

Flamme brennt, was in der Natur und Geschichte gesondert ist, und was im Leben und Handeln, ebenso wie im Denken, ewig sich fliehen muß. Die Ansicht, welche der Philosoph von der Natur künstlich sich macht, ist für die Kunst die ursprüngliche und natürliche. Was wir Natur nennen, ist ein Gedicht, das in geheimer wunderbarer Schrift verschlossen liegt. Doch könnte das Rätsel sich enthüllen, würden wir die Odyssee des Geistes darin erkennen, der wunderbar getäuscht sich selber suchend, sich selber flieht; denn durch die Sinnenwelt blickt nur wie durch Worte der Sinn, nur wie durch halbdurchsichtigen Nebel das Land der Phantasie, nach dem wir trachten. Jedes herrliche Gemälde entsteht dadurch gleichsam, daß die unsichtbare Scheidewand aufgehoben wird, welche die wirkliche und idealische Welt trennt, und ist nur die Öffnung, durch welche jene Gestalten und Gegenden der Phantasiewelt, welche durch die wirkliche nur unvollkommen hindurchschimmert, völlig hervortreten. Die Natur ist dem Künstler nicht mehr, als sie dem Philosophen ist, nämlich nur die unter beständigen Einschränkungen erscheinende idealische Welt, oder nur der unvollkommene Widerschein einer Welt, die nicht außer ihm, sondern in ihm existiert.²⁹

For Schelling, the artwork suspends the division between the conscious and unconscious ("das Bewußte" vs. "das Unbewußte") and, thus, "the last and the utmost opposition" (Schelling 291) – of freedom and nature: "Der Grundcharakter des Kunstwerks ist also eine *bewußtlose Unendlichkeit* (Synthesis von Natur und Freiheit)" (Schelling 293, italics by author). The artwork ("das Kunstprodukt") as well as the work of nature ("das Naturprodukt")³⁰ are products of the "Odyssee des Geistes": in them, the opposition of finite and infinite is suspended, and they reveal the absolute identity of the spirit. Unlike an idealist treatise, whose domain is solely the ideal world, art brings together the ideal with the nature, if only through differentiating between the two. The artwork facilitates a transport; it is a vehicle by means of which the nature – the world of appearances – connects to the world of ideas. Quite differently than in a strictly philosophical way, Schelling employs a metaphor of the raised curtain that opens a passage from one world to another: the metaphor serves to clarify this transition, but it does so solely by the metaphorical – i.e., poetic, not philosophical – means.

²⁹ Schelling 302

³⁰ Cf. Schelling 294 et seqq.

This gesture is repeated by Oskar Becker in his essay "Von der Hinfälligkeit des Schönen und der Abenteuerlichkeit des Künstlers," which Celan read intensively while working on the *Meridian*.³¹ Upon shortly summarizing Schelling's reflections, Becker – on his own accord, not quoting Schelling at this point – compares the artwork to a rainbow over an abyss: "die Brücke des Ästhetischen, [die] – fragil wie der Regenbogen – [den Abgrund] überwolbt" (Becker 19). Already in this short quotation, the main problematic of Becker's essay is expressed: the fragility of the artwork. While for Schelling the artwork is the token of the final unity, Becker's aesthetics emphasizes the precarious nature of the artwork, calling into question the givenness of the aesthetic experience. The term "Hinfälligkeit des Schönen" (taken over from Karl Solger) is what interests Celan the most in Becker's analysis. The character of the artwork, according to Becker, is not that of the final synthesis, as it is for Schelling, but fragility, "Zugespitztheit" (Becker 12); in its existence, the artwork is extreme and thus not secure.³² Celan brings this idea – extreme and risky as it is in itself – to the extreme, assigning the poem with the inclination to fall silent. Poetry contracts to one point between voice and silence, to the breathturn,³³ which, speaking properly, cannot be transmitted by means of "die Kunst."

In the *Meridian*, the metaphor of the artwork as the transport to the transcendent collapses. The metaphor, for Celan, is the mechanical force of "die Kunst," against which "Dichtung" has to withstand but breaks down in silence. This idea of the opposition of "die

³¹ Celan's notes for "The Meridian" contain a number of excerpts from Becker's essay and reflections upon them. Cf. MTA 382, 429, 438, 928.

³² Celan's thoughts on this theme found an expression in his poem "À la pointe acérée" from *Die Niemandrose*, whose title is an allusion to Baudelaire's "il n'est pas de pointe plus acérée que celle de l'infini."

³³ "Breathturn" is the translator's Pierre Joris rendering of Celan's "Atemwende."

Kunst" and poesy is present in Schelling's aesthetics, too, but the artwork ("das Gedicht") is the positive product of this opposition:

[D]ie Poesie, selbst wo sie angeboren ist, ohne die Kunst [bringt] nur gleichsam tote Produkte hervor, an welchen kein menschlicher Verstand sich ergötzen kann, und welche durch die völlig blinde Kraft, die darin wirksam ist, alles Urteil und selbst die Anschauung von sich zurückstößen. (STI 292)

In Schelling's view, poesy is as powerful in its force as "die Kunst," while in Celan's, poesy ("Dichtung") is only as powerful as to disturb the transport of "die Kunst" for one moment. Both Celan and Schelling ascribe poesy with blindness; yet while for Schelling poesy alone repels intuition ("blind" and "Anschauung" are mutually exclusive), for Celan this blindness is the very essence of "Dichtung." Lucile, the speaker of the counter-word, is blind to art, "kunstblind." Precisely this blindness, the failure to resist against art creates the disturbance in the flow of "die Kunst." From this perspective, the already quoted above passage needs to be read once more:

-i- Das Gedicht ist offen; erst ~~in der~~ {durch die} Begegnung, - die ein Geheimnis bleibt – nähert es sich wieder dem Verborgenen, aus dem es kommt. Darin gleicht es der Natur. – In den ~~den Schicksalen~~ {der Schicksalssekunde} des Gedichts wiederholt sich die "Odyssee des Geistes."
Die Schicksalssekunde des Gedichts erinnert dich an die "Odyssee des Geistes." (MTA 140)

Celan, most probably, alludes here to the passage in Schelling, to which Freud refers in his essay on the uncanny: "unheimlich ist alles, was ein Geheimnis, im Verborgenen bleiben sollte und hervorgetreten ist."³⁴ The origin of the poem is, for Celan as for Schelling, and – this will be relevant for the next part of the present study – for Hölderlin, a secret. For Schelling, this secret lies in the genius of the artist, the secret of reconciling "das Bewußte" and "das Unbewußte." If the secret would disclose itself, one would recognize in it "the odyssey of spirit"

³⁴ Freud 235; 254

– the original oneness of nature and spirit. For Celan, the secret cannot be disclosed and further, the secret lies in the encounter ("Begegnung"), thus the origin of the poem is not an initial unity, it is a split within itself. The origin of the poem is, thus, a quotation: the second of poem's fate repeats the "odyssey of the spirit."

"Die Schicksalssekunde" of the poem – the encounter – is, as fate, singular but involves two, and thus not one. This seems to be a direct contradiction of Celan's claim that there is only one language of poetry ("das schicksalhaft Einmalige der Sprache [...] also nicht das Zweimalige") and that the voice and silence in the poem belong to one author only (GW3 175, 177, s.above). The question that arises from these conflicting statements is unequivocally the following: who is the author? Who speaks the language of poetry? Celan arrives at this question reflecting on Lukács's analysis of Schelling³⁵ in his notes:

Ganzheit des Subjekts = nicht der ganze Mensch (MTA 205)

Selbstaufhebung des Subjekts = möglich in der Dichtung??? (MTA 205)

If poetry is, in the end, suspension of the subject, the one language of poetry does not belong to any individual poet. Quotation, in this sense, lacks any connotation of authorship and appears as the movement and countermovement in the language itself. Lucile's counter-word is an example of such quotation: "Es lebe der König!" is merely a movement against the pressure of "die Kunst." These words do not have an author. Yet the breathless pause created by this exclamation is the sound of Büchner's voice. The poet does not own the poem; on the contrary, the poet is and stays given to the poem, when Celan says: "Wer es [das Gedicht] schreibt, bleibt ihm mitgegeben" (MTA 9). The encounter is therefore not a dialogue of two poets in the sphere of

³⁵ Cf. MTA 205 and 248. Celan reads and makes notes from Georg Lukács's "Die Subjekt-Objekt-Beziehung in der Aesthetik," in: Logos. Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie der Kultur 7 (1917-1918), Tübingen 1918.

the poetic speech; it is rather the poesy encountering poesy, language meeting its own repetition. This encounter is the initial enigma of the poem's origin. In order to withstand to the mechanical force of "die Kunst" and to overcome the breathlessness of "Dichtung," the poem must expose itself to quotation.

3. "Geheimes Offen"

On July 19th 1968, upon reading Walter Benjamin's review of Max Kommerell's book on German poetry, Paul Celan writes a highly polemical poem which will remain unpublished during his lifetime.

PORT BOU – DEUTSCH?

Pfeil die Tarnkappe weg, den
Stahlhelm.

Links-
nibelungen, Rechts-
nibelungen:
gerheint, gereint,
Abraum.

Benjamin
neint euch, für immer,
er jasagt.

Solcherlei Ewe, auch
als B-Bauhaus:
nein.

Kein Zu-Spät,
ein geheimes
Offen. (GN 187)

Celan marked the manuscript – as he always did after the year 1960 – with the date of its conception. On the same day he left a note on the margins of Walter Benjamin's "Wider ein

Meisterwerk" (1930),³⁶ where Benjamin attacks certain mythologizing tendencies in Max Kommerell's *Der Dichter als Führer in der deutschen Klasik* (1928).³⁷ Around this time Celan was working on the poems for *Lichtzwang*; "Port Bou," however, was not included in this volume and stayed unpublished until the eventual publication of Celan's *Nachlaß* in 1997.³⁸

To read this short text, one needs to understand the point of Walter Benjamin's critique of Kommerell first. Kommerell, twenty-six and a devoted member of Stefan George's circle at that time, published his book in 1928. Benjamin wrote his critical response in summer of the following year while living in Tuscany. The review was published first about a year later in the journal *Die literarische Welt*.³⁹ Benjamin, who had been not, at the very least, absolutely averse to Stefan George's poetry in his younger years, was now watching the changes in the circle's program with growing apprehension. All the more disquieting was for him the appearance of Kommerell's book, which he recognized as a work of a promising scholar. Already the title of Benjamin's review reveals his uneasiness: he writes *against* the masterwork. The word "Masterwork" itself is problematic, since it can be read as a reference to the quality of the book as much as to its being written in the name of the Master. The review itself is a sharp polemic with George's myth-creating appropriation of the German literature, Romanticism in the first place. Benjamin calls Kommerell's study "eine esoterische Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung" (WB3 254), whose sole purpose is to situate the origin of George's poetry in Romanticism: "Absurd, darin 'historische Gerechtigkeit' zu suchen. Es geht um anderes. Die Romantik steht im Ursprung der Erneuerung deutscher Lyrik, die George vollzog" (WB3 253). Benjamin's critique

³⁶ Benjamin wrote this review in summer of 1929 but it appeared in press almost a year later.

³⁷ This fact is mentioned by Barbara Widemann in the notes to "Port Bou – Deutsch." Cf. KA 955.

³⁸ *Die Gedichte aus dem Nachlaß*, ed. Bertrand Badiou et al., Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997.

³⁹ WB3 641.

is directed against George's self-proclamation as the heir to the German poetry and to the circle's uncritical acceptance of this claim.

Benjamin recognizes the danger of elevating the circle's poetic vocabulary to the status of prophecy: "Denn Rute, Ewe,⁴⁰ Blut, Geschick, sie stehen nun, nachdem die Lechter-Sonne, die sie einst in ihre Glut getaucht hat, zur Rüste ging, als so viele Gewitterwolken am Himmel" (ibid). Melchior Lechter's drawing of the swastika that had embellished the *Jugendstil* book covers of the circle for years was now growing to represent something else – the esoteric symbol of George's "secret Germany." The danger of the esoteric symbols lies in their lack of unambiguous content: they are empty containers waiting to be filled at will, and this danger is recognized both by Benjamin, with his critical stance towards myth, and Celan, with his figurative poetry. Interestingly, Stefan George himself realizes this danger and assigns it with a specific strength, moreover – views it as the very essence of poetry:

Was im Geiste ist, muß gelebt werden. Die Wirklichkeit ist die Form, in der es sich zu Ende lebt. Darum ist die Dichtung die größte Gefahr der Welt. Es kann eine Weile schlummern, eingesenkt bleiben in der Erde, aber es geht nicht verloren.⁴¹

George says this in a conversation with a friend during the first world war, in 1917, as the "spiritual movement" already outgrew the *Jahrbuch für die geistige Bewegung*, the programmatic journal of the circle. Poetry, in this interpretation, is ascribed with ability of surviving the death of an individual. Talking of the spirit ("Geist") of the movement, the members of the circle as well as George himself meant the devotion to George personally.

⁴⁰ NB: this word is subsequently quoted in Celan's poem

⁴¹ Landmann 37.

Whatever contradicted George's politics, was considered lacking in spirit.⁴² What Benjamin – and Celan in his footsteps – recognizes as destruction of poetry in this conception, is the mythical dimension that is given to the individuality of the poet. Both Benjamin and Celan seek for the poetry that outlives an individual poem and an individual poet, not for the individuality that outlives any poetic representation.

For Benjamin, myth is the bad double of critique.⁴³ The main accusation he charges Max Kommerell's book with is the suppression of critical agility and the subsequent satisfaction with a mere vision or perhaps even illusion; for him, Kommerell's book is "nichts als Schau" (WB3 259). At the latest since the start of the *Jahrbuch* this uncritical approach to the works of the circle and, more articulately, to the works of the *Meister* himself, became a part of the circle's politics. Without signing their names, the members of the circle⁴⁴ declare their program on the title page of the first issue of the *Jahrbuch*:

[Die verfasser] wollen keine 'eigenen', keine 'persönlichkeiten' sein, sie wollen sich mit bewusster einseitigkeit einem gesamtwillen – einer Idee – unterordnen. Überall wo sie angreifen, geschieht es wegen der sache, nicht wegen der person: *um zu bejahen, nicht um zu verneinen*. (Jahrbuch, title page, italics mine)

⁴² E.g., as Friedrich Gundolf, for various reasons, started to distance himself from the circle, he indicated the root of his reluctance in growing "mistrustful to *Geist*" (Norton 596-597). In his memoirs, Raymond Klibansky, a close friend of Gundolf's at that time, mentions that the reason for his own rejection of the George circle was the unbreakable conviction of its members in being the "Geistesaristokratie" of the post-war Germany (cg. Klibansky 66).

⁴³ In his essay on Goethe's *Wahlverwandschaften*, Benjamin indicates that while the myth ("das Mythische") is the subject matter ("Sachgehalt") of Goethe's novel, *Kritik* must start with recognition of this subject matter in order to proceed to the insight into the content ("Inhalt") of the novel, which is the break with the mythical. Cf. WB1 140-141. For a detailed analysis of Benjamin's treatment of myth see Winfried Meninghaus, *Schwellenkunde; Walter Benjamins Passage des Mythos*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986.

⁴⁴ Mainly Friedrich Wolters.

The absolute loyalty to its center is precisely the weakness of the George circle, in Benjamin's view. The critique cannot be accomplished in someone's name, be this name George or Germany itself. The critique cannot use a name or a term uncritically; otherwise it fails its task and becomes, to use Benjamin's word, "die Schau." The George circle, on the contrary, ascribes "die Schau" with a much more important, in their eyes, task than critique – the task of establishing a world:

Was ihnen allen fehlt ist eben die anschauung einer welt-einheit; weltanschauung bedeutet nicht, die resultate, begriffe, programme, wünsche und ziele ordnen, sondern zunächst eine welt schauen d.h. schaffen; die wissende kraft kann nie die schau ersetzen, da sie nur die logische ordnung im system darstellt. (Friedrich Wolters, *Jahrbuch* 145)

The "Schau" is a vision – and this vision requires the eyes of a seer. George is unambiguous about the persona, whom the seeing powers be accredited to: the members of his circle see through his own eyes, he says.⁴⁵ For Benjamin, such vision does not constitute a world, but merely draws a picture ("das Bild"). The picture may be genuine, yet by leaving out anything that does not fit into the picture the critic fails his task to grasp the present moment:

Das echte Bild mag alt sein, aber der echte Gedanke ist neu. Er ist von heute. Dies Heute mag dürftig sein, zugegeben. Aber es mag sein wie es will, man muß es fest bei den Hörnern haben, um die Vergangenheit befragen zu können. Es ist der Stier, dessen Blut die Grube erfüllen muß, wenn an ihrem Rande die Geister der Abgeschiedenen erscheinen sollen. Diese tödliche Stoßkraft des Gedanken ist es, welche den Werken des Kreises fehlt. Statt es zu opfern, meiden sie das Heute. In jeder Kritik muß ein Martialisches wohnen, auch sie kennt den Dämon. Eine, die nichts als Schau ist, verliert sich, bringt die Dichtung um die Deutung, die sie ihr schuldet, und um ihr Wachstum. Nicht zu vergessen, daß die Kritik, um etwas zu leisten, sich selbst unbedingt bejahen muß. (WB3 259)

⁴⁵ "[George] once said to Michael Landmann, son of Edith and Julius, that his disciples 'see with his eyes, which he had lent them, in regions into which he otherwise did not see – for that reason their works actually belonged to him. He lives with many bodies' (Norton 652-653).

Benjamin speaks here counter to the circle's writings by employing quotations from the same writings as the means of his critique. "[D]ie Kritik [muß] sich selbst unbedingt bejahen" is perhaps Benjamin's direct response to the circle's plea of giving up their individualities for the sake of the yearbook's idea, "um zu bejahen, nicht um zu verneinen" (s. above). Their assertion of the circle's idea asserts merely the picture of it, thus shifting away from the task of asserting oneself in the face of the idea. Moreover, Benjamin's striking image of the present as a sacrificial bull is, as it seems, taken over, in a transformed way, from the *Jahrbuch* as well. In the same first programmatic issue Friedrich Wolters writes:

So geschah es, dass für die 'Gesellschaft' die Wissenschaftliche Bildung bald das einzige maass des gebildetseins überhaupt bedeutet, dass sie für die meisten lebenszweige das notwendige kriterium der tüchtigkeit wurde und heute noch von immer weiteren gruppen als solches angestrebt wird, dass die erziehung der jugend, indem man sie scheinbar von einem überflüssigen wissen befreien wollte, das wenn auch selbst schon von kritischem angekränkt doch das innere ganze zu bilden strebte, immer mehr in die dienstbarkeit des teilnutzens gepresst werden soll. Wie sehr die zeit daran krankt, die jugend daran leidet, wissen heute viele und viele sind helfend am werke, *aber nur wenige wagen den stier der kritischen ordnung, der so manche junge stirnen blutig stösst, selbst bei den hörnern zu fassen und zu sagen: hier sind deine grenzen!* (Jahrbuch 140, italics mine)

According to Wolters, the criticism ("die kritische ordnung") must be held in due bounds for the sake of life. Criticism destroys life, and to criticize is equal to negate. The circle asserts ("bejaht") life by negating criticism, while criticism, in the passage above, bears solely negative characteristics. Benjamin counters this rejection of criticism by pointing out that life is only present where there is a risk of death. By rejecting criticism, the circle conjures up a vision of life that is detached from the present live moment. Not the criticism is the danger for life, but life itself has within it the danger one may not ignore.

Benjamin makes his point by countering Wolters's metaphor of the bull. While in Wolters's text, the bull represents the life-threatening criticism, Benjamin's bull dies to restore

life.⁴⁶ Without explicitly mentioning it, Benjamin refers to the ritual of Parah Adumah. In Judaism, ashes of a red cow, mixed with living water, are used for the spiritual purification of someone who has become unclean by touching something dead. This ritual is controversial in so far as those who prepare the purifying ashes become unclean themselves. Benjamin implies that by conjuring up an image of life, the circle members – Max Kommerell among them – are, in fact, committing themselves to death. The critic's task is to take upon himself the purification of life from death, but by completing this task the critic unavoidably becomes impure. In a letter sent to Gershom Scholem upon submitting his review of Kommerell's book, Benjamin writes:

In San Gimignano habe ich mir die Hände an den Dornen eines allerdings überraschend schön blütenden Rosenbusches aus Georges Garten blutig zerschunden. Es ist das Buch 'Der Dichter als Führer in der deutschen Klassik'. (WB3 641)

By involving in criticizing Kommerell's book, Benjamin brings impurity – blood on his hands – into his own writing. Yet, besides the recognition of the need for a critique of George and the necessity of involvement in this critique, there is also a sense of a lacking accomplishment in Benjamin's assessment of his own review: the bloody scratches on his hands inflicted by the rose's thorns can hardly be measured against the deadly force of the critique ("tödliche Stoßkraft des Gedanken").

There is no evidence for Kommerell's reading of Benjamin, whether of this particular review or of any other piece of his writings. At any rate, in 1930, about the time "Wider ein Meisterwerk" was published, Max Kommerell "officially" renounced George for good, to the latter's great distress. A few politically charged years later, in May 1933, Benjamin wrote another

⁴⁶ A pit filled with sacrificial blood is the image that Benjamin uses also in an earlier essay, "Goethes Wahlverwandschaften," in which he situates Hölderlin in opposite to George: "vor dem tiefen Grunde seiner Dichtergabe steht er [der Dichter; Goethe] wie Odysseus mit dem nackten Schwerte vor der Grube voll Blut" (WB1 179).

review, "Rückblick auf Stefan George," in which he stated that George's poetical work had seen its end without having encountered an appropriate critic (WB3 398).⁴⁷ Remarkably, in this article, Benjamin speaks of George from a retrospective viewpoint, "looking back" ("Rückblick") at his poetry, as were the poet already dead. In a way, Benjamin's critique of George does not acquire the full strength for the reason of becoming itself involved with death: precisely what the critique has taken upon itself to attack. Already in "Wider ein Meisterwerk," Benjamin speaks of the present moment as if he were addressing the past. Instead of a future, Germany is approaching an end: "Zu Spät" in place of "Zukunft" (WB3 259, s. below). Later in the year of the publication of "Rückblick," a short time after the Nazis had seized the power, George died, without having uttered a definite judgment in this regard but having left Germany to live in exile.

Paul Celan's poem, written in a totally different political situation, decades after prophecies and premonitions were drowned by the force of the catastrophe, takes upon itself the task – *die Aufgabe* in both meanings of the word, the task and the giving up – of Benjamin's review.⁴⁸ In "Port Bou – deutsch?" Celan draws mainly on the following fragment from Benjamin's review:

⁴⁷ Marion Picker in her recent dissertation points at the problematic stance of the two George-articles by Benjamin (the review of Max Kommerell's book, 1928, and "Rückblick auf Stefan George," 1933). Benjamin speaks of the lack of an appropriate critic for George, thus not considering himself as fit for this task (Marion Picker, *Der konservative Charakter*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2004: 35). But there is more to Benjamin's stance toward George: by indicating his own incapability of criticizing George, while writing two critical essays in his regard, Benjamin is clearly contradicting himself, thus significantly undermining the legitimacy of "Bejahung" and "Verneinung," both of which are characteristic expressions for the George circle.

⁴⁸ This double intention stays unrecognized by Jean Bollack in his interpretation of "Port Bou – deutsch?" Bollack writes: "Diese mystische Konstruktion [allegedly Benjamin's], die sich, wie die meisten, auf eine Geschichtsphilosophie berief, der zufolge das geschichtliche Ereignis zwischen Apokalypse und Erlösung eingezwängt wird, schien Celan dermaßen inakzeptabel, daß er gleich nach der Lektüre mit einem polemischen Text antwortete." And further: "Celan empört sich mit letzter Kraft gegen die Apologie der Tradition, die die Verantwortung der Dichter vergessen läßt. Deswegen läßt er seine Reaktion auf Benjamin mit einer tabula rasa beginnen" (Jean Bollack, "Celan liest Benjamin (1968)," transl. by Christoph König, *Mitteilungen des Marbacher Arbeitskreises*, 13/14, 1998). Bollack posits Benjamin as a traditionalist, while viewing Celan's poem as a break with

Ein Hölderlin-Kapitel beschließt diese Heilgeschichte des Deutschen. Das Bild des Mannes, das darin entrollt wird, ist Bruchstück einer neuen *vita sanctorum* und von keiner Geschichte mehr assimilierbar. Seinem ohnehin fast unerträglich blendenden Umriß fehlt die Beschattung, die gerade hier die Theorie gewährt hätte. Darauf aber ist es nicht abgesehen. Ein Mahnmal deutscher Zukunft sollte aufgerichtet werden. Über Nacht werden Geisterhände ein großes "Zu Spät" draufmahlen. Hölderlin war nicht vom Schlage derer, die auferstehen, und das Land, dessen Sehern ihre Visionen über Leichen erscheinen, ist nicht das seine. Nicht eher als gereinigt kann diese Erde wieder Deutschland werden und nicht im Namen Deutschlands gereinigt werden, geschweige denn des geheimen, das von dem offiziellen zuletzt nur das Arsenal ist, in welchem die Tarnkappe neben dem Stahlhelm hängt. (WB3 259)

Benjamin warns that George's "geheimes Deutschland," with its claims of purity and detachment from current politics, provides a ready ideology that can be translated directly from the myth of "der Stahlhelm" and "die Tarnkappe" – both the attributes of the Nibelungen – into the affairs of the official, not secret Germany. Only cleaned from the myth of Germany can Germany be called thus again. Celan's poem, written in response to these lines, reads, on the first sight, as a rejection of Germany contemporary to him. While Benjamin, according to Celan, "neint euch, für immer, / er jasagt," his own answer is definite: "Solcherlei Ewe, auch / als B-Bauhaus: / nein" (s. above). Celan, whose renunciation of Germany was caused by the prevailing silence about Auschwitz in the public sphere,⁴⁹ quoting Benjamin's essay alludes to the spirit of secrecy that, he feels, is characteristic for the time of Benjamin's essay as for the time of his own poem. In this quotation, the silence before the catastrophe encounters the silence following it. Celan's critique is directed against both. Yet, just as Benjamin cannot escape becoming involved

a tradition, although without further identifying the nature of this tradition. At any rate, Bollack's claim that the extensive quotations from Benjamin's review in the poem represent a "tabula rasa" seems to be rather suggestive.

⁴⁹ A number of poems from Celan's *Nachlaß* document his exasperation with this silence, most significantly, "Mutter, Mutter" (1965), where the Germans are addressed with the word "Linksnibelungen," which returns in "Port Bou – Deutsch?" Cf. KA 482.

with the object of his critique in the review of Kommerell, Celan cannot prevent becoming drawn into the silence he attempts to break. He does not consider publishing the poem.

There are two important events that precede Celan's writing of "Port Bou – deutsch?": a visit to Germany in the summer of 1968 and the Paris riots earlier that year. Initially, Celan participated in the demonstrations but very soon became disappointed and withdrew.⁵⁰ Approximately from this time on, Celan began to doubt whether Paris was the best place for living in exile. Later he would consider moving to Jerusalem, which he never did, although he did visit Israel in 1969. Considering this, the "Rechtsnibelungen" divided from the "Linksnibelungen" by the Rhine may be considered as designating both the Germans and the French. Furthermore, already the title suggests this much by naming Port Bou, the place of Benjamin's death on the French border in the Pyrenees. The national borders did not confine National Socialism: the title of the poem can be read in this way. Celan's "nein" applies not to the geographical Germany of his time but, again, to "geheimes Deutschland," namely, to the myth of a pure nation and purity as such, which Celan considers to be at work both in the politics of "then," as Benjamin in 1928 writes about the lack of future for Germany, and of "now," as the Paris riots of 1968 turn, in Celan's view, into inebriation with violence.⁵¹

"Ewe," meaning "time," or "epoch," an archaic word Benjamin quotes from Kommerell's book and brings into connection with Melchior Lechter's symbolic illustrations embellishing the books of the circle, is quoted by Celan in the connection to the Bauhaus.⁵² Celan implies that the

⁵⁰ Cf. BWGL 479-480.

⁵¹ For a biographical account of Celan's critical reception of the Paris events cf. Baumann 55-56.

⁵² Otto Pöggeler gives a possible cause for Celan's allusion to the Bauhaus in this poem: "Martin Heidegger hatte damals [1959] im neuen Ulmer Bauhaus Klee zur Sprache bringen wollen und Celan für eine Stelle vorgeschlagen, beides aber vergeblich. (Das hätte man vorher wissen können, meinte Celan dazu.) Für Max Bill, der die Hochschule für Gestaltung erbaute und leitete, waren Inge Scholls Erinnerungen an ihre ermordeten Freunde nur Ablenkungen

Bauhaus, with its characteristic "clean" style, faces the problem of purity in no lesser degree than Lechter's *Jugendstil* mannerisms. Myth requires symbols, images: its language is symbolic, "bildhaft." Such language is the weapon of the George circle, and its clearest example is Max Kommerell's book. Benjamin acknowledges the artistic merit of Kommerell's book which consists in his extraordinary talent of drawing powerful images in place of interpretation: "Sein Geschichtsbild taucht aus dem Hintergrunde des Möglichen auf, gegen den das Relief des Wirklichen seine Schatten wirft" (WB3 253). Kommerell himself realizes the power of drawing images in writing and makes it explicit in the concluding pages of the chapter on Hölderlin, whom he glorifies as a seer ("Seher") and whose secret visions ("Geheimbilder") present the people ("das Volk") with "das Bild als Sprache" (Kommerell 481). Such language, in terms of Celan's *Meridian*, is the language of "die Kunst."⁵³ By producing solely images in writing, Kommerell thus engages in the empty automatism of "die Kunst," never interrupted by the breathturn of "Dichtung."

Celan's idea that in the poem, the two conflicting forces – "die Kunst" and "Dichtung" – are at work and that the prevailing, because eternal, force is "die Kunst," is parallel to Benjamin's

von den kunsttechnischen Aufgaben. Noch 1968 verband das Gedicht *Port Bou – deutsch?* Walter Benjamins Absage an Max Kommerells Buch über den Dichter als Führer in der deutschen Klassik mit einer Absage an "B-Bauhaus". Stotterte der Dichter absichtlich, oder unterschied er Max Bills Bauhaus von dem ersten und wirklichen Bauhaus eines Gropius?" (Pöggeler 47)

⁵³ In his ground-breaking study of Celan's "Engführung," Peter Szondi demonstrates that Celan's non-mimetic poetry employs a language which cannot be "seen" as a series of images. Furthermore, Szondi reads "Engführung" as a programmatic text against re-creation of the world in the language of images. Such world is, Szondi writes, "zu rein." "Die Dichtung ist nicht Mimesis, keine Repräsentation mehr: sie wird Realität. Poetische Realität freilich, Text, der keiner Wirklichkeit mehr folgt, sondern sich selbst als Realität entwirft und begründet. Deswegen darf weder dieser Text *gelesen*, noch das Bild, das es beschreiben könnte, *angeschaut* werden" (Celan-Studien 80). "[J]ene *Welt, ein Tausendkristall* aus geometrischen Elementen [ist] unzureichend. Es fehlen ihr, *entmischt*, die Unterschiede, aufgrund derer sie gemischt ist und, sich mischend, vermittelt. Diese Welt ist zu rein" (Celan-Studien 93).

thoughts on Hölderlin's caesura in his earlier essay "Goethes Wahlverwandschaften" (1921/22).

Benjamin refers to Hölderlin's "Anmerkungen zum Ödipus":

Der tragische Transport ist nehmlich eigentlich leer, und der ungebundenste. – Dadurch wird in der rhythmischen Aufeinanderfolge der Vorstellungen, worin der Transport sich darstellt, das, was man im Sylbenmaasse Cäsur heißt, das reine Wort, die gegenrhythmische Unterbrechung notwendig, um nehmlich dem reißenden Wechsel der Vorstellungen, auf seinem Summum, so zu begegnen, daß alsdann nicht mehr der Wechsel der Vorstellung, sondern die Vorstellung selber erscheint [quotation from Hölderlin in WB1 181-182].

Benjamin interprets the caesura as the moment in which "das Ausdruckslose" finds its way into the artwork. Benjamin, with the caesura, indicates a moment of an impasse that must be present in any artwork and that prevents the artwork from being resolved into something final and complete. As in the case with Celan's "die Kunst" and "Dichtung," there are two forces at stake in the artwork, none of which is, though, cancelled out by the other. The caesura serves to keep them from suspending each other:

Das Ausdruckslose ist die kritische Gewalt, welche Schein vom Wesen in der Kunst zwar zu trennen nicht vermag, aber ihnen verwehrt, sich zu mischen. (WB1 181)

The essence ("Wesen") of art and the appearance ("Schein") do not mix with each other, yet they do coexist in the artwork. If the poet gives in to the force of the representations, making the "Ausdruck" his only concern and eliminating the "Ausdruckslose," the artwork he produces is a mere appearance, "Schein." On the other hand, the essence of art – life – is expressionless, thus an attempt to express the essence of art would be a monstrosity, "Ausgeburt des Wahnsinns" (WB1 182). By falling into either of the two extremes, the artwork ceases to be an artwork:

[K]ein Kunstwerk [darf] gänzlich ungebant lebendig scheinen ohne bloßer Schein zu werden und aufzuhören Kunstwerk zu sein. Das in ihm wogende Leben muß erstarrt und wie in einem Augenblick gebant erscheinen. (ibid.)

The artwork that becomes "bloßer Schein" is dead. It is not an artwork any longer but a vision: the conjured up image of the dead. George, and Kommerell in his steps, is, according to Benjamin, conjuring up spirits. The spirit of George's "spiritual movement" is but an apparition of spirit – a ghost. Thus, in their attempt to capture life, the movement committed itself to death.⁵⁴ Benjamin uses Hölderlin's term of the caesura – which Hölderlin calls "the pure word" – to designate a border, a "cut" that opens into the region of indivisibility of life and death. The purity of the word lies in its inability of separation. When Benjamin says in the conclusion to "Wider ein Meisterwerk" that "nicht eher als gereinigt kann diese Erde wieder Deutschland werden," he speaks of purity that is pure because of indifferenciation between pure and impure. The ashes of the red cow that are impure restore purity of life by death: the indivisibility of life and death builds the core of the ritual of Parah Adumah as well as of Hölderlin's notion of caesura. George is thus, according to Benjamin's critique, guilty of choosing the dead image of life rather than the indivisibility of life and death. Alluding to Hölderlin's famous letter to Böhlendorff, Benjamin writes to Scholem while working on "Rückblick auf Stefan George": "Soviel glaube ich gemerkt zu haben: wenn jemals Gott einen Propheten durch Erfüllung seiner Prophetie geschlagen hat, so ist es bei George der Fall gewesen" (WB3 664).

Celan's poem is not merely an allusion to Benjamin's critique of the politics of the George circle, but furthermore, a continuation, an expansion, a response to Benjamin's critique. Saying that Germany may not be purified in the name of Germany, Benjamin cannot avoid talking about

⁵⁴ With its mythologizing approach to Goethe, the George circle produced a rigid image of Goethe's life, in place of a reading of his works: "Das gedenkenloseste Dogma des Goethekults, das blasseste Bekenntnis des Adepten: daß unter allen Goetheschen Werken das größte sein Leben sei – Gundolfs 'Goethe' hat es aufgenommen" (WB1 160).

Germany, thus – if against his own words – still talking in the name of Germany.⁵⁵ Celan's project – in "Port Bou," as well as in all of his poetry – is to detach the German poem from the nationality, thus precisely following Benjamin's proposition of purification of Germany yet not in the name of Germany. This program reveals as deeply problematic: would he avoid all references to anything German, his stance would converge with George's project of complete purification; would he, on the other hand, speak of Germany, how could he detach his poem from it? Is it at all possible to write German without implicitly involving all of what the word Germany can mean? In response to these questions, Celan explicitly mentions the word "deutsch" directly in the title – but only with a question mark. As it happens, shortly after "Port Bou" he will write a poem in French, which will stay the only French poem in the entirety of his works.

Celan's attempt to find a way out of this aporia lies in "polluting" the poem in the same gesture with "purifying" it: the line "gerheintigt, gereintigt" not only is an "unclean" repetition of the same word, it brings in Hölderlin's hymn "Der Rhein," which – for Celan as well as for Benjamin – is the epitome of the problem of purity, and decisively not of the purity as such. The soundless aspiration "h" is already an impurity in the purity of the word *Rhein*,⁵⁶ and the line "ein

⁵⁵ In his essay "Hoffnung im Vergangenen," Peter Szondi calls Benjamin's collection of letters "Deutsche Menschen" – which the latter hoped to publish under pseudonym – a rescue undertaking ("Rettungsunternehmen") with help of which Benjamin, in the sense of his notion of origin, attempted to preserve the collapsing Germany for the future: "Es ist ein Buch über das deutsche Bürgertum. Aber kein vergoldetes Denkmal wird ihm gesetzt. Kalt spricht das Vorwort Benjamins von den Gründerjahren, in denen die Epoche *unschön zu Ende ging*. Im Sinn jener Stelle aus dem Trauerspielbuch, die den Ursprung als ein *dem Werden und Vergehen Entspringendes* begreift, ließe sich indessen sagen, Benjamin habe mit dem Briefband den Ursprung des deutschen Bürgertums aufzeigen wollen, einen Ursprung, der ihm immer noch eine Zukunft verheiß" (Peter Szondi, *Schriften II*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978: 293-94).

⁵⁶ Both in Latin and in Greek, the terms for purity and impurity tend to collapse together, as Robert Parker points out in his book dedicated to the problem of purity: "In Latin, even the limited connection between 'sacred' and 'accursed' contained in the use of *sacer* in the *leges sacratae* came to be puzzling; similarly in Greek, if the etymological link of *agos* with *hag-* is correct, differentiation occurred early, through the loss of the aspirate, between beneficial and

Rätsel ist Reinent sprungenes," with its equivocal syntax, is as "unclean" as Hölderlin's non-word "Pallaksch." Celan, who returns to reading Hölderlin again and again up to the very last day of his life,⁵⁷ quotes both – the aforementioned line from "Der Rhein" and the word "Pallaksch" – in the poem "Tübingen, Jänner" written shortly before the *Meridian*.⁵⁸ Hölderlin often used "Pallaksch" during the years in the "tower" in answer to questions that would require a "yes" or "no,"⁵⁹ thus speaking a language not differentiating between these two answers. Precisely this is proposed by Celan in an earlier poem, "Sprich auch Du" from the book *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle*: "Sprich – / doch scheide das Nein nicht vom Ja."⁶⁰ In this language the pure and the impure cannot be separated. In a way, the non-differentiation reveals itself as purer than the "pure" that requires – and thus depends on – its opposition, the "impure."

While, following the logic of language games, a solution necessarily supplants a riddle, Hölderlin's "Ein Rätsel ist Reinent sprungenes" stays "pure" by overcoming the logic of substitution and derivation implied in the possibility of solution: instead, riddle and purity become inseparable. Perhaps, Oedipus was punished with blindness precisely for having solved the Sphinx's riddle – for solving what was not meant to be solved, for splitting the answer from the question; for abusing the separating power of words. And perhaps it was Oedipus, rather than Hölderlin, whom Celan had in mind with "Zur Blindheit über- / redete Augen" in "Tübingen,

destructive forms of consecration" (Parker 12). Curiously, the problem of pure to impure congeals, on the etymological level, to the soundless aspirate.

Furthermore, in "Schibboleth for Paul Celan" Jacques Derrida points out that the phonemic difference between "shi" and "si" in the pronunciation of the password "schibboleth" possesses the divisive and decisive power; it is the word of circumcision, the separating word (Derrida 28). It may be added that "schibboleth" (שבילת) meaning "stream," names the river Jordan itself – the place of the ultimate separation.

⁵⁷ After Celan's death, Hölderlin's biography by Wilhelm Michel was found – open and with reading marks – on his desk. Cf. BWGL 493.

⁵⁸ In *Niemandrose*, GW1 226

⁵⁹ Cf. Barbara Wiedemann's notes on "Tübingen, Jänner," KA 681-682.

⁶⁰ Nor should the dead be told from the living: "sieh, wie's lebendig wird rings – / Beim Tode! Lebendig!"

Jänner." As much as a riddle issues from the pure, the pure itself is a riddle; one is not the origin of the other, and their origin is suspended in their interrelation.⁶¹ Etymologically, both "rein" and "Rätsel" (as well as the English "riddle") derive from the same Old Germanic root (*h*)*ritara*, literally "to sift", which, in its turn, tracks back to the Latin *cernere* and Greek *κρῖνειν*, "to separate."⁶² The riddle of this line is, then, how does separation find its way into what is inseparable, how does the impurity find its way into the pure, how does "rein" become "Rhein"? What is changed, as a soundless gasp of breath enters the pure? For Celan, this soundless sound – "das Stimmhaft-Stimmlose" – is the breathturn, "die Atemwende," in which *Dichtung* enters the poem and assigns it with its date, its "20.Jänner," which is inscribed also in the title of his poem commemorating Hölderlin, "Tübingen, Jänner."

As Jacques Derrida suggests in his "Schibboleth," Celan's poetological term of breathturn (*Atemwende*) corresponds to Hölderlin's caesura. The breathturn is the moment, in which the transport of "die Kunst" is interrupted and the essence of poetry, "Dichtung," makes itself heard in the silence of the poet's voice gasping for breath. "Niemand kann sagen, wie lange die Atempause [...] noch fortwährt" (MTA 8): the breathlessness may lead to death or to a turn of breath. The poem's fate depends on this moment, the decisive "Schicksalssekunde" of "Dichtung." Celan follows Hölderlin in defining the breathturn as the counter-movement to the transport of "die Kunst." Hölderlin calls the caesura "die gegenrhythmische Unterbrechung," which encounters ("begegnet") the chain of representations in tragedy. For Celan, too, the fateful second ("die Schicksalssekunde") of the poem is the moment of the encounter, "die Begegnung."

⁶¹ For a substantial analysis of this motif cf. Fioretos 306-311.

⁶² Cf. entry to "rein" in *Kluge Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, herausg. Elmar Seebold, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995: 677.

Through the encounter, "der Dichter" – the speaker of the poem – seeks to suspend himself. In the passages on the caesura in "Goethes Wahlverwandschaften," Walter Benjamin, too, points at something that Celan, perhaps, would call such an encounter: "etwas jenseits des Dichters [fällt] ins Wort" (WB1 181). The encounter, for Celan, takes place in the quotation through which "das reine Wort," "das Stimmlos-Stimmhafte," enters the poem.

Quotation is for the poet not only a means of a dialogue with another poet; it is, furthermore, an encounter with language, in which the language stands before the speaker as his other. "Wir führen das Gespräch mit der Sprache - trotz und mit all den Sprechern" (MTA 106) can thus be read as Celan's response to Hölderlin's "Seit ein Gespräch wir sind / Und hören können voneinander": the subject is radically displaced, as it addresses not only the others ("die Sprecher") but the language as such. In this dialogue, language encounters itself, while we, the speakers, stand aside witnessing this encounter.⁶³ In the moment as Lucile pronounces her counter-word, "Es lebe der König," language runs counter language, whereas Lucile – and with her, Büchner, Celan, the readers – merely witnesses this happening. The encounter stays hidden: "die Begegnung [bleibt] ein Geheimnis," as Celan says in the passage alluding to Schelling's "Odyssee des Geistes" (MTA 140). The uncanny secret – "das Geheime" and "das Unheimliche" of the encounter – lies in its inaccessibility for the speaker. It is a pure riddle in the sense that it cannot be solved. With this notion of encounter, Celan opposes Schelling's view that the artwork

⁶³ Celan's understanding of poetic language stands in a critical relationship to Heidegger's lecture series "Die Sprache" (1959, later published under the title "Der Weg zu Sprache") and, on the other hand, to Martin Buber's "Das Wort, das gesprochen wird" (1960). "Begegnung" is not synonymous with Buber's dialogue of "I" and "Thou," which, for him, is the ground for all speech. On the other hand, "Begegnung," with its breathless silence, is not synonymous with Heidegger's "Ent-sprechen," which he uses in the sense of falling silent or yielding to silence. The breathturn in the poem does not, for Celan, mean a desperation; much rather, an aspiration, or a "glottal stop" ("Der Kehlkopfverschußlaut singt," in "Frankfurt, September," *Fadensonnen* 114). The breathturn is a silence in the speech which does not stand for something unsaid, unlike "das Ungesprochene" in Heidegger's lectures.

restores the unity of nature and spirit, and that, although we do not have access to this unity, we know how the riddle of art can be solved: "Doch könnte das Rätsel sich enthüllen, würden wir die Odyssee des Geistes darin erkennen" (Schelling 302). Hölderlin's lines from "Der Rhein," perhaps the most enigmatic in the hymn, appear to be a response to Schelling: "Ein Rätsel ist Reinentsprungenes. Auch / Der Gesang kaum darf es enthüllen."⁶⁴ The riddle is pure, and the pure is a riddle, thus, the poem cannot claim containing – or, for that matter, not containing – a solution to it. Celan's encounter, as Hölderlin's caesura, does not disclose itself.

The concluding line of "Port Bou – deutsch?" quotes George's "geheimes Deutschland" via Kommerell's book via Benjamin's review, with a detour through Hölderlin, and in a transformed way. Celan's "geheimes Offen" is not the same as George's "geheimes Deutschland." The elimination of "Deutschland" can be read here as a condemnation of the spirit of secrecy. It can, at the same time, be read as a purification of Germany not in the name of Germany but in a poem in the wake of it. But precisely this indifferentiation between the one and the other is what makes this concluding line both "offen" and "geheim": it is a counter-word that brings out the essence of the present moment, "das Gegenwart" and "die Gegenwart" of the poem. It is, moreover, a definition of the essence of Celan's poetry in general, "das Gedicht ist offen" and "die Begegnung [bleibt] ein Geheimnis" being its grounding propositions.

⁶⁴ Perhaps, speaking of the "Enthüllung des Rätsels," Hölderlin and Schelling both refer to Jacobi. According to Dieter Henrich (who refers to Karl Rosenkranz's *Hegels Leben*), Hegel, Hölderlin and Schelling all read Jacobi around 1795 (Henrich 1553-54); in the so-called *Spinozabüchlein*, Jacobi formulates the task of philosophical investigations as follows: "Daseyn zu enthüllen, und zu offenbaren" (cited in Henrich 1435).

II. Tradition

1. Hand and Hands

*Die Überspanntheit der Frauenhand hatte ihn überwältigt, eines im Grunde ziemlich
schamlos menschlichen Organs, das wie eine Hundeschnauze alles betastet, aber
öffentlich der Sitz von Treue, Adel und Zartheit ist.*
Robert Musil

Celan refers to poetry as handwork on a number of occasions, one of which is his letter to Hans Bender, where his emphasis is particularly explicit.⁶⁵

Handwerk – das ist Sache der Hände. Und diese Hände gehören nur *einem* Menschen, d.h. einem einmaligen und sterblichen Seelenswesen, das mit seiner Stimme und seiner Stummheit einen Weg sucht.

Nur wahre Hände schreiben wahre Gedichte. Ich sehe keinen prinzipiellen Unterschied zwischen Händedruck und Gedicht. (GW3 177)

Hands, along with the voice, are means of poetic speech, while not exclusively its instrument. "Handwork" stands for both the techniques of writing (further on in the same letter Celan uses the word "Mache" in regard to these techniques), as well as for the unrepeatable and singular moment of the emergence of the poem, which interrupts the automatism of writing. Bender proposed "Das Gedicht ist mein Messer" as the title for his anthology; in his response, Celan rejected this equation of poetic language and a cutting instrument: the metaphor of language as instrument – or even cold weapon – is, for Celan, not sharp enough. He counters the metaphor with the emphasis on "Händedruck": on the one hand, "Händedruck" stands for an imprint of the poet's hands and thus invokes a certain "artisanship" and technicality of writing; on the other, it

⁶⁵ Celan writes this letter in response to Bender's invitation to contribute for the anthology entitled *Mein Gedicht ist mein Messer*. Celan found the title unacceptable and, for a variety of reasons, declined the offer.

refers to a handshake between two poets in a poetic encounter. There is always an other in this encounter, whose presence the poem seeks to acknowledge. The coexistence of these two levels of signification in the word "Händedruck" stresses the tension between language as handwork, as technical task, and the gesture of poem as an encounter. Celan shares this recognition with Hölderlin, whose concept of the caesura refers to the ultimate degree of such tension: the mechanical handwork of poetry, "das Handwerksmäßige" (HTS 94), is always interrupted by the "Naturmacht" of mortality, which "den Menschen seiner Lebensphäre, dem Mittelpunkte seines inneren Lebens in eine andere Welt entrückt" (HTS 96).

In "Zwei Gedichte" Walter Benjamin speaks, in reference to Hölderlin's "Blödigkeit," of the caesura that separates the human and the divine, while situating this separation in the middle point between poet's hands:

So ist der Dichter nicht mehr als Gestalt gesehen, sondern allein noch als Prinzip der Gestalt, Begrenzendes, auch seinen eigenen Körper noch Tragendes. Er bringt seine Hände – und die Himmlischen. Die eindringliche Zäsur dieser Stelle ergibt den Abstand, den der Dichter von aller Gestalt und der Welt haben soll, als ihre Einheit. (WB2 125)

The poet is the "untouchable middle" ("unberührbare Mitte," *ibid.*) of the poem, and the middle point between his hands is the locus of the caesura, the pure word, which, not an appearance itself, is a middle which keeps disparate entities together. In the poem "Bei Wein und Verlorenheit" Celan explicitly refers to "Dis-parates": rather than operating with images, poetic language unravels images, interrupting what Celan calls the "illustrative language," "bebilderte Sprache" (GW1 213). This non-mimetic, iconoclastic language is, for Celan, the matter of hands, particularly of Jewish hands. In a letter to Peter Szondi, in which Celan, among other things, discusses the plagiarism affair, he emphatically connects human rectitude with hands:

Noch von den 'Besten' wird der Jude – und das ist ja nichts als eine Gestalt des Menschlichen, aber immerhin eine *Gestalt* – nur allzu gerne als Subjekt aufgehoben und

zum Objekt bzw. 'Sujet' pervertiert. [...] Das Fatale ist, daß einige allen Ernstes und vielleicht sogar in aller Einfalt daran glauben, daß die 'Klaue' die Hand ersetzen kann. (Szondi 2005, 40, the letter from August 11, 1961)

Only hands – and not claws, especially not a thief's claws – are able to separate; hands divide and differentiate, prevent the reduction of the subject, of *any* subject. In a later letter to Szondi, from January 15, 1962, Celan makes this point even more immediate, as he eliminates any linguistic reference to hands in favor of the immediacy of handwriting. The letter is – very atypically for Celan – typed, not handwritten. However, Celan cuts into the typescript with a few, though crucial handwritten additions, and, most importantly, signs the letter with his name in Hebrew characters:

Es [gestrichen: 'ist'] hat mit jener 'Gewissheit' zu tun. Also nichts mit dem 'Verbündeten'. [Gestrichen: 'Vielleicht aber'] Sondern mit Ihnen als Person. Personen sind – Sie wissen es ja – keine Koalisierten. Aber [gestrichen: 'sie steh'] vielleicht darf man für das, was sie zur Person macht sagen, dass es ein *Bund* ist. Ein alter. Ein – ich muss es, nach allen Erfahrungen mit dem wieder akut Gewordenen, *so* nennen -: ein [handschriftlich hinzugefügt: 'blut- und'] *artfremder* [handschriftlich gestrichen: 'blutsferner']. Ein geistiger.

Herzlich Ihr

Paul Antschel, *false* Paul Celan...

שלום ובברכה!

פאול צלן (Szondi 2005, 48)

The added remarks cut into the mechanical row of typewritten characters with a force, which reaches its apex in the signature, signature being the most immediate imprint of one's handwriting. As the typewritten characters sign with the "false" name, the pseudonym, the Hebrew signature rectifies it, straightens the name. The covenant (*Bund*), which Celan proposes to Szondi in his letter, is sealed by spirit, not by blood – his relation to Judaism is indeed

"pneumatic"⁶⁶ – and has thus less to do with Jewish blood lineage than with language and rectitude.

A few years later, Celan writes a poem⁶⁷ in which the interweaving of name and hands reappears:

Unter die Haut meiner Hände genäht:
dein mit Händen
getrösteter Name.

Wenn ich den Klumpen Luft
knete, unsere Nahrung,
säuert ihn der
Buchstabenschimmer aus
der wahnwitzig-offenen
Pore. (GW2 49)

In Jewish mysticism, creation is sometimes described as the work of God's hands, though this notion is free from the pejorative connotations associated with the demiurge in certain forms of Gnosticism. In *Sefer Yetzirah*, a correspondence between the ten *sefirot* (divine vessels, emanations) and the ten fingers is established:⁶⁸ the *sefirot* are polarized between the left and the right hand, and while the unity binding the *sefirot* persists, a tension is created, whose focus lies precisely in the middle point between the hands.⁶⁹ This focus, the unifying covenant Brit

⁶⁶ Cf. Celan's letter to Norbert Koch: "Die Erfahrung u.a., dass wir heute anders sehen, anders wahrnehmen, anders sprechen müssen. Dass das Gedicht, unabdingbarer als bisher, eine pneumatische Angelegenheit ist – und nicht nur das" (MKR 338) and Celan's interview to Israeli radio Kol Yisrael: "Selbstverständlich hat das Jüdische einen thematischen Aspekt. Aber ich glaube, daß das Thematische allein nicht ausreicht, um das Jüdische zu definieren. Jüdisches ist sozusagen auch eine *pneumatische* Angelegenheit" (John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: eine Biographie*, transl. Holger Fliessbach, München: Beck 1997, 339-/340. Celan's "pneumatic Judaism" is a non-rabbinical Judaism which is not confined to a monotheist religion. Further, this term can be understood as a reference to the Graeco-Judaic tradition and to Philo of Alexandria in particular, with whose ideas Celan was somewhat familiar through Ernst Bloch's "Das Prinzip Hoffnung."

⁶⁷ The poem was written on September 9, 1964 and was published in *Atemwende*.

⁶⁸ My source here and in the following is Aryeh Kaplans' commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*.

⁶⁹ Kaplan 32-37.

Yachid (ברית יחיד), has the power of circumcision and of purification. This covenant unifies the congregation and purifies one's hands and tongue for prayer.⁷⁰

Creating earth with one hand and heaven with the other,⁷¹ YHWH channels the power of separation and unity between *sefiroth*, and creation separates itself from the primordial chaos (*tohu*⁷²). Although cosmos is formed from *sefiroth*, they – unlike letters that have form and sound, and also unlike digits which become associated with the *sefiroth* only at a later stage of creation⁷³ – are formless and expressionless: Sefer Yetzirah speaks of *sefiroth beli-mah* (בלי-מה), *beli-mah* meaning "expressionless" or "ineffable," literally: "without-what."⁷⁴ The word *beli-mah* occurs only once in the Bible and is used in differentiation to chaos (*tohu*): "He stretches out the north over empty space [*tohu*] and hangs the earth on nothing [*beli-mah*]"⁷⁵ (Job 26:1). Written as בלום (*balam*), it means "to bridle," and both variants occur simultaneously in Sefer Yetzirah 1:8:

Ten Sefiroth of Nothingness [בלי-מה]
 Bridle [בלום] your mouth from speaking
 and your heart from thinking
 And if your heart runs
 return to the place.
 It is therefore written,
 "The Chayot running and returning." (Ezekiel 1:24)
 Regarding this a covenant was made.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ The division of ten *sefiroth* in two corresponds to Abraham's covenant, in which ten halves of five sacrificial animals create the purifying tension in the middle (Kaplan 34-35; Genesis 15:9). Ancient Greek rituals of purification, likewise, involved cutting sacrificial animals in two; an object placed between the halves was purified. Cf., e.g. the following passage: "Each spring the Macedonian army reassembled, it was marched between the two halves of a sacrificed dog, which created what has been called an 'absorptive zone' for all its impurities" (Parker 22). Parker further notes that this purification ritual has a near eastern analogue.

⁷¹ Isaiah 48:13.

⁷² Before creation, the earth was "unformed and void" (*tohu va-vohu*), Genesis 1:2.

⁷³ In this sense, the cosmos of *sefiroth* is somewhat different from the Pythagorean cosmos whose primordial elements are digits.

⁷⁴ Kaplan 25.

⁷⁵ Whereas Septuagint provides in this verse οὐδέν for *tohu* and οὐδενός for *beli-mah*, both sharing the same stem (as in ουστα), Vulgata translates *tohu* as *vacuum* and *beli-mah* – as *nihilum*.

⁷⁶ Aryeh Kaplan's translation. Kaplan 66.

Beli-mah, the expressionless, both separates and restricts (bridles) – it is the cutting and the covenant, the dividing and unifying power of circumcision. Benjamin assigns, both in "Zwei Gedichte" and "Die Wahlverwandschaften," Hölderlin's caesura with an equal power to separate and to connect: the caesura – which he calls "das Ausdruckslose," the expressionless – is the cut and the restriction that is constitutive for a work of art.

Das Ausdruckslose ist die kritische Gewalt, welche Schein vom Wesen in der Kunst zwar zu trennen nicht vermag, aber ihnen verwehrt, sich zu mischen. [...] Dieses [das Ausdruckslose] zerschlägt was in allem schönen Schein als die Erbschaft des Chaos noch überdauert: die falsche, irrende Totalität – die absolute. Dieses erst vollendet das Werk, welches es zum Stückwerk zerschlägt, zum Fragmente der wahren Welt, zum Torso eines Symbols. (WB1 181)

"Das Ausdruckslose" does not become a fixed term for Benjamin, as central as it is for his understanding of artwork in "Die Wahlverwandschaften."⁷⁷ In fact, one cannot unproblematically speak of the expressionless as a concept, without running the risk of establishing yet another symbol or metaphor. For this reason, *das Ausdruckslose* – as with many other flowing terms Benjamin employs – is abandoned in his subsequent writing; yet this fact only emphasizes the fluidity of his language. *Das Ausdruckslose* is rather what Benjamin calls the *Grenzbegriff* (WB2 106): a marginal, or better yet, a *critical* term, which, like the word *beli-mah* in Sefer Yetzirah, addresses the ineffable power of separation. The expressionless, itself not an expression, names the power that creates distinctions by drawing a dividing line and yet is equally capable of obliterating such divisions. In this sense, before *sefiroth* become bound by the logos of their names and the symbolics of their numbers, they are separated from chaos by the pre-linguistic power, the *beli-mah*. Written as two words, *beli-mah* (בלי-מה) – rather than the

⁷⁷ Winfried Menninghaus emphasizes this fact: "Im *Trauerspielbuch* hat [Benjamin] zwar auf den erratischen Begriff des Ausdruckslosen verzichtet und sogar die 'Wahrheit' als den 'Wesensgehalt der Schönheit' reklamiert" (Menninghaus 71).

more common *belimah*, or *balam* (בלום) – is marginal, because it is mentioned only once in the bible, and critical, because it means "the expressionless" only in separation from "the binding." The expressionless splitting of the word constitutes a separation in the expression. Benjamin's interpretation of Hölderlin's caesura stresses precisely this: the caesura, the "pure word" lacking form or expression, underlies two orders in the artworks that correspond to the two orders in creation, the primordial chaos, and the stasis of established forms. The established forms manifest themselves in artwork as symbols which are expressions of what Benjamin calls the "Verbundenheit" of myth (WB1 109); the caesura unravels the boundness of the symbol.

Benjamin's conception of the caesura might have been inspired by the Lurianic kabbalah.⁷⁸ The idea that the caesura "zerschlägt was in allem schönen Schein als die Erbschaft des Chaos noch überdauert" can be read as an allusion to Luria's concept of *tsimtsum*: the breaking of the vessels and the contraction of the absolute at the stage of creation. The crucial point is that this divine contraction is the presupposition for all existence. The world occupies the space previously taken by the absolute, unlike in the cosmology of Platonic emanations (from which the kabbalah originates and takes leave), where the ideas are engraved into a space exterior to the absolute. *Tikkun olam*, the process of recollection, which restores the unity of world and God in the messianic age, sublates the initial break in *tsimtsum*. The broken shards of the *sefiroth*, the divine vessels, have turned in the world after *tsimtsum* to *qellipoth*, rough husks,

⁷⁸ Winfried Menninghaus, with a claim much broader and in a line of thought quite different from the one proposed in the present study, also sees a connection between Benjamin's *das Ausdruckslose* and Jewish mysticism: "Benjamins Begriff des Ausdruckslosen meint weder einen subjektiven Mangel an Ausdruck noch ein Gegengewicht gegen expressive Stile. Er variiert vielmehr, morphologisch betrachtet, eine Reihe prominenter ästhetisch-theologischer Begriffe, die ebenfalls auf die Silbe 'los' enden, das darin indizierte Fehlen aber positiv besetzen: das Zweck-, Interesse- und Begrifflose des Schönen bei Kant und die Bilderlosigkeit Gottes. Semantisch steht es allerdings nur mit einer dieser Versionen der –losigkeit in engster Affinität: mit dem jüdischen Bilderverbot" (cf. p. 170 Menninghaus, Winfried, "Das Ausdruckslose: Walter Benjamins Metamorphosen der Bilderlosigkeit, in: Für Walter Benjamin. Dokumente. Essays und ein Entwurf, ed. Ingrid and Konrad Scheurmann, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992: 170-182").

which still hold back sparks of primordial divine light. The messianic time will begin when all the sparks, caught in the *qellipoth*, will be recollected. Unlike in Christian messianism, where redemption depends on reconciliation of man and God and can only be initiated by God, the Lurianic *tikkun* is a completing shift in the as-of-yet imperfect structure of the world and can only be completed by the world. While the movement in *tsimtsun* is that from chaos to logos, i.e. from the state which knows no separation – and thus no communication and no language – to the creation of the cosmos from letters, the movement in *tikkun* is not that of a reversal from the logos-based structure of the world back to the initial chaotic state; on the contrary, in *tikkun*, the world experiences a finalizing shift, or separation, in which the language, the logos, is perfected. Even the divine logos is not yet complete or perfect. The means of such perfection, through *tsimtsun* to *tikkun*, is the expressionless. Preceding any expression, the expressionless provides the medium of language. The separation, of which *tsimtsun* is the first stage, becomes ultimate in *tikkun*, and both stages are possible only in the medium of the expressionless.

Nathan of Gaza, the Sabbataian prophet, in his letter of September, 1665, announcing the arrival of messianic age, urges believers to pray from now on by meditating solely on the name of God, YHWH (יהוה), rather than on any particular *sefirah*. The reason for this is that with the arrival of the messianic age the name of God will change and, for the first time, take on its definite form:

In our days all things will be purified with God's help, the [mystical] lights will spread, [the *sefirah*] *Malkuth* [that is, the Shekhinah] will be [restored to the mystical state symbolized as] 'the crown of her husband.' The holy name YHWH will then be read as a double YHYH, and Scripture will be fulfilled [Zech. 14:9] 'in that day YHWH shall be one and His name one.' For the WH of the Tetragrammaton will be in complete union with YH, and they will never be separated. (Scholem 271)⁷⁹

⁷⁹ The square brackets are Scholem's. Scholem's translation from Hebrew is based on Sasportas, Jacob, *Sisath Nobel Sevi*, ed. Isaiah Tishby, Jerusalem, 1954. Note also that the two forms of the divine name, YHWH and YH, are mentioned in *Sefer Yetzirah* (long version) (Kaplan 280).

The arrival of messianic time will not cancel the existence of language as such; yet it will bring about a final shattering of language, in which language – and thus the world – will become beyond repair. This task is the messiah's mission, and the means for the accomplishment of this mission is the same power of separation and unification in circumcision as has been at stake since the stage of creation:

[T]he messiah [...] will tear (Hebrew *para* – a verb which also serves as a technical term, denoting the uncovering of the *glans penis* at circumcision) the "prepuce" of the *qelippah*. (Scholem 309)

The chaos, still present in the existent world as the formless *qelippoth*, will cease to be, once *tikkun* is accomplished. Nathan of Gaza is very articulate in identifying chaos as the source of all imperfection, as well as in tracing the existence of chaos back to the stage before creation:

For the *qelippoth* are called *golem*, that is, a formless mass. For that reason it is said [Gen 1:2], "and the earth was without form (*tohu*) and void" – for there is a building [that is, structure, *kosmos*] and there is formless mass (*tohu*) which is the *qelippoth* and which will be perfected by him [the messiah] (Scholem 309).⁸⁰

Declaring that the caesura, *das Ausdruckslose*, "zerschlägt was in allem schönen Schein als die Erbschaft des Chaos noch überdauert: die falsche, irrende Totalität – die absolute" (WB1 181, cf. above), Benjamin assigns the caesura with the task of the elimination of chaos; the same task is assigned by Nathan to the messiah's power of circumcision. The caesura brings language closer to its shattering; it is a *Grenzerfahrung* of language. The shattering of expressions makes the expressionless itself, the medium of any expression, apparent.

The circumcising power stretched between two hands is the medium of Celan's poem:

Unter die Haut meiner Hände genäht:
dein mit Händen

⁸⁰ Scholem quotes from: *Be Iqvoth Mashiah*, a collection of texts from the beginnings of the Sabbatian faith, selected from the writings of R. Abraham Benjamin Nathan b. Elisha Hayyim Ashkenazi, known as Nathan of Gaza, ed. G. Scholem, Jerusalem, 1944.

getrösteter Name.

Wenn ich den Klumpen Luft
 knete, unsere Nahrung,
 säuert ihn der
 Buchstabenschimmer aus
 der wahnwitzig-offenen
 Pore. (GW2 49)

The name is inscribed, sewn into hands (*genäht*) and made closer (*nah* and *näher*); the syllable "-näh-" in "genäht" is mirroring "hän-" in "Hände," as letter after letter cuts deeper into hands, so that the air we breathe can become our bread (*Nahrung*), our *pneumatic* bread, and our proximity (*Nahrung*). The name, inscribed into *two* hands, shimmers through *one* pore: this is the madness of this openness, its *Wahnwitz*, always one in its dividedness, a covenant of separation. The binding and cutting of the name intensifies endlessly in the persistent movement from *hän* to *näh* to *hän*, a mad turning of writing from left to right to writing from right to left, in which both syllables, neither making a complete word, turn to each other, and counter each other, turn one into another, without becoming one another. This split words speak German circumscribed by the caesura and Hebrew devoid of Hebrew words and devoid of the Hebrew alphabet. They preserve, however, the Hebrew alphabet's countermovement which invokes a Jewish presence in the German text while not speaking Hebrew, while turning German into a Hebrew which speaks German, a Hebrew which speaks German right to left without enunciating itself, without naming itself, never naming the name. This incomplete, imperfect act of pronouncing the name is the poet's attempt to fulfill language in his poetry. This act – which is a speech act – binds the poet to the tradition while it separates him from the ritualistic Judaism. Celan, after all, writes a poem rather than a prayer, and his language is German rather than Hebrew. This imperfect continuation of tradition is his paradoxical attempt to retain tradition while taking leave from it. Yet the

fulfillment of such a language relies perhaps on something which stays not pronounced in the poem: on the divine name which remains silent behind the poet's speech.

The poet's speaking is the kneading of air, and the act of poetic creation is this handwork. In an earlier poem, "Psalm," the kneading is the handwork of no-one, of an absent God: "Niemand knetet uns wieder aus Erde und Lehm"(GW1 225); in "Unter die Haut" not even this no-one perseveres, there are only hands that still knead the air. This sourness, sour-making of bread is, in a certain Jewish context, not kosher: leavened bread is unclean for Passover. In preparation for Passover, leaven (*chametz*) must be carefully separated from any foods in the kitchen and disposed of. Passover, the celebration of freedom, is, both in its rituals and in its content, the holiday of separation: the way to freedom leads through separation of Jews from non-Jews and of Jews from their homes. In remembrance of the Jews who had no time to let their bread rise as they left Egypt, the Jews spend days separating *chametz* from their houses. In Celan's poem, the name, the unnamed name, itself becomes *chametz*: it is the impure leaven that makes "unsere Nahrung," our bread and our proximity, rise. The name – like leaven raising the bread – fills the air with air. The name is not so much the sour as the *Sauerstoff*, the oxygen of the pneumatic Judaism, of the tradition having become the air of poetry. This *pneuma* is mad, a mad turning of breath, a *wahnwitzige Atemwende*: the expiration brings about more *Sauerstoff*, more oxygen, more air. The source of the sour is the light of the name ("der Buchstabenschimmer"), the dwindled rest of the primordial light and the rest of the divine breath, which had started the initial cosmic and cosmologic separation in *tsimtsum* but now perseveres only as fluorescence of something sour and rotten. The air which is the poet's food is "das Jüngste Yoghurt-Gericht," as is pronounced in one of Celan's *Gegenlichter* (MKR 52). This blasphemous invocation conceals a messianic hope which is apparent only by negation. In this

thick substance of post-Judaic Judaism, the poem pierces an opening in the stagnant air of the expired inspiration, a pore in the hand which opens a passage not for blood (this pore is not a stigma) but rather for the weak light which has its source in decay. What decays, is language, logos, which relies on what remains unsaid. Celan's poem binds the expressionless silence with the unfulfilled speech act of naming, and this incomplete synthesis gives the poem its singular shape.

In Nathan of Gaza's understanding of *tikkun*, the arrival of the messianic age depends on the completion of the initial separation between God and world. In Celan's poem, this separation takes on the character of endless opening, spreading out, cutting the open open: the name, not a divine name, not properly a name, is not a proper name any longer. Rather than acquiring a decisive form, such as YHYH in place of YHWH, the movements of naming do not destroy the structural consistency of language: the words of the poem remain intact and still possess a proper semantic content. While operating with perfectly recognizable images, Celan's poem explodes – "zersprengt," to use Benjamin's word – the determinative, formative logos. The language of the poem is that of an indeterminately postponed approximation to naming. It does not bring about the completion of logos in the perfection of the divine name, and by turning around upon itself, suspends itself in the movement of constant turning and returning. "Unsere Nahrung" – more incisively than the conclusive lines of the earlier "Tenebrae," "Bete, Herr. / / Wir sind nah" (GW1 163) – exterminate hope by fulfilling it in the endless approximation.⁸¹

⁸¹ Stéphane Mosès finds that the termination of all messianic hope is at stake in Benjamin's "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire": the invisibility of stars in modern cities due to the electric lights makes constellations hopelessly invisible (Mosès, Stéphane, "Ideen, Namen, Sterne. Zu Walter Benjamin's Metaphorik des Ursprungs," trans. Andreas Kilcher, in: *Für Walter Benjamin. Dokumente, Essays und ein Entwurf*, ed. Ingrid and Konrad Scheurmann, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992: 183-192). With reference to the Jewish messianism, Mosès interprets stars as Benjamin's image for "Funken der Hoffnung" (WB1 694), i.e., as the sparks of the divine light caught in the world, which need to be re-collected in order for the messianic age to arrive. One could add to Mosès's

And, again, more incisively than in "Tenebrae," "Augen und Mund stehn so offen und leer" (ibid): the air – the medium of vision, on the one hand and of our breath, on the other – fills neither the mouth nor the eyes but the hands. The poet's hands become his eyes and respiratory tracts, *Atemwege*, rendering the poet and the poetry mad, monstrous. In creation, the divine breath provided the air that we breathe; now our exhalations turn to air – for those who breathe it after us and who also are us, or us and not us, us and some other us, or perhaps us and no one. This pneumatic tradition is human and even if the divine core perseveres in it, Celan's poem says nothing of this.

In the poem, the name inscribed into the hands is deprived of Jewish connotations, but this erasure which is not merely a lack leaves a trace, a tone, a gesture in the air – precisely "das Nichts der Offenbarung"⁸² that is constitutive for Celan's pneumatic Judaism. Whereas in the earlier "Einem, der vor der Tür stand" (GW1 242), circumcision is explicitly mentioned on the semantic level ("Diesem/ beschneide das Wort,/ diesem/ schreib das lebendige/ Nichts ins Gemüt"), here it cuts into the structure of the word. The sub-semantic movement and counter-movement from letter to letter within a word subverts logos as the essence of language. Between the poet's hands, the poem is suspended in the air stretched between "Unter die Haut..." and "...Pore," in the focus of separating and binding covenant. The pore of the poem pierces through the air still fermented by the eliminated rest of Nathan's Sabbataianism, which consists in sabotaging the name of God, the word of the Scripture and accordingly the logos as such. The messiah has already come and cannot stop coming, his name now, for the first time, having

interpretation that the invisibility of constellations, hopeless as it is for city dwellers, does not eliminate stars by mere destructive force; instead, the starlight is absorbed by the weaker light of street lanterns – dispersed rather than hopelessly lost.

⁸² Gershom Scholem uses this expression in a letter to Walter Benjamin in reference to Kafka. This quotation is picked up and used as pertaining to Celan's poetry by Stéphane Mosès in his analysis of "Die Posaunenstelle."

become ultimately unpronounceable. This messianism culminates first in an apostasy, not merely a renunciation. Renunciation only states that the messianic hope is lost, while leaving the separation of God and man intact. The Sabbataian apostasy perforates the divine name. YHYH is the name of God who is expiring between returning and vanishing. Yet precisely due to its porosity, this porous language, neither divine nor human, is communicable. The apostatic Sabbataian statement that God's name is imperfect brings about the hope for the fulfillment of language in the future when the language will be whole again and when the divine name will reach its perfection. Celan's poem is messianic precisely because it promises nothing and says nothing about the divinity of the name which remains unnamed and unnamable.

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By cutting away the notion of circumcision from its initial ritualistic content and translating it into the language of poetry, Celan attempts to liberate this word, "beschneiden," from the confines of Judaism. Such operation is illegitimate from at least two points of view. First, it transgresses the Jewish law which enforces circumcision as the mark of separation. Second, free from this law, circumcision of the word, *das beschnittene Wort*, separates itself from its previous meaning and thus becomes semantically imprecise, suggestive. Once circumcision is circumscribed from its ritualistic meaning, the very logos of the word becomes illegitimate. What meaning does the circumscribed word then acquire? How does the language consisting of such words function? Is this not a retreat into reductionism of metaphors and tropes which Celan, again and again, attempts to escape? Does "das Beschneiden des Wortes," this genitive metaphor, not stand as another symbol ready to be turned into an image, trope, figure of speech, "ein Objekt oder Sujet" (Szondi 2005, 40)? Celan avoids invoking names or supplying

substitutes: "der Buchstabenschimmer" is neither a palliative nor an antonomastic name of God; "die wahnwitzig-offene Pore" is neither a direct reference to mystical praying techniques nor just a metaphor for circumcision. Rather than a fixed trope, it is intended as a *cut* on rhetoric figure: *Pore*, from *πόρος*, is a way through the aporia, a passage through the impassability of tropes. Yet the question remains open – and perhaps must necessarily remain open – whether this cut on circumcision does in truth open the language of poetry rather than merely metaphorically "opening" it. Can it be that this openness, perhaps just "openness," is nothing but an "as if" and thus just another simile? Does the quotation from the kabbalah, and be it only on the level of gesture or sub-semantic movement in the text, not necessarily implement scare quotes, "Hasenöhrchen, Gänsefüßchen" (MTA 12), to this opening?

The circumcision of the word, Jewish hands, and the connection between circumcision and caesura are recurrent motifs of Jacques Derrida's interpretations of Celan's poetry. Perhaps the most relevant passage is the one related to Celan's poem "Einem, der vor der Tür stand" in "Schibboleth: pour Paul Celan" (1984):

La parole circoncise est d'*abord* écrite, à la fois incisée et excisée dans le corps, qui peut être le corps d'une langue et qui en tout cas lie toujours le corps à la langue: parole entaillée, entamée, blessée pour être ce qu'elle est, parole découpée, écrite parce que découpée, césurée dès l'origine, dès le poème.

La parole circoncise, cela signifie *ensuite* parole lisible, à partir de *rien* mais lisible, à *lire* jusqu'à la blessure et jusqu'au sang (*Wundgelesene*).

Du même coup, si on peut dire, la parole circoncise donne accès à l'alliance, au partage de la langue, dans la langue. Et dans la langue juive comme langue poétique, si toute langue poétique était, comme tous les poètes selon l'exergue, d'essence juive,⁸³ mais cette essence ne se promet qu'à travers la dés-identification, cette expropriation dans le rien de la non-essence dont nous avons déjà parlé. La langue germanique, comme noute autre, mais ici combien privilégiée, un rabbin doit aussi la circoncire, et le rabbin devient alors un poète, révèle en lui le poète (Derrida 1986, 110-11).⁸⁴

⁸³ Derrida refers to the epigraph to "Und mit dem Buch aus Tarussa" which I quote above.

⁸⁴ The circumcised word [*parole*] is *above all* written, at once incised and excised in a body, which may be the body of a language and which in any case always binds the body to language: word that is cut into, written because cut into, ceasuraed in its origin, with the poem.

Derrida reads Celan's poem as a circumcision, an opening of language in poetry: this circumcision cannot be Jewish in essence, can be Jewish only in the non- or dis-essence, it cannot declare itself to be Jewish, nor, for that matter, to be non-Jewish, since in that case it would be only by way of a negative identification, i.e. not open. The circumcised word can announce itself only in openness that is neither Jewish nor non-Jewish, indecisive in its decision not to decide. The circumcised word is the expiration of Judaism in any language, and perhaps in Hebrew above all. It is not merely a foreign word in a national language, but a word that is not quite a word, a counter-word – a word turned upon itself in the *Atemwende*. Yet how is it possible to circumcise a word outside the mystical practice of the kabbalah? Derrida's two attempts are to be found elsewhere: not in his work on Celan but in two texts about Heidegger. In "Schibboleth," Derrida merely hints at the necessity of these attempts in a rather incisive parenthesis:

(Situons ici, non pour la fermer, pour la laisser ouverte au contraire, comme une blessure, la nécessité d'une immense parenthèse: pour la question du rien et du sens de l'être chez Celan, d'une vérité de l'être qui *païsse* par *l'expérience* du rien, pour la question, ici, de la circoncision laissée sans réponse à la date de Todtnauberg lorsqu'elle fut en somme posée à une autre sorte de sage, un jour d'été en 1967.) (Derrida 1986, 110)

Derrida makes an attempt to close – or to re-open – this parenthesis in which he asks anew the question left unanswered in Todtnauberg as well as in "Todtnauberg" (GW2 255), the question of opening in language and of opening towards the other, in his book "De l'esprit: Heidegger et la

The circumcised word is, *next*, readable, starting from *nothing*, but readable, *to be read* to the point of wounding and to the point of bleeding (*Wundgelesene*).

By the same stroke, as it were, the circumcised word grants access to the community, to the covenant or alliance, to the partaking of a language, in a language. And in the Jewish language as poetic language, if all poetic language is, like all poets according to the epigraph, Jewish in essence; but this essence promises itself only through dis-identification, that expropriation in the nothing of the non-essence of which we have spoken. The Germanic language, like any other, but here with what privilege, must be circumcised by a rabbi, and the rabbi becomes then a poet, reveals the poet in him (Derrida 2005, 63).

question" (1987). Translating *Geist* – but also *pneuma* and *ruah* – with the French *esprit*, Derrida lets the breath make another turn, another *Atemwende*, showing not only the untranslatability of what is absolutely universal to all living beings, the air, but also letting the word open itself on its path through languages and translations.

The preparation for this turn of breath, however, is undertaken in the discussion of Heidegger's hand in "La Main de Heidegger (Geschlecht II)" (1985). In this text, Derrida builds his critique around Heidegger's use of "hand" in "Was heißt Denken?" where Heidegger speaks only of a single Hand, "die Hand" rather than "die Hände."

La Main de l'homme: vous l'avez sans doute remarqué, Heidegger ne pense pas seulement la main comme une chose très singulière, et qui n'appartiendrait en propre qu'à l'homme. Il la pense toujours au singulier, comme si l'homme n'avait pas deux mains mais, ce monstre, une seule main." (Derrida 1990, 205)⁸⁵

"Ce monstre" in this sentence relates to *la monstre* (ibid. 184), Derrida's translation of Heidegger's *die Zeige*, as it appears in "Unterwegs zur Sprache." Derrida's translation of this word, which for Heidegger stands nearer to the source of language⁸⁶ and from which poetry originates, is a monstrosity: an outrageous attempt at translating an incommunicable idiom. This attempt exposes the idiom as untranslatable, as "shut" rather than "open." Derrida's critique is directed against Heidegger's "onehandedness," his etymological over-emphasis of *one* national language over language as such.

The sentence quoted above opens the second part of Derrida's essay, which is marked by the Roman numeral II. This second section, in turn, is divided into five subsections, which Derrida announces in the following manner:

⁸⁵ "Heidegger does not only think the hand as a very singular thing that would rightfully belong only to man, he always thinks the hand *in singular*, as if man did not have two hands but, this monster, one single hand (Derrida 1987, 182).

⁸⁶ Cf. Heidegger 253-54.

D'une part, il est trop tard [...] je me contenterai d'en indiquer en quelques minutes le souci principal, tel qu'il peut se traduire en une série d'interrogations suspendues ou suspensives. Je les ai regroupées, plus ou moins artificiellement, autour de *cinq* foyers. Or d'*autre part* [...]

and further:

Au foyer de ce foyer, la marque *Geschlecht* dans sa polysémie (espèce ou sexe) et dans sa dissémination. (Derrida 1990, 215-16)

Without announcing or even hinting at the Jewish character of this procedure, Derrida repeats, or quotes – and purely as a gesture – the kabbalistic ritual of circumcision of the word, namely, of the highly idiomatic German word *Geschlecht*. Between the two hands – visualized with the Roman II – and between the five fingers of each hand, he suspends his re-opened question, "tel qu'il peut traduire," inasmuch as it can be translated. There is always something untranslatable, a difference between one language and another that cannot be overcome, just like the difference between sexes cannot be overcome, not even by an act of love, and surely not by the word *Geschlecht* which entails both sexes. This separation cannot be eliminated, just as the folding of two hands in the gesture of praying does not make two hands become one, it only shows the simplicity of this gesture:

Je me contenterai de deux remarques. D'une part, *on the one hand*, comme vous dites, la seule phrase où Heidegger, à ma connaissance, nomme les mains de l'homme au pluriel semble concerner justement le moment de la prière ou en tout cas le geste par lequel les deux mains se joignent (*sich falten*) pour n'en faire qu'une dans la simplicité (*Einfalt*). C'est toujours le rassemblement (*Versammlung*) que privilégie Heidegger. D'autre part, *on the other hand*, rien n'est jamais dit de la caresse ou du désir. Fait-on l'amour, l'homme fait-il l'amour avec la main ou avec les mains? Et quoi de la différence sexuelle à cet égard? (Derrida 1990, 206)

The irreducibility of separation is manifest in the mirroring of the two hands, and yet this same mirroring, this same separation is the binding principle. In kabbalistic circumcision, the ten *sefirot* are polarized between two hands in such way that the five "feminine strengths" are

assembled on the left and the five "masculine loves" on the right hand. Derrida applies the procedure, or at least "procedure," of the mystical circumcision upon Heidegger's idiom. One might ask whether this procedure, in its furtiveness, is at all legitimate and whether its purpose is to make Heidegger's text more legible. Does the difference between *die Zeige* and *la monstre* expose monstrosity or does it translate Heidegger's idiom into something not less idiomatic yet derivative? Does Derrida's idiom, in fact, demonstrate the monstrosity of the idiom, *die Einfalt* of two hands reduced to one, or does it reproduce it in a gesture that undermines the seriousness of question by pointing an ironic finger at it? The same question pertains to sexual difference, which Derrida invokes as a metaphor for the heterogeneity of language. Does love bridge the radical, matrilineal split between two sexes, or does it only lead to a worse oneness – from unity to solitude?

In other words, the question is whether Derrida's translation of Heidegger's *Zeige* as *la monstre* brings us any further than what Derrida recognizes as an insufficiency in Heidegger's thought, namely, the over-determination of his idiom. On the margin of his copy of Heidegger's "Ursprung des Kunstwerks," which he read in summer of 1953, Celan leaves a remark: "Nein, durchaus nicht merkwürdig, wenn unter Sprache nicht nur Etymologie verstanden wird!" (BPh 350; 358). This comment refers to the passage, in which Heidegger asserts, "das Handwerk, merkwürdiges Spiel des Sprache, schafft freilich keine Werke." With this objection, Celan indicates that poetry as handwork is co-defined by atemporality of language and temporality of poet as a finite being, whose handwork bears traces of his life. A poem is not a pun and not an anonymous expression but rather a work of an individual upon the material of language. This thought leads Celan to comparison of handwork with "heart-work" (*Herzwerk*) and, not surprisingly, to a further question: "Hat das Dichten überhaupt eine Dauer? Und in welchem

Zusammenhang mit der Zeit, der Lebenszeit steht diese Dauer?"⁸⁷ (BPh 351) Celan attempts here to preserve a trace of the poet's mortality in his artwork, to find if not a word then perhaps a maneuver – *Handgriff*, to use Heidegger's word – that would allow a breath enter the lifeless shape of a poem.

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The madness of the breathturn is that any aspiration is second-hand: its source is expiration of an other. As Osip Mandelstam says in "Четвёртая проза" ["Fourth Prose"] (1930), poetry is "stolen air"⁸⁸: a breath, taken with hands without permission, against the law, a certain madness or monstrosity,⁸⁹ a *nefas*, an illegitimate appropriation, illegitimate all the more due to the fact that air – unlike a text which can be plagiarized and thus stolen⁹⁰ – belongs to no one. This equation of poetry with the free breath, which needs to be fought for painstakingly and taken from under pressure, recurs in Mandelstam's poetry written in the years of his exile in Voronezh (1934-37).⁹¹ In these years Mandelstam experiences a new inspiration after many years of scarcity, while he begins to suffer under a chronic respiratory disease. Celan read a

⁸⁷ The problem of temporality in poetry of Celan and Mandelstam is further discussed in the third chapter of my study.

⁸⁸ "Ворованный воздух" ["stolen air"] (OM2 182). Celan's reading of "Fourth Prose" cannot be documented, since he owned no edition containing this text. It is not implausible, however, that Celan might have read it but, most probably, first after 1965, as the text started to circulate in samizdat-prints among Russian emigrants and eventually appeared in the edition of Mandelstam's collected works in 1966 and was also published in the magazine, *Grani*, in Frankfurt in 1967.

⁸⁹ Дошло до того, что в ремесле словесном я ценю только дикое мясо, только сумасшедший нарост" ["It has come to be that in the literary craft I appreciate only the wild tissue, only the mad tumor"] (ibid).

⁹⁰ The biographic background of "Fourth Prose" is Mandelstam's Gornfeld-affair (1929-1930), in which Mandelstam was accused of plagiarizing Gornfeld's *Eulenspiegel* translation. Although the whole case was a misunderstanding generated by a corrector's fault – Mandelstam, who merely edited Gornstein's translation, was indicated as the actual translator – Mandelstam felt obliged to apologize and transferred his whole honorarium to Gornfeld, which did not prevent the latter from publicly accusing Mandelstam and arranging a scandal in press. Cf. Struve and Filipov's commentary, OM2 604-608.

⁹¹ A discussion of the motif of breath in Mandelstam's Voronezh poems can be found in: Boris Gasparov, "Севооборот поэтического дыхания [Crop Rotation of the Poetic Breath,]" NLO 63 (2003).

substantial selection of these poems in the second volume of the almanac, *Воздушные пути* [*Aerial Ways*] (1961),⁹² which was very important for his response to Mandelstam in the poems from *Niemandrose*, where he addresses Mandelstam directly, but also in the later poems, where his encounter with Mandelstam becomes pronounced less explicitly. Celan's title of a later book of poems, *Atemwende*, is perhaps largely influenced by Mandelstam's experience of the "second breath" as the return of inspiration. In one of the poems from the cycle "Восьмистишия [Octaves]", written in Moscow and Voronezh, Mandelstam speaks of "выпрямительный вздох" ["rectifying sigh."⁹³ Although it is questionable, whether Celan read this particular poem during his work on the *Atemwende*,⁹⁴ the word, breathturn, reflects Celan's involvement with Mandelstam's poetics of breathing, unfolded in the Voronezh poems.⁹⁵ In "Стансы" ["Stances"], Mandelstam describes a similar turn of breath, with which the poet turns to life anew: "и в голосе моём после удушья / Звучит земля" ("and the earth sounds / in my voice after breathlessness," *Aerial Ways* 39).

Celan, as it were, "steals" Mandelstam's breath to turn it into the handwork of poetry, "Sache der Hände" (the letter to Bender, GW3 177; cf. also above). Thus, Celan's "breathing

⁹² The volume contains 57 poems by Mandelstam. Celan owned a copy of this volume, translated some of Mandelstam's poems and single lines and left numerous notes on the margins (cf. Ivanović 122-24).

⁹³ OM1 198. This poem was written in Moscow in 1933. An alternative version written in Voronezh two years later has a completely different stanza. The first stanza, shared by both versions, reads as follows:

I love the appearance of the fabric
When after two or three
Or even four gasps
The rectifying sigh comes (trans. by Nancy Pollak, Pollak 47).

⁹⁴ Celan owned no edition of Mandelstam's works containing the octave in question. The complete octave cycle was first included in a later edition (1966), which Celan did not have but might have borrowed or read in a library.

⁹⁵ An incomplete list of references to breath and air (cited with page numbers from *Воздушные пути* [*Aerial Ways*]) shows that this motive is ubiquitous in this selection of Mandelstam's late poems: "воздушный пирог" (11); "Я пью... за астму" (17); "Душно, и всё-таки до смерти хочется жить" (18); "Я должен жить, дыша и большевея" (38); "дыханье, дыханье и пенье" (43); "В гуще воздуха степного" (46); "чернил воздушных проза" (47); "И спотыкаясь мёртвый воздух ем 55 О этот медленный, одышливый простор! / Я им пресыщен до отказа – / И отдышавшийся распахнут кругозор" (51); "И полной грудью их ещё вдыхать я должен" (56); "Пою, когда гортань – сыра, душа – суха" (57); "В дощатом воздухе" (59); "Я обращался к воздуху" (64).

hands" in "Unter die Haut" appear as a permeation of his poetics by the poetics of Mandelstam. For Celan, the breathturn is a way out of a crisis: "es ist ein furchtbares Verstummen, es verschlägt [...] den Atem und das Wort. Dichtung: das kann eine Atemwende bedeuten" (MTA 7). Celan opens a "pore" for Mandelstam's breath in his own poem, and by means of this quotation finds new inspiration. In return, Celan projects his understanding of poetry as work of hands and not quite handwork of poetry as handwork upon Mandelstam. In a letter to Norbert Koch dated January 23, 1962, he writes: "'Hände' -: das sind... die Hände, die beiden Hände, die linke und die rechte, es ist – ich zitiere Ossip Mandelstamm – unser (aller!) 'Zweihändertum.'"⁹⁶ Celan could hardly have read the "Fourth Prose" at this time and quotes, most probably, from "Грифельная ода [Slate Ode,]"⁹⁷ where Mandelstam calls himself "двурушник я, с двойной душой" ("two-handed, with a double soul," OM1 108-9). In the concluding pages of the "Fourth Prose," Mandelstam thematizes, again, the work of a poet as illegitimate. The work of the poet, which Mandelstam "signs with *both hands*," is a work on emptiness and his poetry a hole resulting from making and un-making:

Сколько бы я ни трудился, если бы я носил на спине лошадей, если бы крутил мельничные жернова, всё равно никогда я не стану трудящимся. Мой труд, в чём бы он ни выражался, воспринимается как озорство, как беззаконие, как случайность. Но такова моя воля, и я на это согласен. Подписываюсь обеими руками.

Здесь разный подход: для меня в бублике ценна дырка. А как же быть с бубличным тестом? Бублик можно слопать, а дырка останется.

Настоящий труд это – брюссельское кружево, в нём главное – то на чём держится узор: воздух, проколы, прогулы. (OM2 191)

[I might work as much as I like, I might carry horses upon my back, I might turn millstones, and yet I would never become a worker. My work, whatever expression

⁹⁶ This unpublished letter is stored in Celan's archive in Marbach (call number D90.1.849).

⁹⁷ He read it in the edition of Mandelstam's collected works published in 1955 (cf. Ivanović 87).

it may take, will always be perceived as an outrage, an illegitimacy, an accident. But such is my will, and I agree to it. I sign with both hands.

Here is a different approach: for me, what is valuable about a bagel, is the hole. What to do with the dough? One can eat the bagel, the hole will stay. Real work is Brussels lace, the most important part of which is that which holds the pattern: the air, the perforations, the absences.]

The air rather than the weaving of lace is here what holds together poetry. Quoting Marina Tsvetaeva – a poet, non-Jew and female – in Russian, Celan once calls all poets Yids:⁹⁸ this quotation establishes a "covenant" of poets, a covenant, which is not properly Jewish, non-Jewish, bound by an uncircumcised word, not *milah* but *Atemwende*, barely proper language because not quite a quotation from Mandelstam, not quite a translation from Russian, *en route* between languages, which binds not with blood but by breath. Poets feed on breath rather than bread, their hands open holes in the air, and, as Mandelstam says, he signs this illegitimacy with both hands – not with one hand, but with both hands. This handwork of dividing air cuts a pore between the two breathing hands, both of which abstain from work. Celan's "wahnwitzig-offene Pore" as Mandelstam's "дырка от бублика" ["bagel's hole"]⁹⁹ opens a hole in the word, which first makes the word communicable, readable. Speaking is a matter of hands, "Sache der Hände," handwork, or something like handwork, separated from being only handcraft, "das Handwerksmäßige," by this opening.

⁹⁸ "Все поэты жидаы" ["All poets are Yids"] is the epigraph to the poem "Und mit dem Buch aus Tarussa" (*Die Niemandrose*), GW1 287.

⁹⁹ This allusion to Maiakovskii's "Mysteria-Bouffe" is now, at the time of "Fourth Prose," i.e. around 1930, an echo of Mandelstam's earlier Acmeist polemics with the Futurists. Mandelstam refers to the following lines: "Обещали и делим поровну:/одному – бублик/ другому – дырку от бублика./ Это и есть демократическая республика" ["We are sharing equally as promised:/ a bagel for one, / a hole from a bagel for another./ This is just what the democratic republic is like."]

The theme of the poet's writing as work of hands and physical work returns with intensified urgency in one of Mandelstam's poems written in Voronezh. Celan read this poem, among others, in his copy of the second volume of *Aerial Ways*:

Где связанный и пригвожденный стон?
Где Прометей - скалы подспорье и пособие?
А коршун где и желтоглазый гон
Его когтей, летящих исподлобья?

Тому не быть - трагедий не вернуть,
Но эти наступающие губы,
Но эти губы вводят прямо в суть
Эсхила-грузчика, Софокла-лесоруба.

Он – эхо и привет, он – вежа, нет, – лемех...
Воздушно-каменный театр времен растущих
Встал на ноги, и все хотят увидеть всех,
Рожденных, гибельных и смерти не имущих.¹⁰⁰

[Where is that bound and nailed-down moan?
Where is Prometheus, the support and aid of cliffs?
And where is the vulture and the yellow-eyed race
Of its claws from under its brow?

But no, tragedies will not return,
And these impending lips,
These impending lips lead
Aeschylus the loader, Sophocles the lumberman straight down to the point.

It is an echo and a salutation, it is a guidepost, no – a plowshare.
Stone-air theater of growing time
Stood up upon its feet, and everyone want to see everyone,
Born, perilous and deathless.¹⁰¹]

The poem starts with the recognition that in the present times – and one needs to keep in mind that Mandelstam writes this poem in banishment and subjected to forced labor – individuality suffers a crisis, since individual tragedy and individual heroism is subdued by the overpowering

¹⁰⁰ OM1 240-41, *Aerial Ways* 54

¹⁰¹ I've consulted Burton Raffel's translation of this poem in *Complete Poetry of Osip Emilievich Mandelstam*, New York: SUNY Press, 1973: 268.

collective fate. Prometheus appears in the first stanza of the poem as a titanic figure carrying the rock – the earth – rather than as a hero who suffers speechless pain for the sake of humanity. As long as this other Prometheus stays bound to his rock, the world stays bound to suffering. The gift of fire and liberation from Gods, the purpose of Prometheus's sacrifice, has become devalued in this world. Since the Promethean suffering becomes the ultimate purpose of his heroic sacrifice and thus negates the fulfillment of the hero's fate, the sacrifice for the sake of others turns into a mere perpetuation of suffering and fails its purpose.¹⁰² In an early aphorism Celan uses a similar inversion, when he depicts a Christianity, which has turned the crucifixion into its ultimate purpose and in which Christ is murdered only to prove the thesis that humanity is beyond salvation: "Der Tag des Gerichts war gekommen, und um die größte der Schandtaten zu suchen, wurde das Kreuz an Christus genagelt" (GW3 163). This Christ is not crucified – he is crossed out, as he has become an object rather than the actor.

In Mandelstam's poem, the loss of individuality in a world that has lost sensibility for tragedies is experienced as a lack of tragedy as artwork. Tragedy as artwork that gives highest expression to the individual becomes senseless, once tragedy is universalized and the individual is obliterated. No tragedy is performed on stage in this theater, and the public surrounds an empty stage. Since the tragedians in the present world have become common workers – "Aeschylus the loader, Sophocles the lumberman" – their tragedies are exiled from the stage. The tragedians' place is among the public gathered in this theater of time, which provides a stage for a community of workers-heroes. The poem speaking about this theater of time addresses humanity in the entirety of its history up to the present moment. The audience in Mandelstam's "theater of growing times" is not so much the spectatorship as the collective actor – the humanity

– who lift their gaze from the stage and look at each other. At this moment, the silence of the theater is transformed into a mutual greeting: "Он эхо и привет, он вежа, нет – лемех [It {the theater} is echo and salutation, it is a guidepost – no, a plowshare.]" The poet's task here exceeds the artistic goal of finding a second existence for a stone by making it work as an element of an arch in a cathedral, which Mandelstam associates with both poetry and existence.¹⁰³ The poet in the *Voronezh Notebooks* speaks as a co-worker in the community that arises as a meta-individual entity. The historical moment of Mandelstam's poem, at which this community becomes self-conscious, defies the "reality" of the Stalinist "communism" and of the enforced labor. The shape of the bagel and its hole, used as a metaphor in the "Fourth Prose," returns in the shape of the theater surrounding the empty stage. The poet as handworker is here a mason of air building "the rock-air theater of growing time."

This "air masonry" standing for poetry is as illegitimate as the theft of air in the "Fourth Prose." Mandelstam's image of the community building this theater of time calls to mind the story of the tower of Babel, only this tower grows not merely in height but also in time. This striking image of communal work on time and, thus, on history of humanity suggests a certain affinity to the messianic thought of Nikolai Fyodorov. Fyodorov's religious and political views had an immense impact upon Russia's intellectual life in the early decades of the twentieth century and were of particular importance for Symbolist poets. Among other authors, in whose work Fyodorov's messianism left many traces, was Andrei Bely, with whom Mandelstam had a long and close if ambivalent relationship. There is one essential feature that distinguishes Fyodorov's thought within the sphere of Russian religious philosophy of that time: he expected

¹⁰³ Mandelstam compares poetry to a cathedral and speaks of the "second existence" of the stone in his "Morning of Acmeism," a poetological essay which will be discussed further in my study.

the resurrection of the dead¹⁰⁴ to happen in a very near future and in a perfectly earthly and historical fashion.¹⁰⁵ What Mandelstam's poem shares with Fyodorov's thought is the obliteration of death. The community here consists of those who are "born, perilous and deathless" (cf. above) and, furthermore, the community of those who give shape to history ("growing time"). The airy work of poetry grows in this poem to the – utopian – attempt to preserve in its texture the breath of the living people against death. This utopian hope that poetry may survive the death of an individual brings Mandelstam close to Celan, who speaks of a similar utopia in his *Meridian*: "das Gedicht wäre damit der Ort, wo alle Tropen und Metaphern ad absurdum geführt werden wollen. Toposforschung? Gewiß! Aber im Lichte des zu Erforschenden: im Lichte der U-topie" (MTA 10).

¹⁰⁴ As most of Russian religious philosophers, Fyodorov believed in apokatastasis, i.e. the notion that the second coming will redeem all souls without any exceptions.

¹⁰⁵ A student of Fyodorov's, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, in response to the problem posed by his teacher's thought, started to work on designs for spaceships, since he trusted that colonizing the space would solve the problem of overpopulation caused by the resurrection. Peculiarly, such anti-natural Soviet projects as warming up Siberia by reverting the flow of Gulfstream were perhaps also influenced by Fyodorov's emphasis on the mergence of divine spiritual community and human means. Cf. Lossky 75-80; Fyodorov 53 – 441; Edie, Scanlan and Zeldin 16 – 54.

2. Aporrhoea

There is a further context apart from the Jewish references, to which Celan is responding in "Unter die Haut meiner Hände genäht." "Die wahnwitzig-offene Pore" alludes to Plato's dialogue on love and rhetoric and to Empedocles' cosmology, to which Plato, in his turn, refers.¹⁰⁶ In light of this reference, "Unter die Haut genäht" must be read a love poem, and the addressee, "Du" to whom the poet speaks, must stand for the beloved.

In his second speech in Plato's "Phaedrus" (251b), Socrates speaks about the opening of the soul in love. The pores, which have stayed shut in the absence of beauty, open up once love, *eros*, touches the soul. The sight of the beloved one unlocks the orifices from which the soul's wings grow. Through these pores, the fluids of inspiration flow into the soul. Inspiration, common to poetry, prophecy (*manteía*), thought, and love alike, is rapture to madness (*mania*) (244a-245a). The emanation from the lover to the beloved is facilitated by eyesight, which binds the two, who are irredeemably separated but rejoined by this weak bind.¹⁰⁷ This conception of love in Plato's dialogue relies on Empedocles' notion of *aporrhoea*, effluvia, weak emanations. The Empedoclean dualistic cosmos is constituted by two opposing forces, love (*philia*) and strife (*neĩkos*). In this cosmos, after primordial chaos is divided into separate entities, the agonal principal of *neĩkos* still persists as a remainder of the initial separating force while the binding

¹⁰⁶ Celan owned and read both "Phaedrus" and Jean Bollack's translation and introduction to Empedocles, as well as Yves Battistini's collection of Heraclites, Parmenides and Empedocles. Celan marked passages related to the Empedoclean notion of emanation and its place in his cosmology. Cf. BPh 10-11; 22-24. His notes show that he was particularly interested in the notion of "poros" and the etymologically related "porosity" (cf. MTA 103, 104; MKR 23, 108).

¹⁰⁷ This notion of emanation reappears later in Neoplatonism. In the fifth tractate of the third Ennead, "On love," Plotinus points out that Eros is born from Penia, Poverty, and Poros, Possession, and re-establishes vision as the medium of love: "there is a strenuous activity of contemplation in the Soul; there is an emanation towards it from the object contemplated; and Eros is born, the Love which is an eye filled with its vision, a seeing that bears its image with it; Eros taking its name, probably, from the fact that its essential being is due to this horasis, this seeing" (Plotinus, The Six Enneads, trans. Stephen McKenna and B.S. Page, Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1975).

principle of *philia* still communicates what has been separated. The medium of *philia* is vision. *Apporrhoea* stream out through the pores in the eye and arouse the corresponding stream in the beloved object. This persistent weak force of *philia* makes Empedoclean cosmology in the same stroke more drastically divided and less desperately – and also less disparately – chaotic than that of Anaxagoras, according to Nietzsche.¹⁰⁸ For this reason, Plato feels inclined to call Empedocles "a gentle muse" in the "Sophist." For this same reason, too, Aristotle calls Empedocles the inventor of all rhetoric,¹⁰⁹ according to which language is nothing but *philia*, the binding stream of communication. Plato's concept of eros, however, redefines Empedocles' *aporrhoea* in at least one important aspect: Plato conceives of eros as the means for elevating the soul into heaven and thus for a transcendence from the earthly into the divine regions, whereas Empedocles merely maintains that a remainder of initial unity which is irrevocable still persists in all cosmos in the form of *aporrhoea*.

From this point of view, the seemingly disparate structure of "Phaedrus" follows a perfectly coherent pattern. Plato starts with a condemnation of "bad" rhetoric in the first section, "The soulless speeches," proceeds to "The speech on the soul," and concludes with "The soul of speeches." Rhetoric is "bad" when it lacks soul, i.e. love of what is being said, or better yet – love of language as such; thus the middle part discusses the nature of love, in order to teach Phaedrus, who is passionate about – yet so far inexperienced in – rhetoric; the concluding part deals with "true" rhetoric, i.e. speeches made for and with love. What holds together such unrelated, as it seems, topics as rhetoric and love, is love itself – love of language and language as love (and precisely this is the topic of Derrida's "La pharmacie de Platon"). The dialogue

¹⁰⁸ Nietzsche discusses this point in fragments dedicated to Greek philosophy (Nachlaß Winter 1872-73, KSA7 552-53). Cf., i.e.: "Wie wirkt Entferntes auf einander, Sonne auf Erde? Wäre alles noch im Wirbel, wäre das unmöglich. ἀπόρροαί. Also zwei bewegende Kräfte mindestens: die den Dingen inhärenten müssen."

¹⁰⁹ A lost work, in which Aristotle addresses Empedocles as "father of rhetoric," is quoted by Diogenes Laertes 7.57.

should not be understood as a condemnation of written language (graphie) and praise of spoken word (logos), as it, admittedly, can appear from reading the first part, "The soulless speeches." The fact that Plato *writes down* Socrates' speeches already contradicts such a reading. As Derrida points out, *pharmakon* is both gift and aphrodisiac, its double function is to bring language to death in written characters and to bring it back to life in inspired speeches. Books serve as receptacles for memory storage, as if for dead "bodies" of thoughts. A true rhetorician knows how to revive memory by blowing the breath of animate speech into symbols in order for the language to reveal its "soul" in his speech – and thus the title of the last part, "The soul of speeches."

Rhetoric, however, may not be reduced to either of these two components, the dead repository of writing, or the inspired love of a speaker. Taken separately, writing and inspiration are just two alternative modes of forgetting, death the former, madness (mania) the latter. In the course of the dialogue, Socrates tells two myths in regard to these two reductions of language: the myth of Theuth, who invented the alphabet and caused forgetfulness in students, since from then on they relied on the external memory of letters; and the myth of cicadas, who were humans once but died after the Muses arrived and taught them how to sing, so that in their joy they sang without pause and died in their forgetfulness, yet were reincarnated as singing insects who neither drink nor eat. In writing, language is reduced to a mere repetition of letters, it becomes mechanically reproducible, and, if a student of letters memorizes a sequence of words, he engages not so much in thinking as in the automatism of reiteration in which thought remains an inanimate, breathless body. In the ecstasy of singing, on the contrary, language is reduced to mere sound that exhausts the body and, as pure love and inspiration, brings about amnesia and death.

Celan knew "Phaedrus" well and owned a copy of it. He marked the passage telling the myth of cicadas with the marginal note, "die Zikaden" (BPh 23); on the bottom of the same page he wrote: "Gesprochen also muß werden!" (ibid).¹¹⁰ In writing, language fades down to a spirit, an apparition; in singing, it is sublimated to a pathos, an emotion. Speaking, neither singing nor writing, is the middle which must separate and mediate these two poles. Celan, unlike Plato, does not, however, equate speaking with the act of oral presentation only. The language that the poem speaks is neither the immediate truth of logos nor the pure music of graphe. Rather than reviving dead letters in a flight of inspiration, as is the case in "Phaedrus," speaking for Celan is the only possible means of not lapsing into either the mania of singing cicadas or the lethal forgetting of Theut's silent letters. As the poet speaks, he kneads the air between the written letters of the name sewn into his hands and the "manically-open pore," his vision as horasis, eros. The poet's speaking – kneading of air – keeps apart the name of the beloved, written down under the skin of his hands, and her image, which he knows by vision and touch. Speaking is un-forgetting as opposed to the forgetfulness in the rapture of singing on the one hand and in the fading of memory in writing on the other. If now the only addressee of the poem is language, the wholeness of the poetic tradition must be suspended in the poet's speaking. The poem thus neither merely regenerates a certain poetic tradition, nor completely rejects its existence, but rather opens its own time – its singular date – in differentiation from it. First this "here an now" of the poem, the cut in tradition, allows for the necessary quotation marks, between which the past is suspended.

¹¹⁰ Celan read "Phaedrus" in Greek while consulting a German translation by L.Georgii in 1953 (cf. BPh 22). As long as the correspondence with Ingeborg Bachmann remains unpublished, my conjecture cannot be proven, but perhaps the title of her radio play "Die Zikaden" (1954) was inspired by the same source and mediated by Celan.

Quotation, as it is used by Celan, is neither a reference to a supplementary context outside the text nor a means of inscription into a certain poetic tradition. Rather, quotation is the medium of the encounter with language. Quotation as counter-word, *Gegenwort*, encounters the meaning of an utterance and cuts its consistency open. Quotation – which is not an independent utterance but rather a document of the encounter – opens the text to itself and to the other, and at the same time *as* an other to itself and *as* an other to the other: as a third between the two parties in the encounter and thus also as the second, the moment of their encounter. Quotation is not only the utterance which testifies to the poetic encounter, but also its date. This encounter of language with itself in quotation is the singular moment which signs and assigns the poem with its time:

Noch im Hier und Jetzt des Gedichts – das Gedicht selbst hat ja immer nur diese eine, einmalige, punktuelle Gegenwart –, noch in dieser Unmittelbarkeit und Nähe läßt es ihm, dem Anderen, Eigenste mitsprechen: dessen Zeit. (MTA 9-10)

The date of the poem is not its property. The date is the instant of encounter at the intersection of two paths, two movements. The poem is the trace left by the movement away from itself and towards the other. Only the alienation from itself that leads towards the other leads the poem to the encounter with itself. Quotation as the date of encounter cannot thus be understood as just a dialogue with the other. It is an intersection of a voice and a counter-voice, a movement away from oneself and towards the other. Such a path leads through the encounter in quotation to the most foreign encounter – the encounter with one's own self, in which one's voice is acquired as estranged: "Ich bin... mir selbst begegnet" (MTA 11).

Quotation as the second of the poetic encounter splits the poem from itself and thus produces its duration, its time. In this splitting the poet addresses himself through the other and as the other. At this moment, at this second, this "date," the poem steps aside from the linear

succession of speaking, and the speaker is separated from his own voice. At this moment, the separation of the voice from itself in the encounter of the poet with himself holds together language as a whole. The punctual present of the poem is established in this repetition. A date can only be ascribed in differentiation from another date, from the date of an other, and likewise the singularity of poetic voice is acquired in approximation to and in distance from the other's voice. The specificity of Celan's understanding of the poetic encounter lies in the assertion that the poet can encounter himself as the other. The Meridian journey leads through encounters with various authors and literary figures but culminates in the encounter of the author with himself.

When Celan says that the poem "bleibt seiner Daten eingedenk" (cf. MTA 8), his concept of memory differs significantly from Plato's model of forgetting in writing and remembering in spoken dialogue. The poem, assigned with the date of an encounter, remains attentive to and mindful of the language which arises in this encounter. Rather than reviving a memory, the poet un-forgets the singularity of the other, while the other remains inscribed as quotation in the body of the poem. Quotation is a pore which allows the passage of the other into the text, without, however, absorbing the other's difference. Quotation, thus, does not result in the appropriation of the other's voice; precisely for this reason, Celan insists that quotations are "Fremdkörper" rather than "Fremde Körper" (MTA 156). Quotation, along with the date of the encounter, in which the time of the poet and the time of the other intersect, is the duration of the other's voice and, in this duration, the evacuation of the other into the un-forgettable.

Celan's concept of quotation was essentially influenced by Mandelstam, especially by his prose text, "On the Conversation Partner."¹¹¹ Mandelstam begins his essay with a description of a blind madman who speaks to himself without paying attention to his surroundings. Although the

¹¹¹ OM2, 233-265

poet might appear to be this madman, his language is not addressed to himself. The addressee of the poet is the conversation partner who is neither a personal acquaintance nor a friend but a nameless reader, indefinitely distant in space and time. In the critical moment, a seafarer throws a bottle with a message into the sea water; the conversation partner is the one who finds the bottle and reads the message (OM2 234-235). Poetry is a critical enterprise. If the conversation partner reads the message, the critical moment witnessed by the poet is saved over time. If the bottle with the message is never received, the poet is mad and speaks to no one. The uncertainty whether the message will ever be received renders poetic language undetermined – open to any reader and, at the same time, encapsulated in the madness of isolation. According to Plato's "Phaedrus," memory unavoidably fades in written form, thus rendering all writing fatal. Speaking, on the contrary, can revive the dead memory, at least for the duration of speech. The critical moment is thus the moment of speaking. The good rhetorician can revive memory, where the bad rhetorician fails. In Mandelstam's understanding, however, all speaking – and for him, writing is just a mode of speaking – is ambiguous: as lethal as vivifying, forgetful just as memorializing. The critical moment – the poet's speech in the face of his mortality – can be captured by the conversation partner, another poet, only in the indecision between life and death. Furthermore, his own speech – as acknowledgment of having received a message – is equally undetermined, addressed to an uncertain recipient. The only certainty the poet has is speech as such, speech as a vessel, a bottle, which potentially can be redeemed.

Quotation provides the poet with such a vessel. In the essay, "Conversation about Dante," with which Celan was familiar, Mandelstam defines his concept of quotation through a reference to the Platonic myth of cicadas narrated in "Phaedrus": "Quotation is not an excerpt [*'выписка,'* from *'писать,'* 'to write']. Quotation is a cicada. Incessancy is proper to it. It clings to the air and

does not let go" (OM2 368).¹¹² Mandelstam refers in particular to the end of the fourth canto of the *Inferno*. Here Dante utters the names of poets and thinkers with whom he feels affiliated (the pre-Socratics, as well as Plato and Socrates are present, among others) striking the keys of what Mandelstam calls Dante's "referential/recollecting [*упоминательная*] keyboard." According to Mandelstam, quotation is, for Dante, a means, even a technique, of communication with the written word. This technique is not reducible to the mere storage of letters, which Mandelstam terms "erudition" (*ibid*). Unlike the cicadas in Plato's "Phaedrus," which stand for pure love in the amnesia of manic inspiration, quotation-as-cicada signifies for Mandelstam, beyond the pure sound and breath of poetry, the technicality of remembrance. It is not enough to remember the past – the past must be brought to life again in the medium of poetic speech. The separation between the present and the past perseveres, yet precisely this same separation is the necessary condition for the continuation of all poetic language. Quotation thus relies neither solely on the *philia* of inspiration, nor only on the mechanical memory of writing, it unavoidably implies also the *neĩkos* of separation. Clasp thin air, the cicada holds together speech and the memory of

¹¹² Aside from the Platonic myth of the cicadas and Mandelstam's allusion to it in the "Conversation about Dante," Celan might have been familiar with the chapter dedicated to cicadas in *Souvenirs entomologiques* by Jean-Henri Fabre (1897). Celan owned a book of selected articles from Fabre's *Souvenirs entomologiques* in German translation, *Das offenbare Geheimnis*, but he might have known other chapters of this extensive work as well. In chapter 16 of the fifth volume Fabre writes:

Si l'on m'affirmait que les Cigales, mettent en branle leur bruyant appareil sans nul souci du son produit, pour le seul plaisir de se sentir vivre, de même que nous nous frottons les mains en un moment de satisfaction, je n'en serais pas autrement scandalisé. Qu'il y ait en outre, dans leur concert, un but secondaire où le sexe muet est intéressé, c'est, fort possible, fort naturel, sans être encore démontré.

Neither the anthromorphisation of insects nor an animalization of the human is at stake in Fabre's account; rather, he points to the ecstatic character of the mere fact of being in the world. The sheer joy of existence is free from procreative instinct and manifests itself in a simple and aimless gesture common to man and animal. Rubbing one's hands is comparable to cicadas' singing insofar as both are not oriented towards any goal other than affirming being alive, which consists in being able to feel. Such joy in the ability to feel is ecstasy, a step beyond oneself and beyond the world. Whereas cicadas cease their hearing organs in order not to be deafened by their own singing, people rub their hands, idly refraining from work, before getting their hands dirty. Joyful singing, the mania of poetry, is such a disengagement of hands. Yet in this disengagement, in the suspension of work – and, to return to Derrida's objection to Heidegger's onehandedness, also in the suspension of love between sexes – hands as specifically human sensory organ manifest themselves in the "handwork" of poetry, in the mad weaving and kneading of air.

the dead. In order to revivify language, the poet must act as a cicada, which spends the greater part of its life in the underworld, feeding and keeping silent, before it ascends to the surface for a few days to fill the air with incessant song without eating or drinking. The poet's task consists in holding together and still keeping separate two worlds, the mortality of speaking and the underworld of writing.

Mandelstam equates Dante's practice of quotation with the matter-bursting force of the Democritian cosmos (OM2 368-69). In quotation, poetry is revived, although but for an instant. What is transmitted in tradition, a memory, occurs at a single moment in time and immediately returns to the oblivion of dead writing. The joyful vision of the beloved disappears as soon as the poet recognizes that this memory is only possible due to a larger forgetting: "Io non posso ritrar di tutti a pieno,/ però che sì mi caccia il lungo tema,/ che molte volte al fatto il dir vien meno [I cannot all of them portray in full,/ Because so drives me onward the long theme,/ That many times the word comes short of fact.]"¹¹³ Quotation pierces through the fabric of dead writing with the same splitting force as *neĩkos* and *philia*, which cut and bind the entirety of the cosmos. In the concluding lines of the fourth canto, the vision of the shades disappears, leaving Dante and Virgil alone in an impenetrable darkness, through which they descend to the second, even darker circle inhabited by souls who were damned for carnal intemperance. *Philia* does not reach into this circle reigned by the constraints of dead matter. No shades of the past can appear here. For Mandelstam, quotation is the speaking of the poet to the beloved shadows from the past, the preservation of their memory, and the means of addressing a poetic tradition. In this understanding, quotation is equal to *aporrhoea* in the Empedoclean sense. It is a weak bond with

¹¹³ Canto IV, 145-147, English translation by H. W. Longfellow.

the past of which the present is not a derivative continuation, yet with which it is affiliated by memory.

It is not quite the same for Celan. When Celan speaks of the "wahnwitzig-offene Pore" in "Unter die Haut," the pore is not merely – and not necessarily – a quotation from Plato; it is a definition of quotation as such. Quotation is the poem's pore, open and exposed to the uncertainty of reading and understanding in the same manner as Mandelstam's bottle with a letter inside is open and exposed to the arbitrariness of the open sea. But whereas Mandelstam insists on the incessancy of quotation and the necessity of, on the one hand, reading and remembering the past and, on the other hand, addressing a future reader, Celan questions both premises. The poet not only faces the danger of appearing mad, as Mandelstam says in the beginning of "On the Conversation Partner," the poet is also indecisively suspended between madness and openness. Rather than a preservation of the past, quotation as *Gegenwort* suspends the distinction between memory and forgetting. Although both Mandelstam and Celan emphasize the connection between memory and poetry and despite Celan finding in Mandelstam his conversation partner, their views do not quite converge. Celan's translation of Mandelstam's "Я слово позабыл [I forgot the word]," a poem about forgetting and remembering from the book *Tristia*, elucidates this:

Я слово позабыл, что я хотел сказать.
 Слепая ласточка в чертог теней вернется,
 На крыльях срезанных, с прозрачными играть.
 В беспмятстве ночная песнь поется.

Не слышно птиц. Бессмертник не цветет.
 Прозрачны гривы табуна ночного.
 В сухой реке пустой челнок плывет.
 Среди кузнечиков беспмятствует слово.

И медленно растет, как бы шатер иль храм,

То вдруг прикинется безумной Антигоной,
 То мертвой ласточкой бросается к ногам,
 С стигийской нежностью и веткою зеленой.

О, если бы вернуть и зрячих пальцев стыд,
 И выпуклую радость узнавания.
 Я так боюсь рыданья аонид,
 Тумана, звона и зиянья!

А смертным власть дана любить и узнавать,
 Для них и звук в персты прольется,
 Но я забыл, что я хочу сказать, -
 И мысль бесплотная в чертог теней вернется.

Все не о том прозрачная твердит,
 Все ласточка, подружка, Антигона...
 И на губах, как черный лед, горит
 Стигийского воспоминанье звона (OM1 81-82).

Das Wort bleibt ungesagt, ich finds nicht wieder.
 Die blinde Schwalbe flog ins Schattenheim,
 zum Spiel, das sie dort spielen. (Zersägt war ihr Gefieder.)
 Tief in der Ohnmacht, nächtlich, singt ein Reim.

Die Vögel - stumm. Und keine Immortelle.
 Glashelle Mähnen - das Gestüt der Nacht.
 Ein Kahn treibt, leer, es trägt ihn keine Welle.
 Das Wort: umschwärmt von Grillen, unerwacht.

Und wächst, wächst wie es Tempeln, Zelten eigen,
 steht, jäh umnachtet, wie Antigone,
 stürzt, stygisch-zärtlich und mit grünem Zweige,
 als blinde Schwalbe stürzt es nieder, jäh.

Beschämung all der Finger, die da sehen,
 o die Erkenntnis einst, so freudenprall.
 O Aoniden, ihr - ich muß vor Angst vergehen,
 vor Nebeln, Abgrund, Glockenton und Schall.

Wer sterblich ist, kann lieben und erkennen,
 des Finger fühlt: ein Laut, der mich durchquert ...
 Doch ich - mein Wort, ich weiß es nicht zu nennen,
 ein Schemen war es - es ist heimgekehrt.

Die Körperlose, immer. Stund um Stunde,
 Antigone, die Schwalbe, überall ...
 Wie schwarzes Eis, so glüht auf meinem Munde
 Erinnerung an Stygisches, an Hall (GW5 114).

Celan translates the first line – "I forgot the word which I wanted to say" – quite sovereignly, as "Das Wort bleibt ungesagt, ich finds nicht wieder" (GW5 115). For "беспмятство [forgetfulness]" in the fourth line Celan chooses "Ohnmacht"; for the same word in the eighth line, "unerwacht"; for "Но я забыл, что я хочу сказать [But I forget what I want to say]" in the nineteenth line, "Doch ich – mein Wort, ich weiß es nicht zu nennen". The only word contrary to "forgetfulness," "воспоминаяе [memory, recollection]" in the last line, however, Celan translates "literally" – "Erinnerung." Celan's translation brings the fixed opposition "forgetfulness / memory" out of balance. We do not know which word is forgotten in Mandelstam's poem; the word which is "forgotten" in Celan's translation, is "forgetting." Translation cuts deeper into the wound of the mournful forgetting and thus turns this elegiac tale of loss into an ode to the unforgettable. The un-forgotten word is asleep: "Das Wort: umschwärmt von Grillen, unerwacht." "Grillen," grasshoppers, a northern "replica" of cicadas, are keepers of its dream. Celan specifies: the word remains not merely oblivious among the grasshoppers (as in the original) but "umschwärmt" by them. While the word sleeps, the grasshoppers, the self-forgotten singers, stay sleepless in its wake. Their vigil is the un-forgetting of the word. Celan's translation re-establishes the forgotten word, though not by "remembrance," reconstruction, or replacement. On the contrary, Celan's translation, while transferring the poem from Russian to German, evacuates the word by situating it in a region before the distinction between memory and forgetting. In this region, underlying the conscious repository of language, language is not yet articulate, not quite human, a language of silent birds and insects. In

Mandelstam's poem, the poet fears that he is unable to please the Muses in his forgetfulness and lack of inspiration. His word "grows" like a temple – the beginning of a new cult or a promise for a new word of belief – but returns to oblivion behind the Lethe. Celan transfers the forgotten word from *lethe*, oblivion, into *a-letheia*, the un-forgetting of the pre-conscious. This urge to suspend the word in its movement of becoming is already present in the original, but Celan shifts the emphasis bringing the whole poem over to "this side" of Lethe. In this inversion of memory in unforgetting, the dichotomy of *philia* / *neikos* is suspended, as the separating stream, the Lethe, remains separated from this separation. In the un-dialectical pair forgetting / unforgetting, *neikos* divides itself from itself; the necessary outcome of this inversion is, though, that *philia* no longer makes up for initial separation, remaining bound only to itself. Mandelstam speaks of the failed journey and the return of his thought into oblivion: "Но я забыл, что я хочу сказать, – / И мысль бесплотная в чертог теней вернется [But I forget what I want to say, / And the excarnate thought returns to the seat of ghosts]." The thought fails to become flesh and shape and thus remains a shadow, a ghost. While the dichotomy of thought / word parallels the dichotomy of soul / body, the poet's remembering would equal, or repeat, the act of creation. His word, half-articulated, is inhibited in this coming into existence, fails and, eventually, returns to non-existence. Celan's version suspends the return of the word into non-being: "Doch ich – mein Wort, ich weiß es nicht zu nennen,/ ein Schemen war es – es ist heimgekehrt." The double dash in this sentence slightly changes the syntax, so that the word, if only a nameless shadow, remains un-forgotten, bracketed out from forgetting. The word is seized and freed in its becoming. As the ransom, what returns "home" behind the Lethe, is "I": "Doch ich - ...- es ist heimgekehrt." In the parenthesis, in which the becoming word is captured, "I" becomes "it."

The passage from "I" to "it" opens a pore in the rigid dichotomy of memory and forgetting. The poet, standing at the end of tradition as the last speaker,¹¹⁴ addresses his speech to the wholeness of tradition and frees himself from it in this speaking. But in freeing himself from the tradition, he forfeits his generative bind to it. He exchanges the determinacy of his memory for the unraveling, unveiling, backward movement towards the indeterminate. For Celan, this speaking is the poet's counter-word to the poetic tradition, at the end of which he finds himself in solitude. In Heidegger's "Was ist das – die Philosophie?" one finds a formulation which encapsulates this endeavor: "Überliefern, délivrer, ist ein Befreien, nämlich in die Freiheit des Gespräches mit dem Gewesenen" (Heidegger 1956, 8). In this "Gespräch," tradition is destroyed ("die Destruktion" is the term Heidegger uses in the same text) yet speaking itself is the indestructible rest that remains – the *philia* that generates tradition. Celan's formula of "die wahnwitzig-offene Pore" in "Unter die Haut," however, does not necessarily suggest *philia*. The pore is mad and open, and the air, the poet's nourishment, is soured by the light coming out of it. These *aporrhoea*, the effluvia filling the poet's breath, are evaporating over the passage of the word between the poet's hands, the left and the right. The pore is ambiguous – open-mad, it mediates between the two opposite poles, *philia* and *neĩkos*. Air, the medium of inspiration, is nourishment for a cicada, a singing insect never needing other food. But for a poet, who feeds on air as on bread, the over-oxygenated air, electrified with inspiration, brings about acedia and oversaturation. *Apporrhoea*, the poet's speaking in "Unter die Haut," is a membrane sluicing the flow of *poros*, power, to *penia*, lack.

¹¹⁴ In this sense Maurice Blanchot calls Celan "the last one to speak," "Le dernier à parler," referring to a line from Celan's poem "Sprich auch Du."

As *philia* curdles to *neĩkos*, the joyful cicada – the poet's inspiration – turns into an aggressive raptor. In a late poem, "Gold" (April 12, 1969), written about five years after "Unter die Haut" and published in the posthumous volume *Zeitgehöft*, a kind of singing insects appear in Celan: "der Chor/ der Platanenstrünke/ buckelt sich ein zum Gebet/ gegens Gebet"; "es werden die Kampfgrillen kommen,/ aus meinem Bart" (GW3 71). "Platanen," sycamores – a kind of trees often inhabited by cicadas – suggest, through the phonetic resemblance, Plato, while "der Chor der Platanenstrünke," the inebriated choir of cicadas from the trees which accompanies Socrates and Phaedrus' conversation, bends here down to a prayer against prayer.¹¹⁵ The poetic singing turned against itself is no longer joyful. Unlike the self-forgetting Platonic cicadas, whose song is joyful and interminable, "die Kampfgrillen" turn upon their own speech and upon themselves. In Celan's poetic vocabulary, "die Kampfgrillen," the fighting crickets attacking their own kind, reverse the Platonic myth. Their choir is no longer the ecstatic singing of the poet, the *philia* sublimated to the mania of pure vocalization, but rather the overturning of the word into its antonym, *philia* into *neĩkos*. As the joyful celebration of singing cicadas turns into the death-bringing aggression of "Kampfgrillen," poetic language, instead of engendering tradition, turns upon itself with a destructive force. The air, the pneuma on which poetry feeds, has become chokingly stale here.

Calling poetry his "pneumatic Judaism" and classifying all poets as Jews, Celan seeks to define his relation to tradition. Any tradition established by blood heritage rather than by language is abandoned; however, the pneuma as the medium of inspiration binds the poet to

¹¹⁵ The constellation of the words "Gebet" and "einbuckeln" is probably an allusion to Walter Benjamin. This reference cannot be discussed here. For an exhaustive analysis of prayer as attentiveness in Celan's poetry – a thought tracing back to Benjamin, Malebranche, and Descartes – see Werner Hamacher, "Bogengebete," Liechtensteiner Exkurse III, *Aufmerksamkeit*, Eggingen: Edition Isele, 1998. For a discussion of the role another insect, the praying mantis, plays in Celan's poetry, see Thomas Schestag, *Mantisrelikte*, Basel / Weil am Rhein / Wien: Urs Engeler, 1998.

tradition in the same manner as the Platonic *philia*. In the preliminary versions of "Benedicta" (1961), Celan writes: "ge-/ trunken hast du,/ was von den Vätern mir kam/ und von jenseits der Väter:/ -- Sperma", while in the final version, he replaces the last word with " -- Pneuma" (NTA 73).¹¹⁶ Conjugating the Platonic notion of eros, Aristotle makes the assumption that sperm is generated in the brain and thus that love, for men, is of pneumatic origin. He explains further that hair, like a plant, grows in wet spots and thus that the beard grows, because, during the sexual intercourse, sperm flows down from the brain to the bottom part of the face.¹¹⁷ "Du," the lover in "Benedicta," drinks pneuma and not sperm, because pneuma, the air, supersedes blood lineage. Celan's poem, "Benedicta," extends between languages, speaking at least three languages: Yiddish, German and Greek. The pneumatic bond between languages replaces the bond of human language to the divine logos. Language is cut away from God, while the word "God" itself stays open. God is mentioned only in the epigraph, "got" in Yiddish, while the body of the poem repeatedly names a "Ge-", a totalizing prefix in German to which "Du" builds a counterweight. "Ge-", "g-", the beginning letter of "God" in German as well as in Yiddish, is blown away from "Augen" by the breath of the lover and leaves behind the blind "Auen." The medium of love in this poem is air: breath and vision. But this breath and this vision can be spoiled and lost. In "Gold," erotic pneuma turns into poison. The words emerge as "Kampfgrillen" from the poet's beard, while love putrefies to violence. The word "Kampfgrillen" is its own double, which attacks itself as it signifies both the fighting cicadas and the aggressive moods. The same word that enters the poet's ear as a love song of cicadas comes out of his mouth poisoned by the madness of repetition, which cancels out the distance between the poet's

¹¹⁶ Barbara Wiedemann points out that Celan might be referring to Ernst Bloch's essay on Philo discussing the notion of pneuma as "logos spermatikos" (KA 692).

¹¹⁷ [Aristot.] *Problemata* 10.24; 10.53.

own speech and what he cites, between the speaking of the poem and the totality of the inherited language.

The lines "es werden die Kampfgrillen kommen,/ aus meinem Bart" allude to an earlier poem written around the same time as "Benedicta," namely, "Tübingen, Jänner" (1961), where Celan speaks of "[das] Lichtbart der/ Patriarchen." "Tübingen, Jänner" describes a poetry that has become untimely in the world, as the prophetic language has collapsed. Along with his language, the seer has lost his powers of divination. His eyes, "zur Blindheit überredete Augen" (GW1 226), became "Auen," the moist banks of the river of language. This poetry is late, past meaning, past repair, indiscernible, babble ("lallen"). This, as it were, post-lapsarian language is altogether different from the pre-circumcised and pre-prophetic language of Moses who answers God with his "uncircumcised lips" (Ex. 6:12), doubting whether he can be a prophet. Celan describes here a belated language incapable of all four Platonic modes of inspiration: love, divination, purification, and poetic inspiration. Only a remnant of tradition still persists as a reflection of the poetic word. This belated poetry, the youngest, illegitimate child of past eloquence – and according to Plato, the alphabet of Theuth, *writing as such*, is a bastard son of logos – decorates itself with the "Lichtbart der Patriarchen" to veil the meaninglessness of the word deprived of inspiration. Words that come from the beard of darkened light in Celan's "Gold" are no longer the singing cicadas but rather the fighting insects.

The figure of the poet as a patriarch who has lost his powers attests to Celan's encounter with both Hölderlin and Mandelstam – more precisely, with the poems "Am Quell der Donau" and "Кто знает? Может быть, не хватит мне свечи" ["Who knows, maybe my candle will prove to be too short"] respectively. In "Am Quell der Donau," Hölderlin speaks of the patriarchs and prophets of Asia who "zuerst es verstanden,/ Allein zu reden/ Zu Gott" (HG 323). In

Hölderlin's poem, language first becomes possible by a separation from God. In order to speak, the prophets and patriarchs must learn to be alone – separated from God and alone in speaking. Language, the speaking alone ("allein reden"), compensates for a lost unity. The prophets and patriarchs learn to *read* the world, to recognize "[die] Zeichen der Welt." This joyful ability to communicate, however, is paid for with the pain of separation. We, who know nature, do not have the memory of being in and with God and are oblivious to this state. The air we breathe connects us with the prophets and patriarchs, yet it is incomprehensible to us; for, air is not a "sign of the world" that we could read. The divine breath is clouded to us: "Oftmals, wenn einen dann die heilige Wolk umschwebt,/ Da staunen wir und wissens nicht zu deuten," but the patriarchs and prophets are not entirely lost to our memory: "Ihr aber würtzt mit Nektar uns den Othem." Just as in Plato's conception of good rhetoric, which revives written words in speech with the *philia* of inspiration, the double-weaving of forgetting and memory constitutes a tradition which binds the present to the past: "umgebet mich leicht,/ Damit ich bleiben möge, denn noch ist manches zu singen,/ Jetzt aber endiget, seligweinend,/ Wie eine Sage der Liebe,/ Mir der Gesang, und so auch ist er/ Mir, mit Erröten, Erblassen,/ Von Anfang her gegangen. Doch Alles geht so." Love, *philia*, connects the poet with the past, yet only through mortality and death. The poem can only stay in the world because the poem comes to an end. Every beginning of the poem, *des Gesangs*, takes leave from the impossibility of continuing singing to infinity, the impossibility of reaching the origin of language. Poetry is "Erröten, Erblassen": *eros*, *Erröten*, of inspiration, and death, *Erblassen*, of written language. Speaking to the prophets and patriarchs, the dead ancestors, fills the poet with joy and with sorrow. Yet what remains to be clarified in Hölderlin's poem is the relation of the prophets and patriarchs to God. The Platonic flight of inspiration elevates one's soul, bringing it into a higher sphere; in Hölderlin's poem, on

the contrary, the poet shares language and spirit only with the patriarchs and prophets, who are alone in their speaking. Hölderlin's poet sharing his language with the patriarchs, unlike the Platonic cicadas, does not sing. His speaking separates him from God, while it allows him to "read" nature. Poetic inspiration attaches the poet to language, which does not allow for an immediate communication with God.¹¹⁸

In 1917, Mandelstam wrote a poem referring to the last, anachronistic patriarch of the Russian church. Almost simultaneously with the October Revolution, the Orthodox Church, in a desperate attempt to recover its declining power, appointed a patriarch for the first time since 1700, when Peter the Great replaced the patriarchal see by the synod. Tikhon, the newly appointed patriarch, saw his task in resisting the civil war which followed the revolution. He refused to support counter-revolutionaries and, although he issued a public anathema of the communists and resisted the nationalization of the Church's property, he chose not to leave the country and never gave up attempts to negotiate with the government. In the following years, he was repeatedly taken into custody and issued, under pressure, a public statement that the Church would no longer oppose the government. This affair compromised Tikhon's standing in the eyes of refugee believers and resulted in the schism – the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia was formed in 1922. In Mandelstam's poem, the poet shares the fate of this anachronistic patriarch:

Кто знает! Может быть, не хватит мне свечи –
И среди бела дня останусь я в ночи;
И, зернами дыша рассыпанного мака,
На голову мою надену митру мрака:

¹¹⁸ Hölderlin formulates this recognition more sharply in the Pindar fragment "Das Gesetz."

Как поздний патриарх в разрушенной Москве,
 Неосвященный мир неся на голове –
 Чреватый слепотой и муками раздора;
 Как Тихон, ставленник последнего собора... (ОМ1 143)

[Who knows, maybe my candle will prove to be too short,
 and I will be left benighted at midday
 breathing in dispersed poppy seeds.
 And I will put upon my head the mitre of darkness:

As a late patriarch in the destroyed Moscow,
 carrying the unblest¹¹⁹ world upon my head,
 pregnant with blindness and sufferings of strife,
 like Tikhon,¹²⁰ the one appointed / kindled¹²¹ by the last Council.]

Even though language has lost its spiritual power in the darkened ("неосвященный") world of strife, the patriarch still carries his candle-end, and the patriarch himself is such a candle. The poet is haunted by the agony of losing his inspiration – the same worry that fills Hölderlin's "Hälfte des Lebens" – by becoming irreversibly separated from poetry at all. The poet breathes in the poppy seeds, the *pharmakon* of writing, which remains an aphrodisiac as long as it is bound to tradition but which turns into an amnesiac once this connection is disrupted. Cut off from tradition, the poet becomes a Tikhon, that is, a mute one. Yet in this falling silent, the poet bears witness to the failure of *philia*. In a world which is ruled by strife – in which separation is no longer remedied by any emanation of love, however weak – the poet's silence becomes the last reverberation of the past. The poet knows that with his death, or madness, *philia* and *neĩkos* will fall back into their original dualism. The poet standing at the end of a tradition captures it in its devolution. Mandelstam's patriarch, the last representative of the Church, is – just as Lucile with her counter-word "Es lebe der König" – the actual witness to the revolution.

¹¹⁹ "Неосвященный," "unblest," is homophonous with "неосвещенный," "unlighted."

¹²⁰ "tikho" means "still, silent"

¹²¹ "Ставленник," from "ставить," "to appoint," but also "to kindle" about a candle

The fall of language in the poet's silence, however, does not necessarily have to remain unwitnessed by words. Celan's "Tübingen, Jänner" is, beyond a reading of Hölderlin and Mandelstam's poems, a memory of the collapse of inspiration into forgetfulness. Celan sees the task of the poet as saving the remainders of this fall into unforgetting. Quoting Hölderlin's "pallaksch" – a word which is either not understandable or just not recognized by the conversation partner – Celan transfers it into his poem and continues a conversation starting from this non-word which survives the end of tradition. Celan faces the aporia of speaking with a collapsed language from early on. Unlike in "Phaedrus," where remembering is equated with a love of language which revives written text in spoken word, in *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (1952) love and memory stand in a more complicated relationship. The line from which the title is taken reads: "wir lieben einander wie Mohn und Gedächtnis" ("Corona," GW1 37). Love binds together *pharmakon* and memory. Thus love here is incongruent with the Platonic concept of love as "good rhetoric" in which written text and passionate speech are dependent on one another. For Celan, the love of language must provide more than just the medium of reviving the memory contained in the written language. The Platonic speaker is addicted to the *pharmakon* and stays bound within its dialectics of love and death. For Celan, the poet's task is to step outside tradition in order to free both his own language and the past. In liberating itself from tradition, in disconnecting itself from the past, the love of language holds together the past and the present. While the Platonic rhetorician strives to revive the past in the present, the poet, according to Celan, loves language like forgetting and memory love each other. The Platonic love of language feeds on the past, thus appropriating the difference between the world of the dead and the world of the living. The *philia* between the poppy – *pharmakon*, forgetfulness in mania or death – and memory opens a pore between forgetting and remembering. The poet can

speak only when he forgets to remember. An affiliation, a dialogue with the past can only begin with an association by complete dissociation from the tradition through which the wholeness of tradition first becomes accessible. In this dialogue, the identity of language with itself is abandoned only to be restored in a difference to itself. The last two lines of "Corona" read: "Es ist Zeit, daß es Zeit wird.// Es ist Zeit." The time after tradition cannot be identical with the time of or in tradition. Yet, by asserting that time both "*ist*" and "*wird*," the poet holds together these discontinuous "times" without canceling the difference between them or coupling them in a synthesis. In this gesture, language undergoes another turn – to an indifference to the most radical difference, to a recollection of the most dispersed, to a continuation of the discontinuous by an insistence on wholeness. Such obstinate suspension of memory and forgetting in dis-separation from tradition – which is neither an attempt to overcome separation by bonds of recollection nor an eradication of dispersal by total negation – is a challenge to the binary metaphysics of opposites. Celan wrote "Corona" about the same time as a series of "Gegenlichter," prose variations on negation and negation of negation, among which one finds a Heraclitian river of becoming put to a stop by becoming itself.¹²²

In the concluding line of Celan's "Tübingen, Jänner," language as separation and thereby communication is reduced to *pallaksch*, which, standing for both "yes" and "no,"¹²³ cancels out separation and undermines any possibility of a "clean" language. No longer sweet nectar, but acidity fills the poet's speech. "Die Säure" in "Unter die Haut" is irrevocably ambiguous as the ferment and the rotting of tradition, as the life-sustaining air and, at the same time, the exhaustion of inherited language. Finally, "Give the word," another poem from *Atemwende*,

¹²² "'Alles fließt': auch dieser Gedanke, und bringt er nicht alles wieder zum Stehen?" (GW3 165).

¹²³ Whether or not Hölderlin really used this word for both negation and affirmation, as Christoph Theodor Schwab suggested in his biography, Celan employed "pallaksch" in this double sense in "Tübingen, Jänner," as he explains in a letter to Ilana Shmueli. Cf. Schmueli 2000, 45.

speaks of a final disintegration of prophetic language. The title is a reference to Shakespeare's *King Lear*. In the darkness of his mourning, King Lear asks any passer-by to "give the word." Any answer secures a passage. Like the bearded child in "Tübingen, Jänner," King Lear speaks a language lacking distinction between affirmation and negation: "To say 'ay' and 'no' to every thing that I said!--'Ay' and 'no' too was no good divinity" (*King Lear* IV, 111-113). Exposed to the totality of words and speakers, the poet loses his breath. His inspiration is exhausted, only accessible to him now as quotation of his own lost language, no longer spiritual pneuma but "Atem" in quotation marks:

GIVE THE WORD

Ins Hirn gehaun – halb? zu drei Vierteln? –,
gibst du, genächtet, die Parolen – diese:

"Tatarenpfeile".
"Kunstbrei".
"Atem".

Es kommen alle, keiner fehlt und keine.
(Sipheten und Probyllen sind dabei.)

Es kommt ein Mensch.

Weltapfelgroß die Träne neben dir,
durchrauscht, durchfahren
von Antwort,
Antwort,
Antwort.

Durcheist – von wem?

"Passiert", sagst du,
"passiert",
"passiert".

Der stille Aussatz löst sich dir vom Gaumen
und fächelt deiner Zunge Licht zu,
Licht (GW2 93).

The poem stages an encounter with a progression of speakers, where the subjunctive mood from "Tübingen, Jänner"– "käme, käme ein Mensch"– is turned into present: "Es kommt ein Mensch" (GW2 93). The "man," perhaps the poet himself, now speaks the "babbling" language of a late patriarch. The place of prophets is taken by "Sipheten und Probyllen," infected and homunculous miscreants, bastard heirs of prophets and sibyls, automatons, male and female, like those from "Leonce and Lena" mentioned in the "Meridian." These two words are products of an illegitimate cutting and binding of language: "Si-byllen" and "Pro-pheten" swap parts thus generating sick monstrosities. While in "Am Quell der Donau" the poets are "pneumatic" children of prophets and patriarchs and speak a language filled with nostalgic love, the bearded child in "Tübingen, Jänner" combines infantile inarticulacy with exhausted breathlessness. "Sipheten und Probyllen" are an uprooting of the Platonic myth. Here, words are generated not by nostalgic longing for oneness, but by violent laceration and copulation which produces mutations incapable of further reproduction. Such language is no longer a language of versification, nor of conversation with a *Gegenüber* in an encounter (*Begegnung*), and not even a language of inversion; it is a language of perversion that makes any attempted conversation – be it with the past or with the present – choke in breathlessness. A procession of poets and words ("die Parolen") "passiert," i.e. occurs and passes by before the poet's eyes.

This is not a joyful vision. No names are mentioned. The double-weaving of memory and forgetting is replaced by the omnipresence of the dead ("keiner fehlt und keine"). The poet exposes himself to *philia* and *neĩkos* inseparably, and his language communicates with all language and with all its speakers, no longer with a selection of loved ones. In this way, however, language addresses only itself, cutting the poet from himself in his exposure.

Embracing the whole of the inherited tradition, poetry fights to stay open while being fully self-referential:

Der stille Aussatz¹²⁴ löst sich dir vom Gaumen
und fächelt deiner Zunge Licht zu,
Licht (GW2 93).

With "you" in this poem the poet addresses himself; more precisely, a "you" addresses itself, a language speaking to itself. Poetry exposes itself to itself, bracketing out the speaker from the speech. The essential contradiction of such poetry lies in its ability to address itself as an other. This is not merely a contradiction *in* language; language itself becomes contradiction, counter-diction, *die Gegendichtung* of *Gegenwort*. In a preliminary version of "Todtnauberg," a poem of encounter and of the impasses of conversation, Celan quotes Hölderlin's "Friedensfeier" and proceeds: "Seit ein Gespräch wir sind,/ an dem/ wir würgen,/ an dem ich würge,/ das mich/ aus mir hinausstieß, {zw} dreimal,| viermal" (LTA 49). Interestingly, in one of his octaves Mandelstam speaks of the "rectifying sigh" which he finds after three or four failed attempts: "Когда после двух или трёх,/ А то четырёх задыханий/ Придёт выпрямительный вздох" [When after two or three/ Or even four gasps/ The rectifying sigh comes]¹²⁵ (OM1 198). In Celan's poem, however, the breathturn is not a joyful liberation, as it is in Mandelstam's poem; on the contrary, it is the final devastation of poetic language in which the poet is banned *from* his own speaking *by* his own speaking, and thus, it is nevertheless a liberation after all, although by way of exposure and exclusion, as in Celan's programmatic sentence, "La poésie ne s'impose plus, elle s'expose" (GW3 181). Such exposure and liberation from exposure is fatal. Language which turns on and upon itself becomes "der Aussatz" – ex-sentence as death sentence. Whereas

¹²⁴ This word first appears in Celan's "Engführung" in the phrase "der versteinerte Aussatz."

¹²⁵ Transl. by Nancy Pollak (Pollak 47).

forgetting and memory cease to be two separate states, language as "Passieren" opens itself, beyond the joys of remembrance and the nostalgia of forgetting, to the expressionless silence that precedes all possibility of memory. In this encounter, the poet remains in a state that is neither active nor passive. He neither remembers nor forgets but only endures the impassability of language. If there is a tradition in poetry, this tradition is not a continuous dialogue; rather, it is a repetition of the initial separation that constitutes language. With every beginning of a poem, language endures a separation from itself, and, in every ending, more separation is anticipated. In his radio-essay, Celan thinks Mandelstam's voice as duration: "Mandelstamm [erinnert sich] an seine Vorliebe für das lateinische Gerundiv. Das Gerundiv – das ist das Mittelwort der Leideform der Zukunft" (MTA 221). The poet remembers the past and binds it to the future – but only by forgetting what memory is, by eliminating the difference between the future and the past. His poetry is "das Mittelwort," the middle voice that neither predicts nor prescribes. The poet's endurance consists in his oblivion to the split between his own language and the tradition, and thus in stepping out from his own speech. This endurance marks the poem's presence – its *Gegenwart* – which waits (*wartet*) neither for the future to come, nor for the past to reappear. The poem is bound by the constraint of detachment. Rather than freeing itself from all language, the poem frees language from itself. It steps into its own limit, its "eigenste Enge," and "verhofft" "am Rande seiner selbst" (MTA 8). Poetry is written under duress – as the title of one of Celan's books, *Lichtzwang*, suggests – and in the face of all the impasses of conversation.

The word is split within itself. The poem is the pore, the passage and its passivity through which this aporia is held impassable. In "Engführung," the impassable way of poetry leads from grass-blade to grass-blade, from "Gras, auseinandergeschrieben" (GW1 197) in the beginning to "Gras./ Gras./ auseinandergeschrieben" (GW1 204) in the last line. The poet's topos, the u-topos

of encounter, stretches between a cosmos "written apart" to a cosmos "written apart" anew. The narrow way, the stretto of poetry leads from separation ("auseinandergeschrieben") to a fully immobile cosmos ("die Welt, ein Tausendkristall") to, again, a passage in this frozen structure ("auseinandergeschrieben").¹²⁶ Poetry is a structure cemented by air, "ein Porenbau," built of pores and openings:

es
fiel nicht ins Wort, es
sprach,
sprach gerne zu trockenen Augen, eh es sie schloß.

Sprach, sprach,
War, war.

Wir
ließen nicht locker, standen
inmitten, ein
Porenbau, und
es kam.

Kam auf uns zu, kam
hindurch, flickte
unsichtbar, flickte
an der letzten Membran,
und
die Welt, ein Tausendkristall,
schoß an, schoß an (GW1 202).

"Es" that closes all pores and membranes and leads to crystallization and stasis divides and binds the words in their repetition – "sprach, sprach," "war, war." "Es" is an expressionless separation in sameness, a caesura, that in the critical moment of total binding breaks the totality apart. Even in the moment of crystallization, the language is doubled and split: the world, *one* thousand-crystal, becomes solid *twice* – "schoß an, schoß an." "Es" duplicates the language,

¹²⁶ This movement from the Democritian atomic chaos to a complete stagnation and its collapse is analyzed by Peter Szondi in his study of "Engführung."

preventing, at the highpoint of crystallization, an absolute purity of expression. The term "Atemwende" along with "das Ausdruckslose,"¹²⁷ as Walter Benjamin calls the caesura in his essay on *Die Wahlverwandschaften*, refer to this "es" – a pre-articulate layer, generative for all language. Every beginning of a poem is a new cut in language, while every end of a poem is a new seam in it. "Engführung" starts with "auseinandergeschrieben" and ends with "auseinandergeschrieben," the same word. The separation of the word from itself is the stretto through the porous structure of the poem. The pore, through which the poem "leaks" from Poros, power, to Penia, lack, is the passage from an abundant and inspired poetic language to its obliteration: "porös, spongiös: [das Ge<dicht>] es weiß um die Erosionen, denen es sich aussetzt" (MTA 103). Yet this exposure, *Aussetzen*, which leads to collapse in *Aussatz*, ex-language, reveals the initial state before separation and binding, before even the pre-Socratic dualism of *philia* and *neĩkos*. As in many of Celan's poems, "Engführung" aims at a return to the sameness in differentiation of the beginning and end with the word "auseinandergeschrieben." This word of separation, "written apart," is *zusammengeschrieben* and not *aus-einander-geschrieben*, it holds its inner split within itself, is separated from itself within its wholeness. This return – the Meridian journey – of the word to itself is possible only by means of radical openness and exposure. Like the "I" that becomes "it" in Celan's version of Mandelstam's poem discussed above, the poetic cosmos must go through the loss of its fixed stability. Inspiration, eros, that drives the poet in his speaking, becomes – while he is speaking – *erosion* of his inspiration. While the Platonic eros opens pores which elevate the soul, Celan's poetry knows that such flight of inspiration is paid for with devastation. Eros having become erosion gnaws on

¹²⁷ The possibility of a connection of this term with the kabbalistic notion of *beli-mah* is discussed in the previous chapter of current study.

inspired speeches, like acid air on rock, leaving behind poems as eroded "Porenbau." Inspiration eventually clashes against the hard ground, the "Aussatz" that leaves the poet alone with shatters of language. In "Give the word," "breath," Celan's credo for all poetry becomes just one of many "Parolen" none of which is able to bind anew the poetic cosmos fallen apart. Even this word of belief becomes separated from itself by quotation marks. With the detachment of auto-citation, the poet addresses his own convictions as he would any other inherited text.

Aware of this unbridgeable split in language, Celan repeatedly attempts to restore its wholeness. "Du sei wie du," he demands in a late text (1967), a love poem whose only addressee is language, dead language, "Sprache," "kumi/ ori [Hebrew: arise, shine]" (GW2 327). Rather than presupposing the identity of language with itself, "you = you," the poet pleads for a language that would be its own semblance, "you be like you." To be similar to itself, language must be different from itself, an other to itself. The poet, suspended in "sei wie," must forget that he remembers language, so that in his oblivion even the forgotten, the dead, the lost reappear in suspension of memory and forgetting. Remembering is not a simple reversal of forgetting, for Celan; much rather, forgetting and memory are interconnected by the porous passage, *aporrhoea*, between the dead and the living language. Whereas Plato interprets the Empedoclean *philia* as a remedy for *neĩkos*, which, to a certain degree, makes up for the initial separation and, again to a certain degree, reconciles the fighting opposites, the relation between memory and forgetting in Celan's conception is not reducible to such dualism. "You," the language to be remembered, must be first separated from "you," the language of the dead, the tradition, the forgotten and the forgetting, even the self-forgetting. With this suspension of both remembering and forgetting, Celan seeks – a project curiously parallel to Heidegger's attempt of returning to the thought of pre-Socratics – not only to overcome the initial separation of *neĩkos* but, beyond

that, to reach before *philia* and *neĩkos*. The proleptic call for an identity of language excludes its identity at the moment of speaking, so that "sei wie," "be like," "be your own semblance" opens a space for language to come and to come to itself. The poem creates a frame, a "here and now" for the encounter of language with itself. Addressing itself as an other, saying "you" to "you," such language suspends *philia* and *neĩkos* as it suspends memory and forgetting, freeing itself from tradition by neither canceling it out nor attempting to bear witness to it any longer. Treating itself as its own other, poetry becomes *affiliated* with itself. With such language, Celan attempts to establish a language which would escape the tragedy of failed inspiration, to escape tragedy as such. In Celan's "Du sei wie du," the failure of inspiration does not mean the end of all poetry. The exemption of inspiration is the beginning of speaking in place of singing. Not that any inspiration is forgotten in such a language; it is suspended in the un-forgetting that prevents a lapse into any thematized dualism of affirmation and negation. In "Du sei wie du", Celan projects a language that has not yet come to consciousness that lacks ability to forget merely because no memory is possible in it. "Du sei wie du" is the new formula, which builds a contrast to the earlier "La poésie ne s'impose plus, elle s'expose": only in the future will "you" coincide with "you" and only in the future will it be possible for the sentence of identity, $A = A$, to be fulfilled. The post-lapsarian language of outdated prophecies – the only language at the poet's disposal – is inverted as the pre-lapsarian pre-language which stands neither inside nor outside tradition, for there is nothing yet to be remembered. The cicadas, the inspired singers that starve to death in the service of a remembrance of the Muses, are gone. In this peculiar language of un-forgetting, the inspiration that leads to the reduction of "I" to "it" by passage through the open pore of poetry perseveres in the suspension of the sentence of identity. "A" will equal "A" only when language – all of language – will become past.

III. Translation

1. Poetry of Bringing about Presence

'I recall one superb pun anyway: qui vive la pietà quando è ben morta.' She said nothing. 'Is it not a great phrase?' he gushed. She said nothing. 'Now' he said like a fool 'I wonder how you could translate that?' She still said nothing.

*Then: 'do you think' she murmured
'it is absolutely necessary to translate it?'*

Samuel Beckett

How do time and language relate to each other? Is there a kind of duration peculiar to language alone and does it set language apart from chronometric time? Do grammatical tenses correspond to our perception of time? Is our perception of time, on the contrary, defined by the grammar? Or, perhaps, does all perception rely on a difference between language and time? A speaker delivering a speech on a particular date must face these questions, if he claims to address the present moment. Both Osip Mandelstam and Paul Celan understood their poetic task as consisting in the assertion of presence. Neither Mandelstam, nor Celan, however, defines the present simply through stasis, as the standard of a given status quo. The present, instead, stands for an experience of language, in which a poem marks a punctual encounter with time, rather than an objective state of an array of things on a given date and at a given place. Each poem constructs a unique presence in relation to time in general. Like a stopped clock that displays a particular time with absolute precision, each poem bears a precise physiognomic expression.

That is not to say, however, that there is an absolute poem – as little as a stopped clock can be said to be the absolute measure of time.

On the first page of his radio essay about Osip Mandelstam's poetry (MTA 215), Paul Celan writes: "It is, among other things, known that Osip Mandelstam has studied philosophy in Heidelberg and presently raves about Greek" ("Philosophie studiert hat und gegenwärtig für das Griechische schwärmt"; MTA 215).¹²⁸ The editor of the radio program, Wilhelm Asche, was puzzled by the unusual sequence of tenses in this sentence and put both verbs into simple past, "studierte" and "schwärmte." After reviewing the page proofs containing the editor's corrections, Celan asked Asche to reverse the changes: "On page 1, line 13 of the manuscript which you kindly have sent me I find that the perfect and the present I have placed are being replaced by a preterit (imperfect): 'studied' and 'raved' instead of 'has studied' and 'raves.' Please let the originally placed tenses enjoy their rights again in both cases" (Celan, MKR 884-85). Celan's insistence on the use of the specific verb forms shows that his choice is defined by more than just a grammatical convention. With the use of the perfect tense, "studiert hat" 'has studied,' Celan points to a certain degree of perfection of Mandelstam's studies in philosophy.¹²⁹ With the use of the present tense in "presently raves for Greek and the Greek," Celan makes clear that the present

¹²⁸ All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

¹²⁹ Mandelstam spent the academic year of 1911 in Heidelberg, where he attended lectures on Kant by Wilhelm Windelband and Emil Lask (Brown 46). He found Windelband dull and Lask, on the contrary, lively and "poetic." Although according to his wife Nadezhda, Mandelstam never was a great reader of German philosophy and only bought an antiquarian volume of Kant for its smell (N. Mandelstam 289), references to Kant are not absent from his work. For example, in his essay, "The Morning of Acmeism" (1919), Mandelstam sets "Kant's universal case of categories" as the ground for poetic experience (OM1 322). Furthermore, in the notes to his essay about Dante (1930) which will be discussed later in this paper, Mandelstam makes a surprisingly anachronistic claim: "Я позволю себе сказать, что временные глагольные формы изготовлял для десятой песни в Кенигсберге сам Иммануил Кант" ("I dare say that verbal conjugations for the tenths canto [of *Inferno*] were manufactured in Königsberg by Immanuel Kant himself.")

he has in mind is not reducible to a date – neither 1960, the year of Celan's radio essay, nor 1913, the year of publication of Mandelstam's first book. Further, this present is not reducible to a "timeless" presence of a published text stored in archives and libraries. Celan does not merely make mention of Mandelstam's Greek lessons but, more importantly, clarifies Mandelstam's relation with the classical tradition. Mandelstam, says Celan, raves or daydreams about Ancient Greece, "schwärmt," and yet daydreams in full presence of mind and sober attentiveness, "gegenwärtig." With this remark which might seem to serve no other purpose than to provide some biographical information about a Russian poet hardly known in Germany at the time, Celan introduces here his notion of presence, *Gegenwart*, as the essential premise of poetry. The poet's speech establishes a relation to the past – in other words, to the poetic tradition – and, in transforming it, makes the distance to the past perceptible. This distance – by no means a mechanical implication or imitation of tradition – provides a poem with a time index which is, again, legible only at a distance. The transformation of tradition in the poem is a matter of language rather than of the automatism of chronometric time. The perplexity of the editor who attempts to homogenize the tenses in Celan's sentence has its origin in an implied model of time as a succession of calendar dates. In his response, Celan tries to explain that the tenses are defined by the intention of his essay, not by the timeline. When he says, "the perfect and the present I have placed," his intention is to place, to posit (*setzen*) time in speaking. The present placed by Celan is the present of his encounter with Mandelstam and with Mandelstam's Greece.

In his essay, "On the Conversation Partner" ("О собеседнике,")¹³⁰ Osip Mandelstam proposes that all poetry be addressed to an undefined conversation partner in the future. Mandelstam puts the accent on what he calls "юридическое взаимоотношение, которым сопровождается акт речи," "the juridical relationship" of any speech: "I speak: that means, someone listens to me, not for nothing and not as a favor but under an obligation" (OM2 234). This obligatory aspect is easily forgotten in poetry, says Mandelstam, if the poet addresses a particular and familiar public. The poet needs a conversation partner who is distant and unknown because only in this way can the poet speak without being determined by the listener. Mandelstam needs this restriction in order to avoid contingencies of a language tainted by its use in a familiar circle, which could lead to a codification of meanings. This happened, according to Mandelstam, in the symbolist poetry where "rose stands for sun, sun for rose, dove for girl, girl for dove" (OM2 354). An established code deprives those versed in this specific vocabulary of understanding, since the function of understanding is reduced to deciphering a code. The juridical obligation of poetry is thus to be public in the same way the court hearings are public. The law of presence under which the poet speaks and the rules which he must follow are solely those of language. Thus, when Mandelstam proposes to give "the stone" its "stoniness" back in his poetry, he does not mean to endow language with a mystical power that would make the word coincide with the thing. The slogan "stoniness to the stone!" is Mandelstam's revolutionary

¹³⁰ The title of this essay has been translated into English as "On the Interlocutor." I'm using the more literal version, "On the Conversation Partner," since "interlocutor" suggests additional meanings (such as the role of middleman in minstrel shows) which are not implied in the Russian word, "sobesednik." This is not the only injustice inflicted upon Mandelstam's essay in translation. The French translation of "O sobesednike" which was published in the fourth issue of *L'Ephémère* supplants "некто [someone]" with "personne," "no-one," in place of "une certaine personne." For discussion of this incident cf. Broda 29 – 48.

proclamation of the word's liberation. The freedom of the word is its right to signify independently from the listener and, in the end, from the speaker.

How, then, does the speaker's persona relate to the "I" in his speech? Is it required or even possible for a speaker to bracket out his physical existence from his language? If so, does this bracketing turn his speaking into the ravings of a madman? The poet, says Mandelstam, is not mad, as long as his words are directed to an unknown listener. The poet counts on a "you," a conversation partner, in relation to whom he can say "I." He presupposes that he speaks in the presence of an attentive, yet unfamiliar and thus impartial, listener. As long as the speaker speaks, the listener keeps silent, waiting for his turn to answer. Poetry, Mandelstam claims, shares the structure of a conversation: a speaker addresses a listener in order to communicate something not known to the latter; the listener receives the message and may choose to answer. In Mandelstam's account, it is peculiar to poetry, however, that the future "you," the "you-to-come," which would be the second party in the dialogue, is indefinitely suspended and thus reduces the conversation to a monologue. This condition, however, is true for any dialogue, since the addressee's answer – unless it is not an answer but an interruption – may not occur during the speaker's utterance. Mandelstam's poetry relies on this purely dialogical premise. The poet directs his words to a listener, on whose attention he counts. What his speaking communicates, however, is not a single utterance but, as Mandelstam writes in the conclusion of his essay, poetry as a whole: "Therefore, even if single poems (in the form of epistles or dedications) can be addressed to particular individuals, the poetry as a whole is always directed to a more or less distant unknown addressee, whose existence the poet cannot doubt without doubting himself" (OM2 240). The task of the poet, then, is to hand over poetry as a whole to his conversation

partner. The obligation of the conversation partner is, correspondingly, to receive poetry as a whole. In order to communicate poetry as a whole, the poet himself needs to have received it beforehand. Does this, then, mean that there are no individual speakers but only the totality of poetry that cancels out individuality?

In his essay on Mandelstam, Celan offers an answer to this question: "The poem here is the poem of someone who knows that he speaks under the tilting angle of his existence, that the language of his poem is neither 'correspondence' nor language-as-such but *actualized* language, voiced and voiceless at the same time, set free in a sign of radical individuation which, however, is posited simultaneously in its limits by language and stays mindful of the possibilities opened for it by language" ("Das Gedicht ist hier das Gedicht dessen, der weiß, daß er unter dem Neigungswinkel seiner Existenz spricht, daß die Sprache seines Gedichts weder 'Entsprechung' noch Sprache schlechthin ist, sondern *aktualisierte* Sprache, stimmhaft und stimmlos zugleich, freigesetzt im Zeichen einer zwar radikalen, aber gleichzeitig auch der ihr von der Sprache gesetzten Grenzen, der ihr von der Sprache erschlossenen Möglichkeiten eingedenk bleibenden Individuation"; MTA 215; italics by author). The existence of the individual speaker – more precisely, of the speaker, whose poem brings about his individuation – is set by language, and yet this being posited *by* language brings about the speaker's radical individuation *in* language. The poet's existence itself becomes a sign, "a sign of radical individuation," which Celan also calls the "language of an individual (*eines Einzelnen*) having become shape (*Gestalt*)" (ibid). This radical individuation does not consist in an escape into a "second reality" of poetry disconnected from physical existence; nor is it an attempt to imitate an ideal image prescribed by poetry. The poem is an individuated sign, defined to be the poet's existence set in language. To

set his poem as an individuated sign in the light of his particular punctual existence, the poet needs to transform, to re-shape, poetry as a whole in any particular poem. What moulds language in this transformation, now, moulds also its time, since time, for Celan, is linguistic time. The poem, he writes, is "actualized language," a language that communicates the poet's experience of time and bears the index of the poet's presence. What makes the relation of language and time perceptible, is the poem, as it "stands into time" ("in die Zeit hineinsteht"; *ibid*). The poem is a language in the sign of radical individuation only because it is "gezeitigt," "temporalized," presented in and by its own tempus (MTA 216): that is, brought about, timed, and performed as time. This *Zeitigung*, however, the constitution of the poem's time, can only happen in the medium of poetry and cannot be completed by the poet himself, since he, as a person, always speaks from his present towards an other one. When Mandelstam says that the poet speaks to an unknown and presumably distant conversation partner, he sets his poetry – and with it, all poetry – into a "poetic present tense."¹³¹ Accepting his role as Mandelstam's conversation partner, Celan sets the time of Mandelstam's poetry and the time of his own poetry in relation to him, this conversation partner, who is, for Mandelstam, Celan, for Celan Mandelstam, but beyond that, for both poets, someone even less familiar, an indefinite distant other, to whom Celan refers as to "an altogether other perhaps" (MTA 8). The two tenses – the perfect "has studied" and the present "raves" – in Celan's essay define the grammar of his response to Mandelstam. It is the grammar of poetic time as actualization.

In his essay, Celan fulfills what Mandelstam calls the juridical obligation of the listener towards the speaker. This explains Celan's legalistic vocabulary in his request to the editor, when

¹³¹ This term is of my own invention and corresponds to the historical or literary present tense in prose.

he asks to "let the originally placed (*gesetzten*) tenses enjoy their rights (*Rechte*) again in both cases" (MKR 885).¹³² These rights as well as the positing capacity with which Celan ascribes his response refer to the rules of grammar within poetry. Defining Mandelstam's poetry as a poetry of "Zeitigung," of "temporalization," Celan establishes a succession, in which a particular poet responds to his particular conversation partner and carries over in this way not only the corpse of another poet's works but rather carries on poetry as conversation. The poet sets the perfect and the present in relation to conversation, to poetry as a whole which Celan, after Hölderlin, calls "Gespräch"¹³³ (MTA 216).

Poetic dialogue as understood both by Mandelstam and Celan is, thus, nothing like a colloquy around a given topic under discussion; rather, it is the means to define one's individual language and, within it, one's poetic existence in relation to time.¹³⁴ Celan's response to Mandelstam is not an appropriation of or identification with the conversation partner. It is, on the contrary, the articulation of individuation through, in and by an other's language. The most foreign and the most distant other addressed by the speaking "I" is, Celan says, the time of this other, of this "you" (MTA 216). The poet grounds his experience of time in the difference between his language and the language of the other and, conversely, this experience of language is grounded in the difference between his time and the other's time. This otherness in time first defines the poem's own presence and shape (*Gestalt*). What Celan identifies as his conversation

¹³² In this context, it is interesting to note that Grimm's dictionary lists a meaning of "Gegenwart" as "opponent," in a general sense as well as in court matters. Cf. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 5 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1971) 2281-91.

¹³³ Celan borrows the word *Gespäch*, "conversation" from Hölderlin with one remarkable difference: Hölderlin uses an indefinite article "ein," which Celan eliminates accentuating the singular character of language as conversation.

¹³⁴ It is hardly a coincidence that formally Celan's essay on Mandelstam is divided between two speakers. This division, however, neither constitutes a dialogue nor are the "scripts" of the two speakers independent monologues: the irreducible difference between the two voices reading a homogenous text makes clear, even before any other rhetorical means, that no unity of text can make two voices sound as one.

partner is, thus, not so much the persona of a particular poet but rather the non-synthetic whole of the poet's individual language with all its phonetic, semantic, syntactic and also intertextual nuances, and its time, which distinguishes this individuality within the totality of poetry.

For Mandelstam, the task of the conversation partner is fulfilled in reading and responding to a particular poet. For him, this poet is unmistakably Dante. In his essay, "A Conversation about Dante" ("Разговор о Данте")¹³⁵ Mandelstam analyzes the character of Dante's poetry and discovers a discrepancy between its syntactic and intentional contents:

In talking of Dante, it is more proper to have in mind the generation of impulses [порывы] and not the generation of forms... In other words, the syntax confuses us. All nominative cases should be replaced by datives of direction. This is the law of the reversible and convertible poetic material, which exists only in the performing impulse. – Everything in here is turned inside out: the substantive is the goal and not the subject of the sentence. It is my hope that the object of Dante scholarship will become the coordination of the impulse and the text.¹³⁶

Mandelstam differentiates here between the proper grammatical rules and the intention towards language which manifests itself in the individuality of the poet's voice. Dante's intention, says Mandelstam, is the impulsive dynamisation of the poetic material. This dynamisation defines Dante's grammar so that the substantives, equated with substance, are set into motion by a verbal impulse and thus, even in the nominative case, cannot properly be called subjects since they are dated, given, propounded or evocated by the verb.¹³⁷ In his analysis of Dante, Mandelstam

¹³⁵ Mandelstam knew Dante long before he read him in original and started to work on this essay (around 1930). In 1915 (same year as "Sleeplessness. Homer") Mandelstam dedicates a poem to his fellow poet, Anna Akhmatova, where he compares her smile with Dante's. About two decades later, when Mandelstam will have written his "Conversation about Dante," the two poets will resume their dialogue about Dante with new intensity.

¹³⁶ 2: 413. Trans. by Clarence Brown and Robert Hughes 153. Ironically, this translation was published before the original: Brown and Hughes prepared it in 1965 for the special issue of the American magazine, Books Abroad, which was dedicated to the seven hundredth anniversary of Dante's birth. The Russian text appeared in Moscow in 1967.

¹³⁷ Competition for power between noun and verb and definition of syntactic particularities on the basis of their power relation is the leading motif in Andrea Guarna's humorous tractate on the nature of language, Grammaticale bellum Nominis et Verbi regum de principalitate orationis inter se contententium [Grammatical War between the

reveals his own poetic paradigm. The intention of Mandelstam's poetry is directed towards the interplay of the syntactic structure and verbal movement. The declension, the tense, and the aspect of the word co-establish its meaning. In his essay on Mandelstam, Celan, in turn, responds to this logic and emphasizes the constitutive semantics of syntax in Mandelstam's poetry: "the word – the name! – shows its disposition towards the substantiveness, the epithet fades away, the 'infinite,' the *substantive* forms of the verb (*das Zeitwort*) prevail: the poem stays *time-open*, time is free to enter, time *participates*" (MTA 216, italics by author). Celan finds, however, that this interweaving of syntax and semantics in Mandelstam's poetry is precisely opposite to Dante's. Dante's substantives are liquefied by verbs; Mandelstam's weighty substantives bring the flow of tenses to coagulation. Remarkable is, however, Mandelstam's recognition that the emphasis on the verb forms by Dante brings to the foreground not so much the verbs but, on the contrary, substantives and substances, namely "textiles, sails, scholastics, meteorology, engineering, municipalities, artisans and craftsmen, a list that could be continued ad infinitum" (OM2 413).¹³⁸ Celan draws a corresponding conclusion about Mandelstam. The gravity of the noun makes the time forms in Mandelstam's poetry manifest in their thickened plasticity. This retardation of time marks Mandelstam not so much as a poet of presence but of the present tense and the density of this tense.

Celan's answer to his conversation partner, Mandelstam, is not, however, identical with Mandelstam's answer to Dante, since, beyond reading and responding to Mandelstam's poetry in his own writing, Celan responds by translating his poems. Six of these translations are quoted in

Kings Noun and Verb, Contending with Each Other for the Leadership of Speech], printed in Salerno in 1511. The treaty which concludes this war gives the noun authority over the verb in the nominative or vocative case (*casus rectus*); the verb rules over the substantive in all other cases (*casus obliquus*).

¹³⁸ Brown and Hughes 153.

full in the radio essay and amount to about a half of its length. What happens, when the poet translates his conversation partner? Does the translation not obliterate the distance to the conversation partner and does the constitutive difference to the other's time not disappear in translation? And further: does Mandelstam's model of a "juridical obligation" between conversation partners remain valid in translation? The poem entitled "Sleeplessness. Homer. Taut sails" ("Бессоница. Гомер. Тугие паруса") from Mandelstam's first book, *Stone* [*Камень*], is one of the six poems Celan quotes in his essay. The poem depicts Mandelstam's encounter with his conversation partner, Dante, and with the poetic language in general.

Бессоница. Гомер. Тугие паруса.
 Я список кораблей прочёл до середины:
 Сей длинный выводок, сей поезд журавлиный,
 Что над Элладаю когда-то поднялся.

Как журавлиный клин в чужие рубежи –
 На головах царей божественная пена –
 Куда плывёте вы? Когда бы не Елена,
 Что Троя вам одна, ахейские мужи?

И море, и Гомер — всё движется любовью.
 Кого же слушать мне? И вот Гомер молчит,
 И море чёрное, витийствуя, шумит
 И с тяжким грохотом подходит к изголовью. (ОМ1 48-49).

[Sleeplessness. Homer. Taut sails.
 I've read up to the middle of the list of ships:
 This lengthy brood, this train of cranes
 That once rose above Hellas.

Like a wedge of cranes into foreign confines –
 Divine foam upon tsars' heads –
 Whereto are you sailing? If not for Helen,
 What would Troy alone mean to you, Achaean men?

The sea, Homer – all is being moved by love.
 To whom should I listen? And now Homer is silent,
 And the black sea flourishes and murmurs

And, with a heavy roar, comes close to the head of my bed.]

At first glance, the scenery of the poem seems to be easy enough to reconstruct: unable to fall asleep, the speaker reads the *Iliad* but does not get farther than the middle of the catalogue of ships in Book 2 and finally feels his attention dissipate in the approaching sleep. Both attention sharpened by insomnia and poetic inspiration due to the vacillation between waking and sleeping are dominant motifs in *Stone*. The sail emblemizes attentiveness¹³⁹ in contrast to the dark sea of the pre-articulate oneiric state. The poem emerges from the speaker's encounter with Homer's epic and, in fact, with Hellenism and the Greek language in general. Konstantin Mochulsky, Mandelstam's teacher of the Old Greek, remembers:

He would be monstrously late for our lessons and completely shaken by the secrets of Greek grammar that had been revealed to him. He would wave his hands, run about the room and declaim the declensions and conjugations in a sing-song voice. The reading of Homer was transformed into a fabulous event; adverbs, enclitics, and pronouns hounded him in his sleep, and he entered into enigmatic personal relationships with them. When I informed him that the past participle of the verb *paideo* 'to educate' was *pepaideukos* he gasped with pleasure and was unable to study any more that day (Brown 47).

The next day Mandelstam appeared in class unprepared but handed in a poem with the rather notable lines: "and the question that haunts me is:/ [...] which voice is *pepaideukos*?" (ibid) Mochulsky, not lacking a sense of humor, notices that Mandelstam is unable to continue his studies after having learned the past participle of "to teach." His account, however, draws a picture quite similar to that described in "Homer. Sleeplessness": the poet's intention to study Homer's language is so great that he can barely study. This "gegenwärtige Schwärmerei," to quote Celan, this intent immersion in Greek is not so much the topic as the impulse of the poem. On the figurative level, this impulse takes the shape of a fleet – a swarm – of Achaean ships

¹³⁹ For example, in the poem "The hearing strings up its sensitive sail" ("Слух чуткий парус напрягает"; OM1 9), which Celan also quotes in his essay.

heading to Troy. On the level of narrative, intensified attention defines the disposition of the speaker, whose anxious sleeplessness hovers over the dark sea of sleep. The wind that stretches the sail of the poem is, however, borrowed from Dante, whom Mandelstam calls "a student of [sailing,] this supremely evasive and plastic sport" (OM2 385; trans. Brown). The second line of Mandelstam's poem, "I've read up to the middle of the list of ships," is an allusion to the first line of the *Inferno*: "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita [Midway upon the journey of our life]." The last line of the *Paradiso*, "l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stele [The Love which moves the sun and the other stars]"¹⁴⁰ is referred to in the last stanza: "all is being moved by love." The nocturnal reading of Homer reveals itself as a reading of Dante. The speaker manages to read only half of the catalogue of ships in the *Iliad*, because the *Divina Commedia* interrupts his reading. Homer is, in fact, not the goal but the medium of Mandelstam's intention in this poem. Dante, who finds himself in the beginning of the *Divina Commedia* in the middle of earthly life and in the dark sea of spiritual confusion (Canto 1, 22), is led by Virgil to the light of divine love. Mandelstam, who finds himself in the beginning of his poem in the middle of a Homeric sentence and in confusion about Greek syntax, is led by Dante to the darkness of sleep. Love, the impulse moving not only the Achaean warriors¹⁴¹ but also Dante's faith, becomes an impulse directed solely towards language in Mandelstam's poem. Mandelstam responds to Dante's intention towards language by juxtaposing him with Homer. Dante's impulse consists, for Mandelstam, in the intensification of verb and motion which leads to the emphatic representation of the substantive and of substance. Homer, on the contrary, is for Mandelstam the poet of time and duration:

¹⁴⁰ Trans. H.W. Longfellow.

¹⁴¹ For a discussion of Helen as the Greek beauty ideal and its loss in Mandelstam's poetry see Taranovski 91-93.

Есть иволги в лесах, и гласных долгота
 В тонических стихах единственная мера.
 Но только раз в году бывает разлита
 В природе длительность, как в метрике Гомера.

Как бы цезурою зияет этот день:
 Уже с утра покой и трудные длинноты;
 Волы на пастбище, и золотая лень
 Из тростника извлечь богатство целой ноты. (ОМ1 38).

[There are orioles in the woods and in lines of tonic verse
 the single measurement is the length of vowels.
 But only once a year does there flow in nature
 the long-drawn lengthiness found in Homer's meter.

This day yawns as though with a caesura:
 since daybreak it's been quiet, with troublesome longueurs;
 the oxen are in the pasture, and golden lassitude
 cannot draw from the reed the wealth of one whole note. (Brown 256, transl. modified)]

While the length of vowels (*dolgota*) constitutes the lengthiness of the tonic verse, Homer's meter, even before phonetics, constitutes the lengthiness, the duration of time (*dlitel'nost'*).¹⁴² Homer's meter is compared with a long and lazy day, a holiday, which – precisely because it is filled by no other content but lassitude – holds together all the other days of a year. Not a single whole note is produced, but precisely in this retardation of time and in this lack of sound the lengthiness, not the length of a note is experienced. Homer, for Mandelstam, represents not so much the particular age of Classical Antiquity as the time of poetry in general, Homer is the poet who sets the poetic present tense. When Mandelstam, thus, chooses Homer to mediate Dante in his poem, he follows a certain logic of grammatical complementarity: he lets the poetry of substance lean on the poetry of time in order to re-establish a balance between the substantive

¹⁴² For a discussion of the role of Bergson's *durée* in Mandelstam's poetics see Vladimir Toporov, "O 'psikhofiziologicheskom' komponente v poezii Mandel'shtama" (*Mif. Ritual. Simvol. Obraz*, Moscow: Progress-Kultura) 1995. The interesting connection between Mandelstam's use of the word "caesura" and Hölderlin's notes on Sophocles translations cannot be explored in the current paper.

and the verb. From this point of view, Mandelstam's response to his conversation partner fulfills his "juridical obligation" to Dante by compensating for the imbalance in his grammar. Harmonizing Dante's impulse towards the substantive with Homer's emphasis on the verb, Mandelstam, in a metaphorical sense, brings the balance of justice to the grammar of poetry. His poem, therefore, is not so much a direct response to either of the poets but rather a medium for their encounter. Towards the end of the poem, the speaker remains alone with the dark eloquent sea¹⁴³ which perhaps can be read as language-as-such, non-individual language in the absence of a speaker. First this pre-articulate language allows for a continuity of conversation in individual poems and by individualized speakers, who share this medium with each other and whose individuality is perceptible only in this medium.¹⁴⁴

The intention towards language is not necessarily a poem's theme, although it does define its shape. When Mandelstam uses the word "порыв" ("intention") to describe Dante's dynamisation of substance, he understands intention as desire or inclination towards a particular word material. The intention towards language, however, must not be limited to this impulse but should be understood, following Walter Benjamin's considerations in "The Task of a Translator," in a less restrictive sense of "mode of intention," "Art des Meinens," the term that refers to the each single and particular individuation of a certain language (Benjamin 14). In order to communicate intention, however, the poetic word needs to stay intended, not saturated.

¹⁴³ The black sea in the poem suggests also the Black Sea, the Greek Pontos which bounds the Crimean peninsula (former Russian territory), an important topos for Mandelstam's poetry, which he usually calls by its Greek name, "Tauris."

¹⁴⁴ Jean Starobinski offers a reading of Mandelstam's poem within a long poetic tradition of referring to the night of Troy's destruction. In Starobinski's view, the remembrance of Troy offers to poets – from Virgil to Bonnefoy – the ground for reflection on nature of poetry. The loss of Troy assigns them, who remain Hellenist, with the task of re-inventing poetry. Their poems about the destruction of Troy are, thus, "poetry about poetry." Cf. "Mémoire de Troie," *Critique* 687-688 (Paris, 2004), 725-753.

This does not mean that the word may not be uttered or must stay hidden beneath a veil of allusions. The differentiation between the intention and the application of the word is Mandelstam's main concern in his essay, "On the Nature of the Word" ("О природе слова" [1922]). Comparing words to household utensils, Mandelstam asserts that one does not have to use them for their purpose to be fulfilled. Only in the suspension of usage does the purpose come clearly to the fore: "Hellenism is the funeral bark of the Egyptian dead. One puts in it everything necessary for the continuation of a man's earthly journey, including a jar of perfume, a small mirror and a comb" (OM2 254). In the conclusion, Mandelstam uses the same image to describe all poetry: "I want to compare the poem with an Egyptian bark of the dead again. Everything necessary for life is stored in this boat and nothing forgotten" (OM2 259). Mandelstam's equation of Hellenism with an Egyptian bark obviously displays an irreverence for the platitude that takes Ancient Greece as the culture of light and life in contrast to the Egyptian cult of death. It is immediately clear that he is not interested in the adoration of Greek forms or their imitation in pseudo- or neoclassical poetry. Hellenism, another name for poetry, is a vessel that transports a certain perfection in language to another time while preserving its readability. The striking image of poetry as a boat crossing lifeless waters appears also in a poem by Celan entitled "From Dark to Dark," written a few years before his first encounter with Mandelstam:

Von Dunkel zu Dunkel

Du schlugst die Augen auf – ich seh mein Dunkel leben.
 Ich seh ihm auf den Grund:
 auch da ists mein und lebt.

Setzt solches über? Und erwacht dabei?
 Wes Licht folgt auf dem Fuß mir,
 daß sich ein Ferge fand? (OM1 97)

[From dark to dark

You opened up your eyes – I see my darkness live.
I see into its ground:
there, too, it's mine and lives.

Does that ferry across? And awakens at this?
Whose light follows me at the foot,
that a ferryman found himself?]

The "you" and "I" named in this poem are each other's conversation partners. The "you" is the receiver of "my" poem, the ferryman who navigates the boat of poetry. In this text, Celan uses the verb *übersetzen*, which usually means "to translate," in the less common form, *über/setzen* and meaning "to ferry across." *Übersetzen* in both senses of translation and ferrying across is used by Martin Heidegger in an essay, "Der Spruch des Anaximander," which Celan, as his annotations show, read and knew well.¹⁴⁵ While working on a translation of a play by Picasso, Celan explicitly alludes to Heidegger's essay in a letter to the publisher: "... the Picasso text does not only want to be translated (*übersetzt*). It also – if I may misuse a term from Heidegger – wants to be transferred (*übergesetzt*). You see: occasionally for me it is a question of performing a ferryman's service (*Fergendienst*)" (Lyon 35). The term *übersetzen* builds the core of "Der Spruch des Anaximander." In this text, Heidegger pursues the task of translating a fragment of Anaximander, which, as Heidegger states, is the earliest known philosophical text in the tradition of the Occident. This task involves not only translation from Ancient Greek to contemporary German but, more importantly, translation is the means by which the transformation of thought in the Western philosophical tradition is understood. The question that Heidegger poses is, "In welche Sprache setzt das Abend-Land über?" ("Into what language does the Occident transfer?")

¹⁴⁵ See BPh 365-367.

The Occident, *Abendland*, is, like the word *übersetzen*, split in two by Heidegger and suggests the literal meaning, the "evening land," the land of dusk.

In this poem, Celan does not claim that translation can carry across to light. Even the title, "From dark to dark," leaves no doubts in this respect. All the poet sees is darkness, and yet "a ferryman was found, or found himself," – perhaps. In "Der Spruch des Anaximander," Heidegger ascribes to a ferryman, the seer Calchas from Homer's *Iliad*, who navigated the Achaean ships to Troy, the ability of a translator in the double sense of *Übersetzer* and *Über-Setzer*. Analyzing a passage about Calchas, Heidegger defines the seer – and thus the translator – as the one who is "gegenwärtig," who sees the future from the past (*Perfektum*) and finds the way across the sea due to this knowledge. In this poem, Celan asks, what allows for a translation to find its way to the original: "Whose light follows me at the foot, that a ferryman was found?" The individual language of the poet and the individual language of the translator stay in the realm of darkness, of the "evening land;" both languages remain excluded from light. Absolute translatability as absolute translucence would obliterate the limits between individual languages. The darkness of individual languages, however, presupposes light, for otherwise this darkness could not be perceived as such. For Celan, darkness is a positive and constitutive quality of poetry that has its origin in the opacity of individual languages to each other. This opacity, he says, is "wenn nicht die kongenitale, so doch wohl die der Dichtung um einer Begegnung willen aus einer – vielleicht selbstentworfenen – Ferne oder Fremde zugeordnete Dunkelheit" (MTA 7).

Mandelstam's Egyptian boat ferries the items of the Greek household that are customarily made for use but now remain free of use, merely intentional, while being carried over in poetry. Without explicitly stating this, Mandelstam describes the poetic tradition as translation, if

translation means transference of an intention towards language. For Celan, it is not enough to recognize the mere intention towards language in the poem of his conversation partner and to describe this intention in one's own text. This does not yet translate, "das setzt noch nicht über," to use Celan's expression in "From dark to dark." Describing Mandelstam as the poet of *Zeitigung*, Celan fulfills the obligation of a listener and reader, as Mandelstam demands. He considers, however, the task of the conversation partner to involve a translation, because only in translation does the intention towards language free itself from the individuals who speak. The question of a translation's authorship cannot be univocally answered but it is impossible to deny that translation, in the strict sense, belongs neither to the body of work of the author nor to that of the translator. The transitory status of language in translation propels Celan to respond to Mandelstam by translating his poems.

In his translation of "Sleeplessness. Homer," which, as it happens, Heidegger knew and admired (Lyon 156), Celan recognizes and intensifies Mandelstam's intention to separate the reading as a response from the reader as well as from the read, while he makes translation itself to one of the topics of his translation:

Schlaflosigkeit. Homer. Die Segel, die sich strecken.
 Ich las im Schiffverzeichnis, ich las, ich kam nicht weit:
 Der Strich der Kraniche, der Zug der jungen Hecke
 hoch über Hellas, einst, vor Zeit und Aberzeit.

Wie jener Kranichkeil, in Fremdestes getrieben –
 Die Köpfe, kaiserlich, der Gottesschaum drauf, feucht –
 Ihr schwebt, ihr schwimmt – wohin? Wär Helena nicht drüben,
 Achäer, solch ein Troja, ich frag, was gält es euch?

Homer, die Meere, beides: die Liebe, sie bewegt es.
 Wem lausch ich und wen hör ich? Sieh da, er schweigt, Homer.
 Das Meer, das schwarz beredte, an dieses Ufer schlägt es,
 zu Häupten hör ichs tosen, es fand den Weg hierher (5: 91).

[Sleeplessness. Homer. The sails which stretch themselves.
 I read in the list of ships, I read, I did not get far:
 A dash of cranes, a train of young tails
 high above Hellas, once, before time and time again.

Like this wedge of cranes, driven into the most foreign –
 The heads, Tsar-like, the godly foam upon them, moist –
 You float, you swim – to where? If Helen were not over there,
 Achaeans, such a Troy, I ask, what would it mean to you?

Homer, the seas, both: she, love moves it.
 To whom do I listen and whom do I hear? Look, he is silent, Homer.
 The sea, black and eloquent, it lashes at this shore,
 I hear it roar at my head, it found its way to here.]

As in Mandelstam's poem, where the reader listens to Homer but not only to him, Celan translates Mandelstam's poem but not simply this poem – he also translates the darkness that accompanies it: "You opened your eyes – I see my darkness live." This line in "From Dark to Dark" defines the relationship between "you" and "you," the poet and the translator. The shared darkness and the waking in the night is what joins poet with translator. This darkness is the pre-articulate language which, without mixing individual speakers, presents a transitory medium for translation. When Homer falls silent in Mandelstam's poem, language passes into the dark rumble of this transitory state. This means not only that the attention of the poet, even the most intensive, is inexorably diluted in distraction, like in Horace's saying, "quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus" ("Sometimes even the good Homer nods"; *De arte poetica* 359). Homer is silent, but now the sea speaks; for speaking leads beyond the limits of individuals' voices. In Mandelstam's poem, the task of the reader and listener consists in perceiving the limit between the articulate word and the rumble of silence.

Celan carries this intention even further. The increased stress on partition is thematically accentuated in the line: "I read in the list of ships, I read, I did not get far," in which Celan obliterates Mandelstam's reference to Dante. While "I've read up to the middle" in Mandelstam's poem is clearly recognizable as an allusion to the first line of the *Divina Commedia*, "Midway upon the journey of our life," "I did not get far" erases this link. Simultaneously, Celan emphasizes the intensity of the act of reading by breaking Mandelstam's one straight sentence into three syntactic unities, "I read ... I read... I did not get far." Further, in his translation, "Sieh da, er schweigt, Homer," "he" is an unidentified silent speaker, who is perhaps Homer but perhaps also Dante, Mandelstam or just someone who does not speak now. The speaking falls apart into different voices and the silence which unites them. All the individual speakers depart, while silence, the medium between them, begins to speak.

Like his speaking, the listening of the attentive poet splits: "Wem lausch ich und wen hör ich?" Apparently, the one whom the listener hears is not the same as the one to whom he listens. The rumble of the sea interrupts his listening as much as his speaking. The attention of the reader, a "wedge of cranes," penetrates not only into "foreign limits" as in Mandelstam but is "driven into the most foreign." The intention of Celan's translation is directed towards this "most foreign," which escapes attention, possesses no fixed meaning that may be decoded and manifests itself in a movement of translation from darkness to darkness, from "you" to "you," letting the medium of translatability appear in this movement. This intention towards language is most foreign to language – the falling out of speaking.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Peter Szondi describes a similar movement analyzing another translation by Celan in his study entitled "Poetry of Constancy – Poetik der Beständigkeit." Celan translates Shakespeare's sonnet 105, which thematizes constancy as the expression of the poet's love. In Celan's translation, Szondi notes, this intention upon constancy is transferred from the thematic level to the language of the translation itself. Celan's translation reflects not so much the

Translation strives to overcome this most foreign, which drives languages and speaking apart. For Celan, the highest danger and the highest tension are experienced in the moment of the falling out of speaking. In his translation of Mandelstam's poem the moment of bringing about presence is defined by a double movement, namely, the striving of languages to coincide and their falling apart, in which this striving culminates. Even the language of the sea, the dark rumble preceding any articulation, fails to concur with itself in Celan's translation. Celan separates the rumbling from its medium, as he sets a comma: "Das Meer, das schwarz beredte." In this moment the sea, i.e. the medium of translation, separates itself from "schwarz beredten," i.e. the spoken and the translated. In this difference between translation and translatability, the highest point of speaking and its passing away becomes perceptible.

When Homer falls silent in Mandelstam's poem and the murmur of sea becomes audible, the articulate language of poetry is submerged under the dark muteness of the non-conscious and non-intentional. The poetic present tense is experienced, by Mandelstam, in this transition from attention to sleep. In Celan's translation, however, this moment of Homeric silence is not ascribed as the bearer of the most acute tension. While the last word of the poem is "izgolov'ie" ("the head of my bed"), the translation ends with "hierher" ("up to here"). The movement of translation and transformation is itself being translated up to this "here," – the "here" of Celan's text and of "this present moment," of the text and its reading. The end of the poem is the end of speaking; it is the edge between all speakers and what they are unable to say. This *finis* of language provides the very definition of language. This "shore," this "here," and the final period after it mark the extreme limit of the intention that has propelled the speaking until "here."

constancy as the flow of time, i.e. the medium of this constancy, which is the means but not the intention in Shakespeare's sonnet.

2. Quoting Silence in "Argumentum e silentio"

In the summer of 1954, Celan meets René Char in Paris, becomes interested in his work and translates some of Char's poetry.¹⁴⁷ Around the same time Celan writes a poem called "Argumentum e silentio," which bears the dedication, "für René Char." Later Celan considers using "Argumentum e silentio" as the title for his new collection of poems but decides against it and eventually names his book "Von Schwelle zu Schwelle."¹⁴⁸ Although Celan's poem is dedicated to Char and addresses a "you," this "you" does not necessarily coincide with Char. The very choice of the preposition "für" rather than "an" seems to indicate that Celan takes Char for a conversation partner not without certain reservations.¹⁴⁹ The poem responds polemically to Char's poetry and answers, in particular, two texts, both bearing the title, "Argument:" the first, written in 1938, opens the volume "L'avante monde;" the second, written in 1945, begins the book "Le poème pulvérisé."

Paul Celan

Argumentum e silentio

Für René Char

An die Kette gelegt
zwischen Gold und Vergessen:
die Nacht.
Beide griffen nach ihr.
Beide ließ sie gewähren.

Lege,

¹⁴⁷ For details about Celan's contribution to the first volume of Char in German translation, Poésies / Dichtungen, cf. Gellhaus 200-223.

¹⁴⁸ BWGL 65.

¹⁴⁹ "Ich habe, und darin bitte ich eine Hommage au Résistant zu erblicken, das Tagebuch aus dem Maquis übersetzt und dazu noch einiges Aphoristische. Mit René Chars Gedichten hatte ich es immer schwer" (Gellhaus 210).

lege auch du jetzt dorthin, was herauf-
dämmern will neben den Tagen:
das sternüberflogene Wort,
das meerübergossne.

Jedem das Wort.
Jedem das Wort, das ihm sang,
als die Meute ihn hinterrücks anfiel –
Ihr, der Nacht,
das sternüberflogne, das meerübergossne,
ihr das erschwiegene,
dem das Blut nicht gerann, als der Giftzahn
die Silben durchstieß.

Ihr das erschwiegene Wort.

Wider die andern, die bald,
die umhurt von den Schinderohren,
auch Zeit und Zeiten erklimmen,
zeugt es zuletzt,
zuletzt, wenn nur Ketten erklingen,
zeugt es von ihr, die dort liegt
zwischen Gold und Vergessen,
beiden verschwistert von je –

Denn wo
dämmerts denn, sag, als bei ihr,
die im Stromgebiet ihrer Träne
tauchenden Sonnen die Saat zeigt
aber und abermals? (GW1 138-39)

René Char

ARGUMENT (1938)

L'homme fuit l'asphyxie.
L'homme dont l'appétit hors de l'imagination se calfeutre sans finir de s'approvisionner,
se délivrera par les mains, rivières soudainement grossies.
L'homme qui s'épointe dans la prémonition, qui déboise son silence intérieur et le
répartit en théâtres, ce second c'est le faiseur de pain.
Aux uns la prison et la mort. Aux autres la transhumance du Verbe.
Déborder l'économie de la création, agrandir le sang des gestes, devoir de toute lumière.

Nous tenons l'anneau où sont enchaînés côte à côte, d'un part le rossignol diabolique, d'autre part la clé angelique.

Sur les arêtes de notre amertume, l'aurore de la conscience s'avance et dépose son limon. Aoûtement. Une dimension franchit le fruit de l'autre. Dimensions adversaires. Déporté de l'attelage et des noces, je bats le fer des fermoirs invisibles (Char 51).

ARGUMENT (1945)

Comment vivre sans inconnu devant soi?

Les hommes d'aujourd'hui veulent que le poème soit à l'image de leur vie, faite de si peu d'égards, de si peu d'espace et brûlée d'intolérance.

Parce qu'il ne leur est plus loisible d'agir suprêmement, dans cette préoccupation fatale de se détruire par son semblable, parce que leur inerte richesse les freine et les enchaîne, les hommes d'aujourd'hui, l'instinct affaibli, perdent, tout en se gardant vivants, jusqu'à la poussière de leur nom.

Né de l'appel du devenir et de l'angoisse de la rétention, le poème, s'élevant de son puits de boue et d'étoiles, témoignera presque silencieusement, qu'il n'était rien en lui qui n'existât vraiment ailleurs, dans ce rebelle et solitaire monde des contradictions (Char 216).

The title of the two texts by Char, "Argument," as well as their positions as the opening texts of "L'avante monde" and "Le poème pulvérisé" respectively suggest that their function is akin to short summaries of the plot in opera librettos or play scripts, also termed "arguments."¹⁵⁰ Since the two collections of poems have neither a recognizable plot to be condensed nor a list of actors to be mentioned, the purpose of both "Arguments" must be understood in a different manner. If each "Argument" encapsulates the book it precedes, it must contain *in nuce* something that is told in each of the individual poems. From this perspective, these "arguments" are principles reflecting Char's poetology and thus should be read as theoretical "meta-poems." In his "Argumentum e silentio" Celan responds to Char's poetological claims but shifts the meaning of

¹⁵⁰ In the Middle Ages, these "arguments" in French preceded plays in Latin. For an edition of his dramatic works published 1660, Corneille provided an argument for each play (cf. Patrice Pavis, Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis, trans. Ch. Shantz, Toronto University Press, 1999: 272). Two prominent examples of the "argument" as a summary in poetry are Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, where all twelve books open with a section called "The Argument."

the word "argument" using it in the sense of "statement" or "utterance." As many commentators have observed, the expression, "argumentum e silentio," belongs to the field of formal logic¹⁵¹ and names proof by silence, one type of which is (insufficient) proof of the non-existence of something through the lack of evidence for its existence. Celan's title, thus, suggests that the poem should be read as a speech that withholds something, whether inadvertently or deliberately.

In both "Arguments," Char mentions silence explicitly: "L'homme [...] qui déboise son silence intérieur" in the earlier and "le poème [...] témoignera presque silencieusement" in the later. The relation of the poetic word and silence, as well as the dialectic of the movement between these poles, are cosmos-building in Char's poems. The worlds depicted in the two poems are dissimilar, even if not unrelated. The earlier text speaks of the poem's genesis in a linguistic pre-world, *l'avante-monde*, the later in a pulverized universe after a collapse, *pulvérisé*.¹⁵² This pulverized state results from the work of antagonisms inherent in the proto-universe.

The pre-world of "L'avante-monde" is divided between two poles – accumulation and dispersion – and the economy of the poem is governed by their dualism. The tension between these two poles produces a movement in this radically divided pre-world, where fullness of creation is conceived of as asphyxiating. Men strive to overcome the economy of creation, "l'économie de la création," in their desire to break through to "the world-to-come." The poem describes the impulse to overcome the limits of the existing world. This impulse expresses itself in a search for a liberating vision or for a vision of liberation. Those who spare their imagination,

¹⁵¹ Cf. Petuchowski 119-20, Čivikov 140.

¹⁵² The debt of Char's poetic language to Heraclitus is hinted at by Georges Mounin in *Avez-vous lu Char?* Paris: Gallimard, 1946. This connection is a dominating motif in Maurice Blanchot's interpretation of Char's "La bête de Lascaux."

"L'homme dont l'appétit hors de l'imagination se calfeutre sans finir de s'approvisionner," are contrasted to those who waste themselves in premonitions: "L'homme qui s'épointe dans la prémonition." On the one hand, there is an excess of accumulated provisions ("approvisionner sans finir"); on the other, the silence of those who distribute the bread (L'homme [...] qui déboise son silence intérieur [...], ce second c'est le faiseur de pain). Man's appetite is an appetite for images: some accumulate provisions, *pro-visions*,¹⁵³ preliminary and pre-imaginary half-visions that do not allow access into imagination; others persist in the warning silence of premonitions anticipating but not picturing the future. Image and word ("Verbe") are, for Char, inseparable. The telos of the poem is the liberation from inhibitions caused by the excess of provisions but also from the iconoclasm of silent gestures, which precedes the dawn of consciousness – "l'aurore de la conscience s'avance." The poem speaks in a state prior to this desired consciousness. Both moments define the language of the poem: the impulse of the conscious word to emerge and the silent resistance of images to this impulse.

The outcome of this fight will be either "la prison et la mort" or "transhumance du Verbe." This word, "transhumance," which usually refers to herding or the practice of transporting sheep from one pasture to another, expresses here the impulse of language to

¹⁵³ Maurice Blanchot interprets Char's poetry as an attempt to take a step away from prophetic language, since prophesy obliterates the prophet and predicts only death. For Blanchot, Char's poetry combines the memory of sudden pulverization in the immediacy of pure language with a slow movement of gradual approximation towards the origin. Char's language is thus purely pre-prophetic (Blanchot 1958, 25, cf. also Blanchot 1995, 103). From this perspective, the accumulation of provisions in "Argument" (1938) can be read as "pro-visionary" in the sense of a retardation of the movement towards a visionary language of prophecy. Prophecy, the pure visionary language, is the forbidding limit in this paradigm. Premonition is a counter-movement, which keeps prophecy at bay and suggests a defensive structure. "Prémonition" derives from the Latin *praemonere*, "to forewarn." In post-classical Latin, however, the root *praemonere*- was sometimes associated with *mur*, "wall," by confusion with *praemunit*, the past participle of *praemunire*, "to fortify." Already Quintilian defines the rhetorical device, *praemunitio*, i.e. dealing with possible objections before the presentation of one's own case, as a species of *prolepsis* (anticipation) and thus establishes a connection between forewarning and fortifying (*Inst.* 9.2.17). Celan translates Char's expression, "les grands prévoyants," as "die großen Vorausblickenden," thus focusing on the literal meaning rather than invoking language of prophesy ("A une Sérénité crispée," GW4 584-85).

transcend the "economy of creation," "déborder l'économie de la creation." "Transhumance" is not so much the work of a shepherd who herds sheep or even the work of the "Good Shepherd;" rather, the expression, "the transhumance of the Word," contains an extension of the limits of language. If the divine Word is what shapes *humus* (earth) to humans, *transhumance* is a word that seeks to transcend this economy. While the conscious word is the aim of the poem, "transhumance" describes the movement towards this aim. "Transhumance" is the impulse to overcome what Blanchot calls "the ties of nature" in Char's poetry, something that precedes the totality of the living that exists before individual things and pervades them. Transhumance, the transport from one area (*humus*, "soil") to another does not, however, transfer from the natural to the supernatural or from human to a trans-human. The word, the speaking, seeks to liberate itself from the materiality of images that are involved in its movement. At the same time, the movement occurs only thanks to these materials and their resistance. When "the aurora of consciousness arrives and deposes its clay," the movement, "transhumance," is separated from its "humus," from the material of words and images. The strife between the "opposing dimensions," "dimensions adversaires," excess and lack, that has propelled the movement, ends in lignification, ossification ("aoûtement"). This remainder, the hardened "arrises" ("les arêtes") are the material memory of the movement towards the conscious word.

Consciousness, however, arises beyond this movement and is excluded from its own coming to be, "déporté de l'attelage et des noces." The words "noces" ("wedding") and "attelage" ("a pair of horses") share a common characteristic: both refer to a pair being coupled. "Attelage" is, furthermore, another name for *zeugma*, literally "yoke," the rhetoric figure of joining two

parts of a sentence with a common verb.¹⁵⁴ This coupling under a common yoke – as a figure of speech and as an image – is mirrored in the line, "Nous tenons l'anneau où sont enchaînés côte à côte, d'un part le rossignol diabolique, d'autre part la clé angelique." The verb "enchaînés" is the *zeugma*, which binds the "dimensions adversaires." The diabolic and the angelic, the adversaries, are chained to the same ring. The singing is yoked side by side with the key which perhaps is a reference to the angel of the Apocalypse and his key to the abyss (Revelation 20:1). "We" in Char's poem, however, *hold* this ring, "we" are not chained to it. "Our" speaking excludes and keeps restrained both the singing – the language of nightingales rather than humans – and the unveiling of truth in revelation. In Char's poem, the light of consciousness arises over and beyond this coupling.

The later "Argument" starts with a question arising from the condition shown in the earlier text. If the first text tracks the movement towards the arrival of conscious language, the second faces the stalemate to which it has lead: "Comment vivre sans inconnu devant soi?"¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Zeugma "describes a linguistic phenomenon that is generated by deletion of syntactic units in favor of a remaining one used to complete the meaning of two or more congruent words or clauses" (*Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, ed. Thomas O. Sloane, Oxford University Press, 2001: 792). Zeugma refers usually to the omission of the common element connecting congruent elements, e.g.: "When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language" (Psalms 114:1). Sometimes the term, zeugma, is used in reference to the omission of a common element connecting incongruent elements, e.g.: "and covered themselves with dust and glory" (Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*). According to *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, however, the latter rhetorical device is called "syllepsis" (ibid 760). Since Char's *attelage* yokes together "the diabolic nightingale" and "the angelic key," this parallelism suggests zeugma rather than syllepsis.

¹⁵⁵ Commenting on this sentence, Blanchot emphasizes Char's employment of the neuter singular, "the unknown." Via Clémence Ramnoux, Blanchot draws a parallel between Char and Heraclitus, whose language is full of non-conceptual forms using the neuter (Blanchot 1999, 298-300). It is common to Char and Heraclitus, Blanchot writes, that they speak a language that is not organized by reflection, abstraction or generalization. In the next step, Blanchot points out that Char's neuter indicates a relation to the unknown, wherein the unknown does not become an object of study and, even if acknowledged, absolves itself from this relation. Celan describes a similar phenomenon in a letter to Char, which he writes on March 22, 1962 but never sends to the addressee: "Pour ce qui, dans votre œuvre, ne s'ouvrirait pas – ou pas encore – à ma compréhension, j'ai répondu par le respect et par l'attente: on ne peut jamais prétendre à saisir entièrement –: ce serait l'irrespect devant l'Inconnu qui habite – ou vient habiter – le poète; ce serait oublier que la poésie, cela se respire; que la poésie vous aspire" (Wiedemann 2000, 574). This omission of interpretation is, for Celan, an ethical issue. Precisely abstaining from any claim to understand the text fully –

Once the unknown is recognized as the unknown and the conscious word becomes a stabilized form, the movement depicted in the earlier poem is no longer possible. The call of becoming, "l'appel du devenir," that gives birth to the poem is, in fact, the call to revolution in the literal sense of rolling back. The poem rebels against the outcome of the movement described in the earlier poem: against the lignification, ossification, coagulation of matter that it seeks now to liquefy. The poem derives from the anguish of stagnation ("l'angoisse de la retention"). The movement that has led to the fixation of the world is laid bare and re-traced in this un-doing. The poem is historical – not in the same sense as a novel describing certain events of the past is called "historical" – but in the sense of the perspective from which it speaks: "le poème, s'élevant de son puits de boue et d'étoiles, témoignera presque silencieusement, qu'il n'était rien en lui qui n'existât vraiment ailleurs." After the pulverization of the world, the poem "testifies almost silently" that everything in it has existed somewhere else and has a history of its own. The poem relativizes these histories, even if it does not retell them. Rather, these histories are fragmentary and disparate perspectives or perhaps projections, which appear as the image of the night sky overlapping with its reflection in the muddy bottom of the well. These overlapping perspectives shape the patchwork image from which the poem "elevates itself" to speak "almost silently" testifying to its histories. This retrospective silence mirrors the silence of premonitions in "L'avante monde."

In both poems, silence is the iconoclastic impulse hidden behind the image that charges Char's language with tension. For Char, silence is the void into which the poem is spoken. Silence is the split of speech within itself, something that prevents the word from becoming

without, however, denying the possibility of understanding – allows the text to speak freely and thus opens potential for an interpretation.

terminal and stabilized in its imagery. The poem's existence depends on the work of silence against speech. In this sense, Char's poetry is essentially iconoclastic, as his images harbor a self-destructive impulse which co-defines them. "Yoke," "ring," "retention," "image" are all figures of fixation from which the poem seeks to free itself, while silence is what disrupts this fixation.

In "Argumentum e silentio" Celan responds to this understanding of silence and distances himself from it. Even the title of his poem suggests that his position varies from that of Char. *Silentium* here is not equated with explosive power, since silence itself is a part of speech. It is, on the one hand, a "telling silence" that pronounces something more eloquently than words could do. On the other hand, *argumentum e silentio* defines the relation between the spoken and the unspoken in a manner that does not involve a direct dualism as is constitutive for Char's poetry. "Das erschwiegene Wort" is not so much spoken against and away from silence; it is rather a speech that is accessed by keeping silent. In Celan's poem, the unspoken is the ground of language, rather than its adversary. Unlike in Char, language in Celan's poem does not fight against its own imagery in search of liberation, and silence is not the rebellious impulse of the word that strives to break out from the confines of its own shape. The word is spoken-unspoken "wider die andern," in resistance to or in face of other words. While "le poème [...] témoignera presque silencieusement, qu'il n'était rien en lui qui n'existât vraiment ailleurs" in Char, Celan's word "zeugt zuletzt" "wider die andern," against those who "Zeit und Zeiten erklimmen." "Das erschwiegene Wort" speaks against the words which overcome temporality, "Zeit und Zeiten."¹⁵⁶ Celan thus argues here against Char's triumph over the economy of creation and the "transhumance of the Word." Char's first "Argument" speaks a language that only foreshadows

¹⁵⁶ This expression can be understood as a reference to the vision of chiliastic temporality in John's Revelation 12:14

the arrival of the conscious word and therefore is, in a way, a "provisionary" language of a pre-world. The later text, on the contrary, speaks the language of relativization and transformation following a collapse of a poetic universe. Celan's "Argumentum" speaks "zuletzt," at the end but not beyond "Zeit und Zeiten." Its time is night:

An die Kette gelegt
zwischen Gold und Vergessen:
die Nacht.

The night is restrained and exposed to "gold" and "forgetting." Celan's imperative is that the word be given to the night: "lege auch du jetzt dorthin [...] das Wort." The word remains in the opacity of the night. The Latin *arguere* means to "clarify," "make clear" and derives, like *argentum* ("silver"), from the Greek *argos* (Sanskrit *argunas*) meaning "white," "shining," "clear." Speaking is clarification and silence is the highest clarity, if one keeps in mind the saying, "speech is silver, silence is gold." Celan's *argumentum e silentio* lies, however, between gold and forgetting, between silence and unconsciousness. Silence as gold appears also in a later poem by Celan, "Chymisch," where silence is associated with *lapis philosophorum*: "Schweigen, wie Gold gekocht" (GW1 227). Like the alchemist's search, which never reaches its end, speech never ends in complete silence. If speech is silver and silence is gold, these two poles, for Celan, represent neither a pair of opposites, as in Char, nor two matching pieces of a symbol. Silence and speech, as the other two pairs of figures in "Argumentum e silentio" – word and night; gold and forgetting – are incommensurable counter-figures. This construction is somewhat reminiscent of the title of Celan's first book, "Mohn und Gedächtnis," in which the symbolic representation of forgetting, the poppy, is the counterpart of non-symbolic memory. "Gold und Vergessen" are, however, an even less likely couple, since non of their metaphoric meanings

builds a pair of antonyms. With the first lines of his poem, Celan responds to Char's poetics of zeugma, exemplified in the aforementioned line, "Nous tenons l'anneau où sont enchaînés côte à côte, d'un part le rossignol diabolique, d'autre part la clé angélique." The angelic and the diabolic in Char's poem are a matching pair of opposites, both restrained and kept in hand by the speaking "we." For Celan, the speaker's word is at the chained night's side but not in possession of the ring or the key. On the contrary, the word, even if given freely, is given to the night, which is chained, while the non-symmetrical pair, "gold" and "forgetting," prevail. The freedom of the poetic word consists neither in *potestas clavium* nor in a revolt against restraint but only in the affirmation of the non-dual relation.

These preliminary remarks lead to the main question which one faces reading Celan's poem: what or who does "the night" refer to and what is the status of this word? Is it a personification, a metaphor, a symbol, or an emblem, and what does this image represent if it is an image?¹⁵⁷ These questions pertain to the language of Celan's poetry in general. Like Char's "Argument," Celan's "Argumentum e silentio" should be read as a poem about poetry. The title of both Char's poems, "Argument," reveals his intention of expressing a certain meta-poetic claim. Celan's title, "Argumentum e silentio," names a rhetorical figure and thus ascribes a certain instrumentality or technicality to the poem; it uses the word "argumentum" in the sense of "elucidation" but also hints at the proverb, "speech is silver, silence is gold," as it implies a play on words, "argumentum / argentum," "speech / silver." The title, thus, suggests at least three

¹⁵⁷ This question has been recognized as essential by many interpreters. None of the answers, however, seems to give an adequately differentiated explanation: Elizabeth Petuchowski asserts that "sie" refers not so much to "die Nacht" as to Celan's mother; Giuseppe Bevillacqua argues that Petuchowski's reading is reductive and states that the pronoun "sie" refers to "die Nacht" solely but disregards the fact that the night here has at least some characteristics of a living being; Germinal Čivikov attempts to interpret the night as an image in conjunction with other images of the poem but ends up assigning the night with one particular meaning, namely, "twilight" as contrasted which "gold" (which he reads as a metaphor for "light") and "forgetting" ("darkness").

linguistic functions: a rhetorical tool, a theoretical study, and a riddle or pun. These levels might help us to analyze Celan's "figure" of the night.

"Night" is put on a chain between "gold" and "forgetting." Rhetorically, "gold and forgetting" is a disrupted parallelism, a rhetorical figure that is not impeccable. This is also true for the rhetorical device, *argumentum e silentio*, which is usually logically flawed. If the sentence is a riddle, it presents the reader with an abundance of possible interpretations, so that the reader is left with speculations instead of a simple, unique key. The place of poetry is, according to the poem, at the night's side. Silence and forgetting can be read as the two threats to poetry, both resulting from a lack of inspiration. These dangers, however, threaten the night rather than the word in Celan's poem. The night, at whose side "dämmert es," is bound and exposed and thus appears as a Promethean figure. If so, how should one reconcile the night and its inherent darkness with a reference to the fire-bringing demigod? How does one imagine this night, with which kind of corporeality, if it is possible to chain it? Celan's "figure" of the night does not allow one to form a clear image; it is at best "halb Bild und halb Schleier" (GW3 170), an image obscured by half-references to proverbs, rhetoric figures and half-recognizable symbols. The image of the night is, however, not so much willfully obfuscated as inherently opaque: a clear image of the night would be, for Celan, a misfiguration. Citing Pascal in his *Meridian*, he insists on the constitutive nature of this opacity which resists light rather than denies it (MTA 7). This night, not quite a figure and not quite a symbol, is a "meta-image," with which Celan, like Char, attempts to depict "the unknown" (*inconnu*) without, however, the latter's impulse to exceed the limits of inherited language.

In his meta-poetic "Arguments" Char seeks a plan for the reinvention of language, which for him has the task of overcoming the "economy of creation." Char's poet is banned from creation, "déporté de l'attelage et des noces," but only so that he can be the herald of the arrival of the conscious word. Celan's "night" is, first of all, a skeptical response to Char's vision of "l'aurore de la conscience." No new language is announced and no dawn is expected: the suns stay underwater in the flood of the night's tears, "tauchende Sonnen" "im Stromgebiet ihrer Träne." Vision is impaired by darkness and tears, and the plural, "suns," makes any equation of sunlight with consciousness ambivalent. To these suns – perhaps reflections in the water – the night shows "die Saat," "seed," which is unexpected unless part of a wordplay. The seed, "die Saat," may be read as a mutation of the verb "to see," "sehen," homophonous with "säen," "to sow," in which case "die Saat" might be a pun using the past tense of the root "seh-" – "sah-." The poem says nothing definite about this, certainly; this speculation itself is a typical example of a logically flawed *argumentum e silentio*: if I maintain that in writing "die Saat," Celan has "sah-" in mind, I try to reconstruct the image, to substitute something for what is obscure. But precisely this would be against the paradigm of Celan's language, which, "halb Bild und halb Schleier," evades any clarity of vision – not from a lack of imagination but rather from the intention not to deprive the word, the clear term in its shine, from implied silence, its opaque corporeality.

As "the night," the word "Wort" in the poem is a dark metaphor, figure or image. It, too, is corporeal, apparently alive and suffering: "[das Wort,] dem das Blut nicht gerann, als der Giftzahn/ die Silben durchstieß." In the world of Celan's poem, the word bitten by the serpent's

tooth crawls on the ground, torn by pain.¹⁵⁸ The word is not whole; the poem presents an image of the word as a temporal being, whose bleeding mirrors the flow of the night's tears. The poetic word, for Celan, does not, thus, escape the "economy of creation," unlike for Char. While in Char's "Argument" the poem raises itself from the depth of the well, where stars are reflected in water, the word by Celan knows about both highs and lows – the word is "das sternüberflogne, das meerübergossne" – only it does not detach itself from those perspectives. This elevation remains the unfulfilled desire for light beyond the darkness of the night: "was herauf-/ dämmern will neben den Tagen." Instead of elevating itself, the word lies at the night's side. While the darkness of the night stands for an opaque image, the silence of the word stands for a non-visionary language, a language which does not predict or prophecy. As the image of "the night" withdraws from being quite seen, the word "Wort" withdraws from being quite understood or heard as a clear term. The word is silent, *erschwiegen*, but it also sings: "das Wort, das ihm sang,/ [...] dem das Blut nicht gerann."¹⁵⁹ The word given to the night stands in opposition to other words which are "umhurt von Schinderohren," where "umhurt" is apparently a perversion of "umhört." A word heard is a word abused and tortured. "The word" which stands against other words is, by contrast, addressed to someone or something – the night – that does not quite

¹⁵⁸ Jean-Pierre Wilhelm translated the title of Char's poem, "A la Santé du Serpent," as "Auf das Wohl der Schlange." His translation appeared in the volume of Char's collected poetry published by Fischer in 1955. Along with Jean-Pierre Wilhelm and Lothar Klünner, Celan translated some texts for this volume and took part in editing Wilhelm's translation. Celan, however, prepared later a new translation of "A la Santé du Serpent" and published it separately in *Texte und Zeichen* by Luchterhand under the title of "Der Schlange zum Wohl." A detailed comparison of the two translations cannot be unfolded here. Suffice it to say that this fact indicates that Celan must have considered this poem, in which the motif of the serpent as the necessitator of the fall of language is recurrent, to be particularly important for Char's poetics.

¹⁵⁹ Another pun is perhaps at stake here. Celan might be referring to the earlier "Argument" by Char, namely, to the line "Déborder l'économie de la création, agrandir le sang des gestes, devoir de toute lumière." The German word "sang" means in French "blood," "Blut" in German.

hear.¹⁶⁰ The word, in turn, is never said to speak. The word "zeugt von der Nacht" but this testimony is silent, an *argumentum e silentio*. "Argumentum e silentio" testifies about the word that does not quite speak and about the night that does not quite hear. Unlike for Char, the conscious word does not arise for Celan upon the shatters of a dark unconscious pre-history. The word – half-spoken and half-heard – is only conscious about its being not quite conscious.

In the line, "Jedem das Wort," the difference between Celan's and Char's poetics is particularly pronounced, as it opposes Char's formula, "Aux uns la prison et la mort. Aux autres la transhumance du Verbe." Char's poetics of resistance aims at the liberation of the poetic word in a rebellion which would set the word free and break the yoke of dualisms. This rebellion, however, only redistributes the same opposites, against whose dictate it has been fighting, as Char acknowledges in the second "Argument:" le poème [...] témoignera [...], qu'il n'était rien en lui qui n'existât vraiment ailleurs, dans ce rebelle et solitaire monde des contradictions." Celan's "Jedem das Wort" declares a liberation more radical than that. The phrase is obviously an allusion to "Jedem das Seine," originally the principle of justice made famous by Cicero: "Justitia suum cuique distribuit". The phrase came to mean "to each for his merit" rather than "to each his own." In the language of Hitlerism, "Jedem das Seine," cut in metal and placed over the entrance to the concentration camp in Buchenwald, abuses the phrase in such a manner that instead of proclaiming universal equality before the law, the law becomes equated with the dictator who decides about "merit" and corresponding "justice." Celan's "Jedem das Wort" is not the same as would be "Jedem *sein* Wort," a saying that would correspond to "Jedem das Seine." "Jedem sein Wort" would only establish an autonomy of a "private" poetics in relation to and at

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the cost of others'. It would be an oversimplification, however, to interpret Celan's "Jedem das Wort" as a celebration of the universality of language or a proclamation of freedom of speech for anyone. Celan is quite specific in asserting the singularity of the poem, when he says that the word speaks "wider die anderen." "Das Wort" is not so much solitary as for Char, it is open to anyone and, at the same time, obscure for everyone. The sentence puts *jeden* in relation to the word; this necessity is a dictate. "Jedem das Wort" says nothing about the equality of anyone to whom the word is given, while obliterating the notion of a just share or merit. "Das Wort" is the only share that can be and is given. The construction of the next, almost stanza-long sentence makes, furthermore, clear that "jeder" here is equated with the night: "Jedem das Wort [...] – ihr, der Nacht." The word, which sings, bleeds and is kept silent, but never quite speaks, is given to the night, the receiver, who does not quite listen. It belongs to the structure of language, for Celan, to (partially) fail in fulfilling its function: to speak and be heard. The poem speaks and is speechless, hears and is unheard. Language is never restlessly communicable; and yet precisely its communicability is the dictate expressed by the formula, "Jedem das Wort."

What resists restless communicability in Celan's poem is a certain corporeal element of the word, which gives it density and opaqueness. A reflection about the corporeality of the word is also at stake in Char. The conscious word arises first after it has deposed its clay. The word, it seems, consists both of inessential corporeality and its true essence, the conscious word. The conscious word reveals itself, for Char, when it cleans itself from the debris of its corporeality. In his attempts to liberate the language, Char falls back into distinguishing "body" and "spirit," the "clay" and the "consciousness" of the word. When Celan says that the word testifies of the night, "[das Wort] zeugt [...] von ihr, die dort liegt," this image invokes no separation of the word's

"body" from its "spirit;" the word is inseparable from its obscure corporeality. While Char thinks the existing language to be bound by chains of metaphysics and seeks (pro-)visions announcing the aurora of a renewed language, Celan shows that opacity is the necessary condition of language, rather than an impediment.

The word is given to the night – to the time of incomplete, not quite conscious speaking and hearing, to the night exposed to gold and forgetting. How much silence does this expression, "zwischen Gold und Vergessen," conceal behind its simple syntax? "Gold" for "silence" conceals, *verschweigt* silence referring to it evasively, if one assumes that Celan has in mind the saying "silence is gold." But what if the word "silence" is *er-* rather than *verschwiegen*? An indirect reference or a hint as *Verschwiegenes* would still refer to the same signified. The word as *Erschwiegenes*, however, is approached, accessed by silence, not announced and also not concealed. The title, "Argumentum e silentio," announces that the poem speaks out of silence but not about it; perhaps it can speak about silence only out of silence. Instead of "silver," the matching counterpart to "gold," Celan places "forgetting," which does not allow for a unequivocal reconstruction of the pairs "gold / silence" and "silver / speech." Why does Celan set "forgetting" as the counterpart of "gold?" It remains unclear: what is forgotten – the matching word, "silver?" – and who is forgetting – the night, perhaps, or the word? The word "forgetting," however, is clearly not forgotten. Attention is focused on the forgetting, not on a subject being forgotten or an object which is forgetting. Speaking about forgetting, Celan speaks not so much *e contrario* as *e silentio* about the un-forgotten. Forgetting, the shadow side of awareness, is remembered and preserved in the poem. As the light that dawns ("dämmert") at the night's side, it is only a dim awareness perceived as not quite forgetting. In Celan's poem, speaking,

argentum, seeks its origin in silence, *aurum*, inverting the alchemist dream into the derivation of the lesser metal from the more precious one. Celan's words – such as "silence" or "gold" – are images of what cannot be depicted in language, "images" of silence. This speaking about silence, this so-called silence is the only possibility, for Celan, to approach what is *erschwiegen*: "Mein Schweigen: mein – und das ist keineswegs irgendein als bloße Redefigur abzutunendes Oxymoron – *beredtes* Schweigen: ein stummes Wort, das *dagegen* steht, das gegen das Mörderische steht."¹⁶¹ Speaking about his silence Celan chooses speech over silence, even though he affirms that he is silent. To speak about silence, to make silence to the theme of his speech is the rhetorical figure – this same "bloße Redefigur" which he negates in his letter to Pöggeler – with help of which he can veil his silence and thus communicate his inability to keep silent about silence.

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For Celan, Char is first and foremost the poet of the Résistance. He translates the diaries of Hypnos – Char's codename during the wartime – in a gesture of homage to the French partisan movement.¹⁶² In one of Hypnos's entries, Char describes a painting by Georges de la Tour, "Prisonnier," depicting an old man listening to a woman holding up a candle:

La femme explique, l'emmuré écoute. Les mots qui tombent de cette terrestre silhouette d'ange rouge sont des mots essentiels, des mots qui portant immédiatement secours... Le Verbe de la femme donne naissance à l'inespéré mieux que n'importe quelle aurore. Reconnaissance à Georges de la Tour qui maîtrisa les ténèbres hitlériennes avec un dialogue d'êtres humains (GW4 528-30).¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Letter to Otto Pöggeler from August 9, 1960, Wiedemann 505-6.

¹⁶² Cf. Celan's remark quoted in Gellhaus 210.

¹⁶³ Significantly, Celan translates Char's "maîtriser" with "bezwingen" rather than the more literal "bemeistern."

Char ascribes the light of the words spoken among humans with a power as great as to subdue Hitler's (perhaps, speechless) darkness.¹⁶⁴ Char holds up this conversation among the allied in their underground perseverance to the barbaric darkness of the times, in which people have lost this human ability – to speak with each other. The obvious problem with Char's pathos in this passage is the assertion that the candle-light of the partisans' humanism is represented as having the absolute power over the inhuman cruelty of Hitlerism. But isn't Char here in danger of claiming the absolute possession over truth, as any totalitarianism does? Char's sovereign judgment about what is human and what is not is certainly not an option for Celan. His discontent with Char's unflinching partisanship grows with time and ripens to articulate disagreement in a letter from March 23, 1962. In this letter, Celan responds to Char's advice to disregard Claire Goll's attacks and to prove, thus, to be unsusceptible to enmity. Char, further, claims that he writes his own poems so that only friends come through them unscathed but his enemies fall into an abyss. Celan hardly disguises his skepticism towards Char's firm belief in his own invincibility as he writes: "Vous me dites avoir su créer le vide où s'engouffrent et se tuent vos ennemis – je me réjouis de vous voir si fort, si fortifié. Quant à mon vide à moi, quant au vide qu'on a su créer autour de moi, je le vois... générateur de toute une race de créatures que je ne saurais nommer" (Wiedemann 574). It is not the inhumanity of war in contrast to the humanity of conversation that Celan perceives as menacing; it is rather the vulnerability of any claim to turn out to be false – and if not now then tomorrow – that always threatens from behind

¹⁶⁴ Ironically, this painting is now considered to be de la Tour's only reference to Old Testament among his numerous depictions of Biblical scenes and is identified as "Job Mocked by His Wife." For a discussion of the ambiguity surrounding the female figure in regard to the two versions of the title cf. Annette-Marie Bouquier, "Le Prisonnier, ou Job et sa femme?" *La Mystique de Georges de la Tour*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963: 63-65. It is perhaps even more ironic that Job did, in fact, find immediate help in the words of his wife – only not in her sympathy, as Char implies in his erroneous interpretation of de la Tour's painting, but rather in his own stubborn rejection of her arguments.

any spoken utterance. Thus in his Bremen address (1958), Celan – without, however, referring to his experience during the war directly – describes silence and darkness, which language had to traverse. Celan distinguishes here between language (Sprache) and speech (Rede), rather than opposes light of conversation to darkness of silence, as Char does:

[Die Sprache] mußte nun hindurchgehen durch ihre eigenen Antwortlosigkeiten, hindurchgehen durch furchtbares Verstummen, hindurchgehen durch die tausend Finsternisse todbringender Rede. Sie ging hindurch und gab keine Worte her für das, was geschah; aber sie ging durch dieses Geschehen (GW3 186).

Even if – and perhaps because – not spoken, language is preserved amidst the speechlessness of Rede. Language (Sprache) is kept silent, *erschwiegen*, encapsulated in this speechlessness. This, as it were, hermetically preserved language celebrates no victories but merely perseveres. As language goes through ("hindurchgehen") the speechlessness, its temporality reaches through ("hindurchgreifen"), rather than overbears these times ("hinweggreifen"): "Denn das Gedicht ist nicht zeitlos. Gewiß, es erhebt einen Unendlichkeitsanspruch, es sucht, durch die Zeit hindurchzugreifen – durch sie hindurch, nicht über sie hinweg" (ibid). The poem's appeal to infinity defines a temporality which persists in the paradox of the finite utterance addressing an infinity. Language – and not a single poem or a single utterance – holds together the finite moments of the appeal to the infinite, which is formulated each time anew. Each of these finite moments is lost in time but the appeal to language goes through the losses: "[e]rreichbar, nah und unverloren blieb inmitten der Verluste dies eine: die Sprache" (GW3 185). The poem's appeal to infinity gathers the finite and transforms it into the un-lost, while infinity remains unreachable.

A similar appeal of finitude to the infinite defines the temporality in "Argumentum e silentio," where the time of the poem is – in opposition to the chiliastic "Zeit und Zeiten" – "aber und abermals."¹⁶⁵ "Abermals" is not quite the same as "once more," unlike "wiederum." "Abermals" is not just a mechanical reiteration but rather a repetition despite repetition, a repetition that seeks to traverse repetition, to carry the unrepeatable through – and not over – the ever-repeating machinery of *Rede*. The time of the poem is night but this night is not merely the time of darkness after the sunset, it is the time of repeated sunsets, of "tauchende Sonnen," the time of multiplied darkness. The poem holds its "aber" against time, "aber und abermals," and with this appeal for constancy, reiterated time and time again, it goes through rather than beyond time. Celan's "abermals" stands against the endless repetition of this finite event – the sunset, not just this one sunset but the infinite series of all sunsets the earth has seen and will see.

In 1961 Celan writes in a letter that he has experienced "etwas Meridianhaftes" in his encounter with Mandelstam. He describes this "Meridianhafte" with a quotation from Nietzsche: "Nicht nur eine Sonne war mir untergegangen," which he encounters with surprise reading his own essay, "Der Meridian:" "Die Sonne, und nicht nur sie, war untergegangen."¹⁶⁶ Celan's definition of the meridian here is remarkably distant from the astronomical term for the line connecting all points on the surface of earth, at which the sun stands in zenith. Celan's meridian, on the contrary, is the experience of finitude that connects all sunsets throughout time and, as it were, is perceived from a universal perspective, in quotation. In this paradoxical experience existence repeats itself instead or even despite one's individuality and yet is perceived by the individual as

¹⁶⁵ Cf. "die Bettstatt, darauf/ die Seelen sich abermals stauen" (GW1 129); "das Halbe/ und abermals Halbe" (GW1 247), "ins Abermals-Helle" (GW1 255); "abermals kommst du gegangen" (GW1 287); "das Volk in den Fernen/ abermals um euch geschart" (GW2 195). Cf. also Celan's translation of Mandelstam's "Sleeplessness. Homer" discussed in the previous section. Celan translates Mandelstam's "once" with "vor Zeit und Aberzeit" (GW5 90-91).

¹⁶⁶ Letter to Otto Pöggeler on August 30, 1961 (quoted in Lyon 140).

the highest point of individuation. Reading "Der Meridian," Celan discovers the limit, in which the individual finds back to himself, and calls this event "das Meridianhafte."

3. Aurora of the Stone Age

*Der Stein ist das Andere, Außermenschliche, mit seinem Schweigen gibt er dem Sprechenden
Richtung und Raum.*

Celan' notes to his essay on Mandelstam¹⁶⁷

Around 1959, a few years after writing "Argumentum e silentio," Celan translates "Silentium," a poem from Mandelstam's "Stone," which speaks of silence as the origin of language. In Celan's translation, "Silentium" deviates significantly from the original, illuminating the place of silence in Celan's own poetry.

Mandelstam's poem was written in 1910 in response to Fyodor Tiutchev's famous poem entitled "Silentium!" (1830). Tiutchev was important for Mandelstam as the poet of extreme density, of a "stoniness" which defines the lapidary character of his language,¹⁶⁸ as Mandelstam stresses in his poetic manifesto, "The Morning of Acmeism."¹⁶⁹ This relation to Tiutchev reverberates also in a number of poems in his first book, "Stone." Mandelstam opens "The Morning of Acmeism" with an assessment of a crisis in the poetic language of his time and claims that Symbolism and Futurism are insufficient attempts to overcome this crisis. This is the

¹⁶⁷ MTA 98

¹⁶⁸ Tiutchev's compact style has been the topic of many studies. In his "Question about Tiutchev," Iurii Tynianov explains this peculiar density as Tiutchev's revolution of archaic poetic form (Tynianov 1977, 38-51). His short poems, Tynianov writes, can only be called fragments in so far as the fragment means a microscopic condensation of the monumental lyrical forms of the eighteenth century (in particular, Derzhavin's odes). Tynianov also emphasizes the influence of Heinrich Heine upon Tiutchev, many of whose poems are free translations or variations based on Heine. Tynianov devotes another essay, "Tiutchev and Heine," to a closer exploration of this connection. In a recent study, Anna Ljunggren attempts to show that Tiutchev's dense style has developed in confrontation with the German salon culture ("Fiodor Tiutchev's Poetry against the Background of Salon's Discourse," *Tiutchevskii Sbornik 2*, Tartu, 1999).

¹⁶⁹ "The Morning of Acmeism" was first published in 1919 but there are some indications that it was written much earlier – perhaps, as early as 1913. Cf. OM2 647; NM2 45; Brown 142-143.

result, Mandelstam writes, of his contemporary poets' dwindled attention to what he calls "logos" and equates with "conscious sense." In Mandelstam's view, the word-as-such ("слово как таковое") contains various layers and elements, "conscious sense" ("сознательный смысл") being one of them. Logos, he says, has come to be associated with prose only and finds no place in poetry, since poetry is now focused solely on artistic expression of emotions and neglects the component of reason. In reaction to this destitution of logos, Symbolists emphasize the phonetic and melodic layer of the word and indulge in vague symbolics that devalue logos; Futurists seek to dispose of logos completely by "throwing it overboard" (OM2 321). Mandelstam sees the task of Acmeism in returning to logos without, however, refuting other elements of poetic form, such as meter or phonetics.

How to approach this task? What exactly has been neglected in poetry, according to Mandelstam, if all poetry, Symbolist and Futurist no less than Acmeist, operates with words and words necessarily carry what he calls "conscious sense"? Does his critique, then, mean that Symbolists and Futurists write "unconsciously" – which, one may note, is the task of Surrealists, who formulate quite consciously that they want to approach the unconscious? Mandelstam proposes: "Будем же доказывать свою правоту так, чтобы в ответ нам содрогалась вся цепь причин и следствий от альфы до омеги, научимся носить 'легче и вольнее подвижные основы бытия' [Let us assert our right so that the whole chain of causes and effects from alpha to omega reverberates in response, let us learn to wear 'the resilient bonds of existence more lightly and freely']" (OM2 325). Mandelstam proposes here nothing less than to make the whole of creation answer him, so that language in its fullness would shudder silently from alpha to omega in response to the poet's word. This speaking is, for Mandelstam, conscious. This

formulation of conscious poetry concludes the sixth and final chapter of his short manifesto, the number suggesting a reference to the week of creation. Yet the manifesto does not proclaim the creation of a new language, and poetry is not a restoration of religion for Mandelstam. Mandelstam neither announces a new eon nor prophesizes the arrival of a renewed language. Mandelstam seeks instead to bring the existing language to an identity with itself, so that each word – more precisely, its "conscious sense" – returns to itself. The shudder of the chain of causes and effects is the reverberation caused by this coincidence of the word with itself. In other words, Mandelstam must assume that the "conscious sense" of the word can be forgotten, lost or obscured, so that it can be found anew and experienced as a return to a conscious state, as an "awakening." Mandelstam describes this return with his "new" prescriptive formula for poetry, the law of identity in which the word is equal to itself, "A = A" (OM2 324). In this formula, the word is equal to itself only in repetition. It is hardly a coincidence that the very last words of Mandelstam's manifesto are a quotation from a poem by another author, Sergei Gorodetskii, who also belonged to the Acmeists' group. Having learned the rules of language and its grammar, these "resilient bonds of existence," the poet accepts rather than subjects himself to them. By quoting a poem in the last words of his text, Mandelstam makes clear that his task is not to rebel against the principle of repetition but rather to accept it. Neither the unveiling of logos conjured up in the chiliastic visions of the Symbolists nor the neologisms of the Futurists can break through what Mandelstam calls – in quotation – the resilient bonds of existence. Mandelstam does not perceive these bonds as chains. Logos, for Mandelstam, like the other layers of the word, is "born slowly" (OM2 321). In Acmeism, the word "assumes for the first time a more

dignified vertical position and enters upon the stone age of its existence" (ibid).¹⁷⁰ Logos is a certain stage of language acquisition, of articulation which needs to be learned as walking.

Mandelstam's concept of logos as an evolutionary form, however, relies on an assessment of language within the unrolling of history. The sharp tip of the Acmeist's tool – "акме" ("acme," spelled "akme" in Russian), of which the title of Mandelstam's first book, "Камень" ("Stone," "kamen"), is almost an anagram – divides and differentiates the historical layers which constitute the word in a backwards progression. In a much later poem, "Лестница Ламарка [Lamarck's Ladder]," Mandelstam proposes to step all the way down the ladder of creation: "На подвижной лестнице Ламарка / я займу последнюю ступень [On Lamarck's resilient ladder / I'll occupy the lowest rung] (OM1 177). In "The Morning of Acmeism," Mandelstam describes his project for the "renewal" of poetry as a project of writing-as-rewriting by going backwards through the history of culture rather than nature. He sees the task of an Acmeist in the erection of a Gothic cathedral (OM2 323) with the stones borrowed from Romantics (OM2 322) on the morning of the stone age (OM2 321). Quotation, for Mandelstam, is not an appropriation of the past in his own writing – his notion of poetry as "nostalgia for world culture" should not be misread in this way – but an attempt to articulate the temporality of a word, e.g. the word "stone," preserved in the layers of meaning assigned to it at various points of its history. Mandelstam's stone, handed over from tradition and set into the foundation of Acmeism, recalls its beginning and its subsequent histories. The stone speaks: "Tiutchev's stone, which, 'having rolled down from the mountain, lay in the valley, torn loose of its own accord or thrown down by a sentient hand,' is the word. In this unexpected fall the voice of matter sounds almost like articulate speech. [...]"

¹⁷⁰ Brown 144, translation modified.

Acmeists pick up this mysterious Tiutchevian stone and lay it in the foundation of their building" (OM2 322; Brown 144). Mandelstam's attempt at representing the accumulation of time in the materiality of the word should not be read as a genealogical project. Tiutchev's stone is for Mandelstam not – or not only – a symbol of Tiutchev's Romanticism in relation to which he can build up his own "progressive" poetry. With Tiutchev's stone, Mandelstam quotes the moment in history – an ever-recurring moment – in which the stone, about to fall down and "speak," if only in a series of thumps, still lies at the top of the hill, at the extreme point (*acme*) dividing silence and speech. This moment marks the change in the existence of the stone. Giving the stone a new existence in his poem, Mandelstam repeats this moment once again.

Tiutchev's stone itself has a history of repetitions. Tiutchev wrote his quatrain – entitled "Problème" and telling the story of the stone's fall – twice. The earlier version (1833) ends with the question, whether or not the stone was "cast down by an external will [низринут волею чужой.]" In the second version written in 1857, "external will" is replaced by "thinking hand [мыслящей рукой.]" In this later version, Tiutchev adds two further lines after the question: "Century after century has passed / And no one has found an answer [Столетье за столетьем пронеслося: / Никто ещё не разрешил вопроса.]" Tiutchev's "problem" of the stone might originate from two sources. The prophet Daniel speaks of a stone of faith, which was "cut out without hands," fell, smashed an idol, "became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:34-35).¹⁷¹ This stone is usually interpreted as a symbolic representation of God's word. The second – and more immediate – source is Spinoza's letter to G.H. Schuller, in which Spinoza reflects upon human freedom and compares acts of free will to the motion of a rolling stone. If a

¹⁷¹ Alexandr Ospovat and Omry Ronen discuss this reference and provide further interpretations of Mandelstam's allusion to Tiutchev's stone in their article, "Камень веры [Stone of Faith,]" in *Tiutchevskii Sbornik 2*, Tartu, 1999.

stone set in motion by an external cause could think, it would believe that it was moving of its own accord although it is, in fact, determined in its motion by the external cause. According to Spinoza, when humans think that they are acting from free will, they are, in fact, like the falling stone, predetermined in their actions. Its movement is, for Spinoza – unlike for a defender of the free will – a consequence of conscious determination. Tiutchev's question of the stone's fall is, thus, the question about freedom and especially about consciousness, as the line about the "thinking hand" suggests. The later poem quotes the earlier one and retells the story of the stone's fall. When Tiutchev replaces the "external will" with the "thinking hand" in this re-iteration, he reflects perhaps on his own hand re-writing a poem over two decades later. No longer a mysterious will, obscure to the observer of the fall, but a clearly intelligible act of consciousness causes the stone to move from the mountain's top. Writing the second version, Tiutchev indicates that the problem of repetition is not merely implied but consciously deliberated in his poem. The last two lines of the later version state that the question – whether there is an external will causing the fall of the stone – has not yet been answered. This return of the question, however, is itself a thought. Tiutchev's conscious re-writing of this story of the stone's fall is what causes Mandelstam to quote Tiutchev's second version, rather than first. In the repeated fall of the stone, Mandelstam hears the reverberation of what he calls "the whole chain of causes and effects from alpha to omega," which he equates with existence. The repeated fall of the stone is, for him, an image of the cosmic fall into creation.

Mandelstam cites this entire chain of causes and effects, as he "lays the Tiutchevian stone in the foundation" of his poetry. The language of the falling stone – no more prophetic than the thumps against the ground – is the voice to which Mandelstam responds and in which he

perceives the fullness of language. The law of identity, "A = A," reveals itself as a quotation of "stone = stone," a conscious repetition of the word of another poet or perhaps even of no one's word, a silent reverberation of language "from alpha to omega." "To exist is the highest ambition of the artist," Mandelstam says in the beginning of his manifesto, the last word of which is, once again, "existence." This last word of the manifesto occurs, however, in a quotation from a poem by a different author. With this quotation, Mandelstam shows that the "alpha and omega" of all poetry is its mere existence, the existence of poetic language rather than the existence of a speaking "I" of an individual poet. Mandelstam's formula for poetry is "existence = existence," a sentence of identity, in which the individuality of the speaking subject plays no significant role. The text ends not so much with an affirmation or invocation of existence as with existence in quotation marks, someone or something else's existence, "existence" as poetry and in poetry. The aurora of Acmeism arises, for Mandelstam, with the recognition that the origin of poetry is thinkable only as quotation. Poetry, for him, is not so much writing as re-writing. In "Silentium," a poem about the origin of poetry, Mandelstam rewrites Tiutchev's "Silentium!" – a poem about the origin of poetry.

4. "Silentium" Quoted and Translated

Фёдор Тютчев

Silentium!

Молчи, скрывайся и таи
 И чувства и мечты свои -
 Пускай в душевной глубине
 Встают и заходят оне
 Безмолвно, как звезды в ночи, -
 Любуйся ими - и молчи.

Как сердцу высказать себя?
 Другому как понять тебя?
 Поймёт ли он, чем ты живёшь?
 Мысль изречённая есть ложь.
 Взрывая, возмутишь ключи, -
 Питайся ими - и молчи.

Лишь жить в себе самом умей -
 Есть целый мир в душе твоей
 Таинственно-волшебных дум;
 Их оглушит наружный шум,
 Дневные разгонят лучи, -
 Внимай их пенью - и молчи!..

Fiodor Tiutchev

Silentium!

Speak not, lie hidden, and conceal
 the way you dream, the things you feel.
 Deep in your spirit let them rise
 akin to stars in crystal¹⁷² skies
 that set before the night is blurred:

Осип Мандельштам

Silentium

Она еще не родилась,
 Она и музыка и слово,
 И потому всего живого
 Ненарушаемая связь.

Спокойно дышат моря груди,
 Но, как безумный, светел день,
 И пены бледная сирень
 В черно-лазоревом сосуде.

Да обретут мои уста
 Первоначальную немоту,
 Как кристаллическую ноту,
 Что от рождения чиста!

Останься пеной, Афродита,
 И слово в музыку вернись,
 И сердце сердца устыдись,
 С первоосновой жизни слито!

Osip Mandelstam

Silentium

She is not yet born,
 She is both music and word,
 And thus she is
 The undisturbed bond of all that lives.

¹⁷² Corresponds by Nabokov to Tiutchev's epithet, "bezmolvno," "speechless."

delight in them and speak no word.¹⁷³

How can a heart expression find?
How should another know your mind?
Will he discern what quickens you?
A thought once uttered is untrue.
Dimmed is the fountainhead when stirred:
drink at the source and speak no word.

Live in your inner self alone
within your soul a world has grown,
the magic of veiled thoughts that might
be blinded by the outer light,
drowned in the noise of day, unheard...
take in their song and speak no word.¹⁷⁴

The sea chests breathe quietly
But the day is clear like mad,
And the foam is pale lilac
In the black-blue vessel.

Let my lips gain
Primordial numbness
Like a crystalline note,
Pure by birth!

Stay foam, Aphrodite,
Return to music, word,
And, heart, be ashamed of a heart,
Merged with the source of life!

The silence represented in Tiutchev's poem is an act of the artist who imposes isolation upon himself and thus restricts his cosmos to his self.¹⁷⁵ The conditions of this isolation cannot be attributed solely to Tiutchev's lack of readership during his years outside Russia, and the line, "A thought once uttered is untrue," should not be reduced to an expression of Tiutchev's frustration with his service as Russian ambassador and the ambidexterity of diplomatic language.

¹⁷³ "Molchi," "be silent."

¹⁷⁴ Translation by Vladimir Nabokov. Nabokov's translation is semantically precise and keeps admirably the thrice repeated identical rhyme in the last two lines of each stanza. One divergence from the original is, however, particularly notable: for Tiutchev's "be silent" he chooses the negative opposite, "speak no word." Another divergence occurs in the fourth line, where he chooses "stars in crystal skies" for Tiutchev's "безмолвно как звезды [speechless like stars.]" "Crystal skies" suggests the Pythagorean music of the spheres and builds an obvious contrast to the silent inner cosmos of Tiutchev's poem. Perhaps one of the reasons for Nabokov's choice is "the crystalline note" in Mandelstam's "Silentium," at the time of Nabokov's translation (1946) already almost as well-known as Tiutchev's.

¹⁷⁵ The poem invites an interpretation in view of Schelling's transcendental idealism, which, along with Heine's poetry, has an immense impact on Tiutchev's work. Tiutchev's acquaintance with Schelling, well documented biographically, has stayed little researched so far. V.N. Toporov hints at possible perspectives for future research concerning Schellingian motives in Tiutchev in his article, "Заметки о поэзии Тютчева. Ещё раз о связях с немецким романтизмом и шеллингианством [Notes on Tiutchev's poetry and his relation to German Romanticism and Schelling]" *Tiutchevskii Sbornik* 3, Tallinn, 1990: 32-106. Sarah Pratt offers a number of readings of Tiutchev's poems in light of his studies of Schelling in her dissertation, *Russian Metaphysical Romanticism*, Stanford University Press, 1984. She, however, focuses almost exclusively on Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* rather than the transcendental idealism.

The skepticism of the speaker in "Silentium" is the skepticism towards the very possibility of linguistic expression. The speaker's gaze turns inward in search for hidden impressions, protected from being revealed to the outside. What prevents the poem, however, from producing an image of self-obsession (and allows someone as apprehensive to egotism as Leo Tolstoy in his late years to interpret "Silentium!" as a portrayal of ethic and aesthetic desolation of a hermit in search of God)¹⁷⁶ is that this inner world is perhaps created but not ruled by the poet's persona. The poet speaks about and beyond his own imperative to keep silent. He speaks about the silence that wants to remain unspoken. His language articulates the silence as his task and speaks, thus, of the failure to fulfill it. "A thought once uttered is untrue" is the only affirmative sentence of the poem, neither an imperative nor a question. This line is not the end of the poem but rather its middle – both formally and thematically – and represents the turning point, at which silence leads to more speech, while the silence itself becomes articulated. The statement, "utterance is untrue," makes it impossible to decide, whether Tiutchev is making an apodictic statement or gives an example of an untrue utterance. If the thought uttered is untrue, is this utterance a thought true or false?

Tiutchev's dictum relies on a strong dichotomy, in which speech and silence build a pair of opposites. The utterance stating the falsity of utterance is an apophatic definition, the cataphatic counterpart of which would be, "silence is true." This claim, however, is not made in the poem. What prevents "Silentium," this ode to silence, from being caught in the circularity of the liar paradox, is that Tiutchev leaves open the question whether silence is achievable at all. His imperative, "be silent," is repeated three times in the body of the text in addition to the

¹⁷⁶ Lev Tolstoy, *The Reading Circle [Круг чтения]*, Moscow, 1911: 292-293

exclamatory title, "Silentium!" The repetition of the call to be silent is as far as Tiutchev's imperative leads. Speaking only seizes for an empty line – the stanza break – to start anew and to culminate, again, in the exclamation, "be silent!"

The source of poetry, for Tiutchev, needs the cover of the night and may not be exposed to any polluting influence from outside. "The day" here is synonymous with an utterance, with a thought that has found a rigid form in the spoken word. "The night," in contrast, protects the thought from being uncovered. The poet recognizes that the clarity of a conscious thought is synonymous to the loss of thought, as it becomes manifest in a form thinkable for others and thus subject to falsifications. A thought re-thought produces an imitation or a repetition and comprises the unique truth. In order to avoid being re-thought, the thought may not even come into thinking. The thought stays true in silent contemplation when it is hidden from the light of reason. It is thus more reasonable to stay silent in order to protect the thought precisely from being thought.

In Mandelstam's "Silentium," in contrast, the word "silence" does not occur except in the title and is not expressed in the form of an imperative. The poem keeps silent about silence while it speaks about poetry and its origin. The counterpart of speech here is music rather than silence. Speech, however, is not opposed to music; music and "word" are connected by an "undisturbed bond," which, perhaps, refers to but does not name silence explicitly.¹⁷⁷ While the cosmos of Tiutchev's "Silentium!" is gathered by the principle of strict dichotomies – speech and silence,

¹⁷⁷ This bond of music and word in the poem does not, however, allow for a complete annihilation of words in the melodic "succession of tones," as Omry Ronen suggests in his interpretation of "Silentium" (Ronen 2002, 87).

inside and outside, day and night¹⁷⁸ – the principle underlying Mandelstam's "Silentium" is the "undisturbed bond" that keeps "all that lives" in a flow. With the notion of the "undisturbed bond," Mandelstam attempts to find a way out of the repetition of speaking about silence. The "undisturbed bond" describes a state in which speaking, silence and music are not entirely differentiated but merged. The purity of the source – which, for Tiutchev, must be protected from any influx – is for Mandelstam the state of being mixed or, more precisely, undistilled. The word is untrue for Tiutchev because it is a continuously generated copy of itself and the true word is unachievable because it becomes untrue once it *has become*. In Mandelstam's "Silentium," the word is suspended between being and becoming. Aphrodite is only the floating foam on the sea surface at an atemporal moment, when the time of Ouranos is over and the time of Chronos has not yet started.¹⁷⁹ This temporality corresponds not so much to the gray zone between day and night but to their atemporal simultaneity: "the day is clear like mad." The clarity of sight and word covers the night of madness like the paleness of foam the dark abyss of sea. For Mandelstam, the primordial scenery of poetry is a landscape where sky is merged with sea, a landscape lacking a horizon. In this pre-cosmic state elements are in flow, unlike in Tiutchev's cosmos, where poetry follows the repetitive rotation of stars in the crystal-clear night sky.

Silence, for Mandelstam, is not the absoluteness of the pure word, as for Tiutchev, but the fluid state, in which the word is not fully articulate. Thus, although Mandelstam's poem is entitled "Silentium," he chooses another word for silence as the primordial origin of language – *nemota*, dumbness, numbness, but also incapability, fatigue. Mandelstam's title, "Silentium" –

¹⁷⁸ For an analysis of the night as representation of chaos in Tiutchev and, differently, in Mandelstam cf. Evgenii Toddes, "Mandelstam and Tiutchev," *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics*, Lisse: De Ridder, 1974, 59-87.

¹⁷⁹ The atemporality of the origin is also at stake in another poem: "Вернись в смесительное лоно,/ Откуда, Лия, ты пришла [Return to the womb that mixes,/ From where you, Leah, came]" (OM1 77).

without the exclamation mark – is no longer an imperative to keep silent. *Nemota* does not repeat *silentium* but rather gives it a different name and thus escapes the reiterated invocation of silence in Tiutchev's poem. The last word of the poem, "*slito* [merged, coalesced, flowing together]," with which Mandelstam describes the primordial tie of speech and music, is a phonetic alteration of "*silentium*." *Slito* as a paronomasia of *silentium* gives silence a different name. This paronomasia is Mandelstam's attempt to find a way out of Tiutchev's dilemma, "a thought once uttered is untrue." *Slito* does not distort the word "silentium" and does not call for silence. Rather, it accepts the condition which bothers Tiutchev – that one can neither think without words, nor express a thought without betraying its unspoken purity. Mandelstam's *slito* liquefies Tiutchev's absolute dichotomy of speech and silence. The replacement of the substantive, *silentium*, with a participle of perfect tense, *slito*, refers to the fluidity of the pre-cosmic state in a middle state between being and becoming as well as between silence and speech. Poetry has its source in *slito*, this synthesis of noun and verb. In his essay on Mandelstam's poetry, Celan characterizes this synthesis, when – remarking upon Mandelstam's inclination towards the participle, this "substantivische Zeitform" – he notes that "Zeit partizipiert" in these poems, "time participates" (MTA 216).

Slito, the last word of the poem, is not so much a quotation as a deviation from the poem's title quoting Tiutchev's "Silentium." If in "The Morning of Acmeism" Mandelstam proposes to lay Tiutchev's stone in the foundation of his own poetry, how does this proposition relate to this movement in "Silentium," his Tiutchevian poem? In "The Morning of Acmeism," Mandelstam names Tiutchev's falling stone "the word," the conscious "voice" of existence. The answer to the call ("вызов") of this lapidary language gives the word "another existence" ("иное

бытие"), in which the stone becomes a part of a new structure. Mandelstam contrasts this "other existence" to the motto of Symbolism, "a realibus ad realiora,"¹⁸⁰ in which he sees a violation of the principle of identity, "existence = existence."¹⁸¹ Since each of the words in this poetry must follow the logic of identity, the word must mean what it says ("stone = stone") and, at the same time, be a part of a whole (e.g. an arch, which is the stone's other existence). This other existence, for Mandelstam, is not the same as for Symbolists, for whom one term is a symbol of an other and for whom, thus, "rose stands for sun, sun for rose."¹⁸² The stone as a part of an arch does not stop to be a stone with all its qualities of "stoniness." Following this logic, Tiutchev's *silentium* would have to find such an existence in Mandelstam's poem as a part of a new entity.

But does "Silentium" follow this rule, the Acmeist law of identity, which Mandelstam formulates in "The Morning of Acmeism" a few years later? How can Mandelstam exclaim: "stay foam, Aphrodite," if this exclamation contradicts his own law of identity, which would dictate, in this particular instance, that "foam = foam," "Aphrodite = Aphrodite"? Is a word, a name that is suspended in the pre-cosmic state of being merged with its pre-history not a violation of this principle? Can aurora arise in a world where sky and sea, day and night are merged and is the poet conscious, if his poem calls the light of day mad?

There is one striking affinity between Celan's "Argumentum e silentio" and Mandelstam's "Silentium"¹⁸³ – the repeatedly invoked pronoun "she," which can neither be quite identified as a

¹⁸⁰ In Viacheslav Ivanov's explication, this motto (literally "from the real to the most real") means "от видимой реальности и через нее — к более реальной реальности тех же вещей, внутренней и сокровеннейшей [from and through the visible reality to the more real reality of the same things, to their inner and hidden essence]" (Ivanov 168).

¹⁸¹ Cf. OM1 323-24.

¹⁸² Cf. OM2 354

¹⁸³ No direct allusion is, however, possible, since Celan read Mandelstam's "Silentium" a few years after writing "Argumentum e silentio."

reference to a living being nor quite reduced to the grammatical substitution of the noun, "die Nacht," in Celan's poem and the name, "Aphrodite," in Mandelstam's. Mandelstam's "she," undefined throughout the poem, is called Aphrodite in the last stanza. Aphrodite, who has not yet come into being, is told to "stay foam," to remain caught in becoming. By naming her "Aphrodite," Mandelstam reveals that her emergence has been presupposed since the very first word, the pronoun "she." The theme of the poem seems, then, to be the birth of Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and love, even if the anticipation of her arrival is pictured as preferable to her actual presence. The only difficulty of this reading is that the title appears to be out of place. Why is the poem called "Silentium" rather than "Aphrodite," or, perhaps – so that the mystery holds until the last line – "Foam"? With her name revealed in the last line, "she" loses the enigmatic abstractness that makes the other "she," "the night" in Celan's "Argumentum e silentio," to a veiled, ambiguous figure. This ambiguity, however, is not so much Mandelstam's aim. The obscurity surrounds less the mystery of Aphrodite's birth than the discrepancy between her image and the silence announced in the title, as the last line reveals nothing about the relation between Aphrodite and "Silentium." Mandelstam gives Tiutchev's *silentium* a "second existence" in his silence about this bond. With the emergence of Aphrodite, the word is uttered and its pre-history is unfolded. Silence is here, in contrast to Tiutchev, not the pure source from which the word originates. The genesis of Aphrodite from foam is not the only story told in the poem. When Mandelstam establishes the equation, "Silentium = Silentium," he defines the origin of his poetic word not so much in silence as in the *word* of another poet. Mandelstam's "Silentium" is not silence but the word, "silence," borrowed from Tiutchev, while the silence about the bond of

the word with its origin remains spoken-unspoken, encapsulated in *slito*, the last word of the poem.

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Осип Мандельштам

Silentium

Она еще не родилась,
Она и музыка и слово,
И потому всего живого
Ненарушаемая связь.

Спокойно дышат моря груди,
Но, как безумный, светел день,
И пены бледная сирень
В черно-лазоровом сосуде.

Да обретут мои уста
Первоначальную немоту,
Как кристаллическую ноту,
Что от рождения чиста!

Останься пеной, Афродита,
И слово в музыку вернись,
И сердце сердца устыдись,
С первоосновой жизни слито!

Osip Mandelstam

Silentium

She is not yet born,
She is both music and word,
And thus she is
The undisturbed bond of all the living.

The sea chests breathe quietly
But the day is bright like mad,
And the foam is pale lilac
In the black-blue vase.

Paul Celan

Silentium

Sie ist noch nicht, ist unentstanden,
Musik ist sie und Wort:
so lebt, verknüpft durch ihre Bande,
was west und atmet, fort.

Im Meer das Atmen, ruhig, immer,
das Licht durchwächst den Raum;
aus dem Gefäß, das bläulich schimmert,
steigt fliederblasser Schaum.

O könnt ich doch, mit meinem Munde,
solch erstes Schweigen sein,
ein Ton, kristallen, aus dem Grunde,
und so geboren: rein.

Bleib, Aphrodite, dieses Schäumen,
du Wort, geh, bleib Musik.
Des Herzens schäm dich, Herz, das seinem
Beginn und Grund entstieg.

Paul Celan

Silentium

She is not there, she is not yet arisen,
She is music and word:
what lives and breathes, lives forth
connected by her bonds.

In the sea is breath, quite, always,
the light grows through the space;
from the vessel which shimmers with blue
the foam rises, pale like lilac.

Let my lips gain
 The primordial numbness
 As the crystalline note,
 Pure by birth!

Stay foam, Aphrodite,
 Return to music, word,
 And, heart, be ashamed of a heart,
 Merged with the source of life!

Oh if only I could be, with my mouth,
 this first silence,
 a sound, crystalline, from the ground
 and so born: pure.

Stay, Aphrodite, this foam,
 you, word, go, stay music.
 Be ashamed, heart, of a heart that has
 detached itself from its beginning and ground.

Celan's "Silentium" has no exclamation marks and neither praises nor conjures up silence. The images and the syntax do not so much repeat as detach themselves from the original. If Mandelstam's poem describes the movement towards the mergence of the word with its "ground," towards the melting of articulate word with music and silence, Celan's adaptation traverses this mergence, and the movement tilts over into the un-binding from the "primordial bonds." Even the verb "ist," repeated thrice in the two beginning lines of Celan's translation, stresses that "her" being "not there yet" is already a being, an early existence rather than a pre-being in an atemporal world: she *is* this "noch-nicht." Celan carries Mandelstam's intention towards the mergence of the articulate word with the inarticulate silence further by carrying the word, "silence," "Schweigen," through its melodious transformation from Tiutchev's "silentium" to Mandelstam's "*slito*." Celan translates Mandelstam's *nemota*, "numbness," with *Schweigen*, "silence," but sets the sentence in subjunctive mood – "o könnt ich doch" – thus taking a further step away from the crystalline purity of music, which Mandelstam's poem invokes rather than affirms. If Mandelstam's solution to Tiutchev's dilemma is the obliteration of silence in the synthesis of silence and articulate speech, Celan's re-introduction of the word "silence" is a step beyond silence. Celan completes this step when he demonstrates the impossibility of expressing

silence in speech by means of a hyperbole. Whereas the lips of the poet are numb in Mandelstam's poem – perhaps spellbound by the unnamed beauty *in statu nascendi* – the poet himself, in Celan's version, is filled with the desire to *be* this silence, "o könnt ich... solch erstes Schweigen sein." This silence appears neither as the poet's action nor his being tongue-tied; rather, the silence itself becomes here the speaking subject. In this hyperbolic equation with the original silence, the figure of the speaker dilates precariously but the same exaggeration leads to a reversal in effect – silence becomes reduced to a figure of speech.¹⁸⁴ In this turn, silence and speech traverse each other and their relation reverts.

The last stanza describes the moment, in which the movement that has led to the emergence of word and music in silence leads to their separation from silence and from each other. The momentum of this movement has been building up from the beginning of the poem and becomes particularly noticeable in the line, where Celan's translation clearly deviates from the original: "the light grows through the space [das Licht durchwächst den Raum]" for "but the day is bright like mad [Но как безумный светел день.]" Celan's version obliterates the madness of the atemporal moment, in which day and night are fused, and suggests instead the rise of the sun at dawn and the gradually increasing brightness. The image of the morning aurora is further supported by the verb "rises" in the next line ("steigt... Schaum") as well as with the slight but crucial change in the color palette – from the dark blue of the night to the matutinal azure of

¹⁸⁴ It is worth to note that in his poems written in the Voronezh exile, Mandelstam finds a path to a newly unfolded poetics through an exaggeration of the poet's figure: "И не ограблен я, и не надломлен / А только что всего переогромлен [And I am neither robbed nor broken, / I am just a little overmagnified]" (OM1 218). It is peculiar to Mandelstam's late poetry that the alternation of hyperbole ("overmagnified") and bathos ("just a little") does not obliterate the prosaic task: "Я должен жить [I must live.]" In a letter to Gottfried Bermann Fischer from June 25, 1962, Celan hints at a similar experience: "Vielleicht ist das 'Gefährdete', von dem sie sprechen, ganz einfach dies: das Menschliche in seiner – von 'understatement' und Hyperbel gleichermaßen verdunkelten - Selbstverständlichkeit" (Bermann Fischer 628). This anxious balancing between exaggeration and understatement might have been on Celan's mind already in 1960, at the time when he was translating "Silentium."

water and sky ("bläulich schimmert"). In Celan's version, the sun has moved. The movement towards the ecstatic mergence of language and music with silence, which culminates in the hyperbole, results in their subsequent un-mixing. When Celan writes: "you, word, go, stay music," his gesture is very different from Mandelstam's gesture in the corresponding line, "Return to music, word." Mandelstam's poem starts with a description of a pre-world, in which word and music are yet unmixed, glued by silence in this primordial synthesis. The second half invokes this ecstatic vision in the tone of nostalgic longing and ends with the imperative to the word – which is now spoken, no longer the inarticulate "foam" but rather an articulate word – the imperative to return to the primordial state. Thus, "she," the ineffable word, from which the poem unfolds, becomes a shape just to articulate the longing for the pre-history and its lack of a definite shape. Mandelstam's poem reveals itself as a manifesto of an anti-Pygmalion, who praises the shaping of beauty over the beautiful shape and the pre-articulate numbness over articulation. Celan's translation turns away from the pre-stage of shaping for the sake of both the shape and the unshaped. He separates "music" from "word": "Du, Wort, geh" is set apart from "bleib Musik" by a comma, which not so much twists as sets forth Mandelstam's intention. The synthesis of music, word, and muteness is, for Mandelstam, the perfection of language – a perfection, upon which the poet touches with his last half-word, half-song, *slito*. In Celan's translation, the articulate word has to turn away from this perfection – "Du, Wort, geh." Here Celan's translation traverses the atemporal unity of becoming and being, fused in Mandelstam's "aphrodisiac" moment. The word learns "gehen," to *walk*: Celan's translation fulfills the program for poetry sketched by Mandelstam in his "Morning of Acmeism," where the word is supposed to

"assume for the first time a more dignified vertical position and enter upon the stone age of its existence" (Brown 144).¹⁸⁵

The partition of word and music brings about a beginning of speech, in which the word "stands up." The sky and sea are no longer merged, since the "word's" vertical position relies on a distinction between up and down – only by knowing this difference, it can "walk." The music in Celan's translation "stays" in contrast to the word, which "goes" but also "walks:" "Du Wort, geh, bleib Musik." The movement in Celan's third stanza is, unlike in Mandelstam, no longer towards the primordial synthesis of music and word but through and away from it. Like Mandelstam, Celan lets the emphasis fall upon the very last word of the poem. This word – *entstieg*, "detached" – is, however, opposed to Mandelstam's *slito*, "merged." The articulate, "shaped" word detaches itself from the "source and ground," no longer a part of the process of shaping. Beauty is – and here Celan agrees with Mandelstam – "dieses Schäumen," the bubbling of the source, rather than the shape that emerges from it. Celan emphasizes this even further, as he "verbalizes" Mandelstam's "пена [foam]" and replaces it with "Schäumen [foaming.]" Mandelstam's *slito*, a word rhyming with "Aphrodite" ("слито – Афродита"), in which this name is merged with silence, not so much erases the beautiful shape with an iconoclastic gesture as probes its plasticity. Celan's rhyme "Musik – entstieg," on the contrary, suggests a partition of language and music, which still reverberates as an echo in the last word of the poem. "Entstieg" is Celan's counter-word to Mandelstam's "slito," which indicates the limit of affinity between the two poetics. If Mandelstam's concern is the synthesis – whether it is reachable or not – of music and word, Celan's translation traverses this synthesis while preserving the a-synthetic remainder

¹⁸⁵ Translation modified.

of this mergence, the rhyming echo of "music" in the word which is "detached." For Celan, silence is the force which cannot prevent the mergence of language and music but which keeps them apart even through this mergence.

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The most prominent divergence between Celan's translation and Mandelstam's original consists in the perspective of the poem in regard to the origin of language. For Mandelstam this origin lies in the pre-history, whereto the poem strives to return. Celan's translation is concerned with the emergence of a semblance of this origin, the semblance that first becomes apparent in translation, detached from both the author's and the translator's intention. In Celan's translation of "Silentium" the origin of language is addressed mediated through the other poet's words. If the enigma of Aphrodite's birth is the theme of the original, it is not necessarily the theme of the translation. This becomes particularly clear in the following lines: "so lebt, verknüpft durch ihre Bande,/ was west und atmet, fort." Celan divides Mandelstam's flowing sentence into three clauses, so that the complexity of the syntax gives another dimension to the image of the "undisturbed bond." This complexity is supported by the introduction of the separable verb, "fortleben." The rhyme, "Wort – [lebt] fort," is an adequate phonetic and, to a certain degree, semantic analogy of Mandelstam's "слово – живого," but the syntactic structure of the sentence is not in the least analogous to the original. The sentence, divided in three parts, stretches between the two halves of the verb, the separable prefix of which, "fort," rhymes with "Wort." The simple genitive, "the bond of all the living," is replaced by an involuted arrangement of clauses, in which Celan translates "to live" with "wesen," "atmen," and finally "fortleben" in

place of the most obvious choice, "leben." Translation not so much "revives" the original to a new life, as transforms the story of Aphrodite's suspended birth. In his essay, "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,"¹⁸⁶ Walter Benjamin writes: "Die Geschichte der großen Kunstwerke kennt ihre Deszendenz aus den Quellen, ihre Gestaltung im Zeitalter des Künstlers und die Periode ihres grundsätzlich ewigen Fortlebens bei den nachfolgenden Generationen. Dieses letzte heißt, wo es zutage trifft, Ruhm. Übersetzungen, die mehr als Vermittlungen sind, entstehen, wenn im Fortleben ein Werk das Zeitalter seines Ruhmes erreicht hat" (WB4 11). Translating Mandelstam's "living" with "fortleben," Celan indicates that his concern is not so much to trace the descent of the poem from its origin – or, as in Mandelstam's reverted version, its descent *to* its origin – but rather to depict the nascent poem in the language which is essentially un-original, detached from the origin. His task is not to uncover the enigma of birth but to re-tell the poem about this enigma without addressing the question of origin immediately. Mandelstam's attempt to speak about the continuous arrival of beauty rather than about the beautiful shape drowns in the uncovering of the enigma: once Aphrodite's name is pronounced, the shape congeals and only the longing for continuation still perseveres in the last word of the poem. Celan's translation stands in discontinuity in respect to the event of the arrival of beauty depicted in Mandelstam's poem. Aphrodite's birth revealed to the speaker of the poem stays undisclosed for the translator, since he merely repeats her name rather than names her. The story of Aphrodite's pre-birth in Mandelstam's poem re-told in Celan's translation is her survival, *fortleben*, rather than her re-birth. This structure, however, would be implied in any translation without requiring the translator to be aware of the relation between his translation and the original. With his

¹⁸⁶ Celan owned a copy of this text. Cf. BPh 303

transformation of the verb "to live" in "to be, to breathe" and, finally, "to live forth," Celan disrupts the semblance of continuity between Mandelstam's and his own poetics. This alteration stands in no polemical relation to the original; rather, it speaks of the *Fortleben* of the original in the translation. As Celan takes a further step away from the origin than Mandelstam in his poem about the origin of poetry, he, at the same time, speaks more immediately about language that reveals itself in translation. Celan's translation does not stop at what Benjamin calls "Vermittlung," which would require him to capture the image of Aphrodite in the primordial synthesis of creation invoked in Mandelstam's poem, but carries it over (*setzt über*) to the firm ground, on which "Aphrodite" – the word, rather than the goddess – takes her first step, *entsteigt*.

5. Silence on Edge

There is a poem in *Niemandrose* in which Celan responds to Mandelstam's call for an upright word in the "Morning of Acmeism." Like Mandelstam, Celan identifies poetic language with a stone in this poem:

Wohin mir das Wort, das unsterblich war, fiel:
in die Himmelschlucht hinter der Stirn,
dahin geht, geleitet von Speichel und Müll,
der Siebenstern, der mit mir lebt.

Im Nachthaus die Reime, der Atem im Kot,
das Auge ein Bilderknecht –
Und dennoch: ein aufrechtes Schweigen, ein Stein,
der die Teufelsstiege umgeht. (GW1 273)

In the "Morning of Acmeism," Mandelstam cites Tiutchev's poem about a stone whose fall reverberates through the centuries. Mandelstam perceives existence speaking in this repetition of the stone's fall; it reveals the silent language on which he can ground his own poetry, and this fallen stone marks, for him, the starting point of all speech. The first line of Celan's poem, too, speaks about the fall of the word which defines the poet's speech and gives him an orientation point – a star. Celan's gesture, however, is not analogous to Mandelstam's. The immortal word ("das Wort, das unsterblich war") becomes, falling, inscribed into the speaker's individual language – "der Siebenstern, der mit mir lebt." Once the word has fallen, it is no longer an abstract term – the "word" in general, the pure word – but *a* word, an image and a metaphor, a shaped utterance.

The word "Siebenstern" can be read as Celan's response to Mandelstam's law of identity, "stone = stone." Mandelstam understands this law as the return of the existence – the re-existence – of

the word "stone," in which it acquires a new meaning without becoming a symbol standing for another word or concept. "The stone age" of the word's existence is a heightening of the "stone's" reality, in which the "stone," beyond materiality, acquires a purpose in a world shaped by human work. This model is not unproblematic in respect with Mandelstam's polemical encounter with the Symbolists, whom he accused of being imprecise in their metaphors. Attempting to free the word – the word "stone" – from any symbolic meaning, Mandelstam ends up constructing a more complicated metaphor, in which the stone, to be sure, remains a stone as part of an arch or as the material associated with the "stone age" but poetry itself is compared with a Gothic cathedral. If "poetry" stands for "a Gothic cathedral," doesn't poetry, then, become a symbol for something else? The stone *works* by supporting the roofs of the cathedral. The cathedral, however, points with its sharp spire to the emptiness of the heavens, says Mandelstam (OM2 323). The stones, the material out of which the cathedral is built, work as parts of this entity, which Mandelstam also calls an "organism" in the same essay. Yet the cathedral (as an entity) has no other function, no "higher existence" which the individual stones acquire as its parts, since the heavens are empty. The cathedral's pinnacle – its *acme* – brings the existence of the stone to the utmost vanishing point. At its highpoint, this lapidary art points to nothing. The stone's work in the arch reveals itself as the suspension of work, since the spire of the cathedral points only to its own stoniness. Mandelstam's equation of poetry with a cathedral is essentially ironic. His cathedral of poetry reveals itself as the experimental site for the study of the physical qualities of this particular material, stone. And similarly, "second existence" – *акме*, "acme" – is nothing other than an anagrammatic reflection of this "stony" word – *камень*, "stone." This anagram terminates the fall of Tiutchev's stone with the quotation of which the essay began.

In Celan's poem, "Wohin mir das Wort," the word, a falling star, falls not so much *from* as *into* a heaven, a heaven in the speaker's own head ("die Himmelschlucht hinter der Stirn"). If Mandelstam calls for a conscious word that defines itself by the absence of any higher – divine – order, Celan rejects any notion of divine correspondence outside the horizon of one's own imagination. Whatever falls into the imagination becomes an image, a metaphor. Characteristically, the word "Siebenstern" falls from the earth rather than from the sky, since this star names a flower.¹⁸⁷ With its seven petals, the starflower might be read as a symbol of creation and earthly finitude. More importantly, however, the flower represents a star and not vice versa: it is not a celestial image of an immortalized mortality – as in the case of a constellation named after a hero or animal – but rather a name for the earthly shape of a perishable flower. This earthly name and image, "starflower," becomes an immortal shadow of itself ("unsterblich"), once it falls into the language of the speaker. As a word and an image in the poem, the "starflower" outlasts the life of the flower it names. Celan does not so much praise this survival of finitude in poetry as much as he acknowledges it with a certain stoicism: "Im Nachthaus die Reime,¹⁸⁸ der Atem in Kot, / das Auge ein Bilderknecht – / Und dennoch: ein aufrechtes Schweigen, ein Stein." The flower as an image in poetry gives another dimension to the life of the flower itself; the poem about a starflower ensures its survival and yet this same survival fails to preserve the mortal life of the flower from which it is infinitely detached. The same can be said about the poem itself: the poem – as what Benjamin calls "die Äußerungen des Lebens" in "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" (WB4 11) – speaks about the poet's life. But, by surviving the

¹⁸⁷ Another flower in Celan's *Niemandsrose* suggesting celestial origin is an aster, "Sternblume" (GW1 223).

¹⁸⁸ It is likely that Celan is citing here "Я слово позабыл [I forgot the word,]" where Mandelstam speaks about the return of a word which has failed to awaken in poetry to the "чертог теней [house of shadows.]" In his translation of this poem, Celan speaks of a *rhyme* (rather than a song, as in the original) that sings "tief in der Ohnmacht," "deep in unconsciousness" but also "deep in powerlessness."

poet, it fails to capture his finitude. This conflict between the temporality of speech and the mortality of the speaker's object as well as the speaker's own mortality is, however, to be thought of differently when the speech concerns the stone. The stone, the object of the poem, survives the poet – the same stone will stand in the same landscape long after the starflower perishes and the poet dies. The speech of the poem leans against this stone – the language that, to quote Celan's words from the Meridian, stands "under the tilting angle of existence" (MTA 215) – and finds the resistance necessary for the continuation of speech.

Unlike Mandelstam, who defines poetry against the infinite emptiness of heavens, Celan sets his poem as a medium in which images of finitude relate to each other. The linguistic temporalities of these images – the starflower, the speaker, the stone – are defined in relation to and differentiation from each other. It is not the emptiness of the heavens but the inorganic solidity of the stone that is the foundation of the poem. The earthly "immortality" of the stone means merely the privation of organic life rather than any higher order of existence and, in the end, is not everlasting, since even stones decay with time. Celan, unlike Mandelstam, addresses his poetry not so much to the future reader as to the future stone, which will still be the same stone referred to in the present moment of the poem. This marks the essential difference between the two poetics. While Mandelstam asks for a reader, even a stone can be a "you" for Celan. When Mandelstam says that the Acmeists build their house of poetry on the stone which once fell in Tiutchev's poem, he speaks about the stone as a metaphor and presupposes a continuity allowing for the re-existence of a metaphor in a later poem. When Celan says that poems are not timeless (GW3 186), he speaks about the finitude of a poem's readability, rather than imagining that poems are mortal beings. He can imagine a time when the poem will exist not only in the

absence of its author but also in the absence of a reader. This poem is defined both in contrast to the silence of the stone which exists before human language and in contrast to the stone's lifelessness, which outlasts any organic lifespan. In other words, the "other" of the speaker in such a poem is lifeless – in the same sense as a stone is lifeless – rather than timeless and divine. While a poet speaking to a stone is, for Mandelstam, mad in his forgetfulness,¹⁸⁹ a poet speaking against the silence of a stone is, for Celan, conscious of the madness of his mortality.

The silence of the stone, now far less a secure point of orientation than in any of the poems invoking silence in *Niemand'srose*, recurs in a later poem which Celan writes in June 1968:

Du durchklafterst
 Farbenstoß, Zahlwurf, Verkenntnis,

 viele
 sagen:
 du bists, wir verwissens,
 viele verneinen sich an dir,
 der du sie dir einzeln
 erjast,
 aufständisch wie
 der dem Handgesagten geschenkte
 Steinmut,
 der sich hinhob zur Welt
 am Saum des gewendeten Schweigens
 und aller Gefahr. (GW2 375)

Here, the silent stone rises in revolt ("aufständisch") rather than merely standing upright ("aufrecht") as in "Wohin mir das Wort." This revolt is directed against "ver-kennen," "ver-wissen" and "ver-neinen," all three verbs starting with the prefix "ver-" which distorts their

¹⁸⁹ Cf. "On the Conversation Partner," OM2 233

action.¹⁹⁰ The speaker's addressee, "du," responds to their action not so much with his speech as with his silence. This "gewendete Schweigen" rises up against the distorting action of "ver-..." with the rectifying counter-movement of "er-jahren." This gesture is similar to "Argumentum e silentio," where "das er-schwiegene Wort" stands against "huren," a distortion of "hören." Speech here acquires its individuality in an encounter with silence. The plurality of "many" ("viele") and their action of "ver-..." experiences a turn to the individual ("einzeln") in this positing encounter. "Erjahen," the positive action of silence, is not that of choosing one particular individual among many; rather, individuality itself is posited in reflection upon silence.

The language in Celan's poem defines itself against the positive resistance of silence. This relation between silence and speech is encapsulated in the line, "am Saum des gewendeten Schweigens," which contains a double quotation. Celan cites Karl Kraus's speech, "In dieser großen Zeit" (November 1914), via Walter Benjamin's study, "Karl Kraus" (1931). Kraus, in his exasperation about the outbreak of the war, insists that he finds no words in these speechless times: "Erwarten Sie von mir kein eigenes Wort. Weder vermöchte ich eines zu sagen; denn im Zimmer, wo einer schreibt, ist das Lärm so groß, und ob er von Tieren kommt, von Kindern oder nur von Mörsern, man soll es jetzt nicht entscheiden. [...] Die jetzt nichts zu sagen haben, weil die Tat das Wort hat, sprechen weiter. Wer jetzt etwas zu sagen hat, trete vor und schweige!" (Kraus 207) Benjamin characterizes this speech as "ein gewendetes Schweigen, ein Schweigen, dem der Sturm der Ereignisse in seinen schwarzen Umhang fährt, ihn aufwirft und das grelle Futter nach außen kehrt" (WB2 338). "Gewendetes Schweigen" is a form of speech but only a

¹⁹⁰ Rainer Nägele briefly discusses this row of verbs as Celan's variations of Freud's denegation and proceeds to an analysis of the pair "dichten / verdichten" which he sees as the paradigm underlying these lines (140-41). I read Celan's "ver-" in this poem as forming a pair with "er-," as in the difference between "verschweigen" and "erschweigen." Samuel Weber, in a different context, points out that "ver-" can stand for a movement across a limit or a threshold and discusses Walter Benjamin's use of the word "ver-stummen" (cf. Weber 605-06).

form of speech that says nothing, because it speaks about its own inability to speak. Silence is the only expression that would be appropriate for the shock that Kraus wants to communicate. Keeping silent, however, is not an option for him, because his silence will not be heard, unless he makes it public – for example, in a public lecture. Thus his speech, even if it only cites rather than speaks in any positive manner, must break the silence to which he is drawn. This inversion makes precisely his silence heard as "improper" speech, as speech that fails to communicate anything apart from its own speechlessness. Kraus's "improper" speech defies the impropriety of war propaganda without, however, excluding the possibility of communication in general. The function of this polemical speech is destructive and yet this destruction is also positive, according to Benjamin, since it works towards the liberation of language from the improprieties of its ideological abuse.

[Das Zitat] ruft das Wort beim Namen auf, bricht es zerstörend aus dem Zusammenhang, eben damit aber ruft es dasselbe auch zurück an seinen Ursprung. Nicht ungereimt erscheint es, klingend, stimmig, in dem Gefüge eines neuen Textes. Als Reim versammelt es in seiner Aura das Ähnliche; als Name steht es einsam und ausdruckslos. Vor der Sprache weisen sich beide Reiche – Ursprung so wie Zerstörung – im Zitat aus. Und umgekehrt: nur wo sie sich durchdringen – im Zitat – ist sie vollendet. (WB2 363)

In quotation – that is, in indirect speech – the word becomes a name. To call the word by name is, to use Celan's expression, to say "yes" to the word, to posit it, *erjahren*. By citing "gewendetes Schweigen" through Benjamin's essay – the title of which, "Karl Kraus," calls Kraus by name – Celan breaks his silence by naming it. In "Argumentum e silentio," the word is approached while it is "erschwiegen," "kept silent." This silence stands for a conscious abstention from naming it. In "Du durchklastert" the word "silence" is, on the contrary, called by name. But is "silence" a name for silence, can silence have a name, can that which is

speechless and unspeakable be addressed in speech? Benjamin's task in "Karl Kraus" is, as his explication of quotation as naming suggests, an attempt to redeem Kraus from the polemics which he was forced to lead. But can Celan redeem silence by quoting the word "silence"? Quoting Benjamin's words about silence – quoting them *wortgenau* – Celan responds to the claim that quotation must redeem language in its destruction. What he calls 'silence' is not so much the word as it is a name, liberating silence from its relation ("Zusammenhang") to speech in this citation. This broken relation – rather than the performative act of naming – is what interests Celan here. The sole quotation, "silence" is a paradoxical signifier, a name for a nameless non-word, neither the word of the quoted text, nor the silence of what remains unspoken.

In his poem, Celan hints at the limitation in the structure of Benjamin's notion of quotation: citing Kraus's claim that he is speechless, Benjamin calls upon Kraus's words but is unable to reach his speechlessness. If quotation redeems the word – the word "silence" – silence itself is broken with the rest of the relationship, from which the quoted word is torn in the act of quotation. While, for Benjamin, Kraus's quotations fulfill the work of destruction, Celan points to the limit of what can be carried out by quotation: his poem remains "*am Saum*¹⁹¹ des gewendeten Schweigens." This "Saum," the hem, separates speech with all its inherent silence from nothingness. Although "gewendetes Schweigen" is a faithful quotation of Benjamin's text, Celan adds a decisive change to the image with which Benjamin illustrates Kraus's silence. If Benjamin compares Kraus's polemical speech with the gaudy inside of the dark coat of silence, Celan locates his speech between the seam and the extreme edge of this coat, beyond which there

¹⁹¹ Italics mine.

is just emptiness. For Celan, silence does not mean the lack of language. Speech and silence in his poem stand in an unbroken relation with each other. Benjamin depicts Kraus's speech as silence turned inside out, i.e. as a language which only gestures towards what remains unspoken. To preserve this speechlessness by means of quotation is the task of Benjamin's essay. When Celan speaks of "der Saum... des gewendeten Schweigen," he changes Kraus's metaphor so that silence and speech are no longer seen as standing in a dualistic opposition to each other but rather as a whole in opposition to the nothing of speech.

At this extreme limit – *Saum* – language turns from negation ("verneinen") to something like affirmation, "erjahren," which, however, is not quite a legitimate word and thus cannot be understood as a term for positing language in naming. "Erjahren" is not a name and not a proper word for the performative act of naming. "Erjahren" doesn't call on things by naming them; instead, it only counters the improprieties of "verneinen, verkennen, verwissen." The steadfast resolution of the stone, "Steinmut," is thus neither comparable with Mandelstam's lapidary, anti-metaphoric formula, "stone = stone," nor is it analogous to the material solidity of the stone in contrast to the organic fragility of the starflower in the earlier "Wohin mir das Wort." "Steinmut" describes the poetic mood which resists rather than destroys. The "stoniness" of this *Steinmut* refers neither to the materiality of stone nor to the durability of its existence. This word, *Steinmut* – unlike, for example, *Siebenstern* or just *Stein* – presents no readily intelligible image, because it describes the poet's resolution, his affect rather than an (imaginary) object. By likening his own mood to a stone, the poet speaks not so much *about* as *like* a stone. This speech is lapidary but, furthermore, it is petrifying and petrified. This metaphor – *Steinmut* – invokes the stone not so much as an object or as material but rather as the feeling of stoniness, as we imagine when we,

for example, use the epithets "tough" and "adamant." Citing Kraus and Benjamin's "gewendetes Schweigen" in his poem, Celan, at the same time, transfers the figurative and material characteristics of stone to the sphere of emotions.

Towards the end of his essay about Kraus, Benjamin says that origin and destruction ("Ursprung und Zerstörung") merge in quotation and that this merging brings about justice (WB2 367). Quotation, on the one hand, is destructive, since it wrests the word out of the framework in which it is stuck. On the other hand, quotation is constructive, since it calls the word by name and thus brings it back to its origin. Benjamin thus defines the destructive function of quotation as work rather than as violence and compares Kraus's language with a worker's tool through which the unity of nature and technique is achieved. The merging of "origin and destruction" in quotation, however, must also annul both – the origin and the destruction. In the concluding lines of his essay, Benjamin calls Kraus a "new angel" and compares his language with an angelic voice: "dieser schnell verfliegenden Stimme ist das ephemere Werk von Kraus nachgebildet" (ibid). The merging of origin and destruction in quotation dissolves in a voice that for a moment lays bare an affectation – it sounds "klagend, bezichtigend oder jubelnd." Both Benjamin and Celan thus see the work of quotation as accomplished only when it unveils something which is perhaps a remainder of language but no longer an articulate word – the angelic song in Benjamin's essay and the "stony mood" in Celan's poem.

Celan, however, does not repeat Benjamin's gesture in this poem, just as Benjamin does not quite repeat Kraus's gesture. In order to emphasize the polemical character of his speech, Kraus employs the rhetorical device of praeterition. He insists that he can only remain silent in these times because of the noise ("Lärm") coming from children, beasts, and canons. This

inarticulate chaos, in which Kraus hears sounds of the approaching war but also of the Viennese yellow press, can only be countered with the very means of the yellow press itself. The pathos with which Kraus invokes silence is incommensurable with the polemical style of his own writing. Benjamin recognizes the healing effect of Kraus's indignation precisely in this incommensurability. If Benjamin had stopped at this recognition in his essay, he would have destroyed Kraus's writing along with the subject matter of Kraus's critique. While he calls Kraus's speech "das gewendete Schweigen," however, he depicts the silence which Kraus invokes in his polemical speech with an image in which the tone of the yellow press is likened to "das grelle Futter" (WB2 338) under the dark cloth of Kraus's speechlessness. In Benjamin's illustrative metaphor, Kraus's language appears as a dignified black cloak wrapping the shrill tone of his newspaper style. With this image, Benjamin lets Kraus appear not so much a polemist as a critic fighting the devil – nolens volens with the devil's means. Kraus grows in Benjamin's essay to a prophetic figure, however, when he compares Kraus's use of quotation as a rhetorical tool for the destructive and redeeming angelic voice. This voice does not remain silent in the face of the newspaper "Lärm;" on the contrary, its intensity is what redeems Kraus's polemical call for silence.

If Kraus's intention in "In dieser großen Zeit" is to unveil absurdity through the absurd claim to be silent while speaking, Benjamin's intention is to give voice to the affect that remains speechless in Kraus's speech about speechlessness. The voice of complaint, invective, or exultation ("klagend, bezichtigend oder jubelnd") laid bare in the act of quotation in "Karl Kraus" is not so much Kraus's own voice as the affected tone which Benjamin wants to redeem from the chaotic noise of journalistic "Lärm." When Celan quotes Kraus's silence in his poem, he

also speaks of an affect, even if "Steinmut" is quite different from the three aforementioned affects listed in Benjamin's essay as the prototypes of Kraus's tone. "Steinmut" in Celan's poem is perhaps that mood into which "Kleinmut" turns in the face of danger ("aller Gefahr) at the "Saum des gewendeten Schweigen." If the quotation, "gewendetes Schweigen," is an echo of Benjamin's essay in Celan's poem, then "Steinmut" cannot be said to be an echo of "Kleinmut," for the word "Kleinmut" is never pronounced and if this word is "erschwiegen," we can only claim this with the help of an *argumentum e silentio*. "Steinmut," therefore, would be a word rhyming not so much with "Kleinmut" as with silence. But "silence" and "word" don't rhyme and no word can claim to be a mimetic representation of silence. What *does* indicate that Celan leaves something unsaid in this poem, however, is the explicit thematization of silence connecting this late poem with his earlier texts such as "Argumentum e silentio." While quotation – and this must be true also for auto-quotation, a figure not uncommonly used by Celan¹⁹² – names and carries the word back to its origin, it also establishes a certain continuation through the semblance of unity between the new and the quoted text. This continuity of the theme of silence in Celan's poetry perhaps also allows for a continuity of what remains unspoken in individual poems.

"Du durchklastertst" is a poem about silence, and we can assume that something stays unspoken in it, since Celan's earlier poems about silence – "Argumentum e silentio" in particular – provide us with this insight. "Kleinmut" is an existing word for an existing affect with which

¹⁹² Hans-Jost Frey analyzes the structure of auto-quotation in Celan's poetry in regard to temporality taking as his examples two poems, "Zwölf Jahre" and "Auf Reisen." Silence – called "Stille" in Frey's study – is seen as the medium which allows for auto-quotation and which, furthermore, finds in auto-quotation its expression. First the silence in which a text ends, and which is sometimes represented in Celan's poems as "Leerzeile," allows for repetition and continuation in later texts. This lapse ("Umbruch") lets all poems of an author be read as parts of a continuous text. Cf. Frey 139-55.

Celan's neologism, "Steinmut," builds a rhyme. This hidden rhyme, if indeed intended, would constitute a pair, "Kleinmut / Steinmut," in which the former would persevere as an echo in the latter. As Benjamin writes in his "Karl Kraus," quotation is not merely a name but also a rhyme which gathers together what constitutes a semblance between two texts ("Als Reim versammelt es [das Wort] in seiner Aura das Ähnliche," WB2 363, cf. also above). Celan uses rhymes only occasionally, and a rhyme in his poetry always produces an emphasis that intensifies the interplay of meaning and composition.¹⁹³ If the pair "Kleinmut / Steinmut" stays silent ("erschwiegen") in this poem, the semantic relation suggested by this rhyme needs to be further analyzed. Since "Steinmut" arises ("hebt sich") when silence turns into speech ("das gewendete Schweigen"), this suggests that "Steinmut" stands in a relationship of opposition to "Kleinmut," because it describes the opposite affect, the adamant resolution in place of faintheartedness. It is interesting to note that the antonym of "Kleinmut" is not "Großmut," as the pair of antonyms, "klein / groß" would suggest, but rather just "Mut." "Kleinmut," insufficient courage, expresses a lack of "Mut." In this regard the word "Saum" can be read in a further sense as in "säumig" and "saumselig," "indecisive." What "Kleinmut" and "Säumigkeit" share is a passivity that leads to the suspension of action. "Steinmut" in Celan's poem, on the contrary, stands against the action of "verwissen," "verkennen," and "verneinen." "Steinmut" can thus be understood as Celan's name for the affect underlining the action of keeping silent, as in "erschwiegen" in the earlier "Argumentum e silentio." This silence is neither a passive avoidance of speech for lack of courage nor a strategic trick ("verschweigen") but an affirming speech act of "erjahren."

¹⁹³ An example of this unusual emphasis is the only rhyme, "blau / genau," in "Todesfuge," where the precision (*Genauigkeit*) of the rhyme itself overdetermines the epithet "genau" and where the rhyming diphthong, "au," is the first syllable of "Auge," to which "blau" refers. The rhyme here gathers semantic and compositional elements of the poem in a chiasmic interweaving of meaning and phonetics.

Steinmut,
 der sich hinhob zur Welt
 am Saum des gewendeten Schweigens
 und aller Gefahr.

"Schweigen" here is not so much a double- as a *counter*-quotation, a counter-word ("Gegenwort") that turns speech at the limit of nothingness into speech again. What prevents speech from ceasing altogether at this limit is the critical force – Benjamin, quoting Hölderlin, calls this force "caesura" in his "Goethes Wahlverwandschaften" (WB1 181) – that finds its two-folded metaphoric representation in the figure of the "Saum." "Der Saum" depicts a spatial as well as a temporal borderline. "Der Saum" as a temporal limit is that which holds together speech and silence. The speaker "säumt" to speak, and his pause lets the succession of metaphors appear against the background of silence. At this limit, temporality is experienced as mere duration rather than as a particular time span of a speech act. As a spatial limit, "der Saum" divides speech and what remains speechless from nothingness. This limit is located in the poem in the last linebreak, "am Saum des gewendeten Schweigens / und aller Gefahr." The last line is spoken *after* the speech has turned to *more* speech, as if refracted by "Steinmut." If in his essay, "Karl Kraus," Benjamin seeks to redeem the pure angelic voice that remains after all speech is destroyed, Celan seeks to turn speech away from destruction. The last words of the poem, "und aller Gefahr," follow the critical line break, in which speech returns to itself after being reflected away from danger at the turn of silence ("gewendetes Schweigen"). These final words are redeemed by the act of quotation and can be spoken only after the word "silence" is quoted and the danger that speech might cease has passed by.

Conclusion

In one of his late poems, "Ich trink Wein" (written on November 29, 1969), Celan invokes Hölderlin's term, "caesura," and refers to Hölderlin's last work as a translator, the Pindar fragments:

Ich trinke Wein aus zwei Gläsern
 und zackere an
 der Königszäsur
 wie Jener
 an Pindar, (GW3 108)

Caesura ("die Königszäsur") appears here as a separating limit between the translator's text and the translated original. Celan poeticizes this act of translating and gives it a spatial shape – *Gestalt*, to use his term from the *Meridian* (MTA 3) – in the image of two glass vessels, "zwei Gläser." These two vessels can be read as standing for the two texts, the original and the translation, while wine is the symbolic representation of inspiration which the translator shares with the author of the original. There is a fragment in Celan's notes which might be an earlier version of these lines: "Am Mandelstamm zackernd, aufs neue" (KA 875).¹⁹⁴ Celan compares his own work as a translator of Mandelstam with Hölderlin's translations from Greek and shapes this experience through the metaphors of his own poem. Hölderlin's term, "caesura," stands in Celan's poem for the extreme limit separating the translator's language from the language of the original. In this poem Celan speaks of his encounter with Mandelstam, Hölderlin, Pindar and Sophocles. Quotations¹⁹⁵ serve as the rhetorical means to help him approach the texts of the poets whose

¹⁹⁴ According to Bertrand Badiou, this fragment was written no earlier than November 25, 1967.

¹⁹⁵ Not only "caesura" is quotation from Hölderlin here but also the word "zackern," which Celan quotes from a letter excerpted in Hölderlin's biography by Wilhelm Michel. Cf. KA 875.

presence the poem invokes and, at the same time, separates his idiom from theirs. In quotation the poetic tradition reaches its critical point, since it brings the temporality of two individual languages to the point where the historical is summed up and given shape in the purely metaphorical expression. The semblance of the presence of the author whose work is quoted becomes a "shape," *Gestalt*. Precisely this highest expression is what Celan calls "die Kunst" – the dead image of life against which "Dichtung" turns itself. The work of "Dichtung" against "Kunst" in Celan's description is comparable to the function that Benjamin ascribes to the caesura: it breaks the "false, erring totality – the absolute" (WB1 181). "Dichtung" as the counterpart of "Kunst" is the impulse that seeks to break the totality of expression or a metaphor right from the middle of this totality. "Ich trink Wein" depicts perhaps Celan's closest approximation to Hölderlin and to Mandelstam, an encounter in which his idiom is separated from theirs by the mere comparison "wie" which breaks the totality of expression. The same wine – Celan considers himself to be so close to Hölderlin and to Mandelstam as to share their inspiration, their "Dichtung" – is held in separate vessels merely by the "Kunst" of each individual poetic form.

For Celan, "Dichtung" – unlike "Kunst" with its automatisms – expresses something which is imperfect, not quite regular in the language of an author, something which he calls "the tilting angle of an individual's existence" (MTA 9). This symbol of imperfection stands for the "Kreatürliches" (ibid) in poetry. Remarkably, Hölderlin uses a similar symbol as his figure for a caesura in his comments on translations of "Oedipus the King" and "Antigone" – a slash, a tilting line that, as Hölderlin explains, divides the sequence of representations in Greek tragedy. This symbol itself, however, is translated from the sphere of poetry to the sphere of tragedy and,

applied in this other context, is an image rather than a purely technical means. Another indication that Hölderlin's caesura stands in no direct correspondence to the inner linebreak in poetry is that he uses a slightly different symbol in his "Comments to Antigone" – a backslash. This "counter-caesura" is yet another tilting angle of existence, expressing a fate that mirrors Oedipus's. Whereas the slash is a common sign for the caesura, the backslash indicates that Hölderlin assigns this symbol with a meaning that deviates from the regular use of the caesura as a technical sign for the inner linebreak. Standing for Antigone's fate, the backslash might be read as a symbol of her defiance against the force of tragic "transport." The two signs, "/" and "\", stand together as two unmatching parts that don't constitute a whole image.

Both Celan's "tilting angle of existence" and Hölderlin's symbol of caesura are figurative representations of an individual's earthly existence. This earthly, terrestrial character of poetry also becomes pronounced in Mandelstam's later poetry, especially in the Voronezh poems, which are replete with images of soil. One of these poems contains an image that is similar to Hölderlin's caesura and to Celan's "tilting angle of existence." The poem, "Вооруженный зреньем узких ос [Equipped with the eyesight of tight wasps,]" ends with the line, "Услышать ось земную, ось земную [To hear the earth axis, the earth's axis.]" This line attracts Celan's attention and leads him to think of a possible translation. On the bottom margin in his copy of *Aerial Ways* – the almanach containing the Voronezh poems – he sketches a German and a French version of this line: "L'entendre l'axe terrestre, l'axe terrestre" and "Der Erde Achse hören, sie, der Erde Achse" (marked with the date, "17.8.61," cf. Ivanovič 124-5). The tilting angle of the earth's axis with respect to the ecliptic is the irregularity that leads to the change of seasons. This irregularity of earthly existence is what Celan finds fascinating about this line. The

poet's wish to hear the rotation of the earth's axis is the wish to tune his own existence to a limitless harmony with the existence of the planet. This wish brings the poet to the extreme limit of poetic expression. Poetry, for Mandelstam and for Celan, is an art depicting the "tiltedness," the asymmetry of earthly existence.

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