

Paul Celan: a rhetoric of silence.

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Paul Celan: A Rhetoric of Silence

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ABSTRACT

The thesis focusses on the suspension of Celan's poetry between speech and silence, in particular on the way in which this suspension functions and on the interrelations between its thematic, formal, metaphorical, tonal and structural manifestations. As is emphasized in a fusion like "das erschwiegene Wort" in the early programmatic poem "Argumentum e silentio," silence in Celan is not opposed to, but is inherent in, poetic speech. The fundamental mediality of his poetry engenders numerous devices of suspension, which, according to the rhetorical modes in which they silence reference, may be divided into three distinct but not mutually exclusive categories: unfinality, disjunction and displacement.

The first category is defined by the avoidance of closure. Whatever the technique employed, be it the elision of a final full stop or an explicit self-revocation, this type of poem not only negates its own finality, but consists of this very invalidation. The speech of the poem is the silencing of speech. This primal suspension infuses Celan's work with a host of correlative disjunctions. Metaphors are often radically suspended between mutually exclusive extremes of connotation, mutually exclusive denotations sometimes starkly juxtaposed. The opposing terms at once define and negate each other: the essence lies in the interstice they delimit. The third category investigated is that of displacement, which, exemplified by the use of irony and anagrams, involves suspension by a deviation from, rather than a negation of, literal meaning: an element of deflection and play is to the fore.

All three categories share the basic mechanism of exploiting an interstice between reference and rhetoric. And, the thesis ventures finally to suggest, it is this interstice, reflected thematically in many metaphors of mediality and constituted by a fusion, a synchronization, of multiple grids of signification, that structures the poem; it is silence that speaks.

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Wir
wissen ja nicht, weisst du,
wir
wissen ja nicht,
was
gilt.¹

¹ Paul Celan, Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden, ed. Beda Allemann et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), I, 214-215. All further references to Celan's works are to this edition, and appear, stating volume and page numbers, in the text.

PREFATORY REMARKS

"Das simple Faktum, dass man etwas ausspricht, ist indezent."¹
Hugo von Hofmannsthal's play Der Schwierige, whose protagonist Hans Karl Bühl utters these words in accordance with the most urgent dictates of an anguished existence, received its premiere in 1921 - when Paul Celan was not yet one year old. Nevertheless, the reader of Celan's recalcitrant art may well be forgiven for feeling that Bühl's assertion was conceived with only his own, the reader's, predicament in mind: too often does silence seem the only answer to the difficulties encountered in reading Celan.

Most obviously perhaps, the critic is painfully aware of what he does not know. The ideal reader of Celan possesses, apart from a basic sensitivity to poetry, an adequate command of the German language; an awareness of the history recent and remote of that language, in other words, of its National Socialist past as well as of Old and Middle High German; a firm grasp of the German literary tradition, particularly perhaps of the works of Novalis, Hölderlin, Rilke and Kafka; a knowledge of French, Russian and Hebrew; of Modern French and Russian poetry; of the writings of Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas and Gerschom Scholem; of Jewish religious history and Jewish mysticism, particularly the Hasidic strain; of prehistory; of geology, particularly mineralogy; of medicine, particularly anatomy - the ideal reader of Celan is an elusive creature indeed.

But perhaps such knowledge is beside the point. Perhaps it contributes little to an understanding of what is central in Celan; per-

¹ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Der Schwierige, in his Lustspiele II, ed. Herbert Steiner (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1977), p. 312.

haps the critic may contrive to make of his ignorance a virtue, an article of faith almost. That, however, is by no means the end of his tribulations. On the contrary, what he does know may prove as prohibitive of discussing Celan as what he does not. Thus the critic may be reluctant to present whatever insight he might have gained into the inner workings of this poetry in the often laboured and dense language enforced upon him in the process. This problem does not, of course, arise if one is content to discuss only line 9 of this poem, line 17 of that, and line 5 of another, collecting, for instance, mentions of "Luft" and "Rauch" from the work of the post-war Jewish poet Celan and neatly categorizing them under the heading of "the Auschwitz-theme." But if one follows in interpretation a kind of principle of responsibility, if one aims ideally to account for every element in, without reducing the complexity of, a text, Celan's poems will frequently be found to coalesce only on a level of interpretative abstraction to which the English language is perhaps natively hostile. This is not to imply that the problem is local, merely a matter, say, of regrettable "continental" abstruseness easily remedied by an injection of solid common sense; rather, the problem originates in the process of interpretation itself. If interpretation is the supersessive projection of (lexical, formal, historical, biographical, psychological, philosophical, formalist, structuralist, deconstructive etc.) frames of reference around textual phenomena of signification, what constitutes such phenomena is, in turn, determined by the frame of reference employed. And in reading Celan, the spiralling reciprocity of text and conceptual enframing needs to be left unchecked uncomfortably long before it comes close even to indicating, let alone somehow circumscribing, the multiplicity of potential meanings projected. For instance, the following poem from the volume Fadensonnen (II, 166),

DU WARST mein Tod:
dich konnte ich halten,
während mir alles entfiel.

has, and not without good reason, been designated a work "of utter

simplicity" by Corbet Stewart.² Yet even so simple an example of Celan's art is fraught with questions, for the poem plays off the certainty of death against the indeterminate identity of the "du." Is "du" death? That is to say: is death personified because, as Stewart writes, it is "the only certain companion"?³ Or is someone "allegorized" as death; is the speaker addressing an enemy, or a lover, in the sense of "you will be the death of me"? Is death, then, literal, or figural? The final curtain, or merely an affectation of speech? The poem itself is this question: death is both, and neither wholly.

The point is not that Stewart is wrong or misleading in calling this poem simple; the point is that he is right. Compared to most of this poet's work, and especially to poems like those with which it is contrasted by Stewart, namely the poems surrounding it in the volume Fadensonnen, "DU WARST" is simple indeed. For complexity in Celan tends on the whole to be such that some attempts to come to terms with it can, whether legitimately or not, seem excessively speculative or wayward even to those acquainted with the difficulties involved. This poem from the volume Lichtzwang (II, 307) has given rise to a particularly instructive example:

FAHLSTIMMIG, aus
der Tiefe geschunden:
kein Wort, kein Ding,
und beider einziger Name,

5 fallgerecht in dir,
fluggerecht in dir,

wunder Gewinn
einer Welt.

Wulf H. Ahlbrecht includes among his suggested readings the following:

² Corbet Stewart, "Some Problems in Reading Celan," in London German Studies II, ed. Joseph P. Stern, Publications of the Institute of Germanic Studies, 32 (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, 1983), p. 138.

³ Stewart, "Some Problems," p. 138.

Auch erotisch, als Lust- und Liebesakt, drastisch sogar als intensive Kopulation . . . liesse sich mit dem Text spielen. Was da aus der Tiefe - bei lustvoll keuchendem und mit der Kopulationsdynamik stimmig korreliertem Atem hervorgeschunden werden kann, könnte der Phantasie des Lesers überlassen werden. Aber wohl doch nicht nur der Phantasie: der Text wäre vom Leser kopulierend zu sprechen und zu atmen. Eine Interpretationsorgie also . . .

The most notable aspect of Ahlbrecht's courageous, or ridiculous, suggestion is perhaps not so much the specific direction of its extremeness, not the number of raised eyebrows it is undoubtedly able to provoke, but the fact that this extremeness does not in itself suffice to make these lines an exception in Celan criticism.⁴ On the contrary: the passage quoted brings to a head and thus typifies speculative tendencies variously and, more important, necessarily operative in most approaches to Celan. The multiplicity of signification pervading all levels of this poet's work precipitates the search for a perspective that is conceptually sufficiently focussed to offer guidance yet interpretatively sufficiently wide not to obscure the individual poem and its complexities. The problem is not peculiar to critics of Celan: any discussion of phenomena of which the whole is more than the sum of the parts must strive to balance the exigencies of generality and specificity; any discussion of a poet must strive to do justice to the body of his work, or to that aspect of it under scrutiny, in general synthesis, as well as to individual poems in detailed analysis. But Celan's poetry does pose this problem in a particularly forbidding form. Not only is it evidently impossible to reduce close to six hundred poems, written over a period of roughly twenty years, to a single principle or set of principles; the difficulties in reading Celan tend, moreover, frequently to be of an order prohibitive of proceeding from the inter-

⁴ Wulf H. Ahlbrecht, Paul Celans späte Gedichte: Versuch an den Grenzen eurozentrischer Wirklichkeit, Abhandlungen zur Kunst-, Musik- und Literaturwissenschaft, 356 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1985), pp. 64-65.

pretation of individual poems to general synthesis at all. Thus Bernhard Böschstein calls for the analysis of "das Wort-, Silben-, Buchstabenmaterial bis in die kleinste Zelle in seiner komplexen Verschränkung zu einer Partitur" as a condition for an appropriate reading of Celan's poems, adding, in indication of the magnitude of the task, that this requirement has been met only in "Ansätze," "etwa in Ch. Perels Aufsatz Erhellende Metathesen oder in P. Szondis resolut auf die Selbsterzeugung der Gedichtzeit aus ihrem Fortgang pochende Interpretation der Engführung."⁵ We do not possess general criteria of interpretation adequate to the problems we find in Celan. As Stewart puts it, ". . . the difficulties of reading Celan may well come down to this: that we lack a critical language sufficiently subtle and sufficiently ductile to do justice to the endlessly enigmatic processes operative in his work."⁶ One may query whether the levels of interpretative abstraction and radical tentativeness we posited as almost inevitable earlier on allow for a language that is subtle and ductile; but that critical language can only be developed in actually confronting individual texts seems clear. "Die Einstellung auf ein elementares Wörtlichnehmen sowohl der poetologischen Äusserungen Celans als auch seiner Gedichte," Christoph Perels writes, "muss der Textanalyse, diese der Textinterpretation und natürlich erst recht der Texte übergreifenden oder sogar auf das Gesamtwerk zielenden Synthese vorausgehen."⁷

There are two further reasons for concentrating, initially at least, on individual poems. The first is quite simply that, even after over twenty years of Celan criticism, this has not been done often enough. Too many of Celan's poems have not at all, or only fleetingly,

⁵ Bernhard Böschstein, "Der späte Celan: Dichtung und Übersetzung," in Lyrik - von allen Seiten: Gedichte und Aufsätze des ersten Lyrikertreffens in Münster, ed. Lothar Jordan, Axel Marquardt, Winfried Woesler (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1981), p. 407.

⁶ Stewart, "Some Problems," p. 149.

⁷ Christoph Perels, "Zeitlose und Kolchis: Zur Entwicklung eines Motivkomplexes bei Paul Celan," Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift, 29 (1979), 67.

been touched upon. The most urgent task is still to learn "Celans Gedichtsprache Text für Text."⁸ Only then can more general statements be made, for instance about the course of Celan's development as a poet. This brings us to the second reason for reading, as it were, "across" this poet's work, and not attempting any kind of chronologically-based overview: until the "Historisch-Kritische Celan-Ausgabe" currently being prepared is published, there will be no secure basis for a chronological approach to Celan. Firstly, it is likely that the order in which the last four collections of Celan's poems were published does not correspond to the order in which they were composed. The sequence of publication is as follows: 1969, Fadensonnen; 1970, Lichtzwang; 1971, (posthumously) Schneepart; 1976, (posthumously) Zeitgehöft. But according to the "Verzeichnis der Gedichtbände, Übertragungen, Prosatexte und Reden in chronologischer Folge" recently compiled by Leonard Moore Olschner, the sequence of composition is this: 1967-68, Schneepart; 1968, Fadensonnen; 1969-70, Zeitgehöft; 1970, Lichtzwang.⁹ In addition, as we are told by Perels: "Gelegentlich liegen frühe Einzelabdrucke von Gedichten vor, die erst sehr viel später Aufnahme in einen der Bände, nicht immer in den nächsten, fanden."¹⁰ This seems to have to do with Celan's habit of arranging his poems in cycles within a volume, an aspect of his work which has been little researched.

The difficulties and uncertainties sketched above would appear jointly to direct the critic towards the interpretation of individual poems. And this is all the more so when, as is almost entirely the case in the present study, the poems to be read are taken from the still little-researched later work, which may perhaps be said to begin with the volume Atemwende. This later work raises the difficulty that had anyhow given rise to the commonplace-description of Celan's

⁸ Perels, "Zeitlose," 67.

⁹ Leonard Moore Olschner, Der feste Buchstab: Erläuterungen zu Paul Celans Gedichtübertragungen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1985), pp. 322-324.

¹⁰ Perels, "Zeitlose," 48.

work as being the most inaccessible German poetry since Rilke's Duino Elegies to a new pitch of intensity. In addition, this necessity of emphasizing the individual text is all the more welcome for corresponding to the critic's awareness that, however desirable or necessary it may be analytically to arrive - as we propose to do here with respect to various devices of poetic rhetoric - at a typology of a particular aspect of Celan's work, the essential lies not in any single feature nor in a simple aggregate of features, but in the multifarious constellations of poetic speech of which such features are part. Constitutive in its totality of individual poetic structure, each of these constellations is possessed of a simultaneity which, on the whole, eludes discursive speech, and the latter can offer only the compensation of proposing that the discussions of individual poems or aspects thereof in the following pages are intended reciprocally and cumulatively to complement one another. In this sense, the shifts implied by the progression from heading to heading and chapter to chapter are shifts of interpretative emphasis rather than poetic essence. Finally, in accordance with the priority given to the analysis of individual poems, attempts at wider-ranging synthesis will largely be restricted to the first and final chapters.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Anyone attempting to discuss an aspect of culture is likely to find himself straying time and again beyond the compass of his specialization into areas about which he knows preciously little. To make matters worse, anyone specializing in the poetry of Paul Celan may well feel that this, too, is an area about which he knows precariously little. That this thesis on Celan's rhetoric of silence has nevertheless itself managed to pass beyond the temptations of silence is in no small measure due to the various good offices of the following, whom I wish to take this opportunity to thank: my Supervisor, Corbet Stewart, for his genial advice in an exploration whose method and results he knew were likely to be somewhat at variance with those of his own expert surveys of some of the same land, and for encouraging me to hold on to my many perhapses; Professor F.M. Fowler, for the many years of guidance, encouragement and support from which I have been fortunate enough to benefit both as an undergraduate and as a postgraduate student; Professor M.H. Würzner, for his encouragement and support; Queen Mary College and the Drapers' Company for the award of a Drapers' Company/Queen Mary College Research Studentship; the University of London, for the award of a Sir Edward Stern Studentship. As always, one's indebtedness to family and friends is, for the most part, both less immediate and less tangible: to my parents and my sisters; to Berend, for his fruitful obstinacies; to Marta, for her smiles and for her generous and patient help in producing the final type-written draft; to Sofía, for being there.

Part One

Introduction

ONE

SUSPENSION

I. Speech and Silence

As designations such as "Dauermieter im Unsagbaren" and "Poet des Schweigens" indicate, reactions elicited by Celan and his work range from a sometimes bewildered hostility to something approaching reverential awe.¹ But even responses as different as these, it is equally clear, tend to share a fascination with the vertiginous proximity of this poet's speech to silence. Indeed, for Celan's critics, flirtation with this paradox has become almost de rigueur. They find themselves able to muster ample support for their attitude not only in the frequent metapoetic and metaphorical presence of silence in his poetry, but also in one of the most widely quoted passages of the poetological speech Der Meridian, which Celan delivered upon being awarded the prestigious "Georg-Büchner-Preis" in 1960: ". . . das Gedicht . . . zeigt . . . eine starke Neigung zum Verstummen . . . das Gedicht behauptet sich am Rande seiner selbst; es ruft und holt sich, um bestehen zu können, unausgesetzt aus seinem Schon-nicht-mehr in sein Immer-noch zurück" (III, 197). Yet while the importance of the suspension of Celan's poetry between speech and silence is generally accepted, the ways in which it functions and the interrelations between its thematic, metaphorical and structural manifestations have, somewhat curiously, been ignored. It is entirely characteristic of this negligence that it should extend even to the

¹ Hans Egon Holthusen, "Dauermieter im Unsagbaren: Schwierigkeiten mit 'Fadensonnen', der neuesten Lyrik-Sammlung Paul Celans," Die Welt der Literatur, 16 June 1969; Harald Weinrich, "Befangenheit vor Paul Celan: Der Poet des Schweigens und die Beredsamkeit seiner Interpreten," Die Zeit, 23 July 1976.

passage quoted.

Careful re-reading of Celan's statement readily reveals the emphasis placed on the phrase "um bestehen zu können," which conceivably has tended to be overshadowed by the stark juxtaposition of the terms referring to the realms of speech and silence, "Immer-noch" and "Schon-nicht-mehr." Oscillation between these conditions, then, is not a cross reluctantly borne by, but a potentiating precondition of, Celan's poetry. The mediality of the poem is essential: the poem, in a sense, itself is the oscillation.

A related aspect of the suspension of the poem between speech and silence as presented in Der Meridian resides in the ambiguity of the verb "bestehen," which may mean not only "to exist," but also "to survive," "to surmount." The dynamism implied here is echoed in the temporality of the opposing terms "Schon-nicht-mehr" and "Immer-noch." In maintaining its mediality the poem avoids the poetically untenable extremes of utter silence on the one hand and of superfluous, invalid chatter on the other. These poles delimit an area of intense paradox: in the face of what cannot possibly be adequately expressed - the extreme example in Celan's work is perhaps the Jewish holocaust - words inevitably fail; at the same time, in the face of what most urgently demands to be voiced - and here that very same experience comes to mind - silence verges upon the criminal.² A single source both prohibits and compels poetic utterance. And this paradox, it must be further remembered, is itself situated within the framework of the more fundamental paradox that silence is presentable poetically only through words.

Finally, a third feature of the phrase in question has tended to be equally disregarded. The poem is characterized as being essentially reflexive: "es ruft und holt sich" (emphases added). The poem itself is the instigator of its oscillation between speech and silence.

These deliberations do not pretend to be an elucidation of Celan's poetics as presented in his "Büchner-Rede"; this could only be arrived

² The full range of this paradox is activated, for instance, in Celan's poetic response to Brecht's poem on the "Gespräch über Bäume": "EIN BLATT" (II, 385).

at in meticulous analysis of the complex tentative totality of that speech and its mainly non-discursive progression. And even then, it would remain to be shown to what extent Celan's theoretical statements and his poetry are parallel or congruent - although most critics, it seems safe to say, tend to agree that in this case a wide-ranging congruence does exist. The reflexions on the passage from the poet's poetological speech merely serve at this point to introduce as an appropriate guiding principle in reading much of Celan's work the notion of poetic suspension, perhaps provisionally best defined as a balancing of contrary semiotic energies.

The oscillation between speech and silence as an integral element of the poem; the dynamism of the poem; the potential of both silence and of words to act as threat or as ally to poetic expression; the paradoxical dependence of silence on words to achieve poetic presence; the reciprocal and no less paradoxical dependence of words on silence to attain to poetic validity; the essential reflexivity of the poem - these are some of the features of what might be termed Celan's interstitial mode of utterance: the mode of being-in-between speech and silence projected in Der Meridian and, it may be asserted at the outset, practiced in the poet's work.

II. The Silent Word

The roots of Celan's interstitial diction lie, to put it in the most general of terms, in an intensely felt insufficiency of language in the face of a world of fragmentation, an insufficiency which would seem to promote the alternatives of a utopian unifying or mediating language on the one hand, and of silence on the other. Celan's poetry inhabits the realm delimited by these alternatives and exploits the tension between them. However, as has been intimated above, one of the most salient features of his work is that these seemingly opposed positions display a tendency to merge. What is aspired to, in other words, is often a utopian language of silence or, to borrow a phrase from Rilke, "der Fische / Sprache."³ Silence, indeed, seems frequently to speak louder almost than words from the halting, self-questioning, exploratory progression of much of Celan's work.

The voice of silence is to be heard with far greater eloquence - such, in fact, that some might say: with irritating insistence - in the following poem, which, since it embodies many of the points raised and many of the difficulties Celan poses, seems particularly suited to serve an introductory function:

ARGUMENTUM E SILENTIO

Für René Char

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

II Lege,
 lege auch du jetzt dorthin, was herauf-
 10 dämmern will neben den Tagen:

³ Rainer Maria Rilke, Die Sonette an Orpheus. Zweiter Teil, XX, in Sämtliche Werke in zwölf Bänden, ed. in collaboration with Ruth Sieber-Rilke by Ernst Zinn (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1976), II, 765. On the particular relevance of Rilke to a discussion of silence in Celan, see part IV of this chapter.

- das sternüberflogene Wort,
das meerübergossne.
- III Jedem das Wort.
 Jedem das Wort, das ihm sang,
15 als die Meute ihn hinterrücks anfiel -
 Jedem das Wort, das ihm sang und erstarrte.
- IV Ihr, der Nacht,
 das sternüberflogne, das meerübergossne,
 ihr das erschwiegne,
20 dem das Blut nicht gerann, als der Giftzahn
 die Silben durchstiess.
- V Ihr das erschwiegene Wort.
- VI Wider die andern, die bald,
 die umhurt von den Schinderohren,
25 auch Zeit und Zeiten erklimmen,
 zeugt es zuletzt,
 zuletzt, wenn nur Ketten erklingen,
 zeugt es von ihr, die dort liegt,
 zwischen Gold und Vergessen,
30 beiden verschwistert von je -
- VII Denn wo
 dämmerts denn, sag, als bei ihr,
 die im Stromgebiet ihrer Träne
 tauchenden Sonnen die Saat zeigt
35 aber und abermals?

As one of the earliest explicitly programmatic poems in Celan's oeuvre, "Argumentum e silentio" (I, 138-139) has attracted generous critical attention. But if the poem is programmatic, it is also enigmatically so. It persistently withholds the illumination of Celan's poetic word it is taken to promise, and thus continues both to challenge and to resist interpretation. This resistance becomes particularly obvious when the reduction inherent in ^{exploring} poetic by means of discursive language is aggravated by the attempt to force the poem into a preconceived extraneous framework. The interpretation offered by Klaus Voswinckel is a case in point.⁴

⁴ Klaus Voswinckel, Paul Celan: Verweigerte Poetisierung der Welt. Versuch einer Deutung, Poesie und Wissenschaft, 36 (Heidelberg: Lothar Stiehm, 1974), pp. 87-92.

He begins by contrasting this poem with the equally programmatic "Argument" by René Char, the French poet to whom Celan dedicates his own "Argumentum e silentio." Where Char charged poetry with the task of transfiguring reality, Celan, whom Voswinckel assumes to be commenting on the other poet, urges giving the word to the captive and the obscure, to the night enchained. The reason for this demand, according to Voswinckel, is to be found in the third stanza of the present poem: the human word has been murdered. By contrast, the "erschwiegene Wort" alone has survived the "Giftzahn," and in the sixth stanza asserts itself against the "Schinder," thus testifying to what Voswinckel terms the "Nachtseite des Lebens."⁵ By virtue of its strict opposition, he continues, the night contains at least the possibility of a utopian unpoisoned future. Voswinckel then proceeds to examine the similarities between the symbolism of night in Novalis and Celan.⁶ In both cases, he asserts, the night is closely related to a counter- or submundane realm, the "Unterreich" or "Gegenwelt" opposed to the world of conventional constraining reality. On this basis, he interprets the relations between "Wort," "Gold," and "tauchende Sonnen." "Gold" he identifies as the sun of the mineral "Unterreich" in Novalis, and, applying this notion to Celan's poem, concludes that "tauchende Sonnen" are identical with the word that is "erschwiegen," as well as with "Gold." In the realm of the night, the diving suns constitute poetic grains of gold with the potential to bring about, provided they surface as "Saat," a new dawn. The crucial difference between Novalis and Celan, according to Voswinckel, is that whereas the former, not unlike Char after him, required that poetry poeticize the world, Celan demands that the more truthful language of the obscure and the dark be spoken: "An die Stelle der Poetisierung," Voswinckel writes, "ist nun programmatisch eine Schattensprache getreten, die auf der Dunkelheit und Negativität bis zu ihrer äussersten Verschärfung ('wenn nur Ketten erklingen') insistiert und

⁵ Voswinckel, p. 91.

⁶ Voswinckel, pp. 91-92.

sich allein davon einen Umschlag verspricht."⁷

Interesting as Voswinckel's interpretation is, it does violence to the very letter of the poem. The move from Celan to Novalis and back again, useful in this critic's examination of the "verweigerte Poetisierung der Welt," becomes intensely problematic when applied to the poem itself. The night is obviously at the very least severely compromised in its capacity to act as limitless "Gegenwelt" by being itself confined, "an die Kette gelegt." More importantly, Voswinckel's equation of "Gold" with the "erschwiegene Wort" is patently incommensurate with the text of "Argumentum e silentio." For "Gold" is introduced from the outset as one of the poles between which the night is enchained, and the "du" of the poem is to place the "erschwiegene Wort" "dorthin," that is: "zwischen Gold und Vergessen." Now, unless we assume, in outright contradiction of the poetic text, first that the "erschwiegene Wort" and the "Nacht," and second that, in turn, "Nacht" and "Gold," are identical, unless we assume, in other words, that what is expressly located "zwischen Gold und Vergessen" (emphasis added) is paradoxically itself "Gold," Voswinckel's view is evidently untenable. The identification of the "tauchende Sonnen" as the "erschwiegene Wort" is equally prohibited by the poem; while the movement of the suns is downward, that of the word that is "erschwiegen" is or is intended to be upward: "was herauf- / dämmern will" (emphasis added). Finally, it is notable that Voswinckel somewhat curiously, if understandably, is reluctant to comment on the most immediately indisputable information we are given about the nature of the "erschwiegene Wort" - surely a crucial issue in a poem recognized as programmatic -, namely that it is "sternüberflogen" and "meerübergossen."

Some further cases of such reductive interpretation of this poem are noted and generally criticized by Germinal Civikov, who proposes to adopt a diametrically opposed approach.⁸ It is his aim to concentrate on the "Korrespondenzen und Bezüge" of the poem, and circumscribe

⁷ Voswinckel, p. 92.

⁸ Germinal Civikov, Interpretationsprobleme moderner Lyrik am Beispiel Paul Celans, Diss. Leiden 1984 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1984), pp. 138-153.

respectfully what he perceives as its constitutive nodes of indeterminacy.⁹ Yet this intention is undercut at a significant point by his own interpretation, when he attempts to define the "erschwiegene Wort" in terms of identity with the night: "Das sternüberflogene und meerübergossene Wort ist in gewissem Sinne die Nacht zwischen Gold und Vergessen."¹⁰ In contradiction of the poem, and of his own explicitly formulated aims, Civikov, in his otherwise sensible interpretation, takes recourse to the very strategy against which he defined his own method: while one might with justification speak of the text presenting a "nocturnal" word and a "verbal" night reciprocally related, the assumption that they are identical seems, at best, highly tenuous.

The complexities of contextual correspondence and opposition operative in "Argumentum e silentio," then, seem to invite and defy reduction in equal measure. They are, furthermore, of such an order that understanding cannot but simplify and distort - and thereby, ultimately, disqualify itself as genuine understanding. "Argumentum e silentio," in other words, is a provocation. Indeed, its first two sections are adduced, in his incisive discussion of metaphor, by Winfried Menninghaus in refutation of the conventional notion that metaphorization is substitution, and hence retranslatable to an underlying essentiality. His perceptive if fragmentary analysis - he discusses only the first and second sections - deserves to be quoted in full. Menninghaus notes in the conjunction "sternüberflogen, meerübergossen" the following:

Parallelismus zur Nacht als der gleichzeitig zu einem Ort verdinglichten Zeit des Geschehens (der Stern ist ein Phänomen der Nachtzeit, das Meer ist dunkel wie die Nacht), Verdoppelung der "zwischen Gold und Vergessen" oszillierenden Dialektik der Nacht ("Gold" steht zum einen, durch seine Affinität zum hellen Licht der "Tage", antonymisch zur "Nacht", und das "Vergessen" steht unter dieser Perspektive seinem Lichtwert nach der "Nacht" näher; andererseits ist das "Gold", vermöge der Konno-

⁹ Civikov, p. 139.

¹⁰ Civikov, p. 145.

tation des Kostbaren, selbst dasjenige, was in der Tiefe der "Nacht" aufgehoben zu werden drängt; deshalb lässt die Nacht "beide gewähren", und deshalb hat das in die Nacht zu legende "Wort" von beiden etwas: der "Stern" spielt seinem Lichtwert nach stärker auf "Gold", das "Meer" stärker auf das "Vergessen" an), bildliche Ausprägung der Konfiguration von "Tag", "Dämmerung" und "Nacht" (wenn die "Nacht" neben den Tagen heraufdämmt, gehen über dem "Meer" die "Sterne" auf) usw.

Menninghaus then concludes: "Was . . . nicht, zumindest nicht ohne erhebliche semantische Einbussen möglich ist, ist eine zusammenfassende Übersetzung dieses Kontextgeflechts in ein 'eigentliches' Wort."¹¹ In consequence of this complexity of contextual relation, which does not allow for identificatory or other reduction, the poem, thus not merely thematically but also somehow modally metapoetic, is reducible solely to its essential irreducibility.

"Argumentum e silentio" would appear to turn, as a whole, on the opposition between two very different kinds of word. The one, belonging to "Jedem," the attack on whom it first accompanies with its song, then reacts to with petrification, while later it is "umhurt von den Schinderohren," could not - or so it seems - be further removed from the other: the word belonging and, in explicit opposition to its counterpart, also attesting to the night; the word associated with the "du"; "das sternüberflogne, meerübergossne," "das erschwiegene Wort." This opposition is further underlined by the one thrice set out and metrically stressed between "ihr," referring to the night, and "Jedem," respectively opening the dactylic lines 17, 19 and 22, and 13, 14 and 16. Furthermore, the grammatically singular "Jedem" implies an indifference to individuality which is emphasized by its capitalization, unnecessary in conventional terms, at the beginning of line 16. This suggests an autonomous anonymity, contrasting sharply with the individuality of the apostrophized "du." And while the word reported with bitter irony as having sung when "everyone" was attacked

¹¹ Winfried Menninghaus, Paul Celan: Magie der Form, Edition Suhrkamp, 1026. Neue Folge, 26 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), pp. 139-140.

by the "Meute" subsequently becomes petrified, the word of the night, firstly, is "erschwiegen," that is to say, of the stuff of silence, and, secondly, continues to bleed after the attack, directed against itself, of the "Giftzahn." Its blood refuses to curdle, and its survival or emergence as valid utterance perhaps depends, as Civikov conjectures, on precisely this fact.¹² The context of fluidity, manifest in "meerübergossen" and "im Stromgebiet ihrer Träne / tauchenden Sonnen," surrounding "das erschwiegene" in marked contrast to the stasis of the "erstarrte" "Wort" would seem to bear this out.

But to insist on the antagonism of the word of "Jedem" and the word of the night is already to distort matters. For the purity of opposition assumed to exist between these words is at various points contaminated by approximation, contact, and even confusion. Thus one might mention here the possibility that the "Giftzahn" of the fourth section belongs to the "Meute" of the third. "Meute" designates, in the first instance, a pack of hounds, and, by extension, an unruly mob of people, whose anonymity thus corresponds not without a certain irony to that of "Jedem," and the later "Giftzahn" echoes this ferocity. One might add to this Civikov's observation that both attacks are presented in the past tense, which leads him to conclude, overlooking perhaps that in the third section it is not the word but "everyone" who is attacked, that the events projected in that and the following section are identical.¹³ Be that as it may, this parallel provides, anyhow, merely the basis upon which some of the above differences between the two kinds of word are set forth.

Of greater significance, then, is the upward movement shared by both: while the desire of the "erschwiegene Wort" to "dämmern" "herauf" may at first be unfulfilled, later the parallel is tangible enough to crystallize in the "auch" of line 25, expressing the sharing

¹² Civikov, p. 148. This observation is of course utterly irreconcilable with readings treating "erschwiegen" as synonymous with "verschwiegen"; this view is to be found, for example, in Dietlind Meinel's Wort und Name bei Paul Celan: Zur Widerruflichkeit des Gedichts, Literatur und Reflexion, 2 (Berlin: Gehlen, 1970), p. 245.

¹³ Civikov, p. 148.

of the action of "erklimmen"; a parallel made possible by the startling fact that the petrified word too has after all survived to scale "Zeit und Zeiten." Moreover, "Gold," one of the poles delimiting the realm of night into which the "erschwiegene Wort" is to be placed is, through its fundamental connotation of stasis, enabling it to function at least in part as a metaphor of accepted and enduring value, subtly linked with the word of "Jedem" that becomes static. This note of stasis is obviously also to the fore in the opening formulation of the condition of the night: "An die Kette gelegt." In addition, both "Gold" and "Ketten," individually but the more so conjunctively, suggest something ornamental and possibly trivial, which might be seen to be taken up in the unconcern of the decoratively poeticizing song of the word of "Jedem" in the presence of the murderous "Meute"; this word is also trivialized from the outset by its attribution to "Jedem," which, to complicate matters still further, encompasses "du" too.

Similarly, the word "sang" is recalled even when the "erschwiegene Wort" supposedly comes into its own, in what appears to be a moment of truth not merely beyond the times in the historical sense, but beyond time itself ("Zeit und Zeiten"), "zuletzt, wenn nur Ketten erklingen": the verb one would normally expect here is the harsh "erklirren," but that lacks the musicality connoted by "erklingen," and hence the reference back to the word that "sang." It bears mention in this connection that "Ketten" itself refers back to the opening "An die Kette gelegt / zwischen Gold und Vergessen: / die Nacht," and thereby re-presents the fusion of the spatial and the temporal effected in that phrase: "zuletzt" pertains also, though not exclusively, to the realm of night, which is thus accorded a degree of finality.

These correspondences are constituted, in the main, connotatively. But in line 13, the relation is more immediate. After the theme of the word has been sounded in the second section, where the "du" is urged to place the word in the realm of the night, the opening line of the next section announces that the word is to be given to everyone, "Jedem." Since no differentiation has yet been made between word and word, this is a point of actual confusion: a moment of congruence, if not identity, which subsumes the intricate structure of correspond-

ence and contradiction that is the poem.

The final stanza's density of texture brings not a resolution, but a culmination of this complexity. In this light, its presentation as a rhetorical question addressed to the "du" becomes almost ironic. Firstly, "dämmerts" is doubly ambiguous here. Is the implied "es" the "erschwiegene Wort," which already in the second stanza was attributed the mode of "dämmern"? Or is it a general "es," analogous to that, for example, in "es regnet"? The verb "dämmern," furthermore, is ambiguous in itself, meaning both "to grow light" and "to grow dark." This second ambiguity is equally manifest in the earlier use of the verb, where it is repeated in that of "neben" in the phrase "neben den Tagen": "neben" might mean "with" the days, with the dawn, that is, and "separated from" or even "opposed to" the days, in other words, at night. This syntactical and semantic ambiguity of "dämmerts" acquires, in view of the complexity of the whole poem, an almost symptomatic or structural quality. The phrase "die im Stromgebiet ihrer Träne / tauchenden Sonnen die Saat zeigt" is syntactically ambiguous in that "Stromgebiet" is the area where both the action of diving and that of pointing out take place, but not necessarily simultaneously. The conjunction of "sternüberflogen" and "meerübergossen" reappears here in a more dynamic mode, "tauchende Sonnen" and "Stromgebiet" both connoting greater vigour and purpose of movement than their respective counterparts. "Sonnen" converges optically with "Gold" and "Stern" as well as "Tagen" in opposition to the night; but these suns are diving, suggesting, however remotely, a (golden?) sunset, a time of transition between day and night, a time of "Dämmerung." The downward movement of the suns is countered by the upward orientation of the "Saat," implying the possibility of a meeting between sun and seed, a finding of the "Saat" by the diving suns; this possibility is the more envisageable since "tauchen" has strong connotations of submarine search or quest, and the night is concerned to point out the "Saat" to the suns. The sorrow of the night ("Träne") might, then, ultimately bear fruit. The final lines of the poem, however, comprise a suggestion, slight but perhaps decisive, of the perpetual failure of such a meeting to come about: "aber und abermals" - the insistence of the iteration infuses an apparently merely

rhetorical question with a plaintive note of desperation and the poem as a whole with a degree of unfinality.

Formally, then, "Argumentum e silentio" might be described as a simultaneous projection and subversion of connotative and denotative alignments and oppositions, as a complex structure of disruptive conjunction - not the least symptomatic of which is the almost cantabile tone of a poem denouncing the word that "sang."

Thematically, Celan's early work especially is often viewed as an exploration of the realm of the dead, a specific dead in his case, namely the victims of the Jewish holocaust. His poetry at this stage is said to be structured around a series of complementarily inter-related polarities, such as life and death, remembrance and oblivion, "ich" and "du," light and night, and speech and silence. The impression is given that there exists in early Celan a kind of poetic cosmos in which the key elements - "Nacht," "Herz," "Haar," "Stein," "Stern" and others - and their semantic positions are relatively constant. And as a general rough guide to Celan's early poetry this might be deemed adequate. But not as a rigid framework for the interpretation of individual poems. Thus while the words of "Argumentum e silentio" refer not only to one another, but reverberate also in the wider context of a world beyond the text, a world including cultural and literary tradition as well as Celan's own other work, such reverberations, as has been indicated above, are not to be viewed in isolation, but as subordinate to the exigencies of the formal pattern of the poem. To take as an example the question of the identity of the "du," which appears in the second ("Lege, / lege auch du") and seventh ("Sag") sections: Peter Paul Schwarz, in accordance with his concept of Celan's earlier volumes as "Totengedächtnis" permeated by "dialogische Polarität," interprets this "du" as being Celan's dead mother, representing the dead.¹⁴ While this identification cannot be disregarded completely, in the case of this particular poem, apart from the structural motivation of "du" in distinct if compromised opposition

¹⁴ Peter Paul Schwarz, Totengedächtnis und dialogische Polarität in der Lyrik Paul Celans, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift Wirkendes Wort, 18 (1966), passim.

to the anonymity of "Jedem," three more clearly defined possibilities present themselves: as "Argumentum e silentio" is a poem, and hence to be read, "du" might appeal to its reader; as it is a poem dedicated to René Char, "du" might be addressed to him; and as it is a programmatic, self-reflexive poem, "du" might refer to Celan's poetic alter ego.

However, the main question posed by "Argumentum e silentio" is that of the nature of the "erschwiegene Wort" and its relation to the realm of night. Three main strands, inextricably intertwined in the poem itself, may for the purpose of exposition be distinguished in the texture of the night. The first is that of persecution and captivity, of violence and sorrow. It is in evidence in "Kette," in "griffen nach ihr," in "Meute," in "Giftzahn," in "Schinderohren" and in "Träne," while the night may itself partly be seen as a realm of the dead.

At the same time, the night, in accordance with its Romantic and neo-Romantic employment, exemplified by Novalis and Rilke respectively, may act as a metaphor of utopia. It is a time of expanded consciousness, of an especial intensity of experience.¹⁵ Thus one might, for instance, see the nocturnal "Stern" as an image of transcendence. One might also adduce in this context of utopia the possibility of an allusion, considered by Civikov, in the word "Stromgebiet" to Novalis, who uses it in his "Bild einer, freilich religiös-mystisch erhofften Wohnstätte der Menschheit."¹⁶ In addition, the possibility of a reference to the end of Rilke's Second Duino Elegy deserves at least equal consideration: "Fänden auch wir ein reines, verhaltenes, schmales / Menschliches, einen unseren Streifen Fruchtlands / zwischen Strom und Gestein."¹⁷

The strands of violence and utopia are both woven around what is

¹⁵ Both Schwarz and Voswinckel, the latter in greater detail, examine the relation of Celan's to Novalis's metaphors of night.

¹⁶ Civikov, pp. 152-153.

¹⁷ Rilke, II, 692.

perhaps the central quality of the night: silence. In the first instance, silence may be seen here to comprise four different but closely related modes. At its simplest, silence may be that of the dead, endemic to the realm explored by Celan's early poetry. The possible origin of the "erschwiegene Wort" in the underworld is perhaps indicated in its upward orientation ("herauf- / dämmern"); in its attributes of being "sternüberflogen" and "meerübergossen," which not only express its cosmic span, but also designate as its location or origin a point of great depth; and, finally, in the attribution of the "erschwiegene Wort" to the night. Secondly, silence may, negatively, be that of the failure of speech in the face of a specific experience, in this case most probably the enormity of the Jewish holocaust. This is the silence of the "erstarrte Wort." Thirdly, and more positively, silence may be that of a utopian opposition to the inadequacy of such speech; not having sung, silence is untainted and hence in a paradoxical manner more adequate and communicative. Fourthly, to take the paradox further, silence may be that opposed to speech as such. In the poem, the night is silent, requiring the "erschwiegene Wort" to attest to it. "Gold" carries connotations of this silence, echoing perhaps the proverb "Reden ist Silber, Schweigen ist Gold." Certainly the possibility of an allusion, noted by Ute Maria Oelmann, to Osip Mandelstam's "Silentium," which Celan translated, would belong to this category: in that poem, Mandelstam extolled the purity of a primal silence - in terms, incidentally, of "Meer" and "Licht" - while lamenting the estrangement from it inherent in speech.¹⁸ The "erschwiegene Wort" would appear to encompass all these aspects of silence. Symptomatic of this is its centrality in the poem: not only is it to be placed between "Gold und Vergessen,"

¹⁸ Ute Maria Oelmann, Deutsche poetologische Lyrik nach 1945: Ingeborg Bachmann, Günter Eich, Paul Celan, Stuttgarter Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 74 (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1980), p. 315. Celan's translation of "Silentium" is to be found in his Gesammelte Werke, V, 57. However, it is by no means certain that when he wrote "Argumentum e silentio," Celan knew Mandelstam's poem. Celan's poem was composed not later than 1955, when it appeared in the volume Von Schwelle zu Schwelle, while Celan's intense interest in Mandelstam, Leonard Moore Olschner suspects, did not begin before that same year; Olschner, p. 226.

its first formulation as the "erschwiegene Wort" is also numerically central, coming in line 17, which, excluding the title and the dedication, is the exact middle of the poem.

The above categories of silence share the assumption that it is essentially outside, if not opposed to speech, and is presentable only referentially; that to draw silence into the poem, it needs to be made a theme. But the relation between silence and speech, as its concretions in the term "erschwiegene Wort" and the title of the poem emphasize, is more fundamental: functionally, the "erschwiegene Wort" is the silent structure of mutually determining correspondence and contrariety, the "Argumentum e silentio," that is the poem. Silence, in this view, is not so much a threat to, as a condition of, poetic speech; far from being external to the poem, silence is indelibly inscribed in it.¹⁹ The pages to follow explore the modes of this inscription.

¹⁹ Silence is incorporated as a functional feature, as a "formgeborene Implikation" of Celan's poetic speech, in Menninghaus's notion of "Name," on which his ambitious attempt to offer a comprehensive interpretation of the poet's work is founded (p. 47). Whether or not the critic is somewhat straightjacketed by his guiding concept, which can at times seem interpretatively too narrow and theoretically too general, he certainly, in announcing its incorporation in this concept and thereafter barely mentioning it, muffles the force, at once original and subversive, of silence in Celan.

III. The Concept of Suspension

The difficulties of reading "Argumentum e silentio" arise from its complexities of correspondence and opposition. To say this is perhaps already to imply a specific model of the literary; perhaps it is impossible to read a poetic text without operating at least a subliminal poetics. But instead of enforcing the seemingly inevitable consequence of this recognition, instead of abandoning the helpless critic to a fate of endless theorizing undertaken in quest of a secure foundation for his interpretative manoeuvres, an approach focussing on poetic suspension suggests a rationale for cutting short this process: whatever poetics may be inherent in any act of literary reading need not be more elaborate or comprehensive than is dictated by the poems under scrutiny and the vantage point from which they are scrutinized; whatever categories are employed need not aspire to general validity as long as they are equal to the task in hand. And what the latter, the examination of suspension in Celan, seems primarily to demand is a framework that allows a distinction to be made between two orders of signification whose interaction issues in the kind of complexity confronting the reader in, for instance, "Argumentum e silentio." The cardinal operation involved here is a dislocation of signification in which what might be described as "referential" meaning is contravened by an additional network of signification one is tempted to term "structural."

Both these designations, the "referential" and the "structural," since they are as essential in discussing Celan as they are vague, require some elucidation. Referential meaning may be roughly considered as lexical, determined by the stability of reference in a word to one or, in the case of lexical ambiguity, more objects, or rather, concepts thereof. It is this fixity that Celan's techniques of suspension so energetically and often aggressively disrupt.

It might be objected at this point that before concentrating on the various modes of this suspensory disruption, it is necessary to ascertain as precisely as possible just what it is that is disrupted. But here is one of those cut-off points mentioned above. The notion

of suspension exonerates us from having to venture into an examination of the genesis of linguistic signification. Whether or not it is ultimately a fallacy to assume that words themselves "have" meaning, whether meaning is an issue of form rather than substance, whether all meaning, in ordinary discourse as in poetic speech, is not in the end contextual, is immaterial. What does matter here is that even if meaning theoretically is constantly in flux, and determined in each case by the context involved, which itself is perhaps in theory insaturable or indeterminate, the contexts in which a word actually appears in normal usage tend to be alike to an extent that permits of lexical classification - which in turn, of course, has a normative effect: we do, in conventional discourse, have a sense of stable referential meaning, whether in theory this is delusory or not. We live, linguistically, "in der gedeuteten Welt."²⁰ And if Celan chooses to make us feel less and less at home there, interest lies in the unsettling strategies of suspension employed rather than in the dubious shelter left behind. Wherever suspension is operative, wherever contrary semiotic energies are balanced, it is the balancing and not the origin of these energies that is of the essence.

Suspension involves a level of the text commonly envisaged as "structural." The concept of structure is usually employed to indicate a feature or principle assumed to be underlying the poetic text. Thus Böschenstein writes of Celan: "Ein Wort gesellt sich in seinen Gedichten zu anderen Worten mehr über die sprachliche Struktur als über das Bedeutete hin."²¹ Non-referential, or rather, transreferential meaning, in other words: signification through an internal network of correspondence and opposition, through a purity of relation conceived of almost as "musical" or "mathematical," is here assumed necessarily to be structural. Thus defined, "structure" would be intended to designate what is fundamental or irreducible in a poem. As such the term, however, is self-contradictory, for the "structure" of a poem is not self-authenticating: neither stable nor autonomous,

²⁰ Rilke, II, 685.

²¹ Böschenstein, p. 400.

it is defined by, and itself defines, the signs of which it consists.

In this dual movement, the comparative stability of referential meaning in a word is disrupted by the relations of the latter to other words of the poetic text in which it occurs. This operation takes place on the basis of, and at the same time displaces, referential meaning, which itself becomes, in a poem, a point of further reference. Such "second order" reference, whether, as in the case of the shared luminosity of "Gold" and "Sonnen" in "Argumentum e silentio," its span is small, or whether, as in that of "Sonnen" and "Nacht" in the same poem, it is great: such further reference is fundamentally one of deviation. Referential meaning is displaced only because it may be deviated from. The displacement of reference hence functions on the assumption of that signification it seeks to displace. That is to say: individual references mutually displace one another, while the operations of referentiality as such are pervasive. Thus the very essence of structure, assumed to be autonomous and fundamental, is called into question.

It seems therefore more appropriate to term the non-referential, or rather: the internally referential in a poem its rhetoricity, and to define structure as the irreducibly reciprocal interplay between the referential and rhetorical modes of a poetic text. Open and decentralized, structure is not so much a static system of relations as a function or process. Celan's poetry, and in particular the later work, it might now be ventured, is structural in that it is perpetually engaged in exploring the irreducible reciprocity of its referentiality and rhetoricity.

To recognize this interaction of reference and rhetoric; to emphasize their simultaneity; to conclude that in a poem signification is neither determinate nor indeterminate but interdeterminate, is, in a sense, merely a statement of the obvious, namely of the phenomenon of contextuality. Yet this statement needs to be made in order subsequently to be rejected as conclusion. It is not that to speak of contextuality here is technically incorrect; it is rather that to comprehend Celan's poetry in terms of its contextuality, to conclude, for instance, that it is "contextual" in the extreme, to locate its essence in its contextuality as such, is to fail to do justice to

its radicalness and concomitant precariousness. What is involved is almost a matter of moral choice: the actuality of Celan's work exerts a more radical formulation.

For in a fusion like the "erschwiegene Wort," what we may now legitimately call the structuring principle is not a mere deviation or differentiation of reference but a sheer opposition, whose terms are mutually exclusive yet simultaneous. Viewed contextually, what one is dealing with here are fusions whose operative terms, through their synchronization, ~~mutually~~ ^{Wort} silence all each other's semiotic energies, instead of activating selectively one or more. Such formulations, in which all conceivable signifieds of a signifier are referred to its counterpart, appear to have been forged in accordance with an early poetic self-exhortation: "Sprich - / Doch scheide das Nein nicht vom Ja." (I, 135).

Although the concept of such suspension, owing to its dynamic nature, perhaps defies any attempt at rigid definition and allows only for an "insistent intensification of its play," to be staged in the course of this study, a number of aspects need to be emphasized from the outset.²² Most importantly, suspension is to be understood as a dual process of negation and antithetic definition, resulting in the kind of self-contradictory complex of utterance just mentioned. Thus in what, in more ways than one, might be termed the motto of this investigation of suspension in Celan,

Wir
wissen ja nicht, weisst du,
wir
wissen ja nicht,
was
gilt.

a statement is made that negates itself (I, 214): we know that we do not know. The essence of the statement is that it silences itself. A similar balancing on the tightrope of its own impossibility is accomplished in Celan's question, in the collection of aphorisms

²² Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p. 3.

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

It follows that, in instances like these at least, exegesis based on a primacy of content, of reference, is singularly inappropriate. Content is not merely subjected to the implicit workings of ambiguity and other modes of poetic indeterminacy: it is explicitly effaced. It might be argued against an approach neglecting reference thus that Celan reacted to accusations that his work was becoming increasingly "hermetic" by emphasizing that "jedes Wort ist mit direktem Wirklichkeitsbezug geschrieben."²³ But statements of this kind need to be interpreted with a certain amount of circumspection. It seems far less adequate a response to use this utterance as a platform from which to pounce on biographical reference in Celan's work, than to acknowledge that things are perhaps not as straightforward as they may appear. What kind of "Wirklichkeit" is meant? Celan himself seems to warn against too narrow a conception of this term when he says: "Natürlich geht es mir um Wirklichkeit - um meine eigene zunächst. Aber darin ist viel enthalten."²⁴ And his lapidary assertion: "Wirklichkeit ist nicht, Wirklichkeit will gesucht und gewonnen sein." (III, 168) precludes even more finally any hasty conclusions. Word and world are simultaneous; whence the frequent treatment of words as tangible presences, exemplified in such lines as: "Das Geschriebene höhlt sich, das / Gesprochene, meergrün, / brennt in den Buchten" (II, 75), or: "Kleide die Worthöhlen aus / mit Pantherhäuten" (II, 198). What is said is what is.

Another point that needs to be emphasized from the outset is the following. To focus on the emergence of the text through its own negation, on the being of the poem as an exploration of its own impossibility, might be deemed deconstructive. And indeed, perhaps any examination of Celan's poetry, a poetry which so strongly urges

²³ Arno Reinfrank, "Schmerzlicher Abschied von Paul Celan," die horen, 83 (1971), 73.

²⁴ Harry Neumann, "Wir sprachen mit dem Preisträger," Die Welt, 27 January 1958.

a distinction between reference and rhetoric, is bound in some way to be deconstructive: "deconstruction," as even a glance at one of the various introductions into the field will tell, is difficult to define - and hence difficult to avoid. Yet on two scores at least it should perhaps be sedulously avoided when speaking of Celan's work. The first is the importance, to be discussed in the final chapter of the present study, which Celan attaches to the notion of the self. To the extent to which it "kills the author," deconstruction is inappropriate to Celan.²⁵ Secondly, if deconstruction, as Barbara Johnson puts it, is "the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself," the answer Celan's poems most urgently enjoin upon their reader is that they do not, on the whole, require much teasing.²⁶ The issue in Celan, on the contrary, is often one of absorption rather than discovery: it is not that contrariety needs ingeniously to be coaxed from the deceptively smooth verbal fabric of his poems; it is that, initially at least, the massive contradictions that seem to lie at the heart of his work need somehow to be accommodated by the reader. Celan's texts tend, in other words, to anticipate, to execute, and to consist in, their own deconstruction. They silence themselves.

The present study attempts to trace this move toward silence in a number of poems. Central to this endeavour is the belief that this move itself provides in such terms as "silencing" and "suspension" working metaphors at least as adequate as "structure" and "content" and the like. Moreover, an arsenal of terms of rhetorical suspension has as an additional and perhaps decisive advantage the fact that it refers to, and emphasizes, the processive nature of the phenomenon concerned.

Not surprisingly, the very starkness of contrariety in Celan has

²⁵ Vincent B. Leitch, Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 105.

²⁶ Barbara Johnson, The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 5.

given rise to various attempts at critical accommodation. Perhaps the most significant of these have been undertaken by Georg-Michael Schulz and, to a lesser degree, Menninghaus. While both these critics tend to some extent to soften the impact of Celan's radical suspensions, their different and in a central point themselves mutually exclusive approaches together reveal important aspects of the feature discussed. Schulz starts out by divorcing what he calls the "Ausdruckswert" from the logic of these suspensions: "Die spezifische Spannung der Paradoxie liegt darin, dass die beiden Momente weder einander aufheben wie bei einer mathematischen Operation noch einander in der Art ausschliessen, wie das die entsprechenden Urteile in der Logik täten."²⁷ Yet Menninghaus asserts of this same type of opposition: "Nicht Paradoxie oder gar Sinnlosigkeit ist die Signatur dieser Widersprüche in Worten - lassen sie sich doch durchweg in einem zumindest logisch widerspruchsfreien Sinn verstehen."²⁸ One critic says that such suspensions would be self-contradictory in logic; the other, that at least in logic they are not: it would appear, then, that a separation of logic from expression is unequal to assessing this kind of poetic contrariety. And this is borne out by the way in which Schulz continues. He disqualifies "Spannung" as an adequate term to describe the relation between the poles of a suspension, for "Spannung" posits "Gleichzeitigkeit dort . . . , wo es um den Ausdruckswert einer sprachlichen Figur geht, also um etwas an die Diskursivität der Sprache Gebundenes, den Ausdruckswert einer Bewegung."²⁹ On this basis, he then proposes a view of the second term in a suspension as correcting the first.

However, the very imagery which Schulz exploits to make his point signals the difficulties involved: the use of the image of the linguistic "Figur," which conveys stasis, as synonymous with the

²⁷ Georg-Michael Schulz, Negativität in der Dichtung Paul Celans, Studien zur deutschen Literatur, 54 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1977), p. 162.

²⁸ Menninghaus, p. 176.

²⁹ Schulz, Negativität, p. 162.

dynamic "Bewegung" betrays the measure of a simplification which persists in a residual form even when Schulz concedes to the "Sinn" of some of Celan's radical suspensions "ein Moment von Unübersetz-barem."³⁰

As Schulz's inadvertent self-contradiction indicates, one is entangled here in a web of divergent interpretative impulses from which there appears to be no easy escape; certainly, Schulz's proposal cannot be dismissed outright. In addition, it is worth remembering William Empson's common-sense argument that since life is so often a matter of contradictions, "any contradiction is likely to have some sensible interpretations; and if you think of interpretations which are not sensible, it puts the blame on you."³¹ Nevertheless, there does at least seem to be room for an alternative view, deliberately seeking out those areas in Celan's contradictions that are "not sensible." Thus one might argue that in univocal speech - as opposed to, say, musical polyphony - the absolute simultaneity which Schulz seems to demand is not attainable. Yet we do possess a sense of "relative" simultaneity, which we operate in reading a clause like "the dog is black" and viewing the blackness and the dog as simultaneous - despite the fact that the two are not named in the very same instant. The operations of grammar may suspend linear time; owing to the synchronizing force of grammar, we assume that the elements of a clause are simultaneous. And for literary speech our concessions to simultaneity are greater by far. Indeed, one might adopt a perspective which allows one to regard the impulse toward simultaneity as a source of numerous poetic devices; one might, for instance, consider rhyme as a technique of poetic synchronization in which sounds respectively prefigure and recall their counterparts. Similarly, the interpretative search for repeats, for correspondences and oppositions in a text might be viewed as an attempt to synchronize significations across the temporal expansion of speech. The central

³⁰ Schulz, Negativität, p. 168.

³¹ William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity (1953; rpt. London: Hogarth, 1984), p. 197.

point here appears to be that what we may treat as a condition of linguistic simultaneity originates in a process of synchronization - which can only apply to that which is temporally separated in the first place. In this view, Celan's daring suspensions are not, as Schulz presumes, purely alogical; rather, their unsettling expressive force originates in the way in which they synchronize an urgent invocation and a blatant defiance of the laws of logic.

One way in which one might circumscribe the aim of the present study would be to say that it attempts to justify the suggestion that the concept of suspension provides a framework to encompass this kind of contrariety - something that, for instance, an extended concept of the oxymoron, being concerned with suspensory operations on the level of imagery, would not be sufficiently generic to accomplish. To put it another, more comprehensive way: the present study attempts to show, on the basis of a typologically-oriented, detailed reading of a number of poems drawn almost exclusively from Celan's later work, how the multiplicity of often diametrically opposed interpretations which has accumulated around Celan's poetry is not simply a matter of individual differences of critical opinion, but of the fundamental role of contrariety within the poems themselves.

Suspension motivates in Celan a plethora of connotative and denotative disjunctions. The issue in these is not the intricacy or the extent of what one of Celan's volume-titles programmatically terms his Sprachgitter, but its intensity. And in poetry the utmost intensity of interstitiality imaginable - in interpretation of which one is also paying tribute to this poet's willingness to run the risk of semantic chaos and even utter failure - is that of the suspensory synchronization, the "Engführung" (I, 195) of speech and silence.

IV. A Precursor in Silence

The poet who, with Hölderlin, perhaps most seminally anticipates Celan is Rilke, mention of whom is prompted partly by biographical information. Celan's decision to live in Paris, Marlies Janz tells us, was strongly influenced by his reading of Rilke's novel Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge.³² Israel Chalfen reports the fascinated regard in which the young Celan held the earlier poet, "seinen über alles geliebten Meister" and "verehrtes Vorbild."³³ Finally, Otto Pöggeler assures us that Celan's interest in Rilke continued to the end of his life - and that this was by no means the case with all early influences: ". . . kurz vor seinem Tode konnte Celan Georges Versuch, Verbindlichkeit im Geistigen zu erzwingen, nur 'peinlich' finden (während er für Rilkes späte Gedichte offen blieb)."³⁴ But Celan has also brought into sharper focus some features in Rilke which might now, to speak in terms of Jorge Luis Borges's paradox ". . . that every writer *creates* his own precursors," be identified as Celanesque.³⁵ Our reading of Celan alerts us in particular to the primordial and pervasive role of silence in Rilke's work. In a genealogy of silence in German poetry, Rilke is Celan's most immediate predecessor.

A convenient starting point for a brief sketch of silence in Rilke is provided by Ulrich Fülleborn, who observes that ". . . der

³² Marlies Janz, Vom Engagement absoluter Poesie: Zur Lyrik und Ästhetik Paul Celans (Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1976), p. 213.

³³ Israel Chalfen, Paul Celan: Eine Biographie seiner Jugend (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1979), pp. 65 and 99.

³⁴ Otto Pöggeler, "Kontroverses zur Ästhetik Paul Celans (1920-1970)," Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft, 25 (1980), 212.

³⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, "Kafka and His Precursors," trans. James E. Irby, in J.L. Borges, Labyrinths: Selected Stories and other Writings, ed. Donald A. Yates and J.E. Irby (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 236.

Weg von Goethe zu Rilke stellt sich dar als ein ungeheurer Weltverlust." He then continues: "Dieser erfährt jedoch im geistigen Raum eine bedeutsame Kompensierung durch den schon von der Romantik mit Macht angetretenen und von der Neuromantik entschieden fortgesetzten 'Weg nach Innen' . . ."³⁶ To venture upon this path involves a greater degree and a different order of emphasis on language, which now functions less as a medium of description than of exploration: no longer fettered by the shackles of mimesis, it becomes essentially projective. As the medium as well as the object of such exploration, poetic language is intensely self-referential, constantly preoccupied with the examination of the conditions it is based upon and the possibilities it encompasses.

The case for not speaking in terms of a sudden crisis, comparable to that presented by Hofmannsthal in his "Chandos-letter," of the continual difficulties Rilke encountered in his attempts to complete the Duineser Elegien has been persuasively argued by Anthony Stephens. The ground had perhaps been somewhat prepared for him by the publication in 1957 of the Verstreute und Nachgelassene Gedichte aus den Jahren 1906 bis 1926.³⁷ These attested that Rilke had written important poetry in the years during which he had widely been held to have fallen silent. Stephens adduces several arguments in support of his case; the most significant of these is his contention that the problem of language became acute for Rilke much earlier than had hitherto been supposed. As Stephens points out, Rilke even in 1898, when he first expounded his aesthetics of "Vorwand" and "Geständnis" in a lecture entitled "Moderne Lyrik," was well aware of a discrepancy between what was to be said, and what it was to be said with.³⁸ Stephens concludes: "Die dichterische Leistung stellte sich für Rilke

³⁶ Ulrich Fülleborn, Das Strukturproblem der späten Lyrik Rilkes: Voruntersuchung zu einem historischen Rilke-Verständnis, 2nd ed., Probleme der Dichtung. Studien zur deutschen Literaturgeschichte, 4 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1973), p. 236.

³⁷ Rilke, III.

³⁸ Rilke, X, 360-394.

immer als eine geglückte Überwindung der Diskrepanz zwischen Sprache und Wirklichkeit dar."³⁹

This formulation is perhaps slightly misleading. It might be argued that the discrepancy perceived between language and reality was not only envisaged as a hindrance or necessary evil to be transcended in poetic speech, but equally as a potential to be exploited by it. Stephens does explain that the discrepancy produced a dual response from the poet. While Rilke was aware of the poetic predicament the incongruence of word and world placed him in, he also approved of it, since it afforded the poetic work a depth analogous to that of human personality.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Stephens emphasizes that despite what he calls their thematic negativity, which evolves around the anguish of alienation, works such as the Spanische Trilogie and Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge constitute eminent poetic achievements.⁴¹ But perhaps it is justifiable to be more radical here. For the aesthetics of "Vorwand" and "Geständnis" are founded on the premise that the poetic work of art exists only by virtue of the inability of language immediately to render experience: poetry exploits that by which it would appear to be contradicted or even prohibited.

The early theory of "Vorwand" and "Geständnis"; the later concept of the "Verwandlung" of the world into the "Unsichtbare"; the final aspirations toward the "Entwurf / innerer Welten im Frein" and a "neues Atemfeld": the different aesthetic frameworks Rilke adopts in the course of his life might be viewed as being, at least in part, strategies for the exploitative transcendence of the semiotic gap.⁴² To argue thus does not so much issue in an alternative as in a complement to Stephens's view. Partly, this is because his study

³⁹ Anthony Stephens, Nacht, Mensch und Engel: Rainer Maria Rilkes Gedichte an die Nacht (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1978), p. 51.

⁴⁰ Stephens, p. 50.

⁴¹ Stephens, p. 51.

⁴² Rilke, X, 366; II, 711; III, 185-186.

is itself intended as a complement or corrective to studies focussing primarily on aesthetic problems in Rilke. Accordingly, Stephens traces the contrariety of Rilke's poetry to that of the poet's existence: a mode of existence experienced as fraught with fragmentation begets an analogous mode of poetic utterance. However, the assumption of silence as a precondition of Rilke's poetry also opens vistas obscured by Stephens's fruitful concern with the interplay of existential and aesthetic predicament. Thus what he terms the negative side of the aesthetics of "Vorwand" and "Geständnis," which he claims is operative in Malte, may from this vantage point be judged more positive than Stephens asserts it to be: it does not issue in utter silence, but gives rise to the work it afflicts.⁴³

It is against this backcloth of the poet's early and abiding awareness of the insufficiency of language that Fülleborn's later assertion that Rilke was confident of the capacity of art to compensate for the loss of traditional metaphysics needs to be viewed: "An die Stelle der traditionellen Metaphysik tritt die Kunst als metaphysisches Vermögen"; "die Sternbilder," he continues, focussing on the centrality of stellar metaphors in Rilke's later work, "verdanken ihr Dasein der entwerfenden Kraft des Dichters."⁴⁴ The metaphor of the star is featured at an early stage in Rilke's work, and even then frequently highlights the problem of poetic diction and its relation to silence:

Wenn längst der letzte Laut verdorrte,
bleibt eine Stille, tief und breit:
die Sterne sind nur viele Worte
für eine einzige Dunkelheit.

These lines are dated "Herbst 1899," and Rilke continues, throughout his work, often to employ stellar, nocturnal or cosmic metaphors to

⁴³ Stephens, p. 50.

⁴⁴ Ulrich Fülleborn, "Rilke und Celan," in Rilke heute: Beziehungen und Wirkungen, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 290, ed. Inge H. Solbrig and Joachim W. Storck (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), p. 63.

explore the predicament of language.⁴⁵

The necessarily exploratory nature of Rilke's poetic ventures tends to infuse his art - constitutive rather than descriptive of a world - with contrariety. On the level of his work as a whole, statements made, attitudes adopted and solutions to existential problems proclaimed in one poem may be contradicted by those in another of a different or of the same period. "Ist Rilke im einzelnen Text immerfort bestrebt, den Erfordernissen der logischen Genauigkeit nachzukommen," as Stephens puts it, "so erkennt er . . . keine Verpflichtung an, aus seinem ganzen Werk ein begrifflich einheitliches System zu machen."⁴⁶

But perhaps the phenomenon of contrariety appears also within the individual poem. That this is so on the level of metaphor is evident when we consider that a metaphor operates through the contradiction it posits between tenor and vehicle. It is simultaneously neither and both, and this fundamental indeterminacy, heightened still further in much modern poetry by an elision of tenor, makes metaphor essential to, and is emphasized in, a projective mode of speech. Moreover, a similar constellation might be repeated on a larger scale within a poem. A poem might, in other words, present conflicting or mutually exclusive complexes of thought, experience or metaphor. That Rilke was conscious of this dimension in his work, and indeed aspired to it, is well documented in such poems as "Gong," "Idol," and "Mausoleum," and better still in his epitaph, which brings to the fore the theme and demonstrates the functioning of contrariety: "Rose, oh reiner Widerspruch, Lust, / Niemandes Schlaf zu sein unter soviel / Lidern."⁴⁷

Celan, of course, refers to these lines in the title of his volume Die Niemandrose. And his inheritance is acknowledged in further

⁴⁵ Rilke, VI, 665. For a brief commentary on these lines see Jakob Steiner, "Die Thematik des Worts im dichterischen Werk Rilkes," in Rilke in neuer Sicht, Sprache und Literatur, 69, ed. Käthe Hamburger (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1971), pp. 174-175.

⁴⁶ Stephens, p. 216.

⁴⁷ Rilke, III, 186-187; 185-186; 500-501; 185.

references, pervading his poems as intensification, variation or revocation, to the earlier poet. But more important than to track these down for their own sake, is their placement within the view of Celan's poetry as "Summe des Schweigenden, das / sich zu sich selber bekennt," and the concomitant resolve to heed Rilke's injunction: "Aber das Wehende höre, / die ununterbrochene Nachricht, die aus Stille sich bildet."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Rilke, III, 186; II, 687.

Part Two

Interpretation

TWO

UNFINALITY

I. Self-revocation

The general interstitiality or suspension of Celan's poetry, its being-in-between speech and silence, manifests itself in various devices of unfinality. Thus many of his poems are, at least in part, expressly or metaphorically metapoetic, bitterly negating or persistently qualifying the validity of actual poetic speech. Complementarily, that of projected poetic utterance is not infrequently affirmed. But this kind of thematic unfinality, which has been examined in considerable depth, for instance by Schulz and by Stewart, is perhaps best viewed within a larger framework of structural unfinality.¹ The latter involves poems that do not merely feature thematically but themselves lead up to, enact or consist of, a negation of poetic utterance. The mode of these poems is self-contradictory, their progression circular. Two extreme types may be distinguished: those poems whose circularity is self-emphasizing, and those in which it is dissimulating. The following discussion loosely arranges poems on a scale of descending explicitness.

Surely one of the most strongly accentuated cases of self-emphasizing unfinality in Celan is featured in the volume Schneepart (II, 398):

I UND KRAFT UND SCHMERZ
 und was mich stiess
 und trieb und hielt:

¹ Schulz, Negativität, the first part of which, comprising five brief chapters, is entitled "Das Schweigen": pp. 10-96; Corbet Stewart, "Paul Celan's Modes of Silence: Some Observations on 'Sprachgitter,'" Modern Language Review, 67 (1972), 127-142.

- II Hall-Schalt-
5 Jahre,
III Fichtenrausch, einmal,
IV die wildernde Überzeugung,
 dass dies anders zu sagen sei als
 so.

The opening "Und" suggests that the poem is a continuation of previous utterance, and the dynamism thus conveyed, the reader's sense that in coming to the poem he is attending a process already under way, sets the tone for the first three lines. Hence, when these speak of forces by which the "ich" of the poem has been governed, it is difficult to avoid the impression that this is still so, or will so be again; that what is projected in the past tense is continuing or, at the very least, recurrent. Formally, this section reflects and highlights its content. The five-fold repetition of "und" and the triple assonance of ie in the verbs emphasize the simultaneity of contrary semiotic impulses operative from the start: "Kraft" suggests activity, "Schmerz," passivity; "stiess" denotes sudden and perhaps also violent movement, "hielt," a state of being securely anchored, a fixity of position; "trieb," through its suggestion of continuous, steady propulsion mediates these two poles. Furthermore, the iambic forward thrust of lines that tell of the self being suddenly pushed or struck, propelled and, finally, held, is gathered and literally brought to a halt in the word "hielt" and the ensuing colon.

Accordingly, there then follows a discharge, a metric explosion almost, of three consecutive stresses, "Hall-Schalt- / Jahre," which echoes and condenses in the triple assonance on a the earlier one on ie. The formulation "Hall-Schalt- / Jahre" is a double compound fusing "Halljahre" and "Schaltjahre." The former appears also, in the singular, in the poem "DIE FLEISSIGEN" (II, 151). And in this context it is discussed by Schulz.² Basing his account on Leviticus

² Schulz, Negativität, p. 247.

xxv.8ff., Schulz summarizes the biblical "Halljahr" as follows:

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Jedes siebente Jahr, so heisst es im alttestamentlichen Buch "Leviticus", soll für das Volk Israel ein Jahr der Ruhe sein, ein Sabbatjahr. Das nach wiederum sieben Sabbatjahren folgende 50. Jahr jedoch soll das durch Posaunen angekündigte "Halljahr" sein, ein "Freijahr" (neuere Bibelübersetzungen sprechen vom "Erlassjahr"): ein Jahr des Neubeginns, in dem jeder wieder in den Besitz dessen kommen soll, was er durch Verkauf verloren hat, und in dem jeder Gefangene die Freiheit wiedererlangen soll.

A "Schaltjahr" is an intercalary year, a leap-year, a year with an additional day inserted into the calendar to close a gap between calendar time and solar time. In the double compound these terms, "Halljahre" and "Schaltjahre," reciprocally contextualize each other in an operation as complex as it is worthy of detailed attention. The compound, that is to say, encompasses a simultaneity of different semantic possibilities; these can be simultaneous only on the basis of their difference, but, in being simultaneous, become fused in a way that makes of any attempt at paraphrase an even clumsier exercise in approximation than it is at the best of times. To spell it out, nevertheless: "Schaltjahre" may become also "Halljahre," and occur, then, not every four but every fifty years. At - literally - the same time, the opposite may be the case. "Halljahre" may become "Schaltjahre," returning every four years instead of every fifty.

This fusion, the effects of which we have just rehearsed on the numerical plane, extends also into a more abstract or philosophical realm. The compound presents three different orders of time, the first of which is divine: the concept of a "Halljahr" is passed down to man on Mount Sinai directly from God. By contrast, the second order of time, featured in "Schaltjahre," is merely of human design. Thus it would be possible to read "Hall-Schalt- / Jahre" as effecting an oppositive conjunction of the time of man and the time of God. And, since a "Schaltjahr" is instituted by man in accordance with a third, solar or cosmic order of time, and hence with what is perceived as scientific rather than divine law, one might then assert as central

to the double compound an opposition of what might perhaps, in one way, be considered the principal anchors (or indeed "holds") of man, science and religion.

But ultimately a reading that pits astrophysics against metaphysics, however neat it may seem, is incomplete. In fact, it falls foul of this very neatness, achieved only at the cost of reducing considerably the complexity of these lines. At the heart of the difficulty lies the paratactic construction of the compound, characteristic also of the poem as a whole: the fact, signalled by their capitalization and their sharing of one line, that formally "Hall-" and "Schalt-" are completely parallel. Starkly opposed though they may seem, they are fused here in a single complex whose operations it is imperative not to ignore: "Wer Celans Schrift zu 'lesen' gelernt hat, weiss, dass es nicht darum geht, sich für eine der verschiedenen Bedeutungen zu entscheiden, sondern zu begreifen, dass sie nicht geschieden sind, sondern eins."³

This union is reflected in at least two ways here. Thus the third, astrophysical order of time, with which human, calendar time is synchronized by the observance of a "Schaltjahr," shares with the first, transcendental or metaphysical order of time a fundamental quality of being transsubjective, outside man; both a "Halljahr" and a "Schaltjahr" allow man access to a measure of time in this sense more objective than that perhaps intuitively his. Secondly, this rough synonymy of "Hall-" and "Schalt-" is further reflected in a semantic proximity which is here mediated etymologically. The modern verb "schalten," Wahrigs Deutsches Wörterbuch tells us, descends from the Middle High German schalten, meaning "stossen, schieben (bes. ein Schiff), in Bewegung setzen." The oldest form we are given in this line of descent is the reconstructed Indo-Germanic (s)keld, meaning "schneiden, spalten, stossen."⁴ The relevance of this lineage

³ Peter Szondi, "Durch die Enge geführt: Versuch über die Verständlichkeit des modernen Gedichts," in his Schriften II, ed. Jean Bollack et al., Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, 220 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), p. 389.

⁴ Gerhard Wahrig, Deutsches Wörterbuch, (n.p.: Mosaik, 1980), col. 3197.

to the first section of "UND KRAFT UND SCHMERZ" with its verb form "stiess" and its forward drive is immediately apparent, as is the interstitiality involved in both a leap-year and an Indo-Germanic verb one of whose meanings is "spalten." The connection with "Hall," on the other hand, is more oblique, but by no means necessarily less important. The entry on "schalten" quoted above concludes with the observation: "verwandt u.a. mit Schild, Schall." And "Schall," of course, is very close, in sound as well as meaning, to "Hall"; the former is the generic term for the class of phenomena of which the latter is a specific manifestation.

This aspect is, however, important not in itself, but because it leads up to a feature fundamental to the poem as a whole. Thus while the etymological kinship of "Schall" and "schalten" is to the fore in the phonetic presence of "Schall" in "Schalt-," it is essential to emphasize here that the detection of this presence does not depend on the possession of, or access to, expert knowledge; one need not consult an etymological dictionary nor any other work of reference in order to recognize this feature: it is there for all to hear.⁵ To say so is not to indulge in what might, at first sight, be considered trifling coincidence; it is to touch upon the crux of this poem, which here doubles back upon itself. At this point, its words not only refer to, but enact, concepts; what is otherwise outside the poem, and present only as reference, now becomes an operative mode within the text. Thus the word "Schall," whose reference is to the concept of sound, is present as sound in "Schalt-." This presence, furthermore, rhymes with the immediately preceding "Hall," which, in other words, it echoes. And the word "Hall" designates just that:

⁵ A poem whose appeal to expert knowledge is far more urgent is "DU SEI WIE DU" (II, 327), which incorporates in its eleven lines four of Middle High German and two of Hebrew material, and thus signposts the importance of the reader's being aware of a multiplicity of referential possibilities in Celan, including a backdrop of an earlier stage of the language employed. For a discussion of this poem, see Werner Weber, "Zum Gedicht 'Du sei wie du,'" in Über Paul Celan, ed. Dietlind Meinecke, 2nd ed., Edition Suhrkamp, 495 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), pp. 277-280.

phenomena in which a reflection of sound, an echo, is involved, a duality of original and reflected sound. Finally, the word "Schalt-," mediating the presence of "Schall," acts as a hinge, at once bridging and defining an interstice, between the two textual modes of external reference on the one hand, and self-referential rhetoric on the other. And thereby this word, too, does what it says; through the way in which the control and mediation denoted by this word are made modally as well as thematically significant, it subsumes, in more ways than one, the bewildering complexity of textual operations presented here.

The next section, consisting of a single line, is set off from its predecessors in almost every respect. Thematically, it introduces in the form of the natural "Fichten" the first and only mention of tangible reality into the poem. The sound produced, it is perhaps suggested, by wind passing through these trees is a "Fichtenrausch," which, not being double - not, that is to say, involving resonance or echo - contrasts sharply with the earlier "Hall." It is entirely in accordance with this contrast that this "Fichtenrausch" should be heard only once, "einmal"; that this section presents not, like the first, a continuing or continuous process, nor, like the second, a time-scale of several years punctuated or framed by periodically recurring "Hall-Schalt- / Jahre," but an isolated occurrence. Yet this section, too, owing to the paratactical arrangement of the poem, is part of "was mich stieß / und trieb und hielt."

As is, perhaps more surprisingly, the final section, which revokes what has gone before. That it should do so is arguably, in view of the all but incommunicable textual complexity operative hitherto, almost to be expected, and it may therefore seem less expedient to concentrate, in the first instance, on the origin of this revocation than on its effects - but the two are, in the last resort, likely to be closely linked.

An indication of this link is perhaps the involvement of the last section in the criss-cross of correspondences and oppositions of the poem as a whole: the verb "wildern," meaning "to poach," "to kill or steal game illegally," activates retrospectively the connotations of forest in "Fichten," while its own connotations of being out of control oppose, at least in part, those of "Schalt-." This involvement of the

last section with the rest of the poem is symptomatic of its complete functional integration, however improbable this may seem at first. For it might be argued that the last three lines invalidate the whole poem, and that that, quite simply, is that: that the whole poem, to put it bluntly, does not merit discussion because it was rejected by its author. But if this is so, why was the poem written, and why was it published? Why was "dies" not then actually said in another poem and this one discarded? To ask these seemingly naive yet inevitable questions is to explore the constitutive contradiction underlying the text. For the invalidation to be valid, there must be something there to be invalidated; without the rest of the poem, there could be no invalidation. But in revoking what is said, this invalidation, being itself speech, revokes itself. Thus the revocation is irrevocably part of what it revokes; part, as has been indicated above, of "was mich stiess / und trieb und hielt."

As is exemplified by the compound "Hall-Schalt- / Jahre," external reference in this poem is at once rather specific (biblical and astrophysical) and, since it is suspended or silenced by the internal dynamics of the text, ultimately of limited import. No fixed position is attained, no conclusion reached. The poem perpetually doubles back on itself, and consists, moreover, in this very movement.

Another poem whose progression is circular in this manner, whose medium is the message in that its speech is the silencing of speech, and whose suspension of itself is similarly, though perhaps less drastically, effected and indicated by its ending, is the following, from Lichtzwang (II, 298):

ANREDSAM
war die ein-
flüglig schwebende Amsel,
über der Brandmauer, hinter
5 Paris, droben,
im
Gedicht.

The word "Anredsam" which opens the poem is an unconventional compound consisting of the prefix "an-" and the adjective "redsam." The prefix slightly but significantly alters the meaning of the ad-

jective from "loquacious" or "given to speak" to "given to speak to," "given to address," and also perhaps suggests a passive mode, a condition of being open to speech. In any case, whether the compound projects an active or a passive mode, or indeed their simultaneity, the speech presented here is emphatically dialogical. It belongs, or belonged (the qualification being due to the past tense of the verb, "war"), to a blackbird engaged in an activity which is phrased in terms of impossibility, namely that of floating through or hovering in the air while using or possessing only one wing.

The remaining, longer part of the poem is concerned with pinpointing the location of the "Amsel" within a topography of ever greater intangibility. The first designation is also the most concrete: "über der Brandmauer," the use of the definite article presupposing on the part of the reader a recognition of the wall in question. The second appeals equally to the extrapoetical experience of the reader, in introducing a specific and widely known geographical location, "Paris." This device, apart from continuing in the vein of familiarity posited earlier, seems also to endow the act of flying on one wing with a certain facticity, as does the past tense of the verb with which it is reported. As a designation of place, however, "hinter Paris" is less precise than its predecessor, mainly because of the incomparably expanded frame of reference. The third adverbial designation is more vague still, denoting merely the realm of flight, "droben."

Whether we choose to read "Brandmauer" literally as a fire-proof wall, or connotatively as a reference to the Jewish holocaust or as a border which is here transgressed; whether "Paris" evokes the city of love, of life or of art, or even somehow the figure of heroic myth; whether "droben" suggests to us the realm of transcendence - all such considerations, though they are perhaps instigated by the poem, are ultimately of little value in reading this poem, for its final lines deny the preceding adverbial designations any external reference or ulterior orientation towards extratextual reality: the blackbird, however we may interpret the succession of spatial co-ordinates featured here and the internal relations between them, is literally

suspended in the poem.

The reflexive final lines and their emphasis on the poetic lead us back into the poem itself in an operation of inescapable, perpetual circularity. And this suspension of the poem within itself is paralleled by that of the blackbird paradoxically floating on only one wing; at this point, that is to say, the metaphorical and the structural in the poem meet. With respect to the somewhat precarious condition of bird and poem alike, it is perhaps not without relevance that "Amsel" might be a phonetic play on Celan's real name, "Antschel," or, as it was spelt in the poet's Romanian father tongue, "Ancel" - significantly, the "Amsel" is a bird of song. And Paris is the city where the poet eventually settled, after comparatively short stays in Bucharest and, following his "Flucht" from Romania, Vienna.⁶ When Celan composed "ANREDSAM," he had been domiciled in the French capital for many years.

To consider the constitution of signification by so a- or trans-referential, by so rhetorical a means may seem fanciful. But to do so is not only entirely in keeping with the renunciation of reference enacted in the poem; it also seems peculiarly apt in the case of a poet publishing under an anagram of his own name.

⁶ On the adoption of the pseudonym "Celan" in, and on the circumstances of the poet's surreptitious departure from, Bucharest, see Chalfen, pp. 147-148 and 152-154 respectively.

II. Formal Unfinality

Unfinality appears in Celan not only as explicit self-revocation, but also in various formal devices, one of which is demonstrated in this poem from Atemwende (II, 30):

(ICH KENNE DICH, du bist die tief Gebeugte,
ich, der Durchbohrte, bin dir untertan.
Wo flammt ein Wort, das für uns beide zeugte?
Du - ganz, ganz wirklich. Ich - ganz Wahn.)

This text, based possibly on the motif of the pietà, turns on the opposition of "Ich" and "Du." The "Ich" of the poem recognizes the "Du" as "die tief Gebeugte," after which it discloses its own identity as "der Durchbohrte." It is notable that "Gebeugte" and "Durchbohrte" are not mere adjectives but nouns and, therefore, names. The attitude of the "Du" is one of subservience, yet "Ich," literally and figuratively, is lower still, "untertan." The relation delineated here suggests that of ruler and subject. But there is a further divide, for while the "Du" is utterly real, the "Ich" is quite illusory.

The third line begs for the word that will encompass both "Du" and "Ich," the real and the illusory, the quick and the dead. Certainly, Celan's poem is not where this word blazes, hence the parenthesis: the validity of what is parenthesized is qualified or annulled. An additional and perhaps closely related reason for the parenthesis might be that the poem is phrased as the speech of the dead "Durchbohrte." In either case, the poem as a whole questions its own validity as utterance; in either case, it tends strongly toward silence.

The parenthesis is only one of two striking formal features displayed by the poem; the other is rhyme. The rhyme, too, is prey to the questioning initiated by the device of the parenthesis. We may, however, go beyond proposing that this poem constitutes partially a qualification of traditional poetic form; the reference seems more specific, namely to Gottfried Benn. Celan's question "Wo flammt ein Wort . . ." would appear to refer directly to Benn's poem - rhymed, as are many of his works - "Ein Wort," in which the word is celebrated

in terms of "ein Feuer, / ein Flammenwurf."⁷ There the word, while ultimately the cosmic void prevailed, became temporarily the centre of the universe, dynamically structuring chaos and thereby creating meaning; here, the word is absent. In Benn's "Ein Wort" the elements of silence, which is projected as pre- and postverbal, as outside speech, are "Welt" and "Ich." In Celan's poem, silence, in the first instance, is that of the self and the other, of the "Ich" and the "Du," as well as that of the dead and of the word that is inadequate. Yet this inadequacy is presented in words; the invalidation of the poem is the poem. Silence, then, is not merely outside and beyond speech, but at once its origin and destination: speech reduces itself to silence - the poem is suspended within itself.

In this next poem, from Die Niemandsrose, the ending is marked by a formal device that signals unfinality at least as emphatically as the parenthesis enclosing "(ICH KENNE DICH)"; and here too silence is not superimposed upon, but inherent in, poetic diction: the double dashes staging and advertising what may appear to be an abrupt entry of silence into the text are prefigured, almost to the extent of being generated thus, by a series of suspensory inversions (I, 219):

I ZU BEIDEN HÄNDEN, da
 wo die Sterne mir wuchsen, fern
 allen Himmeln, nah
 allen Himmeln:
 5 Wie
 wacht es sich da! Wie
 tut sich die Welt uns auf, mitten
 durch uns!

II Du bist
 10 wo dein Aug ist, du bist
 oben, bist
 unten, ich
 finde hinaus.

III O diese wandernde leere
 15 gastliche Mitte. Getrennt,
 fall ich dir zu, fällst

⁷ Gottfried Benn, Gesammelte Werke in vier Bänden, ed. Dieter Wellershoff, III (Wiesbaden: Limes, 1960), 208.

du mir zu, einander
entfallen, sehn wir
hindurch:

IV 20 Das
 Selbe
 hat uns
 verloren, das
 Selbe
 25 hat uns
 vergessen, das
 Selbe
 hat uns --

The topography sketched by this poem, whose four sections show throughout a concern with location, is very much out of the ordinary. The opening is conventional enough, focussing on a place "Zu beiden Händen," suggesting what is close at hand, a personal realm. But next we are told that this is where "die Sterne mir wuchsen." The formulation conveys that these stars are at once intimately and ambiguously linked with the self. Thus they are not necessarily produced by the speaker; their growth implies that they are organic, and to that extent autonomous. But while the self does not, perhaps, instigate the development of the stars, a certain degree of nursing is connoted, almost in the manner of a gardener with "green fingers." In short, a dual fusion is projected: of the inanimate and the vegetative or animate, and of the cosmic and the private. Accordingly, the location "Zu beiden Händen," the node where the personal and the cosmic meet, is at once "fern / allen Himmeln" and, in an immediate reversal both paradoxical and logical, "nah / allen Himmeln."

The next line again ^effects an inversion. "Sterne" suggest night, but this suggestion issues in the exclamation: "Wie / wacht es sich da!" This particular reversal, in contrast to the first, sounds a note to which the reader's ear may well be attuned: that of the Romantic topos of night and a concomitant expansion of consciousness. The allusiveness with which it is introduced - its presentation in the overtones of "Sterne" and, to a lesser degree, "Himmeln" - as well as the startling location of the stars close to hand, not only prevent this note from sounding dull, but allow it to be elaborated upon. Thus further condensation of the private and cosmic registers is possible:

"Wie tut sich die Welt uns auf, mitten / durch uns!" This phrase again is fraught with ambiguity. The world reveals itself before the now plural selves by whom it may even be seen to be in some way internalized. However, this reading of "durch uns" as modal or instrumental needs to be complemented by one that acknowledges also the spatial or prepositional bearing of these words, the possibility that the world divides "uns." The world and the selves may be subject and object, mover and moved, all at once.

There then comes, at the beginning of the next stanza, what the line-break suggests might be viewed as a simple statement of the existence of "Du"; it is, of course, also the main clause to which the following "wo dein Aug ist" relates, thereby positing an identity of perception and being. This being is then, through a technique of *inversive correctio* similar to that employed in the first section, projected as ubiquitous: "du bist / oben, bist / unten." In view of the preceding equation of being and seeing, there is something almost threatening about this, for if the "du" is everywhere, so is - shades of Big Brother - "dein Aug." The next statement would appear to bear this out: "ich / finde hinaus" expresses escape from confinement as well as from a loss of orientation.

The third section then takes up this loss, which has been pre-figured in the perplexing equations earlier on of extreme and mutually exclusive positions (lines 2-4; 10-11), and also the notion of escape. The adjective "gastliche" seems to suggest that the self arrives at, or envisages, some manner of refuge. And the very concept of a "wandernde . . . Mitte" consummates the disorientation ^{wrought} ~~wrecked~~ thus far. To ascertain a centre, extremes must be determined. But that is impossible here, since these extremes are interchangeable. What is "fern" is also "nah"; what is "oben," equally "unten." Hence it is at the same time wholly unavoidable and wholly astonishing that the "Mitte" should be a "wandernde." The concept of "Mitte" having thus been drained of significance, it similarly follows that it should be void; and one might be emboldened, against this background, to suggest that the "O" at the beginning of this section embodies or circumscribes the "leere . . . Mitte" featured here, and that the demonstrative "diese" draws attention to this.

The process of delocalization is continued in the next lines. Thus it is not clear to whom the spatial separation expressed in "Getrennt" relates. The possibility the reader is most likely to consider first, namely that it is "du" and "ich" who are separated, is the last to be introduced into the web of options. These seem initially to revolve around a possible division of the self. Lines 9-10 had already anticipated such a division; the whole being of the self was synecdochally equated with a part, which was thus rendered self-sufficient: "Du bist, / wo dein Aug ist." In the present section, a reading of "ich" and "du" as paradoxically separated from themselves is prompted by their being, in turn, subjects of the parallel clauses "fall ich dir zu" and "fällst / du mir zu," which govern equally the anterior, separated participle "Getrennt." Yet whilst these clauses operate syntactically in the service of division, they tell of a movement toward unity of "du" and "ich." This reversal, however, is itself immediately reversed, not only in the ensuing "einander / entfallen," denoting loss, but even in the associations of the verb by which it is instituted in the first place. Owing to the proximity of "zufallen" to the noun "Zufall," the movements or meetings presented are qualified as chance encounters, occurring at random. The verb "zufallen" itself is employed in relation to shares due to an individual when a larger whole is split up; for instance, if a sum of money is divided evenly between four persons, it might be said that "jedem fällt ein Viertel zu." Such quantification is also present in the verb "entfallen," which may here not only mean literally "to lose," but "to be beyond reckoning or consideration," "to be unimportant or negligible" as well.

As might by now almost be expected, mutual loss, a state of being "einander / entfallen," seems to pave the way for a further suspensory inversion, for next, "du" and "ich" are united in the action of "seeing through," which perhaps takes up and amplifies the earlier "Wie / wacht es sich da!" And since "sehn wir / hindurch" lacks an object as much as "Mitte" lacks a verb, there even seems room to suspect that what is seen through is literally the "O" which possibly embodies the "wandernde leere / gastliche Mitte." To summarize the sequence of inversions: a sentence that started with a

statement of separation, then projected a moving together which resulted in separation again, issues finally in a communion of "du" and "ich."

And this is what is focussed on in the last stanza, where the speakers view themselves as being, or as having been, lost and forgotten by the same agency: "Das / Selbe." The ending of the poem seems to enact linguistically an order of inversive fusion similar to that observed throughout in the spatial realm. One would expect, after "verloren" and "vergessen," a third verb expressing loss in some way, but the sentence breaks off before this is supplied, leaving only to be read: "das / Selbe / hat uns --," a statement of possession, and hence of the exact opposite of what the reader has been lead to expect. And this is only the last in a series of suspensory inversions in which what is said is immediately silenced by its exact opposite. It is, then, wholly fitting, within this framework of paradoxically self-silencing speech, that silence should have the last word.

The third formal device of unfinality presently to be examined is the lack of a final full stop:

I VORGEWUSST blutet
 zweimal hinter dem Vorhang,

II Mitgewusst
 perlt

This very short poem from Lichtzwang (II, 251) turns on the antithesis of the words opening respectively its two sections of two lines, "Vorgewusst" and "Mitgewusst." These words may be participles, but the capitalization of "Mitgewusst" in spite of its not beginning a sentence points toward their being nouns, or even somehow names. The prematurity of having or being "Vorgewusst" seems to exact a price, for it is followed by a double bleeding behind the "Vorhang." The latter may simply mean a curtain that hides from sight the bleeding; it may also, less simply and more significantly, as the curtain in a theatre, connote an element of performance, and thus enforce by contrast the authenticity of what expressly takes place behind it.

The preposition "vor" in "Vorhang" is employed in a spatial sense, while in the earlier "Vorgewusst" it is temporal. And it is in the temporal realm that "Mitgewusst" is set off from "Vorgewusst." The latter involves foreknowledge; the former, simultaneity. This difference offers a first indication of why the poem should have no final stop. Foreknowledge comes to an end when it is overtaken by events, when what is known has passed, in one way or another, into more general consciousness. But complicity and the guilt it implies do not come to an end; hence, perhaps, the elision of a final full stop.

A further difference is brought into relief against the background of a common semantic feature of the verbs of the two sections, "blutet" and "perlt." Both suggest liquidity. But where prophecy seems to bring about mutilation and perhaps death, complicity is associated with the value and smoothness of pearls. These also convey brightness; they have a high capacity for optical reflection, which contrasts strongly with the withdrawal from sight of the bleeding in the first section.

And there is the rub. For if "perlt" suggests value and smoothness and lustre, it also carries connotations of superficiality. The authenticity of the bleeding, of the spilling of the stuff of life, has already been emphasized for taking place behind the curtain, and the contrast with the ornamental and trivial overtones of "perlt" lends still further weight to this emphasis. And even the one sense in which "perlt" conveys something unequivocally genuine, its suggestion of beads of sweat, "Schweissperlen," is dominated by this framework of contrast. For these beads of sweat would appear to originate in, and indicate, the condition of having "Mitgewusst." They seem, that is to say, to arise from a fear of discovery, or from an awareness of guilt - for instance, of having known about the death-camps in Nazi Germany, yet having remained silent to save one's own skin. The contrast with, and concomitant recalling of, the first section of the poem is enhanced by a further connection between "perlt" and "blutet." In hunting jargon - and it seems entirely appropriate that this should be a language of persecution and violence -

"Schweiss" means "Blut."

Thus the word "perlt" does not present a conclusion, a fixed position reached in the progression of the poem, an arrival - but a departure. It does not end the poem, but refers back to the text and its beginning. The elision of the final stop at once marks and mediates this referral: the poem is opened and returned to the blankness of the page, the silence whence it comes.

III. Dissimulating Circularity

In the examples discussed thus far in this chapter, unfinality has been self-emphasizing. But the matter is by no means always quite so obvious. Celan's early work, for instance, features unfinality almost exclusively in the form of the poem ending on a question. The basic mechanism of this questioning unfinality is the provocation of an answer. Sometimes, this is provided by the poem or even the question itself; the latter may, in other words, be merely "rhetorical." Of greater interest here, however, are those final questions that open rather than close a poem; those instances where a poem acknowledges that something has been left unsaid or is unsayable. That this avoidance of closure may occur even when a question is construable as merely "rhetorical" has already been observed in the example of "Argumentum e silentio." But there are in Celan's poetry perhaps more defined demonstrations of questioning unfinality.

One of the better known of these is provided by the early volume Von Schwelle zu Schwelle in the form of the poem "Leuchten" (I, 87), whose final stanza, following a dotted line devoid of words, consists of two questions:

LEUCHTEN

I	Schweigenden Leibes liegst du im Sand neben mir, Übersternte.
II	5
III	Brach sich ein Strahl herüber zu mir? Oder war es der Stab, den man brach über uns, 10 der so leuchtet?

This poem is among those discussed by Schulz. His view of silence in this poem as extra- and hence counterlingual leads him, however, to concentrate on the central stanza, the empty line, to somewhat too glib an exclusion of the final pair of questions. For these reach forth in opposite directions. The first surmises that what has come

to pass in the silence of the dotted line is a process of communication between the "Ich" and the "Du," allowing the former, too, to partake indirectly of the stellar luminescence imparted to the latter. The second question, on the contrary, is apprehensive lest this luminescence be a kind of cosmic condemnation. Schulz contends that the negative potential of these last lines is subjected to a positive reversal; that even a condemnation so doubly final is ultimately positive, since it entails the falling of light on the "Ich"; that in the last resort this condemnation amounts to an "Auszeichnung."⁸ What such a view presents is a refusal to take seriously the questioning of the questions, which are comprehended as almost arbitrary expressions of the extralingual communion, achieved by the sharing of light, of "Ich" and "Du." But if these final lines are more properly understood as constitutively rather than merely ornamentally rhetorical, a very different picture emerges. The abyss opened up by the two final questions would appear quite clearly to call for less accommodating a reading than that offered by Schulz.

In the vacant line, light somehow reaches the "Ich." But rather than assert that ultimately it is of little import whether this is due to a deflection of light off the "Du" or to an ulterior condemnation, we must acknowledge the disruptive energies of the latter possibility. The fact that this light may be "der Stab, / den man brach über uns" qualifies retroactively the very valuation of light: the luminous communication, that is to say, is by no means - and to a certain extent this qualification is present too in the contingency of deflection conjectured in the first question - necessarily or entirely positive.

Intimations of shared disaster, moreover, are detectable from the outset. That the body of the "Du" should be silent urges upon the reader the consideration that it might be dead; and when the second line locates this body lying - buried? - "im Sand" (as opposed to on the sand), the implications of death gain even greater prominence. This view is borne out by the shared remoteness of the "Du" and

⁸ Schulz, Negativität, p. 38.

the inanimate stars; while the great contrast in height between stars and man prefigures the final possibility of his subjugation. From this vantage point, the employment of light and not language as a medium of communication seems, of course, wholly logical and altogether less significant than Schulz would have us believe.

It remains true - albeit not without certain reservations pertaining in particular to the appropriateness of the words "Vereinigung" to express relation and "vermittelt" to express what may well be accidental - to say: "Woher das Leuchten dem Ich auch zukommen mag, ob vermittelt durch das Du oder als gemeinsames Schicksal - dieses Leuchten, nicht die Sprache stellt die Vereinigung von Ich und Du her."⁹ But the crux of the matter lies elsewhere. It is that communication is double here. Not only avowedly extralingual, mediation between "Ich" and "Du" is, at the same time, pointedly verbal: the whole poem is addressed to the "Du" by the "Ich." Communication takes place both in and through the poem, which thus enacts a denial of what it says; or rather, of what it does not say; or says is unsayable. The poem suspends itself as do its final questions each other. Silence here is both extra- and intrapoetic, and the aporetic final questions signpost an inconclusiveness that is ineluctable.

Unfinality, then, is not always evident. Sometimes, indeed, it may be present even in the poem that is evidently not unfinal. Circularity, that is to say, may be dissimulating. The following poem, which perhaps is all the more suited to demonstrate unfinality for seeming so obviously final, is a case in point:

- I STREUBESITZ, staub-
 unmittelbar.
- II Abend um Abend schweben
 die den Gedanken entzogenen
 5 Botschaften ein,
 königshart, nachthart,
 in die Hände der Klage-
 vögte:

⁹ Schulz, Negativität, p. 38.

III aus dem Knick
 10 ihrer Lebens-
 linien
 tritt lautlos die Antwort:
 der eine ewige
 Tropfen
 15 Gold.

This poem from the volume Lichtzwang (II, 271) has received more than passing attention from at least two critics, namely Klaus Weissenberger and Ute Maria Oelmann.¹⁰ Both base their interpretations on the transformation of "Streubesitz" into "Gold"; while for Weissenberger the process is of a mystical order and the alchemy of sorrow it presents issues in a language of exaltation, Oelmann sees in the poem an astoundingly confident assertion of the poet's faith in his capability at once to surmount and to commemorate sorrow in the poetic "Gold" he creates. Both of these interpretations are founded on a view of the process presented in the poem as straightforward; both critics assume the process to be linear and complete: what is initially dispersed becomes focussed in the hands of the "Klage- / vögte" and is then transformed into "Gold."

However, on closer inspection the poem yields a degree of complexity that prohibits the adoption of so comparatively simple a view. The poem consists of two sentences, the first of which is cast firmly in a mould which might be recognized as typical of Celan from the collection Sprachgitter onwards: the simplest of statements, a noun, followed not infrequently by an adjective or apposition to form a complex of stasis, which yet contains within itself dormant energies of poetic motion activated in, or rather, perhaps, themselves activating, the unfolding of the poem. The initial statement of this kind thus usually fulfils a dual function, serving both as point of departure and as point of reference, as opening line or stanza and as title.

¹⁰ Klaus Weissenberger, Zwischen Stein und Stern: Mystische Formgebung in der Dichtung von Else Lasker-Schüler, Nelly Sachs und Paul Celan (Bern: Francke, 1976), pp. 208-209; Oelmann, pp. 376-378.

The second sentence extends over the remaining two stanzas of the poem. The syntactic connection is paralleled by a number of semantic features: the second and third stanzas share the motif of the communication ("Botschaften" and "Antwort" respectively) and of the hand ("Hände" and "ihrer Lebenslinien"), as well as an element of motion lacking in the first stanza. Furthermore, the colon setting apart the second and third stanzas establishes a specific relation between them - namely that the final stanza is the summation or the result of its predecessor. The measure of obvious affinity of the second and third stanzas with one another, then, would appear to be greater than that of either with the first. This would tend to emphasize the essential duality, referred to above, of the opening statement, whose function as title or motto, extending in a manner yet to be investigated over the poem as a whole, is lent more weight next to its more obvious role as starting point.

Weissenberger and Oelmann assume that the messages floating in are identical with the initial "Streubesitz," and that both are negatively compared with, and ultimately purified into, "Gold." And certainly on one level of the poem this would appear legitimate. But in the light of the above, this process would seem at that level to act merely as the backdrop to a scene in which altogether more subtle proceedings are presented. The suggestion, that is, in the syntactic and semantic pattern of the poem, that the opening statement both introduces and subsumes what it precedes, undermines the supposedly final validity of the poetic "Gold" arrived at. We are forced to look at the poem itself anew.

The word "Streubesitz" is, in an important sense, a contradiction in terms. Its accepted meaning is simple enough - plots of land scattered over a region or country but belonging to a single owner. "Besitz," though, is literally what one holds "besetzt," what one sits on; the concept presupposes the wholeness of what is possessed, and implies a union of possession and possessor. "Streubesitz," possessions scattered, carries thus, in addition to its conventional meaning, an internal tension between mutually exclusive concepts, and thereby also a suggestion, however slight, of a shattered self. The constellation of the fragmentary thwarting a claim to possession the ful-

filment of which requires the wholeness of what is possessed is echoed, amplified and elaborated in the simultaneity of presence and dissolution conveyed in the adjective "staub- / unmittelbar." What is immediate is not the tangible, integral form from which the dust derives, but merely the product of a fragmentation in its final stage, that of disintegration. The adjective effects an intensification of the word it is attributed to, thus carrying further the fragmentation of the self implied there: the self is now ground to dust. One need not recall the Jewish holocaust to make the connection with death.

A similar tension between the elusive and the possessive may be felt at several other points in the poem. One of these is the formulation "Klage- / vögte," descendent, as both Weissenberger and Oelmann recognize, from the "Klage-Fürsten" of Rilke's Tenth Duino Elegy.¹¹ A "Vogt" does not act for himself and his possessions, but on behalf of others, whose property he may ^{administrate} ~~administrate~~ and whose interests he represents: he is their mouthpiece. Furthermore, the "Botschaften," while originally they belonged to the "Gedanken," are now unbound and floating. The mode of their motion into the hands of the "Klage- / vögte" is highly ambiguous. The participle "entzogen" may mean that the messages are gathered in the hands by a gravitational force; that they are somehow actively withdrawn or, in the course of the alchemical process, distilled, from the "Gedanken" by the "Klage- / vögte." At the same time, the messages might, on the contrary, arrive of their own volition and, far from being elusive, choose to take refuge in the hands after having fled the "Gedanken." Thirdly, the opposed and mutually exclusive modes of being passive object or active subject might be fused in the suggestion of the messages falling into the wrong hands. Perhaps the legitimacy of representation denoted by the word "Vogt" is compromised by its juxtaposition to the word "Klage," the suffering which gives rise to lamentation being so primal and personal an experience that for it to be represented by another amounts to an act of misappropriation or

¹¹ Rilke, II, 724.

alienation. This ring of inappropriateness, echoed in the incongruity of the regality of the "Botschaften" that are "königshart" and the rather lower status of the "Vögte" is, however, tempered by the ambiguity of the word "Klage." This has not only the meaning of lamentation, but also that of a lawsuit. The judicial function of a "Vogt" is in full accord with the latter: he gives legal presence to a voice that would otherwise go unheard. Significantly, in this context of poetic utterance, one of the senses of the word "Vogt," a sense corresponding perhaps also to the extent to which the "Klage- / vögte" are passive, is rendered in German by "Vormund."

Perhaps most surprisingly and thus also most extremely, even the concluding "Gold" is fraught with the tension between the elusive and the possessive. For while it suggests a highly prized possession of enduring value, its immediate context, not without a certain irony, undercuts these associations. "Gold" is liquified here, a "Tropfen" tenuously suspended and on the brink, or already in the act, of falling. And it is this precarious state that is explicitly eternal. The point is not that "Gold" does not retain any of its associations of permanence and value; it does. The point is rather that the ultimacy connoted by gold is so extremely final that any qualification at all, however small in itself, negates the essence of these connotations. Merely to suspect that "Gold" is unfinal is to make it so. The last word, then, is not final: it reflects back into the poem.

"Gold" is compromised, in its finality as well as its desirability, in yet another way. Before their transformation, the messages, in contrast to the resulting gold, are "hart": their purification into the precious metal is attended by a certain degree of dissolution. That the quality of hardness is seen to be at least partly positive may perhaps be inferred from its origins, which lie in the realms of regality and, possibly less or less obviously positive, of night. The role of the adjectives "königshart" and "nachthart" is difficult to establish. The regal and the nocturnal jointly contribute the hardness of the communications, yet they are by the very same token in some way complementary or opposed - the messages are both "königshart" and "nachthart," the implication being that two different orders

of hardness are involved. The connotative range of the regal is centred ^{upon} ~~around~~ the status of what is firmly established at the summit of a hierarchy. In the secular realm, regality tends to suggest the most dignified, valid and elevated mode of existence; in the spiritual, God. The night, by contrast, seems in the first instance to appear here as the time of sorrow, a role in which it is perhaps confirmed in the first four lines of the following stanza: the product of what is "königshart, nachthart" emerges from the break, indicating calamity or grief, in the line of life of the hands. But it is perhaps possible to be more specific, for the communications to which this nocturnal quality pertains arrive in the evening. If we may take as possible here one of the traditional functions of the evening as an image of the decline of life, the night is the time of death and the dead. As such it would take up the allusion to death of the adjective "staub- / unmittelbar." To conclude: the hardness of the regal and the nocturnal would appear to be resistant to transformation, and thus, to a certain degree, to the rest of the poem.

The extent to which this holds true is demonstrated by a further aspect of the poem. The colon of line 8, the central line of the work, unlike the later, more conventional instance of this punctuation, acts as a kind of turning point; one might even be justified in terming it, considering the degree of syntactical parallelism in what precedes and what follows it, a specular axis, a mirror. While the second stanza presents an inward movement, the third features an emergence. Within this framework, a functional equivalence is posited between "königshart, nachthart" of the earlier and "lautlos" of the final stanza. All three are adverbs to the actions presented in the stanzas in which they occur. The paradoxical silence of the "golden" "Antwort," its suspension between the voiced and the mute, thus contains within itself, and is itself contained in, the hardness of regality and of the night. In this way, the capacity of the colon to act as a mirror unsettles yet further the supposed finality and completeness of the process involved and the poem that projects it; mirrored back, "Gold" becomes "Streubesitz." Yet it is only because of the contextual qualification of "Gold" as "Tropfen" that the colon might be seen as a mirror in the first place. The poem offers to

interpretation no fixed point of departure, no secure foothold, unless it be the paradoxically qualified ultimacy of "Gold" as such.

Celan's "Klage- / vögte," as has been noted, seem to descend directly from Rilke's "Klage-Fürsten." This is merely the most obvious of several strands of a relationship between "STREUBESITZ" and the Tenth Duino Elegy.¹² The present poem shares, for instance, with the central section of the latter - that in which the "Jüngling" is guided by "der Älteren eine, der Klagen" - the medievalism of its setting. It is more fully developed in the Elegy, where the landscape of lamentation was reigned over by the "Klage-Fürsten" from castles which now lie in ruins. In Celan, it is presented by the figures of the "Klage- / vögte," by the motif of regality and that of landed property, of "Streubesitz"; but these are not united to form a single coherent complex as in the memory of the older "Klage." Celan's poem designates a point where the dissolution deplored in the Elegy has been carried to yet further extremes. Individual Romantic or Neo-Romantic topoi survive, but only as if to illustrate the more forcefully the disintegration of the universality of vision in which they originate. Relations between them tend to be severely - often ironically or grotesquely - strained, if not broken.

This is perhaps most evident in the role of space in the two poems. In Rilke's Elegy, its function is integrative. The end of the opening section establishes sorrow as the spatial dimension of man's existence, as man's true home; it is said of the "Schmerzen," mentioned two lines earlier: "Sie aber sind ja / . . . nicht nur Zeit -, sind Stelle, Siedelung, Lager, Boden, Wohnort." Against this concept, which is later to unfold into the vast expanses of the "Landschaft der Klagen" and, more intensely, the "Leidland," Rilke sets off the alienation of man from his sorrow in the imagery of the "Leid-Stadt." This alienation might be seen to be taken up and intensified in the word which presents the topos of the land attended by extremes of fragmentation, "Streubesitz, staub- / unmittelbar," and in the hint of misappropriation conveyed, in conjunction with sorrow, by the

¹² Rilke, II, 721-726.

formulation "Klage- / vögte."¹³ And this is indicative of the pattern of the later poet's appropriation of the motifs of his predecessor here: in contrast to those which derive from, or lean towards, the Romantic, those which relate to the bitter topography of the "Leid-Stadt" tend to come away unscathed. Thus the "Zerstreuungen" which are chewed by Rilke's beer drinkers resurface in the opening "Streu-besitz" - modulated but not mutilated. Their identity remains essentially intact. Similarly, the word "Gold" in the later poem, of which we have seen that it fails to keep its promise of finality, seems to derive from one of the salient features of the alienation of the "Leid-Stadt," the false silence - "der falschen, aus Übertönung gemachten / Stille" - which in reality is only "der vergoldete Lärm," "das platzende Denkmal." The latter formulation closely resembles Celan's liquid gold in its dissolution of what is supposedly permanent.

But not only the sarcasm is carried over from the Elegy; so is the realm circumscribed by poetic speech and genuine silence. The "vergoldete Lärm" is opposed in the "Landschaft der Klagen" by the true silence of the night - which has earlier been called a "gehärmte," of sorrow and the dead - in the passage extending from "Abends führt sie ihn hin . . ." to "auf die Waage der Sterne gelegt." The evening is the overture to this silence, which culminates in the emergence, in a mode transcending the division between subject and object ("mondets empor"), of the supreme "Grab-Mal" with its regal head ("dem krönlichen Haupt"; "dem Pschent-Rand"). This is a paradoxical silence, situated as it is in a landscape of utterance, of "Klage." The later silence of the mountaneous region of mute suffering, the "Leidland" is more simply structured in this respect: "Einsam steigt er dahin, in die Berge des Urleids. / Und nicht einmal sein Schritt klingt aus dem tonlosen Los." Elements of this constellation reappear in Celan's poem; the messages which arrive, both subject and object of their motion, in the evening, are "königshart, nachthart" and issue in a paradoxical "lautlose Antwort." Under the same heading, the mining activity of the "Väter," the "geschliffenes Ur-Leid" they

¹³ See above, pp. 67-68, and 68-69.

produce, and the "Perlen des Leids" of the younger "Klage" are possibly echoed in the "Gold" of "STREUBESITZ" and its ornamental overtones.

Both poems share the aspiration toward transforming and purifying sorrow. But while the Elegy opens with an expression situated somewhere between hope and achievement - "Dass ich dereinst, an dem Ausgang der grimmigen Einsicht, / Jubel und Ruhm aufsinge zustimmenden Engeln" -, in Celan, this aspiration is progressively undermined. In much of Celan's later poetry, the tentative, fragmentary mode of progression is self-evident. Here, the process is more deceptive. The poem "STREUBESITZ" may, at first, seem simple. This comparative simplicity is, however, undercut by various devices of unfinality, an unfinality brought into sharper relief against the background of Rilke's Tenth Duino Elegy.

THREE

DISJUNCTION

I. Literal Disjunction

In terms of numbers, unfinality does not matter. Only a small fraction of Celan's poems might be judged unfinal in one of the ways examined in the previous chapter. The value of the notion of unfinality lies elsewhere: it suggests a reading of Celan which seems capable of absorbing this poet's often bewildering intensities of paradox and contradiction. We may view these disjunctions as specific manifestations of the general suspension of Celan's work between speech and silence. And while it would be inappropriate to propose too rigid a demarcation between the literal and figural modes of suspension encompassed by the category of disjunction, it does seem justifiable, if only in response to the exigencies of ordered exposition, to suggest that each of the poems discussed below is suspensory in a less clearly denotative manner than its predecessors.

To open the sequence, the suspension of mutually exclusive denotations is very much to the fore in this poem from Atemwende (II, 76):

- I CELLO-Einsatz
 von hinter dem Schmerz:
- II die Gewalten, nach Gegen-
 himmeln gestaffelt,
 5 wälzen Undeutbares vor
 Einflugschneise und Einfahrt,
- III der
 erklommene Abend
 steht voller Lungengeäst,
- IV 10 zwei
 Brandwolken Atem

- graben im Buch,
das der Schläfenlärm aufschlug,
- V etwas wird wahr,
- VI 15 zwölfmal erglüht
das von Pfeilen getroffene Drüben,
- VII die Schwarz-
blütige trinkt
des Schwarzblütigen Samen,
- VIII 20 alles ist weniger, als
es ist,
alles ist mehr.

The poem begins with the theme of beginning: the entry of a cello. The second line, in locating the "Cello-Einsatz" as coming "von hinter dem Schmerz," expands upon the melancholy of tone associated with this instrument. The deictic "dem" in this line generalizes this suffering; and it is wholly in keeping with the operation of deictic generalization, which persists throughout the poem, that the colon following the first two lines should introduce the remainder of the poem as being identical with, or the result of, the "Cello-Einsatz."

"Einsatz" has not only musical but also military connotations, and these are actuated in the second stanza, which tells of impersonal "Gewalten" that are "nach Gegen- / himmeln gestaffelt." The verb "staffeln" means "to grade," "to arrange in steps," "to arrange hierarchically," but its military overtones derive from its kinship with the noun "Staffel," which, apart from a "step" or "rung," may also mean a squadron of (nine) fighter aeroplanes. This aerial element is also, of course, abundantly present in the word "Himmel," which in German means the natural "sky" as well as the religious "heaven." In respect of the latter it may be that to pluralize the word is already to secularize the concept.¹ Certainly, to speak of several

¹ One's view of this matter depends on which religious framework one considers relevant. Heinrich Schmidt's Philosophisches Wörterbuch, rev. Georgi Schischkoff, 21st ed., Kröners Taschenausgabe, 13 (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1982), p. 279, defines "Himmel" as "im mythisch-religiösen

natural skies is to delocalize, and even more certainly, to speak of "Gegen- / himmeln" is indeed to secularize. But like any negation, the negation of "Himmel" is at the same time, in a sense, a re-presentation or even affirmation of what is negated; and this duality of negation and affirmation is graphically indicated by the enjambement of the compound, the isolation of, and concomitant emphasis on, both "Gegen-" and "himmeln": in being negated, what is negated is paradoxically also afforded a presence it would not otherwise possess.

Or would it? Perhaps the mention of "Himmel," and the aerial implications of "gestaffelt" and "Einsatz," of a military operation involving a squadron of fighter planes, alert us to the presence in the Italian "Cello" of the Italian for "Himmel," "cielo." This presence is not etymological or semantic; it inhabits the material substance of the signifier, its graphic and phonetic form, and is thus purely incidental to the literal meaning of the word "Cello." As has been noted above, the colon of the first section may imply causation: that the remainder of the poem is the result of, or a

Glauben der 'himmlische', über alle Massen herrliche Aufenthalt Gottes. Nach babylon. und jüd. Anschauung gab es sieben übereinander-gewölbte H. 'Im siebten H.' werden die Seligen der Gegenwart Gottes teilhaftig. Der im Matthäus-Evangelium (in den anderen Evangelien nicht) vorkommende griech. Ausdruck *hai basileia tôn uranôn* (die Herrschaft der Himmel, von Luther mit 'H.reich' übers.) meint diese sieben H." The (German) Christian tradition tends - and Luther's singularizing (one "Himmelsreich" instead of several "Himmel") in the one Gospel where the plural "Himmel" occurs is perhaps symptomatic of this - to speak of "Himmel" in the singular; and against the background of this tradition, Celan's plural may assume the appearance of an instance of secularization. On the other hand, Celan's expression may be an allusion to the Jewish concept of the "Seven Heavens" which, as indicated above, are "gestaffelt" one over the other. On this concept see also Gerschom Scholem, Die jüdische Mystik in ihren Hauptströmungen (1957; rpt.: Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), pp. 57-58. Celan is said to have read, and in his poems sometimes to have alluded to, as well as quoted from, Scholem's writings on Jewish mysticism. On this aspect of Celan's work, see Georg-Michael Schulz, "'fort aus kannitverstan': Bemerkungen zum Zitat in der Lyrik Paul Celans," Text und Kritik, 53/54 (1977), p. 39; and especially Joachim Schulze, Celan und die Mystiker: Motivtypologische und quellenkundliche Kommentare, 2nd ed., Abhandlungen zur Kunst-, Musik und Literaturwissenschaft, 190 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1983), passim.

reaction to, the "Cello-Einsatz." A reading allowing for the presence of the near-homonymous "cielo" in "Cello" - the difference between the two being the length of their first vowels - would suggest, in its emphasis on the initial, original "Himmel," what the subsequent "counter-skies-or-heavens" are in fact counter to.

Next, this scene of tentatively identified aerial "encounter" receives a kind of semiotic charge: narrow passages of arrival by air ("Einflugschneise") or sea and land ("Einfahrt") are blocked off by "Undeutbares." This last word is ambiguous in the extreme, it is itself "undeutbar": it may mean "that which is so complex as not to permit of interpretation," in other words something, in the end, unintelligible; or it may mean "that which is so obvious as not to permit of interpretation," that is, something wholly unequivocal. In either case - and we cannot decide between them - the scene as a whole has become a landscape, or indeed a battlefield, of signification.

The "Undeutbares" of the second section, then, seals off the approaches in or to the horizontal plane, and when the third section speaks of the "erklommene Abend" we may, accordingly, be tempted to think the vertical direction the only one now left open to any motion. But, "erklommene" being a past participle, the climbing has already taken place, and it is anyway a notable feature of this stanza that it introduces, after the motion of the first ("Einsatz") and second stanzas ("wälzen"), a moment of stasis, a condition rather than a process: "der erklommene Abend / steht voller Lungengeäst." In the expression "der erklommene Abend" the dimension of time, of which "Abend" is a designation, is rendered spatial, of which the fact that it can be climbed is an indication. "Abend," which is thus perhaps employed as synonymous with the "sky" into which the planes have climbed, is a word laden with poetic and transcendental associations, but these are here radically depoeticized in the fusion of this cosmic "outside" with the human "inside," the anatomical "Lungengeäst."

The deictic impulse running through the poem from the start has now become so strong that "der," which opens the third stanza, is accorded a full line to itself, and this is repeated with "zwei," which opens the fourth. The formulation "zwei / Brandwolken Atem"

intensifies the fusion of the transcendental and the anatomical effected in the preceding stanza; "Atem" is generated, literally and figuratively, by the earlier "Lungengeäst," while clouds, of course, are phenomena of the sky. And there is a further opposite conjunction at work here, for "Atem," a word almost as worn by poetic tradition as "Abend," may be read, in part, as a metaphor of life and (poetic) creation - and is fused to the point of identity with the apocalyptic "Brand." These "Brandwolken Atem," in contrast to the vertical orientation featured thus far, "graben im Buch, / das der Schläfenlärm aufschlug." Their searching motion is downward, and it too, not unlike the act of climbing the "Abend," renders spatial what is otherwise not so. A book does exist in the spatial realm as a three-dimensional object, but it is not literally a space in which one might dig for something. What is projected into the spatial realm here is not ~~is~~ physical corporality, but the essence of its being a book, an essence of which, for the purpose of this poem, a definition focussing on the book's promise of signification and on its concomitant need of interpretation might be considered sufficient. In short, this book pertains to, and embodies more intensely, the same space of signification that was constituted by the introduction into the poem of the "Undeutbares."

It is also a book which has been opened by "der Schläfenlärm," a conjunction again harbouring multiple possibilities of interpretation. "Lärm" denotes an excess of sound, noise, and is thus set off from the musicality of the initial "Cello-Einsatz." Furthermore, the expression "Lärm schlagen," which means "to raise the alarm," is perhaps present in an inverted form here, since it is the "Schläfenlärm" which has performed the act of "(Auf)schlagen." And this echo, if such it is, might draw attention to the origin of the word "Lärm" in the Italian "all' arme!", a cry "to arms!"² Such a connection would not only echo the earlier possible insinuation of the Italian "cielo" into "Cello"; it would also strike anew the chord of martial overtones running through "Einsatz," "Gewalten" and "gestaffelt."

² Wahrig, col. 2321.

Inasmuch as "Schläfe" derives from "Schlaf" and denotes the area of the head on which one rests in sleeping, its conjunction with "Lärm" amounts almost to a kind of etymologically and, more easily recognizable, phonetically mediated oxymoron. The formulation "Schläfenlärm" might also present a heightening of an expression like "das Blut pochte ihm in den Schläfen," in which "pochte" is both mechanical and auditive. Common to all these readings is their conveyance of an excess of (auditive) sensation, of a state of excitement, of a heightened sensibility, and it is, one suspects, this urgency that necessitates the opening of the book.

The past tense of "aufschlug" presents this opening as already having taken place earlier, and thus points also to a salient feature of the next section, which consists of a single line: "etwas wird wahr." For something to become true implies that it was not so before; that it was, for instance, still a mere prophecy or expectation which has now been substantiated. The mention of truth again avails itself of the transcendental-poetic register from which words such as "Abend," "Atem" and, to the extent to which its deictic form suggests the Bible, also "Buch" are drawn; but there is a significant difference in that what is involved here is not even specific, let alone deictic, but wholly vague: "etwas." The point, then, in the first instance at least, is not to discover exactly what becomes "wahr," but to recognize that its so becoming is a result of the search, of the delving into the book undertaken in the immediately preceding section.

And, as the single-line section appears to be generated by its predecessor, so the sixth section appears not just to follow on, but to follow from, the fifth. That is to say: though we cannot be sure of the exact import of the number twelve, we may, in the wake of the emergence of truth, of which the remainder of the poem is perhaps part, safely assume that it embodies a true wholeness, a condition of completeness; and we may so assume without having recourse to the knowledge that, for instance, the Disciples of Christ were twelve; or that the months of the year are twelve; or that twelve hours of light are one day and twelve hours of dark one night. The word "er-glüht" would appear to signify a species of revelation, rather than, as does the semantically related "Brand," of apocalyptic destruction.

Like "etwas," "Drüben" - whose illumination implies that it is otherwise dark - is not further specified; its remoteness is itself its defining feature, and places it in the same category of religio-poetic vocabulary informing this poem at various other points. Finally, that this "Drüben" should be reached by arrows, whose passage is through the air, perhaps suggests that the obstruction by the "Undeutbares" is here circumvented.

The seventh section too presents referential difficulties that, in the end, do not very much matter. We may, to be sure, read the conjunction "Schwarzblütige" as a fusion of the colour of death with the blood of life; it seems more important, however, especially in view of the instances of truth, of wholeness and communication projected in the fifth and sixth stanzas, that, whatever the particular features of the persons involved, they are identical save for their gender: they present a perfect match.

And it is this aspect which is to the fore in the drinking in of the "Samen," an insemination followed by - or giving rise to? - what in both senses of the word is a conclusion: "alles ist weniger, als / es ist, / alles ist mehr." The tone is sententious, the deictic mode has become apodictic; but the promise thus held forth of an arrival, an attainment of a fixed and at least temporarily secure position, is brusquely displaced by a vertiginous contrariety. It is, of course, a familiar and perfectly conceivable notion that something might be less than it appears to be - but not that it is less than it actually is. This paradox is then followed by the information that what is less than it is, is at the same time also more than it is. And this concerns not just some marginal field of our consciousness such as, say, poetry or nuclear physics, in which paradox or indeterminacy may be said to be part and parcel of the matter in hand; it concerns "alles." Mutually exclusive extremes of literal signification are immediately juxtaposed and thus negate or silence each other. Both and neither prevail.

Moreover, "alles" includes also the poem in which the final three lines figure. This reflexivity is perhaps present from the outset - thus "Cello" may be a play on "Celan," and "Einsatz" a self-description of a poem consisting of only "ein Satz" -: but here the poem crystal-

lizes almost into a signal, an instruction in how it might be read, a summing-up and retroactive warning of the impossible duplicities of its diction.

If we heed this warning, and turn back to the poem, we are confronted with elements of a further framework of signification, which would allow one to place this poem in the same category as "Todesfuge" (I, 39-42), "Engführung" (I, 195-204) and "Chymisch" (I, 227-228). The mention of "Brandwolken Atem" in "CELLO-Einsatz" is only the most obvious pointer towards the Jewish holocaust and National Socialism; others are more silent. Thus the connection of "Staffel" ("gestaffelt") with "Himmel" ("Gegen- / himmeln") may be far more sinister than is suggested by the view of "Staffel" as a unit of the air force: "SS" was the abbreviation of "Schutzstaffel" - and its chief, endowed with the title of "Reichsführer-SS," was Heinrich Himmler.

"In the muddle of competing agencies that constituted the governmental system of the Third Reich," writes Gordon Craig, "the SS was the effective instrument of domination."³ One of its prerogatives was a virtual "SS-Monopol auf dem Gebiet der nationalsozialistischen Rasse- und Siedlungspolitik."⁴ Accordingly, it was the SS that was responsible for "the Jewish question." After 30 June 1934, when the SA ("Sturmabteilung") had been eliminated in the "Nacht der langen Messer," the concentration camps were run by the SS.⁵ Moreover, special units of the SS were trained in the elimination of "undesirable elements" - which, certainly from 1941 onwards, meant mostly Jews. These units were the "Einsatzgruppen," which were subdivided into "Einsatzkommandos" ("Einsatz"). That alone might suffice to make it plausible to suspect an allusion in this poem by the Jewish poet Celan. But the

³ Gordon Craig, Germany: 1866-1945 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 601.

⁴ Martin Broszat, Der Staat Hitlers: Grundlegung und Entwicklung seiner inneren Verfassung (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1969), p. 61.

⁵ Broszat, p. 337

experience of the "Einsatzgruppe" touched not only upon this poet's Jewish people, but also on his person. It was the "Einsatzgruppe D unter dem Kommando des SS-Brigadeführers Ohlendorf" that marched into Czernowitz, where Celan and his family lived, on 6 July 1941: "Der Auftrag der SS lautete: 'Energisch durchgreifen, die Juden liquidieren.'"⁶ Celan's parents were among the victims of the actions of this "Einsatzgruppe," which he himself barely managed to escape. In this light, "zwölfmal" might contain a reference to the twelve years (1933-1945) of National Socialist reign, and the completeness conveyed by the number might be that of the virtual destruction of European Jewry. Similarly, the complementarity projected in a formulation like "die Schwarz- / blütige trinkt / des Schwarzblütigen Samen" reminds one more of concepts of racial purity such as were implemented by the SS, than of romantic or sexual union per se.

Perhaps one may add a further observation, connected with Himmler's name and position as the "Reichsführer-SS." His name provides a very tangible, if accidental demonstration of the kind of perversion affecting language in the Third Reich which Celan once called "die tausend Finsternisse todbringender Rede" (III, 186): Himmler's name almost literally promises heaven - but what he delivered was death on a scale of hitherto unknown enormity. This feature is most generally reflected in the fusion in this poem of transcendental and martial vocabulary, and most significantly perhaps in the disjunctive fusion of "Cello" - containing, possibly, the Italian "cielo" - with "Einsatz," which, apart from being a musical term, refers also to the "Einsatzgruppen" of Himmler's SS. This disjunction is thus expressive of the paradoxical fusion of German culture and German barbarism for which the "Todesfuge," alluding to such masters as Bach and Handel, finds the words: "der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland" (I, 42). We are told by Chalfen that Celan, even as the

⁶ Chalfen, p. 115. For further details on the SS-"Einsatzgruppen" see, for instance, Helmut Krausnick, "Judenverfolgung," in Hans Buchheim, Martin Broszat, Hans-Adolf Jacobsen and Helmut Krausnick, Anatomie des SS-Staates (Freiburg: Walter, 1965), II, pp. 348 and 361-370.

Germans approached Czernowitz in 1941, "glaubte noch immer an die Nation der 'Dichter und Denker.'"⁷

The duplicities of diction operative in "CELLO-Einsatz" amount almost to a demonstration of Celan's suspensory mode of utterance. In this next poem, from Lichtzwang (II, 293), these duplicities are less sententiously announced than in the last section of "CELLO-Einsatz," and less insidiously operative than in the whole of that poem, but nonetheless unmistakably present:

- I MAGNETISCHE BLÄUE im Mund,
 erkeuchst du Pol um Pol,
- II gesömmertes Schnee
 wirft sich drüber,
- III 5 bald hängt der taumlige Star
 im doppelten Liedschwarm

The first words of the poem, "Magnetische Bläue," reminiscent perhaps of the metallic blue of a needle in a compass, suggest a lack of, and concomitant quest for, orientation and direction. This is borne out in the second line, where the "du," whose "Mund" contains the magnetic "Bläue," is said to reach "Pol um Pol." That alone would suffice to convey a sense of urgency, but this is heightened by the verb employed, "erkeuchen," which projects the kind of hard rapid breathing that might arise from physical exertion or, more dangerously, strangulation. In addition, the formulation "Pol um Pol" suggests that more, and different, poles are involved than merely those of the earth.

And the second of the poem's three two-line sections immediately illustrates the type of polar constellation concerned: "gesömmertes Schnee." There are, of course, regions of the earth - extreme heights, and regions close to the North and South poles - where snow may be "eternal," but what is presented here is something quite different. It is not snow that, owing to a favourable geographical location, has managed to last through summer, but snow that is itself "gesömmert."

⁷ Chalfen, p. 114

The conjunction of this neologistic participle with "Schnee" constitutes a rhetorical fusion of polar opposites, so that all the referential attributes of one pole are silenced in their entirety by those of its counterpart. These words mutually suspend one another.

This paradoxical, impossible snow "wirft sich drüber." One is prompted to ask: over what? Perhaps over the poles of the first section; perhaps over the magnetic "Bläue": in either case, the obliteration by snow would render whatever area is affected all of a sameness. All landmarks, all points of orientation, are blotted out, and thus is engendered a new disorientation.

This is presented in the third and final section, which temporally moves from the present to a future in which "der taumlige Star" is suspended "im doppelten Liedschwarm." The condition of this starling, owing to the temporal indeterminacy it is attended by, is uncertain. Its dizzying, tumbling motion might be a thing of the speaker's present, to be remedied by the way in which the bird will later be suspended; but the "Star" might equally still be "taumlig" while it is so suspended - which would mean that here, again, is a fusion of mutually exclusive predicates such as structures the "gesömmertes Schnee." If so, then the poem, beginning with a vigorous motion, an urgent search for direction, would end in a state of paradoxical suspension - a suspension modally operative in the disjunction of the second section, and, thematically, in the literal suspension of the starling, as well as in the dubiety of the "Liedschwarm."

This dubiety has been present in the poem from the outset. A "Pol" is defined by its diametrical opposition to its double, and this polarity is also very much to the fore in the formulation "gesömmertes Schnee." Indeed, the poem as a whole, to the extent to which it is structured by such dubiety, may be seen to be subsumed in the "doppelten Liedschwarm" of its final section. A "Schwarm" usually denotes an uncontrollable number of flying birds or insects, and there is almost a suggestion here that the starling, a songbird, is caught up in, as well as supported by, the multiplicity of its own songs. Be that as it may, the emphasis given to expression at the end of the poem activates retrospectively further possibilities of signification in its beginning. For we may now read the beginning

of this poem as describing how the polarity upon which it is based is produced. More specifically, we are alerted to the possibility that "erkeuchen" may mean literally "to cough up" and thus "to produce," as well as conveying metonymically the motion by which the difficulty of breathing it denotes is caused. The close connection of "Mund" in the first section with the verb concerned, as well as the overtones, however slight, in "Bläue" of what became a Romantic symbol of poetry, the "magnetically" fascinating "blaue Blume" of Novalis's novel Heinrich von Ofterdingen, would tend to support a reading of the poem as reflecting its own, starkly disjunctive polarity.⁸

⁸ Novalis, Schriften, I: Das dichterische Werk, ed. Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel in collaboration with Heinz Ritter and Gerhard Schulz (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960), p.195.

II. Mediated Disjunction

The criterion by which literal disjunction may be differentiated from figural disjunction is that in the former, both poles involved in any one suspension are clearly spelt out and immediately juxtaposed. In a predominantly figural disjunction, on the other hand, these poles are actuated by the operations of contextuality, which draw out of a single word opposed possibilities of signification. The poems to be read in the present section occupy a middle ground. The poles of suspension involved are clearly designated, but tend not to be starkly opposed to one another. Rather, they are buffered by variously operative zones of indeterminacy. In this next poem, from Schneepart (II, 359), the impulse toward literal suspension is still strong. But although the text issues in a literal disjunction of the kind examined in the preceding section of this chapter, it opens with a greater indeterminacy of equivocation, and thus might be read as an attempt to spell out ever more accurately the space of contrariety within which it exists:

- I ETWAS WIE NACHT, scharf-
 züngiger als
 gestern, als morgen;
- II etwas wie einer
 5 Fischmäuligen Gruss
 übern Jammer-
 tresen;
- III etwas Zusammengewehtes
 in Kinderfäusten;
- IV 10 etwas aus meinem
 und keinerlei Stoff.

The four sections of this poem are all concerned to encircle as closely as possible the "etwas" with which they begin. The first stanza essays an expression of the "etwas" in terms of the night, which is set apart from both yesterday and tomorrow by virtue of its being "scharfzüngiger." This projection of the night as the realm of

the word is not unusual in Celan, yet here this aspect is double-edged: the night is the realm of the most precise utterance, but also, potentially, that of the most damaging. Thus the "etwas," together with the night, is doubly suspended - between past and future, suggesting as its domain the present and as its mode presence; and between the precision and concomitant danger of its tongue.

The second stanza remains thematically in the sphere of speech, but the latter is of rather special an order: "einer / Fischmäuligen Gruss" - the language of silence. Again, what the poet is searching for is poised between two poles, language and its antonym, silence. "Fischmäuligen" possesses a measure of ambiguity; it could mean a girl or woman whose mouth is that of a fish and who, therefore, is mute; it could also, by analogy to "leckermäulig" or "fleischmäulig," mean one who loves to eat fish. In either case, the bearing of Celan's formulation would be towards silence. In the first, the muteness would directly generate the paradoxical "Gruss" of or in silence; in the second, the longing for fish would again, in this context, suggest a longing for silence, and the "Gruss" here too would originate in the polarity of language and such silence. This "Gruss," with its connotations of familiarity, is spoken across a "Jammer- / tresen," a "sorrow-counter" suggesting a commercialization of human suffering. In the North German colloquialism "übern," then, the poet might be reproducing the accent of a female assistant in a fishmonger's; but more importantly, the ambiguity of "Jammer," which may mean both sorrow and lament, indicates that the "etwas" involved is perhaps not just speech as such, but poetic speech. Firstly, poetry is of course a possible form in which suffering may express itself: "Schmerz - Vater der Kunst," Celan is supposed to have once said.⁹ Secondly, Celan's poem contains, through its emphasis on an "etwas" which it seeks to circumscribe, and its central mention of "Fisch," a possible allusion to one of the seminal documents of silence in modern German literature, namely to Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "Chandos"-letter - with

⁹ Clemens Podewils, "Namen / Ein Vermächtnis Paul Celans," Ensemble, 2 (1971), 70.

which Celan, we are told, became acquainted at the age of seventeen, and which is said to have influenced his early poetry.¹⁰ Towards the end of this letter, the fictitious author Lord Chandos confesses that: "ich vergleiche mich manchmal in Gedanken mit jenem Crassus, dem Redner," the point about whom it was "dass er eine zahme Muräne, einen dumpfen, rotäugigen, stummen Fisch seines Zierteiches, so über alle Massen lieb gewann, dass es zum Stadtgespräch wurde." The letter then continues: ". . . über diese Figur zwingt mich ein unnennbares Etwas in einer Weise zu denken, die mir vollkommen töricht erscheint, im Augenblick, wo ich versuche sie in Worten auszudrücken" (emphases added).¹¹

The two final stanzas mark a break in the poem in several respects. Formally, they are shorter and more dense than their predecessors. Although, like the first two sections, they begin with the word "etwas," they do not continue with "wie," perhaps implying their proximity to the "etwas" to be so great that they are virtually or actually identical with it. Furthermore, they reject the metalingual stance of their predecessors and espouse a rhetoric of intangibility. Thus the third stanza projects "etwas" blown together, gathered by the wind in the fist of a child. There is no room for wind or anything else in the fist of an adult, and even less - if that be conceivable - in the smaller fist of a child. Again, the "etwas" is in a state of suspension, this time between the intangibility of the wind and the concreteness of a fist. Yet there is possibly a mediative ambiguity here, for the fist of a child may not be as firmly nor as purposefully closed as that of an adult; perhaps "etwas" is something to be grasped only by child-like innocence.

The final stanza, presenting "etwas" as consisting of "meinem / und keinerlei Stoff," constitutes a climactic summary of what has gone before. The polarity that has permeated the structure of this poem at every level is at its greatest here, in the opposition between

¹⁰ Chalfen, pp. 67-68.

¹¹ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Ein Brief, in his Prosa II, ed. Herbert Steiner (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1976), pp. 18 and 19.

the substance of the self and nothingness. This last stanza presents, in short, a consummation of the paradoxical incorporeity central to the poem. In this sense, it brings the resolution of the structural paradox inherent in the development of the latter: the closer the poem gets to the "etwas" it seeks to encircle, the less conventionally precise and "scharfzüngig" does it become, seemingly surrendering itself beyond retrieval to the ever more immaterial and vague. The further our reading of the poem progresses, the more difficult does it become to attach to the words of this work referential meanings that are mutually compatible. The poem, that is to say, gains its precision and expressive force from its mode of inclusion, from and through its generality. "Etwas," then, would be a poetic language realized despite and through conventionally referential language, present in it yet immaterial, embracing different extremes of consciousness and experience, truly a piscine language.

In this all-important sense, this language, which, to the extent to which the above poem is programmatic, is the language of Celan's poetry as a whole, agrees with a further seminal appearance of silence in modern German poetry: Rilke's conception, in Die Sonette an Orpheus, of "der Fische / Sprache."¹² Rilke charged this language with the task of bridging the immense distance between human beings, the distance between stars, and, thirdly, the distance between these two realms. This language was to be Orphic in that it was to be all-embracing, uniquely able to close the circle, an achievement the impossibility of which the poet had lamented in the sonnet in which the formulation "der Fische / Sprache" appears. Here, in Celan, the reach of this piscine language is neither indicated nor celebrated; no mention is made of isolation being transcended in any way - but this language, too, is a language of suspensory mediation, and in this fashion central in the most literal sense of the word. And the proximity here of Celan's and Rilke's diction of silence is further underlined by the way in which Celan, besides the motif of the fish, also takes up, within a context of intangibility, that of the child, which in Rilke's sonnet

¹² Rilke, II, 765.

served to demonstrate how "unfasslich entfernt" is one man from the other.¹³

Rilke has a role in the next poem to be discussed, too, which comes from Fadensonnen (II, 184) and employs a similarly suspensory mode of utterance:

- I ANRAINERIN NACHT.
 Zwerg- und riesenwüchsig, je
 nach dem Schnitt in der Fingerbeere,
 nach dem,
 5 was aus ihm tritt.
- II Überäugig zuweilen,
 wenn bikonkav
 ein Gedanke hinzugetropft kommt,
 nicht von ihr her.

This poem might be loosely summarized as offering a projection of the night, which in the first line is called a neighbour, one whose domain borders upon one's own. The sense of relative intimacy thus conveyed is, however, tempered somewhat by the choice of the word that conveys it. For "Anrainer" contains within itself the root "Rain," denoting a border or verge, and the alien quality thus introduced is enhanced by the change of gender Celan imposes upon the usually masculine word "Anrainer." The balance between the proximity and the remoteness of the night - presumably in relation to man - is reiterated in the following lines, where we are told that the night veers between two extreme states of being. The latter, as in the other instances of disjunction with which we have been concerned, are mutually exclusive, but, unlike some other examples, not irreconcilable. This is because the extremes involved are not synchronized - though the "und" by which they are joined perhaps indicates that they are thought of as simultaneous potentials. These possible states of being are given expression through two extremes of human size, the use of which to some extent anthropomorphizes the night.

¹³ Rilke, II, 764: "Einer, zum Beispiel, ein Kind ... und ein Nächster, ein Zweiter -, / o wie unfasslich entfernt."

Yet their extremeness at the same time removes the night from the common run of human experience to its outer limits.

The size of the night depends on what emerges from the "Schnitt in der Fingerbeere," the latter being a colloquial term for the very tip of the finger. The question of whose finger is involved here is left without an answer. It could belong to the night itself, in which case we would be dealing at this point with a development of the anthropomorphization initiated earlier on; it could also belong to man, which would imply on his part a measure of control over the night. The "Schnitt" exposes what is usually closed off and protected from the outside world; perhaps it also impairs the tactile sense. One of the specific functions of the verb "austreten" is to describe the emergence of liquid from inside bodies otherwise sealed off, for instance, the emergence of blood from a wound or of juice from a fruit, especially from berries. Both uses are relevant here, the second exploiting the imagery of the colloquial compound.

At times, the night is "überäugig," meaning, in the first instance, given to overlooking essentials. By implication, the night is "äugig," perceptive, at other times. In addition, "überäugig" is ambiguous in that it could also signify the possession and exercise of a heightened sense of sight, or even of more eyes than is usual, suggesting thus not only a sharpened faculty of perception but also, possibly, abundance or superfluity. In this case the implication would be that the night is otherwise blind. The visual element introduced here is taken up and developed in the word "bikonkav," a technical term in the field of optics, where it is used to describe the shape of lenses. It is applied in this instance to the movement of a thought, a movement which is thereby given not only an inward direction on both of its sides, but also the capacity to correct or focus or heighten perception. There is a certain degree of tension, or balance, detectable at this point between the definite outlines and the soundness or solidity of the movement of the thought as conveyed by "bikonkav," and its fluidity as expressed in "hinzutropft." The thought drips towards, and probably into, the night, merging with or dissolving in it. This unifying force, on the other

hand, is offset by the double emphasis placed upon the alien nature of the thought in regard to the night, first by the "hinzu" of "hinzugetropft," and then by the final line of the poem, which tells us that the thought is moving "nicht von ihr her."

Perhaps this is why the night is changed by the entry of the thought and becomes "überäugig." Such a state would appear to be possible both when the night is extremely small and when it is extremely large. The second stanza seems to adduce a further aspect of the night, an aspect independent of the features set out in the first: hence the words "hinzugetropft" and "überäugig" with their strong hints of excess; hence also the formal structure of the poem, opening with a first line which doubles as a title, immediately followed by a four-line descriptive conditional statement, while a further such statement is then set off both visually and syntactically to form a second section. There is also, possibly, a metaphorical link between the two stanzas, the suggested liquidity of what emerges from the tip of the finger in the first being taken up in the "hinzugetropft" of the second. But instead of hastily concluding that therefore the finger cannot belong to the night, it is necessary to recognize that the poem does not clarify this matter but suspends it.

And this order of suspension seems to be as fundamental to this poem as it has been to others discussed hitherto. The issue is not merely the ambiguity of Celan's imagery, although this is an essential contributory feature; the issue is that the imagery itself is suspended between reciprocally intensifying extremes or polar possibilities. In the present poem, these possibilities of signification, as has been noted, are not synchronized, and hence do not starkly contradict one another. The only actual statement in the poem is to be found in its first line, which is followed by a projection of two extreme potential conditions of the night. These conditions are mutually exclusive - not only in conventional terms, but in those of Celan's poem as well; they occur according to the state of, or to what emerges from, the "Schnitt in der Fingerbeere." Then, in the second section, a further potential condition of the night is projected, a condition apparently independent of what has gone before. The interrelations of the different elements of the poem, presented, except for the first

line, in a virtual mode, are impossible to ascertain; the poem is quite literally in flux.

Thus the attempt to determine the role of the night and its relation to man is stopped short by the constitutive instability of the poem. "ANRAINERIN" does not feature a discernible self; but there are several suggestions of human involvement. The night, as we have seen, is anthropomorphized, but in an ambiguous way so as to suggest a simultaneous proximity and remoteness of the night vis-à-vis man. Furthermore, we do not know the owner of the fingertip, but again he may be human. If the fingertip belongs to the night, the use of the word "Finger" simply constitutes a further anthropomorphization; if it does not, then, presumably, it belongs to man - but this begs the question of how the size of the night is dependent upon him. Finally, if the involvement of man in the above instances seems somewhat tenuous, it takes on more definite outlines at the end of the poem: for where does the thought stem from if not from him?

Given that this is so, the night, which is here perhaps employed, to a certain extent at least, in one of its traditional roles as a metaphor of transcendence, is no longer beyond thought and no longer beyond man. This also means that the transcendental night is no longer to be desired as goal or guide, a function which, in its fluctuating condition, the night is no longer equipped to fulfil. And yet, we cannot be certain. The poem may be infused with a strong depoeticizing tendency, but the latter is too sharply refracted by other elements of the text to be unequivocally dominant. Thus even the very qualification of what might be called the Romantic or neo-Romantic notion of night preserves for poetic usage, even if only fragmentarily, the notion qualified.

And this brings us to a further framework of signification potentially underlying the poem, one which may broadly be termed Rilkean. The most important indication of the possible existence of such a backdrop is furnished by the word "Anrainerin," which may well be a play on Rilke's first name: Rainer. This is all the more likely since the word is placed in so close a union with the night, one of the central metaphors in the work of the earlier poet. Furthermore, even if "Anrainerin" was not, in the first instance, intended as a play on

"Rainer," it seems unlikely in the extreme that the encapsulation of the latter in the former should have escaped one so sensitive to the minutiae of language as Celan; and there is no reason why he should not have developed and exploited this phonetic duplicity. In addition, one is reminded by Celan's changing of the gender of "Anrainer" to a feminine form, of the following utterance of Rilke's: "(ich denke immer im Sinne von *le soleil* und *la lune*, und das umgekehrte in unserer Sprache ist mir konträr, so dass ich immer machen möchte 'der' grosse 'Sonn...' und die Möndin!)" The correspondence, or rather Rilke's part thereof, in which these lines are to be found, was published in 1977, seven years after Celan's suicide in Paris.¹⁴ But this particular utterance had been incorporated by Jean Rudolf von Salis, who had been granted access to this body of letters, in his book Rilkes Schweizer Jahre.¹⁵ This work, which dates originally from 1936, was published in a revised version in 1952, and Celan, given his exceptional fascination with Rilke, may well have been acquainted with it. But even if Celan did know von Salis's book, the connection with Rilke's utterance would admittedly be tenuous at best. The other possible references to Rilke in Celan's poem are more tangible.

Thus the "Schnitt in der Fingerbeere," to pursue this line of inquiry, may be a reference to the injury Rilke sustained from the thorns of a rose when attempting to cut it - the injury that, legend has it, precipitated the final outburst of his leukaemia.¹⁶ And a further Rilkean reference might be harboured by the "Fingerbeere" itself, which may be seen to echo the "Augenbeeren" of Rilke's late poem "Idol," substituting the sense of touch for that of sight; the

¹⁴ Rainer Maria Rilke, Briefe an Nanny Wunderly-Volkart, 2 vols., ed. Niklaus Bigler and Rätus Luck (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1977).

¹⁵ Jean Rudolf von Salis, Rilkes Schweizer Jahre: Ein Beitrag zur Biographie von Rilkes Spätzeit, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 289 (1952; rpt. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1975), p. 207.

¹⁶ von Salis, p. 274. For a medical refutation of this legend, see, for instance, Erich Simenauer, Rainer Maria Rilke: Legende und Mythos (Bern: Haupt, 1953), the chap. "Eine Krankheitsgeschichte," pp. 171-227; esp. pp. 218-223.

more so as Rilke's "kostende Gottheit" is engaged in pressing the juice out of these berries and tasting them in its "dunkeln / Mund," its "Krypta des Gaumens," which would accord with the darkness of the night, and the juice emerging from the berry in Celan's poem.¹⁷

The Rilkean night tends to be that of his poem "Die grosse Nacht" - of which the possibilities that the night in Celan's poem may be "zwergwüchsig" and "riesenwüchsig" are perhaps a revocation and reminiscence respectively.¹⁸ The night, in Rilke, that is to say, tends to stand for transcendence, or the possibility thereof. The self-sufficiency and immensity of the night are usually set off against the confinement of man in his preconceptions and compulsions: the night is a limitless realm of transformation and mystical union, a realm of expanded consciousness, of an especial intensity of experience.

In Celan's poem, the night is far from self-sufficient. It is dependent upon events over which it exerts no control. Indeed, perhaps the night is now even dependent on, and controlled by, man. Moreover, as has been noted, the night is possibly wounded; it is certainly influenced, in the most literal sense of the word, by the thought, which probably originates in man.

Thus one may, in one way, read Celan's poem as an exercise in secularization. This does not in itself differentiate the later poet from Rilke; on the contrary, this kind of secularizing depoeticization is essentially a Rilkean practice in a more extreme form. But the radicalization executed in Celan needs nevertheless to be emphasized, and it is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the different treatment meted out to the relation of night and thought by both poets. In the first of the Duineser Elegien, to take an example which, since it shares with Celan's poem the emphasis on the alien nature of the

¹⁷ Rilke, III, 185-186.

¹⁸ Rilke, III, 74-75. For an incisive discussion of some of the functions of the night in Rilke see Stephens, esp. the chap. "Die Semantik der Nacht," pp. 167-189.

thought, is perhaps particularly relevant, the "du" is asked where he will keep his beloved: "(Wo willst du sie bergen, / da doch die grossen fremden Gedanken bei dir / aus und ein gehn und öfters bleiben bei Nacht.)"¹⁹

Against this background, Celan's sarcasm is unmistakable: his thought comes "hinzugetropft."

¹⁹ Rilke, II, 686.

III. Figural Disjunction

In a third class of disjunction, the issue is not that opposed denotations are starkly juxtaposed, or somehow mediated; it is that single words or formulations are prompted by operations of contextuality to project mutually exclusive significations. To put the matter boldly, a word is made to oppose itself - as in this poem from Atemwende (II, 63):

IN PRAG

- I Der halbe Tod,
 grossgesäugt mit unserm Leben,
 lag aschenbildwahr um uns her -
- II 5 auch wir
 tranken noch immer, seelenverkreuzt, zwei Degen,
 an Himmelssteine genäht, wortblutgeboren
 im Nachtbett,
- III 10 grösser und grösser
 wuchsen wir durcheinander, es gab
 keinen Namen mehr für
 das, was uns trieb (einer der Wieviel-
 unddreissig
 war mein lebendiger Schatten,
 15 der die Wahnstiege hochklomm zu dir?),
- IV ein Turm,
 baute der Halbe sich ins Wohin,
 ein Hradschin
 aus lauter Goldmacher-Nein,
- V 20 Knochen-Hebräisch,
 zu Sperma zermahlen,
 rann durch die Sanduhr,
 die wir durchschwammen, zwei Träume jetzt, läutend
 wider die Zeit, auf den Plätzen.

While "In Prag" has been touched upon by various critics, and been discussed in considerable depth by Stewart, the aspect of metaphorical disjunction has perhaps not yet received sufficient emphasis.²⁰

²⁰ Stewart, "Some Problems," pp. 142-144.

Disjunction is operative from the start. The first line of the poem projects a mode of existence centred between life and death, a motif further developed in the second line: "grossgesäugt mit unserm Leben." Death thus nourished recalls, as Janz rightly points out, the Rilkean notion of the organic individual death, but here, its growth is stifled.²¹ The incompleteness of this death perhaps suggests that it is premature. The range of the paradox of death-in-life is significantly extended in the imagery of suckling and nursing: death is presented as an infant, the end of life as its first stage of development. The suggestion of a redemptive circularity is very much muted, if present at all; rather, life itself is permeated by death from the outset. The slight degree of syntactic personification accorded to death, the "halbe Tod" being one of the two subjects of the one sentence of which the poem consists, is heightened by that on the semantic level: death is, as it were, brought to life.

In this light, the formulation "aschenbildwahr" may conceivably be read, in part, as a poetic summary of the "halbe Tod" and its context. The triple compound specifies through its connotations of premature Jewish death in the Third Reich a possible reason why the "Tod" here is incomplete. The implied "Aschenbild," namely the image of death which is projected here - a condition between life and death, between the personified and the abstract - is "wahr," actually and actively enveloping "uns." The mere image is given physical properties. It achieves presence rather than, or as well as, representation.

There would, then, be as little justification in speaking of an opposition being maintained between life and death, "uns" and "der Halbe," as of its being transcended; instead, these extremes of existence, mutually exclusive though they conventionally be, are drawn together in an insoluble complex of mutual affirmation and negation. Accordingly, the second stanza brings us the second subject of the poem, "wir," as partaking of the very same feeding as death. The poem

²¹ Janz, pp. 212-213.

then introduces, after those of death, life, birth and representation, a further register of imagery in the chivalry connoted by the "Degen." This is prefigured in the word "seelenverkreuzt," which again juxtaposes the abstract and the tangible. The soul, a concept that, fittingly, always speaks of life and death in the same breath, is the dematerialized self, while the ability to be "verkreuzt" depends upon the possession of a well-defined, material linearity; and it is this last requirement that seems almost to generate the metaphor of the two swords. It is perhaps also worthy of note that the word "Degen" can sometimes, particularly in elevated or poetic speech, denote the bearer of the sword himself, the warrior or soldier. The cross thus formed designates - and it is, on one level, primarily a sign - a point of meeting, of intersection, or, in view of the martial connotations of "Degen," of hostile confrontation.

These swords are sewn to "Himmelssteine," a metaphor combining the limitless expanses of the sky with a single, discrete mineral entity, and thereby prefiguring the later constellations of concretion and elusion: the "Turm" located in the "Wohin," and the "Hradschin," the magnificent castle of negation. That the crossed swords should be held in place by being sewn is suggestive of a textile heraldic emblem, and thus resounds again the motif of representation first heard in the earlier "aschenbildwahr." It resounds in the formulation "wortblutgeboren," which in composition and syntactic function in fact closely resembles the other triple compound. As signalled by its capacity to lose blood, the immaterial word is accorded life, and, in turn, itself gives life to the "wir." Again, we may recognize at this point a personification of the intangible, and the concomitant treatment of the latter, in close association with the motif of the emergence of life, as an actual, active presence. In addition, as the word is personified, so the "wir" descending from it are, in the most literal sense, verbalized, made word, and hence dematerialized.

The time of this fertility of the word - attended by a strong suggestion of its mutilation, echoing the martiality of the swords - is that of the night. The first two stanzas, as is indeed the poem as a whole, are literally embedded in the night; a state of affairs

that prompts the retrospective identification of the "Himmelssteine" as stars. The compound "Nachtbett," formed possibly by analogy to a word such as "Kindbett" (a word whose associations with birth enhance the relevance of such an analogy), suitably unites within itself the dimensions of time and space; it is the night which, in an expansion of its traditional function as the setting for the union of sexual love, renders possible the suspensory mode of diction encompassing the union of life and death, and that, in turn, of this complex with "wir."

In consequence, we cannot readily discern whether the "wir" of the central stanza refers exclusively to the ever greater concrecence of the two entities of the second stanza, to that of "ich" and "du" of the third, or equally or primarily to that of the latter two on the one hand and the "halbe Tod" on the other. The more expanded frame of reference would appear to operate in the repetition and gradation of the adjective of the "halbe Tod," "gross," in the first line of the present stanza, "grösser und grösser," while the process of growing clearly derives from the earlier nursing. The uncontrollably intense tightening of this simultaneous interweaving on several levels poses insurmountable terminological problems for the poet, or his poem - as it does for the reader: there is no name that satisfactorily communicates this condition. In this sense, this moment or state of speechlessness is climactic. It designates the nadir of the dimension of representation, which initially, in "aschenbildwahr," was accorded the status of truth, then, in "wortblutgeboren," registered in a state of mutilation, and is now, finally, riddled with insufficiency.

What follows in this stanza is therefore necessarily consigned to a different order of utterance; yet, as so often in similar instances in Celan (one thinks especially of that of the colon), what is here added parenthetically does not, at first sight, even seem to cohere to, let alone elucidate that to which it is appended. However, from the vantage point afforded by recognizing the climactic failure of speech in the face of the fiercely paradoxical coalescence featured thus far, what follows seems almost logically inevitable. It is as though the poem were seeking to reorient itself, to which

end it adopts an almost analytical, dissective stance toward the fusion, and indeed confusion, of what is nearly enough its first half. The poem, as it were, retraces its steps in an effort to untangle itself, in an effort, ultimately, to regain speech. The parenthesis therefore executes a double isolation. Firstly, it separates "wir" from the "halbe Tod," which then becomes the sole concern of the next, the fourth stanza. Secondly, the parenthesis constitutes a regression behind the unity of "wir"; for the first time in the poem, "ich" and "du" are apart: their relation is now, in sexual terms, pre-orgasmic, located in time at some point before the opening of the poem.

Yet the very fabric of "In Prag" appears to resist such analysis, and the parenthetical question retains a high degree of suspension. "Wieviel- / unddreissig" juxtaposes the vague and the precise; "Wahnstiege" the illusory and the real; and the "lebendiger Schatten," a living dead, is a metaphor whose composition is identical to that of the "halbe Tod." Furthermore, the double erosion of the identity of the "ich" leads toward that condition of namelessness indicated in the first half of the section: not the "ich" itself mounts the "Wahnstiege," but a projection of it, its shadow; nor is it alone in doing so - it is one of more than thirty who ascend toward union with the "du."

The fourth section, continuing the dissection instigated in the preceding query, is concerned exclusively with "der Halbe"; but this stanza too is permeated by the mode of speech employed by its predecessors. Thus the vertical motion of "der Halbe," erecting himself reflexively into the "Wohin" as a "Turm" whose phallic overtones are difficult to miss in the context of the "Nachtbett" in which it appears, parallels that of the ascent of the "lebendiger Schatten" towards the "du." The combination of the precise and the elusive in the earlier "Wieviel- / unddreissig" returns when the second interrogative pronoun of the poem, "Wohin," counters the fixity of location suggested by the building of the tower: a paradox which returns yet again, and more intensely so, in the lines "ein Hradschin / aus lauter Goldmacher-Nein," the splendour of the Prague castle arising here from the refusal of those with the capacity to produce the most

prized of possessions, gold. Significantly, it is not simply their refusal as such that generates the "Hradschin," but the language of negation; a supreme instance of unequivocal negation occasioning one of equally supreme affirmation.

"Knochen-Hebräisch," a skeletal language, a language of death and silence, is at once starkly contrasted and closely linked with the alchemists' language of productive denial. For while this language of death, taking its place behind "keinen Namen" and "wortblutgeboren" in the descent from "aschenbildwahr," is pulverized, and thus could not be further removed from the solid "Hradschin" of "Goldmacher-Nein," it is ground down to the originative "Sperma." This metaphor takes the regression in the imagery of the unfolding of life, which began with the infancy of "grossgesäugt" and continued through the emergence of life in "wortblutgeboren," further back to the point of its inception. The downward motion of the sperm with or as time through what, in part, is another traditional metaphor of death, the hour-glass, is, especially in view of the earlier erotic overtones, not devoid of a suggestion of impregnation. The initial paradox of death-in-life, whose range was extended at both poles in the imagery of nursing, is now driven to yet further extremes: the skeleton becomes sperm, which in turn fertilizes death.

Finally, the "wir" return, swimming through the hour-glass. They are at present, in a reversal of their initial condition, two dreams. Where first they had been "Degen" in the sky, tangible entities in a context of intangibility, they are now themselves intangible forms, dreams brought down to earth, "auf den Plätzen." The only resistance they have to offer against the current of time is that of a sign, the ringing of bells; a gesture of futility which is almost literally a mere echo of their former seemingly unstoppable growth, just as their martiality as "Degen" has come to naught in their dematerializing transformation into "zwei Träume." They may not even be moving, for the phrase "auf den Plätzen" is ambiguous. "Plätze" may, of course, denote the squares and public places of Prague where the "Träume" act as bell-ringers. It may also, in conjunction with the verb "durchschwimmen," mean that although the dreams are swimming, they remain, in a suspensory fusion of dynamism and stasis, in one and the same

place.

It will be obvious that the texture of this poem, not unlike that of other poems discussed hitherto, resists any attempt at drawing a single, summarizing conclusion - unless it be simply a statement of this very resistance: that "In Prag" is balanced between a plethora of mutually exclusive extremes, including life and death, growth and dissolution, progression and regression, the abstract and the tangible, presence and representation, affirmation and negation, language and silence; that the poem itself would appear, as a whole, to be suspended between the extremes of linguistic insufficiency and fertility it projects; that this text, in other words, at once undermines and perpetuates itself.

Nevertheless, a certain amount of development does seem to take place, to which the "jetzt," in its opposition to what has gone before, draws attention. The dissolution of the "wir," noted above, is perhaps most evident. As "wir" and the "halbe Tod" are initially presented as descending from the same source, their disparate development becomes the more strongly focussed. The paradox of the "halbe Tod," as has also been noted, becomes more starkly projected in the course of the poem, culminating in its supreme concretion in the fourth stanza. But the resistance of "wir" as "Träume" is a resistance against the supreme disembodiment of "der Halbe," that of "Knochen-Hebräisch" (whose connotations of Jewish death themselves descend from and amplify the earlier "aschenbildwahr") ground down to sperm, running through the hour-glass. Perhaps, then, a transposition of unities has occurred. Perhaps the mutual hostility between "du" and "ich" implied in the metaphor of the crossed swords has given way to a hostility between their union and the "halbe Tod," with which they were initially united in the action of suckling.

However, even so tentative an observation is ultimately undercut by the poem, whose progression as regression in time undermines whatever temporal determinacy "jetzt" seems to hold forth. To say that "ich" and "du" are first mutually hostile and later united is rendered problematic by the fact that it is also in the first half of the poem that they are ^{independently} ~~inseparably~~ fused; at perhaps literally the same time, they

are "zwei" in the beginning, while at its end they unite against time.

A perhaps even more inconclusive figural suspension is intensely projected in this poem from Fadensonnen (II, 147):

- I. DIE TEUFLISCHEN
 Zungenspässe der Nacht
 verholzen in deinem Ohr,
- II mit den Blicken Rückwärts-
 5 gesträhltes
 springt vor,
- III die vertanen
 Brückenzölle, geharft,
 durchmeisseln die Kalkschlucht vor uns,
- IV 10 der meerige Lichtsumpf
 bellt an uns hoch -
 an dir,
 irdisch-unsichtbare
 Freistatt.

Either the night of the first clause consists wholly of diabolical "Zungenspässe," or, that part of the night which does, lignifies, and what follows is an exploration of the possibilities this offers, of further aspects or dimensions of the night. A reading of the night as divided, made up in part of misleading, almost mephistophelian jests of the tongue, and in part presenting a potential activated in the course of the poem, is able to draw a certain measure of support from the second stanza. For whatever it is that, after the lignification of the "Zungenspässe," springs forward almost as if to take their place in the night has hitherto been combed against the grain and held back - and, as the capitalization of "Rückwärts- / gesträhltes" shows, been constituted in so being - by "Blicke," looks suggesting perhaps consciousness or control, but looks also whose power is impaired, if not cancelled, by the dark of the night.

The pattern of action being initiated by the lignification of the "teuflischen / Zungenspässe" is repeated in the next two sections. First, the "vertanen / Brückenzölle," paid in vain for permission to cross a bridge, themselves chisel through the gorge of limestone, and thus parallel, or elaborate upon, the paradox of the second section, in which an action dependent on physical contact, the combing back,

was said to have been performed by intangible "Blicke." In addition, the direction of the action projected in this third stanza is as unclear as it seems, at least at first, to be crucial: do the "Brückenzölle" merely move along inside the gorge, thus explaining or increasing the futility of their payment? Or is that payment, on the contrary, finally justified; are the "Brückenzölle," paid in vain in the face of the "teuflischen / Zungenspässe," now unleashed by the removal of the latter to surge across the "Kalkschlucht" with an energy so great it carries overtones of violence?

Furthermore, the aggressive chipping sounds one associates with "durchmeisseln" are, in turn, starkly set off from the musicality, the warmth and nuance of tone suggested by an opposed yet simultaneous quality of the bridge tolls, namely their being "geharft." There may even be a causal relation; it is perhaps their being "geharft" which causes or allows the "Brückenzölle" to move along inside, or to cross, the gorge. Certainly, where the only other sound featured thus far in the poem, that of the "teuflischen / Zungenspässe," was characterized by obfuscation and stasis, the "Brückenzölle, geharft" are remarkable for their clarity of tone (this much "geharft" and "durchmeisseln" have in common) and their dynamism.

As has been noted, we do not know whether this dynamism actually carries "uns" across the gorge; we do not know whether the events projected in the fourth stanza take place on the far side of the gorge or not. But that is of no matter; either way, the subjects now come under attack: "der meerige Lichtsumpf / bellt an uns hoch." The "Lichtsumpf" might be read as a traditional image of truth significantly qualified or indeed inverted. This light is literally saturated with water to form a "Lichtsumpf," and even that which stood for ultimate truth and certainty is now treacherous and swampy. But this is only one way of reading the compound. The "Sumpf" may not only consist of, but also suck in, "Licht." Both of these readings centre ^u ~~around~~ an element of threat, and this is taken up in the next line, where the metaphor of the "Lichtsumpf" is contextualized into one of a hound baying up at "uns."

Each of the clauses presented thus far ends with an explicit indication of place or direction: "in deinem Ohr," "springt vor,"

"die Kalkschlucht vor uns," "bellt an uns hoch." But owing to the ambiguities variously attending the actions thus localized, no determinate spatial relations are projected; no fixed point is ascertainable. And now even what we might have been tempted to view as the starting point of this dislocation is itself delocalized: "an dir" is substituted for "an uns" as if the two were synonymous, and the "du" then further identified as a locality, the "irdisch-unsichtbare / Freistatt."

Whatever fragile unity the poem possesses may be seen to revolve around this "du." Apart from appearing in the first and last sections of the poem, which it thus enframes, the "du" stands at the centre of a number of oppositions ranging across this text as a whole. More specifically, the "du"- "Freistatt" complex is opposed to the different manifestations of threat or restriction featured, mainly in connection with light, in the poem. First, the "du" proved immune to the "teuflischen / Zungenspässe der Nacht." Furthermore, it is, in contrast to the "meerige Lichtsumpf," solidly "irdisch." At the same time, the "du" is invisible, and thus can neither be controlled by "Blicke" nor sucked into a "Sumpf" which draws in light.

All of these aspects would appear to amplify the conventional meaning of "Freistatt" - a shelter or refuge. And yet the "Freistatt" is under attack. This need not affect the security of the "Freistatt," which may simply be unassailable, not to be reached by the hound baying up at it; perhaps the "du"- "Freistatt" complex is as immune to the sound of what might be the hell-hound Cerberus as it was to that of the equally underworldly "teuflischen / Zungenspässe."²²

²² The possibility of an allusion to Cerberus is perhaps part of a wider allegorical grid, roughly identifiable as Orphic, projected fragmentarily in Celan's poem. Viewed thus, the night might stand for the underworld into which Orpheus descended with his harp-like lyre ("geharft") to bring back from the dead his wife, Eurydice. He was permitted to take her back to earth ("irdisch-unsichtbare / Freistatt") provided he did not turn backwards to look at her on the way ("mit den Blicken Rückwärts-") - which he did. Furthermore, the fact that Celan rhymes "Ohr" with "vor" may not be an accident but a pointer towards a specific incarnation of Orpheus, namely Rilke's. This same rhyme is to be found in the first quatrain of Die Sonette an Orpheus, and, slightly varied, in the second sonnet, which rhymes "hervor" and "in meinem Ohr" (Celan: "in deinem Ohr"). Rilke, II, 731.

But perhaps a "Freistatt" under attack is no longer a "Freistatt"; perhaps the mere possibility of being attacked suffices to deprive the "Freistatt" of its constitutive property. As so often in Celan, we cannot decide; in this case, whether the last two lines of the poem are closer to a fear-stricken exclamation or a serene refutation.

"DIE TEUFLISCHEN" ranges over a variety of sometimes harshly antagonistic extremes by exploiting not a framework of neat dialectic or complementarity, but of incalculable, paradoxical rhetoric, and thus illuminates, if ever that word is legitimate in discussing Celan, the fundamentally interstitial mode of diction this poet often espouses. In this particular poem, it is the force of grammar or syntax, rather than an immediate juxtaposition of opposed significations as operative in the term "erschwiegene Wort" in "Argumentum e silentio" (I, 138-139), that unsettles reference and renders it figural. First, the genitive case of the word "Nacht," denoting the time between sunset and sunrise, suggests that we view the night both as possessing, and as consisting of, diabolical "Zungenspässe." Next, the sentence of which the reference "Nacht" is part continues with a second clause (the second section of the poem) of which we may presume that it presents an effect of the first, and which prompts us to assume that the poem as a whole takes place in, and is rendered possible by, the night. This is not to say that our initial interpretation of the "Nacht" as a negative, infernal realm is now, since it has been superseded by a view of the night as a realm of positive potential and transformation, to be discarded. On the contrary, we are forced to entertain both of these irreconcilable readings at once. Indeed, one might even argue that the very attribution of the "teuflischen / Zungenspässe" to the night specifically negates and at the same time thereby paradoxically activates Romantic and neo-Romantic overtones of the "Nacht" as the realm of poetic utterance.

FOUR

DISPLACEMENT

I. The Grotesque

The discussions above of unfinality and disjunction both closed with examples whose status was perhaps debatable: the feature in question was present only in a dissipated, unspecific form. But at least that feature had at an earlier stage shown itself to be amenable to initial exposition. Both discussions were able to start out from poems in which unfinality or disjunction were distinctly manifest, and the development of a chapter was a matter of tracing these features through a sequence of poems in which they were progressively less evident. Put differently: the first examples in either category were constituted predominantly by literal signification, the last predominantly by contextual signification.

The poetic features to be discussed in the present chapter do not easily lend themselves to similar treatment. A poem here is not, as in the case of unfinality, made to signal its opposition to itself; nor are opposed signifieds, as in the case of disjunction, united explicitly in stark juxtapositions or implicitly in single words or formulations. Literal meaning is indeed suspended, but by a process of deviation rather than opposite negation. And the specific kind of deviation with which this chapter is concerned is covered by the term ~~of~~ "displacement." The latter is not meant to include the half-silent deviations from literal meaning to be found, for instance, in allusions and connotations; displacement designates acts of signification exploiting literal meaning as a vehicle for rhetorical meanings which are either wholly incidental to their vehicles, or connected with them at most by a relation of opposition. This would especially appear to be the case with poems drawing on what Hans-

Peter Bayerdörfer has called an "Ästhetik des Grotesken."¹ Here, it is not individual acts of signification that confront, suspend, and thus silence one another; it is registers of signification - varieties of tone and gesture.

The most extreme manifestation of this mode of suspension is perhaps the appearance of sexually explicit vocabulary in Celan's poetry. The use of such vocabulary has, on the one hand, been condemned as "sonderbar pubertär" by Holger Pausch.² On the other, it has been viewed by Menninghaus as a "Kritik des Bedeuteten im Medium seiner Darstellung, ja als Kritik des Bedeutens selbst," and hence as an instance of Celan's "Vollzug einer impliziten Sprachphilosophie."³ Pausch appears to make no attempt to go beyond his initial repulsion and examine Celan's obscenities with a view to a possible poetic motivation. Thus his conclusion, in this form at least, seems a little out of place in a work of literary criticism - and, for that matter, would also, one suspects, be found sorely wanting as a display of amateur psychology. Menninghaus does attempt to integrate this aspect of Celan's poetry into an aesthetic framework. But for all his energetic efforts, Menninghaus's view, in the end, strikes one as either too vague or too narrow. For if he employs the word "Kritik" to mean a critique, his statement would too easily apply to all forms of linguistic utterance which, as does poetry in a high degree, convey more than just literal meanings, to be of much help in discussing the specific case of Celan. If, on the other hand, "Kritik" is meant in the sense of a criticism, a dissociation from a particular practice, Menninghaus's formulation is perhaps too exclusively phrased. For in Celan's work the excess of literal reference which obscenity brings into his poems is not just negated; it is exploited in various operations of suspension. More generally

¹ Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer, "Poetischer Sarkasmus: 'Fadensonnen' und die Wende zum Spätwerk," Text und Kritik, 53/54 (1977), p. 51.

² Holger Pausch, Paul Celan, Köpfe des XX. Jahrhunderts, 94 (Berlin: Colloquium, 1981), p. 35.

³ Menninghaus, pp. 197 and 203.

speaking, the view of Celan as enacting at any point of his work - let alone, as one often cannot but help feel Menninghaus to be suggesting, at every point - a "Vollzug einer impliziten Sprachphilosophie" is surely far too mechanistic. It is contradicted at an early date by Celan in a letter of 18 November to Hans Bender, in which he confesses: "das Wie und Warum jenes qualitativen Wechsels, den das Wort erfährt, um zum Wort im Gedicht zu werden, weiss ich auch heute nicht näher zu bestimmen."⁴ And on a later, less private stage, namely in his "Büchner-speech" of 1960, Celan spoke of poems as "Daseinsentwürfe" (III, 201) - a notion whose exploratory essence it would be difficult to reconcile with any definite "Sprachphilosophie," however vaguely "implicit."

The following poem from Fadensonnen (II, 218) is almost always mentioned when the issue is obscenity in Celan. But it has not yet, as far as it has been possible to ascertain, been interpreted as a whole:

I UNBEDECKTE. Ganz und gar
 Brüstende du.
 Entflochten der Brodem vor dir,
 im Angesicht aller.
 5 Keines
 Atem wächst nach, Un-
 umkleidbare.

II Der Steinmützenkönig vorn
 stürzt von der Steineselskruppe,
 10 die Hände klamm
 vorm tittenbeschrieenen
 Antlitz.

The first of this poem's two sections projects an exposure. It starts out by introducing a female who is uncovered, an "Unbedeckte." The verb behind this noun, "bedecken," owing to its use in the expression "seine Blösse bedecken," may specifically call to mind physical nudity. These associations are certainly actuated by the

⁴ Briefe an Hans Bender, ed. in collaboration with Ute Heimbüchel by Volker Neuhaus (München: Hanser, 1984), p. 35.

next sentence, which presents this female as being a wholly "Brüstende": she is all breast. This aggressive sexual overexposure counters the initial, more defensive suggestion in "Unbedeckte" that the woman concerned was, on the contrary, in need of clothing to protect herself from being seen in the nude. A similar kind of tension may, in fact, be seen at work in the term "Brüstende" itself, too, whose kinship with the verb "sich brüsten" conveys a note of inauthenticity balancing the literal reference to the "naked" facts.

The next two lines, like the first pair, fuse an active and aggressive stance with a more passive and defensive bearing. After emerging, almost like a figure in a fairy-tale, from the foul vapour which rose before her, the "Brüstende," if only by implication, is "im Angesicht aller." The divergent readings provoked by this last phrase are these: on the one hand, the naked woman is no longer protected from anyone's eyes; on the other, no one is any longer protected from the sight of her. There may even, to follow this line through, be a suggestion that the "Brüstende" purposely exposes herself to full view by performing, before everyone's eyes, the act of unravelling the "Brodem" by which she might have been "bedeckt" as by a garment: "Entflochten" suggests that this "Brodem" is somehow tangible and textile.

In the next three lines, the "Brüstende," to whom this first stanza is addressed, is told that no "Atem" is taking the place of the "Brodem" to cover her, the "Un- / umkleidbare." This last name presents one of those internal suspensory negations sometimes employed by Celan, in which negation and affirmation are fused by virtue of the way in which the negating prefix is separated by a line-break from the word to which it is attached. Thus the "Brüstende" is both an "Unumkleidbare" and an "Umkleidbare." In this way, "Un- / umkleidbare" echoes the duplicity of the earlier name, "Brüstende," which fused naked truth with falsity. For "umkleiden" may not only literally mean "to cover in cloth," but also figuratively "to disguise, to cover up" - for instance, a disagreeable or dangerous truth. From this vantage point, the division of "Un-" and "umkleidbare" may be seen to generate simultaneously two meanings which might be thus circumscribed: the disruptive sexual force projected by the wholly

"Brüstende" is said to be so potently primal a force that it cannot be disguised or contained; yet at the same time, this force is said to be disguisable. And as if this paradox did not cut deeply enough into our conventional modes of apprehension, the textual duplicity operative in this poem cuts deeper still. For we may read "bar" in "umkleidbare" as a suffix, expressing a possibility denied and affirmed in the coalescence of opposed semiotic energies in "Un- / umkleidbare": the possibility of clothing the "Unbedeckte." But we may also perhaps read "bar" as an adjective with the not altogether inappropriate meaning of "naked," a meaning to the fore in the related English adjective "bare." In this case, "umkleidbare" would mean a condition: that of being without dress, of being, to spell it out in German, "eines Umkleides bar."

The complexity of "Un- / umkleidbare" retroactively infects the apparently unequivocal statement: "Keines / Atem wächst nach." For if the "Brüstende" is in fact projected as being in some way "umkleidbar" after all, why should no "Atem" appear to cover her? One is prompted to ask in this seemingly unwarranted manner by the tone of the last three lines, which suggest that it is only or mainly because the "Brüstende" is anyhow an "Un- / umkleidbare" that no "Atem" does actually materialize to cover her. Thus there may be an admittedly rather muted indication even here of a possibility of covering the grossly "Unbedeckte" - and hence perhaps an indication of a wasted opportunity. But this hint is tempered, in turn, by the implication in "wächst" that the "Atem" is organic, vegetative perhaps, and its growth therefore involuntary. Furthermore, in one way the predication of "Atem" as organic better equips it to take the place of the similarly paradoxical tangible and concrete "Brodem"; in another, this predication underlines the most significant difference between the two nouns. If "Brodem" might justly be said to be employed as a term from physics, meaning a foul-smelling vapour, liquid in a gaseous state, "Atem" is a term from biology: "Atem" implies life, and this implication is further promoted in the verb attributed to this noun. This same verb, which underlines a difference between "Brodem" and "Atem," also, however, implies their being functionally equal in that the one is equipped to take the place of the other: "nachwachsen."

But regardless of what might have been, the bare essence of the actuality projected seems to be that here is a wholly "Brüstende"; and the second stanza would appear to present the consequences of this situation. This stanza begins by introducing the "Steinmützenkönig," a figure perhaps even more reminiscent of the world of fairy-tales than the "Brodem" which had surrounded the "Brüstende." The word "Steinmützenkönig," presumably, is a neologism; it appears, that is to say, to be generated only or mainly by the text in which it figures: by its relations with other elements of that text. Thus the stasis and the coldness, the overtones of death in "Stein" throw into sharper relief several points from which they are set off: the organic "Atem" which does not materialize; the textile, vapourous "Brodem" which is untangled; and, perhaps most of all, the vibrant, vitalistic sexual force - to say nothing of the softness - of the "Brüstende." In addition, this stone is coupled to a "Mütze," a piece of clothing.

Taken as a whole, the triple compound may be read in a variety of ways. To name a few, the "Steinmützenkönig" may be the king of a people of "Steinmützen"; a "Steinmütze" become king; or a "Mützenkönig" become stone. Furthermore, the stasis and regal elevation contained in this compound are taken up in another, the "Steineselskruppe" upon which the "Steinmützenkönig" is suggested to be riding. "Steinesel," again, may be an "Esel" of "Stein," but also an "Esel" used to carry "Stein." In the former case, the stasis conveyed by the first triple compound would simply be elaborated upon and heightened; in the latter, one might be tempted to suspect that, by being compared to a load of stone being carried around by a donkey, the king is in some way being robbed of his authority.

And as soon as one refrains from attempting to attach to the triple compounds meanings too fixed, both of the possibilities just mentioned occupy the centre of the stage of reading. For it is less important to presume to state what each of these compounds means "exactly," than to recognize that most if not all their possible significations themselves "fall" when the "Steinmützenkönig vorn / stürzt." The static stone is made to move violently, the elevation present in "Mütze" (atop a body), in "König" (atop a state) and in

"Kruppe" (atop a donkey) is suddenly reversed.

This is achieved by the sight of the "Brüstende." In the tenth line, the "Steinmützenkönig" has his statically and, owing mainly to the possible allusion to the authority of the figure of Klamm in Kafka's novel Das Schloss, also untranslatably "klamm" hands raised before his "Antlitz" in fright as well as perhaps in a vain attempt to protect himself from the force of the "Brüstende." And this confrontation between the subversive force of the latter and the static regality and elevation of the former is restaged linguistically, in the confrontation between the words, or rather, between the registers of speech whence these words derive, "Titten" and "Antlitz." The word "Antlitz" is "beschrieen" by the excessive force and direction of literal reference in the word "Titten." The process at work is perhaps more easily traced in considering that a literal synonym of "Titten," such as, for instance, "Busen," is not, owing to the crass difference in the rhetorical, connotative sphere, something by which an "Antlitz" could ever be "beschrieen." On the level of the actual situation projected in the poem, the poetic choice of the word "Antlitz" is in accord with the nobility of the king to whose features it pertains; on the level of the rhetorical processes operative here, the word "Antlitz" presents an elevated register of speech which is opposed and suspended by, and itself suspends, the base register of the obscene.

Similar though less extremely polarized processes obtain in the case of the grotesque, whether viewed narrowly as the conjunction of human and animal forms in art or, more widely, of absurd and realistic elements in expression:

- I ALLMÄHLICH CLOWNGESICHTIG,
nichtsgespiegelt,
- II die Schminke Wahrheit blauefrorn
im Winkelmund,
- III 5 Frostpollen Puder auf dem blanken Überschädel,
rund um die dünne Fragelocke Schwarz,
- IV die Brauen, Brauen: wachsend,
zwei Riesenfühlerkämme, zwei
- du grossgestrählte,

10 grossgespürte Rauhacht Immerimmer -,
schon fortgeschwungen aus der Flocke Welt,
nicht hin, nicht her.

This poem, which as a whole amounts to something of a portrait, possibly even a self-portrait, and is to be found in the volume Lichtzwang (II, 313), falls into two parts of six lines each. The first part, itself subdivided into three pairs of lines, fuses arctic, anatomical and cosmetic metaphors, of which the latter are dominant. Thus whoever is being sketched - and if it is the poet himself, the poem is a moment of summing up, of reckoning, an account, then, in the double sense of the word - is introduced as ultimately becoming grotesquely or absurdly "clowngesichtig."

The second line features a situation temporally or causally related to the first: the reason or condition underlying the gradual and presently almost completed transformation of the portrait into that of a clown is precisely that nothing is underlying. His existence is without foundation; he is thrown back upon himself, in a process phrased here in optical terms, by nothingness. The self, gazing into the mirror in a quest for identity and authenticity, is faced not by its own image, but by existential nullity. The compound "nichts-gespiegelt," nothingness being unable to reflect anything, is paradoxical, and hence enacts what it expresses - it dramatizes the lack of ontological basis it deplores.

If being has no foundation, all is surface. Hence even truth, already implicitly denied validity, far from transcending the metaphysics of appearance posited in the first two lines, participates in it in the form of "Schminke," mere make-up. Moreover, truth here is immobilized or dead, "blaugefrorn / im Winkelmund." This last formulation would appear to be an inversion, conveying the grotesque contortion of the clown's lips into a grimace, of the conventional expression "Mundwinkel," the corners of the mouth.

The relation to one another of the following pair of lines, which continue thematically in the vein of their predecessors, is highly ambiguous. They might be syntactically parallel, each line projecting a separate aspect of the face. In this case, the sixth line would reverse the pattern of statement employed in the second pair of lines

and in the fifth line, where the subject is succeeded by an adverbial designation of place: "Schwarz" would be the subject, surrounding the "dünne Fragelocke." If, however, the relation of the fifth and sixth lines is hierarchical, the latter is subordinate to the former, and the "Überschädel" bald save for the "dünne Fragelocke Schwarz" (a formulation analogous to "Schminke Wahrheit" and "Frostpollen Puder") - which is surrounded now not by black, but, on the contrary, by the presumably white or light "Frostpollen Puder."

This undecidability lies at the heart of the poem. While "Überschädel" is akin in composition to the previously featured "Schminke Wahrheit" - both conjunctions transforming what is anatomically structural into merely superficial phenomena -, "Fragelocke" stands out in several ways, most obviously perhaps as hair from the otherwise bald "Überschädel." If the lock is not surrounded by, but is itself, black, the contrast is the more starkly pronounced; but whether it is immediate or not, this opposition is boldly delineated. Secondly, the "Fragelocke," by extension, is set off from the image of pure surface sketched (in "-gespiegelt," in "Schminke," in "Winkelmund," in "Puder" and in "Überschädel") thus far. These two differentiating features emanate from the latter part of the compound; the third distinction derives from the "Frage" which indicates a quest, a straining away from the present, and is thereby related to, or identical with, the desire for ontological foundation and authenticity implied previously, in the second line of the poem.

This questioning, to be sure, is exhausted, is worn, faint, "dünn"; possibly dwindling still further by the minute, surrendering gradually to encroaching baldness, eroded perpetually by the pressures of nothingness, of which "blank," "Schwarz" and "Überschädel," with its connotations of death, are embodiments physical, optical and existential. But yet this obduracy is there. And it is this obduracy, however endangered, that appears to generate the remainder of the poem: in marked if mediated contrast to the emphasis in the first section of the poem on blandness and blankness, stasis and superficiality, the second, in taking up and developing the motif of hair sounded in "Fragelocke," employs a figurality of animalism that is grotesquely cosmic. The change in tone and tempo is conveyed semantic-

ally by two dynamic participles, "wachsend" and "fortgeschwungen," and formally by a use of repetition which informs this section with a notably cumulative urgency - the space of six short lines features the literal repetition of "Brauen," of "gross," of "Immer" and of "nicht," while the operation of duplication is reflected and emphasized thematically in line 8.

The second section is concerned with the eyebrows of the face. To say this is already to acknowledge a distinctive aspect of this latter half of the poem, namely its comparative eagerness of expression. Where the first section employed a diction of laconic nomination, symptomatic of which was the curt dismissal of the conventionally unfathomable question of truth as "Schminke," the second section introduces its subject, "die Brauen, Brauen," follows it with a colon, and then sets about sketching it.

The eyebrows are doubly linked with the "Fragelocke." Both are manifestations of hair, and, more importantly, both transgress the confines of the present. However, while the lock of hair was "dünn," the egress of the brows is one of unstoppable, unwavering and in its rapidity perhaps also undescribable growth: at first, possibly taking up and activating the vegetative potential of the erstwhile frozen "Pollen," they are "wachsend"; next, they are two gigantic "Riesenföhlerkämme"; and then already beyond the compass of the world, "schon fortgeschwungen aus der Flocke Welt."

"Riesenföhlerkämme" - the depiction, which has been grotesque in a general sense from the start, now becomes so in a stricter sense, too, fusing animal and human traits. Moreover, this particular slant of grotesque conjunction, that of man and insect, has, of course, an unmistakable predecessor in German literature in the "Verwandlung" of Kafka's Gregor Samsa. But although it is easy enough to establish the tone of the triple compound, the interrelations of its constituent parts are more elusive, and hence the triple compound projects at once a variety of possible meanings. If we read "Riesen" as a noun, "Riesenföhlerkämme" may be seen both as "Kämme" to be applied to the "Föhler" possessed by "Riesen," and as "Kämme" used as "Föhler" to seek out and explore "Riesen." If we read "Riesen" as an adjective capitalized as a result of being welded to a noun or nouns, the compound presents

gigantic "Fühler" which function as "Kämme," and "Kämme" to be applied to gigantic "Fühler."

This indeterminacy is anticipated and echoed in other parts of the poem, but not absorbed; it expands into surrounding elements without being resolved. Thus the eyebrows are at once projected as being "zwei Riesenfühlerkämme" and, since they are hairy, themselves suggested as a fitting object for such combs to work upon. This paradoxical identity or duality of subject and object fully complies with the other instances of duality, mentioned above, in this second half of the poem, and the repetition of "zwei" in the eighth line perhaps signals this complicity - of which the night, too, partakes in no small measure. The involvement of the night has been prefigured by the compound "Riesenfühlerkämme" in one point in particular, for while the activities of combing and of using feelers depend on physical contact, the need for feelers perhaps also implies a degree of blindness, of disorientation and distance; and this fusion of proximity and remoteness is central in the portrayal of the night.

The word "Rauhnacht" denotes one of the twelve nights between Christmas Eve and Epiphany, and although it would perhaps be possible to extract from this denotation potential referential motivations for the use of the word in this poem, these would be subject to the more immediate order of contextual motivation with which we are concerned here. Thus in size the "Rauhnacht" is at the very least on a scale with the "Riesenfühlerkämme," a scale far removed from that of the world, whose diminution takes up again the arctic metaphors used earlier on: the world is a mere snowflake, contingent and dissolute, as were the "Schminke Wahrheit" and the "Frostpollen Puder." In texture too the night is starkly opposed to the universal superficiality presented elsewhere: "rauh" may mean "hairy" as well as "coarse," and thus endows the night with an animal, almost feral dimension. Complementarily, the "Rauhnacht" by dint of this same feature corresponds in some degree to the "Fragelocke" and the "Brauen."

Thus despite the projection of the spatial and temporal immensity of the night as primal and remote, as beyond the grasp of the depicted, cosmetic self, that same self is not wholly out of touch with this immensity. This duality is emphasized in the participles

pertaining to the night in the ninth and tenth lines, "grossgestrählte" and "grossgespürte." To comb something implies that it is being touched; to sense something, that it is not present, or is at a distance. The same kind of ambiguity emerges from the first part of these participles, "gross." The night, that is to say, may both be combed and sensed as "gross," and be made so by being subjected to these acts. In addition, the supposedly remote, "grossgestrählte, / grossgespürte Rauhnacht Immerimmer" is in fact directly addressed, as "du."

Smoothness and protrusion, surface and depth, stasis and dynamism, presence and absence are all amalgamated here by Celan in a grotesquely oppositional grid of utterance. On the one hand, the complexity of this grid precludes us from arriving at any uniform, homogeneous reading. Thus we cannot, for instance, conclude that this poem ridicules man's aspirations towards transcendence - although there is much in the poem that would appear to support such a reading. Nor can we say that these aspirations are in some devious way vindicated or celebrated - although there is not a little support for this view in the text too. On the other hand, it is the very same forbidding complexity of this grid of utterance that permits the well-worn note of man's relation with the cosmos to be resounded and heard at all. The role of the grotesque in this poem is, in short, perhaps best seen as regenerative of a particularly jaded register of poetic vocabulary - at least as far as it relates to this poem's fragmentarily recognizable underlying theme of man and cosmos: a very definite "déjà lu."

II. Irony

A manifestation of displacement less extreme and less easily recognizable than the use of obscene vocabulary and grotesque formulations is irony. Irony is, of course, an elusive notion to handle, and some of the reasons for this will emerge soon enough. But most analyses agree on at least one point: that irony is at work when what is said is the opposite of what is meant. Thus a recent, provisional definition reads as follows: "*Irony is characterized by a semantic and referential relationship of opposition made possible by the possession of one or more contrary semantic features*" (italics in original).⁵

For irony to be recognized, a signal is required which draws the reader's attention to an incompatibility of what one must tentatively term extended and intended meaning - tentatively, because here one is in the thick of the difficulties mentioned above. In the simpler cases of irony, this signal may be part of the immediate or wider context of an utterance. A meaning extended at one point may be corrected at another: an example of this would be the intratextual inversion of a previously conveyed meaning we find in dramatic irony. It is here, where suspensory displacement is largely a matter of time - where, that is to say, the two meanings involved are separated temporally as well as semantically - that the terms "intended" and "extended" meaning may seem justified.

But in more complex cases, it may be impossible and indeed presumptuous to claim to distinguish between meanings extended and intended. Here, the intratextual corrective is not present, not recognizable, or itself ambiguous. Incompatibility is not, after however long a suspension, pointed out, and the question of whether an utterance is ironic or not becomes almost purely and paradigmatic-

⁵ Donald Rice and Peter Schofer, Rhetorical Poetics: Theory and Practice of Figural and Symbolic Reading in Modern French Literature (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), p. 31.

ally a matter of interpretation. Such cases involve an appeal to the expectations of the reader, for instance to his knowledge of traditional and conventional literary forms. The incompatibility upon which irony depends for its effect would then be situated less between different segments or strata of a text, than between the text and the reader: between textual event and interpretative expectation. This is the type of irony one most often encounters, or rather, most often suspects in Celan, where corrective signposts are always less likely than further supersessive disruptions.

In the initial examples above of unfinality, disjunction and displacement in Celan, the feature in question, however susceptible to divergent evaluations, was at least unmistakably present. With irony, it is not even that. In addition, it must be remembered that where irony is suspected to be at work, it will not appear in, nor preside over, a text in isolation: irony contextualizes, and is itself contextualized by, all further elements of a poem. As with the other aspects of suspension discussed hitherto, the physiognomy of irony will be different in each individual work. As a result, the attempt to arrive at a definition of irony aspiring to a general, say, philosophical validity, to be applied more or less mechanistically and atomistically to various poems in order to seek out instances of irony, becomes at once more alluring and more perilous. Amidst a concatenation of confusions, the mind may perhaps all the more urgently crave a secure foothold. But when the latter is obtained at the cost of forgetting that it is this very concatenation that properly constitutes the object of study, it seems not only less presumptuous, but also interpretatively more fruitful, to forsake the sterile and, where Celan's later poetry is concerned, illusory respite of rigid general definition, and to concentrate more specifically on the functioning of irony in individual poems as wholes.

One of the most fertile approaches is suggested by the same factor that makes irony in Celan so difficult to pin down in the first place: the relative shift within the process of poetic signification from textual event to interpretative expectation. For one of the few ways to surprise the readers of Celan's later work, readers who continually expect to be surprised, is, in a way, not to surprise

them: to employ words and formulations which - and this is where irony is akin to obscenity and the grotesque - are referentially overdetermined. More specifically: the surprise is in seeing the German-Jewish post-holocaust poet Celan employing anew vocabulary drawn from what might loosely be termed the religio-poetic tradition in German literature. This regenerative function of irony is nothing new in itself; thus Johan Huizinga has observed of French love poetry of the 15th century: "De gekunstelde, gepolijste, versleten vormen van het minnedicht ondergingen een verfijning en zuivering door de bijmenging der ironie" ("The artificial, polished, worn-out forms of the (medieval) love poem were rendered more subtle and pure by the addition of irony"), and: "De oude conventionele vormen kregen door het nieuwe sentiment nieuwe frisheid" ("The old conventional forms received from the new sentiment a new freshness").⁶ However, from Celan's post-cataclysmic vantage point, not just the easily clichéd verbalizations of love, but any utterance reeking even remotely of the religio-poetic register of speech not only worn out by being overused in literature, but also poisoned by being misused in recent German history, might easily have carried overtones mocking a million-fold death. Thus Celan's regeneration of the forms of this German poetic tradition must necessarily be an often bitter reckoning with its now macabre vatic optimism:

FADENSONNEN
über der grauschwarzen Ödnis.
Ein baum-
hoher Gedanke
5 greift sich den Lichtton: es sind
noch Lieder zu singen jenseits
der Menschen.

The opening lines of this poem from Atemwende (II, 26) project a space characterized by a vertical polarity. At the highest level

⁶ Johan Huizinga, Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen: Studie over Levens- en Gedachtenvormen der Veertiende en Vijftiende Eeuw in Frankrijk en de Nederlanden (1919; rpt. Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1982), pp. 315 and 317.

are "Fadensonnen." Below them lie bleak expanses of waste land. This static scene is disturbed in the next lines, where a thought that is "baum- / hoch" and thus stands out from the horizontal plain of "Ödnis" takes possession of the "Lichtton." The verb employed here, "greift sich," conveys more than a hint of misappropriation about this action, and in this connection it seems not altogether irrelevant to consider the ambiguous status of the thought. Indubitably, the "Gedanke," as has been noted, is set off through its elevation from the flat "Ödnis." This elevation is, moreover, emphasized by the enjambement of the third and fourth lines which renders the central line of the poem simply as: "hoher Gedanke." The dissociative energy of the enjambement also makes for a further aspect of these lines, a kind of syntactical duplicity of signification. It is almost as though two separate readings are suggested: "Ein Baum greift sich . . ." and "Ein hoher Gedanke greift sich. . . ." We are thus allowed to guess at an actual situation underlying these lines, namely that of a tree in an otherwise barren, sombre plain. This tree then comes to figure in the poet's vision as a focus or metaphor of thought. But being allowed this glimpse of what might be the genesis of this poem only underlines the more strongly the rhetoricity of the fusion effected in the finished verbal fabric. The tangible tree becomes abstract, the abstract thought tangible; the tree thought, the thought, tree. Owing to its opposition to the "Ödnis," this complex of elevation, in short, corresponds to the "Fadensonnen," which are higher still. And it is here that the crux of the afore-mentioned ambiguity is to be found: the thought, after all, is only "baum- / hoch," while the "Fadensonnen," whence the "Lichtton" derives, are immeasurably higher - hence, perhaps, the almost ironic note of illegitimacy.

The final lines of the poem are preceded by a colon, which indicates that they are closely connected with what has gone before. But whether the statement "es sind / noch Lieder zu singen jenseits / der Menschen" is itself the "Gedanke," or perhaps the "Lichtton," or the result of the latter being appropriated by the former, or something else yet, it is impossible to decide. These lines have proved, moreover, to be among the most controversial of Celan's entire oeuvre. They attest, it is said, to a refusal to communicate on Celan's part,

and thus spell out his commitment to poetic hermeticism; they amount to an arrogant avowal of wilful obfuscation. A fairly typical example of this reaction to these final lines is to be found in Erich Fried's poem "Beim Wiederlesen eines Gedichtes von Paul Celan," whose last two stanzas run as follows: "Lieder / gewiss / auch jenseits / unseres Sterbens / Lieder der Zukunft / jenseits der Unzeit in die wir / alle verstrickt sind / Ein Singen jenseits / des für uns Denkbaren / Weit // Doch nicht ein einziges Lied / jenseits der Menschen."⁷

One of the most necessary comments to be made on this kind of reaction is that doubtless it is justified. But only in part. For Celan's poem, as we have had occasion to see, is too fluid in the interrelations of its constituent parts to preclude such a reading - which for the very same reason is by no means wholly borne out: the poem is simply too complex to permit one to say that this or that alone is the case. Thus a reading centred on a putative hermeticism is as much provoked as it is retracted by the text. Firstly, the "Lieder" in question are to be sung not "jenseits / des Menschen," not beyond man as a species, but "jenseits / der Menschen" (emphases added) - which may well imply an impersonal multitude. Secondly, the final statement is not in the actual but in a projective mode. It expresses potential. One might also mention at this point that the emphasis imparted to "noch" by letting it open the sixth line not only conveys a threat - from a multitude? -, but also holds forth hope. This accords, retrospectively, with the positive connotations in both the "Lichtton" and the "baum- / hoher Gedanke," connotations deriving in each case from a contrast with the "Ödnis": first, between the darkness of the latter and the luminosity present in the "Lichtton"; then between the aridity of the plain and the vegetative fertility of the thought.

But not only the mode and the connotations of the final statement need to be pondered. For the third and in the present discussion decisive factor to be considered is that the poem goes beyond offering

⁷ Erich Fried, Die Freiheit den Mund aufzumachen. 48 Gedichte, Quarthefte, 58 (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1972), p. 33.

merely a tentatively identifiable ray of hope; it also articulates such positive confidence far more directly. There is no compelling reason for reading the lines "es sind / noch Lieder zu singen jenseits / der Menschen" as an antihumanistic proposal. They can indeed be so read, but they can also - and this is where irony is perhaps at its most incisive - be read as proclaiming the exact opposite: as asserting that even "jenseits," man will continue to sing, or songs of man will be sung; that even there, there are songs to be sung by, or attesting to, "Menschen."

Furthermore, attention has tended to focus exclusively on the final lines of the poem without recognizing that they are prefigured from the outset. The duplicity that allows us to read these last lines as being at once a celebration and a rejection of man is insinuated into "FADENSONNEN" from the start: the very first word of the poem speaks of plural suns. What is effected here is an extreme degree of dislocation: a rejection not only, as one may take the last lines in one way to harbour, of anthropocentrism, but of heliocentrism. The whole Copernican world is in flux; the sun, central to the constellation we deign to call ours, displaced by "Fadensonnen." At the same time these "Fadensonnen," by being set off spatially and optically from the "Ödnis," do offer a possibility of orientation which is taken up by the "Gedanke." For one of the salient features of the waste land below is precisely that it has no features: it offers no bearings, no direction, no signs. Furthermore, the dual role in the poem of "Fadensonnen," which act simultaneously as guiding signals and disruptive decoys is reflected in the composition of the compound itself. The word "Fadensonnen" recalls a word from which it appears to have been derived by analogy, "Fadenkreuz." The latter denotes a reticle, that is, threads or lines arranged in the form of a cross in the ocular of optical instruments used to focus as precisely as possible on a point in space. This aid to visual pin-pointing may be found, for instance, in binoculars, or the telescopic sights of a rifle. Yet here the first component of this word which refers to an instrument of accurate spatial designation is ironically coupled with an agent of disorientation on a cosmic scale, the plural "Sonnens."

In its anticipation of the duplicity of the final lines of the

poem, the word "Fadensonnen" is programmatic, and this is underlined by the capitalization of the word as a whole, and by its being given the first line to itself. But the word is programmatic also in a wider and probably deeper sense, for Celan used it as the title for the next volume of poetry he published.⁸ One of the most striking features of this volume, and one which was quickly recognized, was its use of irony and sarcasm.⁹ This technique attacked, and in so doing made available to Celan's poetic diction once more, words especially loaded with poetic tradition. The recognition of the importance of irony in the volume Fadensonnen might perhaps, one feels, have drawn attention to the fundamental and in many ways exemplary role of irony in the poem "FADENSONNEN." For it is irony that allows this poem to avail itself of such poetically worn-out words as "Sonne," "schwarz," "Baum," "hoch," "Gedanke," "Licht," "Ton," "Lieder," "singen," "jenseits" and "Menschen," and to emerge projecting not the staleness one might perhaps expect but a vividly controversial potential of significations.

The regenerative function of irony in Celan, to approach the matter from a different angle, is perhaps also especially evident when we consider the incipient reception of his work in a country such as Spain, where the poeticizing tradition, though not unbroken, is obviously still sufficiently alive for Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot to be able to ask: "Hasta cuándo seguirá llorando de diversa manera la poesía de lengua española? Es una pregunta que surge a propósito de Paul Celan." ("Until when is poetry in the Spanish language to continue crying in a variety of ways? This is a question that arises upon reading Celan.")¹⁰ It is the fusion of personal and political history that forces Celan to put so exemplary a case against any hint of poetic sentimentality: as a post-cataclysmic Jewish survivor, he could not accede without the most severe and distrustful questioning

⁸ This was not necessarily the next volume to be written. See above, p. 10.

⁹ See especially Bayerdörfer.

¹⁰ Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot, "Noticia sobre Paul Celan," Quimera, 33 (1983), p. 36.

to his poetic inheritance - that poeticizing German language of his predecessors which had shown itself so amenable an accomplice to atrocity.

If irony in the poem "FADENSONNEN" is present in, or rather perhaps itself presents, nearly every motif sounded, in the next poem to be discussed here, irony attaches itself to a specific word, a specific traditional poetic topos: eternity.

- I DIE EWIGKEITEN führen
 ihm ins Gesicht und drüber
 hinaus,
- II langsam löschte ein Brand
 5 alles Gekerzte,
- III ein Grün, nicht von hier,
 umflaumte das Kinn
 des Steins, denn die Waisen
 begruben und wieder
 10 begruben.

Once more, as we have so often had occasion to observe in the course of the present study, the only feature holding together the constituent parts of this poem from Lichtzwang (II, 283) would appear to be the way in which they are all pervaded by a motion of suspensory inversion. This operation is manifest, in a highly ironic form, from the outset: although the word "Ewigkeit" denotes limitlessness in the temporal realm, the poem speaks of plural "Ewigkeiten," and thus paradoxically posits single and discrete, somehow limited units of eternity. The abstract concept of temporal transcendence is, at least in part, rendered concrete and thereby secularized. Hence the deictic "die," which might indicate that the eternities are perhaps not beyond number and in this way also not entirely beyond the human compass. Hence also - and this aspect to some extent bears out the last - the possibility of these "Ewigkeiten" acting upon the "Gesicht" with a violence that might recall a similar situation in Rilke's First Duino Elegy, where man was also confronted with a transcendent immensity: "O und die Nacht, die Nacht, wenn der Wind voller Weltraum / uns am

Angesicht zehrt. . . ."¹¹

That the temporal immensities in Celan's poem should focus on a single "Gesicht" - which may be read both as "face" and as "sight" - is remarkable for the discrepancy of dimension as well as of scale. Time acts spatially here. It is of course not unusual for time to be measured and expressed in terms of space, as a glance at the face of any clock with a dial and hands will tell; but this order of time is supposedly immeasurable, eternal. And such paradoxical pinning-down of the intangible occurs even within the dimension of time itself, for the "Ewigkeiten" are assigned a particular time of action - namely a point or period in the past. All these factors would appear, in short, to effect what might almost be termed a domestication of the temporally absolute. And yet the "Ewigkeiten" remain larger than man, the violence of the blow they impart to "ihm" carrying beyond the "Gesicht" into an exteriority which is emphasized by the attribution to "hinaus" of a single, separate line.

The hinge between the first and second stanzas is one of opposition. The violent motion presented by the verb "ins Gesicht fahren" gives way to the alliteratively underlined slowness of "langsam löschte." But on another, unthematic level, the second section, evolving as it does around moments of inversion, is closely akin to its predecessor. In the complex projection of "ein Brand" as extinguishing "alles Gekerzte," virtually all conventional attributes of the signifieds concerned are overturned. Thus fire, instead of being extinguished, itself extinguishes; thus the life-saving liquidity suggested by the verb "löschen" is countered by the identification here of this verb with the lethal potential of fire. "Gekerzte" would appear to be intended as a participial noun derived from a verb formed neologically by Celan, "kerzen." The overtones of candles are many, but perhaps the context of time established in the first section sharpens the ear for a suggestion in Celan's formulation of ritual and remembrance, as well as for the resonance of expressions like

¹¹ Rilke, II, 685.

"Lebenslicht" and "sein Leben verlosch so still wie eine Kerze."¹²
The bearer of these associations of human life, human aspirations, human memory and human transience is extinguished slowly, but wholly and relentlessly by a larger "Brand." Again, as was the case with the "Ewigkeiten" violating the "Gesicht" of the human self, there is a discrepancy of scale: a single and in some way external "Brand" extinguishes "alles Gekerzte."

The third section, which in terms of the number of lines constitutes the second half of the poem, follows upon the second section as did that upon the first, through a motion of opposition. The near-apocalyptic vision of an all-consuming fire is answered by the connotations of organicism, of life, in "ein Grün." This "Grün" is "nicht von hier": the theme of exteriority is sounded again. Furthermore, it is said of this "Grün" that it "umflaumte das Kinn"; the verb conveys the fluffiness of a prepubescent beard and thus actuates a further register of signification in "Grün," present also in an expression like "grüner Junge": youth and inexperience. But that, as we may by now have come to expect, is by no means all - this "Kinn" belongs to a hard, inanimate stone. And this inversion is itself further inverted. For the stone is handled by "die Waisen," orphans, a word in which, again, the emergence and the end of life are fused.

Furthermore, the conjunction of "Stein" and "Waisen" immediately calls to mind an identical sound, the formulation "der Stein der Weisen," the philosophers' stone capable of transmuting base metal into gold, the ephemeral into the eternal. Yet this stone, and the possibility of final validity and knowledge it stands for, are here, in a reversal of the alchemical process, buried - and buried yet again. The repetition of this act negates to the highest possible degree the kind of finality represented by the philosophers' stone.

¹² In part, this interpretation of "Gekerzte" is in accord with Otto Pöggeler's. However, he views the plural "Ewigkeiten" as a gradation of "Ewigkeit" and then identifies it with the "Brand" as easily as he does "ihm" with "dem Dichter." Otto Pöggeler, "'Schwarzmaut': Bildende Kunst in der Lyrik Paul Celans," in his Die Frage nach der Kunst: von Hegel zu Heidegger (Freiburg: Alber, 1984), pp. 317 and 318.

And this negation is not solely produced - although it is enhanced by - the acoustic insinuation of "Stein der Weisen" into "Stein der Waisen." For the very concept of burial, like the levelling-out in death of all vertically "Gekertzte" upon which it may follow, is itself final, and to repeat it endlessly is to negate it endlessly. There would appear, then, to be something of an inversive frame around this poem, which begins in ironically suspending the temporal infinity of eternity, and ends in ironically suspending the finality of death.

III. Play

In instances of the grotesque and irony, suspension operates between various tones or registers of speech; in a third type of displacement, it involves different modes of speech. If we find ourselves unable to make sufficient sense of a poem in ways that might be deemed conventional - in tracing, for instance, the interplay of denotation and connotation -, and if we trust the poet to reward the effort, we shall go in search of more peripheral modes of poetic speech. And some of the most marginal modes, modes at the very verge of intelligibility, are anagrams, palindromes, "Wortspiele." These are constituted by, and work through, the medium of literal signification. But if such modes of play may therefore be said to be dependent upon the literal mode, so the latter, since we found it incapable of replenishing our desire for sense in the first place, depends on the former for its justification.

It is for this reason that the concept of suspension, involving as it does a full reciprocity and interdependence of its operative agents, is perhaps particularly suited to embrace forms of poetic play. The latter have of course been noticed in various of Celan's poems before, but, not least because of the necessarily somewhat random nature of their discovery, they have not yet been placed in a wider context of Celan's poetics. One of the first to stumble upon this kind of signification in Celan was Peter-Horst Neumann. The occasion was provided by some lines from the poem "...Rauscht der Brunnen," to be found in the volume Die Niemandsrose (I, 237): "Wir werden das Kinderlied singen, das / hörst du, das / mit den Men, mit den Schen, mit den Menschen. . . ." Of Celan's division of the word "Menschen" into "Men" and "Schen" Neumann remarks: "Die getrennten Wortglieder . . . wechseln in je eine andere Sprache hinüber. Als englisches 'men' und chinesisches 'schen' (=shen) wiederholen sie das zerstörte, in ihnen aber heile Wort 'Menschen.'"¹³ Further instances

¹³ Peter-Horst Neumann, Zur Lyrik Paul Celans, Kleine Vandenhoeck-Reihe, 286/287 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1968), p.21.

of this mode of signification have been observed by Elizabeth Petuchowski and by Christoph Perels.¹⁴

Owing to the nature of the phenomenon concerned, the more outlandish types, depending for their recognition on, for instance, a knowledge of Hebrew or Russian, will have to be left aside in the following discussion. But it is anyhow less important, for the moment at least, to try to establish a comprehensive catalogue of techniques and languages upon which Celan's moments of play draw, than to examine how some of the latter function within the text in which they figure; how they are generated by and subjected to a multiplicity of contextualizations in each poem:

- I BERGUNG allen
 Abwässerglucksens
 im Briefmarken-Unken-
 ruf. Cor-
 5 respondenz.
- II Euphorisierte
 Zeitlupenchöre behirnter
 Zukunftssaurier
 heizen ein Selbstherz.
- III 10 Dessen
 Abstoss, ich wintre
 zu dir über.

This poem from Schneepart (II, 413) begins in announcing or naming a movement of rescue or safe-keeping, of conservation, particularly though not necessarily from a potential threat or actual situation of immersion in water. But our consequent expectations that what is to be so guarded or saved is worth the effort are disappointed when we are told that this is, or is to be, a "Bergung allen / Ab-

¹⁴ Elizabeth Petuchowski, "Bilingual and Multilingual Wortspiele in the Poetry of Paul Celan," Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte, 52 (1978), 635-651. Apart from his "Zeitlose und Kolchis," already mentioned above, see Christoph Perels's "Erhellende Metathesen: Zu einer poetischen Verfahrensweise Paul Celans," Sprache im technischen Zeitalter, 62 (1977), 158-166; and "Eine Sprache für die Wahrheit," Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 21 December 1985.

wässerglucksens" - of the marginal, of rubbish, of waste. Moreover, what is to be rescued from a possible threat of water is itself water or, more precisely, the sound of waste water, its "Glucksens." This confusion of values is further elaborated upon: the place of safe-keeping is, or is to be, the enigmatic "Briefmarken-Unken- / ruf," itself a sound and one, moreover, associated not with safety but with the disaster it is superstitiously held to forbode. "Briefmarken," in a sense, fuses within itself several of the notions featured in this first section of the poem, such as time, signification, exposure and safety, value and waste. First, a "Brief," like "Bergung," embodies a moment of conservation, namely of the fleeting forms of speech in the enduring traces of writing; and owing to this conservation - which is what makes it personally valuable or officially valid - a "Brief" is both opposed to the waste referentially conveyed by "Abwässer," and related to the poetic conservation of the latter effected here. Second, a "Brief," like the "Unken- / ruf," is of course a form of communication. Third, a stamp, a "Briefmarke," like the "Unken- / ruf," is a sign - something which announces, and is validated by, future events and actions.

At the same time, "Mark" denotes not only an outward sign, a phenomenon of surface, but also the exact opposite: literally, the marrow of something, and figuratively, the core or heart of someone or something, an innermost essence. The final word of the first section makes thematically explicit the criss-cross of significations that makes up the section: "Cor- / respondenz." Most immediately, the word appears to have been generated by, or to be linked to, the "Brief" of the third line; more remotely, the isolation of "respondenz," which derives from the Latin verb "respondere" meaning "to answer," draws out an element of answering to the call - the similarly isolated "ruf" - of the preceding "Unken- / ruf." The misspelling of "Kor-" as "Cor-," as a form, then, which in Latin means "heart," on the one hand refers back to the centrality denoted by "-marken," and on the other activates in "glucksens" an archaic meaning relating to the sound of a beating heart. In addition, "Cor- / respondenz" draws attention to the way in which refuge and refuse, which are both projected in this poem as sounds, correspond to one another.

Sounds are also to the fore in the second section, whose subject is the compound "Zeitlupenchöre." A "Chor" is a choir, and a "Zeitlupe" the replay in slow-motion of action conserved on film: as so often before, we shall not get very far in attempting to fathom what this compound means in any precise sense. Its constituent parts both involve the notion of time. In the case of the "Zeitlupe," the connection is obvious, and explicit; while a choir is a number of voices singing at the same time. Furthermore, the need to use a "Zeitlupe" only arises when the action registered is too quick for normal perception.

Whether or not this brief action is the singing of the "Chöre" we cannot be sure; but there is strong support to be gathered for the suspicion that it might be so. For these are "Euphorisierte / Zeitlupenchöre," and, euphoria being a delusory feeling of well-being such as may follow the use of narcotics or precede the onset of death, the implication may well be one of transience. The more so as we read on: "Euphorisierte / Zeitlupenchöre behirnter / Zukunftssaurier." "Saurier" may in this context be read as referring to dinosaurs, a species which suffered a fate of extinction, not ~~in the last place~~ ^{least} because of the comparative smallness of its brain. The paradoxical conjunction "Zukunftssaurier," reminiscent of the equally paradoxical salvage of waste water, cannot, then, be taken to convey a literal reference; and we are invited to explore the grammar of the compound and to conclude that perhaps this "Zukunft" is a time, any time, after the demise of the "Saurier." To speak of creatures which, after all, are projected as possessing brains as "Saurier" is to presage their extinction - it is to let forth an "Unken- / ruf." Thus, whether or not these creatures are grotesquely meant to be men - whose emergence in geological time is very recent, whose history as a species so far is very brief compared to prehistory - this projection is extremely bitter. This is also evident in the last line of the section: all these "Zukunftssaurier" "heizen" a single "Selbsterz." And such single-minded intent has been prefigured in the way in which these "Zukunftssaurier" are projected as being bundled in "Chöre," collectives in which the individual voice is submerged. The verb "heizen," too, is not without a note of sarcasm, for while its literal meaning

may be simply that the "Selbsterz" is warmed, it also carries strong overtones pertaining to the activity of a "Heizer," the stoking of the furnace of a machine. This would contrast starkly with the emotional warmth and softness conveyed by "Herz" alone, but to some extent is in accord with the egoistic or narcissistic self-sufficiency of a "Selbsterz." Finally, "Herz," and perhaps more specifically "Selbsterz," of course recall the way in which the first syllable of the word "Korrespondenz" was given a semantic value unto itself which was, in addition, emphasized by a misspelling.

The ambiguity which surrounds the "Selbsterz," the question, that is, of whether it is to be viewed as being positive or negative, is perpetuated in the final lines of the poem. Here, the self is presented as the "Abstoss" of the heart. On the one hand, "Abstoss" could refer to an effect of the contraction of a heart, a beat of a pulse, for instance, a sign of life. On the other, it could mean the opposite: a dissociation from the lifeless, mechanistic "Selbsterz" that needs to be stoked. This last possibility would appear to be borne out by the very fact that these lines convey a coming together of an "Ich" and a "Du," of two hearts that are, as it were, complementary and thus set off from one that is self-sufficient. The contrast between the union of "Ich" and "Du" and the isolation of the "Selbsterz" is also, and perhaps most forcefully, manifest in the mode in which this union is brought about: the cold of "ich wintre / zu dir über" could not be further removed from the heat, or the need to be heated, of the "Selbsterz."

In the poem "BERGUNG," play is auditive, and its presence could not be ascertained nor even suspected were it not graphically marked by the substitution of the letter "C" for the letter "K" in the word "Cor- / respondenz." In this next example, brief but complex, and taken from Fadensonnen (II, 117), there is no such indication of the possible involvement of an element of play:

I DIE SPUR EINES BISSES im Nirgends.

II Auch sie
 musst du bekämpfen,
 von hier aus.

Even the trace of even a single bite "im Nirgends," the poem tells us, is among those things to be combatted by the "du," albeit from a distance, "von hier aus." Why is this single bite so threatening that even a mere trace of its presence needs to be obliterated?

"Nirgends," the category of spatial nullity, is rendered by the poem in and into spatial terms, and thus becomes paradoxically concrete: in order that a bite whose mark remains visible may be taken out of it, "Nirgends" must be tangible. It is, presumably, this impossible and also illegitimate concretion that the "du" strives to annul. Hence, not just the bite needs to be attacked or in some way refuted, but even and especially its "Spur": for a "Spur" offers orientation in space, it is a sign, and thus negates the "Nirgends." The latter, then, by implication, is projected as a positive reservoir of spatial nullity, as a kind of refuge free - and so to be kept - of external definition and control: a utopia. And this word, or, as Celan's Meridian would have it, "U-topie" (III, 199), translates literally into "non-place," "non-locality." The necessity of leaving this reservoir untapped, of leaving vacant this non-space whose potential resides in its complete opposition to spatial determination, is also why its defence must necessarily take place "von hier aus."

But there may be, next to the bilingual play involving "Utopie" and "Nirgends," a further instance of play in the poem. There is a possibility that the threat to the "Nirgends" is more closely specified, namely by the possible presence in the "Biss" of "byte." This is a term from the field of information technology; it refers to a unit of information processed by a computer. At first sight, to consider the possibility of such a reference may seem wayward, to say the least; yet there are several pertinent reasons for not wishing to rule it out. First, there is the simple fact of the auditive identity of "byte," and the English - significantly, the usual language in information technology is American English - for "Biss," "bite." Second, "byte," we are told, perhaps originated as an alteration of the noun "bite."¹⁵ Third, there are at least two further

¹⁵ Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, 6th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 136.

instances to be found in Celan's later work where he draws on information technology for his vocabulary. In a poem from Lichtzwang (II, 324), the "SCHALTJAHRHUNDERTE" which give the text its title are, together with other items, said to be "in Wabentrögen gespeichert, / *bits / on chips*" (italics in original). And in the same volume from which "DIE SPUR EINES BISSES" is taken, we may find the poem "ALLE DEINE SIEGEL ERBROCHEN? NIE." (II, 134) in which Celan, playing on the way in which the English "date" means both a piece of information and a kind of fruit, speaks of the computer as an "Elektronen-Idiot," "der Datteln / verarbeitet."

The aspect of such play that most interests us here is the constitutive suspension it instigates. We are caught up between two readings that are not mutually exclusive in themselves, but in the modes of signification upon which they rely. If we read "seriously" - namely only what is actually said - we are left with the absurdity of a "du" resolving to fight what cannot exist: "Die Spur eines Bisses im Nirgends." It is only upon "playfully" considering what is silent in this poem's speech, that the reason why and the threat against which the "Nirgends" is to be defended becomes specific enough to offer at least a foothold to understanding. The action of the "du" now becomes an effort to prevent the utopia presented as being in some way essential to the individuality of the self from becoming, in however slight a degree, another bit of information to be processed collectively with a multitude of others.

Only the silences of the poem, then, "make sense" of its speech. As readers, we cannot decide in which mode to read. The matter is beyond our reach: suspended "im Nirgends." This is symptomatic of one of the most far-reaching effects of poetic play, and one which epitomizes the kind of unsettling force of suspension with which we have been concerned throughout in this study: to realize that the refractive effects of play may be acutely important in a single poem - such as, say, "CELLO-Einsatz" or "BERGUNG" - makes one suspect, in principle, that there may be such concealed modes of signification in all other poems. Now, even the most innocent-looking word like, for instance, "Erde" may "really" mean "Rede": to consider the possibility of play at all is already to gaze into an abyss of suspension.

Part Three

Conclusion

FIVE

SYNCHRONICITY

I. Silence and Der Meridian

Peut-être qu'on compte trop peu
avec ce mouvant équilibre;
il y a des courants dans le Tibre,
tout jeu veut son contre-jeu.

Perhaps this is an apt diagnosis of an abiding tendency in Celan criticism; perhaps critics, in setting sail upon Celan's poetry, are inclined to take too little into consideration, and hence to breach, what Rilke, in the poem from which the lines above are taken, named "la sainte loi du contraste."¹ Celan's readers, professional and otherwise, have of course long been aware of the radical inversions and disjunctions to be encountered in their poet's work; and possibly no poetic metaphor has been more eagerly paraded before the eyes of German school children than the "Schwarze Milch der Frühe" of the "Todesfuge" (I, 41-42). But there has been a marked reluctance actually to navigate - without imposing upon them the extraneous co-ordinates of, say, mystical or philosophical speech - the vortices of silence opened up by the suspensory mode of Celan's diction.

It has been a primary concern of the present study to examine closely some instances and aspects of the contrariety encompassed by this mode of utterance. The results of such a venture do not lend themselves to easy generalization. To a certain extent, this difficulty is perhaps endemic to the critical enterprise as such; poetry can perhaps not be circumscribed "in principle," but only

¹ Rilke, IV, 528.

be elucidated "in practice," that is, in individual analyses of poems. But there are more specific reasons. For interpretations embarked upon under the aegis of contrariety are bound, at times, themselves to appear tenuous or controversial - indeed, it would be ground for concern did they not. If language, as Ferdinand de Saussure asserts, is essentially relational, if "in language there are only differences *without positive terms*" (italics in original), then any poetry such as Celan's, which subjects these differences to an "Engführung" (I, 195), any poetry which at certain central points phases out these differences, will be virtually impossible to talk about in ordinary discourse - and hence to understand.²

For "'verstehen,'" as Nietzsche writes, "das heisst naiv bloss: etwas Neues ausdrücken können in der Sprache von etwas Altem, Bekanntem."³ And about Celan's later modes of utterance especially, there is little of the old and familiar: we cannot understand, because the nodes of silence we have been concentrating on go so wholly against the grain of our linguistic presuppositions and possibilities. We cannot express the "Neues," the radical otherness here of this poetry, because it consists in the suspension of the very differences which structure speech. Thus this aspect of Celan's work is not only clearly inaccessible to an understanding which persists in the endless rehearsing of its own presuppositions; it also, and perhaps inevitably, renders all the greater the urge to grope for - and all the more probable that all readings cannot help but be - comfortable and comforting strategies of reduction.

Perhaps, then, we are not to understand. Perhaps the challenge issuing from Celan's radical suspensions is precisely that, to the extent to which it is "naiv" at least, we abandon our will to understand; that we let subside what Christopher Norris has adroitly termed "the interpreter's rage for order," and accept that this poetry asks

² Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), p. 120.

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, Werke, ed. Karl Schlechta (München: Hanser, 1969), III, 805.

us perhaps less to understand, than to suffer, its silences.⁴ We are, in short, to experience these silences as outside - not of "circular" poetic speech, but of consecutive, "linear," ordinary discourse -, as different; we must leave behind the familiar clutter of our preconceptions, linguistic and otherwise, and move toward "das Andere" (III, 198) as it is presented to us in individual poems.

This "Andere" is a central term in Celan's poetological meditations in Der Meridian. In this speech, of which the following observations, concerned primarily to elucidate some aspects of "das Andere," can offer only a partial view, the term designates the goal the poem aspires to (III, 198):

Das Gedicht ist einsam. Es ist einsam und unterwegs. Wer es schreibt, bleibt ihm mitgegeben.
Aber steht das Gedicht nicht gerade dadurch, also schon hier, in der Begegnung - *im Geheimnis der Begegnung?*

Das Gedicht will zu einem Andern, es braucht dieses Andere, es braucht ein Gegenüber. Es sucht es auf, es spricht sich ihm zu.
Jedes Ding, jeder Mensch ist dem Gedicht, das auf das Andere zuhält, eine Gestalt dieses Anderen.

Thus far, the "Andere" appears outside the poem. But there are already indications that a reading operating with such easy dichotomies as inside/outside is perhaps inappropriate. One of these indications is the presentation of the poem as open, as "unterwegs": if it is a necessary feature of the poem to be "en route," the goal, too, becomes part of the whole. A further such indication is the paradox of the poem's being "einsam," "unterwegs," yet at the same time accompanied by its creator. There is about departures often at least a minimal critique of the point of departure, a setting off, a leaving behind. And, inasmuch as the poem, as Celan emphasized in a speech delivered two years before Der Meridian, is "eine Erscheinungsform der Sprache und damit seinem Wesen nach dialogisch" (III,

⁴ Christopher Norris, Deconstruction: Theory and Practice, New Accents (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 22.

186), this point of departure is the speaking self. But this self is here transported with and by the poem. In other words, this self is not to be conceived of as a stable locus, but as a function of, as constituted by, the poem that it speaks. In this way, the poem stands, from the very outset, "*im Geheimnis der Begegnung*": it mediates the self and the Other. And whatever the allusions and echoes the term may harbour, the "Andere" which is needed by the poem is defined principally by its pure ^{alterity} alterity.⁵ Thus to attempt to paraphrase or define more closely, in terms assumed to be more accessible, "das Andere," is already to deny its import. It is defined only reciprocally: without its difference from what it is not, from "das Andere," the self is not; nor is, in turn, "das Andere" without its difference from what is.

The reciprocity of the self and the Other is to the fore again in this next passage, separated in the "Büchner-Rede" from the above quotation by two paragraphs referring to the concentration of the poem on what it encounters (III, 198):

Das Gedicht wird - unter welchen Bedingungen! - zum Gedicht eines - immer noch - Wahrnehmenden, dem Erscheinenden Zugewandten, dieses Erscheinende Befragenden und Ansprechenden; es wird Gespräch - oft ist es zweifeltes Gespräch.

Erst im Raum dieses Gesprächs konstituiert sich das Angesprochene, versammelt es sich um das es ansprechende und nennende Ich. Aber in diese Gegenwart bringt das Angesprochene und durch Nennung gleichsam zum Du Gewordene auch sein Anderssein mit.

The "Andere" is now explicitly encompassed by - constitutive of as well as constituted by - the poem. And the poem, the "Gespräch," is a space of irreducible reciprocity, of which the reader, inasmuch as he, too, "ist dem Gedicht . . . eine Gestalt dieses Anderen," is part. In the dialogical "Gespräch," the definitory functionality of

⁵ Gerhard Buhr, in his Celans Poetik (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1976), pp. 193-194, sketches the religio-philosophical history of the term "das ganz Andere" in the works of Rudolf Otto, Karl Barth, Martin Buber and Martin Heidegger.

the self, its constitutive instability, comes into its own. For what, for the self, is the Other, is for the Other the self. This dialogical essence has perhaps best been distilled by Emmanuel Levinas, who situates Celan's poem "au moment du pur toucher, du pur contact," and accordingly typifies its speech as: "Langage de la proximité pour la proximité, . . . le premier des langages, réponse précédant la question."⁶

Celan arrives at the position of viewing the poem as "Gespräch" by way of the prior conclusion that "Kunst," to which the poet presents poetry as being in some ways opposed, "schafft Ich-Ferne" (III, 193). Confronted thus with the possibility that "Dichtung," too, "die doch den Weg der Kunst zu gehen hat," might issue in the lifeless automation of "Kunst," Celan embarks upon a radical and tentative questioning (III, 193):

Vielleicht - ich frage nur -, vielleicht geht die Dichtung,
wie die Kunst, mit einem selbstvergessenen Ich zu jenem
Unheimlichen und Fremden, und setzt sich - doch wo? doch
an welchem Ort? doch womit? doch als was? - wieder frei?

We may recognize in this formulation the elements of an approach to the poem as "Gespräch," although at this point poetry is still projected as perhaps under way "zu jenem Unheimlichen und Fremden" the move towards which presumably makes for the automated alienation of "Kunst." But then Celan asks whether there is not perhaps, next to that alienation, another kind of "Fremde": "Aber es gibt vielleicht, und in einer und derselben Richtung, zweierlei Fremde - dicht bei-einander" (III, 195). And he continues by asking whether "Dichtung,"

. . . da das Fremde, also der Abgrund *und* das Medusen-
haupt, der Abgrund *und* die Automaten, ja in einer Rich-
tung zu liegen scheint, - vielleicht gelingt es ihr hier,
zwischen Fremd und Fremd zu unterscheiden, vielleicht
schrumpft gerade hier das Medusenhaupt, vielleicht ver-

⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, "L'Etre et l'Autre: A propos de Paul Celan," in Sense et Existence: En Hommage à Paul Ricoeur, ed. Gary Brent Madison (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 24.

sagen gerade hier die Automaten - für diesen einmaligen kurzen Augenblick? Vielleicht wird hier, mit dem Ich - mit dem *hier* und *solcherart* freigesetzten befremdeten Ich, - vielleicht wird hier noch ein Anderes frei?

It is in this passage (III, 195-196) of Der Meridian that the term which has perhaps silently structured Celan's address from the outset is first made explicit; it is in this passage that the "Andere" is revealed as a cardinal term in Celan's poetic discourse as well. For what remains when "Medusenhaupt" and "Automaten" are cancelled out is the "Fremde" of the "Abgrund" - that same "Abgrund" of which Celan, in commenting on the passage from Büchner's Lenz: "... nur war es ihm manchmal unangenehm, dass er nicht auf dem Kopf gehen konnte" (III, 195), has just said that it may become the "Himmel": "Wer auf dem Kopf geht, meine Damen und Herren, wer auf dem Kopf geht, der hat den Himmel als Abgrund unter sich" (III, 195). This, then, is the abyss in which that "Andere" is to be found which provides the poem with one of its "raisons d'être": ". . . ich denke, dass es von jeher zu den Hoffnungen des Gedichts gehört, gerade auf diese Weise" - namely in speaking "immer nur in seiner eigenen, aller-eigensten Sache" - "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*" (III, 196). Here, the "Andere" is fully differentiated from the "Fremde" of the alienation of "Kunst"; here, too, the reciprocity of the self and the Other is fully manifested.

For the abyss in which the Other is located Celan finds a designation which was later to become the title of the first of those volumes of his later poetry with which we have primarily been concerned: "Atemwende." Lucile, of Büchner's Dantons Tod, had spoken her "Gegenwort," had performed her "Akt der Freiheit," had taken her "Schritt" (III, 189) on the "Revolutionsplatz" itself: "'Es lebe der König!'" (III, 189). Celan comments upon this surprising exclamation thus (III, 189-190):

Gewiss, es hört sich . . . zunächst wie ein Bekenntnis zum "ancien régime" an.
Aber hier wird . . . keiner Monarchie und keinem zu

konservierenden Gestern gehuldigt.
Gehuldigt wird hier der für die Gegenwart des Mensch-
lichen zeugenden Majestät des Absurden.

This "Huldigung," the poet goes on, "hat keinen ein für allemal feststehenden Namen, aber ich glaube, es ist ... die Dichtung" (ellipsis in original). The conjunction of "Dichtung" with the "Gegenwort," the "Schritt," returns in the passage introducing the "Atemwende." Büchner's Lenz, who wished to be able to walk on his head and who would thus have had "den Himmel als Abgrund unter sich," this "Lenz - das heisst Büchner - ist hier einen Schritt weiter gegangen als Lucile" (III, 195). Of Lenz's wish to walk on his head, Celan had said earlier: "Das ist er, Lenz. Das ist, glaube ich, er und sein Schritt, er und sein 'Es lebe der König!'" (III, 195). And this, Lenz's own "Es lebe der König!", unlike Lucile's,

ist kein Wort mehr, es ist ein furchtbares Verstummen,
es verschlägt ihm - und auch uns - den Atem und das
Wort.

Dichtung: das kann eine Atemwende bedeuten. Wer weiss,
vielleicht legt die Dichtung den Weg - auch den Weg der
Kunst - um einer solchen Atemwende willen zurück?

It is the silence of the "Atemwende" which - "vielleicht" -
motivates Celan's poetry. To be sure, as the poet emphasizes (III,
197),

Niemand kann sagen, wie lange die Atempause . . . noch
fortwährt. Das "Geschwinde", das schon immer "draussen"
war, hat an Geschwindigkeit gewonnen; das Gedicht weiss
das; aber es hält unentwegt auf jenes "Andere" zu, das
es sich als erreichbar, als freizusetzen, als vakant
vielleicht, und dabei ihm, dem Gedicht - sagen wir: wie
Lucile - zugewandt denkt.

This passage, alluding possibly to Rilke's Seventh Duino Elegy,
is perhaps, inasmuch as the reader, too, embodies "das Andere," as
nearly an explicit instruction for - and, in the face of the threat
of the "Geschwinde," also an appeal to - the reader as one may find

in Celan.⁷ For Lucile was projected earlier (III, 188) as

jemand, der hört und lauscht und schaut ... und dann nicht weiss, wovon die Rede war. Der aber den Sprechenden hört, der ihn "sprechen sieht", der Sprache wahrgenommen hat und Gestalt, und zugleich auch . . . Atem, das heisst Richtung und Schicksal. (First ellipsis in original.)

In the preceding chapters, we have attempted to read "wie Lucile"; to focus on each poem's suspensions of reference - of "wovon die Rede war" - and thus to trace the processive essence of the poem, its silencing "Atemwende":

. . . das Gedicht behauptet sich am Rande seiner selbst; es ruft und holt sich, um bestehen zu können, unausgesetzt aus seinem Schon-nicht-mehr in sein Immer-noch zurück.

The "Immer-noch" is then more closely identified (III, 197-198):

Dieses Immer-noch kann doch wohl nur ein Sprechen sein. Also nicht Sprache schlechthin und vermutlich auch nicht erst vom Wort her "Entsprechung". Sondern aktualisierte Sprache, freigesetzt unter dem Zeichen einer zwar radikalen, aber gleichzeitig auch der ihr von der Sprache gezogenen Grenzen, der ihr von der Sprache erschlossenen Möglichkeiten eingedenk bleibenden Individuation. Dieses Immer-noch des Gedichts kann ja wohl nur in dem Gedicht dessen zu finden sein, der nicht vergisst, dass er unter dem Neigungswinkel seines Daseins, dem Neigungswinkel seiner Kreatürlichkeit spricht. Dann wäre das Gedicht - deutlicher noch als bisher - gestaltgewordene Sprache eines Einzelnen, - und seinem innersten Wesen nach Gegenwart und Präsenz.

This passage, in allusion perhaps to Saussure, distinguishes between the absence and virtuality of "Sprache" and the presence and actuality of "Sprechen." The latter, in an act of "Individuation," constitutes the self. In this respect - and this possibility is trans-

⁷ Rilke, II, 711: "Und immer geringer / schwindet das Aussen."

formed into a rather definite probability by the reference to the word "Entsprechung" - this passage presents a revocation of Heidegger's view that: "Die Sprache spricht, nicht der Mensch. Der Mensch spricht nur, indem er geschicklich der Sprache entspricht."⁸ Celan's emphasis on the individual voice is also to the fore when he concludes that this "Immer-noch" is to be found only in poetry which arises not just from a particular and hence personal slant, from a characteristic "angle" of a "Dasein," but also from the decline of the latter, its bearing toward death and nothingness, its "Neigungswinkel" (emphasis added). Thus the poem is doubly - as an actualization of the absent system of "Sprache," and as a testimony to, and mediation of, the individual, transient self - "Gegenwart und Präsenz."

This emphasis on presence returns in a cardinal passage on poetic imagery (III, 199):

Und was wären dann die Bilder?
Das einmal, das immer wieder einmal und nur jetzt und
nur hier Wahrgenommene und Wahrzunehmende. Und das Gedicht
wäre somit der Ort, wo alle Tropen und Metaphern ad ab-
surdum geführt werden wollen.

The "Majestät des Absurden," we recall, attested to the "Gegenwart des Menschlichen" (III, 190). It is, then, also this "Gegenwart" which is inscribed in the "Atemwende" of the poem in which images are ~~transduced~~ ^{conducted} "ad absurdum." Indeed, this silencing of images, of the "einmal . . . Wahrgenommene und Wahrzunehmende," is the process of poetry, of Celan's poetry, itself; only a few moments earlier in the "Büchner-Rede," the poem had been projected as "Gedicht eines - immer noch - Wahrnehmenden" (III, 198). Accordingly, it comes as no great surprise that the transduction "ad absurdum" - in the terms of the present study the "absurd" synchronizing of logically incompatible semiotic operations - is central in the exclamatory definition of

⁸ Martin Heidegger, Der Satz vom Grund, (Pfullingen: Neske, 1957), p. 161. A detailed discussion of Celan's reference to Heidegger's "Entsprechung" is to be found in Pöggeler, "Kontroverses," pp. 232-233.

poetry provided in the final, summarizing section of Der Meridian, a definition which subsumes in its own suspensory structure many of the instances of suspension with which we have been concerned here, as well as many of those featured in, and fundamental to, the "Büchner-Rede" itself (III, 200):

Die Dichtung, meine Damen und Herren -: diese Unendlichkeitssprechung von lauter Sterblichkeit und Umsonst!

At the heart of the suspension governing this utterance lies an irreducible circularity, an "at-the-same-time" as impermissible in logic as it is ineluctable in Celan's poetry. Symptomatic of this are the words with which this poet introduces the final section of his poetological speech (III, 200): "Meine Damen und Herren, ich bin am Ende - ich bin wieder am Anfang." This circularity, which gave to the speech its title, is also manifest when, after having spoken of two of his own works, and having concluded that: "Ich bin ... mir selbst begegnet" (ellipsis in original), Celan asks, in a passage again expressive of the essential and existential reciprocity of the self and the Other, of the necessity of departing from, in order to arrive at, the self (III, 201):

Geht man also, wenn man an Gedichte denkt, geht man mit Gedichten solche Wege? Sind diese Wege nur Um-Wege, Umwege von dir zu dir? Aber es sind ja zugleich auch, unter wievielen anderen Wegen, Wege, auf denen die Sprache stimmhaft wird, es sind Begegnungen, Wege einer Stimme zu einem wahrnehmenden Du, kreatürliche Wege, Daseinsentwürfe vielleicht, ein Sichvorausschicken zu sich selbst, auf der Suche nach sich selbst ... Eine Art Heimkehr. (Ellipsis in original.)

Finally, this circularity is most prominently manifested at the very end of the "Büchner-Rede." Indeed, one might loosely describe this speech as a cumulative realization, in both senses of the word, of its own circularity. And just as "Sprache," with which it is here compared, renders possible, but does not wholly control, the "Sprechen" of the individual voice, so such circularity, which now, accordingly,

issues in an encompassing figure of mediation, gives rise to Celan's poetological and poetic "Gespräch." This is what Celan touches upon at the close of his speech (III, 202):

Meine Damen und Herren, ich finde etwas, das mich auch ein wenig darüber hinwegtröstet, in ihrer Gegenwart diesen unmöglichen Weg, diesen Weg des Unmöglichen gegangen zu sein.

Ich finde das Verbindende und wie das Gespräch zur Begegnung Führende.

Ich finde etwas - wie die Sprache - Immaterielles, aber Irdisches, Terrestrisches, etwas Kreisförmiges, über die beiden Pole in sich selbst Zurückkehrendes und dabei - heitererweise - sogar die Tropen Durchkreuzendes -: ich finde ... einen *Meridian*. (Ellipsis in original.)

II. Interstice and Doubling

The aim of the next two sections is to explore some operations underlying the process of suspension. Each of the titles of the second, third and fourth chapters of the present study provides a term which might not only serve, as it has here, to categorize loosely an aspect of suspension, but also as a generic name for the phenomenon of suspension as such. Thus displacement and disjunction might be viewed as versions of unfinality; unfinality and disjunction as versions of displacement; and displacement and unfinality as versions of disjunction. Common to all of these propositions is a move from speech towards silence - or rather: a move of and in speech towards silence. This basic synchronizing of speech and silence, the being-in-between of the poem, is reflected thematically in the numerous motifs of mediality to be found in Celan's poetry. One of the most evident of these is the currency of, and emphasis on, the word "zwischen" itself.⁹ The interstitiality denoted by this word, and its functional duality of separation and conjunction are equally to the fore in a series of further motifs, including emptiness, the gap, the pause, the leap-year, the middle, duplication and - conversely - splitting, the bridge, and the thread. In addition, interstitiality may be seen to manifest itself dynamically in various motifs of motion and travel, most generally perhaps in such terms as "Schwimmerin" (I, 167) and "Schwebenden" (I, 278), but often more specifically and even technically in many references to aviation and sea-faring. Another thematic manifestation of suspension, especially in the earlier work, is the renunciation of conventional perception in favour of the espousal of a Romantically or neo-Romantically poly-perspectival, counter- or submundane realm under the aegis of the motifs of blindness or of the night. Closely related to this, yet presented in a far more fractured and counter-poeticizing mode, is the theme of a certain dislocation or decentralization of perception,

⁹ The Index zur Lyrik Paul Celans prepared by Karsten Hvidtfelt Nielsen and Harald Pors (München: Fink, 1981) lists thirty instances; pp. 287-288.

and the concomitant rejection of anthropocentrism, informing, in turn, much of the poet's later work.

In the above instances, a basic poetic mode becomes a poetic motif. The following interpretation attempts to examine some of the consequences this emergence entails for the operations of reference and rhetoric alike:

I MERKBLÄTTER-SCHMERZ,
 beschneit, überschneit:

II in der Kalenderlücke
 wiegt ihn, wiegt ihn
 5 das neugeborene
 Nichts.

The economy of diction operative in the two short sections of this poem from Lichtzwang (II, 321) is difficult to probe. Nevertheless, certain features do allow for the recognition of a distinct if paradoxical order of coherence. The opening word "Merkblätter-Schmerz" presents the pain of a kind of writing which serves to mark points in time. The second line explains the reason for, or the condition of, this pain; the latter, that is to say, arises from the "Merkblätter" being "beschneit, überschneit," or is itself so covered. In any case, the "Merkblätter" or their "Schmerz" - the hyphenation of the compound indicates and instigates a measure of independence of its constituents - are rendered invisible by a layer of snow, and hence both the graphic signs (the marks), and the mention the poem makes of "Schmerz" are silenced. As is the word "beschneit": its syntactical function is duplicated, in an instance of "correctio," by the word which semantically supersedes it, "überschneit." In any poem, but especially in so brief an example, such apparent loquaciousness must be suspected of signalling a constitutive feature - and so it will prove.

The second part of the poem, introduced by the colon of the first as explication, continuation or summation, begins by presenting an absence, the "Kalenderlücke." This interstice is extratemporal; framed by, but not of, time. A calendar consists, of course, of "Merkblätter," and perhaps this "Lücke" results from their obliteration.

tion by snow. Certainly, the extratemporality of the interstice eludes, and is opposed to, the task of temporal designation assigned to the "Merkblätter."

The fourth line is parallel to the second in so far as it, too, executes a syntactical duplication; but it is, in addition, also a semantic and phonetic doubling: a literal repetition. In part, this heightens the operation of negation carried out in line 2; what is repeated is not only enhanced, but also, and perhaps more significantly, devalued as single utterance. But next to this paradoxical invalidation, the repetition may also act out the duality of the word duplicated. For the sorrow of the first line is here at once measured or in some way weighed up, and consoled, comforted, cradled. And while this suggests an infant crying in pain being soothed to sleep and silence, the cradling is done by another infant, the "neugeborene / Nichts." The latter is thus subjected to an irresolvable tension between its semantic and syntactical predications, the first presenting an infant, the second a parent. Moreover, the formulation "das neugeborene / Nichts" is contradictively structured in itself: nothingness cannot be born, since it is that which is not. Nothingness is conceivable only as an absence or negation of presence, and not as self-present. Furthermore it cannot, as it is here through the temporal implications of birth, be governed by time; if it is at all it is absolute - and significantly the poem speaks deictically of "das . . . Nichts" (emphasis added). Nothingness, as extra- or atemporal as the "Kalenderlücke" in which it is situated - this operation of locating nothingness is of course itself impossible -, is born and thus accorded an origin, an outline and definition.

The second part of the poem, then, dramatizes in a network of correspondence, repetition, negation and contradiction the silencing of signification posited in the first. The only conclusion permitted by the poem is that of its inconclusiveness; the operative force is aporetic. We are not, as readers, able to describe a condition or awareness arrived at in the poem, only a process enacted: reference, inasmuch as it is a transferential act, is brought to bear upon itself - and thus becomes rhetorical. What, in terms of the act of referring, is merely a vehicle for transporting into the poem ex-

ternal signification, here refers to, and thus unsettles the polarity between inside and outside underlying, its own operation. Reference doubles back upon itself. And this operation of doubling involved in the thematizing of the operation of suspension, is itself rendered thematic in this next poem, from Schneepart (II, 338):

- I UNLESBARKEIT dieser
 Welt. Alles doppelt.
- II Die starken Uhren
 geben der Spaltstunde recht,
5 heiser.
- III Du, in dein Tiefstes geklemmt,
 entsteigst dir
 für immer.

The opening phrase comes as a surprise to the reader. As he embarks upon the act of reading the poem, he is confronted by a statement of cosmic illegibility. The concept of illegibility presupposes the perception of a set of signs, and denotes the impossibility of comprehending what is perceived. It is concerned, in other words, with the failure to determine meaning. The second phrase of the first stanza presents universal duplication as the cause of this condition. Duplication suspends the making of discriminations, the discernment of differences: an ability fundamental to that structuring of complexes of experience, consciousness and language which gives rise to meaning. Illegibility does not, however, imply that signification is absent; only that it is not to be determined unequivocally. Nor does it preclude the possibility of signification precisely through such indeterminacy of, ultimately, reference - a possibility explored by this poem.

Thus the poetic mode of the first stanza is true to its theme. The use of the word "dieser" draws the reader into the textual reality by suggesting that the world so designated is shared by him and the poet alike. At the same time, "dieser" might imply the existence or the projection of at least one further world, which at this point is simultaneously presented in, and excluded from, this poem. This "dieser," then, is double in the sense of being

ambiguous; secondly, it is operative in the duplication of the word, or indeed world, it is attributed to; finally, it mediates the simultaneous presence and absence of the duplicate.

In contrast to the negation featured in the first stanza, the second presents, in the agreement of the clocks with the "Spaltstunde," an instance of affirmation. The compound "Spaltstunde" is the cardinal term of the poem, and the numerically central position it occupies (as the eleventh word in a poem of twenty-two) reflects this semantic and structural centrality. It is very much "unlesbar" in the above manner, embodying as it does an extreme degree of suspension. Thus the "Spaltstunde" might equally denote an hour that is split, and one that is particularly suited or devoted to the activity of splitting. Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, it could mean an hour that - like this word in respect of the poem in which it features - itself carries out the task of splitting: a medial hour. This last notion, in turn, embraces various interpretative possibilities. The "Spaltstunde" might, possibly in the form of an interstice, separate or link, or function as a turning-point between, different periods or orders of time. The figure of the "Spaltstunde," then, in an operation of some complexity, implicitly mediates between various directions of signification, while itself explicitly denoting such mediation.

The relation of the clocks to the "Spaltstunde" is almost equally difficult to ascertain, for while the former do affirm the latter, there is also a suggestion of a certain antagonism between them. There are several clocks, and a single "Spaltstunde"; the use of the verb "rechtgeben" connotes the possibility of a preceding clash of positions; finally, the clocks, whose function of indicating the time is typified by unequivocal reference, are, despite their specification as strong, inadequate in the face of the complexity of this particular hour. This inadequacy seems to be echoed in the final word of the stanza, "heiser," which presents an impairment of speech resulting from earlier excessive utterance: from a superfluity of reference. Hence, whatever antagonism there may have been, the "Spaltstunde" prevails.

The first stanza featured a statement of negation on a cosmic

scale; the second an affirmation of mediation; the third constitutes a climactic complex of suspension encompassing the duality and the mediation, as well as the illegibility of its predecessors. It posits a split self, one half of which liberates itself from the other. This alone would be paradoxical enough; matters are, however, further complicated by the participle "in dein Tiefstes geklemmt." For the logically mutually exclusive activities of being jammed in the very depths of the self and of rising up pertain grammatically to the same subject: the "Du," whose integrity is emphasized by the isolating comma it precedes. The two paradoxical reflexivities, that of the self escaping from itself and that of its so doing while being jammed within itself are, then, inextricably fused in a single complex of suspension. This synchronization undercuts even the supposed final validity of the last words of the poem, "für immer"; for if the self escapes itself for ever, it is equally for ever locked in itself.

"Unlesbarkeit dieser / Welt": the world seen here in terms of a text of indecipherable signs might literally be that of the poem or the poetry in which it figures. Here, determinacy of external reference is suspended by a self-referentiality which, in turn, is founded upon what it suspends: reference is double, perpetually contained within and perpetually transcending itself. The "outside" of the poem becomes "inside"; and vice versa. The world becomes word; the word, world.

To put it another way: at this point the distinction between reference and rhetoric, which has been underlying the analyses of the present study, breaks down. Reference here refers to its self-reference - to its rhetoric. And rhetoric is thus perpetually caught up in a "meridional" circularity. This is not to say that these terms are disqualified as analytical tools; we could not, for instance, comprehend without them the breaking-down of the distinction between them, a distinction based upon a polarity of inside and outside. It is, rather, to say that this - perhaps - is the emergence of "das Andere."

III. Synchronicity and the Silent Letter

The distinction between reference and rhetoric breaks down when poetic modes become poetic themes. In this process, reference and rhetoric are synchronized; like the poles variously involved in the suspensions examined earlier, they are rendered mutually inclusive. The disjunctive order of union thus achieved, and the synchronization by which it is achieved, are concentrated and, as it were, paraded in a late poem from the posthumous volume Zeitgehöft (III, 109):

I ES WIRD etwas sein, später,
 das füllt sich mit dir
 und hebt sich
 an einen Mund

II 5 Aus dem zerscherbten
 Wahn
 steh ich auf
 und seh meiner Hand zu,
 wie sie den einen
 10 einzigen
 Kreis zieht

The poem opens with a statement of virtuality. What is said is not; save as something to come. What is said hence only is as what it is said. Not so much represented as presented in the poem, its existence is purely verbal. And such presence as it possesses is that of futurity, of potentiality: of absence.

The future entity is to fill itself with "dir" and to raise itself to a "Mund," suggesting that "du" is to be imbibed. We are reminded of the lovers in Rilke's Second Duino Elegy, who are addressed thus: "Wenn ihr einer dem andern / euch an den Mund hebt und ansetzt-: Getränk an Getränk. . . ." ¹⁰ The imagery is sufficiently unusual, Celan's reading of Rilke known to be sufficiently intense, and the present poem - with its opposition of stanzas given respect-

¹⁰ Rilke, II, 691.

ively to "du" and "ich," succeeded by the figure of union, of wholeness, of limitlessness: of the circle - sufficiently, if perhaps remotely, a love poem, to warrant the exclusion of coincidence. The more so as the second line of Celan's poem features almost identically, again in conjunction with the lovers and, through the metaphor of spring, with virtuality, in the same Elegy: "Da sagt uns wohl einer: / ja, du gehst mir ins Blut, dieses Zimmer, der Frühling / füllt sich mit dir. . . ." ¹¹

The most striking aspect of Celan's appropriation of Rilke's imagery of imbibing is that the reciprocity of the action projected in the latter, its reflexivity and closure, are abandoned. Where before the lovers were entwined in mutuality, both simultaneously subject and object of their action, the "du" is now passive, at the disposal almost of the impersonal "etwas"; then, what was raised was "euch," whose reflexivity was expressive of the lovers' communion, now it is, again, "etwas" that raises itself in a reflexive motion perhaps not devoid, against the background of the Rilkean lovers, of a certain narcissism; finally, the destination of this raising is no longer the mouth of the beloved, but, indiscriminately, "einen Mund." The impersonality of "etwas" transforms what was a figure of mutual containment into one, possibly, of exposure and usurpation.

And this depersonalizing transformation, far from being a revocation of the earlier poet's utterance, is indicated by Rilke himself, who follows the imagery of imbibing with the lament: "o wie entgeht dann der Trinkende seltsam der Handlung." ¹² With this statement of evanescence, Rilke exposes as vacuous the lovers' clinging autonomy, which he sets off against the genuine - and notably narcissistic - self-sufficiency of the Angels and the "Wirbel / ihrer Rückkehr zu sich." ¹³ Against the background of the Second Duino Elegy, Celan, while recalling the apparently autonomous reciprocity of the lovers, may be seen to heighten the element of depersonal-

¹¹ Rilke, II, 689-690.

¹² Rilke, II, 691.

¹³ Rilke, II, 690.

ization featured in Rilke's invalidation of their anxiously possessive mode of being.

The capitalization of "Aus" signals that the first and second stanzas, devoted respectively to "du" and "ich," are separate sentences. The former, however, lacks a concluding full stop. This elision to a certain extent calls into question the sequence of the two sections. In the act of reading they follow one after the other, but the absence of a full stop at what conventionally would appear to be the end of the first stanza prevents us from ascertaining a temporal hierarchy within the poem. We know that what for the purposes of discussion we must continue to term the "first" deals with what is to come. But we are not to know whether the second equally posits what is not yet, or, by contrast, what is; whether it is in the actual or the virtual mode: whether the second section presents an opposition to, or continuation of, the first. The poem is disrupted by an impulse, to the fore also in the shared present tense of all verbs subsequent if not subordinate to the "initial" "Es wird . . . sein," of simultaneity. The only certainty is what is somewhat apodictically announced as to come: what is, is what is not.

Thematically, the second stanza would appear, in the first instance, to differ greatly from the first. Lines 5-7 speak of a resurrection, an "Auferstehung," of the self from the "zerscherbten / Wahn." This last formulation is ambiguous, begging the question of whether the delusion is shattered to give way to a more adequate awareness, or whether delusion consists in fragmentation itself. Perhaps the centrality of "Wahn," which emerges in the sixth of eleven lines, would tend to support this last proposition.

Be that as it may, what matters more is the prevalence of fragmentation. For the "ich," immediately following its resurrection, is reduced to observing passively the movement of its own hand. The self is excluded from itself in action. In this connection the following consideration, bold though it be, is perhaps not without interest. The German for action is "Handlung," and Celan, in positing a chasm between act and identity, seems to mobilize the semantic energies this word harbours: the poet may justifiably be seen, that

is to say, as rendering literal the autonomy of the hand in action implied in "Handlung." And one might add, in a similarly tentative vein, that the cue for this depersonalizing move would appear again to come from the Second Duino Elegy: "o wie entgeht dann der Trinkende seltsam der Handlung" (emphasis added) - that Celan ultimately, to venture an extreme formulation, etymologizes Rilke.

This instance of fragmentation is succeeded yet again by one of integration: the figure of the circle. Thus it would be tempting, perhaps, to view the poem as playing off against each other moments of fragmentation and integration, and concluding in a consummating figure of redemptive circularity. But this poem is too radical in its formation to allow for so comparatively neat a resolution. The alternation is projected in terms not of opposition but of inevitability; the "und" of line 8 expressing consequence, the resurrection of the self is the instrument of its own fragmentation; and this very fragmentation, in turn, generates the integrative figure of the circle.

As the emphasis it is accorded attests, the figure of the circle is more than just the last term in a sequence; it is the "eine / einzige / Kreis." The double singularization is deictic as well as universally encompassing; it conveys a sense that all is circumscribed by this figure: that what is, is this one circle. The circle is final not because it concludes, but because it subsumes and thereby perpetuates, the sequence; it participates as term or metaphor in, and simultaneously transcends as governing principle, the progression of the poem. The metapoeticity of the reflexive figure of the circle is recognizable also - even without recourse to Celan's dictum that "Nur wahre Hände schreiben wahre Gedichte. Ich sehe keinen prinzipiellen Unterschied zwischen Händedruck und Gedicht" (III, 177) - in its being traced by the hand; the circle, like the poem, as the poem, is quite literally handwritten, and, as such, autonomously irreducible and all-embracing, nothing but itself, primal and final at once.

In this structural metaphor the poem doubles back upon itself: it not only features but also forms a circle, and as such possesses no beginning and no end, no first and no second stanza - and no final

full stop. In terms of T.S. Eliot's image of the poem as a "raid on the inarticulate," this point, or rather, this elision, seems to mark its retreat.¹⁴ To conclude, however, that the poem here cedes to a silence outside itself is evidently still to fall short of its actuality. For such redoubling returns the poem to, and thereby negates as origin, its origin, where the poem begins itself anew. The concept of origin, in other words, applies to this poem not as a point in a spatial, temporal, logical or other order, but solely as function. The circle is self-generative; the poem suspended within itself. The retreat of the poem is the agent of its perpetual progression; the absence of the poem the agent of its presence; the closure of the poem the agent of its unfinality. Where the elision of a full stop following the first four lines mediated the simultaneity of the two sections of the poem, here it mediates that of the voiced and the mute: in its disjunctive, suspensory unity the poem emerges as a reflex of silence.

Silence as speech, and the blank page as writing are reflected, in the most literal sense of the word, in the volume Lichtzwang (II, 272):

- I DER VON DEN UNBESCHRIEBENEN
 Blättern
 abgelesene Brief,
- II der Totstell-Reflexe
 5 grausilberne Kette darauf,
 gefolgt von drei silbernen
 Takten.
- III Du weisst: der Sprung
 geht über dich, immer.

Here too, as in so many of the poems discussed in the preceding pages, the structuring force is aporetic. The first section fuses in a complex of suspensory synchronization the poles of graphic silence and graphic speech - and thus presents as theme the inscrip-

¹⁴ T.S. Eliot, Collected Poems: 1909-1962 (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 203.

tion of silence in and as poetic speech which, from the initial analysis of "Argumentum e silentio" onwards, has been the focus of the present study.

The second section, concentrating more closely on the interstice read in the first, perpetuates the mode and the theme of suspension. The formulation "Totstell," which is part of the compound to be found in the fourth line, is highly ambiguous: death may either be feigned by, or imposed upon, the subject. Yet it is not primarily this ambiguity, not, that is to say, the simultaneity of the dissimulatory and the operative senses of the verb "stellen," that is suspensory. It is the opposition between the conscious intent involved in both on the one hand, and the involuntariness connoted by the ensuing "Reflexe" on the other.

These paradoxical reflexes of intent are arranged on the page in a "grausilberne Kette." The mention of the colour silver indicates that the word "Reflexe" designates an optical as well as a neural process. In addition, in this context of communication, the possibility of an allusion to the proverbial expression "Reden ist Silber" cannot be ruled out. Why this particular chain should be "grausilbern" is, and may well be meant to be, a matter of conjecture. We are not allowed to know what exactly, if anything, is referred to. But we assume, in reading, that something is. What is referred to, then, is in any case this operation of reference as such. Thus, especially in view of the earlier projection of the blank page as writing, of the white as the black - in German, to have something "in writing" is to have it "Schwarz auf Weiss" -, a tentative interpretation of the "Kette" as being black and white at the same time, and hence grey, is perhaps ultimately not merely possible but necessary. The more so as this "Kette" is itself essentially suspensory. Firstly, it is to be understood spatially as well as temporally, as a sequence of signs spaced, and to be read, one after the other on the page. Secondly, and more importantly, the very nature of a chain is dominated by the concept of the interstice. To be linked in a chain, entities must be separate. Indeed, it is a moot point whether the notion of a chain is best conceived of as a linking of discrete entities defined by interstices, or as a linking of interstices

defined by discrete entities. A chain consists, in other words, of the mutual suspension of entity and interstice.

The word "gefolgt," like the "Kette" the following of which it both enacts and thematically reflects, is to be read spatially and temporally; what follows thus are "drei silberne / Takte." These words seem even less than their predecessors to refer to anything specific. The cardinal number "drei" is a case in point, and one, moreover, in whose light the priority given above to a generalized referentiality is apt to appear less fanciful than perhaps it has till now. The number "three" is well established as being of especial mythical, ritual and magical significance. And Celan's "drei," in the text of or about the letter read from blank pages, seems more than anything specific to mean this capacity for meaning. Similarly, "silberne" is obviously, if lightly, contrasted with the doubly preceding adjective "grausilbern"; what the later word seems above all to mean is this contrast: this interstice. That the silent interstice should give rise to signification is not only something posited here by Celan's poem: "Denn wenn - gemäss Saussure - eine Sprache nur aus Differenzen besteht, und wenn weiterhin die Differenzen unsagbar sind," writes Manfred Frank, "dann kann man begründet behaupten, das Unsagbare sei der Grund für das Sagbare."¹⁵ The interstice underlies the functioning of any linguistic utterance, not just that of a poem in which this feature may be modally and thematically exploited.

In the final word of this second section, the interstice, and with it the interstitiality of Celan's language, is even more to the fore. "Takete" are units of time. And time, like language, is essentially relational; it is, in the words of Hegel, "das Sein, das, indem es *ist*, *nicht* ist, und indem es *nicht* ist, *ist*."¹⁶ This is

¹⁵ Manfred Frank, Was ist Neostukturalismus?, Edition Suhrkamp, 1203. Neue Folge, 203 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), p. 601.

¹⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830), ed. Friedhelm Nicolin and Otto Pöggeler, 6th ed., Philosophische Bibliothek, 33 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1959), p. 209.

further emphasized by the provenance of the order of time concerned here, which is the realm of music. Once again, as in the chain of the reflexes of intent, the poem projects around itself a supersessive framework of signification that highlights a constitutive feature of the text thus encompassed: for music is not only essentially, but purely relational. It is devoid of external reference. And music too, as was the notion of the chain, is governed by the interstice. The musical interstice too divides and defines the entities by which it is itself, in turn, defined. Again, one is dealing here with a mutual suspension of the constituents of a duality.

The final section, accordingly, presents an all but impenetrable complexity of such suspension. The self, possibly as a result of reading the script of silence, knows that it is condemned to an eternal exteriority. This experiential exclusion, however, is suspended by being cognitively internalized: the self, through its awareness of the situation of exclusion, participates in it. The "Sprung" is thus at one and the same time outside and within the self. The leap is, furthermore, not only thematically suspensory, but also modally so. It is constituted by going over the self: the self is essential to that by which it is excluded, and hence defines what it is passed over by. And this interdependence may be seen to be dramatized in the ambiguity of the word "Sprung" and of the formulation "geht über dich." The former may mean a crack as well as a leap, and the latter "goes via or through" "dich" as well as simply "goes over" "dich." It is, ultimately, this pervasive order of suspension that is eternal.

IV. Provisional Conclusions

The fundamental interstitiality of Celan's poetry, its mediality between speech and silence, gives rise to numerous devices of suspension. Thus actual poetic speech is not infrequently subject to explicit or metaphorical qualification or refutation, while projected poetic speech is complementarily endowed with a utopian validity. This metapoetic order of suspension needs, however, to be integrated in the larger framework of structural suspension. The latter may be tentatively divided into three categories.

The first of these is defined by the poem that fails to close. Lacking a final full stop; blatantly interrupted by silence in mid-sentence or -syllable; negating the finality of its own utterance by "ending" with a question or an explicit self-revocation - this type of poem concludes by opening itself. Turning back upon itself thus, it may be said to exhibit a perpetual structural circularity. The poem not only negates its own finality, but consists, moreover, in this very invalidation. To function, the invalidation must necessarily presuppose the validity of what it invalidates; if not, it invalidates itself. And yet, in functioning, invalidation, being itself part of what is invalidated, namely the poem it afflicts, does invalidate itself. Thus the act of invalidation does not issue in a higher order of validity, but perpetuates itself. The speech of the poem is the silencing of speech; the poem is suspended within itself. This inescapable simultaneity of affirmation and negation is, however, not always evident; it may also be embodied by the poem of apparent formal and thematic completeness, whose finality is yet negated structurally, in an insidiously reflexive operation of suspensory circularity. The poem as a whole is thereby indefinitely suspended between progression and attainment, execution and achievement. In either case, whether this circular unfinality is self-emphasizing or dissimulating, the underlying process is the reciprocal mediation of speech and silence.

This primal suspension between speech and silence infuses Celan's work with a host of correlative disjunctions, which together

constitute a second category. Metaphors in Celan are often not merely employed to encompass a certain range of ambiguity, but radically suspended between mutually exclusive extremes or polar possibilities of connotation. Furthermore, not only metaphors are thus suspended: the stark juxtaposition of mutually exclusive denotations, though less frequent, is at least equally notable. Synchronized thus, the opposing terms reciprocally define and negate: suspend each other. This circularity might be viewed as a class of unfinality on a smaller scale, concerning not, in the first instance at least, whole poems but phrases or lines or single words. In the case of denotative suspension, matters, though perhaps violently unsettling, are comparatively clear: the first term posits a specific semiotic valency which is negated in its entirety by the second. Each of the constituent words is in itself final; it is only in their being identified one with the other that these words become unfinal. But in the case of figural disjunctions, a greater complexity prevails. For the semiotic valencies that are in conflict, and are fused with each other, belong to one and the same word. They are activated by its contextual relations. The single word itself becomes unfinal. It has two meanings at once, and, since these are diametrically opposed, none. It is silent. Just as the immediate context - the neighbouring yet wholly opposed semiotic valency - of each of the poles in a denotative disjunction silences, and is silenced by, its opposite, here the single word is silenced by its wider poetic context, ultimately by the poem as a whole.

A mode of suspension quite similar in many aspects to connotative and denotative disjunction yet sufficiently different to constitute a category in itself is that of displacement. Where disjunction consists in antithetic mediation, displacement involves suspension not so much by a negation of, as by a deviation from, literal meaning. Signification is not disjunctively anti-literal but a-literal; an element of deflection and play is to the fore. Thus in the intra- and interlingual "Wortspiel" and the poetic metathesis literal meaning is utilized as the vehicle of a trans-semantic or anagrammatic order of signification. In the pervasively employed technique of *correctio*, a statement made is subject to

immediate qualification by the next; signification proceeds cumulatively in a series of acknowledged missignifications. Correctio tends, then, to effect a perpetual provisionality of utterance. Irony, the grotesque and sarcasm function, in differing degrees of intensity, in a similar fashion, but here it is the tone of a statement in its context which reflexively undermines its literal meaning. Finally, the appearance of obscene vocabulary in poetic speech is in itself an instance of suspension. As with the other types in this category, the issue is one of tone rather than of metaphor or literal reference. The suspensory silencing is operative here not between individual words or clauses, but between registers of signification or vocabulary, in the case of obscenity the elevated and the base.

These suspensory devices do not issue in an infinite arbitrariness of meaning; rather, they involve an oscillation between reference and rhetoric, a contradiction of their diction. Such indeterminacy, inevitably attendant upon the struggle to make language embrace life and death, presence and absence, and speech and the unsayable, is hence not, ultimately, an effect of contextuality. Indeed, Celan's poetry demands on a fundamental level to be read as a critique of contextuality. The essence in a poem resides, in so radical and desperate and impossible a way that one is tempted to speak not of contextuality but of "countertextuality," in the relations between words, between reference and rhetoric, between diction and contradiction. It is the interstice that constitutes the poem; it is silence that speaks. Silence is not "dead," but, on the contrary, "vital"; it does not mean that nothing is said; only that what is emerges from germinal interstices of reciprocity, of opposition, of counterdetermination. The word is not "verschwiegen," but "erschwiegen" (I, 138) in the "entscheidenden / Pausen" (III, 120), in the "Schaltjahrhunderte, Schalt- / sekunden" (II, 324), "im / Grossen Dazwischen" (II, 98): the poem is a "Posaunenstelle / tief im glühenden / Leertext" (III, 104).

The poems examined in the preceding pages reflect thematically, metaphorically and structurally their origin in silence; they inscribe their interstitiality within themselves. They are not, and

they signal that they are not, mere sequences of reference, but verticalities, complexes of simultaneity in which multiple grids of signification are grafted one upon the other to form lattices of language, "Sprachgitter" (I, 167). In these, meaning, conceived of as a stability of reference, is perpetually negated, undermined, displaced or deferred - it is suspended, in order, ultimately, to render possible the alterity of the Other. In consequence, the poem is not a reservoir of meanings inexhaustible by the limitations of the critic. Rather, meaning as such, its very conception, is suspended. It is not that not all meanings are ascertainable; it is that none is. The sole presence is that of the perpetual process of displacement - as in the novel constituted by such infinite deferral, Kafka's Der Prozess. Celan's poems do not have an original and now, for whatever reason, irrecoverable meaning; these poems, on the contrary, originate as explorations, as projections, as "Daseinsentwürfe" (III, 201) -: they are themselves, from the outset, interpretations. If the goal - the putative "original meaning" - is unattainable or, as here, inexistent, the way itself becomes the goal:

Die Tatsache, dass dem Verständnis . . . die letzte Sicherheit, ob der Sinnentwurf des anderen Individuums wirklich getroffen ist, prinzipiell mangelt, muss viel eher unter positiven statt unter negativen Vorzeichen bewertet werden: sie bringt den Respekt vor der irreduziblen Andersheit des anderen Menschen in der erforderlichen Radikalität zum Ausdruck . . .

Frank's observation relates to ordinary discourse, and therefore the word "prinzipiell" is perhaps the pivot upon which his thought turns.¹⁷ Although we usually do in ordinary linguistic practice manage to communicate, there is in principle always at least a residual failure of communication. And this silence is not contingent but necessary. It is not due to an unfortunate inadequacy of one or more participants in the act of communicating; it is inherent in

¹⁷ Frank, p. 557.

speech. In the terms of Celan's Der Meridian - terms to which Frank's, similarly reminiscent of the Jewish dialogical philosophy of a Franz Rosenzweig and a Martin Buber, are at this point remarkably close - this silence is the locus of the otherness of the Other: that otherness which renders communication both possible and necessary in the first place. Thus in the poetry of Paul Celan - "aktualisierte Sprache," we remember, "freigesetzt unter dem Zeichen einer zwar radikalen, aber gleichzeitig auch der ihr von der Sprache gezogenen Grenzen, der ihr von der Sprache erschlossenen Möglichkeiten eingedenk bleibenden Individuation" (III, 197) - the view of the irreducible and thus incommunicable otherness of the Other and the concomitant ineluctable silence as underlying speech would appear to be greatly heightened - the number of critical readings that has accumulated around the work of Celan to wit. What in ordinary speech is merely and sometimes only uncertain in principle, is so in practice as well in Celan's poetry.

Pride of place is given to the otherness of the Other in Levinas's comments on Celan's poetry, which he speaks of as: "Recherche se dédiant en poème à l'autre: le chant monte dans le *donner*, dans l'un-pour-l'autre, dans la signifiante même de la signification."¹⁸ But the point of silence being fundamental to speech is made most graphically by Celan himself, in conversation with Hugo Huppert: "Ich stehe auf einer andern Raum- und Zeitebene als mein Leser; er kann mich nur 'entfernt' verstehen."¹⁹ Of this reader Celan, quoting from his poem "Sprachgitter" (I, 167), then goes on to say:

. . . er kann mich nicht in den Griff bekommen, immer greift er nur die Gitterstäbe zwischen uns: 'Augenrund zwischen den Stäben. / Flimmertier Lid / rudert nach oben, / gibt einen Blick frei'. . . Und dieser durchs Gitter 'freigegebene Blick', dieses 'entfernte Verstehen' ist schon versöhnlich, ist schon Gewinn, Trost, vielleicht

¹⁸ Levinas, p. 30.

¹⁹ Hugo Huppert, Sinnen und Trachten: Anmerkungen zur Poetologie (Halle an der Saale: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1973), p. 30.

Hoffnung. Keiner ist 'wie' der andere; und darum soll er vielleicht den andern studieren, sei's auch durchs Gitter hindurch.

Celan's poems, rather than "having" meaning, "make" sense: orientation, direction, process. In speaking to the Other - manifest as "Ding" or "Mensch" (III, 198) - the poem speaks itself and the speaking self.

Owing to its essential dynamism, Celan's poetry, constantly emergent, constantly under way, cannot be understood - at least if to understand is to pin down in variously intonated paraphrases. The poem of Paul Celan - the post-cataclysmic Jewish survivor who had learnt at first hand how horrifically the private and the political can be one, and who consequently has been described as a "jeglicher Fremdbestimmung abholde Autor" - cannot be so mastered.²⁰ But neither can it be served. There is no central message to take away, no central meaning to do justice to; nor is there anything hierarchical about the relation of Celan's poetry to the Other, of which the reader is one manifestation: the relation is reciprocal. There is, then, a sense - a sense with which the critic, as the present interpretations too confirm, cannot be satisfied, but which needs nevertheless to be acknowledged - in which this poetry gains at least some of its desperate significance in the very act of being read, an act in which poem and reader alike open themselves to the alterity of the Other. Accordingly, when he was asked by Chalfen for an interpretation of one of his poems, Celan replied: "Lesen Sie! Immerzu nur lesen, das Verständnis kommt von selbst."²¹ "Celan," as Hans Mayer reminds us from personal experience, "liebte Genauigkeit."²² We do well, then,

²⁰ Theo Buck, "'Wachstum oder Wunde': Zu Paul Celans Judentum," in Im Zeichen Hiobs: Jüdische Schriftsteller und deutsche Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert, ed. Gunter E. Grimm and Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer (Königstein: Athenäum, 1985), p. 343.

²¹ Chalfen, p. 7.

²² Hans Mayer, "Erinnerung an Paul Celan," in his Der Repräsentant und der Martyrer: Konstellationen der Literatur, Edition Suhrkamp, 463 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), p. 175.

to note in his reply to Chalfen Celan's insistence that the act of reading itself entails "Verständnis"; and that this last word has far greater overtones of an open acceptance of the otherness of the Other than the more rationally and reductively operative "Verstehen" which we might have expected at this point instead.

To read Celan is, for the most part, immensely difficult. Yet it is this very difficulty - the tentative complexity of his nominations, his finely graded indeterminacies and, most extremely perhaps, the occlusive intensities of diction of which we have been concerned not to fight shy in the present study - that often makes reading Celan's poetry so deeply and disturbingly moving an experience.

"Das Gedicht ist . . . unterwegs" (III, 198): because silence is not merely the silence of death; of the enormity of the Jewish holocaust; of the mystical experience; of romantic or sexual union; of Romantic utopian opposition to speech; not merely the void surrounding speech, the acoustic or typographic blank it borders upon and by which it is enveloped; not merely context - but the text of speech.

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