The Poem as an Interlinear Version: “[…] the poem is, in its own way, occupiable.”

In a draft version of his acceptance speech for the Georg-Büchner-Prize in 1960, Paul Celan writes:

> The poem […] wants to be understood, it offers itself up to an *interlinear version* […]; […] the poem carries, as poem, the possibility of the *interlinear version*, both real and virtual; in other words: the poem is in its own way *occupiable*.

> Das Gedicht will […] verstanden sein, es bietet sich zur *Interlinearversion* dar […]; […] das Gedicht, als Gedicht, [bringt] die Möglichkeit der *Interlinearversion* mit, realiter und virtualiter; mit andern Worten: das Gedicht ist, auf eine ihm eigene Weise, *besetzbar*.

The technicistic term of an “interlinear version,” which denotes a word-for-word translation standing between the lines of the source text that does not aim at a cohesive, grammatically correct text in the target language, but rather has to follow the structure of the source language and proposes corresponding equivalents for single words and often also multiple alternatives for one word as an aid to understanding the source text, is particularly noticeable and appears in the midst Celan’s literary language like a peculiar foreign body.

A similar relationship between the notion “interlinear version” and the language that surrounds it can be found at the end of Walter Benjamin’s essay, “The Task of the Translator,” appearing in the introduction to his 1923 translations of Baudelaire, which develops the “great motif” of “integrating many tongues [dispersed through Babylon] into one true language,” and which perhaps allows for the juxtaposition of excerpts from both Celan and Benjamin that are centered around this term. Benjamin writes:

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2 German text from Paul Celan, Der Meridian (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1999), 140. I will henceforth be citing only the English translation for the remainder of the essay, though it should be noted that the pagination is the same in both the English and German versions of the text.
Holderlin’s translations from Sophocles were his last work; in them meaning plunges from abyss to abyss until it threatens to become lost in the bottomless depths of language. There is, however, a stop. It is vouchsafed in Holy Writ alone, in which meaning has ceased to be the watershed for the flow of language and the flow of revelation. Where the literal quality of the text takes part directly, without any mediating sense, in true language, in the Truth, or in doctrine, this text is unconditionally translatable. To be sure, such translation no longer serves the cause of the text, but rather works in the interest of languages. This case demands boundless confidence in the translation, so that just as language and revelation are joined without tension in the original, the translation must write literalness with freedom in the shape of an interlinear version. For to some degree, all great texts contain their potential translation between the lines; this is true above all of sacred writings. The interlinear version of the Scriptures is the prototype or ideal of all translation.5

Drawing from the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, Benjamin’s philosophy of language considers the potential translation into all existing languages as a remembrance of the one forgotten language.6 According to the story, all humans once spoke the same language up until the Babylonian confusion of tongues; following their dispersion, all languages had remained incomplete, striving ever since for their complements, which Benjamin describes as a supplementation (Ergänzung) of languages – in the sense that “the way of meaning… is supplemented in its relation to what is meant”7 – in order to regain their original condition, which allowed for universal understanding among humans. The supplementation of languages in their “ways of meaning”8 does not concern an already given sense that is expressed in different ways in various languages, but rather a surplus of sense, or something other than sense that can only come to light in the mutual supplementation of different ways of meaning. The supplementation of languages, however, takes place in a negative way: translation opens up the target language to that of the so-called “original,”9 in a specifically inward motion, that is to say, as its own

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5 Ibid., 262-3 (author’s emphasis). Against the advice of Benjamin and his thesis of the untranslatability of a translation, Hölderlin’s translation from Sophocles was translated into both English and French.
6 The Babylonic Talmud contains the saga of Rabbi Yonathan, in which the tower is destroyed in three steps: the first part was burned, the second had sunk into the earth, and the third remained as a ruins. The air surrounding the ruins was enveloped in oblivion ever since. The ones who had survived the punishment were those in the ruins, but they have forgotten the event of the destruction. With reference to the Talmudic saga, Benjamin conceives of translation as an act of remembrance. See: Walter Benjamin’s concept of the Unforgettable (“The Task of the Translator”, 16). Compare: Heller-Roazen, Daniel: Echolalias. On the Forgetting of Language. Cambridge 2005, 230.
8 Ibid.
9 For the term original see Hamacher, Werner: “Intensive languages”, 493: “The essence of a language lies in its translatability—in this, it imparts not its contents but rather its impartibility to another language. Only with respect to its translation, its status as translatable, does a text become an original; and only with respect to the language of the translation does the language of the original become language. The linguisticity of a language is defined not by
disfiguration and displacement (**Entstellung**), in that the structure of the foreign language of the original enters into the language of translation, penetrates it and breaks open its “decayed barriers” from within\(^{10}\)

The specific shape of the *interlinear version* as a “virtual translation between the lines,” which Benjamin comes to address only at the very end of his essay as an “ideal of all translation,” denotes the vanishing point to which Benjamin’s considerations are drawn. The interlinear version appears as the most radical form of translation, in that it offers a view of the unique syntactic and semantic characteristics of the original, of its way of thinking language, while arriving at no closure or unity by itself. While an original text and its translation can be juxtaposed as two independent formations, since their respective semantic and syntactic unities are ensured, the interlinear version finds itself necessarily dependent on the original, having been placed in between its lines. Here it is revealed to be structurally different from the translation: rather than detaching itself from the source text and transferring it to a new location over the abyss that yawns between the languages, with the interlinear version, the times and places of reading in different languages do not stand apart from each other. The interlinear version does not appear to yield the self-standing sense that is demanded by the false conception of translation; every single word in it remains bound to a corresponding word in the source text. This structural disparity thereby also affects the process of reading this hybrid formation: losing its linear temporality and becoming akin to studying, it tilts over vertically from word to word, from line to line.\(^{11}\)

When Celan connects the term *interlinear version* with that of *Besetbarkeit* (occupiability), however, he goes a step further than Benjamin in drawing the two places of reading together more narrowly\(^{12}\): *Be-setzung* (occupation) no longer takes place *between* the lines and words of the original, but *on* and *in* the words of the original itself. The tilting from line to line, from word to word, becomes, for Celan, the tilting of the word itself. *Besetbarkeit*, or


\(^{11}\) The tilting from line to line is also the literal translation of *interlinear version*. *Version* means in fact *translation*, but is derived from the Latin *vertere*, what means *to tilt/to turn* – and this meaning has only survived in the compound *interlinear version*.

\(^{12}\) Stoll applies the word *Engführung* here to convey this associative gesture; this word also resonates with Celan's poem of that name, which is often translated "Stretto."
occupiability, is thus introduced as a new linguistic form that allows the poem itself to appear as translation, as an interlinear version, rendering unthinkable the subordination of the original and the translated text in the name of a theory of imitation, whose impossibility has already been clarified by Benjamin.\textsuperscript{13} The possibility of occupying an already-occupied place, with the aim of holding it open and giving it on, presupposes peculiar linguistic properties which Celan himself describes as “empty lines”, not in a factual sense, but as a characteristic to be imagined “spatially” and “temporally.”\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{The Poem as Conversation (Gespräch) and a Search for Reality: “[…] unoccupiable // I and you, too […]”}

In his \textit{Bremen Address}, held two years before the \textit{Meridian Speech}, Celan highlights a particular aspect of conversation, which, for him, always presents itself as one between languages:

Poems [...] are underway: they are heading toward something. Toward what? Toward something standing open, occupiable, perhaps toward an addressable “you,” toward an addressable reality. Such realities, I think, are at stake in a poem. [...] They are the efforts of someone who, overarc by stars that are human handiwork, and who, shelterless in this till now undreamt-of sense and thus most uncannily in the open, goes with his very being to language, stricken by and seeking reality.\textsuperscript{15}

It is the reality-promising addressability of a “you”, as a fundamental presupposition of dialogue, which appears in the form of occupiability in this quote. The inclusion of a “you,” for the sake of whom the poet “mit seinem Dasein zur Sprache geht” (“goes with his very being to language”), distinguishes Celan’s conception of translation from that of Benjamin’s. Whereas Benjamin preliminarily leaves aside speakers and addressees – “since speakers and their audience occur...

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Celan, Paul. \textit{The Meridian}, 140. Employing the term \textit{interlinear version} as a mere “auxiliary word,” Celan asks his reader to imagine „these empty lines as spatial, as spatial {–} and – temporal.”
\item \textsuperscript{15} Celan, Paul. \textit{Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen}, W.W. Norton 2001, 396.
\end{itemize}
only because of language, and as its functional extreme"¹⁶ – Celan draws these “extremes” into his thinking of occupiability from the very beginning. Whereas the “you” for Benjamin takes on the position of the translated, as opposed to the translation, in view of a quasi-transcendental linguisticality (Sprachlichkeit), Celan does not simply abstract it as a mere “position” from language. It is precisely the “you” whose occupiability—both potential and factual—co-constitutes language. Whereas Benjamin, in his translation essay, stays his course for language alone, Celan holds course not only for this (going with his very being to language), but also for a singular direction, a “you” that is not reducible to language, a move that shifts his poetics into a particular tension.

The demand for enabling “true understanding”¹⁷ in the interlinear version of the poem therefore deals not first and foremost with an understanding of the poem, but rather calls for the poem to be viewed as the locus of understanding in the form of a conversation whose positions are not yet occupied, but whose possibility of occupation is nevertheless sought after by the poem. A particular aspect from Celan’s poetics of conversation is suggestive: the positions of “I” and “you” are not simply presented as analogous to those belonging to the original and translated text; they do not appear secured. Translation no longer shows up here as merely taking place between subjects and their speech, but instead as the extreme case of translation, a translation that emerges from a not-speaking. The poem that is an address sets up a “you,” in that it first presupposes something that is addressable, which only then allows the poem to constitute itself as address. The security of this direction, the “Zuhalten” (holding-course) is shown to be breached by the openness of the “auf etwas” (for something). The “you” as something occupiable seems entirely given over to the address, but the address in fact does not hold power over it, and has not yet even reached it. The difficulty of “hold[ing] course for that occupiable distance” of a “you,” only to arrive “close to something open and free,”¹⁸ shows up in almost all of Celan’s poems. Oftentimes it is a “desperate conversation,”¹⁹ a desperate “setting-course toward” the, as

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¹⁷ Celan, Paul. _The Meridian_, 140.
¹⁸ Celan, Paul. _The Meridian_, 11.
one of the lines in Celan’s poem, “Open Glottis,” puts it, “uncathectable (unbesetztbar)\textsuperscript{20} // I and you, too.”\textsuperscript{21}

\textit{Häm. Inhibition [Hemmung] and Placelessness [Stellenlosigkeit]}

The first aspect of Celan’s radicalized idea of translation as occupiability becomes evident above all when Werner Hamacher reads Paul Celans “Aus dem Moorboden” [“From the Moorfloor”] in his text, “HÄM.” Hamacher’s reading concentrates on a “half-word”\textsuperscript{22} inside which an occupiable “empty line” of the sort Celan bespeaks, is hidden:

“Häm” is not one. It is \textit{not} one word, not a nominal unit, but a “multi-site” [vielstelliger] complex of possible words and, moreover, a word in which each word is broken off. [...] as an an-economic “word,” as “word” before any determinate historical or national language - be it Greek, Middle High German, Yiddish or Hebrew - before any political or linguistic-political community, before any community with its “self,” its home or “Häm” (HÄM 179).

The "word-stump" that exposes its “open- and halfness” (HÄM 197), which is closely tied to “Celan’s use of the line-break” (ibid.), opens the language of the poem in functioning as an occupiable empty line: the language that inhabits the poem – the German language, Celan’s mother-turned-murderer tongue – becomes inhibited by the broken-off word. “Häm,” which, for Hamacher, directly speaks its inhibition in that it transcribes the sound made by “clearing one’s throat” (HÄM 181). Yet precisely in its withdrawal, disfiguration, and displacement (Entstellung), in its borderline dysfunctionality, this language can place itself in relation to other languages. It is the circumcision of the word which makes possible its “manifold semantic determinations” (HÄM 185), given that the “Häm” can “speak in many tongues and idioms and take on many meanings” (HÄM 184). Over the course of seven pages, Werner Hamacher collects meanings ranging from the “Greek, [h]aima” – blood – to the “Middle High German [...] haem” (HÄM 180), the “Yiddish ‘Hajm,’ the homeward bound” (ibid.), the Hebrew “‘Em’ [28], signifying ‘mother’” (ibid.), and “once again [the] Greek Hem” (HÄM 185) – the prefix half

\textsuperscript{20} Unbesetzbar is also widely translated in Joris’ renditions as “uncathectable,” a Freudian concept that Stoll elaborates at a later point in this text.

\textsuperscript{21} Celan, Paul. “Open Glottis” in Breathturn Into Timestead, 373.

the French *aimé*, and the English *aim*” (ibid.), and so on. In this way, Hamacher develops the translation-constellations set off by the half-word “Häm” as a communication or a dispute among the meanings that arise in the various languages evoked, meanings that “do not correspond with each other, but rather controvert one another” (ibid.). And it is only in this most extreme tension that the poem seems to begin to speak.

Yet more than the broken, inhibited word, *Häm*, what enables Hamacher's reading is the inhibition of the German language in the poem, which hinders any decision for one national language, or for national languages at all. The fact that *Häm* can offer and bare itself as an “empty line” is, in the context of the poem, only possible through its grammatical (dis-)placement and (dis-)figuration, its occupiability on a syntactic level. With its mere infinitive constructions, all of which stand in connection to the infinitive “steigen” (*to climb*) in the second line, it is not only that the positions of “I” and “you” are not yet given in the poem; for the poem also sets up no clear position of subject or object, which is why, according to Hamacher, it carries the tone of a “memorial” or an “imperative” (cf. *HÄM* 179):

AUS DEM MOORBODEN ins Ohnebild steigen, ein Häm im Flintenlauf Hoffnung, das Ziel, wie Ungeduld mündig, darin. Dorfluft, rue Tournefort.

FROM THE MOORFLOOR to climb into the sans-image, a Häm in the gun barrel hope, the aim, like impatience, of age, in it. Village air, rue Tournefort. 23

The ambiguity in syntax that is evoked through the infinitive constructions leaves open the question of whether the lines and the line pairs marked off by the first two commas each possess their own subject. In lines 1 and 2, the subject remains undetermined. It is possible, however, that the lines refer to the wish (*Wunsch*) for an “I” that is indicated in this way. In lines 3 and 4, the subject may appear to be “Häm”; in line 5, “das Ziel”; and in line 6, the “Dorfluft.” Thus, it remains an open issue as to whether the lines are loosely juxtaposed, standing next to each other independently, nearly unconnected, and separated from one another, or whether all the above-mentioned possible subject positions are related to the “Häm” that is found in the third

23 Celan, Paul. “From the Moorfloor” in *Breathturn Into Timestead*, 373. Here, “ein Häm” is translated as “a hemo.”
line in the middle of the poem’s first strophe, which thus stands in connection with each of the five remaining lines (of the first verse) and forms their node or knot a quasi-decentralized center of the poem. It is this very grammatical disfiguration and displacement that leads to a situation where Häm, as Hamacher reads it, can be both the “projectile” in the gun barrel hope as well as its “explosive” and "aim," in addition to – as I would like to add further to Hamacher’s reading – the remembered or conjured up subject of "climbing." The fact that Häm does not exist as a word in any language – but merely as a syllable, a half-word, released from its wholeness by the line break that issues into emptiness (the Greek meaning of hem, half, designates, somewhat self-reflexively, this halfness), just goes to underscore the uncertainty of its meaning and, consequently, the possibility of its manifold grammatical occupation. Both the semantic and syntactic aspects are interlocked, and they are not available separately from each other. Occupiability is therefore generated on the one hand semantically, through the inhibition of the German language, the word’s syllabic character (Silbigkeit) and its opening up to other languages, and, on the other hand, syntactically through grammatical indetermination.

As an unfinished “intermediate being” (HÄM 175) with “blurred” semantic contours (HÄM 176), Häm, for Hamacher, approaches "a shape again and again over deflected and fractured ways, and it does so only partially and inchoately with each reading attempt." Häm arises, like Kafka’s female figures, from what Benjamin calls the “Moorboden” of a pre-world in his Kafka-essay, and with it, the poem arises as well – for the Häm binds to itself not only the previous lines (“Aus dem Moorboden ins // Ohnebild steigen” (line 1f.)), but also the ones that follow (“im Flintenlauf Hoffnung” (line 4) and “das Ziel darin,” “das Ziel im Flintenlauf Hoffnung (line 5)). Climbing “into the sans-image” of “an image without image,” and thus as an “image of an unimageability,” Häm, for Hamacher, partakes in both the image-apt as well as in the image-less, whereby it appears as the “translation of an [(un)]occupiable entity” (HÄM 178). The moorfloor can thereupon be read as a language decomposed into its smallest syllabic elements, which, in facing its grammatical and semantic constitution as a sort of pre-linguisticality, appears as the basis for every language, but as a language that appears before every decision for one (national) language. With these linguistic particles, the poem climbs out from the moorfloor.

Werner Hamacher reads Celan’s poem, “Aus dem Moorboden,” as a poem on hope, which presents itself here “as a weapon, as a protective and combative device, that is launched in a political and linguistic struggle, a struggle over language and politics, over the politics of language and the language of political history” (HÄM 179). Although Hamacher writes that hope “possesses the aggressivity of a handgun” (HÄM 179), a hoping or firing subject is not (yet) constituted. Instead of a subject, the “Häm” in Hamacher’s reading hence becomes a “gesture of impatience,” an instance of speaking, as it were, in the poem and structures its language as a temporal structure of intention.

A substitution in the subject position of the Ziel in line 5 is especially accentuated in Hamacher’s reading, given that the Ziel is already contained in häm in its English form (aim) and therefore appears as doubled (Line 3 and Line 5). Lines 3-5 would therefore be read as follows: “ein Ziel // im Flintenlauf Hoffnung, // das Ziel, wie Ungeduld mündig, darin.“ The node, „Häm“, that up until now has connected the lines and pairs of lines of the poem, becomes, at this juncture, knotted in itself. In reading Häm as aim, the Häm appears not only as the target and goal due to the double-meaning of Ziel; the Ziel itself, since it is now a target inside a target, appears as separated from itself and inhibited then and there:

The aim “therein,” in the Häm of hope, would still be an aim against the aim, an aim on the way to something other than the one that is presented, and therefore an aim without an aim, an aim-less one, which follows the movement of the “Häm,” the movement of ex-distantiation (Ent-fernung). Therefore, in Celan's poem, Ziel does not signify a telos that defines the horizon of experience and language (HÄM 187).

Viewing the Ziel as a target or aim, argues Hamacher, renders it “first an aim toward the aim“ (HÄM 188) and thus indicates that there is not yet a target (ibid.). Only as a true, that is, not yet anticipated, target, as a “turn toward what is missing” (HÄM 196) does it become independent and consequently come “of age” to speak. It finds its language only when released from itself. The target’s capacity for language and self, to which the word “mündig” (of age) refers, replaces any “target-language” (HÄM 188) in which the poem could arrive. A target language no longer has to be “targeted” in the conventional conception of translation as bearing over the abyss and reaching a new shore, “because it itself [and with it, the poem, is the one] that speaks, [precisely in its non- and multilingualism, in its being-between-the-languages]” (ibid.).
The arrival at the one target language is hindered by way of the target (Ziel) wedged in its way. The focus shifts toward the target wedged in front of the Ziel, the temporary target-language of each reading. As Hamacher’s reading shows, the poem thus speaks not only structurally, but also thematically, on occupiability as a radicalization of Benjamin’s concept of translation.

What Hamacher does not talk about is the constitution of “I” and “you” in the poem. While an “I,” as addressed above, is first evoked through the ways in which the grammatical indetermination of the poem allow it to be read as the wish of an “I”, a “you” is to be found solely in the in-between stages of reading, which appear to correspond with certain languages, with levels of translation and occupation; it disappears, however, in other linguistic occupations. The wish of the “I” therefore consists not only in letting a poem, and with it, languages, climb up; the wish of the “I” consists in the constitution of a place through the language of the poem, of a home, an “at home,” and this "at home" arises solely through its occupation by Yiddish. Only with this place, which the poem wants to let rise, can a “you” acquire a nebulous, albeit only temporary shape. As the “you,” the subject of the climb along with the place, the Yiddish ‘Hajm,” emerges the mother, which appears solely in the occupation of Häm through the Hebrew (אם). The mother is attributively and affectively occupied, in turn, by the French occupation aimé, or loved one. She even attains corporeal form if one adds to Hamacher’s collection of meanings – his Häm-lexicon – the English term hem. The hem thus comes into view as the pars pro toto for the mother. The German idiom jemandem am Rockzipfel hängen (to ride on someone’s coattails) establishes the “I” of the wish as something childlike, reminiscent of the past. The seam is also that which the half-word häm has lost, namely, its limitation. A stripped shred of a word, it is constantly in danger of disintegrating, and of losing its place in the text, or becoming a mere thread (of remembrance). Only through the occupations that occur in reading is the thread of the häm recaptured and a textual weave produced.

Memory climbs up with Häm. It is Celan’s murdered mother who is remembered as the one who arises in the poem. And, as seen above, Häm can lose its way of ascent in the poem and fall before the gun barrel as its Ziel. Both the mother and her murder are thus restaged in the poem. Yet another possible occupation of Häm, of which Hamacher does not speak, appears here too, again through Hebrew, although now through the Hebrew haim (khaim) [חיים], life, whose pharyngeal [ח] (khet) disappears in the German transcription. Home, mother, life – the poem
should offer all a place according to the wish of the “I,” yet the memory stands in contradiction to this wish. Repressed, it breaks into the reality of the wish, when Hām loses its way of ascent and falls before the gun barrel as the target (Ziel). The poem appears thus as a Vexierbild of the contradicting modes of memory and wish, a Vexierbild of the constitution and loss of a “you” and its place, the poem; for hām falls with the mother, the hem, and life, and with it, the poem – through which alone a remembered “you” could be capable of emerging – before the gun barrel.

The Parisian street Rue Tournefort, which signifies a "forceful turning point," is the street onto which Celan moved in 1968, during the era of the student revolts and two years before his suicide. The “Dorfluft” (village air) that is foregrounded in the last line and stands antithetical to capital city Paris, does not seem only to be reminiscent of the moorfloor from the first line. The words contained within it, dort and fort – with fort redoubled in rue Tournefort – appear to echo the motion of Celan’s finger, which, in his Meridian speech, was said to search on a map for an inhibited homeland, a so-called “Herkunft” (place of origin), but does so unsuccessfully:

I am […] searching for the place of my origin […] with a […] fidgety finger on […] a child’s map[.] None of these places can be found, they do not exist, but I know where, especially now, they should be, and… I find something! […]

jetzt, geben müßte, und … ich finde etwas! […]

In the ensuing sentences, the place of origin is not only turned into multiple places, which already points to the biographical story of Celan’s flight and his homelessness; these places are, at the same time, also the places that all have a say in the poem, with their own languages, cultures and contexts, people, and historical dates. The poem is a life story, no matter how abstractly, complexly, and deconstructively it may told via circuitous routes. The languages of these places of origin carve out the errant pathways of the poem, its cartography.

Celan’s poem, “Aus dem Moorboden,” makes one thing clear in an exemplary way: like Benjamin’s philosophy of translation, Celan’s poems consider translation to be a displacement and disfiguration of language. Indeed, his poem, “Aus dem Moorboden,” seems to have lost the “decayed barriers” of the German language. The syntactic and semantic indeterminacy, in
constellation with the syllabic word-stumps, opens up the language of the poem, although not in any way that would invite vague and arbitrary interpretations. On the contrary: the occupiability of Celan’s poems appears as an acutely determine indeterminacy (bestimmte Unbestimmtheit),\(^{25}\) through which conventional readings are obstructed and opened anew. Appearing as determine indeterminacy, the structures of the poem sketch out entirely precise ways of reading while excluding others, first and foremost, that of a monolingual reading. The German word for occupiability, Besetzbarkeit, already embodies, to a certain extent, the concept that it names, for it carries in its midst a “spatial” and “temporal” vacancy akin to the “empty line” Celan addresses in his Meridian speech: in German, the syllable bar means empty, unoccupied. At the same time, the suffix -bar (corresponding to the English -able), suggests that something can be done, and consequently points to the “structural possibility” of occupiability.\(^{26}\)

Occupiability, even in its ostensible gesture towards occupation, thus appears as dis-occupation, as a mode of holding open for as long as possible,\(^{27}\) as a conversation between conflicting meanings, as in- and ex-scription (Er- and Entschreiben). The wounds of the poem and its language cannot be closed through one reading, one translation or occupation, for with the closing of its wounds, the poem falls mute. A closure of the wound would correspond with the decision for one language, one that would remain behind, to the exclusion of all others as well as their associations, fixed and incapacitated. Historical places and times wander through Celan’s poems with plural languages. They are languages that are biographically connected to Celan.

**Three Stories of Occupiability from 1967/1968**

Next to the Meridian and Bremen speech, three poems from the years 1967-8 circle around the concept of occupiability: "…auch keinerlei” from the volume, Fadensonnen, which arose on May 7, 1967 at the university psychiatric hospital in Paris; "Ein Leseast," an unpublished poem from the period of Schneepart that arose on August 21–22, 1968 in Paris, Rue Tournefort; and “Offene Glottis,” also unpublished, which arose from the Schneepart-period in Paris, Rue Tournefort on the same day as "Aus dem Moorboden." According to the new

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\(^{27}\) Thanks to Thomas Schestag for this point.
annotated edition, Celan had already planned a cyclical title for the Sprachgitter volume: “Unbesetzt, Frei, Besetzbar.”\(^{28}\) In these "occupiability"-poems, the concept of “I” and “you” as occupiable is made particularly clear. That said, two of the three poems deal with unoccupiability. In the Meridian and in Celan's Bremen-speech, occupiability is connoted unequivocally positively. It is tied there with the addressability of a “you” and with its reachability. Along this line of reasoning, however counterintuitive it may be according to everyday usage, unoccupiability seems to be connoted negatively for Celan. The terms sound less like an allusion to military areas and recall rather Sigmund Freud’s theories of energy and drives.\(^{29}\) An object, a “you” would consequently be unoccupiable or uncathectable (unbesetzbar) if it can no longer be loaded up with energies and affect and thus goes lost (verläuft sich) in its unreachability.

Anything that is occupied in Celan’s poems can only ever appear as a stopover that is overtaken by other realities and thereby deconstructed; that is, it can only ever be a half, something broken or injured. This concept is shown in an exemplary way in the poem “… auch keinerlei”:

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\(^{28}\) Barbara Wiedemann, Paul Celan. Die Gedichte. Neue kommentierte Gesamtausgabe in einem Band (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018), 1158.

“…AUCH KEINERLEI”: “[…] Bewegtes, Besetztes […]”

... AUCH KEINERLEI

Friede.

Graunächte, vorbewußt-kühl.
Reizmengen, otterhaft,
auf Bewusstseinsschotter unterwegs zu
Erinnerungsbläschen.

Grau-in-Grau der Substanz.

Ein Halbschmerz, ein zweiter, ohne Dauerspur, halbwegs hier. Eine Halblust.
Bewegtes, Besetztes.

Wiederholungszwangswangs-
Camaïeu.

... THOUGH NO KIND OF
peace.

Graynights, preconscious-cool.
Stimuli quanta, otterlike,
on the way to
memory-vesicles.

The grisaille of matter.

A halfpain, a second, without permanent trace, halfway here. A halfpleasure.
The moved. The occupied.

Repetition-compulsion-
Camaïeu.30

"The occupied" (line 12), which simultaneously appears as that which is moved, and thus, as something that is in the process of occupations from within the framing concept of occupiability, is accompanied by a series of half-measures (Halbeiten): “Eine Halblust” (line 11), followed by “Ein Halbschmerz,” which is immediately doubled (“ein zweiter” [line 9]), but has also only arrived "halfway here" (“halbwegs // hier” [line 10f.]) in the poem. That the occupation, and with it, the occupied, cannot last long is explicitly pronounced in lines 9f. of the poem. It is “ohne Dauerspur” (line 9f.). This constitutive instability (Unstetigkeit der Konstitution) is already named by the title itself, with “… AUCH KEINERLEI // Friede” (line 1f.) In the transient place of the language of the poem, what is “occupied” only receives the status of “Erinnerungsbläschen” (line 7), which can easily burst and disintegrate. The “Bläschen” appear as an echo of the “Häm” that rises from the moorfloor. In its communication with the poem “…auch keinerlei,” “Häm” itself shows up as a memory-vesicle, as the smallest part of an injured memory of greatest fragility. Even the memory landscape (Gedächtnislandschaft) surrounding the memory-vesicle points to injury: “Bewusstseinsschotter” (line 5), “Graunächte, vorbewußt-kühl!” (line 3), and “Reizmengen, otterhaft” (line 4) reveal a semantic field of injured memory. The way that injured memory becomes thematic here has an autobiographical aspect.

30 Celan, Paul. “…though no kind of” in Breathturn Into Timestead, 198. Here, “Besetztes” is translated as “The cathexed”; “Camaïeu” is translated as “monochrome.”
Celan drafted the poem "...auch keinerlei" on May 7, 1967 in the university psychiatric hospital in Paris. He struggled with memory problems, of which he later wrote in a letter from April 6, 1970 to his childhood friend from Czernowitz, Ilana Shmueli, who was then living in Israel.\(^{31}\)

The pre-conscious coolness, as well as the otterlike-character of the stimuli, point again to the moorfloor as a pre-world of a pre-language decomposed into its smallest pieces, which can only in memory-vesicles rise in its halfness as a poem. Even the Schotter (gravel) of the next line, related to Schutt (debris) and Schütten (dumping), points to this pre-linguistic character, to something not-yet-established. The synonyms Kiesel or Kieselstein (pebble), which often come up in Celan’s poems together with the attempt at constituting a “you,” suggest, along with the allusion to ballasted train tracks, that the Bewusstseinsschotter or “consciousness-gravel” contain a “you” of stone that is no longer and not yet constituted, while simultaneously paving the way to memory in the poem. This way to the memory-vesicles and to the “you” keeps breaking off “ohne // Dauerspur” (line 9f.). The breaking itself, however, does not give up, in spite of the displeasure of defeat. Wiederholungszwang changes its meaning in the context of the poem from the Freudian term (“repetition compulsion”) to the compulsion to repeat, that is, to remember. With this necessity comes pain, which, however, can itself only half-appear, over and over, due to the injured memory that is offered with the vesicles. “Graunächte” (line 3), the “Grau-in-Grau” (line 8) of the remembered substance, its undifferentiated and shapeless quality, its “Camaïeu” (line 14), all point to the loss of color in that which is remembered. The gray tones, the colorlessness, thereby indicate the incompleteness, the deficiency, the bleaching of memories, which now only appear faintly vesicular (bläßchenhaft). Furthermore, gray is the color of the stone and the gravel from line 5, as well as that of the “you” that is retrieved with the stone. Yet night, darkness, and distant memory are somewhat opposed in the last line with “Camaïeu.” To be sure, Camaïeu-style painting only ever uses one color, which then appears in varying nuances. This special form of monochromatic painting, however, excludes the color gray. Monochromatic works prepared in gray tones are designated as Grisaille, after the French word for gray, gris. In this way, the last line of the poem imposes a chromatic, if only monochromatic, accent. The constitution of the poem therefore appears as a way out of the

preconscious, the night, and the gray, toward a (mono)chromatic memory-vesicle, which can be read as a correlate to the retrieved memory, to the simple occupation. The “I” thus appears in the poem as one that is remembering. On account of the “stimuli quanta,” it finds no peace in the night, but in the poem it succeeds in rendering these stimuli quanta productive. Passing through the halfpains, the “I” of the poem turns from Grau-in-Grau to monochromaticity, to the memory-vesicles, in which even the “you” that is hidden in the consciousness-gravel has hope of constitution. The yet to be established place of the poem merges here with the memory that is to be re-established. Writing appears as remembrance of a “you,” and therefore, as something passive. Although the poem appears to describe the condition of the writing “I,” the germs of a “you” can nevertheless be traced.

“Ein Leseast”: Unoccupiable Capital

The notion that the constitution of a “you” in the poem accompanies the constitution of a place is also demonstrated in Celan’s second occupiability-poem, “Ein Leseast”:

EIN LESEAST, einer, die Stirnhaut versorgend,
eine Lichtquelle, von dir schläfrig geschluckt, passiert das hungrige Wirtsgewebe,
Sehhilfe, streifig, über mondbefahrene Rückstreu-Sonden. Im großen: im kleinen.


Terrestrisch, terrestrisch.

Ein Leseast, einer, die Stirnhaut versorgend – als schriebst du Gedichte –, er trifft auf den Kartengruß auf, damals, vorm Blutklumpenort, auf der Lungen-

ONE READING BRANCH, one, feeding the forehead skin,
one light source, by you sleepily swallowed, passes the hungry host-tissue,
visual-aid, striated, over moon scouring backscatter-probes. On a large: on a small scale.


Terrestrial, terrestrial.

One reading branch, one, feeding the forehead skin– as if you wrote poems –, it comes to the postcard greeting – back then, before the bloodclotplace, on the lung-
Here, too, the writing of the poem appears to be passive, though now explicitly so in comparison to the writing in "…auch keinerlei." The constitution of a “you” appears here as the occasion and motivation to write a poem at all. This reason is offered for the development of the poem: “als schriebst du // Gedicht –” (line 19f.). The “Lesest,” whose repetition in line 18f. marks the second half of the poem: “Ein Lesest, einer, // die Stirnhaut versorgend” (line 1f. and line 18f.), and lends the poem the momentum of a song, recalls at the same time the compulsion to repeat from "…auch keinerlei." Behind the “Lesest,” which can intuitively be interpreted as a reading guide, a doubly passive concept of writing emerges. The writing of the poem first appears as a gleaning (Auflesen), indeed as a gleaning of the “Lichtquelle, von dir” (line 3), the light source of “you.” And still, this gleaning does not occur actively, but rather “schläfrig geschluckt” (line 4), which is underscored by the line break after “von dir” (lines 3 to 4). The direction of reception is shown to go from the “you” to the “I”. The gleaning, which also seems to be a swallowing, occurs in a sort of preconscious mode between dreaming and waking. The words are administered to the “I” who composes the poem the way medicine is administered to a patient. The writing “I” is “hungrig[]” (line 5) for it. In the poem, it presents itself not as a person, but as “hungrige[s] // Wirtsgewebe” (line 5f.) that is dependent on the source-input that is given through the “you” in order to come into existence. At the same time, it presents itself – and this

32 Celan, Paul. “One Reading Branch” in Breathturn Into Timestead, 386-9. Modifications: “von dir // schläfrig geschluckt” is translated here as “sleepily // swallowed by you” (I have re-arranged the English words in order to retain the emphasis placed by the author on “von dir.”); “Umlauf-Geschau” is translated as “circulation-gawking” (I chose orbital-show, as rendered by Popov and McHugh, to continue the cosmic vocabulary from the previous lines); “zeitwild” is translated as “ensavaged” (my more literal translation puts emphasis on the temporal indices conveyed by “jahrhin” and “jahrüber”); “Leisegepreßtem” is translated as “pressed into muteness”; In the line “hißt, wo du lebst,” I have omitted the word “there” that appears in the English translation.
is yet a further step in the passive direction – as the literal recipient of that which is given to it through the “you.” For it is not only a recipient in the sense of capturing the “light source” that comes from the “you” and is brought onto paper when gleaned by the “I.” It also presents itself as the recipient of what s/he has written in this way, that is, as the reader of the text that lies before us. The *als ob* from line 19 simultaneously makes clear that the “you” is not (any longer) in the position to write poems itself. The “I” “writes” for the “you,” that is, in place of the “you.”

The “you” therefore functions as a “Sehhilfe” (line 7), albeit a “streifige,” that is, a damaged or dirtied one, which enables the “I” that has been catapulted into the darkness of the universe and lost all possible orientation to attain a view of the earth appearing from various distances, and thus, in the plural. This reading is supported by the designation of the visual-aid as “backscatter-probes” (line 9), which measure reflected light just as passively as the “I” of the poem writes by receiving the “Lichtquelle, von dir.” Through its contribution, the “you” alone makes it possible for the “I” to get a visual hold upon a “Horizont” (line 16) that indicates the terrestrial, the solid ground: “Binnenland-Horizonte. // Terrestrisch, terrestrich.” (line 16f.). Standing on its own, the repetition of the word “terrestrich” in the middle of the poem initially accentuates uncertainty and incredulity, as well as the subsequent confirmation of the discovery of secure inner territory, removed from water and sea. The “hornhautüberzogene[] // Basalt” (*cornea-coated // basalt*) (line 11f.) reveals the terrestrial area as a hybrid of human and inorganic nature, as a region of a lost, fossilized (*steiniges*) “you,” that is not, or no longer to be, constituted as such. The attribution “raketengeküsst” (line 13) also allows both of the spaces, terrestrial and cosmic, to merge.

A change in place occurs in the second half of the poem from the cosmic realm to an injured body, when the reading branch “damals” (line 22) encounters the “Kartengruß” (line 21), and the memory shows itself to the “you” as a memory of its writing, its written greeting from Pilsen. The clash between the writing of the “you” and that of the “I,” which was only made possible with the “you” as its source, happens (in the present) “vorm // Blutklumpenort” (22f.), “auf der Lungen-/schwelle” (line 23f.). With a disturbance of spatiality comes a disturbance of temporality: the temporal indices “jahrhin” (line 24) and “jahrüber” (line 25) appear as “zeitwild” (line 26).
“Bon vent, bonne mer” (line 28) stands on its own, like “Terrestrisch, terrestrich” (line 17, middle of the poem), and is further accentuated through its italicization. The “Leisegepreßte[]” (line 27), a concentrated matter that speaks no more, while nevertheless speaking through the poet, speaks here of travel at sea. The “flackernde[] // Hirnlappen” (line 29) as which, the “I” of the poem, that appears to be the poet himself, designates itself, refers again to impaired memory. Like a broken, flickering lamp, the brainlobe stands in contrast to the light source of the “you.” Instead of applying its impaired memory, it uses itself as a flag, which is immediately hoisted in order to mark its place, the place “wo du lebst” (line 32), as the “Hauptstadt” (line 33). The insertion of “ein Meerstück” (line 31) reinforces the notion that this city can longer actually be a city, but instead must become a site, a site of remembrance, a site of the writing of the “I” and with it, the “you.” Not only has the mainland, the “Binnenland” (line 16) from the first half of the poem, disappeared again – at sea there can be no land seizure, no occupation via the hoisting of a flag. The flag that is hoisted in the “Meerstück” either floats in unbounded water or goes under. Only when the seapiece is read as a piece of the sea of remembrance can it go from an unoccupiable place to a place of remembrance, where the lost “you” (“wo du lebst” [line 32]) can live on.

Memory itself, which is injured, does not appear throughout the poem in the form of a story of a past time in Pilsen or in Celan’s homeland in Czernowitz, the capital city of Bucovina that was unoccupied prior to 1941. Memory takes place only suggestively, as a gesture toward the mode of remembering and its presuppositions, the reception of a “you.” The unoccupiable capital city, or the site of the “you,” is also accompanied by an unoccupiable “you.” It is unreachable, but its reflections nevertheless serve the writing “I” as a source for the poem that lies before us. The “Lichtquelle, von dir” from line 3; as well as the phrase, “als schriebst du // Gedichte – ,” from lines 19–20; and consequently, the poetry-writing itself, all seem belatedly to come from the place “wo du lebst” (line 32), that is, from the “you,” from the unoccupiable capital city of the brainlobe, from the seapiece of memory. Whereas the “you” in “Ein Leseast” only becomes unoccupiable by way of the unoccupiable capital city, the “I” and the “you” in “Offene Glottis” are directly marked as unoccupiable.
“Offene Glottis”: “[...] unoccupiable // I and you, too [...]”

OFFENE GLOTTIS, Luftstrom, der Vokal, wirksam, mit dem einen Formanten, Mitlautstöße, gefiltert von weithin Ersichtlichem, Reizschutz: Bewußtsein, unbesetzbar ich und auch du, überwahr- heitet das augen-, das gedächtnisgierige rollende Waren- zeichen, der Schläfenlappen intakt, wie der Sehstamm.

OPEN GLOTTIS, airstream, the vowel, effective with the one formant, consonant-thrusts, filtered by clarity clear from afar, protection shield: consciousness uncathectable I and you, too, overtruth-ed the eye-, the memory-greedy rolling commodity- sign, the temporal lobe intact, like the visionstem.33

The first strophe of the poem describes the physical production of a glottal stop, the inaudible sound that opens the body’s pharyngeal cavity in preparation for speaking. The filtered consonant-thrusts leave only this silent sound to sound off the poem. In place of the “Reizmengen” (line 4) from “...auch keinerlei,” there is “Reizschutz” (line 9), and “Bewusstsein” (line 9) appears in place of the pre-conscious (“...auch keinerlei,” line 3) and the “Bewusstseinsschotter” (“...auch keinerlei,” line 5). Differently than in “Ein Leseast,” the “Schläfenlappen” and “Sehstamm” (line 18f.) appear intact here; a “Sehhilfe” given by the “you” is not required. The poem paints a largely undamaged picture of memory. The line toward which the poem seems to be moving, “Unbesetzbar // ich und auch du,” lets the “I” and the “you” appear as intact as well, as lives that can be told in a linear way. Yet nothing is told. What remains is the mere affirmation of their unoccupiability.

The fifth strophe is wholly set under the sign of the hypervisibility of a “Waren- // zeichen,” a trademark, a logo. The strophe therefore stands in opposition to the surrounding ones

that are haunted by inaudibility. Truth and commodity are at stake, landmark (Wahrzeichen) and brandmark (Brandmarkung). The “augen- // das gedächtnisgierige rollende // Waren- // zeichen” (lines 14-17) draws all attention toward itself due to its catchiness as a memorable corporate brand, whose rolling can be understood as its circulation in the context of a marketing concept. When read in communication with "Ein Leseast," however, the trademark can also appear as a landmark of the unoccupiable capital city, and can therefore be traced back to a concept of memory that urges a displacement from the automated, unavoidable, manipulative memory recording (Im-Gedächtnis-Bleiben) of the advertising logo toward the internalized recall (In-Erinnerung-Rufen) of the branded, toward an entirely different mode of remembrance.

In this mode, the inaudible glottal stop moves again to the center of attention – away from the visible, away from the audible. The initial sound, which opens the pharyngeal cavity for speaking and thus prepares for the production of words, is written in the Hebrew. As a transcription of this glottal stop, aleph (א) functions as a graphic indication with no phonetic value and therefore remains mute. In another place within the word, though also at the beginning of the word, aleph can also function as a vowel. א is also the first letter of ani (אני) or ata (את), the Hebrew words for "I" and "you." The poem, with a Hebraic “occupation,” therefore appears as an attempt to express an “I” and a “you.” These attempts to utter consonants in addition to the mute initial sound nevertheless appear filtered, inhibited. That which is filtered is “clear” (see line 8), that is, it belongs to the realm of the trademark, the manipulated mode of remembrance. The “I” of the poem, which seems here to describe its own (memory) condition, knows what is responsible for the fact that “I” and “you” cannot be spoken. The words already get stuck with the glottal stop in preparation for speaking, that is, even before any sound or stuttering. The description of arrested speech as a phonetic description of the production of a glottal stop attests to a clear rationality. In place of the Hebraic “I” and “you,” a German poem emerges; it intervenes in the constitution of “I” and “you.” Thus, “I” and “you” indeed appear to be unoccupiable and intact, but also untranslatable, since the intrusion of other languages is hindered by the intactness of the language of the poem. Differently than in "Aus dem Moorboden," where the German language of the poem is inhibited, and “you” and “I” are thus made occupiable, "you" and "I" are not addressable or reachable here. The only thing that remains is the affirmation of the unoccupiability of “I” and “you.”
The constitution of a “you” in Celan’s poems seems possible only in passing through a painful, injured memory, and only with the help of the injured, occupiable language of the poem. Occupiability thus does not appear to be fundamentally a positive term. Only for the condition of the poet and poetry after the Holocaust does it appear as a possibility for remembering. The only thing in the poem that is open, that is, occupiable, is the glottis through which the air flows, the breath that can generate the sounds that form words like אנחנו ואית and אני ואתא.

The Poem Has Shape. Lucile, the Occupiable

Twice, with Lucile’s “Long live the king,” and when the sky opened as an abyss beneath Lenz, the Atemwende, the breathturn seemed to happen. Perhaps also when I tried to set course toward that inhabitable distance which finally becomes visible only in the figure of Lucile. And once, due to the attention given to things and beings, we also came close to something open and free. And finally, close to utopia (MRD 11).


A third aspect of Celan’s concept of occupiability becomes apparent in the Meridian. Occupiability for Celan there becomes visible “in der Gestalt Luciles.” It appears as “jenes Ferne und Besetzbare,” toward which the poem, but also Celan’s speech, “zuzuhalten versucht[]” (tries to set course) (ibid.). The figure, who only appears twice in Büchner’s four-act drama, Dantons Tod, and whose second appearance concludes the play, marks another fissure in Celan’s concept of occupiability, which has thus far been reconstructed in terms of the inhibition of language and its opening to multilingualism, as well as the constitution of “I” and “you.” The piece stages Robespierre’s decision to execute former leaders of the French Revolution as counterrevolutionaries. Among them was Lucile’s husband, Camille Desmoulins, who allowed himself the liberty to criticize the ongoing terreur, the mass public executions by guillotine of those who were suspected of opposing the revolution.

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34 Celan, Paul. The Meridian, 11. Cited henceforth with MRD the body text.
Whereas the three pieces by Büchner that Celan summons to the place of his speech make a mockery of art – each does so in different figurations: the trained ape in *Woyzeck*, the automaton in *Leonce und Lena*, and the marionette in *Dantons Tod* – because anything that is artificial and runs smoothly seems predictable and dehumanized, Celan finds in Lucile the alternative projection for a creatureliness (*Kreatürlichkeit*) in art that his poetry also seeks. She can only come into appearance when the systematic nature of art goes wrong, when the automatons “versagen […] für diesen einmaligen kurzen Augenblick” (“…break down – for this single short moment”) (*MRD 7*).

In her first appearance, Lucile is the one who shifts her attention. She does not listen when Camille speaks about art. Camille criticizes art for being an ideal reproduction, which comes to be the only thing of consequence in contrast to the events of the “erbärmliche[n] Wirklichkeit,” because solely the copy is still capable of drawing forth emotion, as an overly visible, idealistic stylization, comparable to the trademark in “Offene Glottis.” Due to the drastic nature of art, people risk losing their sense for the real, which would appear too ordinary for them thereafter. The exclamation, “ach, die Kunst!” (*MRD 4f.*), which appears so prominently in Celan’s speech, finds its counterpart in the exclamation that Camille likewise makes: “ach, die erbärmliche Wirklichkeit!” (Oh, wretched reality!).

Lucile is not interested in art – in something so overt that draws attention to itself like the “Waren- // zeichen” from "Offene Glottis." As the “Kunstblinde” (*MRD 3*), she shifts her attention to the speaking of her husband, whom she “love[s] to watch… talk,” to the materiality and corporeality of his language, to his “Gestalt,” to his “Atem, das heißt Richtung und Schicksal” (*MRD, 3*), to the “Menschlichen” (*MRD, 3*), to the “you.” She sees, not in the sense of a conspicuous marketing logo, but through a change of media that she has carried out: she shifts her awareness from the content of the communication to the materiality of communicating, and still more, to the person who speaks.

In her second and last appearance, with which the play concludes, the situation switches from the initial, relaxed private conversation, at the end of which Lucile senses Camille’s
impending death when Danton delivers news of his own arrest, to the moment of the execution of Camille Desmoulins and his fellow convicted companions at the Place de la Révolution. The execution of Danton, Camille, Lacroix, Phillipeau, Fabre, and Hérault becomes a theatrical play for curious spectators of the public. As they climb up to the guillotine one after another, taking leave and commenting upon the execution directly before them, “einige Stimmen” in the audience react with disappointment to the play presented to them – “Das war schon einmal da! Wie langweilig!” (“We’ve heard that one before. Boring, boring!”). The execution itself, Camille’s death, is not performed; we learn of it, as Celan says, “zwei Szenen später, von einem fremden – einem ihm so nahen – Wort her” (“two scenes later through a word foreign – yet so near – to him) (MRD 3), through Lucile:

A street.
LUCILE.
[...] The stream of life should stop if a single drop is split. The earth should be wounded. Everything moves, clocks go, bells ring, people walk, water runs, everything goes on and on, then – No, it can’t happen. I’ll sit down on the ground and scream so everything will stand still, in shock. Everything stock-still.
She sits down, covers her eyes and screams.
After a pause, she stands.
No good, everything as before, the houses, the street, the wind blows, clouds move. We just have to bear it.
[...] Camille, where shall I look for you now?

Lucile cannot understand how the world could simply resume its course after the life of her beloved was taken, together with the “countless thousand” (viele hunderttausende[en] ungezählt[en]) others who had fallen under the sickle. When her repeated cries of “nein!” and her closed-eye scream – which shows that she has lost language – fail to alter anything, she replaces both with an “absurde[n] Wort” that pays homage to the “für die Gegenwart des Menschlichen zeugenden Majestät des Absurden” (“majesty of the absurd as witness for the

38 Büchner, Georg. Danton’s Death, Methuen 1987, 78.
40 Büchner, Georg. Danton’s Death, Methuen 1987, 80.
41 This is evidenced more clearly in the German original: Georg Büchner, Danton’s Tod, hg. Burghard Dedner und Thomas Mayer(Darmstadt: WBG, 2000), 490f.
presence of the human”) (MRD 3), the cry: “Es lebe der König!”, the penultimate word in Büchner’s piece:

The Place de la Révolution.
[...]
LUCILE (enters and sits on the steps of the guillotine). I sit on your lap, silent angel of death. (Sings.)
There is a reaper, name of Death.
Who draws breath
From Almighty God.
Dear cradle who rocked Camille asleep. You suffocated him under your roses. You passing bell, your sweet tongue sang him to his grave. (Sings.)
Men and women, short and tall
Countless thousands fall
Down before your scythe.

A PATROL enters.

A CITIZEN. Who’s there?
LUCILE. Long live the King!
CITIZEN. In the name of the Republic.
She is surrounded by the WATCH and led away.43

In no way a "declaration of loyalty to the ancien régime," the formulaic phrase for confirming the old power becomes, in Lucile’s mouth, a “Gegenwort” (counterword) (MRD 3), which “den ‘Draht’ zerreißt” (ibid.) and appears even as an “Akt der Freiheit” (ibid.), as an “Atemwende” (MRD, 11). Because Lucile follows neither the old ideology nor the new one and thereby places herself, singular and isolated, outside of both systems, Celan perceives her as an open position that is, according to him, occupiable. Like the poet in "Ein Leseast," she receives a “you,” one through which she first speaks, with which she empathizes and dies (mitfühlt und mitstirbt). Dietmer Goltschnigg compares Lucile’s self-sacrifice to Celan’s writing of poetry when he writes: “If nothing, neither nature nor society, comes to a standstill in the face of the barbaric events of world history, then art stalls, the commemorating poem, by marking its formal aesthetics with an unmistakable caesura.”44 This caesura appears in the Meridian in connection with Lucile’s self-sacrifice in the form of the Atemwende (breath turn):

The poem tarries and tests the wind – a word related to the creaturely – through such thoughts.

43 Büchner, Georg. Danton’s Death, Methuen 1987, 80.
Nobody can tell how long the breath pause – the testing and the thought – will last. The “swift,” which has always been “outside,” has gained speed; the poem knows this, but heads straight for that “other,” that it considers reachable, able to be set free, perhaps vacant, and thus turned – let’s say: like Lucile – turned toward it, the poem (MRD 8).

Das Gedicht verweilt oder verhofft – ein auf die Kreatur zu beziehendes Wort – bei solchen Gedanken.

Celan says, „das Gedicht verhofft […] bei Gedanken.“ Through the verb *verhoffen*, the poem is implicitly compared with a wild animal standing before the hunter’s rifle, who, already sensing mortal danger, stands still to listen intently. The Middle High German meaning of *verhoffen*, to hope intensely and to give up hope, connects utmost hope and despair, the two modes that describe the risky moment of Lucile’s *Gegenwort* as well as the *Atempause* in Celan’s poems. Just as Lucile "tests the wind" in searching for the lost “you,” so too, does the poem. Along with "Häm," the *pars pro toto* of the poem "Aus dem Moorboden," this poem too appears in view of the barrel of the gun, like a hunted doe, as its *Erinnerungsbläschen* rise and take personal shape. *Verhoffen*, “[w]ie lange […] noch?” The suspension of breath, the resumption of breathing, itself mirrors the movement of occupation (*Besetzen*) and horror (*Ent-setzen*).
Bibliography of Translations


