

Paul Celan and the Poetics of Anxiety

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precarious = the poetic as the precarious

—Paul Celan, 'Drafts', in *The Meridian*¹

There is something inherently precarious about anxiety. When conceptualizing the dreadful affect in 1844, Søren Kierkegaard posits that anxiety is located in 'the nothing', that is, in an indefinite space of thought that discloses the 'possibility of possibility'.² Kierkegaard's short treatise, dominated by theological assertions regarding original sin, establishes an abstract framework that situates itself in the – or *a* – non-place of nothing. Rooted in the rootlessness of futurity, which the Danish philosopher repeatedly names a 'possibility to freedom', anxiety is imagined as a choking feeling that paradoxically looks toward the future: anxiousness is hence mobilised as a primary affective narrowness that necessarily opens itself up.³ I begin with Kierkegaard's work for three key reasons: first, his locating of anxiety in the/*a* nothing flags up an ambiguity that mirrors the affect's own inner workings – anxiety is an *anxious* term, being as uneasy in definition as it is in praxis; secondly, the concept's indefinite status brings nothingness and anxiety into proximity with each other; and thirdly, Kierkegaard's argument measures out a conceptual path later be pursued by thinkers such as Freud, Lacan, Sartre, and, most importantly for this essay, Martin Heidegger.⁴ Listening to the resonances between Kierkegaard and Heidegger, and later Heidegger and Paul Celan, I will read anxiety as a meridian that passes through their work. I argue that anxiety is constitutive of Celan's poetics, perhaps even called for by the poet as he commences his 'wounded' search for reality in the wake of the Shoah.⁵

Let us first stay with Kierkegaard's ontological enquiry. The openness of Kierkegaard's anxiety is positioned in contradistinction to the concept of fear, which in its disclosure of 'something definite' is

1 Paul Celan, 'Drafts', in *The Meridian: Final Version-Drafts-Materials*, ed. by Bernhard Böschstein and Heino Schmuil, trans. by Pierre Joris (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 134.

2 Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, ed. and trans. by Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 42. Owing in part to the concept's elusive definition, Princeton University Press's previous edition (1957) opts for "dread" rather than "anxiety".

3 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

4 Cf. Freud, 'Lecture XXXII: Anxiety and Instinctual Life', in *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. and ed. by James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1960), pp. 102–131; Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety, 1962–63*, trans. by Cormac Gallagher, from unedited and unpublished French manuscript; Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956).

5 'Wounded by reality and in search of it' [my translation; '*wirklichkeitswund und Wirklichkeit suchend*']. Celan, 'Ansprache Anlässlich der Entgegennahme des Literaturpreises der Freien Hansestadt Bremen', in *Der Meridian und andere Prosa* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), pp. 37–39 (p. 39).

thereby 'altogether different'.⁶ Fear manifests itself in relation to the definite, coming into being by finding an object: *that* particular pain, for instance, or *this* particular struggle. Defined as fear's antipode, anxiety is an object-less counter-concept: if anxiety could find an object it would necessarily be "nothingness". As Kierkegaard asks himself: 'What, then, is it? Nothing.'⁷ Using this 'Nothing' to account for the spiritual nature of humanity, and to subsequently explore the differences between original and hereditary sin, Kierkegaard's religious text proposes that anxiety – while defined as negation – is not necessarily negative:

When we consider the dialectical determinations of anxiety, it appears that exactly these have psychological ambiguity. Anxiety is *a sympathetic antipathy* and *an antipathetic sympathy*. [...] One speaks of a pleasing anxiety, a pleasing anxiousness [*Beangstelse*], and of a strange anxiety, a bashful anxiety, etc.⁸

Figured in the antimetabole as that which is *both* pleasant *and* repulsive, Kierkegaard's anxiety emerges as a multivalent concept that forms an essential psychological dimension of the human. Although I am wary of reading Kierkegaard too earnestly, his 'etc.' also speaks to anxiety's conceptual 'ambiguity', implying an indefinite catalogue of adjectives that foreground and radically transform the affect. Kierkegaard's anxiety is thus integral to the existential freedom of the human, and its heterogeneity is inherent to this formulation.

In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger's reflections on anxiety similarly find the concept in a 'completely indefinite' space. Responding to and developing Kierkegaard's claims, Heidegger's anxiety becomes the 'fundamental existential phenomenon', providing the 'basis for explicitly grasping the primordial totality of being of *Dasein*.'⁹ Discussed in §40, 'The Fundamental Attunement of Anxiety as an Eminent Disclosedness of *Dasein*' [*Die Grundbefindlichkeit der Angst als eine ausgezeichnete Erschlossenheit des Daseins*], anxiety inspires a feeling of 'Being-in-the-world as such', no less because its affects reveal humanity's uncanny situation: we want to be at home in a world, yet we do not uniquely belong to one. Echoing Kierkegaard's discourse of freedom, Heidegger's anxiety similarly communicates our existential possibilities back to us, 'reveal[ing] in *Dasein* its being toward its own most potentiality of being'.¹⁰ As Mark Wrathall summarises, anxiety joins together 'our thrownness into a world, our particular way of finding ourselves in the midst of entities in the world, with our existential freedom to pursue new possibilities.'¹¹ What unites both Kierkegaard and Heidegger is, firstly, an attention to the "nothing", to the anxiety-inducing abyss where the concept is spatially located, and to its object-less centre; anxiety is therefore pictured as a something that is nothing and a somewhere that is nowhere.¹² Secondly, the

6 Kierkegaard, p. 42.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

8 Kierkegaard, p. 42. Author's emphasis.

9 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (New York: SUNY Press, 2010), p. 177.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 180, 182.

11 Mark A. Wrathall and Max Murphy, 'An Overview of *Being and Time*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger's Being and Time*, ed. by Mark A. Wrathall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1–53 (pp. 18–20).

12 I am indebted to Eugenie Brinkema's recent work on the abyssal function of anxiety in Lacan and the horror film *Open Water* (2003): 'Intermittency, Embarrassment, Dismay', in *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), pp. 181–209.

philosophers' projects coincide with their particular vocabulary, drawing on the synonyms 'possibility' and 'potentiality' to point toward how anxiety's existential grounding in Being makes it both paradoxically choking and freeing.

The complex mutual admiration between Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger has been well documented.¹³ The most recent and exhaustive work on their correspondences, written by James K. Lyon, describes Celan and Heidegger as 'antithetical figures', and chooses as the title of its opening chapter an affective encapsulation: 'The Repulsion and Attraction of Opposites'.¹⁴ To momentarily return to Kierkegaard, we might even say that Celan and Heidegger's relationship is based on a feeling not too dissimilar to anxiety as such, namely, 'a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy'.¹⁵ While I do not want to dwell on the historical details of Celan and Heidegger's relationship, I am concerned here with the poetic conversation between the thinkers. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's *Poetry as Experience* (1986), for example, insists that 'it would be an understatement to say Celan had read Heidegger'. Indeed, Lacoue-Labarthe puts it that Celan's poetry is, 'in its entirety, a dialogue with Heidegger's thought'.¹⁶

If Celan's poetics is one that listens to and speaks back to Heidegger, we might readily assume that there is something of Heidegger's (and perhaps then even Kierkegaard's) writing on anxiety in Celan's work.¹⁷ Scholarship on Celan, though, is yet to give adequate ground to this issue. The closest the discipline comes to a discussion of anxiety is found in Eric Kligerman's *Sites of the Uncanny* (2007), yet this is a study concerned with a world *after* Celan: Kligerman's project is to read Celan *with* visual artists such as Alain Resnais and Anselm Kiefer, 'examining the reception and translation of Celan's poetry by his successors'.¹⁸ Interrogating art's 'strategies of proximity (spatial), anxiety (affect), and disrupted vision (perception)', Kligerman names a '*poetics of anxiety* in which the artist's fears of failing to represent shift to the reader's horror in her inability to read or see'.¹⁹ There are problems here, though: firstly, we should be suspicious of assuming that Celan's poetics intends to 'represent', for as Lacoue-Labarthe cautions, Celan's 'poetic art consists of perceiving, not representing'.²⁰ Secondly, Kligerman's 'shift' takes anxiety *away* from Celan's corpus, looking for how it mediates and disrupts the reader rather than the work itself. Thirdly, the intriguing term 'poetics of anxiety' is never returned to, a lonely coinage drifting within its own conceptual nothingness.

I want to pause over Kligerman's brief mention of a "poetics of anxiety". I want to articulate what its thematics might be and, through this, give anxiety back to Celan, attending to its place *within*

13 Cf. Hadrien France-Lanord, *Paul Celan et Martin Heidegger: le sens d'un dialogue* (Paris: Fayard, 2004).

14 James K. Lyon, *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger: An Unresolved Conversation, 1951–1970* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), pp. 1–8 (p. 1).

15 Kierkegaard, p. 42.

16 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, trans. by Andrea Tarnowski (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 33.

17 Celan's library did indeed house copies of Kierkegaard's work, as well as around 500 other philosophical texts in six different languages, cf. Alexandre Richter, Patrik Alac, Bertrand Badiou, eds., *Paul Celan: La bibliothèque philosophique* (Paris: Editions Rue d'Ulm, 2004).

18 Eric Kligerman, *Sites of the Uncanny: Paul Celan, Specularity and the Visual Arts* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), p. 18. My emphasis.

19 Kligerman, pp. 6, 115.

20 Lacoue-Labarthe, p. 67; cf. Celan's description of art – and therefore mimesis – as an 'eternal problem' in *The Meridian*, p. 2.

Celan's work rather than *outside* of it. I will do so by concentrating first on Celan's autopoetological *Rede*, the 'Meridian' speech, where anxiety becomes Celan's *occasion*; indeed, anxiety might even be the occasion of poetry.²¹ Afterwards, I will conclude with a close reading of Celan's 'Speak, You Also', from the collection *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle* (1956), identifying in its conceptual proximity to 'The Meridian' the anxious possibility of freedom as described by Kierkegaard and Heidegger.

Delivered on the receiving of the Georg Büchner Prize for literature in 1960, 'The Meridian' sees Celan adumbrate the intersections of Büchner, poetics and 'the eternal problem' of art.²² 'The Meridian' is a formally anxious speech, replete with uneasy syntax, false starts and restless repetitions. Emmanuel Levinas describes it as an 'elliptical and allusive text, interrupting itself ceaselessly'. This, Levinas tells us, is a metonymic quality, for it 'constitutes the fabric of [Celan's] poems.'²³ *The Meridian* sees Celan closely read Büchner's work, and he uses such a reading to perform what Jacques Derrida calls an 'ironic attack' on art.²⁴ Celan defines art in relation to lifeless and uncanny automata, the 'childless' and the 'puppet-like'; Celan searches for something that can 'interfere' with art and mimesis, and finds such an interference in Büchner's play *Danton's Death* (1835). Here, Celan listens to a radically political – and hence not monarchical or conservative – 'counterword' [*Gegenwort*], uttered by Lucile as she shouts the suicidal dictum 'Long live the king!' This, a 'pure provocation' that cuts art's puppet string, is what Celan first calls poetry: 'It is an act of freedom. It is a step' (pp. 2–3).²⁵ Inside of an uncanny art but necessarily working against it, Celan's 'step' is automatically anxious. The counterword is a risk, signifying in its possibility an appropriation of magisterial language; its existential act of freedom is to confront and step across its non-place.²⁶ This is why Celan lets his definition of poetry hang over an elliptical chasm: "This, ladies and gentlemen, has no fixed once and for all, but I believe that this is ... poetry' (p. 4).

Celan signals the counterword's import by giving it an 'acute accent', and thereon moves to address another of Büchner's texts, *Lenz* (1836), that performs another 'calling-into-question' of art (p. 5). Celan distances himself from the representational, closing his eyes at the mention of Medusa and turning to face Lenz's meanderings through the valleys. Anxiously occupied with the 'I-distance' that art creates – that 'he who has art before his eyes and on his mind [...] forgets himself' – Celan follows Lenz's route through art, step by step. Here, Celan asks whether this route will eventually lead us to 'the place where the strangeness was, the place where the person was able to set himself free as an – estranged – I? Can we find such a place, such a step?' Lenz's step – his act, his event, his provocation – is this: "... except sometimes it annoyed him that he could not walk on his head." He who walks on his head, ladies and

21 I approach 'The Meridian' from the same position as Jacques Derrida, who treats the speech as a 'poem on poetry'. Jacques Derrida, 'The Majesty of the Present', trans. by Alessia Ricciardi and Christopher Yu, *New German Critique*, 91 (2004), 17–40 (p. 28).

22 Celan, 'Final Version' in *The Meridian*, p. 2. All future references will be by page-number, in parentheses, in the body of the text.

23 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Being and the Other: On Paul Celan', trans. by Stephen Melville, *Chicago Review*, 29, 3 (1978), 16–22 (p. 18); cf. Derrida's reading of Celan's conditional "perhapses" in 'The Majesty of the Present', p. 130.

24 Derrida, 'Shibboleth: For Paul Celan', in *Sovereignities in Question*, ed. and trans. by Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 1–64 (p. 4).

25 Lacoue-Labarthe, p. 51.

26 Cf. Derrida's astute close reading of Celan's counterword in 'The Majesty of the Present', namely that 'Celan's gesture in recurring to the word majesty – and here is what seems to me most important [...] – is a gesture that consists of placing one majesty over and above another, thus to engage in an effort trumping sovereignty', p. 22.

gentlemen – he who walks on his head, has the sky beneath him as the abyss’ (p. 7). Turning the world upside down lets Lenz encounter the dizzying sublime above, the non-place of possibility.²⁷

Yet Celan does not find a counterword here, for there are indeed no words to be found at all. Instead, Lenz’s sublime recognition of the anxiety-inducing abyss goes a ‘step further than Lucile’, closing his mouth and choking his language. Pausing over Lenz’s sudden aphasia, his ‘terrifying falling silent’ (p. 7), Celan names poetry the *Atemwende*, or breathturn; like the counterword before it, the *Atemwende* also ‘defines poetry’.²⁸ Poetry becomes a holding of breath, a precarious coming-to-being in the space where language gives way.²⁹ Its precariousness, though, is simultaneously in tune with its potential for freedom. Poetry’s stepping out, then, must always be at the risk of suffocation and of losing language. Heidegger’s *Being and Time* returns to us here: anxiety, Heidegger says, ‘is so near that it is oppressive and takes away one’s breath – and yet it is nowhere.’³⁰ Anxiety is again a somewhere that is nowhere, an event and occasion that presses down on the self.

As a counterword and breathturn, Celan states that poetry therefore ‘stands fast at the edge of itself’ (p. 8). Teetering on the edge of a conceptual cliff face, poetry is created at the very turning towards that which takes the breath away. The holding and exhaling of breath, as a moment in time and confrontation with the uncanny nature of art, is even the event or occasion of poetry. It is here that anxiety makes its appearance. As Kierkegaard writes, anxiety is ‘the pivot on which everything turns’.³¹ Poetry’s creation as a breathturning is thus a necessarily anxious one, an occasion fuelled by what Heidegger calls the ‘individualised potentiality-of-being’.³² Celan points to language as one such anxious freedom, for poetry is ‘language actualised, set free under the sign of a radical individuation’. Despite this, poetry still ‘remains mindful of the border language draws and of the possibilities language opens up for it’. The poet speaks ‘under the angle of inclination of his Being’, alert to the uncanny strangeness of language in its world-forming capabilities (p. 9). Being itself is at stake in the poem, and with it its existential anxiousness as the foundation of freedom. As Celan says nearer the end of ‘The Meridian’, individual poems might be thought of as ‘blueprints for being’ (p. 11).

If poetry is an occasion of anxiety then where is it found? Where is its groundless “nothingness”? With a typically idiosyncratic compound at hand, Celan’s ‘Meridian’ locates poetry with *Toposforschung*, or topos research. Celan attests that poetry is indeed *within* art, for it cannot exist outside of art, but poetry looks for that which is ‘open, empty and free’. For Lacoue-Labarthe, this might be the

27 Cf. Kierkegaard, ‘anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility’, p. 61; the *OED* similarly invokes a certain verticality in its definition of the sublime: ‘high up, elevated, [...] (of breath) shallow, panting, tall’: ‘Sublime, adj.’, in *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), <<http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/192766?%20rskey=u96iWB&result=1&isAdvanced=false>> [Accessed: 07/01/2016].

28 Raymond Geuss, ‘Celan’s *Meridian*’, in *Politics and the Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 117–141 (p. 126).

29 Lacoue-Labarthe, p. 49.

30 Heidegger, p. 180.

31 Kierkegaard, p. 43. My emphasis.

32 Heidegger, p. 296.

empty non-place of anxiety: 'The place of poetry, the place where poetry takes place, every time, is the place without place of the intimate gaping.'³³ Celan dwells on this gaping non-place, naming it 'u-topia':

Topos research?
 Certainly! But in light of what is to be searched for: in light of u-topia.
 And the human being? And the creature?
 In this light.
 What questions! What claims!
 It is time to turn back. (p. 10)

Poetry is a condition of freedom, found 'in light of u-topia' and hence in light of an immemorial abyss. Celan's hyphen marks the negation of place, making an opening that radically changes the landscape from a utopia to a 'u-topia'. Poetry is thus invoked as the abyss or *caesura* of art, its pause and its turn within the nothing.

Before Celan finds his meridian, he turns back to the question of art: 'go with art into your innermost narrows. And set yourself free' (p. 11). In its juxtaposition of narrow and open/freeing spaces, Celan's sentence might at first appear paradoxical: how can narrowness lead to openness? Yet as we have read in Kierkegaard and Heidegger, it is precisely the choking narrowness of anxiety that reveals existence: its tightness *is* its openness. The etymology of anxiety speaks to this tightness. Deriving from the Greek *ἄγχω*, meaning to compress or to press tight, with a particular emphasis on the throat – to strangle, to throttle, to choke – anxiety's affect is tied to its narrowness.³⁴ With these 'innermost narrows' in mind, I want to conclude by reading one of Celan's poems.

'Speak, You Also' is perhaps the epitome of Celan's poetics of anxiety. The poem is simultaneously narrow and abyssal, even *abysmal*, for its allusions to a mysterious 'shade' disclose a chasm of darkness.³⁵ Its paratactic lines, indicative of Celan's spare poetic style, have been called a 'strangling of language' by Lacoue-Labarthe.³⁶ Echoing some of the charges of hermeticism levelled against Celan's poetry, Maurice Blanchot similarly calls on us to read the poem in the 'sealed silence that it painfully brings us'.³⁷ As a 'strangling' and 'sealed silence', we are already seeing the discourse of anxiety taking hold of the poem. It begins with a tight and monosyllabic opening stanza:

Speak, you also,
 speak as the last,
 have your say. (ll. 1–3)

³³ Lacoue-Labarthe, p. 54.

³⁴ Eric Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (London: Routledge, 1966), p. 98

³⁵ Celan, 'Speak, You Also', in *Poems of Paul Celan*, trans. by Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil, 2007), pp. 106–107 (p. 107). All future references will be by line-number, in parentheses, in the body of the text.

³⁶ Lacoue-Labarthe, p. 12.

³⁷ Maurice Blanchot, 'The Last to Speak', in *A Voice from Elsewhere*, trans. by Charlotte Mandell (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), pp. 54–93, p. 89.

Celan's dimeter draws our attention to the repeated imperatives, calling on the poem's 'you' to speak, and offering a privileged but confined space to speak 'as the last'. This embodied finality is emphasised as Celan unites the German '*Sprich*' and '*Spruch*' with paronomasia and half-rhyme. While Michael Hamburger's translation chooses 'have your say', the German '*Spruch*' might be closer to "saying", "quotation" or "verdict".³⁸ Celan's '*sag deinen Spruch*' can thus be read more concretely: 'say your saying', for instance, or 'say your piece'. The stresses, then, fall on the act of speaking: *Sprich, sprich, sag, Spruch*. This is why '*Sprich*' becomes '*Spruch*', for it maps out a way to language, and why in the poem's second stanza the '*Spruch*' can have shade [*Schatten*]:

Speak –
 But keep yes and no unsplit.
 And give your say this meaning:
 give it the shade.

Give it shade enough,
 give it as much
 as you know has been dealt out [*verteilt*] between
 midnight and midday and midnight. (ll. 4–11)

Speech produces shadows; each act of speaking is a discernible event or occasion that individuates the speaker. Speaking, then, might be said to be constitutive of Being. To speak is to acknowledge that we are bodies living under a sun, to live in and ground ourselves in a world. Celan's idiomatic cutting or – to evoke Derrida's essay 'Shibboleth' – incising of letters also lets us pause on the shadows of the poem: '*Mittnacht und Mittag und Mittnacht*.' Celan strips the *-er-* from *Mitternacht*, highlighting the proximity between the two opposing times. He asks the speaker to 'deal out' or 'distribute' [*verteilt*] the same amount of shade (language) as has been naturally shared by the rising and setting sun. The addressee's identity as human is therefore intimately tied to language; poetry is an occasion of speech that creates a reality – it is saying *as* Being. As Heidegger writes in 'The Way to Language' (1959), 'the essence of man consists in language' and, even more tellingly, 'in speech the speakers have their presencing.'³⁹ 'Speak, You Also' continues:

Look around:
 look how it all leaps alive –
 where death is! Alive!
 He speaks truly who speaks the shade. (ll. 12–15)

38 Cf. *Das große Oxford Wörterbuch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 1225.

39 Martin Heidegger, 'The Way to Language', in *Basic Writings*, trans. by D. F. Krell (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1993), pp. 393–426, pp. 398, 406.

The poem's opening 'speak' now turns to 'look', as if language fails the addressee.⁴⁰ Nevertheless it is this looking, the visual acknowledgement of the 'shade', that allows for a poetic axiom or *Spruch* to end the blank quatrain: 'he speaks truly who speaks the shade'. Having spoken and *then* having fallen into silence, the speaker-turned-silent can perceive the shade of a concrete language.⁴¹ Echoing Celan's path from counterword to breathturn in 'The Meridian', this silence *is* poetry. Indeed, Celan's reference to 'where death is!' reminds us of his insistence that poetry must take place within but decidedly wary of an uncanny mimetic art. Poetry and language both remain alive even within death. As Celan states in the 'Bremen' speech, 'in spite of everything, [language] remained secure against loss.'⁴² Language is secure, but having spoken the shadows the speaker is now 'stripped' of their shade:

But now shrinks the place where you stand:
Where now, stripped by shade [*Schattenentblüster*], will you go?
Upward. Grope your way up.
Thinner you grow, less knowable, finer.
Finer: a thread by which
it wants to be lowered, the star:
to float farther down, down below
where it sees itself gleam: in the swell
of wandering words. (ll. 16–24)

Stripped of shade, illustrated by the compound *Schattenentblüster*, and standing on a shrinking place, Celan narrows the parameters of the poem's spatiality. He has, as we have already seen, taken language out of the human body, and now he reduces the ground on which we stand. What opens up in this space is anxiety, its narrowing and its freeing. Celan's leading question 'Where now [...] will you go?' points us in the direction of just one route to take – 'upward'. In absence of language the poem's imperatives provoke action: to 'grope' upward and to 'grow' thinner. Losing ourselves in the open, we grow 'finer', like Lenz's breathturn as he contemplates the nothing above him. Celan takes us into the 'Meridian's' 'innermost narrows' and sets us 'free'.⁴³

Yet with a single colon, a caesura that momentarily suspends the poem's movement, Celan shifts the address, turning from a 'you' to an 'it'. On Celan's careful use of caesurae, Derrida writes that the caesura designates 'that which, in the body and in the rhythm of the poem, seems most *decisive*.'⁴⁴ Thus Celan's decisive turn from a 'you' to an 'it' pronounces the shifting from a human to a creature; fallen silent and stripped of shade, the human loses its Being-in-the-world. Human becomes 'star', lowered down from its height towards the 'swell of wandering words'. The human-as-star sees its reflection, its

40 Echoing this sequential withdrawal from language, Celan declares in another poem 'Do not read anymore – look! | Do not look anymore – go!' (ll. 6–7): 'The Straighting' (pp. 158–171).

41 Cf. Lacoue-Labarthe's 'Poetic art consists of *perceiving*' (my emphasis), p. 67.

42 Celan, 'Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen', in *Paul Celan: Collected Prose*, trans. by Rosmarie Waldrop (New York: Carcanet & Sheep Meadow Press, 1986), 33–35 (p. 34).

43 Celan echoes this notion in 'Illegibility' (1971): 'you, clamped | into your deepest part, | climb out of yourself | for ever' (pp. 364–65, ll. 6–9).

44 Derrida, 'Poetics and Politics of Witnessing', in *Sovereignities in Question*, pp. 65–96 (pp. 69–70); Derrida's emphasis.

Being, in the abyss of language beneath. To speak, then, would be to performatively conjure humanity, to make yourself human through language. This primordial step is the anxious step of existence.

For Celan, then, anxiety uncannily rests in a u-topia, a ‘swell of wandering words’, occupying the poet’s thoughts as he looks for a place to be and to dwell. And as ‘Speak, You Also’ insists, the poem as *Spruch* is the individuating speech act of humanity; language gives the performative possibility to be. As we have read in Kierkegaard and Heidegger, anxiety might be *dreadful*, *awful* and *abysmal*, but it is not necessarily negative: it is dialectical. Its pressing and strangling tightness is in fact called for by Celan as that which frees the poem, or at the very least turns poetry towards the open and the sublime dizziness of potentiality. Humanity itself – and the ‘realities’ [*Wirklichkeiten*] of that humanity – might therefore be at stake in the poem’s creation and its world-forming capabilities.⁴⁵ Anxiety is imagined, then, as something imperative. It necessarily constitutes an embrace with the nothing, and takes on a particularly significant role within Celan’s world – a world decisively *after* the Holocaust.

45 Celan, ‘Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen’, p. 35.

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