

Filiations of the Negative
in Franz Kafka, Paul Celan, and André Green

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von Herrn Francesco Adriano Clerici
geboren am 08.09.1988 in Mailand

Prof. Dr. Julia von Blumenthal
Präsidentin der
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Prof. Dr. Claudia Becker
Dekanin der Kultur-, Sozial- und
Bildungswissenschaftlichen Fakultät

Gutachter:

1. Prof. Dr. Daniel Weidner (Humboldt Universität Berlin)
2. Prof. Gabriele Guerra (Universität La Sapienza)
3. Prof. Daniela Nelva (Universität Turin)



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**Filiations of the Negative
in Franz Kafka, Paul Celan, and André Green**

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Francesco Adriano CLERICI
Matricola: R13089

Supervisor:

Prof.ssa Rosalba MALETTA (Università degli Studi di Milano)

Prof. Dr. Daniel WEIDNER (Humboldt Universität Berlin)

Coordinatrice: Prof.ssa Maria Vittoria CALVI

A.A.
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Table of Contents

<u>Abstract / Zusammenfassung / Riassunto esteso</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Acknowledgements</u>	<u>9</u>
Introduction	11
 Chapter 1 – <i>André Green’s Work of the Negative between Psychoanalysis and Literature.</i>	
1.1 <u>A Sketch of an Intellectual Biography</u>	<u>22</u>
1.2 <u>The Work of the Negative and the <i>Incréable</i> – An Analysis of Green’s Theory from the Perspective of the Creative Processes</u>	<u>35</u>
1.3 <u>The Poetic Reserve of the Theory or, the <i>Incréable</i> in Green’s Work: From Literature to Metapsychology</u>	<u>51</u>
 Chapter 2 – <i>The Writing of the <i>Incréable</i>: Franz Kafka’s Late Writings and the Work of the Negative</i>	
2.1 <u>Revisiting the Question of the Negative in Kafka’s Work</u>	<u>67</u>
2.2 <u><i>Eine kleine Frau.</i> The Exponential Work of Sublimation and the Unconscious of Writing</u>	<u>80</u>
2.3 <u><i>Ein Hungerkünstler.</i> The <i>Incréable</i> and the Deferred Reserve of Representation</u>	<u>96</u>
2.4 <u><i>Josefine, die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse.</i> The Temporality of the <i>Incréable</i> between <i>Transfert d’Existence</i> and <i>Evenement Négatif</i></u>	<u>114</u>
 Chapter 3 – <i>The Death Drive at the Umbilical of the Poetic: The Work of the Negative in Paul Celan’s Late Poetry</i>	
3.1 <u>‘An Other Blank.’ Towards a New Understanding of the Work of the Negative in Paul Celan’s Late Poetry</u>	<u>131</u>
3.2 <u>Celan’s ‘Being for Poetry.’ The Poem as Trans-Narcissistic Object</u>	<u>141</u>
3.3 <u>“Another Time.” Temporality and the Work of the Negative</u>	<u>158</u>
3.4 <u><i>Der Unsichtbare</i>, or the ‘Invisible of the Page.’ The Poem between <i>Psychose Blanche</i> and <i>Incréable</i></u>	<u>175</u>
 Conclusions – <i>Filiations of the Negative</i>	 189
 Bibliography	 197

Abstract

Within the specific theoretical framework developed by the French-Jewish psychoanalyst André Green (1927-2012) my dissertation investigates the work of the Negative in the late writings of two crucial German-Jewish authors: Franz Kafka (1883-1924) and Paul Celan (1920-1970). Providing a new interdisciplinary re-elaboration of Green's theory of the Negative between psychoanalysis, literature, and Jewish studies, my work investigates the role of the Negative in Kafka's and Celan's late writings, aiming at expanding the understanding of their works in the context of 20th century Judaism. Moreover, my dissertation explores Green's psychoanalytic theory in the context of contemporary Judaism and literary creativity, advancing a new reading of the Negative as a meta-theoretical thread running through Green's writings and thought.

The question of the Negative in Kafka and Celan has drawn the attention of many scholars from diverse fields of research such as philosophy, comparative literature, and Jewish studies, becoming a topic of primary importance in the contemporary reflection upon the transformation of Jewish cultural and literary expression. However, the specific contribution of psychoanalysis in such a debate has often been neglected.

Unlike other philosophical, literary, or theological approaches, Green provides an original psychoanalytic contribution, envisaging the work of the Negative as the matrix of the structuring of subjectivity in relationship with the alterity of a lost object. His theory puts forward a structural model of the psychic activity and functioning in its heterogeneity, the complexity of which is characterized by the ineliminable dimension of the *limit*, understood both as a protective barrier of the psychic apparatus, as well as a transitional area of transformation. The question leading my investigation is how such liminal dimension is transformed through the process of sublimation into a stylistic fingerprint, into a form of writing which reorganises the complexity of the psyche. Showcasing the creative power of the subject of coping with absence, loss, and mourning through the act of representation, the Negative becomes for these authors (borrowing Green's expression) a "framing structure for the representation of the absence of representation."

The work is divided in three chapters devoted to Green's metapsychological studies (Chapter 1), Kafka's *Ein Hungerkünstler* (1924, *A Hunger Artist*) (Chapter 2), and Celan's collections *Schneepart* (1971, *Snowpart*) and *Zeitgehöft* (1976, *Timestead*) (Chapter 3). The exploration of the representational vicissitudes of the Negative in the writings of these authors, or what I call their 'filiations of the Negative,' allows to track the transformation of Jewish creativity in

different forms and historical contexts, before and after the Shoah, and to rethink from a new perspective the question of representation of absence, memory, and transmission.

Keywords: The Work of the Negative; Franz Kafka; Paul Celan; André Green; Psychoanalysis.

Zusammenfassung

Gegenstand der vorliegenden Dissertation ist die Arbeit des Negativen bei Franz Kafka (1883-1924), Paul Celan (1920-1970) und André Green (1927-2012). Anhand einer interdisziplinären Neubearbeitung von Greens psychoanalytischer Theorie des Negativen, zielt meine Arbeit darauf ab, die Rolle und die Einzigartigkeit des Negativen in den Spätwerken von Franz Kafka und Paul Celan zu erleuchten. Darüber hinaus wird das Negativ als metatheoretisches Kennzeichen analysiert, welches das Denken André Greens durchzieht. Greens Oeuvre stellt daher nicht nur den theoretischen Rahmen meiner Forschung dar. Zusätzlich wird die epistemologische Verknüpfung zwischen Literatur und Psychoanalyse im Schreiben des Autors erörtert, welche sich als ausschlaggebend für die Entwicklung der Theorie „der Arbeit des Negativen“ bei Kafka und bei Celan herausgestellt hat.

Die Kafka- und Celan-Forschung hat sich im Bereich Philosophie, Literaturwissenschaft und Judaistik intensiv mit der Frage nach dem Negativen beschäftigt, welche zum zentralen Thema innerhalb der zeitgenössischen Debatte über die Transformationen jüdischer Kultur und Literatur im 20. Jahrhunderts geworden ist. In diesem Zusammenhang wurde dennoch der spezifische Beitrag der Psychoanalyse bzw. der angewandten Psychoanalyse häufig vernachlässigt. Im Unterschied zu philosophischen, literaturwissenschaftlichen oder theologischen Ansätzen konzeptualisiert Green die Arbeit des Negativen als dynamischen Keim, welcher die Strukturierung der Grenzen der Subjektivität ermöglicht. Solch eine Strukturierung spielt sich in einer untrennbaren Beziehung mit der Andersartigkeit eines verlorenen Objekts ab. Green liefert mit seiner Theorie ein Modell des psychischen Apparats, welches einerseits die inter- und intrapsychische Komplexität und Heterogenität des seelischen Lebens berücksichtigt. Andererseits ist Greens Modell von der unauslöschlichen und ambivalenten Rolle der Grenze gekennzeichnet. Die Grenze ist in diesem Kontext nicht nur als Schutzbarriere der Subjektivität, sondern und vielmehr auch als transformative Übertragungsgebiet zu begreifen. Die Fragestellung, die zugrunde meiner Arbeit liegt, ist, wie solche Dimension der Grenze durch die Sublimation in einen stilistischen Fingerabdruck bzw. in einer Form des Schreibens verwandelt werden kann, wodurch sich die Komplexität der Psyche neu artikuliert. Die Arbeit des Negativen bezeichnet somit die Fähigkeit des

schaffenden Subjekts, sich mit der Abwesenheit und dem Verlust des Objekts durch die Repräsentation auseinanderzusetzen. In diesem Sinne verstehe ich die Arbeit des Negativen bei Kafka und Celan als Rahmenstruktur für die „Darstellung der Abwesenheit von Vorstellung“ („représentation de l'absence de représentation,“ in Greens Formulierung).

Die Dissertation gliedert sich in 3 Kapiteln, die jeweils auf die Theorie Greens aus der Perspektive der Sublimation (Kapitel 1), Kafkas 1924 Sammlung *Ein Hungerkünstler* (Kapitel 2) und Paul Celans' Gedichtsammlungen *Schneepart* (1971) und *Zeitgehöft* (1976) (Kapitel 3) eingehen. Die Untersuchung der „Filiationen des Negativen“ dieser Autoren zeigt die Transformationen der jüdischen Kreativität in verschiedenen Formen und historischen Kontexten, und ermöglicht somit eine neue Betrachtung der Frage nach der Repräsentation der Abwesenheit, des Gedächtnisses und der Transmission.

Schlüsselwörter: Die Arbeit des Negativen; Franz Kafka; Paul Celan; André Green; Psychoanalyse.

Riassunto esteso

Il presente studio indaga la costellazione psicoanalitica del lavoro del Negativo negli scritti di Franz Kafka, Paul Celan e André Green. Rielaborando l'impianto teorico sviluppato dallo psicoanalista ebreo-francese André Green (1927-2012) in studi quali *Narcissisme de vie*, *Narcissisme de mort* (1983), *La déliaison* (1992), e *Le Travail du négatif* (1993) la mia tesi esplora le peculiarità stilistiche e rappresentazionali mediante le quali il Negativo emerge nei testi dei tre autori, ponderandone il portato nel campo dei processi creativi e di un'etica della rappresentazione. Lo studio costituisce un tentativo inedito di estendere e ripensare la teoria di Green nel contesto specifico degli studi letterari su autori ebreo-tedeschi del Novecento. Esso si pone perciò in un territorio intermedio tra diverse discipline quali studi letterari e culturali, studi ebraici e lettura psicoanalitica del testo poetico e letterario.

La mia ricerca non tenta solo di contribuire in modo innovativo alla ricezione delle opere di Kafka e Celan e alla comprensione del ruolo dei loro scritti nel contesto culturale dell'ebraismo del XX secolo, ma punta anche a evidenziare l'importanza degli studi di Green (tutt'ora poco noti al di fuori dell'ambito psicoanalitico) all'interno del dibattito contemporaneo sul Negativo. Inoltre, il proposito del mio lavoro non è circoscritto a mostrare un volto del Negativo fino ad ora non preso in considerazione o recepito dalla ricerca, ma anche di portare alla luce, tra letteratura, psicoanalisi e studi ebraici, una dimensione del Negativo legato alla Shoah e fatto oggetto di rimozione, se non di sconfessione e / o forclusione da parte dell'Occidente.

Ad oggi, le ricerche sul Negativo in Kafka e Celan ne hanno rilevato ricorrenze e peculiarità stilistiche (Georg-Michael Schulz, Malte Kleinwort, Shane Weller), il legame con la matrice ebraica (Harold Bloom, David Meghnagi, Rosalba Maletta), la componente teologico-mistica (Shira Wolosky, Moshé Idel, Michael B. Levine) nonché la rilevanza filosofica e culturale (Theodor W. Adorno, John Zilcosky). Il mio studio amplia lo stato attuale della ricerca costruendo un nuovo percorso di analisi incentrato sul ruolo del lavoro Negativo nelle dinamiche creative e nei processi rappresentazionali.

Per Green la costellazione del lavoro del Negativo definisce la complessità dei meccanismi di difesa, di cui la rimozione (*Verdrängung*) è il prototipo. La teoria di Green considera inoltre le dinamiche della relazione oggettuale, sviluppate soprattutto nel contesto della psicoanalisi britannica, articolando perciò il piano intrapsichico (pulsione) con quello interpsichico (oggetto). Il Negativo va concepito come ciò che si situa ai limiti della rappresentazione psichica – da un lato come effetto dell'inconscio e, dall'altro, come dimensione ineliminabile della distruttività e della pulsione di morte in quanto elemento disorganizzante e destabilizzante. Green è stato in grado di mostrare come tali limiti della rappresentazione possano essere trasformati, proprio grazie al lavoro del Negativo, in un contenitore della complessità dello psichico, delle sue dinamiche di strutturazione e destrutturazione, organizzazione e disorganizzazione. È proprio nell'articolazione di inter- e intrapsichico che il lavoro del Negativo diventa condizione stessa dell'esistenza umana in quanto matrice e motore del funzionamento dell'apparato psichico.

Uno dei quesiti che sta alla base del mio studio è come questo lavoro *del* limite e *al* limite della rappresentazione trapassi nelle dinamiche creative, ossia come i limiti del soggetto si riarticolino attraverso l'atto di scrittura, sia nel senso di un processo di demarcazione, contenimento, soggettivazione (l'unicità dello stile del soggetto che scrive), sia come tentativo di ricucitura di un legame con un'alterità che rappresenta un oggetto irrimediabilmente perduto. Poiché per Green pulsione e oggetto non possono essere pensati separatamente, la strutturazione di un 'contenitore stilistico' (limiti del soggetto) e il tentativo impossibile di ricucitura con la perdita si intrecciano, su molteplici piani, nel lavoro creativo. Letto dalla prospettiva del lavoro del Negativo il processo di scrittura costituisce una struttura inquadrante la *rappresentazione dell'assenza di rappresentazione*, per usare le parole di Green.

L'originalità del pensiero di Green, che io qui traghetto e rielaboro in un continuo confronto con l'unicità testuale di Kafka e di Celan, si esprime, in primo luogo, nella sua irrimediabilità con una negatività filosofica di matrice hegeliana – irrimediabilità che rispecchia, in termini più ampi, quella tra filosofia e psicoanalisi. Per Green, il lavoro del Negativo non è un momento

oppositivo in un processo di presa di coscienza o nel cammino esperienziale (*Erfahrung*) verso un sapere assoluto, ma si presenta come inscindibile dall'inconscio, dalle dinamiche pulsionali (pulsione di morte e Eros) e dalle vicissitudini di queste ultime nel processo di sublimazione, nonché dalla specifica concezione psicoanalitica della relazione oggettuale. Il Negativo, inoltre, proprio poiché inconcepibile senza un "lavoro" dello psichico, si caratterizza come elemento trasformativo in un processo impossibile da concludere, che interessa non solo la soggettività e / o l'oggetto bensì pure la dimensione liminale (quella che, con Winnicott, potremmo chiamare l'area transizionale tra il soggetto e un'alterità che permane irriducibile). A tal proposito, un elemento che metto in rilievo nella teoria di Green, così come nei testi di Kafka e di Celan, è l'importanza della dimensione temporale nei processi creativi: dimensione che non è mai divinabile *a priori* poiché essa inaugura una nuova complessità temporale, da leggersi *a posteriori*, secondo il concetto freudiano di *Nachträglichkeit*.

Va inoltre rilevato che il mio interesse per l'opera di Green supera l'orizzonte esclusivamente teorico. Nel mio lavoro Green rappresenta anche un 'caso studio,' in cui il Negativo emerge come una componente strutturante e organizzatrice di un pensiero, di una modalità di concepire la psicoanalisi e l'umano, dando forma a una tradizione nella reinvenzione che il soggetto articola attraverso la scrittura. Considero dunque l'opera di Green anche nei suoi aspetti più prettamente creativi e 'poietici' come tentativo di delineare una metapsicologia per il Terzo millennio che trova nel lavoro del Negativo il suo asse portante.

La dissertazione è suddivisa in tre capitoli, ciascuno dei quali dedicato all'opera di uno dei tre autori. Il primo capitolo introduce il lettore alla figura e al pensiero di André Green, mettendone in rilievo la peculiarità e l'importanza non solo nella psicoanalisi francese bensì nella sua ricezione internazionale. L'opera di Green ha lasciato un segno indelebile ed è a giusto titolo considerata come la terza grande metapsicologia dopo quella di Sigmund Freud e di Jacques Lacan. In questo capitolo, la costellazione del lavoro del Negativo di Green viene presentata e analizzata dalla prospettiva delle dinamiche di sublimazione e dei processi creativi nella scrittura, secondo il taglio interdisciplinare che caratterizza il mio studio. A un'introduzione generale della teoria del Negativo segue l'analisi dettagliata della nozione di *incréable*, neologismo col quale Green nomina la traccia della relazione corporea con il corpo materno, ossia il nodo affettivo che, nella struttura edipica, sussiste anche dopo la recisione messa in atto dalla figura paterna. Tale traccia corporeo-affettiva, che copre la rimozione primaria (*Urverdrängung*), permane quale nucleo inavvicinabile e oggetto di investimento pulsionale, divenendo, nel processo creativo, il punto centripeto e centrifugo da cui scaturirà

l'opera. L'*incréable* rappresenta dunque quella cesura, quel nocciolo di assenza che costituisce, al contempo, la fonte del processo creativo e il limite ultimo che la creazione non può infrangere senza mettere a repentaglio il potere creativo del soggetto, la vita stessa.

A conclusione di questo capitolo, propongo un'analisi del legame epistemologico tra lo sviluppo del pensiero di Green e i campi del poetico e del letterario. Tali ambiti non rappresentano per Green solo territori di analisi concettuale. Lo 'spazio transizionale' tra psicoanalisi e letteratura incorpora anzi, nella lettura che qui propongo, una riserva affettiva di creatività e significazione che assume nuova forma nell'andirivieni tra *poiesi* e *teoresi*, o meglio, nel processo di trasformazione del 'poietico' all'interno del 'teorico.' Il processo di teorizzazione si dischiude così a una dimensione altra, terza, che non corrisponde alla dicotomia 'sapere' o 'non-sapere.' Essa è piuttosto composta di elementi che resistono nel processo di teorizzazione in quanto 'slegati' dalla catena rappresentazionale e che proprio perciò sono forieri di rivisitazione, riscoperta, risignificazione, 'rilegame.' Questa dimensione 'terza' costituisce, dunque, nella sua forma altalenante, liminale una domanda aperta. Essa sta per qualcosa che non necessita di una risposta immediata, ma che è proprio perciò motore nell'attività psichica. È qui possibile osservare come il lavoro del Negativo emerga nell'opera di Green quale plesso meta-creativo e meta-teorico: filo conduttore della creatività che sfocia nell'articolazione di una modalità di pensiero.

Per comprendere appieno questo elemento nell'opera di Green prendo in esame alcuni saggi cruciali su letteratura e scrittura tratti dalla raccolta *La déliaison*, ove la questione della riappropriazione del testo freudiano emerge in tutta la sua portata innovativa. L'opera di Sigmund Freud si delinea, a sua volta, come traccia di una perdita legata al lutto per la morte del padre della psicoanalisi. In tal senso è proprio il processo di scrittura a aprire uno spazio in cui l'inesauribilità delle possibilità interpretative si intreccia con una dimensione continuamente *in fieri* del soggetto nel suo rapporto con una tradizione da riscoprire e reinventare.

Il secondo capitolo è dedicato all'opera tarda di Franz Kafka (1883-1924), nella fattispecie a tre dei quattro racconti della raccolta *Ein Hungerkünstler (Un artista della fame)*, pubblicata postuma da Max Brod nel 1924 per volontà dell'autore. Ampliando e approfondendo le riflessioni teoriche esposte nel primo capitolo, avanzo qui l'ipotesi secondo la quale lo *Spätwerk* di Kafka possa essere letto come un'opera *della* sublimazione e, al contempo, in termini meta-rappresentazionali, *sulla* sublimazione. Una lettura inedita dei racconti *Eine kleine Frau (Una piccola donna)*, *Ein Hungerkünstler (Un artista della fame)* e *Josefine, die Sängerin oder Das*

Volk der Mäuse (Giuseppina la cantante, ovvero il popolo dei topi) mostra come l'ultima scrittura kafkiana non abbia come protagonista tanto, o non solo, l'artista nel suo rapporto con il pubblico, la società, la vita, il mondo, bensì la questione della rappresentazione e delle sue vicissitudini. *Ein Hungerkünstler* può essere letto pertanto come tentativo di scrivere ciò che resta del corpo nel processo di sublimazione consistente nel dare forma rappresentazionale – nell'accezione della freudiana *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* – alla traccia di un corpo nel suo trasformarsi da *corpo*, appunto, in *corpus*.

Superando i limiti di una tendenza interpretativa incentrata su biografismo, autobiografismo o su aspetti teologici e filosofici della scrittura dell'autore, la mia lettura notomizza differenti stratificazioni di analisi coniugando, da un punto di vista psicoanalitico, la preoccupazione di Kafka per la questione del rapporto con l'ebraismo – su un piano individuale e collettivo – con il problema della perdita delle origini; la questione del corpo e del soggetto, della creazione artistica e della rappresentazione della scrittura. In particolare, l'accostamento inedito dei tre testi in oggetto, di rado letti congiuntamente – soprattutto per ciò che concerne *Eine kleine Frau* – getta nuova luce sull'ultima stagione creativa kafkiana che leggo come scrittura sulla scrittura, sullo scrivere, sui limiti della rappresentazione artistica e letteraria quale impronta digitale del soggetto.

L'ultimo capitolo della tesi prende infine in esame una cernita di liriche tratte dalle due ultime raccolte poetiche di Paul Celan (1920-1970). Alla luce della particolare complessità e della dimensione liminale che questa fase dell'opera poetica di Celan incorpora, l'analisi dei due volumi postumi *Schneepart* (1971, *Parte di neve*) e *Zeitgehöft* (1976, *Dimora del tempo o Vece del tempo*, secondo una traduzione proposta in lingua inglese da Pierre Joris), comporta uno slittamento ulteriore nella mia indagine del Negativo e dell'orizzonte concettuale nella lettura di questi testi. L'opera tarda di Celan viene qui analizzata proponendo un nuovo taglio che, in primo luogo, considera attentamente la questione del narcisismo nel processo creativo e nella sublimazione. Green ha avuto il merito di ripensare la questione del narcisismo alla luce della seconda topica freudiana e della pulsione di morte. Sollecitato dai problemi posti dai nuovi orizzonti della clinica psicoanalitica – in particolare dal confronto con i casi limite dell'analizzabilità (*cas-limites* o casi *borderline*) – Green ha rilevato come a un narcisismo positivo (o di vita), tendente verso 'l'uno' e il mantenimento della barriera protettiva dell'unità psichica, si contrapponga un narcisismo negativo (o di morte), tendente verso la dissoluzione del soggetto, lo 'zero.' La mia lettura non fa tuttavia leva sulla presunta condizione psicologica dell'ultimo Celan – spesso frettolosamente categorizzata come condizione paranoico-

persecutoria – ma indaga, a partire dalla scrittura dell'autore, ciò che resta del soggetto esposto, *con* la poesia e *nella* poesia, alla ferita della Shoah e alle sfide che essa comporta nelle vicissitudini rappresentazionali. Dalla mia lettura emerge come la dimensione di assenza incolmabile, che costituisce il nodo attorno cui si dipana la poesia di Celan, componga, evochi, crei l'oggetto di trasmissione della scrittura nel suo riflettere sui limiti e sulle responsabilità dello scrivere all'indomani della catastrofe voluta e perseguita nel cuore dell'Europa più evoluta e coltivata.

Al centro della poesia di Celan si colloca un corpo a corpo che vede protagonista l'intreccio tra sublimazione e pulsione di morte. La scrittura assume un valore non solo testimoniale, in quanto essa disvela, indica e denuncia, sottoponendolo al giudizio del lettore attento, anche il legame tra processi culturali e distruttività, tendenza all'azzeramento dello psichico e pulsione di morte.

Anche in questo caso, il mio lavoro intende superare i limiti di un certo canone interpretativo del Negativo nella scrittura di Celan, incentrato su aspetti teologici, filosofici o squisitamente stilistici, per indagare in una molteplicità di registri il complesso tessuto rappresentazionale soggiacente all'ultima fase creativa del poeta. Ne emerge un ordito, una tramatura atta a captare i resti di un lutto interminabile e irriducibile al processo di storicizzazione. Tale tessitura orchestra un'aspra critica verso l'atteggiamento di rimozione della Shoah messo in atto dalla cultura occidentale all'indomani del Secondo conflitto mondiale, mostrando come la pulsione di morte non sia un elemento collaterale del processo culturale, ma ne sia parte integrante e costitutiva. In tal senso, al bianco della rimozione e della forclusione, Celan contrappone un altro bianco, ossia quello della *rappresentazione dell'assenza di rappresentazione* quale punto di partenza per interrogare e ripensare le politiche culturali e istituzionali della memoria.

In retrospettiva, la ricostruzione delle vicissitudini rappresentazionali del Negativo in questi tre autori mi ha indotto a formulare il concetto di "filiazioni del Negativo" come titolo della dissertazione. Con tale espressione intendo rendere conto di come l'opera di questi tre autori, dando nuova forma al Negativo in diversi contesti culturali, costituisca non solo un prisma per leggerne l'unicità, ma anche un filo conduttore per rilevare le trasformazioni di una creatività ebraica a confronto con nuove sfide rappresentazionali e circostanze storiche. Queste opere ci invitano dunque a ripensare il problema delle strategie rappresentative dell'assenza e dell'irrepresentabilità in relazione alla questione dell'eredità e della trasmissione.

Parole chiave: Il lavoro del Negativo; Franz Kafka; Paul Celan; André Green; Psicoanalisi.

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I would like to extend my gratitude and appreciation to Ewa for proofreading parts of the manuscript.

Tessa provided indispensable, insightful suggestions to the final draft of the text and took me by the hand in the final stages of this work: from another hemisphere of the world and of the mind,

“Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end where I begun.”

This work is dedicated to my family, who enabled me to escape and become someone else.

La critique de notre époque, si audacieuse qu'elle se veuille, se borne toujours à traiter de l'écrit dans l'espace d'une clôture. Que l'écrit soit refermé sur lui-même dans la perspective intra-textuelle, qu'il soit enclos dans la lettre des textes par l'intertextualité, il y a fermeture sur la vie. Et quand bien même l'ouverture s'élargit jusqu'à accepter de l'inclure, ici encore la clôture se referme sur le passé. L'écrit n'est envisagé que dans une perspective régrédiente, jamais progrédiente. Comme si l'on trouvait décidément trop osé de lui accorder une fonction prémonitrice ou annonciatrice de la vie à venir. Quand un écrit trouve son germe dans un fantasme de la vie qu'on peut même parfois emprunter à un autre, l'écrit devient à son tour fantasme organisateur de la vie à venir. Non de ses événements mais de l'expérience intérieure qui en ordonnera les données.

Si l'écriture donne lieu à la création d'une vie autre par les ressources de la fiction, l'autre vie à laquelle l'écriture aura donné naissance deviendra le temps traumatique dont la vie encore à venir révélera l'effet après coup. L'écriture n'est donc pas seulement la conséquence de ce boulet du passé que l'écrivain traîne péniblement en avançant. L'écrit de fiction sera aussi un écrit d'anticipation sur la vie qui est en devenir et qui deviendra en fonction de cette fiction.

André Green

*die wildernde Überzeugung,
daß dies anders zu sagen sei als
so.*

Paul Celan

INTRODUCTION

Un libro que no encierra su contralibro es considerado incompleto.

Jorge Louis Borges¹

“Il y a quelque temps déjà que le travail du négatif a commencé à faire parler de lui.” “The work of the negative has been a subject of debate for some time now.”² So writes the French-Jewish psychoanalyst André Green (1927-2012), a key figure of contemporary psychoanalysis, at the beginning of his book *Le Travail du négatif*—first published in 1993 in France. Within a time span of almost thirty years, Green’s sentence remains a cogent actuality. With his groundbreaking work, he anticipated a wave of renewed interest for the question of the Negative extending beyond psychoanalysis. Green has expanded the conceptual, theoretical, and clinical horizon of this field of research—indeed inseparable from psychoanalysis—providing new fundamental and insightful perspectives that prosecute and rethink Freud’s work, accompanying psychoanalytic thought into the third millennium.

A remarkable number of international publications have appeared on the topic over the last ten years, confirming the vitality of the contemporary debate on the Negative. Green’s contribution, however, is still widely unknown if not ignored by many scholars from diverse fields of study. In *Die Arbeit des Negativen: Negativität als philosophisch-psychoanalytisches Problem*, a collection of essays of international authors edited by Emil Angehrn and Joachim Küchenhoff,³ published in 2014, Green’s name appears only once (in footnote). In another volume of contributions with the title *Negativität: Kunst, Recht, Politik*⁴ Green is, significantly, not even cited once. Admittedly, that an author, such as Green, is not explicitly mentioned in the scholarly literature does not necessarily mean that his ideas and theories are not the object of a subterranean reception and further development. This, however, does not seem to be the case at all here.

Whereas in the American psychoanalytic sphere the interest in Green’s work continued to grow, even prior to the first edition of *The Work of the Negative* in 1999, and while in Europe, Great Britain, and South America, most notably in Argentina, the importance of his contribution has long been established, his work lacks a proper reception in Germany to this day. The reasons

¹ Jorge L. Borges, *Obras Completas 1923-1972* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1974), 439: “A book which does not contain its counterbook is considered incomplete.”

² Green, TN, 9; WoN 1. For a complete list of abbreviations of the main texts cited in this work the reader may refer to the *Bibliography*.

³ See the introduction to Emil Angehrn und Joachim Küchenhoff (Hrsgg.) *Die Arbeit des Negativen: Negativität als philosophisch-psychoanalytisches Problem* (Weilerswist-Metternich: Velbrück, 2014), fn. 2.

⁴ Thomas Khurana et al. (Hrsgg.) *Negativität. Kunst, Recht, Politik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2018).

for this absence of reception in Germany are multiple, complex, and difficult to summarize. They are arguably intertwined with the vicissitudes of the historical development of psychoanalysis, which after the *Anschluss* of Austria by Nazi Germany in 1938 took the way of the exile towards new countries, idioms, and cultural contexts. Sigmund Freud's hopes of seeing in Carl Gustav Jung the potential symbolic heir of psychoanalysis outside the Jewish context in which the latter had flourished were long vanished, and Jung took a different path that took him far away from Freudian thinking and dangerously close to National socialism.⁵

Following the migration of psychoanalysis from Austria, no intellectual figure embodying the innovative character of the likes of Wilfred Bion, Donald Winnicott, and Jacques Lacan (to name some of the most popular psychoanalysts) can be found in the German speaking context. Freud's legacy, alongside the first kernel of his fellow Jewish pioneers, left German as a foundational language of expression, conceptual invention, and written communication to never return. Following War World Two, especially in countries such as France and England, psychoanalysis has enriched its epistemological, clinical, technical and theoretical horizon, opening to new possibilities, undertaking change, and facing new historical and cultural challenges.

Also in the case in which Green is object of study or research his work on the Negative has been systematically read in relationship with Hegel, or more generally reduced to a philosophical perspective that does no justice to the unicity of his theory.⁶ This is not only a symptom of the resistance that Green's work still faces but also a manifestation of the inadequacies of cultural and intellectual categories characterizing the confrontation with his writings in Germany.

In 2018, Dr. Erwin Kaiser presented a paper at the Karl-Abraham-Institut in Berlin titled "Hinter dem Gesetz. Eine Deutung von Franz Kafkas *Türhüterlegende*,"⁷ an interpretation of Kafka's text *Vor dem Gesetz* advanced with reference to Green's concept of the "dead mother" (*la mère morte*). After the presentation, many questions were posed from the audience, among which one about the reception of Green's theory of the Negative in Germany, and of why Green's *Le Travail du négatif* was still basically unknown in spite of its relevance to German psychoanalysts. The answer left a durable impression on me: "Wahrscheinlich darum, weil

⁵ See David Meghnagi's *Il padre e la legge. Freud e l'ebraismo* (Padova: Marsilio, 2015), 60-73.

⁶ See for instance Charles Mendes de Leon, "Die Arbeit des Negativen und die théorie vivante. André Green zum Gedenken," *Zeitschrift für psychoanalytische Theorie und Praxis*, Ausgabe 2014.1 - Themenheft 'André Green' (Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld Verlag, 2014), 13-27.

⁷ Erwin Kaiser, "Hinter dem Gesetz. Eine Deutung von Franz Kafkas *Türhüterlegende*." (2018) <https://ekaiser.de/kafka-tuerhueterlegende-psychoanalyse/>.

Greens Werk *so philosophisch anspruchsvoll* ist...” “Perhaps because Green’s work is so *philosophically demanding*...”

Green, in continuity with Freud, has never ceased to insist on the specificity of psychoanalysis, particularly the unicity of the psychoanalytic Negative, emphasizing how the latter ought not to be simplified as a derivative of philosophical concepts:

Une hypothèque hégélienne a pesé sur la psychanalyse, qu’il convient de lever. Mais un emprunt terminologique ne saurait à lui seul aliéner un titre de propriété. Celui que rencontre le travail du négatif désigne autre chose que ce dont parle la *Phénoménologie de l’Esprit*. Les psychanalystes peuvent venir au travail du négatif sans que Hegel ait jamais été pour eux l’objet de la moindre réflexion. C’est le cas de la tradition qui règne dans la Société britannique de psychanalyse.⁸

With his research, Green has developed a fruitful dialogue with diverse fields of knowledge but has also expressed harsh criticisms toward the attempt of establishing the foundations of psychoanalysis on other disciplines, such as linguistics, philosophy, or anthropology. For Green, psychoanalysis needed to rediscover the distinctiveness of its own methods, theories, models, practices, and way of thinking. To do so, it was necessary to articulate the gaps between clinical experience and theory, on the one hand, and between Freud’s text and the post-Freudian developments marking the journey of psychoanalysis on the other. In the historical and intellectual context in which Green began working, marked by a deep, melancholic crisis in psychoanalysis, such a need represented the search for a lost origin, an interminable work of mourning.

The lack of reception of Green’s work constitutes a limitation in today’s debate on the Negative and represents what I regard as a closure to new explorative and analytic possibilities. The present work attempts to contribute to the ongoing debate on the question of the Negative through a new interdisciplinary approach combining components of literary text analysis, Jewish studies, and psychoanalysis.

* * *

Within the theoretical framework developed by Green my dissertation investigates the work of the Negative in the writings of two major German-Jewish authors of the 20th century: Franz

⁸ Green, TN, 15; WoN, 4-5: “Psychoanalysis was burdened with its Hegelian antecedents which needed jettisoning. But borrowing terminology is not enough in itself to alienate a title of ownership. Anyone who has come across the work of the negative will have something different in mind from that which is spoken of in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is possible for psychoanalysts to come to the work of the negative without ever having studied Hegel at all. The tradition which prevails in the British Psycho-Analytic Society is a case in point.”

Kafka and Paul Celan—two names for whom the association with the category of negativity is of primary importance.⁹

Providing a new interdisciplinary re-elaboration of Green's theory of the Negative between psychoanalysis, literature, and Jewish studies, my work investigates the role of the Negative in Kafka's and Celan's late writings, aiming at expanding the understanding of their works in the context of 20th century Judaism. Furthermore, it explores Green's theory in a new setting, by rethinking it in the context of contemporary Judaism and literary creativity.

This double movement reflects different layers of analysis intertwining in my work. On the one hand, Green's metapsychology represents the theoretical background of my investigation. From this vantage point, my purpose is to explore the ways wherein features of Green's work of the Negative¹⁰ emerge in the writings of Kafka and Celan according to the specific representational dynamics that characterize their writings.

Green defines the work of the Negative as the ensemble of the psychic operations of which the *Verdrängung* (suppression, or repression) is the prototype; in addition to that, he extends the field of the Negative beyond the drive theory to the question of the object relation. By articulating the gap between the first and the second Freudian topographical models (the latter characterized by the introduction of the death drive), Green was able to offer a theoretical conceptualization of the Negative as matrix of the process of structuring of subjectivity—a process in which intersubjective and intrapsychic dimensions are inseparable.

Green's theory cannot be reduced to a theory of subjectivity but has rather to be envisaged as a *theory of the limit*. The relationship with an otherness (the object) is vital to the constitution of subjectivity, precisely for the persistence of an ineliminable liminal, transitional area of transformation (D. W. Winnicott). The question that leads my work is how the limits of subjectivity are transformed and reorganised through the process of sublimation into a stylistic fingerprint, into a form of writing which is foremost creation of a *subject of writing*—and that by means of an object which is not only the writing itself, but also the process of writing, understood as an object of psychic, affective, and corporeal investments.

⁹ A detailed discussion of the secondary literature on the topic is provided to the reader at the beginning of each of the two chapters devoted to the authors. The *status quaestionis* introducing respectively Kafka's and Celan's chapters evaluates the limits of the existing research and discusses the novelty of my approach. This decision allows me not only to focus on the scholarship of every single author but also to refer case by case to different theoretical and conceptual tools of Green's that I consider more appropriate to explore the stylistic peculiarity of the texts.

¹⁰ In my work, I shall refer to the Negative, with capital letter, in order emphasize the original and specific features of my elaboration, distinguishing it from other forms of negativity tracked in the writings of Kafka and Celan by other scholars.

Green's theory is not simply the primary theoretical source of my investigation. His writing represents also a 'case study.' From this standpoint, my work aims to reconstruct a 'subterranean' link between the three authors, whose peculiar expressive forms (Kafka's prose, Celan's poetry, and Green's psychoanalytic writing) are considered as different elaborations of the work of the Negative. Thereby, I do not intend to suggest that the link between their works ought to be envisaged as a 'chronology' (i.e., in mere terms of 'evolution'). What I mean is rather that the particular forms in which the Negative is at work in the writings of the three authors share a common element consisting in the attempt to give form to a blank, an absence, which lies at the core of the creative process and persists in the texts.

The works of the authors shall be analysed according to three interwoven dimensions. A crucial element of my analysis is the focus on the *representational dynamics* through which the creating subject gives form to writing. The question of representation, to which we shall continuously return, is of crucial importance in order to grasp the complexity of Green's theory as well as the innovative approach that my work puts forward.

For Green, "representation" (*représentation*) can be considered a synonym of the psychic (*psychisme*). We can know the complexity (but *not* the totality) of the psychic activity and mental functioning only inasmuch as the psyche can be grasped through the spectrum of its representational modes and dynamics (starting with the "framing structure of representation" through the negative hallucination of the mother, which for Green is precondition of the hallucinatory wish fulfilment) and its representatives (e.g., the drive, which is in turn a 'representative' of the link between the body and the psyche).¹¹ Green underlines that representation is not confined to the dimension of "sense," but has to be considered in terms of a complex heterogeneity entailing elements such as bodily states, acts, affects, drives, and of course, traces and vestiges of unconscious order. In an interview with Fernando Urribarri, Green affirms how much of his work has been devoted to the extension and re-elaboration of this question, with the aim of developing a psychoanalytic theory of representation:

Je pense que la théorie de la représentation (qui est implicite chez Freud et que j'ai cherché à réélaborer) est absolument fondamentale. / L'existence d'une telle théorie dans mon œuvre est due à l'extension que j'opère sur le champ de la représentation. La représentation est au fond quasi synonyme du psychisme, car telle que je l'entends, elle ne s'arrête pas au domaine du sens mai

¹¹ See also Green KI, 128: "The spectrum of modes of representation that we have defined [i.e., the psychical representative of the drive, thing- or object-representations (unconscious and conscious), word-representations, and the representatives of reality in the ego, implying relations with thought] merely corresponds to the range of psychic manifestations that are connected, on the one hand, with the body, and, on the other with reality and thinking. Going even further, one could conceive of the whole psyche as an *intermediate formation* between soma and thinking."

déborde aussi du côté de la force. (C'est justement ce qui la distingue de la "représentation" de la philosophie ou du signifiant linguistique.) / Avec cet élargissement du champ de la représentation qui fonde ma théorie de la représentation généralisée, je propose que l'on considère les différentes relations de la psyché: avec le corps, avec l'autre-semblable et avec le monde. L'essentiel, c'est qu'à partir de chacune de ces relations, de ces "matériaux," la psyché produira divers types de représentations. Le fonctionnement psychique se définit alors par le travail avec des matériaux hétérogènes. Par conséquent, l'hétérogénéité est la clé de cette réélaboration où la notion de limite acquiert un sens: celui d'un territoire de passage, c'est à dire de transformation.¹²

The issue at hand is how the *heterogeneous relational complexity* of the psyche articulates itself, in its changing plasticity, into linguistic representations by integrating elements which are in fact *not* reducible to a linguistic dimension, and are *otherwise*, i.e., an *alterity* to language. The writing is not only the result of an articulation in different terms of a wide and irreducible array of non-linguistic elements. It is also the embodiment of a liminal dimension, i.e., of irrepresentable aspects which are, as such, not 'external' to the representational process but rather 'unbound' from the representational chain, surviving in the creative act as well as in the text. In psychoanalysis, therefore, the Negative has less to do with a 'dialectic' of consciousness than with another *form of being* irreconcilable with ontology.

By not ceasing to hint at such a heterogeneity characterizing mental functioning, writing shows the transformative capability of the psyche of reinventing itself, of assuming new forms and shapes, of creating objects and investing processes, even creative activities (such as writing itself) and therefore of modifying the 'status' of the writing subject as well as of that object which is the text.

The literary text is as such the outcome of a relentless work of recreation of the complexity of the functioning of the psychic apparatus—a complexity which we may call the 'virtuality' of the psyche in its relationship with the body—towards that form of homogenization, of linearity which is the written language. A homogenization which embodies linguistic and non-linguistic or seemingly a-significant elements. These refer to modes of representation which are 'other' to linguistic signification or sense, and that nonetheless persist as dynamically active, embedded into the fabric of language in the text. Green observes that the complexity of the life

¹² Fernando Urribarri, *Dialoguer avec André Green. La psychanalyse contemporaine, chemin faisant*. Préface de Cláudio L. Eizirik (Paris: Éditions d'Ithaque, 2013), 43: "I think that the theory of representation (which is implicit in Freud and which I tried to re-elaborate) is absolutely crucial. / The existence of such a theory in my work is based on the extension that I propose of the area of the representation. [...] Representation is essentially a synonym of the psychic, because the way I envisage it, that does not confine to the area of the sense but extends beyond it also to the area of force (and it is precisely what it distinguishes it from the 'representation' in philosophy.) / With this extension of the field of representation which lay at the heart of my generalized theory of representation, I propose to consider the different relationships of the psyche, with the body, with the 'seemingly-other' [*autre-semblable*], and with the world. The essential thing to keep in mind, is that from each of these relationships, of these 'materials,' the psyche will create different kinds of representations. The functioning of the psyche is defined therefore by its operating with heterogenic materials. Consequently, the heterogeneity is the key to this re-elaboration of mine, in which the notion of the limit acquires a new sense: that of a territory of crossing, i.e., of transformation."

of the psyche cannot be reduced to a single model. Correspondingly, we can also say that the dynamics of creation and creativity cannot be limited to linguistic models without giving account of the panoply of elements of organization and disorganization that exceed the linear, homogenic logic of language.

Such an insistence on the creating process from a ‘subjective’ point of view cannot be properly addressed if we also fail to consider the historical and cultural context in which Kafka and Celan lived and worked. In this case, my research considers two deeply intertwined historical contexts, namely those of mid-European German speaking Jewry before and after the Shoah.

At the turn of the 20th Century, German speaking Jews in Europe experienced an unprecedented cultural crisis that represented, on the one hand, an outcome of the assimilation process and, on the other, the early stage of a wave of renewal. While in those days German speaking Jews were facing the loss of means of intergenerational cohesion and cultural identification, they were also developing new cultural options to cope with the challenges that assimilation posed to the dynamics of tradition and transmission.¹³

The pivotal issue of cultural and existential survival reached an unparalleled peak in the aftermath of World War Two. The Shoah left an immedicable wound not only in the collective physical and psychic body of Judaism, but also in its representational creativity, challenging the testimonial and memorial force of Jews on a subjective and collective scale. Many of those who survived the annihilation of the concentration camps were bearing the critical task to piece together what had been destroyed, attempting to recreate a channel towards an irremediable loss.

In both contexts, literature for many Jews provided a new peculiar and crucial function. Kafka’s literature can be read in the pre-Shoah context as a struggle for the representation of a loss, of an emptiness at the margins of Judaism.¹⁴ Celan’s writing embodies the attempt to testify for what remains of Judaism ‘under the sign of Auschwitz,’ and to put forward a radical

¹³ See for instance David Meghnagi, “A cultural event within Judaism,” *Freud and Judaism*, ed. by D. Meghnagi (London: Karnac Books 1993), 57-72. Gershom Scholem’s reflection on this topic are as of today of great relevance. See Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis. Selected Essays*, ed. by W. J. Dannhauser (New York: Schocken Books, 1976).

¹⁴ Daniel Weidner, “Jüdisches Gedächtnis, mystische Tradition und moderne Literatur. Walter Benjamin und Gershom Scholem deuten Kafka,” *Weimarer Beiträge*, 46 (2000), 234-249.

questioning of the cultural dynamics that made the concentration camps possible at the heart of Europe.¹⁵

This aspect of my research thus suggests a reading of Kafka's and Celan's writings as intergenerational and transgenerational resources not only to articulate the laceration of traditional transmission dynamics, but also to attempt to reinvent a form of transmission, voicing the work of mourning for a people, for a world. Their poetic efforts represent a new vital attempt to shape an ethics of literature before and after the Shoah, bearing testimony for the Jewish condition in times of cultural struggle and existential tragedy.

Kafka's and Celan's representational strategies shape a new way of articulating a relationship with transmission, to interact with a tradition *in absentia*, and to reinvent it by means of writing. The study of Green's work of the Negative and its further development in the field of 20th century German-Jewish literature thus opens a new way to reconsider the question of Jewish transmission and cultural filiation through writing.

To these two layers of analysis, we must add a further element informing my work: the 'meta-representational' dimension of the creative process. This allows me to highlight how the writings of the three authors can be read as an endeavour to reflect through the creative process upon the dynamics that shape the *Kulturarbeit*. It is important to stress how that goes beyond a simply "meta-literary" concern, pertaining less to literature *per se* than to literary writing as an expression of the work of the unconscious, in its organising and disorganising, structuring and destructuring motions. The place of the Negative is, also in this case, absolutely crucial. If as Green has shown, the death drive is not only an antagonist of Eros, but also intertwines with the latter in the process of sublimation, the works of these three authors can be read as a meditation on the role of destructivity in cultural dynamics, in a critical confrontation with their historical context.

Such a 'meta-representational' dimension cannot be confined to an authorial awareness of political, social or cultural issues, nor to a conscious cultural-critical engagement. It has to be read according to that other form of temporality with is the *après-coup*, what Freud called *Nachträglichkeit*. This does not mean that Kafka, Celan, and Green were detached from the cogent themes of their time and did not share a deep concern as for the question of destructivity in culture and civilization—quite the contrary actually. My focus here is another one. What interests me is the way in which the Negative at work in the creative process allowed these three

¹⁵ Rosalba Maletta, "Paul Celan: poesia come resilienza. *Francoforte, Settembre: 'Un sogno di maggiolini,'*" *La parola in udienza. Paul Celan e George Steiner*, ed. by S. Raimondi and G. Scaramuzza, *Quaderni di Materiali di estetica* 6 (Milano: CUEM, 2008), 31-106.

authors to reflect upon the process of sublimation itself as outcome of the work of the psyche in a continuous transformation of the drive towards other goals and purposes. The creative work of the unconscious, as such, implies a social and cultural component. Sublimation puts in a deep relationship and on different registers the individual and the collective unconscious, reopening the critical question of the possibility of a social bond based on an ethics of literature.

The imbrication of these three dimensions characterizes what I shall call “filiations of the Negative.” With the term ‘filiation,’ psychoanalytical literature understands the creative link which an author establishes with another author, with an intellectual or theoretical lineage or with a chain of tradition. It is a notion that, nonetheless, does not coincide with the idea of a school. Instead, it describes the endeavour of the subject of reinventing a tradition through a relationship which, in turn, informs the subject itself of tradition.

By filiation, furthermore, I do not simply mean the relationship that the author establishes with the past history of the discipline, with a tradition of thinking or, as in the case of Kafka and Celan, with literary traditions. ‘Filiation’ marks the biological, corporeal root of a work of the psyche in the journey towards the creation of a work which is unique inasmuch as it transforms our view of the world. It is in this sense, that the idea of a “filiation of the Negative” acquires a peculiar role in my research: “filiation” defines the ‘genetic’ endeavour of an author to leave, beyond the limits of life, a mark in the world through the fingerprint of writing, and thereby to show unprecedented aspects of the work of the Negative.

Kafka, Celan, and Green are creators of new ways of representation of the Negative. And as representatives of the Negative they create a new relationship with time and temporality, in that they become at once father, mother, and child of a writing, allowing us to see them in the process of (re)discovering, (re)inventing themselves as subjects in a chain of tradition that they contributed to creating. The Negative represents in my work a prism to read the uniqueness of these authors, as well as the thread of a Jewish creativity in transformation, coping with new representational challenges in different forms and historical circumstances. It is in this sense that, in the process of sublimation “genetic,” “generational,” and “genealogical” converge.

* * *

These remarks allow me to return to André Green’s theoretical contribution, and to highlight how his work represents a decisive, original element for my research. Green is a focal point of my research for two reasons in connection to both psychoanalysis and literature. From a

psychoanalytical vantage point Green's work offers a heterogeneous interpretational matrix beyond the stagnating categorization of the Negative from a "mystical," "theological," and "philosophical" perspective. Green's Negative allows a multi-layered exploration of the subjective stylistic representational dynamics of absence and their reverberations on an inter-/intra-subjective as well as collective dimension. In psychoanalysis, the foundation of negativity embraces the effects of absence, non-presence, and loss of the object. Negativity is therefore not a dialectical position or a moment of consciousness in the process of self-perception. It is based on the capacity of the psyche to respond to absence through the act of representation on a structural and organisational level. It therefore pertains to the limits of the subject in the relationship with the otherness of the object. The Negative must be considered not only as a destructive element, but also as a creative one. For Kafka and Celan, as I suggest, such creative-structuring element—which represents the innovative core of Green's Negative—is articulated by writing. Writing embodies that liminal space in which the work of the Negative intertwines with the dynamics of sublimation.

Consequently, Green's importance locates in a shift towards the study of poetic and literary representational constellations. Here the work of the Negative emerges as a stylistic framing structure for the 'representation of the absence of representation.' A framing structure that bears thus an active, dynamic, and creative power. Green's theoretical contribution allows to reconsider Jewish creative capability in literature from the perspective of a work of stylistic invention which copes with and reflects on absence, developing representational strategies that go at once beyond the text and the here and now of the creative act, reaching out to past and future generations.

Three main chapters compose my work, each one devoted to the study of an author. In the first chapter I present and analyse Green's theory of the Negative by focusing on the process of sublimation and creativity in writing. I shall particularly refer to Green's concept of *incr able* (which we could translate with the term *uncreatable*) and tackle the epistemological reverberations of such a concept in his theory, thus highlighting the importance of Green's psychoanalytic investigation of literary and poetic texts for the development of his theory. The chapter is introduced by a biographical sketch which provides an overview of the crucial landmarks of Green's life and work. It puts his thinking in the historical context of an international debate regarding the epistemological horizon of psychoanalysis, highlighting the novelty of his way of thinking, as well as the human and intellectual relationships he established throughout his life.

In the second chapter, my analysis focuses on Franz Kafka's collection *Ein Hungerkünstler* (*A Hunger Artist*), published in 1924 by Max Brod with the authorisation of the author. I shall consider in particular three texts of this collection, which have seldomly been read together: *Eine kleine Frau* (*A little Woman*), *Ein Hungerkünstler* (*A Hunger Artist*), and *Josefine, die Sängerin, oder das Volk der Mäuse* (*Josefine, the Singer, or the Mouse-Folk*). In this chapter, I will show how Kafka's late work can be read not only as an outcome of sublimation, but also as a work upon sublimation. I shall therefore highlight the meta-representational dimension of his work in relationship with the historical and cultural context in which he created. From this point of view, Kafka's *Ein Hungerkünstler* represents the meta-representational invention of a journey towards sublimation, a 'narration' of the vicissitudes of representation itself through sublimation and the work of writing.

The third chapter offers a close reading of the work of the Negative in Paul Celan's late poetry. I shall tackle a selection of poems composed between the years 1967-1970 from the posthumously published collections *Schneepart* (*Snowpart*, 1971), and *Zeitgehöft* (*Timestead*, 1976). In Celan's poetry, the Negative acquires a new specificity, which cannot be separated from the tragic loss of an entire world. Celan's poetry doesn't limit to bear witness for something which is 'unsayable,' or 'nicht mitteilbar.' Transcending forms of language scepticism characterizing modernism and late modernism, the Negative becomes in Celan's writing the matrix of a work of critical interrogation of sublimation, indeed a wrestling with the death drive in its being intimately intertwined with sublimation itself.

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Note to the text:

The present work is the outcome of a field of tension created by four languages: my mother tongue, Italian; the language in which the work was developed and written, English, and the two languages in which the primary sources were analysed and explored, German and French. For this reason, I considered of primary importance to quote the texts, whenever possible, in the original language, providing my translation in the footnotes. References to other English translation are mentioned in footnotes.

CHAPTER 1

ANDRÉ GREEN'S WORK OF THE NEGATIVE BETWEEN PSYCHOANALYSIS AND LITERATURE

1.1 A Sketch of an Intellectual Biography

This chapter explores André Green's theory of the Negative from the point of view of the dynamics of sublimation. More specifically, I shall focus on an "exceptional destiny"¹⁶ of sublimation: the representational processes of literary writing. In this regard, the chapter offers a theoretical background (or better, a *structure encadrante*) essential for a more detailed study of the work of the Negative in the writings of Franz Kafka and Paul Celan. Furthermore, it attempts for the first time an exploration of the development of the theory of the Negative in André Green's own work from a metatheoretical, or rather metarepresentational perspective, by drawing particular attention to its imbrications with literature and literary creativity.

In what follows, I shall sketch a biography of André Green, with the aim to carve, at least, a contextual '*bas-relief*' of his life and work. The importance of such an overview is motivated not only by the need to offer a concise and necessarily selective presentation of an author who, in spite of his importance, is still quite unknown outside the domain of psychoanalytic literature and clinical research. A presentation of the very theory of the Negative cannot be considered satisfactory without a brief reconstruction of Green's intellectual adventure. To do so, I shall highlight a series of crucial moments or stages in his life by putting them in relationship with his theoretical developments and with some of the great themes of his work.¹⁷

Although from a certain point of view André Green's intellectual origins may arguably be situated in the continental European culture, and especially in the lively French cultural milieu in the aftermath of World War Two, his childhood and adolescence take us back to the Mediterranean Sea, notably to the northern coasts of Africa. Not unlike another major thinker

¹⁶ Green, D, 315.

¹⁷ The most significant sources for this bio-sketch are the following: François Duparc, *André Green* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996); the introduction to the volume André Green, *Geheime Verrücktheit. Grenzfälle der psychoanalytischen Praxis*, Hrsg. und übersetzt von E. Wolff (Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2000), 9-15; André Green, *Associations (presque) libres d'un psychanalyste*. Entretiens avec Maurice Corcos, avec la participation d'Alejandro Rojas-Urrego (Paris: Albin Michel, 2006); Louis Scuderi, *The Work of André Green: An Introduction*, Master Thesis (Smith College, Northampton, MA., 2015), <https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses/661>.

of the 20th Century, Jackie Derrida,¹⁸ Green is heir of a certain form of cultural colonialism in which French culture locates at the crossroad between heterogeneous linguistic and intellectual influences. This element allows us already to establish an interesting link between Green, Kafka, and Celan. Their lives are not only characterized by being at the crossroads of different linguistic and cultural spheres. Their creative and intellectual development is marked by a complex relationship with a “mother tongue” which is strangely present, quotidian, and at the same time meaningful testimony of an ‘elsewhere.’ For different reasons and responding to different existential and representational challenges, Kafka and Celan found in the German language the ‘mother tongue’ of their literary expression. André Green saw in France his “country of election,” and through his precocious fascination with French language and culture he would develop his intellectual interests.¹⁹ The three of them are thus united by this crucial element: the formation of a creative idiolect in and through their work has to be understood from the angle of a complex relationship with a cultural and, most importantly, linguistic otherness. For them, as well as for many other authors and intellectuals of Jewish origin, such aspect characterized their personal way of living and inhabiting the dimension of the Jewish diaspora. In this sense, each of them represented in a very specific and peculiar way a “borderline” case of a certain development of Judaism in the 20th Century. This liminal dimension is engraved in their works: it fuels their creative endeavour, the vital questions driving their writings, and the style in which those questions were shaped.

André Green was born on March 12, 1927, to a family of Sephardic descent in Cairo, Egypt. The mother was of Spanish origin, the father Portuguese. The youngest child of four, born fifteen years after his first sister, Green grew up in a progressive and cosmopolitan environment animated by different cultural and linguistic influences, such as Arabic, English, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Armenian, Greek ones. French remained the language of domestic all day life as well as of the Jewish community in which Green grew up: the idiom of his formative years and the tongue of a “myth of the origin” yet to be written.²⁰ He studied at the *Lycée Français* in Cairo, where he admittedly did not have any significant encounter with a “maitre à penser.”²¹ Such life-changing encounters would come later on in Green’s life. However, one significant

¹⁸ We shall not be able to explore in further details the relationship between Jacques Derrida and André Green: a relationship that albeit apparently subterranean, reveals indeed a rich cultural exchange between the authors. To give the reader a hint of the importance of the relationship between the two, let us just mention that one of the most important texts written by Derrida during the Sixties, *Freud et la scène de l’écriture*, was the fragment of a conference presented at the *Institut de psychanalyse* in occasion of a seminar hosted by André Green. See Jacques Derrida, *L’écriture et la différence* (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1967), 293.

¹⁹ Green, *Associations (presque) libres*, 23-49.

²⁰ Green, *Associations (presque) libres*, 44-45.

²¹ Ivi, 44.

experience that no doubt determined the course of his teenage years was the encounter with the world of theatre. It represented, in fact, the beginning of a passion that would last throughout his life: first as an amateur actor in his adolescence, as spectator and, later on, as a perceptive reader and commentator of theatrical texts. Two important works on theatre, *Un œil en trop* and *Hamlet et Hamlet*,²² are noteworthy examples of how such a passion evolved and, in *après-coup*, acquired importance for Green foremost on a theoretical, metapsychological level.

His early years of life were marked by a series of difficult circumstances, one of which being the mortal illness of his first sister, who was hospitalised for four years in France due to bone tuberculosis. As a child, André had repeatedly visited France, accompanying his family, and especially the mother attending to the oldest daughter. The prolonged stays in France would represent, according to Green, one of the causes that led his father (who died in 1941, when Green was fourteen) to bankruptcy, as the latter was not seldomly forced to neglect his work in Egypt while traveling back and forth from Cairo to France.²³ Moreover, when André was only two years old, his mother suffered a severe depression due to the loss of her own sister in an accident, in which she was burnt alive. This depressive condition gravely incapacitated Green's mother to devote the proper attention to his youngest son. Green would retrospectively detect in this condition of "psychological absence,"²⁴ and in the resonances that the depression of the mother had on his own childhood, the affective root of what he would later describe in clinical terms as "the dead mother complex."²⁵

I shall not explore this concept in detail here. I only limit myself to highlight that "the dead mother complex" situates for Green at the crossroad between at least two important dimensions: on the one hand, the wider theoretical context of the Negative, particularly in relationship with the problem of emptiness and blankness in psychic structuring and functioning, and with the question of affect on the other hand.²⁶ With the concept of "la mère morte" Green refers to a dramatic mutation in the imago of the mother, perceived from the child as catastrophic, which is not caused by an actual physical death of the parent. It rather describes a form of depression—revealed during the analysis by the transfer—occurring in the presence of the object. In other words, that "living object," that "source of vitality for the child," which the mother embodies, is transformed "into a distant figure, toneless, practically inanimate, deeply impregnating the

²² André Green. *Un œil en trop; le complexe d'Œdipe dans la tragédie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1969); Id., *Hamlet et Hamlet: Une interprétation psychanalytique de la Tragédie* (Paris: Balland, 1982).

²³ Other commentators also see in the travels between Egypt and Europe one of the early sources of the fascination that Green would develop towards the French language and culture. See for instance Duparc, *André Green*, 6-8.

²⁴ Scuderi, *The Work of André Green*, 2.

²⁵ Duparc, *André Green*, 9. Green, N, 247-283; LN, 170-200.

²⁶ Green admittedly connects his general interest for the question of affect with his own relationship with the motherly figure. See Duparc, *André Green*, 9.

cathexes of certain patients [...] and weighing on the destiny of their object-libidinal and narcissistic future.” The dead mother, continues Green, “is a mother who remains alive but who is, so to speak, psychically dead in the eyes of the young child in her care.”²⁷

Given this definition in a nutshell, what is to be noted here is that by analysing how the author retrospectively confronts himself with past experiences in his life in connection with crucial development both in his clinical experience and theoretical developments, we can already grasp a feature of what psychoanalysis shall be for Green. In continuity with Freud, psychoanalysis is for Green not *Weltanschauung*, but rather *a mode of organisation of thinking* operating, as in this very case, beyond the intelligibility of immediate events and contingencies. To be more precise, it should be envisaged in terms of a *forma mentis*, an associative framing structure underlining the capability of the subject to create new constructions of sense and insights through the continuous confrontation with those traces and vicissitudes—and their retrospective reading—which would have allowed the subject, in *après-coup*, to become such.

Albeit the major turning points of his intellectual life would take place only after moving to Paris, a further crucial encounter, along with that with theatre, marked Green’s last years in Egypt: the first reading of the Freud’s work. In 1945, age eighteen, Green met a junior philosophy teacher of the *Lycée Français*, Lydia Harari—who would later become a member of the Parisian Psychoanalytical Society (SPP).²⁸ It was Harari who offered him private lessons and introduced the young student not only to the work of French intellectuals such as André Breton, but foremost to Freud’s *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*.²⁹

After completing his *baccalauréat* and preparing the “Certificat d’études physiques, chimiques et biologiques” (PCB), one year after the encounter with Harari and with Freud’s work, Green would permanently leave Egypt to pursue his studies in medicine in Paris. His mother died three years thereafter. While Egypt surely represented the maternal, sensorial country of his childhood and adolescence—a land for which he would nonetheless nourish ambivalent feelings, associating it for many years with a sort of ‘captivity’—the actual emigration to France represented all but an ‘exodus’ towards the ‘promised land’ of his imaginary.³⁰ At least during the first years after settling in Paris, Green struggled with solitude. According to Duparc, it was also during the first years in Paris that Green experienced first-

²⁷ Green, LN, 170; N, 247.

²⁸ Duparc, *André Green*, 9. For the rest of his life, Green would feel a sense of gratitude towards Lydia Harari, as suggested by the obituary that he wrote for her in 1991. See André Green, “Nécrologie: Lydia Harari (1991),” *Bulletin de la Société Psychanalytique de Paris* (n° 22, 1991), 140.

²⁹ Green arguably first read Freud’s *Vorlesungen* in the French translation by Samuel Jankélévitch published in 1921 for the Parisian publishing house Payot.

³⁰ Duparc, *André Green*, 10-11.

hand antisemitism, to which he was apparently never exposed before while living in Egypt.³¹ This is however rather unlikely. It was perhaps the lack of protective elements such as familial closeness, friendships, and affective points of reference that exacerbated for Green the impact of antisemitic discrimination in Paris, at least during those first years after his arrival in France.

Green preferred medicine to philosophical studies exclusively for practical and financial reasons. The development of a strong interest in psychiatry, however, allowed him to join his curiosity for the functioning of the human mind, both from a medical perspective as well as from the point of view of the so called ‘human sciences.’³² He eventually concluded his studies and begun an internship in 1953, a year of capital importance for the history of psychiatry, no less than for Green’s own personal history.

Green would later on look back at 1953 as “l’année de ma naissance,” “the year of my birth.”³³ Indeed, from a personal point of view, the years of his psychiatric training, and most notably the residency at the Sainte-Anne Hospital in Paris, represented for him the encounter with the *insurmountable opacity* of mental illness. If the confrontation with patients ‘at the limit of analysability’ would surely reveal itself crucial as Green will tackle the new challenges of the treatment of psychosis and border-line cases [cas-limites] from a psychoanalytic standpoint, such element of insurmountable opacity shall also inform the development of his conception of language. It must also be clarified here that, for Green the veritable object of interest of the psychoanalytic discourse—of the analytical practice no less than the theoretical conceptualization—is not quite language, but rather that which is ‘other’ than language, that which is not reducible to language: the drive [la pulsion]. How is one supposed to make sense of the apparently senseless discourse of the psychotic? How is it possible to make sense of the language of a subject whose thinking processes are attacked in such a radical, destructive way by the drive?³⁴ On this point, it is worth reading an insightful reflection by Green, which reveals

³¹ Duparc, *André Green*, 11.

³² With regards to medical training, Green would often insist on the singularity of his research itinerary and of psychoanalysis in general, stressing how the tasks and the area of investigation of the latter cannot be reduced to “principles and techniques from medicine or the natural sciences.” (Scuderi, *The Work of André Green*, 3). Psychoanalysis develops for Green a third specific way. In an interview, he would affirm: “Even now I regret and deplore that a young man who wants to become involved in the psychical field – either is a psychiatrist or psychoanalyst – must train in medicine. Medical training is probably one of the best ways to obscure the mind.” Quoted in Scuderi, *ibid.*

³³ See Green, *Associations (presque) libres*, 29.

³⁴ See Green, PP, 136: “‘Comment le langage peut-il donner accès au langage de l’au-delà du langage?’ N’avons-nous pour réponse que des raisons? Selon Wittgenstein : ‘Ce dont on ne peut parler, il faut le taire.’ Il y a beaucoup de facilité à adopter cela, à quoi Charcot avait déjà répondu : ‘Ça n’empêche pas d’exister.’ / Prenons un exemple. Écoutons un discours psychotique. Et de là, comparons les divers discours non psychotiques qu’on lui oppose pour en saisir le sens. À moins de décréter que ce discours n’a aucun sens, les autres discours ne s’avèrent pas capables d’offrir une traduction acceptable de ce que dit le psychotique. Ni le psychiatre, ni le phénoménologue, ni le cognitivo-comportementaliste ne nous donneront une idée de la langue que parle ce patient et dont nous ignorons la grammaire.” “‘How can language give access to the language of what is beyond language?’ Don’t we have but

at once, in all its complexity, the legacy of his psychiatric training, as well as the capital role which the latter would play in his later conception of psychoanalysis. Looking back at his years of apprenticeship in a text from 2007, Green writes, with passionate tones:

Il n'est peut-être pas indifférent d'avoir été psychiatre ou de ne pas l'avoir été. D'avoir côtoyé l'horreur indéniable de la maladie mentale et de ses prétendus asiles. Un psychiatre ne l'oublie jamais mais celui qui ne l'a pas connu ne peut pas s'en souvenir. Qui n'a pas vu un malade mentale enfermé pendant les douze mois de l'année dans une cellule – c'est ainsi qu'on nommait leur chambres – d'où tout meuble avait été retiré parce qu'il aurait été automatiquement réduit en pièces et dont le lit était limité à une armature métallique indestructible, tourner dans cet espace comme un lion en cage, qu'il vente ou qu'il neige, en hurlant pendant des jours et des jours, ne recevant sa nourriture qu'à travers un guichet et qu'aucun soignant ne pouvait s'autoriser à approcher ni à lui parler car il aurait été agressé avant même d'avoir eu le temps d'ouvrir la bouche. Je le sais d'expérience. Qui ne sait pas ce que c'est que d'être dément, au sens d'une psychose destructrice, devait tourner sa langue dans sa bouche sept fois avant d'émettre le moindre jugement. Mais enfin, qu'est-ce que cela a de commun avec mes patients en analyse? Rien et tout. Ça n'empêche pas des analyses sur les tragiques. Terrorisme psychiatrique ou terrorisme culturel? Terrorisme de la destructivité en acte.³⁵

Green began his residency at the Sainte-Anne Hospital one year after that Jean Delay and Philipp Deniker experimented the chemotherapeutic use of chlorpromazine (synthesised in 1951 by Paul Charpentier, and most commonly known as Largactil). The introduction of chlorpromazine—the first antipsychotic medication—in the treatment of mental illness represented a revolution in a medical environment dominated by the neuro-chirurgical praxis of lobotomy. Green enters the world of psychiatry while it is in a moment of deep transformation, caught in a tension between new tendencies and ideas and the heavy anchor of old views and practices.³⁶

arguments for an answer? / Don't we have good arguments to attempt an answer? According to Wittgenstein: "That which cannot be said, one must be silent thereof." It is a whole lot easier to adopt this approach, to which Charcot already answered: "But that does not prevent from existing." / Let us take an example. We listen to the discourse of a psychotic. Starting from that, let us compare the different non-psychotic discourses that we can juxtapose to it in order to grasp its sense. Unless we decree that such discourse has no sense, the other discourses would fail to offer an acceptable translation of what the psychotic is saying. Neither the psychiatrist, nor the phenomenologist, nor the cognitive-behaviourist would be able to give us an idea of the language that this patient is speaking, and the grammar of which we ignore."

³⁵ Green, PP, 138: "It is perhaps not irrelevant the fact of having been a psychiatrist or not. Of having been so close to the undeniable horror of mental illness and of their so called asylums. A psychiatrist never forgets it but those who have never experienced it cannot remember it. Those who have never see a mentally ill person locked up throughout the twelve months of the year into a cell – thus are called their rooms – in which every piece of furniture has been taken away because it would have been automatically turned into pieces, and in which the bed was simply an indestructible metallic frame, pacing in circles in that space like a lion in cage, come rain or shine, screaming for days and days, not receiving any food but through a tiny window; without that anybody could even dream of approaching or speaking to him or her, because in that case one would have immediately been attacked before having the chance to speak. Those who do not know what it means to be demented, in the sense of being affected by a destructive psychosis, should think ten times before opening their mouth and to utter any judgement whatsoever. But in the end, what does all that have in common with my patients in analysis? Nothing and everything. That doesn't prevent the analyses to have tragic results. Is that psychiatric terrorism or cultural terrorism? It is the terrorism of actual destructivity."

³⁶ Looking back at those years, Green commented: "Je suis né à la psychiatrie à une date historique. En 1953, année de la découverte des neuroleptiques, j'ai été nommé à l'internat. J'ai donc vu coexister pendant mes années de formation une vieille psychiatrie, qui n'osait pas utiliser les neuroleptiques, et une psychiatrie d'avant-garde

In fact, a double movement of secession characterized the cultural *milieu* at the clinic Sainte-Anne, concerning not only psychiatry, but also psychoanalysis. While the revolution set into motion by the introduction of neuroleptic medications pushed psychiatry towards new frontiers and the progressive medicalisation of the field—still not with unproblematic outcomes—³⁷ the year 1953 also marks a split within the SPP, the Parisian Psychoanalytic Society (which was founded before the Second World War, in 1926, by Marie Bonaparte and others with the endorsement of Sigmund Freud).³⁸

In this context, Green was particularly close to Henri Ey, an eclectic personality and one of the leading figures of the Hôpital Sainte-Anne.³⁹ Ey embodied with his work, his cultural activities, and his intellectual spirit a new form of psychiatry which was not only critically acquiring a new awareness of its means, instruments, techniques, but was also open to ideas and contributions converging from different fields of study and research such as anthropology, literature, sociology, philosophy, and neurophysiology. In Henry Ey, Green saw one of the most inspiring models of his intellectual life: he was deeply influenced by his vision of a psychiatrist who was not only an excellent and prepared expert, but also a passionate humanist.

Green's relationship with the Sainte-Anne Hospital was no less important also on another account. At this stage of his life and training, Green had not only the chance to get in contact with the most brilliant minds of the time, while working at the forefront of new significant trends in psychiatry and psychoanalysis in France (such as the psychosomatic medicine, psychopharmacology, and neurology, for example). Green was able to relativise the plethora of different positions, influences, and theoretical contributions, and to establish a critical relationship with a complexity of perspectives. In such an intellectual attitude we can recognize

qui le faisait empiriquement, plus ou moins à l'aveugle." Green, *Associations (presque) libres*, 29-30: "I entered the field of psychiatry at an historical date. I started my residency in 1953, the year of the discovery of the neuroleptics. During my formative years I saw coexisting an old psychiatry, which did not dare to make use of the neuroleptics, and an avant-garde psychiatry which did it empirically, more or less blindly."

³⁷ See Green, *Associations (presque) libres*, 29-30.

³⁸ We cannot enter into details as to the reasons that led to the scission and to the subsequent foundation of a new psychoanalytic society, the "Société Française de Psychanalyse" (SFP). We can say that the most important debates that animated the SPP, and especially that between Daniel Lagache and Sasha Nacht, may be read in the wider context of the epistemological, didactical, and technical transformation of psychoanalysis in a crucial historical and cultural turn. While in this clash of ideas Lagache represented an integrative and interdisciplinary approach to psychoanalysis, Nacht defended the idea of a medically influenced approach to the practice. See Scuderi, *The Work of André Green*, 4.

³⁹ Thus Duparc in *André Green*, 13-14, describes the "unique character" of the Sainte-Anne: "[it was] not only a hospital, but a space of encounter, a breeding ground [vivier] of researchers and leading figures who could find a certain freedom in comparison to the usual standards of the institutions of the time: it was animated by an atypical, multidisciplinary leadership (such as Ajuriaguerra), or who welcomed researchers of different fields (neurologists, neurobiologists, but also psychologists, anthropologists, psychoanalysts); a faculty clinic in which a numerous personnel was devoted to a small number of patients, and an exceptional chief librarian, Henri Ey, leader of an unconventional clinical service, who organised courses and debates of high level. It was in such a place that, in the course of free and lively intellectual exchanges, [Green] would have met the majority of those who facilitated the development of his psychiatric and psychoanalytic thought."

the seed of what Green would later call the “contemporary paradigm.” In its evolving “from an adjective to a concept, from a question to a project, from an issue to a key idea for a new paradigm,”⁴⁰ the notion of the “contemporary” is linked to an historical conceptualization of the evolution and mutations in psychoanalysis.⁴¹ It expresses the capability of enduring plurality, of conceiving the complexity of different views and theories within psychoanalysis, without falling into the impasse of an aspect that often characterized post-Freudian schools: militant dogmatism. It is indeed precisely starting from the gaps between the Freudian work and the different subsequent contributions that, for Green, a new fruitful theoretical and clinical space of resignification can be opened. The construction of such a contemporary matrix, as we will see, is intertwined with an operation of reacquisition of the Freudian textuality. Green envisages psychoanalysis not only as a corpus of clashing ideas, but as a living knowledge that has to rediscover its roots in a critical relationship with the Freudian text, in tension with the different post-Freudian legacies and interpretations, as well as with the epistemological horizons that made them possible.⁴²

Among the personalities that Green met at Sainte-Anne, Jacques Lacan surely stood out as one of the most charismatic figures of the intellectual *milieu* of those years. From 1953 onwards, Lacan’s seminars took place at the Hôpital Sainte-Anne, attracting a heterogeneous and growing audience of fellow psychoanalysts and psychiatrists, intellectuals, philosophers, writers, poets, literary critics. Lacan’s teachings created a stimulating debate, resonating far beyond the specialistic field, and left an indelible mark on the cultural landscape of the time for the decades to follow.

One of the defining moments of Green’s relationship with Lacan occurred during the Bonneval Conference, organised by Henri Ey in 1960. In that occasion, for the first time members of the two societies met and discussed after the internal split that took place in the French psychoanalytical movement in 1953. The quality of the papers presented by Lacan’s followers, especially by Laplanche and Leclaire, deeply impressed Green, who finally accepted to engage first hand with Lacan’s teachings by attending his seminars.

⁴⁰ Gregorio Kohon and Rosine J. Perelberg, (Eds.) *The Greening of Psychoanalysis: André Green’s New Paradigm in Contemporary Theory and Practice* (London: Karnac Books, 2017), 137.

⁴¹ Urribarri, *Dialoguer avec André Green*, 75.

⁴² Urribarri, in his paper “On clinical thinking: the extension of the psychoanalytic field towards a new contemporary paradigm,” Kohon and Perelberg (Eds.), *The Greening of Psychoanalysis*, 134, writes: “Green’s epistemological engine is fuelled by the irreducible but fertile gap between Freudian foundations and the challenges of psychoanalytic practice with non-neurotic patients. According to Green, the contemporary project of building a new paradigm is very different from, and is in fact opposed to, the construction of yet another post-Freudian school or discourse. The contemporary project is a research programme, and André Green viewed his own work [...] as an important contribution to the foundations of a new contemporary paradigm: a new Freudian matrix, pluralist, extended, and complex.”

In spite of his closeness to Lacan, the interest for his theories, and the direct participation to his seminars for a time span of seven years, Green did not give up his critical openness, as well as his loyalty to a pluralist vision of psychoanalysis. In this respect, Green had a privileged position in Lacan's *entourage*. By remaining a member of the SPP while attending the seminars, and by refusing to actively join Lacan's school, Green aimed to protect his intellectual freedom in front of the dangers of dogmatism, authoritarianism, against the intellectual seduction that Lacan was capable of.

It is also no accident that Green—notably with the encouragement of Julian de Ajuriaguerra, another important influence in Green's training years—decided to begin his training analysis with Maurice Bouvet in 1956, instead of opting for Lacan himself. Bouvet, who became in that year the president of the Parisian Psychoanalytic Society, was, according to Green, the “only analyst capable of standing up to Lacan within the SPP.” Green's decision of beginning his training analysis with Bouvet is an important signal of his intellectual independence. After the analysis with Bouvet, prematurely interrupted due to his death in May 1960, Green would undergo two further analyses: the second one with Jean Mallet, during which he focused on the mourning for the death of Bouvet, and the third and final one with Catherina Parat. This final analysis would reveal itself crucial in the elaboration of his relationship with the maternal figure and inspired his work on the complex of the dead mother, *La mère morte* (1980), a paper explicitly dedicated to Parat. It is not of secondary importance that, shortly after the completion of his last analysis, Green also decided to return for the first time to Egypt, the country of his childhood, that he left almost forty years before.

Although Green would gradually develop the critical perspectives which would later bring him to take distance from Lacan's teachings, the spark that brought to light the controversy with Lacan was ignited as Green published a seminal paper with the title *Le narcissisme primaire: structure ou état*.⁴³ This work, to summarize it in a schematic way, explored the question of primary narcissism and the role of it in the creation of a structural representational space through the relationship of the subject with the motherly figure. Moreover, we can detect here the first traces of what would be Green's revisiting of Freud's concept of negative hallucination. With this paper, Green addressed a crucial subject of Lacan's theoretical system,⁴⁴ the concept of narcissism indeed, without referring to Lacan's work as a source. The publication of the paper created further tension between Green, Lacan and Lacan's followers. The ultimate decision of

⁴³ The paper was first published in 1967 in the review “L'Inconscient” and subsequently in Green, N, 88-147; LN, 48-90.

⁴⁴ In the introduction to *Narcissisme de vie. Narcissisme de mort*, Green reminds us that narcissism represents the “*pièce maîtresse*,” i.e., “the cornerstone of the Lacanian system.” Green, N, 14; LN, 10.

distancing from his sphere of influence was not only inevitable but irreversible.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, a critical, lively dialogue with Lacan's theory represents an important *trait d'union* that runs through many of Green's writings.

Between 1961 and 1967, while Green was attending Jacques Lacan's seminars, he also did come in contact with members of a radically different analytical tradition, that of the British Psychoanalytic Society.⁴⁶ Among the many British colleagues, such as the followers of Melanie Klein (Herbert Rosenfeld, Hannah Segal, and John Klauber), the most influential authors for Green were no doubt Donald Winnicott (whom he met in 1961), and Wilfred Bion (whose work he started studying in 1970 prior to meeting him personally in 1976). With them, Green would develop more than a simple professional relationship: in a sense, he would see the two as intellectual fatherly figures. With Wilfred Bion, he developed a close friendship too.

Green's connection with British psychoanalysis represented far more than the encounter with crucial authors and works that would contribute to inspire his own psychoanalytic thinking. It actually opened the window to another way of practicing and conceiving psychoanalysis, of establishing relationships with patients and presenting clinical material. Duparc rightfully emphasizes that it is impossible to appreciate the innovative relevance of Green's work if one fails to envisage it from the angle of a fruitful articulation of two different, if not opposed types of analytic thinking: "on the one hand the symbolizing and fatherly metaphor conceived by Jacques Lacan, which resumed and accentuated tendencies within Freudian theory centred on the figure of the father; on the other hand," continues Duparc, "the insistence on the emphatical experience, the relationship with the motherly figure offered by authors such as Winnicott or Bion, who refined and expanded the work of Melanie Klein."⁴⁷

The impact that British psychoanalysis had on his work will be described by Green himself in terms of a shock.⁴⁸ Over the years, the echo of it amplified through a relentless close study of the writings of the British authors. It is not at all an accident that Winnicott's theory of transitional spaces and phenomena shall play a determining role in the development of Green's objectalising and disobjectalising functions; as much as the theory of thinking put forward by Bion (an author basically unknown in France at the beginning of the Seventies) shall inspire Green's own approach to psychosis and border-line cases.⁴⁹ There is therefore no doubt that

⁴⁵ See Scuderi, *The Work of André Green*, 8.

⁴⁶ The first life changing contact with this group of psychoanalysts took place in London, during a preliminary conference to the International Psychoanalytic Association's congress in Edinburgh. See Scuderi, *The Work of André Green*, 9.

⁴⁷ Duparc, *André Green*, 19.

⁴⁸ See Scuderi, *The Work of André Green*, 9.

⁴⁹ See Scuderi, *The Work of André Green*, 9-10.

such encounter represented a defining moment in his career, as well as a turning point in the evolution of contemporary psychoanalysis as we know it today.

From this point of view, Green was able to act as a sort of mediator, or better, as an ambassador between the not seldomly too abstract intellectualism of French psychoanalysis and a clinical pragmatism of the British tradition. Green facilitated the exchange between two worlds, two alternative ways of practising psychoanalysis, two languages in which psychoanalysis found new forms of expression after Freud—and the psychoanalytical thinking with him—took the path of exile, fleeing from Vienna in 1938.

Given this wide spectrum of influences and different experiences, we can see how Green's theoretical horizon is not only the outcome of a plurality of ideas, but most importantly the articulation of a threshold between worlds. His legacy cannot be grasped in all its impact without considering at once his encounter with Lacan and the critique of his teachings—Green's work on the affect being a privileged example.⁵⁰ Of equal importance for understanding Green's work is the operation of critical reacquisition of the Freudian text, as well as the discovery of the contribution of British psychoanalysts, Wilfred Bion and Donald Winnicott above all. Discussing this matter with Urribarri, Green said:

Je revendique en effet la richesse et la puissance théorique de la pensée de Freud. À mon avis, aucune des théories qui ont essayé de la dépasser – l'*Ego-psychology*, le kleinisme ou le lacanisme – n'y est parvenue. Pis: elles sont toutes tombées dans un certain type de réductionnisme. Or, pour moi, l'œuvre de Freud ne relève ni du talmudique ni d'un quelconque attachement religieux à sa lettre. Il faut la travailler à partir de ce que l'histoire de la pensée post-freudienne nous a fourni et des défis que la clinique contemporaine nous pose. Cela dit, même lorsque nous voulons repenser ces questions auxquelles Freud a répondu de façon ambiguë ou insuffisante, c'est dans son œuvre que nous trouvons les éléments à partir desquels avancer.⁵¹

For Green, the Negative constitutively inhabits the Freudian *œuvre* both as for its clinical technique as well as for its theoretical teachings—representing a thread that accompanies psychoanalysis since its birth. It was however also thanks to the elaboration of his criticism towards the *Maître absolu* Lacan and to the creative reception of authors such as Bion and Winnicott that Green was able to put forward new conceptual and linguistic resources to rethink the Negative in psychoanalysis in an articulated theory. In the third section of this chapter, we

⁵⁰ Green, DV; FA.

⁵¹ Urribarri, *Dialoguer avec André Green*, 39: “Indeed, I claim the richness and the theoretical power of Freudian thinking. In my opinion, none of the theories who tried to go beyond it—the Ego-psychology, the kleinian or the lacanian psychoanalysis—succeeded. Even worst: they all fell into a sort of reductionism. Now, for me, the Freudian *œuvre* is not a matter of Talmudism, nor of any sort of religious attachment to the letter of its text. The Freudian text has to be dealt with starting from what the history of the post-Freudian thinking has offered us and from the challenges that contemporary clinic poses to us. That being said, if we want to rethink the questions Freud answered in an unsatisfactory or ambiguous way, it is in his work that we can find the elements from which we have to proceed.”

shall focus on a further element which, I claim, marked Green's theory of the Negative: the role of literature, of the textual dimension. Or to be more precise: of that component of the psychoanalytic mode of thinking that configure itself as writing.

The process of development of the theory of the Negative is for Green inseparable from the question of the *creative filiation* of a new psychoanalytic paradigm: a metapsychology⁵² for the new millennium.⁵³ Over more than forty years of work, Green conceived an impressive *corpus* of writings, which we can by all means consider as the third great metapsychological reorientation, after Freud's and Lacan's.⁵⁴

As such, the relevance of the theory of the Negative in the history of psychoanalysis cannot be properly grasped if we fail to keep in mind Green's relationships with the complexity of the psychoanalytic tradition(s) in a context of deep crisis: with masters and teachers, whom reception and rearticulation contributed to the birth of a creative subject within tradition and of a tradition. In an important paper on the question of the father and filiations in psychoanalysis with the title *Après Lacan: père, pacte fraternel et filiation analytique chez André Green*, Urribarri, rereading Green, underlines how:

[...] la crise de la psychanalyse post-freudienne est une crise "mélancolique:" elle est marquée par le deuil interminable de la mort de Freud. De manière symptomatique, chaque auteur post-freudien a voulu le remplacer comme figure principale, chaque mouvement militant a cru revivre la situation originnaire des pionniers et du Père (re)fondateur. L'*Ego psychology*, le kleinisme et le lacanisme, les « trois grands dogmatismes post-freudiens » – come dit J. Laplanche (1986) – ont répété le même processus. Comme dans une formation réactive, le sentiment historique d'abandon a été substitué par une mythologie (c'est-à-dire une idéologie) paternaliste.⁵⁵

⁵² The psychoanalytic term *metapsychology*, which recurs as early as in Freud's letters to Wilhelm Fließ, "refers to the psychology of which [Freud] was the founder when it is viewed in its most theoretical dimension. Metapsychology constructs an ensemble of conceptual models which are more or less far-removed from empirical reality." Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, trans. by D. Nicholson-Smith, with an introduction by D. Lagache (London: Karnac Books, 1988), 249. As such, metapsychology represents the workshop in which psychoanalysis reflects on its own theoretical and conceptual constructions.

⁵³ Green, KI, 239-289.

⁵⁴ See Fernando Urribarri, "The negative and its vicissitudes: a new contemporary paradigm for psychoanalysis," Gail S. Reed and Howard B. Levine (Eds.), *André Green Revisited: Representation and the Work of the Negative* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 67 ff.

⁵⁵ Fernando Urribarri, "Après Lacan : père, pacte fraternel et filiation analytique chez André Green," Dominique Cupa (éd.), *Image du père dans la culture contemporaine: Hommages à André Green* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008), 51-63, here 53: "[...] the crisis of post-Freudian psychoanalysis is a "melancholic" one: it is marked by the interminable mourning caused by Freud's death. In a symptomatic way, each post-Freudian author wanted to replace him as main figure, each militant movement was persuaded of experiencing anew the original situation of the pioneers and of the (re)founding Father. The Ego-Psychology, the kleinian and the lacanian orientations, the "three great post-Freudian dogmatisms" (as remarked J. Laplanche in 1986) have repeated the same process. As in a sort of reactive formation, the historical feeling of abandonment had been substituted by a paternalistic mythology (i.e., an ideology)."

The portrait that we thus far traced would justify the claim that, in a way, what I would like to call Green's heterogenous "poetics of the theory" may be read in connection with the creative phantom of his own work, i.e., the question of the irreducibility of the process of subjectivation. A phantom of a *separation*, we might add, that unconsciously drives Green's way of thinking, creating, writing, transmitting psychoanalysis. What I am suggesting is that, retrospectively, the very theory of the Negative that Green would have developed throughout the course of his life can also be envisaged as an attempt, beyond a purely theoretical horizon, to give form to a complexity of thinking, to a 'negative capability' which is crucial also for his being a subject in the history of psychoanalysis.

But that is perhaps a too reductive of a vision. Nonetheless, by reclaiming the Freudian textuality—in opposition to Lacan's oral teachings—, by rethinking the legacy of British psychoanalysis and, as we will see, by giving particular importance to 'applied psychoanalysis,' Green succeeded in giving new expression to a phantasmatic dimension of psychoanalysis itself.

But not only. Indeed the question ought not to be limited to psychoanalysis; rather, starting from what psychoanalysis—and namely: Green's metapsychology—can help us unveil, in this respect, we may extend the range of the issue to the wider question of cultural experience, and to the issue of transmission of a peculiar form of 'knowledge' in permanent transformation. To put it in other words, the core of the question might be formulated with an expression that we can read in Winnicott's *The Location of Cultural Experience* (1967): *how is it possible to give form to a "separation that is not a separation but a form of union"?*⁵⁶ It is, ultimately, the relationship between subject and tradition, i.e. the question of filiation through writing, which is here at stake.

That is the theme that we shall develop in the third section of this chapter. For the moment, let us move forward to Green's theory of the Negative.

⁵⁶ Donald. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, with a new preface by F. R. Rodman (New York: Routledge, 2005), 132.

1.2 *The Work of the Negative and the Incréable* – An Analysis of Green’s Theory from the Perspective of the Creative Processes

*L’inconscience ne supprime pas le travail psychique.*⁵⁷

La permanence du souvenir est la preuve que rien n’est définitivement disparu, que rien ne saurait être vraiment mort.

André Green⁵⁸

Among his numerous publications, *Le Travail du négatif* (1993) is the most comprehensive work Green has devoted to the Negative. His research on the topic, however, did not begin with this book, nor did it come to an end with it. The Negative is one of the major bonding forces of Green’s work, and stands out as his “most original contribution to contemporary psychoanalysis.”⁵⁹ The traces of such a “passion for the Negative”⁶⁰ emerge—in a more explicit or allusive way—in essays, books, seminars, talks, and other contributions published since the early Sixties.⁶¹ *Le Travail du négatif* is in this regard a text of capital importance: in it, Green articulates decades of investigation in a new organic exposition, reorganising and conjugating different stages of his thinking, expanding on new implications, and further delving into clinical and theoretical sources—which, most notably with Freud’s notion of *negative Halluzination* [negative hallucination], reach back to the very roots of psychoanalysis, indeed to the days prior to its discovery.⁶² The publication of this multifaceted work marked a turning point for Green—even prior to what he considered as the “turning point of the year 2000”⁶³—paving the way for later developments of his thinking. Later works such as *Pourquoi les pulsions de destruction ou de mort?*—in which Green explores the metapsychological role of the death drive and destructiveness in the *Kulturarbeit*—or *Du signe au discours. Psychanalyse et théories du langage*,⁶⁴ are unconceivable without *The Work of the Negative*, and they ought to be considered in direct relationship with it.

⁵⁷ Green, *Séminaire sur le travail du négatif* (1988), in TN, 393; WoN, 282: “Unconsciousness does not do away with psychical work.”

⁵⁸ Green, TN, 348-349; WoN, 251-252: “The permanence of memory is proof that nothing has disappeared definitively, that nothing can really be dead.”

⁵⁹ Urribarri, “The negative and its vicissitudes,” 65.

⁶⁰ See Andrea Baldassarro (a cura di) *La passione del negativo: Omaggio al pensiero di André Green* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2018).

⁶¹ In a footnote to *Le Travail du négatif* (TN, 287, fn. 43; WoN, 400) Green notes that one of the first expression he employed in reference to the Negative, “moment négatif,” (“negative moment”) dates back to the discussion of the report by J. Laplanche and S. Leclair during the Bonneval Conference in 1960. See also Duparc, *André Green*, 41, in which, however, the date of the discussion seems to be reported incorrectly.

⁶² Green, KI, 212.

⁶³ Urribarri, “The negative and its vicissitudes,” 67.

⁶⁴ Respectively: *Why the destruction or death drives?* [PP] and *From the Sign to the Discourse. Psychoanalysis and Theory of Language*. [SD]. To my knowledge, both these works are to this day still untranslated in English.

As anticipated, in what follows I shall not provide an exhaustive presentation of Green's studies on the Negative.⁶⁵ While Green's thought does not cease to inspire new insights and expansions, the arborescent richness of it, as well as the prismatic variety of approaches from which it can be explored, compel to limit our investigation to a more specific focus. After concisely introducing the general features of Green's theory, I shall therefore venture in a reading of what I consider as a key 'figure' of the Negative: the *incréable*.⁶⁶ As I do so, I intend to dwell on a particular vicissitude of the Negative by putting Green's conceptual tools to work in the context of sublimation and representational processes.

The notion of *incréable* represents in this respect a compelling and emblematic case: in it, which metapsychology and "applied psychoanalysis" enter in a fertile field of tensions worth of being examined. Such a strategy has a double advantage: first, it allows to highlight the main features of the work of the Negative by addressing a specific case in Green's writings—a concept, I must add, to which the majority of the research has not yet devoted appropriate attention. Furthermore, it gives me the chance to develop an original approach to Green's Negative by reflecting in meta-theoretical terms on its conceptual tools, between 'poetics' and 'theory.' The study of the work of the Negative in the late writings of Franz Kafka and Paul Celan shall enable us to return to many elements outlined in this section of the work, in order to analyse the Negative *at work* in the creative process, thus enriching the conceptual tools here exposed.

In a homonymous paper published in 1986 on the *Revue Française de Psychanalyse*, and later included in *Le Travail du négatif*, Green proposes to designate as the work of the Negative

[...] l'ensemble des opérations psychiques dont le refoulement est le prototype et qui a ultérieurement donné naissance à des variantes distinctes telles que la négation, le désaveu et la foreclusion. [...] Faut-il rattacher le travail du négatif au seul moi et à ses mécanismes de défense? On pourrait le penser au premier abord. Je soutiendrai au contraire que le travail du négatif s'étend à l'ensemble des instances de l'appareil psychique. Soit encore que l'analyse nous amène à

⁶⁵ Along with *Le Travail du négatif*, which represents the primary theoretical reference of my investigation, I shall also consider other texts by Green, which provide a more concise, albeit by no means less effective definition of the Negative. In recent years, numerous works have not only established the solidity of Green's theoretical *corpus*. Many contributions have shed light, from a variety of perspectives, on its relevance, exploring its stages of development as well as clinical and metapsychological implications. Among the most prominent contributions, many of which have already been mentioned, we can refer to: Duparc, *André Green*, 40-56; Gregorio Kohon (Ed.), *The Dead Mother. The Work of André Green* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Green, LM; Richard François (Éd.) *Autour de l'œuvre d'André Green. Enjeux pour une psychanalyse contemporaine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005); Green, *Associations (presque) libres*; Urribarri, *Dialoguer avec André Green*; Kohon and Perelberg, (Eds.) *The Greening of Psychoanalysis*; Maurizio Balsamo, *André Green. Il potere creativo dell'inconscio* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2019); Baldassarro (a cura di) *La passione del negativo*; Reed and Levine (Eds.), *André Green Revisited*.

⁶⁶ Green, D, 313-340.

distinguer le non du moi, le non du surmoi et le non du ça. J'envisagerai également les incidences de la réponse de l'objet sur la constitution des rapports oui-non.⁶⁷

This description offers a preliminary point of access to Green's theory of the Negative. To begin with, let us focus on the first part of the excerpt. There are at least two essential elements that need to be pointed out. The first one is the *structural, organisational* role of the *Verdrängung*—and of other psychical operations such as negation, disavowal and foreclosure, as further configurations of the prototypical model of suppression. The second element into play here, which is directly linked with the defence mechanisms of the psychic apparatus, is the ineliminable relationship between the work of the Negative and the drive processes.⁶⁸ In a more general sense, we may say that the defence mechanisms ought to be understood as operations allowing the constitution and the modulation of a barrier, of a limit which protects and 'contains' the psychic apparatus. A border which is not pre-existing: its structural fundamental matrix has to be created in the early stages of infancy.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Green, TN, 373; WoN 269: "[...] I proposed to designate as 'the work of the negative' all the psychical operations of which repression is the prototype and which later gave rise to distinct variations such as negation, disavowal and foreclosure. [...] Should the work of the negative be related to the ego alone and its mechanisms of defence? One might think so at a first approach. I would maintain on the contrary that the work of the negative extends to the agencies of the psychological apparatus as a whole. In other words, an analysis of it leads us to distinguish the no of the ego, the no of the super-ego and the no of the ide I shall also envisage the effects of the object's response on the constitution of yes-no relations."

⁶⁸ See Green, TN, 58 ff. With "drive processes" Weller translates Green's expression "motions pulsionnel." See Green, WoN, 36.

⁶⁹ Let us notice—as Urribarri has also eloquently shown—how these two elements, i.e., the structuring dimension of the defence mechanisms and the ineliminable role of the drive motions [*le pulsionnel*], are present from the outset in Green's thinking. As it turns out, they constitute indispensable features to envisage the work of the Negative beyond a philosophical standpoint. In "L'inconscient freudien et la psychanalyse freudienne contemporaine" *Temps modernes*, vol. 18, n° 195 (1962), 365-379, Green discusses what he sees as the "reductionist" position of Lacan's approach defended by Laplanche and Leclaire. Green asserts that: "Notre position tient à mettre davantage en valeur le rôle des pulsions dans ses aspects économiques et ses organisations basales et cherche, tout en tenant compte du rôle structurant fondamental du refoulement, à saisir les manifestations du sujet dans son conflit entre la positivité et la négativité." Green, *ivi*, 373. In one of the footnotes at the end of his paper, Green also observes: "En fait la reconstruction de Freud à travers Lacan se situe sur des bases radicalement différentes de celles du fondateur de l'analyse. Lacan semble poursuivre un dessein particulier qui est la recherche d'un statut ontologique de la psychanalyse, sur des fondements d'une cohérence philosophique d'où tout un aspect du freudisme est à réinterpréter. Celui qu'on a coutume de qualifier de naturaliste. Malgré les impasses où il peut paraître conduire, son maintien semble indispensable, car cette perspective représente une des rares tentatives – sinon la seule – pour donner corps à la réalité psychique sans la substantifier." Green, *ivi*, 379, fn 26. See Urribarri's translation of these two quotes—which he condenses in one—in "The negative and its vicissitudes," 68: "In contrast to Lacan's position, ours tends to place more value on the role of drives in their economic aspects and in their basic organization, and aims, while also considering the fundamental structuring role of repression, to grasp the subject's manifestations in the conflict between positivity (drives) and negativity (defences). Actually Lacan's reconstruction of Freud is built upon grounds that differ radically from those of the founder of psychoanalysis. Lacan seems to follow a particular desire: to find an ontological status for psychoanalysis based on philosophical consistency, which requires the reinterpretation of a whole aspect of Freudism: everything that is usually labelled as biologicistic. In spite of the impasses to which this apparently leads, it seems to me to be indispensable to preserve it, since this perspective is the only attempt to give psychic reality *body* without reifying it." In this regard, Green has devoted an ample chapter to the question of the irreconcilable differences between psychoanalytical negative and philosophical one in TN, 45-75. One of such differences situates precisely in the concept of the drive, i.e., in the question of the relationship between the body and the psyche. Let us just not forget that, according to Freud's formulation in *Triebe und Triebsschicksale* (1915), the

A major breakthrough in the development of the Negative envisaged from a structural and organizational perspective was marked by Green's first paper on narcissism, *Narcissisme primaire: structure ou état*, first published in 1967.⁷⁰ It is not accidental that Green attains to a crucial step forward in the formulation of the Negative by investigating this concept. One of the main purposes of this paper was to overcome a description of narcissism in terms of clinical "state," and to further explore the role of the death drive in the psychic apparatus. Green juxtaposes here two models of narcissism developed by Freud: a "primary narcissism"—an absolute form of narcissism that aims to a minimal tension within the psychic apparatus (hinting at the so called "Nirvana principle")—and a "secondary narcissism"—outcome of the construction of the Ego, the goal of which is conservation and representation. Green defends the hypothesis according to which narcissism ought to be conceived in terms of a structure facilitating the binding process of the death drive. To illuminate this point, he refers to Freud's concept of *Reizschutz*—the protection barrier against stimulation—developed in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920). It is through this multi-layered membrane, which allows the binding processes and the neutralisation of the death drive, that living matter acquires its structural limits.⁷¹

This key step forward is accompanied by another critical development. By analysing the concept of narcissism, Green shows that the exclusive reference to the *pulsionnel*, i.e., to the drive processes, is actually insufficient in order to come to grips with the complexity of the Negative. That leads us to consider now the second part of Green's excerpt from his 1986 paper. In it, he extends the area of the Negative not only to the articulation between the first and the second topography in Freud's work, but also to the object relation—an area of research explored in particular by British psychoanalysts. In this respect, as Duparc also points out, Green's originality consists in having shown that the condition *sine qua non* for the framing structure of the psyche of the subject has to be thought from "the absence on the background of presence:" from an empty and "mortified" [mortifiée]⁷² shell, we might say with Duparc, that the subject creates in a negative relationship with the object. The primary object that allows the development of such framing structure is the mother. It is indeed what Green calls "the negative hallucination of the primary object" that enables the infant to negativize the presence of the

drive is a concept "on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body." Freud, GW X, 214. The introduction of the death drive (1920) and the subsequent remodelling of the second topography shall no doubt complicate the whole picture.

⁷⁰ We already mentioned this paper in the previous paragraph. Green, N, 88-147 ; LN, 48-90.

⁷¹ See Duparc, *André Green*, 42 ff.

⁷² Duparc, *André Green*, 44.

mother, and to internalize it as such.⁷³ This passage is essential for the creation of a “framing structure” and the formation of an empty representational space, on which new representations and autoerotic tendencies are to be inscribed.⁷⁴ The role of the object is summarized as follows by Green:

[...] l’objet absolument nécessaire à l’élaboration de la structure psychique doit s’effacer. Il doit se faire oublier comme constituant de la structure psychique ; il existe sous la forme de l’illusion qu’il n’est pas constitutif de la structure psychique, mais se donne comme différent de celle-ci, comme objet d’attraction ou de répulsion [...]. *La fonction intrinsèque de l’objet est paradoxale: l’objet est là pour stimuler, pour éveiller la pulsion et en même temps pour la contenir.*⁷⁵

The space in which the primary object gives the illusion of effacing itself, of being absent from the perceptive field of the subject is indeed the space of the negative hallucination. The role of negative hallucination, in this regard, is not that of being a mere container without content, but rather of circumscribing the limits of a space *that appears to be empty*, and which is occupied instead by the very *absence of representation*. This is, for Green, one of the necessary conditions for the creation of a structure framing representation.⁷⁶

To sum up the main features of Green’s theory of the Negative which we attempted to delineate so far, we may refer to an interview with Fernando Urribarri, in which Green is particularly clear as he explains the core of the question:

[Le travail du négatif] apparaît d’abord comme condition à la vie humaine, à la vie sociale. Car il faut bien contenir la ‘force brute’ – cette force qui est la donnée de base du psychisme du fait de sa relation avec les pulsions. Du coup, le négatif consiste premièrement à dire ‘non’ à certaines pulsions. / Le non est fondamental pour s’organiser. Il peut être ‘dit’ à plusieurs choses et il opère à différents niveaux. Un premier niveau, lié au rôle des pulsions, correspond à l’organisation interne.

⁷³ See Green, N, 139: “*La mère est prise dans le cadre vide de l’hallucination négative, et devient structure encadrante pour le sujet lui-même. Le sujet s’édifie là où l’investiture de l’objet a été consacré au lieu de son investissement. Tout est alors en place pour que le corps de l’enfant puisse venir se substituer au monde extérieur.*” Id. LN, 85: “*The mother is caught in the empty frame of negative hallucination and becomes a framing structure for the subject himself. The subject constructs himself in the place where the object’s investiture has been consecrated to the locus of its investment. Everything is then in place so that the infant’s body can take the place of the external world.*”

⁷⁴ Duparc, *André Green*, 45.

⁷⁵ Green, TN, 389-390; WoN, 279: “[...] that object which is absolutely necessary for the elaboration of psychical structure should efface itself. Its role as a constituent of psychical structure should be forgotten about; it exists in the shape of illusion which is not constitutive of psychical structure but presents itself as being different from it, as an object of attraction or repulsion. [...] *The intrinsic function of the object is paradoxical: the object is there to stimulate, to awaken the drive and at the same time to contain it.*” (tr. mod. f.c.)

⁷⁶ See Green, TN, 384 : “L’hallucination négative n’est pas un phénomène pathologique. Elle n’est pas l’absence de représentation comme le suggère l’absence de l’image dans le miroir, mais *représentation de l’absence de représentation*. L’hallucination négative est le concept théorique qui est la précondition à toute théorie de la représentation, qu’il s’agisse du rêve comme de l’hallucination.” Green, WoN, 276: “Negative hallucination is not a pathological phenomenon. It is not the absence of representation as is suggested by the absence of the image in the mirror, but the *representation of the absence of representation*. Negative hallucination is the theoretical concept which is the precondition for any theory of representation, whether it is dreams or hallucination which is concerned.”

Un deuxième niveau renvoie au plan intersubjectif, celui des relations avec les objets. Il faut dire ‘non’ à l’objet pour pouvoir dire ‘oui’ à soi-même, pour devenir un sujet.⁷⁷

Green’s work of the Negative may be envisaged as a structural model of the psychic activity and functioning in its heterogeneity.⁷⁸ The complexity of such structure cannot be properly appreciated if we fail to consider the *ineliminable conflictuality* that characterizes the psychic apparatus. By no means confined to the explanation of a pathological state, this theory gives account of the dynamics of *organization and disorganization*, of *structuring and destructuring* inhabiting the subjective constitution and indeed creating the “condition for the existence of the structuring psychic apparatus,”⁷⁹ in the continuous articulation of the intrapsychic (the drives) and intersychic (object relation).⁸⁰

Before proceeding, let me also clarify that, in this preliminary and necessarily reductive introduction to Green’s theory, I deliberately put the accent on a “constructive,” or rather “organising” perspective of the work of the Negative. In such a context, the death drive plays a fundamental role, we might say, of ‘co-operation’ with Eros—although it would be more appropriate to speak of ‘intricacies’ between death drive and Eros. If we envisage the death drive—or destructive drives, as Green also has proposed to call them—in terms of *unbinding processes*, we can grasp the importance of destructivity in the organization of the psychic apparatus: the subject can basically say ‘yes’ to its own existence by saying ‘no’ to the object—a ‘no’ which, as we just explained, has a gravid, fundamental role. What we did not discuss in more specific terms, however, are those situations in which destructivity is not at the service of structuring or separation of the subject, but rather of its radical disorganization and disintegration towards death. This is what Green calls the “subversion of the work of the Negative:”

Or la subversion du travail du négatif, que l’on rencontre dans les cas-limites, consiste à se dire non à soi-même. Mais ce n’est pas un “non” au sens du refoulement ou du renoncement à l’objet incestueux en réponse à l’exigence du Surmoi. Le mouvement est plus extrême : il consiste à négativer le désir en attaquant les liens à l’objet jusqu’aux fondements de l’éros dans le Moi. / Ces

⁷⁷ Urribarri. *Dialoguer avec André Green*, 21-22: “[The work of the Negative] seems to be above all the condition for human life, for social life. For it is necessary to contain the ‘brute force’—this force which is the basic result of the psyche in relationship because of its relationship with the drives. At once, the negative consists primarily in saying ‘no’ to certain drives. / The ‘no’ is fundamental to organise the subject. Such no may be ‘said’ to multiple things and operates on different levels. A first one, linked to the role of the drives, corresponds to the internal organisation. A second level refers to the intersubjective level, that of the object relation. It is necessary to say ‘no’ to the object in order to say “yes” to yourself, to become a subject.”

⁷⁸ Maurizio Balsamo has described André Green as a “thinker of the connections,” pointing out the peculiar “reticular” dimension that characterizes Green’s thinking. Balsamo, *André Green*, 10 ff.

⁷⁹ See Rosine Perelberg’s contribution in Kohon and Perelberg (Eds.) *The Greening of Psychoanalysis*, 19.

⁸⁰ It might have been noticed that in this brief overview, we deliberately focused on what we may call the “spatial dimension” of the Negative. As our work unfolds in relationship with Kafka’s and Celan’s writings, we will have the chance to confront us with another dimension of the Negative, linked to the question of temporality.

sujets peuvent alors utiliser dans des buts destructeurs n'importe quelle variante (de la simple négation à la forclusion) de ce travail du négatif – destruction de leur propre structure psychique et de toute forme d'évolution vers une prise de conscience de ce qu'ils sont, de leur désir, du rôle de leur histoire, du rôle des facteurs qui les constituent [...]. Voici donc le paradoxe du travail du négatif: Comment quelque chose qui fait partie de l'"équipement humain", si l'on peut dire, peut-il se retourner contre soi-même?⁸¹

We shall have many occasions to return to the role of such mortiferous and destructive subversion of the Negative in its 'intricacies' with the creative process by analysing the writings of Franz Kafka and Paul Celan in the next chapters.

Let us now turn our attention to the main focus of my reading and consider Green's theory of the Negative from the angle of the creative processes through writing. What I would like to show is how the work of the Negative can enable us to give account not only of the sources, or better of a possible *origin* of creation and creativity, but also of the *originality* of the representational strategies that characterize the work of an author. Otherwise formulated, the question I would like to address is how Green's theory can enable us to envisage the specificity, the uniqueness of a work and of the work of writing—as trace of a process of subjectivation—by reconstructing *après-coup* the matrix characterizing *the possibility* of literary creation. A process of subjectivation, whose outcome, as we shall see in the following, is not limited to the creating subject, but rather involves *another form of subjectivity*. From a psychoanalytic perspective, as Green remarks, the questions of creation, of creativity, of its goal and of its end, lead us to investigate the relationship between *body* and *being* (Winnicott) and their transformations occurring in the process of sublimation.⁸²

The ample chapter devoted to sublimation in *Le Travail du négatif*—closing with a remarkable analysis of Nerval's *Aurélia ou le Rêve et la Vie* (1855)—is only one of the many writings that bears witness to the centrality of such a question for Green. Here I would like to create nonetheless another explorative trajectory, by dwelling more in particular on a paper that Green published more than ten years prior to the publication of *The Work of the Negative*. The paper I am referring to is *La réserve de l'incréable* (1982).

⁸¹ Urribarri. *Dialoguer avec André Green*, 22: "Now, the subversion of the work of the Negative, which we encounter in borderline cases, consists in saying no to oneself. But this is not a 'no' in the sense of suppression or of renouncement to the incestuous object in response to the demand of the Super-ego. The movement is much more extreme here: it consists in negativizing the desire by attacking the links with the object until the fundamentals of Eros within the Ego. / These subjects can then use with destructive purposes no matter which variety of such work of the Negative (from the simple negation to the foreclosure)—destruction of one's own psychic structure and of all the forms of evolutions toward an awareness of what they are, of their desire, of the role of their history, of the role of the factors that characterize them [...]. Here lies therefore the paradox of the work of the Negative: how something that belongs to the 'human equipment,' if we can say so, can backfire and turn against us."

⁸² Green, D, 314.

In this paper, one of the most inspired and inspiring he has ever written, Green engages in a close reading of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927), with a focus on *Le Temps retrouvé*, posthumously published in 1927. The fact that Green develops this paper by tackling Proust's work is surely of no secondary importance. The validity of his formulations, however, are not confined to the particular case of Proust only. Quite on the contrary: with this essay, Green attempts to go to the roots of creativity by investigating what he elsewhere calls that unknown wound, that inarticulable loss, that form of mourning which every creative work presupposes. An unsaturable absence, of which the work shall be the transformation, the tangible product.⁸³

Qu'est donc l'incréable? L'incréable, c'est pour le créateur, le noyau maternel, le noyau de la relation du corps de la mère: le représentant psychique de la pulsion, sous forme d'affect lié à la relation au corps maternel qu'il s'agit de représenter autrement, par le travail de l'art. Non le corps, mais l'affect, c'est-à-dire la trace du rapport au corps de la mère. L'action de représentation (qu'on peut appeler la représentance) est liée à la perte de l'objet maternel, au deuil, et à l'évocation du souvenir dans l'absence. Cette perte est liée à la coupure instaurée par le père entre l'enfant et sa mère. Le lien avec le corps de la mère est alors définitivement rompu. Cette coupure va laisser subsister des investissements érotiques et agressifs ; sensuels et tendres, les premiers étant soumis au refoulement, les autres conservés parce qu'ils sont inhibés quant à leur but. Mais il y a quelque chose que le père ne réussit pas à faire disparaître. C'est le mouvement auto-érotique de cette relation au corps de la mère qui perdure comme un noyau protégé, dynamiquement actif et inabordable. Le refoulement primaire recouvre cela.⁸⁴

The term *incréable*, that Green introduces in the psychoanalytic vocabulary by adverbializing the French adjective *incrée* (uncreated), defies to a great extent translation.⁸⁵ To be sure, it is possible to render this *terminus* with the English adverb *uncreatable*. For the purpose of my analysis, however, I deem of particular importance to leave the signifier *incréable* untranslated. This term represents indeed not only one of those "encounters between concept and affect" that characterize Green's thinking.⁸⁶ The decision of not translating this term also allows me to put the accent on an 'untranslatability', a 'non-paraphrasability' which

⁸³ Green, D, 57.

⁸⁴ Green, D, 321-322: "What is then the *incréable*? The *incréable* is for the creator the maternal core, the core of the relationship with the body of the mother: the psychic representant of the drive, in form of affect, linked to the relationship with the body of the mother, and which has to be represented otherwise, through the work of art. Not the body, but the affect, that is the trace of the relationship with the body of the mother. The action of representation (which we can call representational) is linked to the loss of the maternal object, to the mourning, and to the evocation of the memory in the absence. This loss is linked to the cut operated by the father between the infant and the mother. The link with the body of the mother is thus irrevocably severed. This cut provokes the emergence of investments both erotic and aggressive, sensual and tender, the former being subjected to suppression, the latter preserved because they are inhibited as for their goal. But there is something that the father cannot make disappear. That is the auto-erotic motion of the relation with the body of the mother, which remains and lasts as a protected core, dynamically active and inaccessible. That is the place of primary suppression."

⁸⁵ As also does this particular text as a whole: an English version of this remarkable paper is indeed still unavailable.

⁸⁶ So Green, KI, 208-210.

resists, in spite of any effort of decoding and interpretation, at the core of the poetic, of the literary, and of the psychoanalytic.

But that is not all. It is evident that, if we consider Green's particular relationship with French language, we can detect in this term an attempt to incarnate the loss of an origin which can only take place by means of the writing process. But the *incr able* is not only an attempt to establish a relationship with an 'unknown' deeply inscribed in body and psyche. Green is here trying to give thinkable form to what remains inaccessible and inarticulable to the subject in spite of its proximity, and which only the work of creation is capable of *re-presenting* to the subject in new, acceptable—i.e. cultural—terms. As a linguistic trace of that which the subject 'does not know *not* to know,' the signifier *incr able* represents, in my reading, a crucial element of an associative web that for Green reflects upon the wider topic of the relationship between the complex role of the oedipal structure and the question of the transitional cultural objects.⁸⁷ What concerns here Green is how sublimation intervenes in the process of transformation of a severed link, into the creation of a new cultural bond through the creation of objects which are neither created nor uncreated, internal or external, existing or non-existing, but rather *un-create-able*. The term *incr able*—in which we may also hear resounding, for example, the word *incroyable*, i.e., unbelievable—invites us to consider from a new point of view the question of cultural experience and of the place in which cultural objects situate. As such, the *incr able* transcends the category of the judgement of existence, for literature, poetry, and more generally speaking, art and creation give form to something which in spite of its apparent inexistence, is perceived as particularly, effectively, and affectively *real*.

The *incr able* is therefore not simply a concept: it is a neologism that defies the limits of representation of the psyche—there where, we may dare to say, we cannot yet discern the *most remote* from the *deepest*. It constitutes a sort of 'theoretical hieroglyph:' a product of sublimation on its own, that epitomises the level of creativity, of *poiesis*, at work in Green's "clinical thinking." Indeed, this word touches something which is pre-ontological, albeit *not* pre-corporeal, and whose 'language' is pre-verbal. By *incr able*, Green refers to that remnant of the maternal core, to that affective trace of the relationship with the body of the mother around which the creating subject shall asymptotically revolve by means of the creative process, without any possibility of accessing or possessing it. Let us notice that in Green's definition of the *incr able* we can recognize all the elements constituting his theory of the Negative: the structuring role of the defence mechanisms; the drive motions; the narcissistic structuring (auto-erotic investments); the object relation; and ultimately, although not explicitly mentioned, the

⁸⁷ Green, TN, 324 ff; WoN, 235 ff.

work of negative hallucination, the latter emerging in the loss of the maternal object. The representation of the absence of representation is what also allows, in this context, the protection of that affective “knot,” “dynamically active and unapproachable.”

The *incr able* constitutes as such, an insuperable barrier of possible contact *and* the ultimate limit, the transgression of which would entail the dissolution of the creative capability of the subject. As Green explains, however, the *incr able* is not yet the artistic creation:

Serait-ce la cr ation artistique? On peut   bon droit en douter. Car, tout  tre humain poss de un tel noyau, et s’il est vrai que la cr ativit  humaine d passe de beaucoup les limites de la cr ativit  artistique, il n’en reste pas moins que celle-ci demeure l’apanage de certains. Mais il me fallait d’abord aller   la source de cet appel   l’objet, au plus profond de l’inconscient, pour tenter d’ clairer le processus. La cr ation commence au moment o  ayant r ussi   mettre le Moi en contact avec ce noyau maternel le sujet va se livrer   une transaction   la fois violente et subtile, par un jeu d’allers et retours, de reconnaissances et de d nis, d’affirmations et de n gations, de pers cutions et d’id alisations par et de ce noyau. Ces relations donnent lieu   la formation d’un simulacre qui va passer pour vrai, et qui sera le point de d part de la r alit  artistique.⁸⁸

Two further conditions are required for the work of creation to come into being. The *incr able* may represent the maternal kernel [*noyau maternel*] as primary source of creativity only inasmuch as it is preserved in a field of tension of affirmations and negations, contacts and separations, bounding and unbounding processes, i.e., at the condition that any access to such “inviolable sanctuary” [*sanctuaire inviolable*] is interdicted. Moreover, for the act of creation to be possible, this kernel must be invested and undergo the working-through of the process of sublimation.⁸⁹

As a possible vicissitude of the sexual drive “onto a non-sexual aim and onto objects of high social value,”⁹⁰ sublimation constitutes, as Green has eloquently shown, not simply a process of diversion, but of radical transformation of the drive in terms of *neg-sexuality*. The desexualisation of the drive involves, in our specific case, a transformation of the *somatic* dimension into a *semantic* one. The work of the Negative gives form, through sublimation, to that process of “representing otherwise” the “repr sentant psychique de la pulsion, sous forme d’affect li    la relation au corps maternel.”⁹¹

⁸⁸ Green, D, 322: “Would that be already artistic creation? We have good reasons to doubt it. For, if every and each human being is characterized by such core, and if it is true that human creativity surpasses by far the limits of artistic creation, it is clear that the latter remains the privilege of few. But it seems to me necessary, first of all, to go to the source of this appeal of the object, rooted in the deepest depths of the unconscious, in order to attempt to clarify its process. Creation begins at the moment in which—having been able to put the Ego in contact with that maternal kernel—the subject engages in a transaction at once violent and subtle through and of such core, in a play of alternate back and forth, of recognitions and denials, of affirmations and negations, of persecutions and idealisations.”

⁸⁹ Green, D, 321-323.

⁹⁰ Green, TN, 301; WoN, 218.

⁹¹ Green, D, 321.

Such “*otherwise*” is noteworthy and leads to the question of language and representation—to the specific materials of creation. In it, new ways of expressing the relationship with world and with an elsewhere take form. In order to think the passage from Green’s theory of the Negative into that “negative adventure”⁹² that writing composes and represents for an author, we need to insist therefore on the structuring-destructuring and organising-disorganising value of the *limit*.⁹³

Before moving further, I hasten to add that the analytic standpoint I am proposing by drawing from Green’s research should not be mistaken for the category of *Grenzüberschreitung* (“border crossing,” or “border transgression”) that in the last decades gained momentum in many research fields in cultural studies. The approach I am developing does not centre on the act or process of factual or symbolic border crossing *per se*; nor does it refer, for instance, to the implications of moral transgressions. It focuses instead on the ineliminable role of the limit as a “fluctuating and moving” frontier,⁹⁴ on its transformational potential for the subject in the context of the representational processes of the work of writing. In an interview with Fernando Urribarri, while reflecting on the metapsychological relevance of such a concept in his theoretical and clinical work,⁹⁵ Green explains:

[...] J’ai proposé la notion de limite en essayant d’en introduire une élaboration en tant que concept métapsychologique. *La limite n’est pas une simple ligne, c’est toute une zone de transformations entre le dedans et le dehors, ainsi qu’entre les instances psychiques*. Il n’y a pas de psychisme sans limite. Il n’y a pas de sujet sans limite.⁹⁶ [m. e. f.c.]

⁹² Green, AN.

⁹³ Duparc, in *André Green*, 40-41, writes: “In order to better give account of the innovative aspect of Green’s thinking, it would be necessary to define the negative as that which situates at the limits of representation; as an effect of the unconscious on the one hand, and as destructivity on the other. [...] But Green’s originality consist in having suggested the possible transformation of these limits of representation into a container, into the limits of the representative apparatus in its complexity, thanks to the work of the negative.”

⁹⁴ See Green, D, 57.

⁹⁵ This ‘transformational potential’ of the content of the drive’s initial expression is rooted in the concept of *Trieb* itself. In order to highlight this aspect, Green insists on the role of the “demand of the work” [*Arbeitsanforderung*] in Freud’s definition of the drive in *Trieb und Triebchicksale*. See André Green, “La sexualité a-t-elle un quelconque rapport avec la psychanalyse?” *Revue française de psychanalyse*, vol. n° 60, no. 3, 1996, pp. 829-848, here 839 ff.

⁹⁶ Urribarri. *Dialoguer avec André Green*, 24: “I proposed the notion of limit, with the purpose of introducing an elaboration of it in terms of metapsychological concept. *The limit is not simply a line, it is a zone of transformations between the inside and the outside, as well as between the psychic agents [or instances]*. There is no psychic without limit. There is no subject without limit.” The conceptualization of the limit as a third, intermediary potential space of transformation, is pivotal for André Green. In it, at least three prominent intertwining sources are recognizable (four, if we also consider the role of the Freudian matrix underlying his work): the fruitful exchange between clinical investigation and theoretical reflection of borderline cases (Green, PM, 60-83); the creative reception of Donald Winnicott’s theories (See Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*) To that, as we shall see in the next paragraph, I would add also the analysis of literary and poetic texts.

The process of writing, by means of which the creating subject plays and copes with *limits and resources of language*, entails a rhythmical *re-organisation* of the subject on the page.⁹⁷ What is essential to understand in this respect is that the limit is not only an “area of transformation between the inside and the outside, as well as between the different agencies of the psyche,” as we just read. The limit is also that which has to be transformed in the creative act, an element which does not cease to resist and to remain, no matter how mutated or altered, as condition of creation. The process of writing involves a transformation of the complexity of the psychic-corporeal dimension of the subject, i.e. of the limits of the subject, into the linearity of the written text. Thereby, a new liminal dimension finds new form in writing, re-emerging as a stylistic, rhythmic, prosodic fingerprint. On this matter, in the paper *Le double et l’absent* (1973), Green emphasizes how:

Le texte est une suite de phrases qui se différencie du discours vivant de la parole. Tout se passe comme si, loin des conditions de production de la parole vive, divers processus de transformations – qui seront toujours autant de décantations, même si elles se veulent incantatoires – auront produit cette succession de séquences grammaticales du langage écrit qui rendent méconnaissables leurs énoncés originaires [...] Le texte a pour fonction, réduit à la linéarité du langage écrit, de ressusciter tout ce qu’il a absorbé par le travail de l’écriture.⁹⁸

To write means, in a certain sense, to say “no” to corporeal, sensorial components—we may well use the adjective “sexual”—through a process of subtraction, of *decantation*, as Green writes. In this process of transformation, such “no” of the work of the Negative constitutes a new organising principle—again, a new *structure encadrante*, or *framing structure*—which while expressing a form of antagonism towards the subject (in terms of “neg-sexuality”)⁹⁹ also shapes a new object: the work. The question is thus, in other words, of *being otherwise* through the work of writing in order to preserve a link, a relationship with the maternal kernel, of reinventing it without ‘possessing’ it or violating its limits.

Here we can see a further transformation of the *réserve de l’incréable* to the ‘reserve of the work:’ for there is indeed a continuity between the general matrix of the functioning of representation—achieved through the internalisation of the maternal frame thanks to the

⁹⁷ Here we cannot but refer the reader to the important work of another author, whose investigation contributed to shed light, from this point of view, on this transformative element of the body in the creative process: Henri Meschonnic. See, in particular, Id. *La rime et la vie* (Paris: Verdier, 1989); Id. *Politique du rythme, politique du sujet* (Paris: Verdier, 1995).

⁹⁸ Green, D, 50, 54: “The text is a succession of phrases which differs from the living discourse of speech. Everything happens as if, far from the conditions of carnal speech, certain transformations (which will always be so many decantations, even if they masquerade as incantations) had produced this succession of grammatical sequences of written language that don’t allow to recognize their original enunciations. [...] The function of the text, reduced to the linearity of written language, is to resuscitate all that it has absorbed by the work of writing.” I use here the verb “to absorb,” which I think better translates the French “absorber”, instead of the term “to kill,” chosen by Jacques F. Houis in the English version of this text (see Green, PM, 320).

⁹⁹ Green, TN, 305-308; WoN, 221-222.

mechanism of negative hallucination of the mother—and the more specific matrix of the representational processes of the creative work. The common thread uniting the two is a gap, a blank spot, the structural value of which emerges, in the former, in the cut operated by the father in the relationship between infant and mother. In the latter case, such cut, such point of separation and, nonetheless, of proximity, is created by language, remodelled and reinvented by the subject through the process of writing. The recreation of such a *cesura*, the reestablishment of this liminal dimension, of this framing structure ‘with other means’ embodies precisely that *being otherwise* through which the work of the Negative inscribes its mark in the structuring of the subject.

As outcome of a transformation from the ‘living corporality’ to the ‘corporality of writing’ the work becomes furthermore a container: a reserve or receptacle *for something that remains inaccessible* to the conscience of the creating subject, and that only the unconscious, stylistic dimension of the work shall reveal in *après-coup*—*nachträglich*. As Green formulated this very matter in a *postscriptum* to the English translation of *Le discours vivant*: “The absence of the body [is] replaced by the body of words.”¹⁰⁰

In this sense, the creative process necessarily operates, through the work of the Negative, a continuous reconfiguration of a limit as condition *sine qua non* of subjectivity and of the work—as barrier and point of contact, frontier and space of encounter. The stylistic unicity of the author, the stylistic dimension of the work is that which *reveals* the *incréable* insofar as it preserves it as that uncancellable, ineliminable absence, as that lost object towards which the author strives. It is thus under the sign of that very untranslatability that we alluded to, of a limit *within* and *of* creation, which is incarnated by sublimation, that creation is deemed to happen.

The *incréable* is that which cannot be created without destroying the possibility of creation itself. It is what representation must lack—i.e., that which must be continuously unbound from the chain of representation—in order to make representation possible. Entertaining a fundamental relationship with corporality, the *incréable* leads back to a link, a state of undifferentiation which cannot persist, otherwise the subject would not be. In order to be such, the subject has to venture in a *doing*, through the peregrination of creation, in an impossible and yet necessary work of rediscovery and reinvention. The work is as such the space in which the attempt of recovering an unrecoverable link with a lost origin does not cease to take place: there, where “everything begins” and where also “everything remains to be done.”¹⁰¹

These remarks lead to a further point worthy of being addressed. Green writes:

¹⁰⁰ Green, FA, 292-342, here 307. This contribution is not included in the French original version of the text [DV].

¹⁰¹ Green, D, 323.

[...] il y a de l'incréable, parce que la création ne saurait franchir certaines limites, à savoir accomplir un certain type de transgression sans compromettre définitivement la créativité c'est-à-dire le pouvoir créateur du sujet. Ce point est celui-là même où son statut de sujet, c'est-à-dire d'être séparé, est ancré dans le corps de sa créatrice: la mère. C'est l'incréable parce que cette réserve est la propriété d'un autre, ou d'une autre qui ne détient ce pouvoir à son tour que par les facultés créatrices de tiers, eux-mêmes créés *ad infinitum*. Tout œuvre suppose la couple créateur-créature unis par le processus de création. Ceci m'amènera à revenir à nouveau sur l'origine de la création, la créativité et la fin de la création c'est-à-dire son but et son terme.¹⁰²

In this excerpt, Green underlines how the *réserve de l'incréable* represents “the property of an Other,” an otherness that “does not detain such power in turn but for the creative capabilities of a third.” The process of creation intrinsically involves a *thirdness*, an *otherness* that escapes any attempt of capture. But not only: this also entails a genetic (poetic) process through which the subject becomes active member of a genealogical chain, created by the subject inasmuch as the latter is created from it. Through the work in progress of writing, the creating subject, who aims to be, narcissistically speaking, at once first and last of a generative process, becomes simultaneously genitor and heir of a new form of *filiation*.

Now, this crucial passage, and indeed the paper *La réserve de l'incréable*, allows us to show first of all, and from a new perspective, why Green's theory of the Negative cannot be simply confined to a theory of subjectivity or of subjectivation. The process of subjectivation incepted and put into motion by the work of the Negative cannot be conceived but in the twofold relationship with the drive, as well as with the object. If anything, therefore, as we tried to show in the previous pages, Green's work of the Negative should rather be envisaged, in its complexity, as a theory of the limit: of the limits of representation, and of their transformation into a container for the absence of representation, linked to the loss of the object. As such, the *incréable* proves how a psychoanalytic theory of representation—in this particular case of literary representation—can hardly be conceived without a theory of the limit.¹⁰³ *Limits*, we should say to be more precise, for indeed both the intrapsychic as well as the interpsychic dimensions are at work, in their intricacies, in the creative process. Furthermore, such relationship between limit and representation should not be envisaged exclusively in terms of “limits of representation:” it is the representational process itself that becomes *a limit*, a limit

¹⁰² “[...] there is something which is uncreatable because creation could not overcome certain limits, i.e. to accomplish a certain type of transgression, without ultimately jeopardizing the creativity or the creative power of the subject. This is the point in which the condition of subject, i.e. of being separated, is anchored in the body of his creator: the mother. It is uncreatable because that reserve is the property of an Other, or of an otherness that does not detain such power in turn but for the creative capabilities of a third, themselves created *ad infinitum*. / Every work implies the couple creator-creature united by the process of creation. That will lead me to return anew on questions such as the origin of creation, creativity, and the end of creation, i.e. its aim and term.” Green, *D*, 313-314.

¹⁰³ See Green, *SD*, 44-45.

of accessibility to an irrepresentable element surviving in the creative process as well as in the text. In this respect, as we have seen, the representational process constitutes both an attempt to approach and to reconstruct a relationship with that affective, maternal trace. An attempt that, however, is deemed to fail, due to the process of representation forbidding the possibility of access to the *reserve de l'incréable*.

But there is a further element of interest, directly linked with the question of filiation and of the status of cultural objects, and which regards the link between the drive and the object relation, i.e., between the intrapsychic and the interpsychic, in relationship with culture. In Green's paper "La sexualité a-t-elle un quelconque rapport avec la psychanalyse?"¹⁰⁴ we find an insightful formulation in this regard. Discussing the role of sexuality and addressing the question of its decreasing importance in the contemporary theoretical and clinical horizon, Green writes that the peculiar focus of psychoanalysis is to shed light on "l'enracinement corporel du psychique lié aux objets, *l'ensemble étant immergé dans une culture*." [emphasis mine] He continues: "[...] il est impossible de considérer isolément les pulsions ou l'objet. La véritable relation met en rapport un Ça constitué de pulsions et un objet."¹⁰⁵

If this is the case, as I would claim with Green, the question that concerns us is how this link between the drive and the object translates in the work of writing, and not only in the context of the creative process, but also with regards to the status of the text as a cultural object underway. In other words: what does that relationship articulate if the *Ça*, the *Id*, is not that of an individual, but rather that of a text?

Read in such a light, the concept of the *incréable* cannot be reduced, evidently, to an individual sphere. It concurrently inscribes itself in the wider horizon of the cultural role of the subject in relationship with that *transitional cultural object* which is the work. What is therefore at stake here is the role that the creating subject plays by means of his creative endeavour in unveiling the *incréable* of the culture, of a community. If, on an individual level, the work of writing may be seen as an object articulating the attempt to reconstruct a link with a loss, with the trace of an absence, the question of the cultural relevance of the *incréable* compels us to consider a sort of *transmission of unknown origin*, an unconscious of the creative process which transforms into an unconscious of the *Kulturarbeit*. To be more precise, the *incréable* may be read as representative of the transmission of a loss which shapes the cultural dynamics through

¹⁰⁴ The English version of this article was published one year prior to the publication of the French one in the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 76, 1995, 871-883.

¹⁰⁵ See Green, "La sexualité a-t-elle un quelconque rapport avec la psychanalyse?", 840, 841. The original English text reads: "the roots of the mind attached to the body and linked to objects, immersed in a culture. [...] it is impossible to consider separately the drives alone or the object. The true relationship connects an id made of drives and an object." See "Has Sexuality Anything to do with Psychoanalysis?", 878.

the work of the Negative, a loss which survives in the shaping of culture as an irrepresentable element.

This very reference to the cultural context, and therefore to sublimation, is of primary importance, because it informs my approach to the question of cultural filiation in relationship with the work of the Negative, read in terms of a ‘theory of the limit,’ i.e., as a continuous work of reinvention and shaping of a blank and a loss which has a foundational role in the process of cultural transmission. The question of the *transitional cultural objects*, which Green derives from his reading of Winnicott, shall be further addressed in the conclusive part of this work, albeit it will emerge in different points of my work.

Given this theoretical “framing structure” for my analyses of Kafka and Celan’s writings, however, I would like to insist again, before proceeding, on the work of André Green, and to discuss the relationship between his metapsychology and literariness.

1.3 The Poetic Reserve of the Theory or, the *Incréable* in Green's Work: From Literature to Metapsychology

[...] *l'analyste réagit au texte comme à une production d'inconscient. L'analyste devient alors l'analysé du texte. Cette question, c'est en lui qu'il faut lui trouver une réponse et d'autant plus, dans le cas du texte littéraire, qu'il ne peut compter que sur ses propres associations. L'interprétation du texte devient l'interprétation que l'analyste doit fournir sur le texte, mais en fin de compte c'est l'interprétation qu'il doit se donner à lui-même des effets du texte sur son propre inconscient.*¹⁰⁶

Peut-on faire la différence entre vie psychique et écriture ? Dans bien des œuvres, l'entrelacs est presque impossible à démêler.

André Green¹⁰⁷

The *incr able* has enabled us to tackle the work of the Negative from the angle of literature and of the creative process. The *incr able* represents, however, more than a pivotal notion or conceptual stage in the development of Green's theory. While being a 'figure' of the Negative on its own, it situates at the border between representability and irrepresentability, the areas of the 'poetical' and of the 'theoretical,' and last but not least, between conscious and unconscious dimensions. This liminal peculiarity of the *incr able* allows us to advance some metatheoretical remarks to discuss what I consider an 'epistemological' relationship between Green's thinking and a 'passion' for creativity, writing, and literature.

The psychoanalytic exploration of creative processes characterises Green's work and informs his thinking no less than the confrontation with clinical cases "at the border of analysability."¹⁰⁸ Papers such as *La d liaison* (1971), *Le double et l'absent* (1973), and, indeed, *La r serve de l'incr able* (1982) are among others eloquent testimonies of how literature represents for Green a sort of *Doppeltg nger* which accompanies from the outset the development of his theory.

Green has never ceased to assert that the "psyche encompasses literature, not the contrary"— "le psychisme englobe la litt rature, pas le contraire."¹⁰⁹ In this respect, as peculiar means of

¹⁰⁶ Green, D, 20; Id. PM, 338: "[...] the analyst reacts to the text as if it were a product of the unconscious. *The analyst then becomes the analysed of the text.* It is within himself that he must find an answer to this questioning, all the more in the case of a literary text, since he can only rely on his own associations. The interpretation of the text becomes the interpretation which the analyst must provide for the text but when all is said and done, it is the interpretation that he must give himself of the effects of the text in his own unconscious." (translation modified)

¹⁰⁷ Green, LM, 27: "Is it possible to mark the difference between mental life and writing? In the case of many works, the interweaving between the two is almost impossible to disentangle."

¹⁰⁸ Urribarri, *Dialoguer avec Andr  Green*, 79.

¹⁰⁹ Green, LM, 16.

expression of the psyche, writing and literature can illuminate relevant aspects of the creative power of the unconscious. But not only: in this specific case, I claim that the very relationship that Green establishes with literature—and notably with works of authors of the likes of William Shakespeare, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, Louis Borges, and Marcel Proust—enables us to read features of the creative processes which are ingrained in the transition from the “space of literature”¹¹⁰ towards a specific form of theoretical organisation and structuring of knowledge.¹¹¹

Many scholars have already discussed the link between clinic and theory in the development of Green’s metapsychology—or to use Duparc’s expression, between a “clinic of the void” and a “theory of the Negative.”¹¹² Hereby, I aim to contribute to an understanding of Green’s work by highlighting the role that literature plays in the development of his theory. By so doing, I aim to trace the possible vicissitudes of what I call the ‘poetic’ in Green’s process of theorization—from a “poetic of the void” to “the theory of the Negative.” I use here the word ‘poetic’ primarily in its etymological value, i.e., in terms of *poiesis*, thereby referring to a form of *creativity*, of *making* which seems to stem, indeed, from literature, but that is in fact not limited to it. It would be more appropriate, in this case, to say that literature rather allows us to see, to perceive in specific terms (that I shall clarify in the following) a creativity of the unconscious, a *poiesis* of the psyche at work. What is important to emphasize here is that such *poiesis* is not neutralized in Green’s process of theorization: on the contrary, it expresses itself in new forms and configurations, surviving and transforming ‘otherwise,’ and becoming recognizable in *après-coup* as a constitutive, yet irrepresentable element of the writing process and of the text.

Beyond any difference of genre or style, I maintain that such a *poiesis* marks for Green a strong kinship between literature and psychoanalysis, actually opening a sort of ‘transitional area’ in which the two imbricate and communicate with each other in a common attempt to reconstruct a relationship with a loss, an absence. Of course, what I mean by that is not that

¹¹⁰ Maurice Blanchot, *L’espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955).

¹¹¹ In an unpublished paper, Maurizio Balsamo has recently emphasized the crucial role that literature and, in general, artistic creativity, play not only as an area of verifiability of theoretical and clinical aspects of psychoanalysis. Balsamo has also stressed the role of literature as a field of conceptual elaboration, i.e., as a fundamental source for deducible models and auxiliary constructions that may facilitate the thinkability of features of mental functioning, especially in those cases in which a theoretical systematization seems to be hardly possible or yet far from being satisfactorily cohesive and coherent. The same goes for particular clinical aspects, the complexity of which can be properly and effectively illustrated by artistic or literary creations in the first place, as in a sort of an “avant-coup” paving the way for further theoretical developments. See Maurizio Balsamo, “Transizioni nella metapsicologia. Una rilettura del Perturbante.” Unpublished paper presented in occasion of the seminar “Literature and Psychoanalysis” at the University of Milan (1 December 2022), 3-4. Quoted with the consent of the author.

¹¹² See Duparc, *André Green*, 40.

psychoanalysis and literature are interchangeable or equivalent, but rather that the question of the transformation of this creative, ‘poietic’ element common both to psychoanalysis and literature ought to be envisaged from the vantage point of the writing process, or rather from the specific angle of what the writing, the economy and the structuration of the text show of the psychic life.

For Green, the writing process, envisaged from the specificity of a psychoanalytic vantage point, allows in a unique way the creation of a space of theoretical reflection—in Green’s words: “l’espace théorique que seul l’écriture rend possible.”¹¹³ Therefore, before addressing in further detail Green’s relationship with literature, I shall first insist on the question of writing [*écriture*]¹¹⁴ as both a mode of meta-reflection and articulation of psychoanalytical thinking, as well as of creation of a new form of relationship with an analytic tradition, which the writing subject (re)invents and is subjected to at once.

The introduction to the English edition of *La folie privée, On private Madness*, in which Green presents an important collection of papers to the Anglo-American public, provides a revealing passage that allows to expand on this point:

One day, a former analysand asked me: “Why do you write?” The question took me by surprise: it was not one I had ever asked myself. Without thinking, I answered: “As a testimony.” To be sure, I was aware of the less avowable reasons that I had learned from my analysis: the need to be admired, exhibitionism, oedipal rivalry, and so on. But there were other reasons, too, on a more evolved level: the wish to organize experience into theory, and, last but not least, the expression of my search for truth in the filiation of Freud. However, all this would not have constituted the right reply. I should have said: “I write because I cannot do otherwise” – which does not contradict the interpretations I have just given, but rather includes them all. For, this persisting wish (which belongs to the unconscious) to satisfy, in a sublimated form, the instincts of one’s infantile sexuality does not disappear with time, but endures, though transformed, ever endowed with the same imperiousness. And it is a necessity no less imperious which seizes the elements of a complex experience, often obscure and sometimes elusive, to organize it into a coherent vision which ensures that it does not completely escape our understanding. The aims of both the unconscious and the ego come together in the compulsion to write. They are founded on a third element, which takes into account the imperatives of the superego and the ego ideal. I feel hardly free to write or not to write: I must write to contribute to the increase of knowledge and to maintain a self-image which I can recognize. In each instance, the agencies which compose my psychical personality, as Freud says, converge towards the same goal, which is imposed upon me rather than freely chosen.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Green, “Transcription d’origine inconnue. L’écriture du psychanalyste: critique du témoignage,” *Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse. Écrire la psychanalyse*, N° 16, automne 1977 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France), 27-63, here 28.

¹¹⁴ I do not intend to offer here a full account of what Green may or may not understand with the term *écriture*. Furthermore, by using this term, I am not suggesting an explicit or direct link with Barthes’ concept of *écriture*—see Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l’écriture* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1953)—although Green often refers to Barthes’ work in papers such as *Le double et l’absent*. The question of writing occupies a special place in the French intellectual context of the second half of the 20th Century, and to address it here in its complexity would do only an obvious injustice without considering the work of authors such as Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and many others.

¹¹⁵ Green PM, 3. This introduction is, significantly, an original text written in English and does not appear in the original French edition. It is, however, the remodelling of the introductory pages of an essay previously published

Let us comment on this rich text by beginning with the fundamental reference to Sigmund Freud, which I propose considering, indeed, in a strict link with the question of writing. In my reading, Green is not speaking here simply of a confrontation with the ‘content’ of the Freudian legacy (concepts, theories, models, hypotheses, paradigms, and so on). By reflecting upon the reasons pushing him towards the work of writing in relationship with the “wish to organize experience into theory,” and the “expression of [a] search of truth in the filiation of Freud,” Green is here underscoring the role of the very process of writing as both a fundamental creative element of his reception of Freud’s writing, and of his own psychoanalytic thinking. Writing emerges here, for Green, in the confrontation with the Freudian text, as instrumental *in thinking* his own role as a subject of a tradition, within a tradition, and beyond it. A tradition which the subject does not only reinvent and rediscover by developing a critical relation with it through writing, but which, conversely, actively affects and informs a process of subjectivation. Beyond the ‘content’ of Freud’s work, therefore, what is essential to highlight in this passage is the role of writing as a mode of *inscription* of a trace, a form of, in Green’s word, “testimony:” a way of developing and leaving on the page the creative fingerprint of a subject through language, as construction and representation of a way of thinking.

This text epitomizes how for Green the revindication of Freud’s legacy in its complexity and fertility needs to be envisaged *in relationship with that component of analytic thinking and practice that takes form as textuality, as writing process*. Such a relationship with writing as a means of confrontation and transmission of the Freudian foundations is far from being presumable, especially if we consider the predominant *oral* dimension of Lacan’s influential teachings in the context of French psychoanalysis—which, not unlike De Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique Générale*, crystallized as text in the *Seminars* only in a second moment, through the work of Jacques-Alain Miller.¹¹⁶

as “Transcription d’origine inconnue,” 27-63. In the following I shall therefore consider only the text of the English edition.

¹¹⁶ The development of this specific point would require a detailed analysis which I cannot provide here. I will confine myself to formulate a work hypothesis in a nutshell. Such a relationship with the work of writing, through which Green rediscovers the Freudian textual sources of psychoanalysis, may be read coherently alongside with the movement whereby Green ‘turns away’ from the influence of the *maître absolu* Jacques Lacan—a movement which however did not prevent Green from pursuing, through his work a constant, critical dialogue with Lacan. In this regard, we may underscore an element of interests which radically differentiates the work of Jacques Lacan and that of André Green—pertaining the relationship that the works of these two authors develop with the psychoanalytic tradition. Lacan’s work appears to be characterized by a sort of ‘adamic’ tendency, which expresses an attempt of (re)foundation, a gesture of breaking with Freud, to ‘return’ to Freud. Does such ‘return’ to Freud silently imply a ‘*return to be a new Freud?*’ A return to Freud in order to read Freud as he ought to be read and interpreted? That is what also the work of Urribarri seems to suggest, as he speaks of the crisis of post-Freudian psychoanalysis (See Urribarri, “Après Lacan,” 51-63). Green’s metapsychological endeavor, on the other hand, seems to stem from a different gesture, which transcends the *cesura* that every work of transmission entails, to put a new accent on the complex diachronic and synchronic development of the psychoanalytic thinking. Green has

But that is not all. Let us reread another passage of Green's text: "However, all this would not have constituted the right reply. I should have said: 'I write because I cannot do otherwise' – which does not contradict the interpretations I have just given, but rather includes them all." This answer, which may sound surprising in the text of a psychoanalyst, displays the level of awareness and sensitivity of Green's psychoanalytic thinking towards the capabilities and the limits of the written word. In addition, I am inclined to associate Green's expression with that 'necessity,' that compulsion to write that Rainer Maria Rilke addresses in his *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter* (*Letters to a Young Poet*).¹¹⁷ But foremost, we may ask ourselves, pushing even further this web of associations: "to whom such a letter about the necessity to write may be directed?" The question whether this 'letter' may be addressed to himself—or rather to a younger Green—, to a new generation of psychoanalysts, to the figures that constellated Green's intellectual life or to an unprecise subject elsewhere in time, elsewhere in space must remain for the moment open. We shall return to this point in a moment. "That cannot be decided," would have nonetheless said Green, as he indeed writes in *La réserve de l'incroyable*, for the addressee of the work is "one for all and all for one."¹¹⁸ Also in this case, an answer, or an approximation to an answer, must bear the weight of the undecidability, *bona pace* for the principle of non-contradiction.

Beyond all these questions, certainly of no secondary importance, this text shows how, for Green, writing represents much more than a simple attempt to convey knowledge and to communicate. "*I write because I cannot do otherwise:*" beyond any theory, the Negative is already at work here as an active, creative force. This sentence is therefore pivotal to highlight

said on this point: "J'ai toujours eu à cœur de reconnaître ce qu'il y a d'intéressant chez d'autres, sans pour autant me convertir. Je ne suis jamais entrée en religion. Ni dans le kleinisme, ni dans le winnicottisme, ni dans le lacanisme. Ce que j'appelle 'le babélisme psychanalytique' des courants post-freudiens est sans doute un ferment supplémentaire dans la crise de la psychanalyse... Mais il ne s'agit pas de pratiquer l'éclectisme. Je cherche la complexité. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est de découvrir et de suivre historiquement les grandes lignes de l'évolution de la pensée psychanalytique chez Freud et après Freud. Nous sommes *après Freud*, bien sûr, et aussi *avec Freud*, pour penser les problèmes de notre temps." (Urribarri, *Dialoguer avec André Green*, 76) "I have always been committed to recognize the elements of interests in the other authors, and that without necessarily convert myself. I have never joined a religion in this regard. Not the kleinism, nor the winnicottism, and neither the lacanism. What I call the 'psychoanalytic babelism' of the different post-Freudian trends represents no doubt an additional ferment in the context of the crisis of psychoanalysis. But the question here is not to practice a form eclecticism. I am in search of the complexity. What interests me is to discover and to follow historically the great lines of evolution of psychoanalytic thinking with Freud and after Freud. We come *after Freud*, of course, but we are also *with Freud*, embracing the task of thinking the problems of our time." The work of André Green *inscribes* itself, from this point of view, in a filiation with Freud (a prominent one, although historically not isolated) because it undertakes the task of carrying Freud's work through time by putting it into a fertile tension with the works that followed Freud, and therefore following its peregrination towards a "contemporary." In this regard, if we dare speaking of a 'return' to Freud in Green's case, such movement of return is counterbalanced by a 'setting-out' towards the new challenges that psychoanalysis faces in new contexts and epochs. It does not attempt to obliterate, willingly or not, the role of the father figure, but rather recognize in it an ineliminable limit which *is necessary in the process of filiation*, and from which the subject is compelled to begin its peregrinations.

¹¹⁷ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter* (Berlin: Insel Verlag) 1929, 10.

¹¹⁸ Green, D, 314.

in metatheoretical terms the relationship between writing and thinking, writing and theory, writing and knowledge, and especially the process of writing and the work in progress of subjectivation. The expression “I cannot do otherwise” (which in French would presumably translated to *je ne peux pas faire autrement*) suggests, how writing, for Green, articulates a form of organization of the subject which is bound to the objectalising function of writing, i.e., to that function of sublimation which allows an activity (such as writing) to acquire “object status” and to be considered as a “possession of the ego.”

At this point it is possible to detect one of the most interesting aspects of Green’s text: while on the one hand we are dealing with a conscious subject, a subject that is highly aware of the fact the “[he] must write to contribute to the increase of knowledge and *to maintain a self-image which [he] can recognize*,” [emphasis mine] we are also confronted with sentences such as “I write because I cannot do otherwise” and “I feel hardly free to write or not to write.” These sentences do not contradict Green’s way of reflecting upon his writing, but they rather seems to constitute utterances of other agencies of the psyche at work within the text. As such, they represent the traces of the work of the Negative which is actively and creatively operating in his writing. Green is putting here into words a discrepancy between the writing subject and a *subject of writing*, the latter operating, unbeknownst to the writing subject, in a deferred, dislocated dimension:

Écrire implique une dissociation entre le sujet écrivant e le sujet de l’écriture. Il y a à la fois comme une possibilité de mise en chaîne, de saturation, de construction temporelle impliquant un véritable décollement qui permet de comprendre ou de croire que l’on comprend, après-coup, ce que l’on écrit, pourquoi on l’a écrit. L’écriture fait retour sur son auteur, comme la parole revient vers l’énonciateur.¹¹⁹

There is no doubt that literature can show more clearly such a form of discrepancy between writing subject and subject of writing, as we shall see in our analyses of Kafka’s and Celan’s works. As far as Green is concerned, however, the question that remains open is how such discrepancy may emerge in the process of theorization, i.e., in that “theoretical space that only writing enables.”¹²⁰

To the question whether Green is ‘thinking’ here of himself as a writer or as a psychoanalyst, we know a possible answer, since he admittedly did not consider himself a writer.¹²¹ We may

¹¹⁹ Green, LM, 98: “To write implies a disassociation between the “writing subject and the subject of writing. There is there at once a sort of possibility of linking together, of saturation, of temporal construction entailing a veritable detachment which allows to understand, or to believe to understand, retrospectively, what one writes, and why one has written that. The writing returns towards the author, like the work returns towards its enunciator.”

¹²⁰ Green, “Transcription d’origine inconnue,” 28.

¹²¹ Green, LM, 98.

or may not agree with him. Regardless of Green's opinion, however, the importance of his relationship with writing cannot be underestimated. Perhaps, it would be more correct to say that Green was conscious of being a *writing psychoanalyst*, i.e., a *psychoanalyst whose way of envisaging psychoanalysis cannot be conceived but in relationship with the act of writing*. Yet, writing reveals something more, something beyond the intentionality or the consciousness of the author: it erodes the illusion of a simultaneity, creating the possibility of a new temporal construction and signification. It develops *a* and *in a* deferred rhythmic, in *après-coup*.

Keeping in mind the remarks that we have thus far formulated, I would like to return to the question of Green's relationship with literature and, more specifically, to that liminal concept of the *incréable*. Indeed, the text we just read is even more important for it presents to a larger English-speaking audience two of Green's most relevant works on literature: *The Unbinding Process (La déliaison)* and *The Double and the Absent (Le double et l'absent)*. Significantly, *La réserve de l'incréable* is absent from this collection: the text was not reprinted, not in the original French or in the English translation.¹²² Still, surprisingly enough, in this complex web of associations, in this fabric of affects this introduction intertwines, we can detect the *incréable* at work:

For, this persisting wish (which belongs to the unconscious) to satisfy, in a sublimated form, *the instincts of one's infantile sexuality does not disappear with time, but endures, though transformed, ever endowed with the same imperiousness*. And it is a necessity no less imperious which seizes the elements of a complex experience, often obscure and sometimes elusive, to organize it into a coherent vision which ensures that it does not completely escape our understanding. [emphasis mine]

While addressing the 'epistemophilic' dimension of the drive emerging in sublimation, Green is perhaps consciously, perhaps unconsciously tracing the *incréable* of his own work. If any work of creation necessarily implies and transforms an absence which binds the creator to an affective remnant of the body of the mother, the urge, the *compulsion to understand* expressed by epistemophilia is no less linked with such a kernel which persists and dwells at the core of the creative effort of theorization. Green rightfully points out, however, that literature is rather related to *scopophilia*, to a 'pleasure of seeing,' while epistemophilia situates more on the side of the intellectual sphere.¹²³ In spite of that, the two are linked by two crucial

¹²² Interestingly, in spite of its importance, this text was not included in the recent Howard B. Levine (Ed.), *The Freudian Matrix of André Green: Towards a Psychoanalysis for the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Routledge, 2023). As of today, *La réserve de l'incréable* remains basically unknown to the international audience.

¹²³ Green, D, 25: "[...] lire est lié au plaisir de voir, ce qui implique qu'une certaine curiosité anime le lecteur. Mais cette curiosité, si la lecture peut permettre de penser qu'elle comporte quelque abstraction, reste quand même loin de ce qu'on appelle la curiosité intellectuelle, car elle est beaucoup plus 'sensuelle' que cette dernière. C'est tout l'écart qui sépare la scopophilie de l'épistémophilie. L'épistémophilie est recherche d'une 'théorie'

aspects: first, both scopophilia and epistemophilia find their sources in the drive motions [*pulsionnel*], and are therefore intimately related with sublimation. Second, both scopophilia and epistemophilia are necessarily bound to an element of irrepresentability which cannot be removed, but that is actively operating, instead, on a structural level. As he writes “to organize [...] into a coherent vision which ensures that it does not completely escape our understanding,” Green is indeed aware that there is far more than a mere resistance at work in the process of theorization. And is not the *incréable* itself a word, a signifier *created* with the purpose to give form to something which was already there, and which awaited to be found through the act of creation? A word, a remnant of language which may “ensure” that the “often obscure and sometimes elusive” complexity of life “does not completely escape our understanding”?

We are walking here on the borderline between psychoanalysis and literature, or rather, in the words of Winnicott, in *a transitional area between the two*. Now, Green’s relationship with literature is of key importance to grasp the relationship with Freud’s textual legacy as we are envisaging it through the process of writing. By that I am not suggesting that Green is reading Freud as an author of literature, far from it. Rather, Green’s relationship with literature, his interest for *what remains unwritten and yet encapsulated in the written text* constitutes a mark of *originality* which draws directly from the *origins* of psychoanalysis.

Notoriously, the question of the so called ‘application’ of psychoanalysis still raises as of today a certain scepticism not only without, but also within the field of psychoanalysis, fuelling debates regarding the domain of specificity and the tasks of psychoanalysis itself. Many discoveries of psychoanalysis can nonetheless hardly be conceived without keeping in mind the fertile exchange with literature. Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, just to name one example, remains an unreplaceable creative source for the formulation of Freud’s oedipal theory.¹²⁴

Discussing in this context the cultural relevance of Sophocles’ work, Green has remarked how “[b]eaucoup plus que d’une tragédie antique, si importante soit-elle, il s’agit là d’un

explicative, ainsi qu’en témoignent les théories sexuelles que les enfants bâtissent pour s’expliquer comment les bébés viennent au monde. La scopophilie est une quête pour un plaisir moins inhibé, moins déplacé, moins déssexualisé. Plus affectif qu’intellectuel. Une œuvre littéraire est appréciée selon l’effet émotionnel qu’elle provoque chez le lecteur plus que par l’intelligence qui en émane, même s’il faut beaucoup d’intelligence de la part de l’écrivain pour produire cet effet.” See Id., PM, 343: “Reading is related to the pleasure of seeing, which implies that the reader is moved by a certain curiosity. But this type of curiosity, even though it would seem that the act of reading entails some form of abstraction, remains quite far from what we call ‘intellectual curiosity,’ because it is much more sensuous than the latter. The discrepancy between the two is precisely that between scopophilia and epistemophilia. Epistemophilia is more akin to the search for an explanatory ‘theory,’ as exemplified by the sexual theories put together by children to explain how babies come into this world. Scopophilia is a drive toward a much less inhibited, displaced, or desexualized pleasure. It involves the affect more than the intellect. A literary work is appreciated according to the emotional effect it induces in the reader, much more than through the understanding that emanates from it, even if it takes a great deal of intelligence on the part of the writer to produce this effect.”

¹²⁴ See for instance Green LM, 16.

véritable vecteur culturel de messages inconscients.” In my translation: “Far more than an ancient tragedy, no matter how important, [Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*] is a veritable cultural vector of unconscious messages.”¹²⁵ From a psychoanalytic vantage point, nothing forbids us from extending this definition also to other works of literature, insofar as every piece of great literature is characterized by an unconscious textual dimension:

[...] Même si cela peut paraître étrange, un texte *a* un inconscient qui le travaille. Comment le prouver? Les critiques littéraires d’inspiration structuraliste, même les plus réservés à l’égard de la psychanalyse, admettent l’existence des structures formelles inconscientes d’un texte [...]. Mais lorsqu’il s’agit de l’inconscient freudien, la réticence est manifeste. Or cet inconscient peut se montrer – je n’ose pas dire se démontrer. Et ceci sans nécessairement faire appel à l’auteur. L’existence de cet inconscient textuel est présent (sic) dans les articulations thématiques, les césures du texte, les silences brutaux, les ruptures de ton et surtout les taches, les scories, les détails négligés qui n’intéressent que les psychanalystes. Les critiques traditionnels épiluchent un texte avec un soin vertigineux, la philologie n’a pas de secret pour eux, leur érudition est accablante. Il reste qu’à un moment ou à un autre se pose toujours la question, ne serait-ce que pour eux, si ce n’est pour autres : “Qu’est-ce que ça veut dire? Qu’est-ce que ça me fait? Comment, pourquoi cela me fait-il quelque chose?”¹²⁶

Green speaks here of an *unconscious of the text* which touches and resonates within and with the unconscious of a reader.¹²⁷ The communication of these unconscious dimensions—of the author through the text, of the text itself, of the reader—constitutes what Green calls “the discourse of the work.” What is at stake here is not the text *per se*, but the work as a cultural object ‘underway:’ the work in its capability of creating complex resonances on individual as well as collective levels, in different ways and modalities, in different places and times.¹²⁸ “The discourse of the work” is for Green, we might say, that living dimension of exchange, which the text can provoke and carry beyond its time and space of creation in communication with that otherness, that reader whose reading act makes the work ‘alive.’

If we conceive literary and artistic works as cultural vectors of unconscious messages, as Green suggests, then the history of literature, the history of the readings of literary works, may be envisaged in terms of the multifaced forms in which the unconscious dimension of a culture

¹²⁵ Green, *ivi*.

¹²⁶ Green, D, 58; *Id.*, PM, 323: “[...] Even though that may seem strange, the text *has* an unconscious which works it and through it. But how to prove it? Structuralist literary critics, even those who have the most reservations concerning psychoanalysis, admit that a text possesses formal unconscious structures [...] But where the Freudian unconscious is involved, there is a manifest reticence. This unconscious can be detected — I dare not say that it can be proven. And this, without necessarily referring to the author. This textual unconscious is present in the text’s thematic articulations, its brutal silences, its shifts of tone, and especially in the blemishes, incongruities, and neglected details which only interest the psychoanalyst. Traditionalist critics dissect a text with incredible care, philology holds no secrets for them, their erudition is overwhelming. There comes, nevertheless, a time, a moment of truth, when one has to ask: “But, what does this mean to me? How, why does this do something for me?” (translation modified)

¹²⁷ Green, D, 19, ff.

¹²⁸ Green, PM, 20.

emerges, affects and *represents itself* in different times and spaces, in an interplay of folding and unfolding, veiling and unveiling. The history of the reception of a work can be considered as the possible, yet unforeseeable peregrination of the effects of the work on its readers: of that which the work can show, in each time and space, as the unconscious of the culture.

In other words, the question of the unconscious of the text, and of the messages that such an unconscious can convey, lead us to consider the destiny of a work, of the “text of writing,” in its being capable of interrogating the “text of life,” of the life of the psyche beyond the surface of consciousness:

Il reste qu'on ne peut s'en tirer sans interroger l'œuvre, le texte de l'écriture, par rapport au texte de la vie. Non seulement de la vie de l'auteur, mais de la vie comme espace commun partagé par les hommes et dans lequel l'œuvre prend racine ou se transmet, ne serait-ce que pour arriver à son destinataire. Ce tourbillon de vie, ce bruit de la vie dont Freud dit qu'il est entièrement le fait d'Eros, comprend aussi ce noyau de silence, cet ombilic neutre autour duquel il se tisse jusqu'à le faire complètement oublier.¹²⁹

If this is true, the “unconscious messages” conveyed by works and writings, can emerge, beyond the domain of literature, in theoretical works, essays of literary criticism, and metapsychological studies. In its close connection with the oedipal structure, with sublimation, and with the work of the Negative, of which it is indeed a *representative*, the *incréable* can be considered, I claim, as an outcome of the transformation of such an unconscious dimension which lies at the core of the work of writing, of every work of great literature. In this sense, the *incréable* can be interpreted as an attempt to resonate, to respond to the unconscious of texts that touched and shape a new, attentive reader, elsewhere, elsewhen. Moving in this meta-theoretical and meta-poetical area, this concept embodies furthermore the conceptual trace of a writing which has not yet been written, the irrepresentable core around which the writing process is restless at work. Here, I am more specifically thinking to Green's own work, to his writing to come, to the development of his own thinking.

In other words, the *incréable*, in its peculiar features, constitutes a trace of an unconscious dimension of the writing process and of the text susceptible of emerging as a constitutive part of the theory, of the process of theoretical thinking, and of the ways whereby we may or may not acquire and organise psychoanalytic knowledge. From this point of view, the *incréable* enable us to detect not only an ‘unachieved,’ but indeed an “uncreatable,” a blank that breaks

¹²⁹ Green, D, 59; Id., PM, 324: “Still, we cannot proceed without questioning the work, the text of writing, in terms of the text of life – not only in terms of an author's life, but also of life as a common space shared by human beings, in which the work takes root or circulates, if only in order to reach its audience. This whirlwind or commotion of life which Freud ascribed entirely to Eros, also includes a core of silence, a neutral navel which life makes us forget as it winds itself around it.”

the circularity of consciousness in the process of theorization. An element which cannot be created and which in spite of that becomes the secret object of the creation process. Such gap, which is in its own right a characteristic of the work of the Negative, leads us to consider the *incréable* as an embodiment of a conceptual “reserve” of unconscious order within Green’s theoretical structuring.

It is in this sense, I think, that the literary space constitutes for Green the container of a possible *poetic* of the theory, which, however, deploys such poetic possibility only in a deferred dimension. The literary work does give form, for Green, to a dimension of knowledge *en souffrance*, trace of a *living discourse* whose reverberations doesn’t cease to deploy as remnants of a fascination that the intellectual effort of theorization cannot ultimately saturate. Such a ‘poetical reserve of the theory,’ this unachieved, unachievable kernel of signification is one of the elements that Green inherits from the space of literature.

But that is only one element of a more complex picture. Indeed, the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis cannot be limited to a question of knowing or unknowing. If we accept the hypothesis according to which the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis cannot be reduced to a mere question of ‘inspiration’ or ‘anticipation’ of knowledge of the psyche, the unconscious dimension I am trying to address here is essential to explain how a theory—the *writing of a theory*—conveys the seeds of possible signification *a posteriori* of a subjectivity in its relationship with that twofold object *which is the work and ingrained in the work*.

In an interview with Dominique Eddé, Green speaks of the importance of the *insight* in the context of the clinic and of the analytic *séance*, differentiating it from the sphere of the intellectual knowledge. He says:

[...] l’insight n’est pas une prise de conscience intellectuelle, c’est une idée qui prend corps et s’enracine comme une conviction, c’est un moment où, pour employer une comparaison banale, le puzzle laisse apparaître l’image. Là où on ne voyait pas clair, là où les choses étaient vagues et confuses, un paysage se devine.¹³⁰

Literature offers a sort of gaze, of sight towards our innermost cell which we are unable to recognize but through the eyes of another. The act of writing makes perceivable that sight *that*

¹³⁰ Green, LM, 96: “[...] the insight is not a form of intellectual awareness or knowledge, it is an idea that takes shape and roots as a sort of conviction, it is a moment in which, to use a trivial analogy, from a puzzle an image appears. There, where we did not see clearly, there, where things were vague and confused, a landscape can be seen.”

transcends the sight to re-veal an image which we cannot perceive but as if the image of another looking at us and within us in turn, in response, through the written text.

These texts suggest indeed how for Green literature does not only represent a field of conceptual investigation or a theoretical substratum. The transitional area between literature and psychoanalysis, between scopophilia and epistemophilia that I tried to outline invites us to consider as constitutive component of Green's thinking, and of his work of theorization, an affective matrix which writing only can inscribe and illuminate in the subject.

It is such multiplicity of perspectives, this form of inhabiting the threshold between different worlds—made possible by literature—which Green incorporates as a further poetic element of his theory:

*L'analyste devient alors l'analysé du texte. Cette question, c'est en lui qu'il faut lui trouver une réponse et d'autant plus, dans le cas du texte littéraire, qu'il ne peut compter que sur ses propres associations. L'interprétation du texte devient l'interprétation que l'analyste doit fournir sur le texte, mais en fin de compte c'est l'interprétation qu'il doit se donner à lui-même des effets du texte sur son propre inconscient.*¹³¹

We do not only read literature: literature reads us. As we direct our eyes towards the white of the page, that page, that text *regards us in turn* — as the title of a book by Didi Huberman suggests.¹³² The unconscious of the text reads our unconscious, it *reveals* its being presents and absent at the same time in the effects and in the affects put into motion through the act of reading. The image that appears in front of us, within us, in such an insight, is all but the reflection of a mirror, or an image in which we can actually recognize ourselves. It is rather the negative hallucination of the subject, that representation of absence of representation in which Green detects the structure that frames and allows representation.

In this sense literature represents for Green the space in which it is possible to give form to a dimension of absence susceptible of reconfigurations and transmissions. Beyond any specific interpretative act, any detailed reading or structuration of sense, writing conveys an affective matrix which is harbinger of signification, of a continuous invention and reinvention of the human, in the light of the very limits of such signification. The psychoanalytic act, as well as the act of writing, becomes in this sense an incessant form of testimony for the human, for the rediscovery of the human in its link with the creativity of the written word, through time.

¹³¹ Green, D, 20; Id. PM, 338 (tr. mod.): “[...] the analyst reacts to the text as if it were a product of the unconscious. *The analyst then becomes the analysed of the text.* It is within himself that he must find an answer to this questioning, all the more in the case of a literary text, since he can only rely on his own associations. The interpretation of the text becomes the interpretation which the analyst must provide for the text but when all is said and done, it is the interpretation that he must give himself of the effects of the text in his own unconscious.”

¹³² Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1992).

In *Le double et l'absent*, Green offers us a significant reflection on this point, as he writes:

L'acte d'écrire est un acte étrange, aussi peu nécessaire qu'imprévisible, mais aussi tyrannique qu'inévitable pour l'écrivain. Les tentatives d'explication psychanalytique sont peut-être trop restées au niveau des significations préconscientes en soulignant le rôle du fantasme de création, ou même d'autocréation dans l'écriture. Freud a ouvert une voie sans l'explorer jusqu'au bout. Mélanie Klein, après lui, y a vu un désir de réparation après le travail des pulsions de destruction. Ne serait-ce que par la négation du monde réel qui existe au départ de tout désir d'écrire. Winnicott, enfin, a situé l'œuvre dans cet espace potentiel où l'œuvre prend le statut d'objet transitionnel, espace de jeu et d'illusion entre le moi et l'objet. Ce que nous aimerions ajouter ici à leur suite est que le travail de l'écriture présuppose une plaie et une perte, une blessure et un deuil, dont l'œuvre sera la transformation visant à les recouvrir par la positivité fictive de l'œuvre. Aucune création ne va sans peine, sans un douloureux travail dont elle est la pseudo-victoire. Pseudo parce que cette victoire ne dure qu'un temps limité, qu'elle est toujours contestée par l'auteur lui-même qui éprouve l'inlassable désir de recommencer, donc de nier ce qu'il a déjà fait, de nier en tout cas que le résultat, si satisfaisant qu'il ait pu paraître, soit entendu comme son dernier mot.¹³³

With this passage, which almost seems to reconstruct a sort of psychoanalytic 'history of literature,' a history of the vicissitudes of sublimation through literature, Green is capable of putting on the page the work of transmission, the work of filiation: he makes it visible, i.e., *readable* by reinventing a heritage, a legacy in the work of other authors that preceded him and by seeding the works of others to follow. Maurice Corcos, in this sense, rightfully pointed out how Green's work can be understood, in its complexity, as a "praise of transmission." But what is transmitted more specifically, what is the object of such a transmission?

If I may add a further link in the chain that Green creates here—a link which I consider as one of my contributions to the understanding of his theoretical legacy—is that precisely this absence, this wound, this work of mourning that the work transforms constitutes the veritable object of the process of transmission lying at the core of Kafka, Celan, and Green's work. An object which allows creation, making indeed possible the task of exploring, knowing, representing. But not only. This work of the Negative shapes something which remains inaccessible, and that therefore, in the light of such inaccessibility, can save the most precious remnant of the creature. Such work of transmission of an absence, of a constitutive blank by

¹³³ Green, D, 57; See Id., PM, 322: "The act of writing is a strange act, as unnecessary as it is unpredictable, but for the writer it is also as tyrannical as it is inevitable. It may be that attempts at psychoanalytical interpretations have remained for too long on the level of preconscious meanings, by emphasizing the role of creation and even self-creation fantasies. Freud blazed a trail but did not follow it to the end. Melanie Klein, after him, saw in the act of writing a desire for repairs in the wake of the destructive instincts – if only because of the negation of the real world, which coexists with the desire to write. Winnicott, finally, placed the work in that potential space where it has the status of a transitional object, that arena of play and illusion between ego and object. To this, we would like to add the notion that the work of writing presupposes a wound and a loss, a work of mourning, of which the text is the transformation into a fictitious positivity. No creation can occur without exertion, without a painful effort over which it is the pseudo-victory. Pseudo, because this victory can only last for a limited time, because it is always contested by the author himself, who constantly wishes to start over, and thus to deny what he has already done, to deny in any case that the result, satisfying as it might seem, should be taken as the final product."

means of writing—which lies at the very core of my investigation—motivates the title of my work: *Filiations of the Negative*.

In another interview with Dominique Eddé, Green says:

Je ne me considère pas comme un écrivain mais j'ai quand même beaucoup écrit et il m'arrive en rouvrant l'un de mes livres, parfois à vingt ans de distance, de me dire, étonné: "Ah tiens, c'est moi qui ai écrit cela... c'était déjà là!" Ce qui revient à dire que la chose s'est totalement détachée de soi. Il y a constamment ce mouvement d'excentration, de non-coïncidence avec soi et de quelque chose qui est propre au mouvement même de la communication orale ou écrite; le produit de cette communication devenant en lui-même un objet qu'on peut considérer soi. Comme une objectivation de la subjectivité par l'écriture.¹³⁴

If the act of writing is the sublimated object of the objectalising function, we may ask ourselves what is the objectalising function of the text, of writing. Green's quote seems to suggest that the text, as a result of the process of sublimation, does have in turn an object. If it is true that the text, the writing regards us in a change of perspective that decentralizes the subject, the veritable object of the process of writing can be indeed the process of subjectivation itself. That absence which lies at the core of the writing, and which writing conveys as its own remotest object is that subject of writing which the writing subject is still unaware of.

The space of literature enables Green to see the reflection of the *logic of the heterogeneity*¹³⁵ of the psychic functioning at work. In this sense, for Green, writing allows to show what Freud called the "endopsychic perception of the process."¹³⁶ This means that writing puts us in front of the opacity of our own psychic life emerging through the structuring of the text from the double vantage point of double and absent, of writing subject and written subject, of 'agent' and 'acted one.' Writing re-presents us, in front of ourselves, in the guise of an alterity. It is in this sense that writing does not demonstrates but rather *shows* the complexity (not the totality) of the work of the psyche.

There is a passage of surprising force in Green's work, in which this particular aspect of the unconscious of the text emerges. It is an extract from Green's *La déliaison*, a paper to which we shall often return below.

¹³⁴ Green, LM, 98-99: "I do not consider myself a write, but at least I did write much. It happens to me, reopening a book of mine, perhaps after twenty years, of telling myself, chocked: "Look at that, it is me that wrote that... that was already there!" That is to say that the thing is totally detached and separated from oneself. There is constantly that movement decenration, of non-coïncidence with oneself, something which is proper of the very movement of oral and written communication; the product of that communication becoming itself an object which one can consider as its own. Like an objectification of subjectivity by means of writing."

¹³⁵ See Urribarri, *Dialoguer avec André Green*, 43.

¹³⁶ Green, "Transcription d'origine inconnu," 38.

The essay *La déliaison* represents an attempt to reflect, through literature, on the evolution of psychoanalysis. What can literature and the mutations of its representational strategies tell us about the necessity of a reorientation and expansion of the psychoanalytic horizon in front of the challenges of the contemporary, both from a clinical as well as a cultural vantage point? A veritable *Fortschritt in der Geistigkeit*—to use Freud’s famous expression in *Der Mann Moses*¹³⁷—, a step forward in the evolution of psychoanalysis can only be achieved, so I read Green’s paper, if psychoanalysis can listen attentively to that *alter ego*, that *Doppelgänger* that literature embodies. If psychoanalysis does not intend to give in in front of the new challenges posed by the mutations within the clinical, analytical, and theoretical horizons, it is necessary to welcome and rethink, from a new perspective, other forms of expression of the creative power of the psyche, such as literature and poetry, which can be considered as “fictional alterities”¹³⁸ of a truth, of an approximation to the truth. Literature could be, in this respect, a ‘good-enough mother,’ to use Winnicott’s famous formulation, a sort of maternal figure for psychoanalysis, from which psychoanalysis can learn to recognize anew the importance of the openness to contradiction, and the counterfactual.

The final page of the essay *La déliaison* takes us, literally, by surprise, as we read:

Peut-être la littérature mourra-t-elle, mais peut-être aussi qu’une mutation que notre imagination n’est pas capable de concevoir lui donnera un autre visage. Notre horizon actuel est borné par nos modes de pensée. Après tout, nous ne sommes guère pas plus capables d’imaginer ce qui succèdera à la psychanalyse qu’on était, en 1880, en mesure de concevoir ce que Freud nous permettrait de voir, et qui était là sous nos yeux, depuis toujours. Il suffit d’un seul.¹³⁹

Little did Green know, as he wrote these lines, what extraordinary intellectual itinerary expected him. Here again, we can detect another reference to the Freudian foundations, to scopophilia, epistemophilia, and to that passion for discovery which is the adventure of writing. Also, we can surely interpret Green’s last words as a form of identification with the figure of the father, with the figure of the conqueror—an identification which was not alien to Freud himself. Nonetheless, I would like to propose a different perspective, which leads us back to the question of the unconscious of the text. Here, we can recognize, in my opinion, the seeds of a subject of the unconscious who speaks through a subject in time. At the threshold between literature and psychoanalysis, in that liminal field of tensions which allows us, at once, to read

¹³⁷ Freud, GW XVI, 219 ff.

¹³⁸ Balsamo, “Transizioni nella metapsicologia,” 3-4.

¹³⁹ Green, D, 42; Id., PM, 359: “Perhaps literature will die, or perhaps a mutation, which imagination cannot now conceive, will occur and give it another face. Our present horizon is confined by our modes of thought. After all, why should we be more capable of imagining what will come after psychoanalysis than people were in 1880 of imagining what Freud was about to reveal, which had been there, under their noses, since time immemorial? One adventurer is enough to change the face of everything.”

together literature and psychoanalysis and to recognize their own specific values, Green is able to express *the future in the past of his own intellectual adventure*. Green is therefore not so much identifying here with the figure of the father or of the discoverer. Rather, he is leaving an empty space, an empty place in the fabric of the text and of his work, for someone yet to come. Was perhaps that sort of 'letter' to a younger psychoanalyst addressed to this empty place, to this absent guest?

Celebrating and honouring this empty place, it is as if Green were taking the first step in a chain of transmission as a future heir of his own work, of his own thinking, in the filiation of Sigmund Freud. Nothing can give for granted that such a thing can happen. The projection of such an image can be transmitted only from a seemingly unknown origin.

CHAPTER 2
THE WRITING OF THE *INCÉRABLE*:
FRANZ KAFKA AND THE WORK OF THE NEGATIVE

2.1 Revisiting the Question of the Negative in Kafka's Work

The question of the Negative represents a crucial and complex topic in Kafka's scholarship across the fields of i.a., religious, philosophical, and literary studies. Although recurring in countless contributions, and having been addressed from a variety of perspectives, only a handful of studies to date have been specifically devoted to it. A review of the scholarly literature on the topic indicates, indeed, that the Negative has often been the subject of erratic analyses, as if it were characterized by a sort of elusiveness and resistance to interpretation. Other times, scholars have considered the Negative as being so organically interlocked with Kafka's writing that no actual investigation of its features seemed to be required, resulting in a general overlooking and underappreciation of its specificity. And yet, many prominent examples throughout the twentieth century show that Kafka's writing has provided a fertile territory for the investigation of the Negative. Let us think for instance to the pivotal reflections that animate the correspondence between Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem;¹⁴⁰ to the 1953 essay *Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka (Notes on Kafka)* by Theodor W. Adorno;¹⁴¹ to many inspired pages by Maurice Blanchot,¹⁴² Jean-François Lyotard,¹⁴³ and Harold Bloom,¹⁴⁴ to name only a few. Only in recent years scholars such as Rosalba Maletta¹⁴⁵ and Shane Weller¹⁴⁶ have systematically addressed the question of the Negative in Kafka's writing, respectively from a psychoanalytic and a stylistic-comparative vantage point.

¹⁴⁰ Walter Benjamin und Gershom Scholem, *Briefwechsel 1933-1940*, Hrsg. von G. Scholem (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985). On Scholem's reception of Kafka see also Harold Bloom, *The Strong Light of the Canonical: Kafka, Freud, and Scholem as Revisionists of Jewish Culture and Thought* (New York: The City College, 1987).

¹⁴¹ Theodor W. Adorno, "Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka" *Gesammelte Schriften in 20 Bände. 10,1, Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft: 1. Prismen. Ohne Leitbild*, Hrsg. von R. Tiedemann unter Mitwirkung von G. Adorno, *et al.* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 254-287.

¹⁴² Maurice Blanchot, *De Kafka à Kafka* (Gallimard, 1981).

¹⁴³ Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger et "les juifs"* (Paris: Galilée, 1988). Id. *La prescription. Rue Descartes*, No. 1/2, Des Grecs (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, Avril 1991), 239-254.

¹⁴⁴ Bloom, *The Strong Light of the Canonical* and Id. *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (London: Macmillan, 1995) 447-462.

¹⁴⁵ Rosalba Maletta, "L'avventore intempestivo". Alcune riflessioni sull'ultimo Kafka". *Studia Theodisca IX*, ed. by F. Cercignani (Milano: CUEM, 2002), 109-155; Id., "Sopra un Frammento del giovane Kafka. Modi della *Vorstellung*," *Franz Kafka. Un Frammento giovanile sull'Estetica*, ed. by R. Maletta e G. Scaramuzza, *Materiali di Estetica*. Terza serie, N. 4.2 (2017), 131-157; Id., "Franz Kafka: la letteratura tra serie complementare freudiana e meccanica quantistica." *Enthymema 22* (novembre 2018), 62-81.

¹⁴⁶ Shane Weller, *Language and Negativity in European Modernism: Toward a Literature of the Unword* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

We are in other words confronted with a somewhat paradoxical state of research, in which the question of the Negative seems to be as pervasive as much as elusive. This paragraph aims to discuss in general terms the limits of prevailing interpretative trends of the Negative, and to advance a new work hypothesis based on Green's work, which shall be developed throughout the following chapter. In this sense, it has to be remarked how especially in recent decades scholars have generally overlooked Green's original theoretical contribution to the current research on the Negative. This occurs also in cases in which psychoanalytical concepts or approaches are applied (for instance in Sokel,¹⁴⁷ Kaus,¹⁴⁸ or Neumann¹⁴⁹). Furthermore, in those cases in which Green's theories are taken into consideration (Kaiser),¹⁵⁰ his conceptual tools are applied without a proper critical articulation of their complexity. This reveals not only lack of proper reception of Green's work, but often results in a flattening of the specificity of the Negative at work in Kafka's writing. In fact, few important exceptions notwithstanding,¹⁵¹ the reception of Green's work on the Negative constitutes not just a neglected, but foremost an unwritten chapter in Kafka scholarship in general. For this reason, in the present section I will not focus specifically on psychoanalytical investigations of the Negative but opt for a more general approach.

Given the extension of Kafka's research, it is nonetheless necessary to limit this overview to a few relevant works, and to postpone a detailed analysis of other important contributions in each of the following sections of this chapter, case by case. In order to orient in the *mare magnum* of scholarship, I shall therefore organise the present survey by following the development of three intertwined axis in some of the most representative publications available. The first axis refers to the subject of investigation itself ("what is the Negative?"); the second one considers the theoretical sources and the methodological approach ("how can I read the Negative?"). The third one relates to the primary Kafka texts each commentator relies on ("where can I detect the Negative?").

¹⁴⁷ Walter H. Sokel, *The Myth of Power and the Self: Essays on Franz Kafka* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002).

¹⁴⁸ See for instance Rainer J. Kaus, *Literaturpsychologie und Literarische Hermeneutik. Sigmund Freud und Franz Kafka* (Bern: Lang Verlag, 2004), which tends to limit his reading patho-biographic elements by considering negative-oedipal conflicts or the *Vaterkomplex* in Kafka.

¹⁴⁹ Gerhard Neumann, *Kafka-Lektüren* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013).

¹⁵⁰ See Kaiser, "Hinter dem Gesetz. Eine Deutung von Franz Kafkas *Türhüterlegende*."

¹⁵¹ See Gregorio Kohén, *Reflections on the Aesthetic Experience. Psychoanalysis and the Uncanny*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), as well as the work of Maletta, particularly "L'avventore intempestivo", 109-155. Also, Meghnagi's *Il padre e la legge*, originally published in 1992, deserves to be mentioned here for the attentive depiction of the intellectual and cultural context in which authors such as Freud and Kafka lived and worked, as well as for the rich parallels drawn between them as for the question of the relationship between the process of writing, sublimation, and Judaism. See also Meghnagi, "A cultural event within Judaism," 57-72.

As Green points out,¹⁵² we cannot say what Kafka had in mind as he refers to the Negative in his writings. Also, it is not possible to establish with certainty whether or not Kafka was alluding to any particular authorial or theoretical source.¹⁵³ I hasten to add that these aspects are of secondary importance for the present research: what do we suppose Kafka had in mind, or which author do we believe he refers to with regards to the Negative does not satisfy the purpose of my investigation. Foremost, this does not offer an enriching insight of the complexity of this specific matter as it emerges in Kafka's work. On this point, it is worth recalling how Adorno grasped this aspect in his influential essay *Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka*.¹⁵⁴ In a significant passage, we read:

The artist is not obliged to understand his own work, and there is particular reason to doubt whether Kafka was capable of doing so. [...] Kafka's images protected themselves against the deadly aesthetic error of equating the philosophy that an author pumps into a work with its metaphysical content. Were this so, the work would be stillborn; it would exhaust itself in what it says and would not unfold itself in time. To guard against this short-circuit, which jumps directly to the significance intended by the work, the first rule is: take everything literally; cover up nothing with concepts coming from above. Kafka's authority is that of the texts. Only fidelity to the letter, not oriented understanding, can be of help.¹⁵⁵

Bearing in mind Adorno's remark, I will show in this chapter a side of the Negative in Kafka's writing which has not been properly explored by the research: a work of the Negative that cannot be reduced to a conceptual tradition (e.g. negative theology, or Hegelian dialectic)¹⁵⁶ nor to an intentional or conscious expression of themes and concepts (i.e. to a projectuality inscribed *a priori* in the text).¹⁵⁷ If it is fair to assume that Kafka's Negative has been limited to a thematic core or to the subject of theoretical meditation, that is to some extent related with a certain approach towards the textual sources on which many scholars have focused their studies.

Some of the most important and direct references to "das Negative" in Kafka's *corpus* can be tracked down in 'non-fictional' texts and fragments, such as the *Zürauer Aphorismen*. This

¹⁵² See Green, *Associations (Presque) libres*, 227.

¹⁵³ On this point, however, much ground has been covered thanks to the work of Ritchie Robertson, *Kafka. Judaism, Politics, and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), Ch. 5: *Reflections from a damaged life*, 185-217; and, most recently, Paul North *The Yield: Kafka's Atheological Reformation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

¹⁵⁴ Along with Beckett and Celan, Kafka is notoriously among those authors who had a striking impact on the development of Adorno's negative dialectics and, more generally, on his thinking. The richness of Adorno's reading, however, extends beyond the specificity of philosophical research. Also thanks to the peculiarity of his reception of the Freudian text, it provides elements of great actuality to revisit the Negative in Kafka's writings. See Franz Kaltenbeck, "Adorno et la psychanalyse," *Savoirs et clinique*, vol. 18, no. 1 (Toulouse: Erès Editions, 2015), 84-94.

¹⁵⁵ Adorno, "Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka," 246.

¹⁵⁶ Also Bloom, *The Strong Light of the Canonical*, insists on the difference between Kafka's and Hegel's Negative.

¹⁵⁷ Maletta, "L'avventore intempestivo," 109-155; Id., "Sopra un Frammento del giovane Kafka," 131-157.

series of aphorisms was written between September 1917 and April 1918 in a small village in the western region of Bohemia, where the author was trying to recover from tuberculosis, the illness which will ultimately have proved fatal a few years thereafter, on June 3, 1924. “Das Negative zu tun, ist uns noch auferlegt, das Positive ist uns schon gegeben” [KKANII 47, 119], writes Kafka in a well-known excerpt: “To do the Negative, that’s what is still required of us, the positive is already given.” Another page, in this case from the *Oktavhefte*, contains another important reflection:

Ich habe von den Erfordernissen des Lebens gar nichts mitgebracht, so viel ich weiß, sondern nur die allgemeine menschliche Schwäche, mit dieser – in dieser Hinsicht ist es eine riesenhafte Kraft – habe ich das Negative meiner Zeit, die mir ja sehr nahe ist, die ich nie zu bekämpfen sondern gewissermaßen zu vertreten das Recht habe, kräftig aufgenommen, an dem geringen Positiven sowie an dem äußersten, zum Positiven umkippenden Negativen hatte ich keinen ererbten Anteil. Ich bin nicht von der allerdings schon schwer sinkenden Hand des Christentums ins Leben geführt worden wie Kierkegaard und habe nicht den letzten Zipfel des davonfliegenden jüdischen Gebetmantels noch gefangen wie die Zionisten. Ich bin Ende oder Anfang. [KKANII 97-98]¹⁵⁸

Instead of providing here a commentary of these quotes, I will return to them as well as to other crucial passages by the author in the following paragraphs. For the moment, what is important to note is how the recurrence of such themes in Kafka’s ‘non-fictional’ texts has induced scholars to interpret the Negative in the context of a theoretical (no matter how “a-systematic”) construction,¹⁵⁹ or as an intellectual project, whose framework would later substantiate the late proses of the author.¹⁶⁰ This approach pursued for instance by Robertson and North, risks more generally to relegate Kafka’s writing to the ‘performative’ endeavour of an accomplished aesthetics, as if the text were the result of a translation of a systematic and coherent thinking on the page.

The interest in texts such as the *Zürauer Aphorismen* is of course not accidental. Robertson has shown how such series of aphorisms situate in a crucial period of Kafka’s life, characterized by radical political, social, cultural, as well as personal transformations. Most notably, these texts echo a new awareness of Kafka’s own role as a writer, expressing at once the search of a new way of conceiving the individual and the community and the endeavour to reinterpret the legacy of a Jewish tradition that could not be received through “traditional” channels. The *Zürau aphorisms* reflect a movement of re-appropriation, or rather of re-invention of a channel

¹⁵⁸ “I have brought none of life’s requirements, so far as I know, but only the universal human weakness; with this – in this respect it is a gigantic strength – I have strongly registered the negative of my age, which is very close to me, which I have no right to combat but in a certain sense the right to represent; I had no inherited share in the scanty positive aspect nor in the extreme negative that turns into the positive. I was not led into life by the sinking hand of Christianity, like Kierkegaard, nor did I catch the tip of the Jewish prayer-shawl as it flew away, like the Zionists. I am End or Beginning.”

¹⁵⁹ North speaks of “atheological-political treatise.” See North, *The Yield*, 5.

¹⁶⁰ Robertson, *Kafka*, 185-217.

with a Judaism perceived as hopelessly “other,” but that *as such* may, at least, become an object of transmission. Furthermore, as Robertson claims, these texts constitute a threshold to the last creative season, for they encapsulate themes, motives, stylistic and semantic features of Kafka’s *Spätwerk*.¹⁶¹

However, Robertson, and even more so North, seem to underestimate that, before being a “theorist”, Kafka was first and foremost a writer. The question that concerns us here is not whether Kafka ‘applied’ or ‘expressed’ his genius through a particular genre, nor whether he formulated his thoughts in a more or less systematic way. What I intend to highlight is how the creative dynamics of writing, rather than those of theoretical or speculative thinking, shaped his imagination, his psychic life, and his representational capabilities. In a letter to Felice Bauer, dated August 14, 1913, Kafka writes: “Nicht einmal das ‘künstlerische Interesse’ ist wahr, es ist sogar die falscheste Aussage unter allen Falschheiten. Ich habe kein litterarisches Interesse sondern bestehe aus Litteratur, ich bin nichts anderes und kann nichts anderes sein.” [KB 13-14, 261]¹⁶² And more than a year and a half prior to this letter, on January 5, 1912, Kafka wrote in his *Journal*:

In mir kann ganz gut eine Konzentration auf das Schreiben hin erkannt werden. Als es in meinem Organismus klar geworden war, daß das Schreiben die ergiebigste Richtung meines Wesens sei, drängte sich alles hin und ließ alle Fähigkeiten leer stehn, die sich auf die Freuden des Geschlechtes, des Essens, des Trinkens, des philosophischen Nachdenkens der Musik zu allererst richteten. Ich magerte nach allen diesen Richtungen ab. Das war notwendig, weil meine Kräfte in ihrer Gesamtheit so gering waren, daß sie nur gesammelt dem Zweck des Schreibens halbwegs dienen konnten. Ich habe diesen Zweck natürlich nicht selbständig und bewußt gefunden, er fand sich selbst und wird jetzt nur noch durch das Bureau, aber hier von Grund aus gehindert. [KKAT, 341]¹⁶³

This does not imply, of course, that Kafka did not reflect through his writing upon issues of his time, nor that his work cannot be appreciated from a speculative and theoretical perspective. Yet, the peculiarity of Kafka’s “thinking,” or “meditative moment,” cannot be conceived but through an effort of articulation that does not saturate in the movement of a conscious subject, or in the present tense of the act of writing: “I didn’t find that purpose *independently* and *consciously*—writes Kafka—*it found itself*” [emphasis mine]. To paraphrase Adorno, the work of writing does not exhaust itself in “what it says”: it rather “unfolds itself in time”. This

¹⁶¹ Robertson, *Kafka*, 187.

¹⁶² “Not even the ‘artistic interest’ is true, this is actually the falsest statement among all falsities. I don’t have any literary interests, I rather consist of literature, I’m nothing else and cannot be nothing else.”

¹⁶³ “In me it’s easily possible to recognize a concentration towards writing. As it became clear in my organism that writing was the most fruitful direction of my being, everything rushed towards it and left empty and vacant any abilities directed to the joy of sex, eating, drinking, philosophical reflection, of music above all. I atrophied in all those directions. That was necessary, since my forces were in their totality so slight that only if gathered could they even halfway serve the purpose of writing. Of course, I didn’t find that purpose independently and consciously; it found itself, and it is now interfered only by the office, but that interferes with it completely.”

‘unfolding’ entails a peculiar form of temporality, that, as we will see, can be understood from the angle of the psychoanalytic concept of *Nachträglichkeit* [*Afterwardness*]. The “scene of thinking” seems to come, in this respect, *après-coup* (i.e., afterwards the “scene of writing”). The writing therefore constitutes a creative framing structure, interlocked with the work of the Negative.

Precisely the fact that Kafka did not offer any further insights on the matter of the Negative allows a new way of reading it, namely not in theoretical, but rather in *poetic* terms, from the angle of the processes of representation as they emerge from the stylistic fingerprint of the author. By placing the unicity of the representational processes at the centre of the analysis, rather than the recurrence of aesthetic, philosophical, theological categories, my approach implies a form of methodological scepticism towards the terminological recurrence of “das Negative” in Kafka’s texts. In other words, the fact that the author explicitly refers to the Negative in his writing is not necessarily a trace of the work of the Negative; it rather signals a far deeper and multi-layered movement, investing the creative process in its complexity.

As surprisingly as it may sound, we will be more likely to encounter the work of the Negative where Kafka does not explicitly address it. Not the misleading lexical presence will therefore guide our analysis, but the investigation of the traces of a subjectivity impressed in the stylistic feature of the text. In this sense, the very term “Negative” may arguably be conceived as a *Provisorium* [B, 338]—or “just an image” [KKAT 877]—for something that is still unbeknownst to the author, that does not belong to consciousness, and which will have been unfolded, retrospectively, in the work of writing. A key passage from an entry of his *Journal*, written on January 31, 1922, seems to suggest Kafka’s own perplexities:

Das Negative allein kann, wenn es noch so stark ist, nicht genügen, wie ich in meinen unglücklichsten Zeiten glaube. Denn wenn ich nur die kleinste Stufe erstiegen habe, in irgendeiner, sei es auch der fragwürdigsten Sicherheit bin, strecke ich mich aus und warte bis das Negative – nicht etwa mir nachsteigt –, sondern die kleine Stufe mich hinabreißt. Darum ist es ein Abwehrinstinkt, der die Herstellung des kleinsten dauernden Behagens für mich nicht duldet und zum Beispiel das Ehebett zerschlägt, ehe es noch aufgestellt ist. [KKAT, 898]¹⁶⁴

This quote is particularly significant also for another reason: the word *Abwehr-Instinkt* leads us back to Green’s definition of the work of the Negative as ensemble of “all the psychical operations of which repression is the prototype.”¹⁶⁵ On this point, it is important to recall that

¹⁶⁴ “The Negative, on its own, even though it is still so strong, cannot suffice, as I did believe in my unhappiest moments. For when I have climbed only the tiniest step onward, I won no matter what security, be it also the most doubtful one, I stretch myself out and wait until for the Negative to not quite run after me, but rather to drag me out from the tiny step. Hence it is a defence instinct in me that won’t tolerate my having the slightest degree of lasting ease and smashes the marriage bed, for example, even before it has been set up.”

¹⁶⁵ Green, *WoN* 269; *TN*, 373.

Freud first used the word “Abwehr” to refer to what he later called “Verdrängung.”¹⁶⁶ Of course, it would be erroneous to simplify this occurrence as a direct reference to Freud—a reference which, also, cannot be properly corroborated by evidence. How could we explain, after all, the presence of the word “Instinkt,” knowing of the clear difference that Freud establishes between the concepts of *Trieb* and *Instinkt*? What is relevant here is that Kafka’s expression allows us to establish a link between the question of the limit and representation, the intertwining of which constitutes the core of the process of sublimation as form of organization and structuration of subjectivity through the work of writing. I shall return to this point of my reading in the following discussion.

From another point of view, Harold Bloom, described Kafka as the “literalist of the Negative”,¹⁶⁷ offering a pivotal contribution to the debate. In *The Strong Light of the Canonical* Bloom has advanced a reading of Kafka’s role as “revisionist” of the Jewish cultural and intellectual horizon, focusing his analysis precisely on the question of the Negative. Bloom has also established fruitful connections between the work of the author and those of Sigmund Freud and Gershom Scholem. One of the most important findings of Bloom’s study consists in the recognition of specific features of Kafka’s “version” of the Negative, which he reads as a new way of conceiving and transmitting a remnant of Jewish tradition in front of the challenges of assimilation and cultural dispersion.¹⁶⁸ As such, Kafka’s Negative has to be clearly distinguished from Hegel’s or Heidegger’s negativity.

In Bloom’s essay, however, two fundamental issues remain open to discussion. First, Bloom’s intuitions lack a substantial stylistic analysis of the dynamics of the work of the Negative in Kafka’s work. Secondly, Bloom confines the question of the Negative to an intellectual and cultural horizon, thus failing accounting for the unconscious dynamics taking place in the context of literary creativity—what Jean Guillaumin called “the conscious work of the unconscious in sublimation.”¹⁶⁹ Also, Bloom’s comparison with the Freudian *Verneinung* [Negation] and Scholem’s negative symbolic offers a limited idea of the Negative at work in Kafka’s writing. Let us recall that Freud’s decisive essay on negation (*Die Verneinung*, 1925)¹⁷⁰ represents an essential and yet advanced stage of theorization of a question whose roots reach back to *Studien über Hysterie* (*Studies on Hysteria*, 1895). In Green’s terms, the Negative is

¹⁶⁶ Freud, GW X, 48.

¹⁶⁷ Bloom, *The Western Canon*, 460.

¹⁶⁸ This element was pinpointed in different terms and context also in Schmidt’s theological-literary analysis of Kafka’s “Negativität.” Joachim Schmidt, “Konstruktive Negativität. Notizen zur theologischen Annäherung an Kafka,” Wimmer, Georg. (Hrsg.) *Franz Kafka zwischen Judentum und Christentum* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2012), 151-164.

¹⁶⁹ Jean Guillaumin, *Le moi sublimé, psychanalyse de la créativité* (Paris: Dunod, 1998) 72-106.

¹⁷⁰ Freud, GW XIV, 11-15.

indeed “*co-naissant*,” or ‘con-genital’ to psychoanalysis, and, as we showed in the first chapter of this work, promptly emerges in the defence mechanisms such as repression [*Verdrängung*], the discovery of which marks in many ways the birth of psychoanalysis.¹⁷¹ That is also to say that negativity in psychoanalysis cannot be reduced exclusively to a linguistic register, for must be envisaged in the light of that corporeal, affective trace that the *incréable* veils and unveils at once.

Since Bloom’s work, much ground has been covered on the question of the Negative in Kafka’s writing, also thanks to the works of Weller and Maletta. Their studies constitute the most advanced stages of the research on the Negative in Kafka’s work and provide, for different reasons, an important precedent for this work. Weller reads Kafka’s work in the broader cultural, political, and artistic context of European Modernism of the twentieth century history. He defines the writings of the Czech-Jewish author as one of—if not *the*—landmark of “linguistic negativism” in the interwar period, which would have a major impact on authors such as Beckett, Sebald, and most notably Celan.¹⁷² Weller’s reconstruction of the vicissitudes of the Negative in Kafka analyses the diachronic development of stylistic recurrences, as well as lexical, morphological, syntactical forms of negations.

Weller argues that, in the context of European Modernism, linguistic negativism serves a threefold purpose: “the enactment of language scepticism in literary work”; “the representation of experience by way of the negative, in accordance with the principle that any positive representation of the experience of modernity would be a deformation of that experience.”¹⁷³ According to Weller, linguistic negativism incarnates as an either explicit or implicit critique of modernity, and of its dehumanizing and alienating effects.¹⁷⁴

Here, I will push Weller’s research a step further, by bringing together the attention for the stylistic features of Kafka’s writing with an analysis of the metapsychological, metaliterary, and ethical implications of the Negative in the creative work of the author—whose importance is only suggested in Weller’s analysis. In contrast to Weller, however, I will not read Kafka’s Negative from a “performative” angle—a term which etymologically conveys the idea of completion and fulfilment (from the Old French *par-fornir*)¹⁷⁵—but rather as an interminable

¹⁷¹ Green, TN, 23, 75-116; WoN, 12, and 50-80.

¹⁷² Weller, *Language and Negativity*, 6.

¹⁷³ Weller, *Language and Negativity*, 5.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Weller translates with *to perform* the German verb *tun* in “Das Negative zu tun, ist uns noch auferlegt” [KKAN II, 47, 119] after Malcolm Pasley’s rendition of the famous aphorism: “To perform the negative is what is still required of us, the positive is already ours.” Franz Kafka, *The Collected Aphorisms*, translated by M. Pasley (London: Syrens, 1994), 8.

work in progress that allows us to reflect on at least two crucial aspects: the “ethical and gnoseological statute of the subject”,¹⁷⁶ and the “phantom of self-generation” articulated by the work.¹⁷⁷ Understood as such, writing creates not only a literary world, a form of ‘fiction’, but foremost invents a form of subjectivity which unveils itself inasmuch as it escapes disclosure through the text. This sort of subjectivity, that we will read as the subject of the unconscious of the text, becomes recognizable only in a deferred dimension of the work. In that respect, the literary text constitutes a form of filiation unfathomable to the author, a threshold wherein the writer is at once father *and* son of a literary work. By defining Kafka’s “linguistic negativism” as a commitment “to the impossible” and “to communicate an experience of unknowing, insecurity, incapacity, and uninterpretability,”¹⁷⁸ Weller highlights exclusively a stylistic dimension of the Negative in the context of linguistic scepticism and expressive crisis of the early twentieth century, failing to consider what these stylistic traces do tell us of the representational processes at work in the text.

Maletta’s studies on Kafka is one of the few examples of a critical and attentive reception of not only Green’s work, but of the historical plurality and heterogeneity of post-Freudian developments. By bringing the massive *corpus* of psychoanalytic knowledge in dialogue with other disciplines, e.g., contemporary philosophy, utopian studies, Jewish studies¹⁷⁹ and quantum physics,¹⁸⁰ she develops an interdisciplinary approach on the question of representation and creativity. One of the most important aspects of Maletta’s work is the focus on the transgenerational dimension of an ethics of literary representation, which she studies by exploring the stylistic devices that Kafka articulates in his writings. This analytic approach provides important insights on the specific ways wherein the writer copes with the limits and the resources of language. Conveying the trace of an irreducible subject in time and space—or, to put it in Meschonnic’s terms: as rhythmical *re-organisation* of the subject through language¹⁸¹—the style of the author, so Maletta, is always an interminable work *at* and *with* the limits of representation.

This liminal dimension constitutes the starting point of my investigation of the Negative in Kafka’s work. In the following I shall develop a reading of his *Spätwerk* with the purpose of highlighting a double dimension of his writing. Such double dimension revolves around the

¹⁷⁶ Maletta, “L’avventore intempestivo,” 115.

¹⁷⁷ Maletta, “Franz Kafka: la letteratura tra serie complementare freudiana e meccanica quantistica,” 67.

¹⁷⁸ Weller, *Language and Negativity*, 87.

¹⁷⁹ Maletta, “L’avventore intempestivo”.

¹⁸⁰ Maletta, “Franz Kafka: la letteratura tra serie complementare freudiana e meccanica quantistica.”

¹⁸¹ See Henri Meschonnic, *La rime et la vie* and id. *Politique du rythme, politique du sujet*.

dynamics of sublimation. I argue that Kafka's late work can be read not only as a form writing *of* the sublimation, but also as a writing *upon* sublimation. This twofold perspective allows, on the one hand, to shed light on the specific representational strategies that Kafka articulates in his writing as transformation of the subject's corporeal dimension into the body of the work. Furthermore, this re-organization of the limits of the subject into the liminal dimension of the stylistic unicity of the author is, in a way, an attempt to challenge the very limits of representation, of literature, and writing, in order to write something which is unwritable, uncreatable. On the other hand, this approach also enables me to put the accent on a meta-representational component of his writing, which emerges with particular intensity in his late work. As such, the study of the dynamics of sublimation also opens a new space to reflect upon the question of Jewish creativity as a search for new means to cope with the cultural crisis of European Judaism—and most notably with the crisis that Kafka's generation confronted itself with.

By so doing, I intend to bridge what I consider to be a major gap in the research on the Negative. Such gap lies in the failure of showing how the work of the Negative acquires at once specific literary and stylistic features, which stem from the uniqueness of Kafka's work, while representing the mark of an engagement with Judaism that also animates his writing. From this point of view, Green's concept of *incr able*, which we addressed in the previous chapter, and which will lead my analysis, is useful to describe Kafka's attempt to recreate an impossible, 'uncreatable' link with that corporeal matrix from which creativity originates. At the same time, the *incr able* marks Kafka's endeavour to establish a relationship with a lost, absent cultural "origin," in a relentless confrontation with the most cogent issues that engaged the Jewish cultural life at the turn of the past century in Europe. In this regard, Kafka was capable of reinventing the childhood of a language within a heterogenic literary and cultural tradition, at the border between different worlds and languages, between the cultural challenges of assimilation and the new childhood of a people. A childhood that was taking form through the Zionist enterprise, which Kafka could ultimately envisage only from within the border of his own literature. His writings gave form and literary dignity to an absence, a void, which was unsaturable, abyssal. And yet, through his writing, he was capable of giving transmissible form to such absence within the creating subject as well as within the body of a people, turning it in the pulsating heart of an extraordinary literary peregrination. As such, irrepresentability and transmission are inseparably intertwined in Kafka's work.

There is an interesting recurrence in Kafka's *Tageb cher*, which has not been properly considered by other scholars, that allows us to trace the dynamics of sublimation as a veritable

fil rouge running through Kafka's work as a whole. On March 28, 1911, Kafka recalls part of a private meeting with the Austrian thinker, theosophist, and later founder of the Anthroposophical Society Rudolf Steiner at the Hotel Victoria, on the Jungmannstraße Nr. 18 (Jungmannova) in Prague:¹⁸²

[...] Ich fühle wie ein großer Teil meines Wesens zur Teosophie hinstrebt, gleichzeitig aber habe ich vor ihr die höchste Angst. Ich befürchte nämlich von ihr eine neue Verwirrung, die für mich sehr arg wäre, da eben schon mein gegenwärtiges Unglück nur aus Verwirrung besteht. Diese Verwirrung liegt in Folgendem: Mein Glück, meine Fähigkeiten und jede Möglichkeit irgendwie zu nützen liegen seit jeher im Litterarischen. Und hier habe ich allerdings Zustände erlebt (nicht viele) die meiner Meinung nach den von Ihnen Herr Doktor beschriebenen hellseherischen Zuständen sehr nahestehen, in welchen ich ganz und gar in jedem Einfall wohnte, aber jeden Einfall auch erfüllte und in welchen ich mich nicht nur an meinen Grenzen fühlte, sondern an den Grenzen des Menschlichen überhaupt. [KKAT 33-34]¹⁸³

On January 16, 1922, after eleven years, Kafka is about to enter the intense final season of his creative journey. Vexed by a deep personal crisis and by the debilitating deterioration of tuberculosis, and engaged in the study of the Hebrew language, Kafka writes once more the very constellation of words that we read in the 1911 journal entry:

[...] Dieses Jagen nimmt die Richtung aus der Menschheit. Die Einsamkeit, die mir zum größten Teil seit jeher aufgezwungen war, zum Teil von mir gesucht wurde – doch was war auch dies anderes als Zwang – wird jetzt ganz unzweideutig und geht auf das Äußerste. Wohin führt sie? Sie kann, dies scheint am Zwingendsten, zum Irrsinn führen, darüber kann nichts weiter ausgesagt werden, die Jagd geht durch mich und zerreißt mich. Oder aber ich kann – ich kann? – sei es auch nur zum winzigsten Teil mich aufrechterhalten, lasse mich also von der Jagd tragen. Wohin komme ich dann? “Jagd” ist ja nur ein Bild, ich kann auch sagen “Ansturm gegen die letzte irdische Grenze” und zwar Ansturm von unten, von den Menschen her und kann, da auch dies nur ein Bild ist, es ersetzen durch das Bild des Ansturmes von oben, zu mir herab. // Diese ganze Litteratur ist Ansturm gegen die Grenze und sie hätte sich, wenn nicht der Zionismus dazwischen gekommen wäre, leicht zu einer neuen Geheimlehre, einer Kabbala entwickeln können. Ansätze dazu bestehn. Allerdings ein wie unbegreifliches Genie wird hier verlangt, das neu seine Wurzeln in die alten Jahrhunderte treibt oder die alten Jahrhunderte neu erschafft und mit dem all en sich nicht ausgibt, sondern jetzt erst sich auszugeben beginnt. [KKAT, 877-878]¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² The excerpt represents one of altogether three entries dedicated to Rudolf Steiner in Kafka's *Journal*, and as such they bear witness to an initial curiosity towards the Berlin theosophist. See here Hartmut Binder, “Rudolf Steiners Prager Vortragsreise im Jahr 1911. Berichtungen und Ergänzungen zu der Kritischen Ausgabe der Tagebücher Kafkas“ *editio: Internationales Jahrbuch für Editions-wissenschaft* 9 (1995), 214-233; Id. “Der Prager Fanta-Kreis. Kafkas Interesse an Rudolf Steiner,” *Sudetenland. Europäische Kulturzeitschrift. Böhmen, Mähren, Schlesien* (1996), 106-150. See also Reiner Stach, *Kafka. Die frühen Jahre* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2014), 453-469.

¹⁸³ “[...] I feel like a big part of my being strives toward theosophy, and yet at the same time I have the greatest fear of it. That is, I am afraid that from it will result in a new confusion, which would be very bad [arg] for me, because even my present unhappiness consists only of confusion. The confusion consists in the following: my happiness, my abilities, and every possibility of being of any help have always been in the Literary. And here I have to be sure experienced states (not many) that in my opinion are very close to the clairvoyant states described by you, Herr Doktor, in which I dwelled completely in every inspiration [Einfall], but I also did justice to every inspiration [Einfall], and in which I felt myself not only at my limit, but also at the limit of the human in general.”

¹⁸⁴ “[...] This hunting takes a direction outside humanity. The solitude, which has been since always inflicted upon me for the most part, and in part sought by me—but what was this if not another compulsion—becomes now entirely unambiguous and goes towards the outermost limit. Where is it leading? It can lead to insanity, as it seems to be most unavoidably; there is nothing more to say about that, the hunt goes right through me and rips me apart. Or else I can—can I?—even if just to the tiniest extent, stay right on my feet, and let myself carry from the hunt.

This recurrence is noteworthy because it allows to trace a sort of ‘signifier’ of Kafka’s creative venture. The double occurrence of the constellation of the “literary,” the “human,” and the “limit” seems to embody a sort of meta-representation of sublimation, anticipating that ‘writing of sublimation’ and ‘upon sublimation’ which is, I claim, the collection of *Ein Hungerkünstler*. In other words, it ‘fictionalizes’ not quite the psychic and corporeal movement of the process of creation, but rather the traces of such process as they sediment through the work of writing at the border between past and future, conscious and unconscious, and the different agencies of the writing subject in relationship with the ‘object’-writing. Also, in terms of temporality, the text might be read as if expressing a double movement, a double limit, a field of tension. On the one hand, as an *après-coup* of the thoughts articulated in the aftermath of the encounter with Rudolf Steiner; on the other, as a sort of ‘announcement’, still without any ‘divinatory’ value, of the literary endeavour to come.¹⁸⁵ As the diary pages from March 1911 represent a farewell from esoterism towards the discovery of another form of rationality by means literature, Kafka’s 1922 entry put in words a leave of the earth, of the somatic, animal body¹⁸⁶ (as also suggested by the term *Jagd*) towards a new, liminal territory that writing opens. The work of writing acquires the function of an organising, structuring principle, beyond the subject, towards the work itself.

This ‘double limit’ that circumscribes Kafka’s writing has been well highlighted by Meghnagi, in an illuminating comparison between Kafka’s and Freud’s works:

In this respect it is interesting to compare the solutions both [Freud and Kafka] found for a problem that was of historical as well as existential significance. Both Freud and Kafka were aware that their writings were a place for sublimation of the anxieties of a whole generation. [...] In Kafka, literature and Jewishness coincide, and the loss of a sense of roots, even though these may be wandering roots, becomes unhappy literary wandering.¹⁸⁷

A ‘double limit,’ therefore, marking his struggle between the “impossibilities” of writing [KB 337-338] and the “mandate” of literature [KKANII, 320]; literary representation and

Where, then, shall I be brought? “Hunt” is only an image, I can also say “assault to the last earthly limit”—an assault from below, from the humans, and since also this is only an image, I can replace it by the image of an assault from above, aimed down at me. // All such literature is an assault to the limit and if Zionism had not intervened, it might easily have developed into a new secret doctrine, a Kabbalah. There are premises for that. Thought it is required here as a sort of ungraspable genius that drives anew his roots in the old centuries, or creates the old centuries anew, and with all that does not pose, but rather only now begins to express itself.”

¹⁸⁵ To use Green’s words in AN 61: “L’écrit devient [...] fantasme organisateur de la vie à venir. Non de ses événements mais de l’expérience intérieure qui en ordonnera les données.” “Writing becomes [...] organising phantom of the life to come. Not quite of its events, but of the inner experience which will order its contents.”

¹⁸⁶ Green TN, 305-306; WoN, 221.

¹⁸⁷ Meghnagi, “A cultural event within Judaism,” 60, 61.

Jewish culture, the psyche in its attachment to the body (i.e., the drive) and its textual vicissitudes; the subject and that otherness which is the subject of writing and *the* writing itself as a cultural object, underway. A cultural object stretching between the generations, from within “humany” outwards and back, through literature, to reinvent the human: towards sublimation, through sublimation.

It is at these borders of his writing that our own journey begins.

2.2 *Eine kleine Frau*. The Exponential Work of Sublimation and the Unconscious of Writing

Eine kleine Frau [A little Woman, KKAD 321-333] was composed between the end of November 1923 and January 1924, approximately in the same time span during which also *Der Bau* was penned [KKADA 420]. Unlike other works of the late creative season, however, *Eine kleine Frau* has received far less critical attention, and except for a few relevant cases, it has long been a neglected text in Kafka scholarship.¹⁸⁸

Indeed, *Eine kleine Frau* appears to be an anomaly in the context of a work such as *Ein Hungerkünstler*, which has been systematically interpreted as a collection of “artists stories,” dealing with the tormenting dichotomy between the public and the artist, or between life and art.¹⁸⁹ Another aspect that no doubt contributed to the limited critical fortune of *Eine kleine Frau* lies in the challenges that the text poses to interpretation. Somehow to an even greater, bewildering extent than other pieces of the same collection, *Eine kleine Frau* seems to escape any analytic approach, no matter how sophisticated, especially if based on the assumption that the text itself may be constructed as a riddle, a puzzle, or a coded message.¹⁹⁰ In this respect, *Eine kleine Frau* exposes the ineffectiveness of a way of reading and interpreting that is still strongly attached, on the one hand, to an idea of literary representation and figurability that the irony of Kafka’s writing relentlessly erodes; and, on the other, to a conciliatory, “allegorical” expectation from the side of the reader/interpreter, which the text continuously betrays.

At a first reading, *Eine kleine Frau* unfolds as a series of reflections concerning the intricate and apparently indissoluble relationship between the narrator and a “little woman” who is constantly vexed by an unclear reason that the narrating voice attempts to unravel, though without success. Kafka writes:

¹⁸⁸ See Manfred Engel und Bernd Auerochs (Hrsgg.), *Kafka-Handbuch* (Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag & Carl Ernst Poeschel, 2010), 322.

¹⁸⁹ Engel und Auerochs, *Kafka-Handbuch*, 320. Scholars like Wirtz, Kleinwort, and Neumann have undertaken the task of overcoming such view by proposing new interpretative approaches that highlight the role of *Eine kleine Frau* in *Ein Hungerkünstler* beyond the well-established interpretation of the question of art and artistry. Kleinwort, for instance, expanding Wirtz’s thesis according to which *Eine kleine Frau* functions as a sort of “hinge” or “joint,” has remarked how a new link between *Eine kleine Frau* and the other texts of *Ein Hungerkünstler* can be detected in other common themes, apparently less prominent, such as that of dissatisfaction, physical pain, suffering, as well as failure and omission. Irmgard Wirtz, “Kafkas ‚Kleine Frau‘(en) im ‚Hungerkünstler‘-Komplex. Eine textgenetische Lektüre,” H. Herwig, I. Wirtz, S. B. Wurffel (Hrsgg.). *Lese-Zeichen. Semiotik und Hermeneutik in Raum und Zeit. Festschrift für Peter Rusterholz zum 65. Geburtstag* (Marburg: Francke 1999) 306-322, particularly 317; Malte Kleinwort *Der späte Kafka. Spätstil als Stilsuspension* (Stuttgart: Fink Verlag, 2013), 244-251, here 247; Neumann, *Kafka-Lektüren*, 115, 119, 556 ff.

¹⁹⁰ See Malcom Pasley, “Kafka’s Semi-private Games,” *Oxford German Studies*, 6:1 (1976), 112-131. See also Id., “Die Schrift ist unveränderlich...” *Essays zu Kafka* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1995) 61-83 and Robertson, *Kafka*, ix.

Diese kleine Frau nun ist mit mir sehr unzufrieden, immer hat sie etwas an mir auszusetzen, immer geschieht ihr Unrecht von mir, ich ärgere sie auf Schritt und Tritt; wenn man das Leben in aller kleinste Teile teilen und jedes Teilchen gesondert beurteilen könnte, wäre gewiß jedes Teilchen meines Lebens für sie ein Ärgernis. Ich habe oft darüber nachgedacht, warum ich sie denn so ärgere [...] warum leidet sie so sehr darunter? [KKAD 322]¹⁹¹

To this question no explicit answer will be given throughout the text; but this is of secondary importance for our purpose. Indeed, the relationship between the narrator and the little woman seems to ‘exist’ only insofar as it is denied, repeatedly contradicted (e.g. the recurrence of expressions such as “*ja gar*”, “*ja niemals*”) and altogether seemingly ungraspable. And if nothing is changed, decided, or solved of such ambiguous relationship,¹⁹² if *nothing* seems to be happening in this story, that is indeed because what does unfold in this text is precisely this ‘nothing’ around which the writing process revolves and that Kafka’s writing, in turn, does not cease to articulate:

Es besteht ja gar keine Beziehung zwischen uns, die sie zwingen würde, durch mich zu leiden. Sie müßte sich nur entschließen, mich als völlig Fremden anzusehn, der ich ja auch bin und der ich gegen einen solchen Entschluß mich nicht wehren, sondern ihn sehr begrüßen würde, sie müßte sich nur entschließen, meine Existenz zu vergessen, die ich ihr ja niemals aufgedrängt habe oder aufdrängen würde – und alles Leid wäre offenbar vorüber. [KKAD 322-23]¹⁹³

Eine kleine Frau, in this sense, bears witness of a relationship that no matter how radically denied, deplored, painful, or kept silent it might be, still *takes place* in the realm of writing:

[...] diese unreine Sache auch noch vor der Öffentlichkeit zu besprechen, das wäre für ihre Scham zu viel. Aber es ist doch auch zu viel, von der Sache ganz zu schweigen, unter deren unaufhörlichem Druck sie steht. Und so versucht sie in ihrer Frauenschlauheit einen Mittelweg; schweigend, nur durch die äußern Zeichen eines geheimen Leides will sie die Angelegenheit vor das Gericht der Öffentlichkeit bringen. [KKAD 324]¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ “Now this little woman is most dissatisfied with me; she always has something to criticise me, I always offend her, I vex her at every turn; if one could divide life up into the tiniest of tiny parts, and judge each separate tiny part separately, every particle of my life would assuredly be a scandal [or a vexation] to her. I have often thought about why I vex her so much [...] why does she suffer so much from mine?”

¹⁹² See KKAD 330-331: “Aber nichts von Entscheidung, nichts von Verantwortung, Frauen wird leicht übel, die Welt hat nicht Zeit, auf alle Fälle aufzupassen. Und was ist denn eigentlich in all den Jahren geschehn? Nichts weiter, als daß sich solche Fälle wiederholten, einmal stärker, einmal schwächer, und daß nun also ihre Gesamtzahl größer ist.“ “But nothing of a decision, nothing of responsibility, women readily feel ill; the world has no time to keep an eye on every case. And what has actually happened in all these years? Nothing else but such cases repeating themselves, now stronger, now weaker, so now their sum total is the greater.”

¹⁹³ “There is absolutely no relationship between us at all that would compel her to suffer on my account. She would only have to make up her mind to look on me as a complete stranger, which after all I am, and I wouldn’t defend myself against such a decision, but welcome it; she has only to make up her mind to forget my existence, which after all I have never forced upon her, nor would I ever do so—and all her suffering would clearly be over.”

¹⁹⁴ “[...] To discuss this impure subject [Sache] in public would be too much for her sense of shame. But it is also too much for her to remain completely silent about the thing [Sache] that constantly oppresses her. And so with her woman’s cleverness she tries a middle way; by remaining silent, only by the outward signs of a secret suffering, she is tries to bring the matter before the open court of the world at large.”

This scandalous [ärgerlich - Ärgernis] ‘nothing’, this *Sache*¹⁹⁵ for which the narrating voice cannot yet find a name, becomes at once centre and object of the creative process as well as of the text. In other words, what ‘happens’ of crucial in *Eine kleine Frau* does not lie on the level of the textual content (i.e. of what the author seems to be writing about), but rather, as we anticipated, on a meta-textual level. *Eine kleine Frau* opens in this sense a potential, liminal space, literally a *Mittelweg*,¹⁹⁶ in which the unconscious dimension of writing operates in its ambiguous and disturbing dynamics, while turning into the very object of representation.

To shed light on this representational shift that I argue emerges in *Eine kleine Frau*, I propose to consider it in the context of those “scriptural transformations” upon which Green reflects in his essay *La déliaison*.¹⁹⁷ As outlined in the first chapter of the present work, Green tackles here the question of the relationship between the transformations of literary representation and the changes of the metapsychological, clinical, therapeutical horizons in psychoanalysis. The psychoanalytic reading of literary texts becomes as such a way to reflect on the evolution of psychoanalysis itself.

For the present matter let us just recall how Green detects in modern writing an unprecedented tension towards non-representability and the ‘evacuation of figurability.’¹⁹⁸ In this representational mutation, Green discerns two developments, or rather two poles between which contemporary writing has become “disjointed”: on the one hand we encounter a “writing of the body” [“l’écriture du corps”] that does not cease to reflect and articulate its own fragmentation and transitory states. Green explicitly refers in this case to authors such as Antonin Artaud and Samuel Beckett. Here a “short circuit occurs between body and thought,” which turns thought into a fractured “corporeal organ”; the new object of such writing “is the state of the body proper in its most violent manifestation,” in its physiological and metabolic processes, in its bare sufferance. Confronted with its impotence, language cannot but expose the failure to communicate in the writing process a rendering of such corporeal fragmented dimension.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Etymologically, *Sache* means a “subject of a dispute” between two parts. “SACHE, f.,” *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm, digitalisierte Fassung im Wörterbuchnetz des Trier Center for Digital Humanities, Version 01/23*, <<https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=S00203>>, abgerufen am 17.04.2022.

¹⁹⁶ Green, D, 56; PM, 322.

¹⁹⁷ Green, D, 30 ff; PM, 348 ff.

¹⁹⁸ By “modern writing” let us understand, in this case, emblematic texts of European literature produced, roughly speaking, after the birth of psychoanalysis. The fact that Green, coherently with his clinical interests, considers the texts he mentions in “La déliaison” as literary ‘borderline-cases’ is implicitly suggested by names of the likes of Artaud and Beckett. With regards to Kafka, and with no explicit reference to Green, Maletta describes in terms of “a-mimesis” this sort of “evacuation” of the image, of “unbinding” of the text from the figurative power of writing, an aspect which she reads in relationship and continuity with the prohibition on graven images rooted in Jewish tradition. See “L’avventore intempestivo,” 110, ff.

¹⁹⁹ Green, D, 34; PM, 352.

On the other hand, Green pinpoints the emergence of a way of writing that he names “of the sublimated text” [“de l’écrit sublime”].²⁰⁰ The attribute “sublimated” is in this context open to a variety of interpretations, whose implications we will not be able to explore in detail now. We have good reason to assume that it does not refer exclusively to the level of abstraction of these texts, but to the exponential nature of the sublimation of which they represent an outcome. Since a literary text, and indeed any form of artistic creation or intellectual enquiry (epistemophilia), can be interpreted, psychoanalytically speaking, as a product of sublimation, how can we closer define a “sublimated text”?

In Green’s words, the “sublimated text”

[...] s’efforce de rien ne dire d’autre que ce qui est le procès même de l’écriture [...]. Ici l’absence de figurabilité fait de l’écriture la seule matière à représentation [...] Son but ultime est, en abolissant toute trace de la représentation, de parvenir à une écriture blanche. Elle efface au fur et à mesure qu’elle trace. La dérive d’un texte, son écart progressif avec la représentation inconsciente qui fait du texte un produit de transformation d’un fantasme, a disparu pour ne laisser place qu’à un texte absent. Le texte sur l’absence est devenu l’absence de texte. Tout texte est absolument, intégralement texte fléché vers son silence²⁰¹

At least two elements are therefore involved as we talk about a “sublimated text”: on the one hand, a meta-representational turn, i.e., a revolvment of the text upon itself, through which writing turns into the contended object of the text and of the creative process. On the other hand, the “sublimated text” is characterized by a work of the death drive which dangerously pushes writing towards dissolution and evanescence. As much as sublimation represents a ‘farewell’ from the somatic body towards the recreation of a semantic corporality, the “sublimated text” takes leave from the materiality, from the ‘texture’ of the text, towards its very absence.

But there is more. A few pages after exposing these reflections, Green returns to the issue to add a further point. Green claims that the flaw, or weakness of modern writing in the struggle against representation consists in an implicit contradiction:

[...] Écrire, par le fait même que toute écriture est une trace visible puisque lisible, et c’est son destin d’être lue, c’est encore représenter. Écrire est pris entre la non-représentabilité de l’écriture et son inévitable représentation. Un livre blanc, c’est encore un livre, fût-il sans écrivain, sans titre et sans caractères [...].²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Green, D, 34; PM, 352.

²⁰¹ Green, D, 35 ff; Id. PM 353: “[The sublimated text] strives to say nothing beyond the mere statement of the writing process. [...] Here the absence of figurability makes the script the only representation. [...] Its ultimate goal is, through the eradication of all representation, to reach a state of total blankness. It deletes the very lines it forms as it moves along. The drifting of a traditional literary text, its progressive lag away from unconscious representation which makes it a transformation product of fantasy, has disappeared to make way for an absent text. The text celebrating absence has become the absence of any text. All such text is absolutely, integrally, pointing toward its own silence.” (English translation slightly modified, f.c.)

²⁰² Green, D, 37; PM, 355: [...] For to write, due to the very fact that all writing is a visible trace – visible because legible, and indeed it is destined to be read – is still, one way or another, to represent. Writing is caught between

Green reflections lead us to one of the most important motives that accompanies Kafka's late writings. Along with the question of the legitimacy, the authority, the limits of creation, and of its accessibility, another common thread runs through the texts of *Ein Hungerkünstler*. Kafka's late writing seems to relentlessly deny its very right of 'being' as writing, its legitimacy to transmit itself as a text, as if haunted by the very uncertainty of its vicissitudes.²⁰³

Here is the burning contradiction that Green highlights, and that plays a crucial role in Kafka's late creative season: no matter how hard writing attempts to free itself from representation, the link between the two is inescapable. Indeed, if the "return to representation" described by Green is unavoidable, even for those texts which tend to drift towards their dissolution, the issue concerning the *object* of a "sublimated text" entangled in such "representational re-turn", remains open and worthy of exploration. This is the issue that emerges with particular intensity in the case of *Eine kleine Frau*. What does it mean that such form of writing strives to say nothing beyond "the mere statement of the writing process"? What does such a text can represent? Would it be plausible to say that this very unavoidability of 'evacuating representation' becomes the very object that haunts, like a spectre, the text itself, namely through an exponential work of sublimation?

To be sure, *Eine kleine Frau* does not entirely fall into the second category of texts indicated by Green. The text presents other relevant elements that push also towards a writing "of the fragmented body." The passage "wenn man das Leben in aller kleinste Teile teilen und jedes Teilchen gesondert beurteilen könnte, wäre gewiß jedes Teilchen meines Lebens für sie ein Ärgernis," or the very description of the little woman, allude indeed to a corporeal fragmentation articulated through writing. It might therefore be more accurate to say that Kafka's *Eine kleine Frau* swings back and forth between the two poles that Green describes. It is however not my intention to propose a categorical description of this text, but rather to rethink Green's insights²⁰⁴ in order to put *Eine kleine Frau* in a perspective that has not yet been considered.

the non-representability of the writing process and the inevitability of its representation. A blank book is still a book, be it an authorless, titleless, and typeless book [...]. (English translation slightly modified, f.c.)

²⁰³ See Maletta, "Paul Celan: poesia come resilienza," 74 ff.

²⁰⁴ By his own admission, Green is perfectly aware of the problematic sharpness of the distinction he proposes between a "classical" way of writing and a writing that does not cease to 'represent' its farewell from figurability, be it in the guise of a writing "of the body" or of a "sublimated text." And yet, Green's observations are valuable for authors such as Kafka, who shaped with their works a new way of understanding writing and literature in the West during the 20th century. We will also see how Green's remarks do find an echo in other analyses of *Eine kleine Frau* by scholars such as Pasley and Robertson.

I argue here for a reading of *Eine kleine Frau* that focuses on the relationship between the process of sublimation and the vicissitudes of representation. My purpose is twofold: I aim to reflect on how Kafka's writing articulates here a meta-representational turn, for which the unconscious dimension of the work of writing—i.e., the articulation of a form of rationality of the psyche unreducible to consciousness and which dwells as an 'otherness' in the writing—becomes the ungraspable, ever-absent object of the text itself. Moreover, I claim that this very irrepresentable kernel, this errancy of signification which pervades and informs the text, constitutes in turn the structuring, organizing matrix of the subject of writing. In other words, this meta-representational turn goes hand in hand with the articulation of the question of an origin, which is in fact, as Green suggests, an origin of the very 'blankness' of the text: an ever-absent kernel around which the vicissitudes of creation revolve.

As anticipated in the previous paragraph these aspects are crucial to grasp the work of the Negative in Kafka's late writing, and they recur especially in *Ein Hungerkünstler* and *Josefine, die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse*. It is therefore pivotal to tackle *Eine kleine Frau* not just as an isolated text, but rather as a crucial and specific link in the textual economy of the collection. If in *Erstes Leid*, the prose that opens the book, we read of a *Trapezkünstler* who literally converts his lifestyle to the dizzying heights of his artistic practice, and if the hunger artist relentlessly hosts in his body an unsaturable absence, the question of the role of *Eine kleine Frau* remains open.

It is perhaps the seemingly marginal, *liminal* ("Mittelweg") position of *Eine kleine Frau*²⁰⁵ that keeps awakening the curiosity and the fascination of the reader. We read the text again and again, searching for an unexpected association to present, a word overlooked enlightening the meaning of a sentence, but without fruition. One may also wonder why Kafka would decide to include such an apparently 'anonymous', strange prose in a collection populated by so many vividly parabolic, powerful, and yet elusive images. It is almost as if the memorable, however evanescent images of the trapezist in *Erstes Leid*, of the hunger artist and of Josefine were functioning as some sort of 'traps' for the attention of the reader, deflecting it away from a kernel that writing protects as much as it reveals. Interestingly, Pasley mentions a diary entry in which Max Brod recalls how, after reading *Eine kleine Frau* to his friend, Kafka would have said: "Die Erzählung ist verschleiert," "the story is veiled," but also "concealed," "disguised."²⁰⁶ The discrepancy between chronological order of the texts' composition and internal organisation of the collection represents also an important hint, for it suggests a hidden link, a

²⁰⁵ Wirtz speaks of "Scharnierfunktion". See Wirtz, "Kafkas ‚Kleine Frau‘(en) im ‚Hungerkünstler‘-Komplex," 306-322, here 317.

²⁰⁶ See Pasley, "Die Schrift ist unveränderlich..." 61-83, here 76.

continuity between the texts which may have become clear to Kafka only retrospectively.²⁰⁷ All these elements give rise to the suspicion that *Eine kleine Frau* plays a far more relevant role than one might expect. We have good reasons to think that, by articulating the ‘exponential work of the sublimation’ highlighted with Green, *Eine kleine Frau* marks a crucial stage in the inner economy of *Ein Hungerkünstler*: it prepares that representational ‘re-turn’ in the writing which characterizes the two last proses of the collection. Before discussing this point, however, we must yet address a few relevant issues concerning the scholarly reception of *Eine kleine Frau*. This shall lead me to the core of my argument.

The critical reception of this text is still strongly limited to a semi-biographical standpoint. Scholars have generally considered *Eine kleine Frau* as being inspired by Kafka’s irritating relationship with a no better specified Frau Hermann,²⁰⁸ the landlady of the one-room apartment the author was sharing with Dora Dymant in Berlin Steglitz (Miquelstraße 8), before moving to the two rooms apartment of Grünewaldstraße 13.²⁰⁹ Needless to say, the spark from which the story presumably came into being does not pay justice to its complexity, nor to the paramount role that, I claim, we can attribute to this text.

Even psychoanalytic interpretations of this text are not exempt from the temptation of biographism and patho-biographism. Lange-Kirchheim and Moser claim that the intricated relationship of the narrator with the little woman reflects Kafka’s own relationship with the “maternal” and “femininity”. Drawing a comparison with *Brief an den Vater*, Lange-Kirchheim suggests that *Eine kleine Frau* may be read as a concealed, poetic representation [Darstellung] of Kafka’s relationship with his mother.²¹⁰ Moser, on the other hand, maintains that the feminine figure of the text can be interpreted as a both internal and external projection of Kafka’s relationship with his feminine side.²¹¹ Such is also the point of departure of Kaus’ patho-biographic and psychosexual study.²¹² Following the recurring pattern of a “negative irony”, Kaus extends the rela-

²⁰⁷ Kafka decided to put this text right before *Ein Hungerkünstler* (originally written in 1922, although he will return to it right after completing *Eine kleine Frau*), and *Josefine, die Sängerin*, Kafka’s very last text, which he included in the collection only shortly before his death.

²⁰⁸ See Rainer Stach, *Kafka. Die Jahre der Erkenntnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2008), 567.

²⁰⁹ Franz. Kafka, *Briefe an die Eltern aus den Jahren 1922-1924*. Hrsgg. von J. Čermák und M. Svatoš, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), 35; See also Dora Dymant’s text “Mein Leben mit Franz Kafka“ in H.-G. Koch (Hrsg.), “Als Kafka mir entgegenkam...“. *Erinnerungen an Franz Kafka* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1995), 178.

²¹⁰ Astrid Lange-Kirchheim, “Kein Fortkommen. Zu Franz Kafkas Erzählung *Eine kleine Frau*,” *Phantasie und Deutung: Psychologisches Verstehen von Literatur und Film*. Hrsgg. von W Mauser, U. Renner et al. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1986), 180-193.

²¹¹ Tilmann Moser, “Das zerstrittene Selbst. Kafkas Erzählung *Eine kleine Frau*,” *Phantasie und Deutung*, 194-206.

²¹² Reiner. J. Kaus, *Eine kleine Frau. Kafkas Erzählung in literaturpsychologischer Sicht* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2002).

tionship with the little woman in the text to the wider question of the relationship with otherness.²¹³ He defends the hypothesis according to which the structural-relational “problem of the you,” projected towards the outside in the guise of the main feminine figure. Kaus asserts this masks an attempt of “protection from paranoia in form of its representation” [Darstellung], which may be interpreted as signal of repressed homosexuality.²¹⁴

Consistently with my focus on the stylistic strategies and the meta-literary implications of the dynamics of sublimation, what interests me here is neither the role of the feminine and masculine components of the author’s personality *per se*, nor simply the maternal or the fatherly aspects emerging in the text from an autobiographical perspective. If anything, what would rather draw our attention here is how the ‘maternal’ and the ‘fatherly’ may intervene as traces, remnants susceptible of reinscription in the creative process. With the *incr able*, Green has indeed shown how both the affective link with the trace of the body of the mother, as well as the *cesura* that the father imposes to such relationship, are elements of equal importance in the creation of that frontier which protects the kernel of creativity and representation. In this sense, the oedipal structure, if understood in a broader sense, has nothing to do with biography or biographism but it rather lays the foundations of that “family romance” constituting the “symbolization of the generation.” The word “generation” can be understood here both as ‘generational’ ‘creation.’²¹⁵ The issue at stake is therefore how the writing subject can transform the oedipal structure and the affective traces connected to it through sublimation, making of the text at once the outcome of a filiation and an attempt to create a contact with an origin that remains lost, dislocated, in a word: *incr able*. An origin which is covered as much as uncovered by the work of writing. “Plongeant aux sources de l’origine, l’originaire donne naissance   l’original,” writes Green: “Plunging into the sources of the origin, the primal gives birth to the original.”²¹⁶ By giving birth to the work²¹⁷ the subject becomes at once father, mother, and child of the very work of creation he has put into motion. Sublimation, in its link to the drive, always represents an attempt of the re-creation of a relationship with an origin that is constantly elsewhere, protected, safe, and inaccessible.

²¹³ Kaus in Kaus, *Eine kleine Frau*, also explores a possible relationship between Kafka’s work and Martin Buber’s *Ich und Du* (1923).

²¹⁴ Kaus, *Eine kleine Frau*, 70-71.

²¹⁵ Green, “Transcription d’origine inconnue,” 31.

²¹⁶ Green, D, 317.

²¹⁷ Cfr. also Charles Hammond, “Not a Room, but a Womb: The Birth Metaphors of Kafka’s *Das Urteil*,” *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, Band 66 (2016), Heft 1, 61-79.

From this point of view, the turn towards a meta-representational component that I claimed characterizes Kafka's late season, allows to pinpoint a further subtle allusion (generally overlooked by the research)²¹⁸ in the title *Eine kleine Frau*: an allusion to his pages on the *kleine Litteratur*, penned in 1911 in his *Tagebücher* [KKAT 312-315, 326]. The pertinence of this reference is not quite linked to the socio-political implications of the *kleine Litteratur* but rather to a childhood of the literary in his writing. It is almost as if, approaching the end, Kafka were able to recover and revisit with his pen the distant traces of a lost origin of his own work. This subtle link, however, does not justify *per se* the claim that beyond the intricate web of allusions of *Eine kleine Frau* lies the fantasy, or the 'phantasm' [*fantasme*] of a lost origin, of a lost 'object-literature.' In order to substantiate this hypothesis, we have to leave behind the limits of biographism and tackle this work otherwise.

In sharp contrast with this biographical interpretative trend,²¹⁹ Malcom Pasley has suggested that *Eine kleine Frau* can be read in comparison with texts such as *Elf Söhne* and *Die Sorge des Hausvaters*, in which the motives of sublimation and filiation by means of literature assume a prominent role.²²⁰ He claims that "the image of the 'little woman' was developed, like that of Odradek, from the author's contemplation of some actual literary product, some concrete expression of his literary self that he had before his eyes." Such literary object, continues Pasley, "did not merely serve as the starting point for the fantasy, but remains present in the story as a secret point of reference." *Eine kleine Frau*, *Elf Söhne*, and *Die Sorge des Hausvaters* thus articulate a common imaginative trajectory, a stylistic strategy through which, "while pursuing

²¹⁸ Indeed, scholars tend to consider the pages on the *kleine Litteratur* in relationship with texts such as *Ein Hungerkünstler* or *Josefine, die Sängerin*. See for instance Hans-Georg Pott, "Allegorie und Sprachverlust. Zu Kafkas *Hungerkünstler*-Zyklus und der Idee einer ‚Kleinen Literatur‘". *Euphorion* 73 (1979), 435-450, Neumann, *Kafka-Lektüren*, 402-421.

²¹⁹ Pasley has called biographism "the actual original sin of Kafka's interpretation," thereby criticizing the assumption that the author had deliberately wanted to embody, in his writing, specific real occurrences from his past, people, places, episodes, institutions (See Pasley, "*Die Schrift ist unveränderlich...*" 150-151). Again in "Kafka's Semi-private Games," 127, Pasley remarks: "[...] The pointing out of such private allusions on Kafka's part, whether to his literary work, or to his lungs, or to his friends, or to events in his life, does not and cannot constitute an interpretation of the stories in which such allusions occur." Like Green (Green, AN, 10, 50) Pasley stresses the distinction between *biography* as a 'private', auto-referential object of the work and *life*—the lived, un-lived, imagined, hallucinated, even neglected one—as source of creativity (Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 87-114) as well as in its transformative potential in literature. The works of scholars such as Pasley and Robertson are in this respect instrumental to overcome the *impasse* of biographism. See R. Robertson, "Der Künstler und das Volk. Kafkas *Ein Hungerkünstler. Vier Geschichten*," *Text+Kritik. Sonderband Franz Kafka*. Zweite, gründlich überarbeitete Auflage, Hrsg. von H. L. Arnold (München: Text+Kritik, 2006), 180-191.

²²⁰ See also Kafka's journal entry from February 11, 1913 [KKAT 491], in which he retrospectively reflects upon the creative process of *Das Urteil*. We read: "Anlässlich der Korrektur des ‚Urteils‘ schreibe ich alle Beziehungen auf, die mir in der Geschichte klargeworden sind, soweit ich sie gegenwärtig habe. Es ist dies notwendig, denn die Geschichte ist wie eine regelrechte Geburt mit Schmutz und Schleim bedeckt aus mir herausgekommen, und nur ich habe die Hand, die bis zum Körper dringen kann und Lust dazu hat [...]" "In occasion of the proof reading of the 'Judgement' I register all the relationships that have become clear to me in the story as far as I remember them. This is necessary because story came out of me as a downright birth, covered with filth and slime, and only I have the hand that can reach to the body itself and the strength of desire to do so [...]"

his exploratory personification, the author retains at the same time a network of hidden reference back to his figure's inanimate origin."²²¹

Pasley explores how in *Eine kleine Frau* the materiality of writing meets the playfulness, the unpredictable fantasy of the writing process: "the little woman is essentially an image of what literature meant to Kafka, an image of his 'literary part' [...]."²²² In this meta-representational fantasy, literature, the process of writing, and in a wider sense, the material support (pages, sheets) as well as the graphic inscription, thus become a living creature (and not necessarily an anthropomorphic one, as in the case of Odradek). The handwriting, the ink, the notebook, even the simplest typographic elements of a publication are not mere 'things' anymore. They become, we may add, living objects of an emotional, affective, creative investment, within and without the subject.

Robertson, furthermore, has noticed how the figure of the little woman may be understood as "an image of the art, namely as embodiment of the artistic conscience or of an artistic super-ego relentlessly criticising and supervising the empirical self of the artist."²²³ In this regard, we may say, if Pasley underscores the 'pleasure principle' of Kafka's relationship with the materiality of writing and literature (the sensorial involvement of touch, smell, motion, gestural repetitions vehiculating the tension of the whole body in its transformation in the writing process), Robertson grasps no doubt the persecutory element of Kafka's passion for writing. If we value Robertson's and Pasley's readings we can easily grasp in the following passage an allusion to the tyrannic imperiousness of the moment of inspiration, to the bloodthirsty exigence of literature that constantly imposes itself on the subject, and to the seductive, burning passion of the creating *impetus* in its persecutory character:

Immer wieder werde ich etwa im Glück der ersten Morgenstunden aus dem Hause treten und dieses um meinetwillen vergrämte Gesicht sehn, die verdrießlich aufgestülpten Lippen, den prüfenden und schon vor der Prüfung das Ergebnis kennenden Blick, der über mich hinfährt und dem selbst bei größter Flüchtigkeit nichts entgehen kann, das bittere in die mädchenhafte Wange sich einbohrende Lächeln, das klagende Aufschauen zum Himmel, das Einlegen der Hände in die Hüften, um sich zu festigen, und dann in der Empörung das Bleichwerden und Erzittern.²²⁴

²²¹ Pasley, "Kafka's Semi-private Games," 127; Id. Pasley, "*Die Schrift ist unveränderlich...*" 77 ff. See also Robertson, "Der Künstler und das Volk," 181.

²²² Pasley, "Kafka's Semi-private Games," 126.

²²³ Robertson, "Der Künstler und das Volk," 181.

²²⁴ "Day after day, for instance, I will leave the house in the joy of the early morning hours, and I will see this face, bad-tempered because of me, the ill-humoured curl of the lip, the scrutinizing eye that already knows the result of the scrutiny, that looks me over briefly and that nothing, however fleeting, can escape, the bitter smile painfully hollowing her prim little face, the plaintive heavenward gaze, the hands planted on her hips to steady herself, the growing pallor, the palpitations."

The function of the ideal in its link with sublimation²²⁵ opens here a space in which emerge not only the expectations, the discipline of writing, and the concerns regarding the vicissitudes of the work,²²⁶ but also Kafka's confrontation with the body of a tradition—a canon of the literary in which the author enters as heir as much as a heretic figure: “[...] mag sein, daß alles an mir ihrem Schönheitssinn, ihrem Gerechtigkeitsgefühl, ihren Gewohnheiten, ihren Überlieferungen, ihren Hoffnungen widerspricht, es gibt derartige einander widersprechende Naturen, aber warum leidet sie so sehr darunter?“ [KKAD 322]²²⁷

Pasley and Robertson's remarks seem to be consistent with a reading *Eine kleine Frau* as a meta-representation of the passion of writing and of the vicissitudes of representation, caught in the field of tensions between a tendency to 'evacuation' and dissolution, and its inevitable 'return on the page.' What is indeed pivotal in *Eine kleine Frau*—and both Pasley and Robertson, in this sense, fail to grasp this point—is how two irreducible dimensions of writing emerge and coexist, unsolvable, namely as signals of a radical alterity at work within the text. “*Es ist eine kleine Frau*” [KKAD 321, emphasis mine] we read, at the beginning of this work: “*It is a little woman,*” we may translate word for word. Significantly, this syntactic structure²²⁸ seems to hint at something more than a simple discrepancy within the subject of the text. Indeed, this is not only what Pasley qualifies as the “Doppelbödigkeit” of many Kafka's writings—i.e., an ambiguous and inextricable mixing of humorous and serious elements.²²⁹ Rather, it is a trace of the unconscious process through which creativity emerges on the conscious level of the text. It is important to stress how this unconscious element does not just represent a mere disturbance in the creative process, but an 'other' form of rationality (i.e. a negative form of consciousness) unfolding in the writing process and making it possible. This emerges with particular intensity in the following passage of the text:

Den Eindruck, den ihre Hand auf mich macht, kann ich nur wiedergeben, wenn ich sage, daß ich noch keine Hand gesehen habe, bei der die einzelnen Finger derart scharf voneinander abgegrenzt wären, wie bei der ihren; doch hat ihre Hand keineswegs irgendeine anatomische Merkwürdigkeit, es ist eine völlig normale Hand.²³⁰

²²⁵ Green, TN, 307 ff.; WoN, 222 ff.

²²⁶ “[...] die Welt hat nicht Zeit, auf alle Fälle aufzupassen.“ [KKAD 331]; “[...] the world has no time to keep an eye on every case.”

²²⁷ “[...] it may be that everything about me contradicts her feeling for beauty, her sense of justice, her habits, her transmissions, her hopes, there are incompatible natures of this kind, but why does she suffer so much from mine?”

²²⁸ See for instance the opening of *In der Strafkolonie* [KKAD 201-248].

²²⁹ Pasley, “*Die Schrift ist unveränderlich...*,” 79.

²³⁰ “I can render the impression that her hand makes on me only by saying that never before have I seen such a Hand, in which the single fingers are so sharply separated one from each other, as in hers; and yet, her hand has in no way any sort of anatomic peculiarity [her hand is in no way anatomically remarkable], it is just a normal hand.”

The hand of the little woman, rightfully identified by Pasley as a playful allusion in form of a pun to handwriting [Hand-Schrift],²³¹ can be read from another perspective, namely as a *writing hand*. Many critics have focused their attention on this passage, on the anatomical oddity of it, yet overlooking what this hand might *represent*: a hand which impresses [eindrücken] a surface as the hand of otherness. It is a hand that writes as much as it comes into being by means of writing, inscribing signs which are perceivable, and yet irreproducible, inaccessible to the narrating voice, to the writing subject, as well as to the reader. These are spectral written and writing signs of an absence, of a corporality dissolving as it leaves on the page a blank script.

What we can read here, in the trace of the writing hand is the signal of a deep affective investment associated with the work of writing: “Wieviel Tage sind wieder stumm vorüber; heute ist der 29. Mai. Habe ich nicht einmal die Entschlossenheit, diesen Federhalter, dieses Stück Holz täglich in die Hand zu nehmen“ writes Kafka in 1910 [KKAT 16-17].²³² Many entries from the *Tagebücher* show indeed an intricately associative and imaginative network expressing, in all its ambivalence, the torments, the joys, and the passion of writing. At times, a writing hand turns into a reaching one, a hand that stretches, through writing, between the generations. On January 21, 1922, Kafka writes: “Ohne Vorfahren, ohne Ehe, ohne Nachkommen, mit wilder Vorfahren-, Ehe- und Nachkommens-lust. Alle reichen mir die Hand: Vorfahren, Ehe und Nachkommen, aber zu fern für mich.“ [KKAT 884]²³³ In desperate times,²³⁴ Kafka’s writing hand traces lines on the empty surface of the page to inhabit the absence of the affects, transforming it not quite into *the* work, but rather into a filiation of a work which is counterfactually underway from an irreducible distance.²³⁵

²³¹ Pasley, “Kafka’s Semi-private Games,” 130.

²³² “How many days have passed again in silence; today is March 29. Not once have I had the determination to take daily this pen, this piece of wood in my hand.”

²³³ “Without forebears, without marriage, without descendants, with a wild longing for forebears, marriage, and descendants. They all stretch their hands to me: forebears, marriage, descendants, but too far for me.”

²³⁴ See also the journal entry from October 19, 1921 [KKAT 867] in which the writing hand literally registers and bears witness [ein-tragen] from among the ruins of life.

²³⁵ In this sense, another interesting passage can be found in a diary entry from September 14, 1915. Kafka puts here on the page the impressions of his visit to Rabbi of Žižkov. The hand of the *Wunderrabbi* unleashes a series of associations in which the whiteness of the skin makes possible the encounter between infancy and the transgenerational, as if taking place in the space untouched by writing on a blank page: “Schmutzig und rein, Eigentümlichkeit intensiv denkender Menschen. Kratzt sich am Bartansatz, schneuzt durch die Hand auf den Fußboden, greift mit den Fingern in die Speisen – wenn er aber ein Weilchen die Hand auf dem Tisch liegen läßt, sieht man das Weiß der Haut, wie man ein ähnliches Weiß nur in Vorstellungen der Kindheit gesehn zu haben glaubt. Damals allerdings waren auch die Eltern rein.” [KKAT 752] “Dirty and pure, a characteristic of people who think intensely. Scratches in his beard, blows his nose through his fingers, reaches into the food with his fingers – but when he leaves the hand resting on the table for a little while you see the whiteness of his skin, a whiteness such as one thinks having seen before only in the representations of childhood. Back then however the parents too were pure.”

There is a further element which is important to highlight. In the hand of *Eine kleine Frau*, we can grasp a relentless work of concealment and dislocation that informs, in fact, the text as a whole. In the closing lines of this work, Kafka writes:

Von wo aus also ich es auch ansehe, immer wieder zeigt sich und dabei bleibe ich, daß, wenn ich mit der Hand auch nur ganz leicht diese kleine Sache verdeckt halte, ich noch sehr lange, ungestört von der Welt, mein bisheriges Leben ruhig werde fortsetzen dürfen, trotz allen Tobens der Frau. [KKAD 333]²³⁶

The gesture that closes *Eine kleine Frau* encloses not only the text, but metonymically speaking, the writing process as a movement of covering and simultaneously of uncovering. The hand embodies the twofold role of ‘writing hand’ and ‘written hand’, articulating a *bluffing*²³⁷, i.e., a continuous dislocation of the “kernel,” around which writing revolves. It is a hand that, to borrow Green’s words in *La déliaison*, “[...] efface au fur et à mesure qu’elle trace”— “[it] deletes the very lines it forms as it moves along.”²³⁸ But we would be mistaken to think that this bluffing does not represent anything other than the malevolent nature of a writing whose purpose is solely of deceiving the reader. This ‘bluff,’ in a broader sense, is rather signal of the interlocking of negative hallucination and work of writing.

The notion of negative hallucination precedes the birth of psychoanalysis and can be traced back to the prime time of hypnotism and to the demonstrations of Charcot and Bernheim at the Hôpital de la Salpêtrière.²³⁹ The term appears in Freud as early as 1890 in an article called *Psychische Behandlung* (1890) and is presented by establishing a link between hallucination and negation. For Freud, it is not a matter of a simple lack in the perceptive field. Negative hallucination is rather described as a psychic mechanism that constitutes the counterpart to hallucination, and can be induced, unbeknownst to the subject, by an external force as well as an internal one. Green summarizes the difference between ‘positive’ hallucination and negative hallucination as follows: “à l’en-plus de l’hallucination positive (‘perception sans objet’) correspondrait l’en-moins de l’hallucination négative (‘non perception d’un objet’).”²⁴⁰

²³⁶ “So from whatever angle I look at it, it becomes clearer every time, and I stick to this, that if I keep my hand covering this little thing over even quite lightly, I shall be allowed to me to go on with my life as before for a very long time, calmly, undisturbed by the world, despite all that little woman’s raging.”

²³⁷ See Rosalba Maletta, “Dis-adattare al debito, Kafka, la letteratura e la ‘parola che chiama,’” *Re Mida a Wall Street: debito, desiderio, distruzione tra psicoanalisi, economia, filosofia*, a cura di F. Leoni (Milano: Mimesis, 2015), 147-174, here 151. To *bluff*, from the Dutch *bluffen* “to brag, boast,” or *verbluffen* “to baffle, mislead.” means “to deceive (opponents), especially by betting heavily and with a confident air on a *worthless hand* to make them ‘fold’” [emphasis mine]. See Douglas Harper, “Etymology of bluff,” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/bluff>.

²³⁸ Green, D, 36; PM, 353.

²³⁹ Green, TN, 223-224; WoN, 161.

²⁴⁰ Green, TN, 223-224; WoN, 161-162: “In positive hallucination (‘perception without an object’) there is something in excess [...] which corresponds to what is lacking [...] in negative hallucination (‘non perception of an object’).”

In his work, Green extends and redefines the importance of this neglected psychic mechanism, turning it into a cornerstone of the theoretical constellation of the Negative.²⁴¹ What is important to highlight here is the role of negative hallucination in *Eine kleine Frau* and its explanatory potential in the light of the meta-representational turn that this text undertakes. Indeed, negative hallucination may help us further define what we called the “blankness” of the text, which constitutes the ever-absent kernel of the vicissitudes of creation: the very ‘non-object’ of this “sublimated text.”

Let us return for a moment to Green’s paper *La déliaison*, particularly to a passage that previously escaped our attention. Green writes:

[...] Ce que l’on tente d’évacuer par cette écriture [du texte sublimé], c’est la relation au signifié, au profit du seul signifiant. L’écriture pure, délivrée du signifié, libérée de la représentation, a rompu ses amarres avec l’objet, elle est son propre objet. *Par une comparaison qui, comme toutes les comparaisons, est imparfaite, nous dirons que la réalisation hallucinatoire du désir qui fait apparaître l’objet absent a cédé le pas à l’hallucination négative.* Il s’agit non seulement de tuer dans l’œuf la représentation de l’objet, mais aussi celui pour qui un objet existe comme objet de désir. Le seul désir est le désir d’écrire, sans objet.²⁴²

Imperfect as it may be, this comparison is quite fruitful for the purpose of our investigation and deserves to be elucidated before moving forward. Green defines negative hallucination as “the non-perception of an object or of a perceptible psychical phenomenon.” It is, in other words, “a phenomenon involving the erasure of what should be perceived.”²⁴³ In the context of *Eine kleine Frau*, negative hallucination allows to read Kafka’s writing as a means of articulation *and* erasure, at the same time, of a non-object, an object which is blank. As writing unfolds on the page, the object of writing is subjected to an erasure for which the very writing is responsible. If we consider literary style as a means to make possible the creation of a counterfactual world, allowing its aesthetical ‘resensorialization’ and ‘perception’ through the act of reading (hence Green’s aforementioned reference to the hallucinatory fulfilment of desire), negative hallucination operates in Kafka’s writing in a double sense. First, as a device for the perception of an absence, which, nonetheless, cannot be made present or conjured up. Such absence remains, literally, a blank hole in the ‘perceptive field’ of the text. In this sense, negative hallucination functions as a necessary limit of the perceptive field that writing creates.

²⁴¹ Green, KI, 221.

²⁴² Green, D, 36; PM, 353-354: “[...] what one is trying to evacuate through this type of writing [sublimated text] is the relation to the signified for the sole benefit of the signifier. The pure script, unfettered by the signified, set free from representation, has severed its moorings to the object; it has become its own object. *To use a comparison which, like most comparisons, is imperfect, we propose that the hallucinatory fulfilment of desire which conjures up the absent object has yielded to a negative hallucination.* The purpose is not only to kill representation in the egg, but also him for whom an object exists as object of desire. The only desire left is the desire to write, without object.”

²⁴³ Green, KI, 218.

Concurrently, however, in relationship with the stylistic dimension of the text, negative hallucination allows a form of representation, in spite of all, creating the framing structure for the articulation of an erasure—as representation of the absence of representation.

The question that concerns us is, more specifically, what this absence is. In order to attempt an answer this question, we have to push a little farther the ‘image’ of the writing hand at the end of the text. Metonymically speaking, the writing hand of *Eine kleine Frau* is and is not the writing hand of the author. To be more precise, it is the fingerprint the author leaves through language as his own unique stylistic mark. Such fingerprint is indeed the representation of an erasure, of a diffraction²⁴⁴ which invests the writing subject. The motion of this writing hand tells the ‘story’ of the effacement of a writing hand as a metonym of the subject of writing. If a form of subjectivity may survive in the text, it is surely not only that of the author, for the author, in its corporality, transforms into a new body: the written trace on the page. A remnant of the subject survives as that otherness which, reciprocally, writes itself and the subject: an otherness which inscribes itself as *a* subject.

The focal point of the matter lies therefore less in a negotiation between representation and irrepresentability than in the unfolding of a paradoxical textual economy: *representation and object of representation seem to entertain an insurmountable relationship of mutual exclusion*. The bluffing of this exponential work of sublimation consists in the articulation of a diffraction, a disassociation which cannot be recomposed, and that constantly haunts Kafka’s late writing, becoming its very object. Here we face one of the crucial paradoxes of his late work: to write means at once to set up to a journey striving to give form to and invent a lost object. An object that does not cease concealing itself as far as the journey of ad through sublimation proceeds. In the gesture of the hand that closes *Eine kleine Frau* is thus possible to detect in meta-representational terms a sort of ‘fiction’ of the relationship between creative process and object of representation. As we can see, the stylistic dimension of writing appears in all its ambiguity, being at once point of contact and insurmountable limit.

We meet here, once more, the *incr able*: the blank space *in* and *of* the text, which writing does not cease to represent as the ‘uncreatable’ of the work. Writing is what may get us closer (always in the sense of an *as if*) to *an* origin insofar as it covers up and obliterates *the* origin. Subjectivation, i.e., the fact of *being separated from an object*, as well as literary creation, are inconceivable without this very rupture, which the writer will continuously revisit and delineate. The *incr able*, that unreachable “kernel of the relationship with the body of the mother,” is

²⁴⁴ Green, LM, 98.

what the subject is now called upon to represent “otherwise, through the work of writing”.²⁴⁵ Sublimation thus conveys the traces of that first, inaccessible wound of the body, reactivating it in the repetition of writing, and transforming it in a new framing structure.

Eine kleine Frau—alongside the other texts of *Ein Hungerkünstler*—explores in a certain way the creative capabilities of the psyche to give form to an absent ‘other’ by exploring the limits of writing it. As the readings to follow of *Ein Hungerkünstler* and *Josefine, die Sängerin* will show, *Eine kleine Frau* represents a necessary, intermediary structural stage of the work of the Negative in Kafka’s writing.

²⁴⁵ Green, D, 321.

2.3 *Ein Hungerkünstler*. The *Incréable* and the Deferred Reserve of Representation

Veiller sur le sens absent.

Maurice Blanchot²⁴⁶

[...] *a posteriori fängt Alles an [...]*

Georg Büchner²⁴⁷

“Vorgestern ‚H.-K.‘”, reads a page from Kafka’s *Tagebücher* dated May 25th, 1922 [KKAT 922]. This laconic journal entry is widely regarded as marking on May 23rd (the “day before yesterday”, [KKAD A 332]) the composition of one of the masterpieces of Kafka’s late creative season. Alike *Erstes Leid*, *Ein Hungerkünstler* [KKAD 333-349] was penned in a hiatus during the writing process of the unfinished novel *Das Schloss*, and first appeared on the *Neue Rundschau* in the October issue of 1922.

However, as Pasley remarks, Kafka would return to *Ein Hungerkünstler* after completing *Eine kleine Frau*—that is, around the beginning of 1924—supposedly with the intention of expanding, perhaps even of restructuring the text printed in the *Neue Rundschau* before sending the work to the *Die Schmiede Verlag*.²⁴⁸ Eventually, the author would reject the additions he introduced. Kafka’s alterations, corresponding to almost “a third of the whole”,²⁴⁹ featured two sections: one describing the exchange between the hunger artist and a spectator (a *Besucher* in the original text [KKAD A 441-442]), and a much longer passage in which the *Hungerkünstler* receives the uncanny visit of a *Menschenfresser*, or man-eater [KKAN II 646-649].

Had Kafka resolved to leave these additions, today we would be reading a quite different text. Of the two sections that he retrospectively attempted to integrate in the work and then discarded, the episode of the *Menschenfresser* has no doubt most drawn scholarly attention. It has been remarked that specifically the presence of the “counter-figure” of the *Menschenfresser* would have damaged the consistency of the prose and “pushed it over the border into the grotesque.”²⁵⁰ The two passages can nonetheless be compared in that they both portray the encounter of the hunger artist with some sort of antagonistic figures. On the one hand, the *Besucher*, who questions the integrity and flawlessness of his hunger [KKAD A 442]; on the

²⁴⁶ Maurice Blanchot, *L’écriture du désastre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 72.

²⁴⁷ Georg Büchner, *Leonce und Lena* in *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Hrsg. von A. Martin (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2012), 201.

²⁴⁸ Malcom Pasley, “Asceticism and Cannibalism: Notes on an Unpublished Kafka Text,” *Oxford German Studies*, 1:1, (1966), 102-113, here 104 ff.; for the German translation see Id. “*Die Schrift ist unveränderlich...*” 21-34.

²⁴⁹ See Kafka’s written commentary “Ein Drittel aus der Mitte gestrichen” and Pasley’s analysis in “Asceticism and Cannibalism”, 104, ff.

²⁵⁰ Pasley, “Asceticism and Cannibalism,” 103-104.

other hand, the man-eater, who challenges the hunger artist with his vitality and “childlike voracity.”²⁵¹ We can suppose that the integration of these new sections, in particular that of the *Menschenfresser*, would have clipped the wings of a representational economy that seems to accept no reduction to any sort of game of opposites. In this sense, the *Menschenfresser* would represent that “bone of writing” that necessarily has to remain an “absent reference,”²⁵² exiled from the text, unseizable, ‘undevourable’ in order for the text to be such.²⁵³ We shall return to this hypothesis. For the moment, we can say that, by refraining from including such textual additions, Kafka seems to impress in the work the mark of an omission: a form of ‘hunger’ which acquires a meta-representational role in that it alludes, again, to an absent core of the creative process in which the *incr able* dwells insofar as it remains unreachable—indeed the very object of an interminable wake.

Furthermore, it is meaningful that Kafka has retrospectively attempted to revisit his work after the first print on the *Neue Rundschau*²⁵⁴—something that, if I am not mistaken, never occurs, at least not to such an extent, except for one relevant case.²⁵⁵ This suggests the retrospective reactivation of a creative process of re-writing that concerns not only the specific piece, but the wider economy and organization of the collection. Although the last version of the text apparently retains no trace of the revisions that the author attempted in the early months of 1924, we have reason to believe that the piece had undergone a deep transformation in Kafka’s mind, acquiring a new relevance that he probably did not perceive, or at least not immediately, after finishing the very first draft.²⁵⁶

It is therefore between the two poles of an unsaturable hunger for and through writing (Blanchot’s “wake on an absent sense”) and of the rhythmic of the *Nachtr glichkeit* (B chner) that the subject of the present paragraph unfolds. These two poles circumscribe an ‘other’ scene of a writing which does not cease to put into words a deferred form of signification. In representational terms, I understand this ‘other’ scene as the unconscious counterpart of Kafka’s conscious resolution of omitting the two aforementioned passages in favour of a textual

²⁵¹ See also Maletta, “Dis-adattare al debito,” 150-151. Interestingly, Kafka does not use here the term anthropophagus, nor cannibal; with *Menschenfresser* he rather seems to prefer a linguistic register more proper to child stories and fairy tales.

²⁵² Green, D, 51.

²⁵³ Maletta, “Dis-adattare al debito,” 160-161.

²⁵⁴ Shortly thereafter, the text was published in the daily paper *Prager Presse* (Nr. 279, Oct. 11, 1922); part of it also appeared after a few weeks on the Sunday paper of the *New Yorker Volkszeitung*, (Nr. 45, Nov. 5, 1922), on *Vorwrts. Wochenblatt der New Yorker Volkszeitung* (Nov. 11, 1922) and again on *Vorbote. Unabhngiges Organ f r die Interessen des Proletariats* (Nr. 45, Nov 15, 1922).

²⁵⁵ That being Kafka’s very last text, *Josefine, die Sngerin oder Das Volk der Muse*.

²⁵⁶ Let us also keep in mind that, at this point in his life, Kafka had yet to write what will actually be his last work, (*Josefine, die Sngerin*) as also indicated by an early version of the contract drafted by ‘Die Schmiede’ dated March 7, 1924, in which only three texts (with slightly different titles) are mentioned [KKAD A 391, 462].

economy of subtraction. Whereas the latter (i.e., the ‘conscious scene’ of this work) has been the subject of a considerable number of studies, the former has hardly been taken into consideration by the existing research.

Before tackling this ‘other’ scene of writing, which sheds light on the unconscious of the text,²⁵⁷ I will advance two preliminary remarks. First, what I call here the ‘other’, or unconscious scene of writing, does not entertain with the ‘conscious’ scene a relationship of mere opposition. As Green maintains, “L’inconscient n’est [...] pas seulement l’opposé du conscient, mais ce qui e nest séparé – par le refoulement.” “The unconscious is not only the opposite of consciousness but that which is separated from it by repression.”²⁵⁸ Although we shall not refer explicitly and in detail to repression *per se*, we ought to bear in mind that the *Urverdrängung* (i.e., primal repression), while laying the foundation of the unconscious (building the matrix and the magnetic pole of secondary repression [*Verdrängung*]) is also intimately involved in the creative process in reason of its relationship with the *incréable*—and therefore with the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*.²⁵⁹ The *Urverdrängung* notably covers the ‘original’ core of repressed material—indeed, that irremediably lost, inaccessible ‘original scene’—linked to the loss of the corporeal relationship with the maternal object through the rupture operated by the father. As we know, there is something that the *caesura* of the father could not entirely sever: the narcissistic movement of the relationship with the body of the mother.²⁶⁰ Thus the *Urvedrängung* constitutes the blank spot of a severed link to a primal object, towards which the subject will subsequently funnel the affective investment at the basis of the creative process. From this point of view, the question of repression allows us to consider the work of the Negative not quite in its ‘oppositional’ aspect, but rather as expression of a radically “different mode of being”²⁶¹—that of the unconscious—which ceases to be identifiable as such by the parameters of consciousness. The conscious does not and cannot ‘fore-see’ [*deviner*] the unconscious.²⁶²

To this we must add that such ‘scenes’ are not linked, from our perspective, by a chronological or developmental relationship of progressive, linear continuity. In other words, the one is *not* the consequence or the cause of the other, and *vice versa*. Their relationship ought rather to be envisaged from the angle of that deferred structuring of sense which is the product

²⁵⁷ Green, D, 57-58.

²⁵⁸ Green, TN, 67; WoN, 43.

²⁵⁹ Green, D, 321.

²⁶⁰ Green, D, 322.

²⁶¹ Green, TN, 58; WoN, 36.

²⁶² Green, TN, 64; WoN 41.

of the “temporal generative potentiality” proper of the *Nachträglichkeit*.²⁶³ Their relationship revolves around a continuous rearrangement of their articulation in a frame that the subject constructs as much as it is constructed by it. That represents the kernel of a diachronic heterogeneity, as Green calls it, which is constantly open to resignification, thus essentially questioning the linearity of the chain past-present-future—such is the case of the “future in the past”. The inscriptions of these ‘scenes’ are therefore not inert and crystallized, nor fixed in time or ultimately bonded to their ‘chronologic’ value. They are instead the material of a work of construction that springs from a discontinuity (i.e., a negation of continuity): a work which modifies the perception of time as relationship between experience and signification, exposing them to a transformation of their roles, the one informing and affecting the inscriptions of the other.²⁶⁴

Along with *Josefine, die Sängerin, Ein Hungerkünstler* has been the focus of privileged scholarly attention, as shown by the considerable number of contributions, corresponding to just as many interpretative approaches, readings, and analyses. A notoriously long-established trend of research has addressed in *Ein Hungerkünstler* motives such as the ambiguous relationship between artist and public,²⁶⁵ or between the figure of the Impresario and the hunger artist. Also the questions of truth and deception of the artistic endeavour, sanctity and impurity, ascetism and consumption represent topics of extensive investigation.²⁶⁶ While contributions such as Bauer-Wabnegg’s traced the possible sources behind the historical phenomenon of fasting in the context of *varieté*, freakshows, and circuses at the beginning of last century,²⁶⁷ scholars like Efraim Sicher²⁶⁸ enriched the path opened by Jack Riemer,²⁶⁹ exploring *Ein Hungerkünstler* within the specificity of a “Jewish hermeneutics,” and considering its kinship with the storytelling of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav.²⁷⁰ In the last decades, moreover, consistently

²⁶³ Green, AC, 22. See also Green, DP, 11-39.

²⁶⁴ Green, AC, 23.

²⁶⁵ This trend consolidated since the late fifties with works such as Benno von Wiese, “Franz Kafka: *Ein Hungerkünstler*,” Id. *Die deutsche Novelle von Goethe bis Kafka* (Düsseldorf: August Bagel Verlag, 1956), 325-342. For an overview of the reception of Kafka’s *Ein Hungerkünstler* see Engel und Auerochs, *Kafka-Handbuch*, 322-323, 328.

²⁶⁶ See Neumann, *Kafka-Lektüren*, 248-286.

²⁶⁷ Walter Bauer-Wabnegg, *Zirkus und Artisten in Franz Kafkas Werk. Ein Beitrag über Körper und Literatur im Zeitalter der Technik* (Erlangen: Palm und Enke, 1986), 166-176.

²⁶⁸ Efraim Sicher, “Kafka’s Panther And Rabbi Nachman’s Turkey” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 3:1, 2004, 3-15.

²⁶⁹ Jack Riemer “Franz Kafka and Rabbi Nachman: Comparisons and Contrasts,” *Jewish Frontier* 4 (1961), 16–20.

²⁷⁰ Jill Robbins, “Kafka’s Parables,” *Midrash and Literature*, edited by G. H. Hartman and S. Budick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 265–84; Michal Oron, “Kafka und Nachman von Bratzlaw. Erzählen zwischen Traum und Erwartung,” *Franz Kafka und das Judentum*, Hrsgg. von K. E. Grözinger, S. Mosès, and H. D.

with the new intellectual, cultural, and socio-political challenges of the third millennium—i.e., the question of the anthropocene—new studies have expanded the interpretative horizon, reading Kafka’s poetics in ecocritical perspectives,²⁷¹ or finding in the text a conceptual source to interrogate the transformations of the role of literature in the humanities.²⁷²

Gerhard Neumann’s essay *Hungerkünstler und Menschenfresser* surely represents a turning point in the research.²⁷³ What is here of particular interest for my investigation is the exploration of the category of “refusal” [Verweigerung], i.e., the hunger artist’s “refusal to eat” [Essensverweigerung]. Neumann reads it as a “desperate attempt to affirm the peculiarity [Eigentümlichkeit] of the subject against the double strategies of family’s upbringing (which is indeed an upbringing ‘for life’) through the rules of eating.”²⁷⁴ Neumann jointly reflects on the relationship between the “ritualisation of the act of eating”²⁷⁵ as an “act of foundation of the law”²⁷⁶—not only in a religious sense, but more broadly in terms of parental authority and socio-cultural conventions—and the textual semiotic system that *Ein Hungerkünstler* subverts.

For Neumann, Kafka’s text “enthrones” for the first time in the history of literature the category of refusal, elevating it to an aesthetic principle which is at once anti-symbolic and anti-oedipal.²⁷⁷ He claims that what the hunger artist strives to create through his “*Kunstakt*” is indeed a “paradoxical construction” of an “absolute sign” [absolutes Zeichen], which reveals an “apocryphal counter-aesthetic.” In contrast to the “transfigurational” principle [Verklärung] of the dominating Christian and Western culture,²⁷⁸ the “poetology” of refusal in *Ein Hungerkünstler* attempts to “establish a reversed history of salvation” [eine umgekehrte Heilsgeschichte] as “return of the sign to the body after their separation through the original

Zimmerman (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1987), 113–121; Roger Kamenetz, *Burnt Books. Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav and Franz Kafka* (New York: Schocken Books, 2010).

²⁷¹ Sabine Wilke and Cora L. Wilke-Gray, “Performing Hunger: Fasting in Franz Kafka’s *Hunger Artist* as Poetic Practice,” *German Ecocriticism in the Anthropocene*, ed. by C. Schaumann and H. I. Sullivan (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 147–164.

²⁷² Brenda Machosky, “Fasting at the Feast of Literature,” *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2005), 288–305. To be sure, these different interpretative perspectives do not exclude each other. Their variety rather speaks for the richness of a text that, ironically enough, do not lend itself to any definitive ‘interpretative performance’. Resistance to the “performance” from the hunger artist and resistance to ‘interpretative performance’ from the text go hand in hand in Kafka’s *Ein Hungerkünstler*, as much as in *Josefine, die Sängerin*. Interpretation becomes itself a theme of Kafka’s writing, as Sicher has rightfully observed in “Kafka’s Panther and Rabbi Nachman’s Turkey,” 3. Again, with “performance” I refer here not only to the artistic performance of the hunger artist, but foremost to the etymological sense of ‘accomplishment’, ‘perfection’, ‘closure of the circle.’ Kafka’s creatures do not reflect any integral image in the mirror of the West. And in this sense, perhaps, many of his characters are somehow akin to some biblical figures of the Old Testament, inasmuch as they give somehow new life to the comic side of that ‘sacrifice’ which is interpretation itself.

²⁷³ Auerochs even went so far as to consider it as “one of the few definitive achievements of Kafka scholarship.” Engel and Auerochs, *Kafka-Handbuch*, 323.

²⁷⁴ Neumann, *Kafka-Lektüren*, 248–286, here 254.

²⁷⁵ Ivi, 264.

²⁷⁶ Ivi, 266.

²⁷⁷ Ivi, 270–273.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

sin, as if such original sin were never happened.”²⁷⁹ Paraphrasing Neumann’s thesis, we might say that in a world marked by humanity’s disobedience to God’s prohibition of feeding on the tree of knowledge, the path towards redemption begins with the refusal to eat. This regressive dynamic of the “*Kunstakt*” is paradoxical, argues Neumann, in that the “enactment” [Inszenierung] of an “absolute sign” would inevitably lead also to the “enactment” of an absence of language, i.e., to the absence of sign. And yet, for Neumann, Kafka’s achievement consists precisely in carrying out such *Inszenierung* “in the language” and “with the language.”²⁸⁰ Thus, by showing through writing “the process of the self-dissolution of the sign,” Kafka’s text ultimately “represents the irrepresentable”, or following the semantics of the *Inszenierung* evoked by Neumann, “stages what cannot be staged” [das Nichtdarstellbare darstellen].²⁸¹

It is important here to attentively consider Neumann’s lexical and conceptual choice informing his analysis. By identifying the category of the *Verweigerung* as aesthetic axis around which *Ein Hungerkünstler* revolves, Neumann denotes in his reading what Kafka’s literary character *seems* to be aiming at exposing through his artistic endeavour: a “pure form of negativity,” “a sign of a non-sign.”²⁸² From this point of view, the hunger artist performs, in Neumann’s reading, a conscious, intentional refusal (indeed, a *Verweigerung*) of an aesthetic logic and of a symbolic order. Thereby, the hunger artist attempts to “lay the foundation of a negativity” [Begründung von Negativität] that might show something which “does not let show itself,” the “truth of a form of hunger” which cannot be witnessed, not by the guardians who distractedly survey his hunger, nor by the audience who loses interest in the hunger artist.

The analysis advanced by Neumann centres on what we have called a ‘conscious scene’ of Kafka’s writing, its ‘intentional’ textual economy. It offers insights into the possible overlapping of authorial expressive intention and psychology of the fictional character, between anthropological erudition and socio-cultural criticism. For this reason, although Neumann does not explicitly declare the source of what he calls “pure Negativity” [pure Negativität], we can assume that he’s hinting at a philosophical, Hegelian negativity—which, as we already highlighted, radically differs from the matter of our investigation.

It is almost as if the hunger artist transforms in Neumann’s pen into a philosophical subject: “conscient, unified, voluntary.”²⁸³ A subject “who knows what he says, does what he knows,

²⁷⁹ Ivi, 271.

²⁸⁰ Ivi, 267.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Meschonnic, *L’utopie du Juif*, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001), 13.

and knows what he does,” to say it with Meschonnic.²⁸⁴ Turned into a monadic “performer,” in which corporality and sign allegedly identify, Kafka’s character loses its poetic opacity for the sake of an intellectual and culturally disruptive ‘program’ that somehow echoes, again, the Hegelian notion of the “End of the History”. Despite Neumann’s attempt to free the hunger artist from the constraints of Western culture, the ‘hero’ that we are confronted with appears instead to be taking his place among the heirs and advocates of the West.

To that extent, there is indeed another cogent point of criticism of particular interest, concerning what Neumann calls the “anti-oedipal” and “anti-symbolic” status of the “pure negativity” that the hunger artist expresses with his “*Kunstakt*.” Even though it is not my purpose to venture in a study of the psychology of the main character of *Ein Hungerkünstler*, or in an evaluation of educational practices through food and upbringing,²⁸⁵ we cannot but be struck by a problematic contradiction ingrained in Neumann’s thesis. As Green reminds us, one of the most remarkable achievements of the Oedipus complex consists in the successful transformation of “hostility” into “identification.”²⁸⁶ Now if we consequently follow Neumann’s argument, i.e., if we accept to regard the “artistic enactment” of the hunger artist as an attempt to establish a fatherless, “anti-oedipal,” “anti-symbolic,” “counter-cultural”²⁸⁷ aesthetics, we also must acknowledge the possibility that the hunger artist can indeed successfully convert his hostility in a new form of order, no matter how supposedly “counter-cultural,” “counter-mythical,” “anti-oedipal” or “anti-symbolic” this order may be. In other words, through his *Kunstakt*, the hunger artist ultimately and unavoidably identifies, thus I read Neumann’s interpretation, with the very metonymical target of his refusal. The attempt of the hunger artist does not liberate him from the cultural and familial order he refuses with his *Essensverweigerung*, but not only. His “foundational act of an a-cultural aesthetic” [Begründung einer akulturellen Ästhetik] does not escape the orbit of the ‘dominant’ semiotic, cultural order either. Rather, it recreates it in a disguised fashion in which the Oedipus survives as a vestige, a potential presence of the father, transformed in the hunger artist’s own artistic gesture. Caught in the crossfire of his very artistic “act of foundation,” rooted in the refusal of the cultural system through nourishment, the hunger artist incarnates a new fatherly figure: no more a saturnine one who devours his sons, but rather a fatherless, sonless father, whose ‘no’ remains, however, sterile and ineffective in rejecting the “dominant culture”. Totality does not tolerate any heir.

²⁸⁴ Meschonnic, *L’utopie du Juif*, 13.

²⁸⁵ Although it must be stressed that, as Neumann certainly knows, the Oedipus complex and parental upbringing are not quite the same thing.

²⁸⁶ Green, KI, 193.

²⁸⁷ Neumann, *Kafka-Lektüren*, 285.

Neumann's underestimation of the complexity of the oedipal frame is a prominent limit of his interpretation.²⁸⁸ The main issue at stake here remains nonetheless that, from the specificity of a psychoanalytic standpoint, the concept of *Verweigerung* constitutes an intentional, voluntary form of refusal which is still unavoidably anchored in a psychology of consciousness. In other words, the concept of *Verweigerung* does not allow any 'access' to that "liminal concept" which is the drive,²⁸⁹ and therefore to the drive process [le pulsionnel] that, alongside with the compulsion to repeat, represents the paramount reference underlying the work of sublimation and of the Negative.²⁹⁰

That brings us to an important distinction worth elucidating before moving forward. I allude to Neumann's claim about Freud's 1907 essay *Der Dichter und das Phantasieren*.²⁹¹ For Neumann, also psychoanalysis—the arguments of which, he argues, are founded “under every circumstance on the basis of the desires [Wünsche] of the body”—would basically affirm the transfigurative function [“verklärende Funktion”] of “traditional” aesthetics.²⁹² Yet, *Phantasieren* is not artistic creation *per se*—and we can rest assured that Freud did not dispose of the issue so naively. Most importantly, we should bear in mind that whereas the *Verklärung* involves the transfiguration of the body into the divine and the celestial, sublimation—etymologically, the highest reachable point before the limits of the heavens—operates in a different way. If, on the one hand, it represents a possible vicissitude of the sexual drive (and *not* of desire) “onto a non-sexual aim and onto objects of high social value.”²⁹³ On the other hand, as Green has shown by reflecting upon Freud's theoretical turn of the year 1920,²⁹⁴ “sublimation is the adverse counterpart of Eros, which far from serving its aims [of Eros], sides with those forces which are antagonistic to its purposes”—i.e., the death drive.²⁹⁵

D'une part la sublimation apparaît comme un destin de la pulsion sexuelle, une forme épurée qui a sa place parmi d'autres destins possibles mais qui reste dans le patrimoine d'Eros, de l'autre, elle en

²⁸⁸ Neumann also seems to overlook the crucial role that the oedipal complex plays in the process of subjectivation. See Green, D, 321-322.

²⁸⁹ Green, TN, 50; WoN, 30. It is important to underscore that I am not referring here to the drive *per se*—since the drive is *per se* unknowable—but rather to Freud's cardinal definition exposed in *Trieb und Triebchicksale* (1915), according to which the drive is a “liminal concept between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body.” Freud, GW X, 214. See also Green's commentary on such definition in Green, “La sexualité a-t-elle un quelconque rapport avec la psychanalyse?”, 839 ff.

²⁹⁰ Green, TN, 58 ff.; WoN, 36 ff.

²⁹¹ Freud, GW VII, 213-223.

²⁹² Cfr. Neumann, *Kafka-Lektüren*, 271 fn. 33.

²⁹³ Green, WoN, 218; TN, 301.

²⁹⁴ Green, TN 296-354; WoN, 215-256.

²⁹⁵ Green, WoN, 219; TN, 302.

est la contrepartie adverse qui, loin de servir ses buts, se range du côté des forces qui lui sont antagonistes.²⁹⁶

We can now see why our approach to *Ein Hungerkünstler* cannot be confined to a dialectic or a game of opposites. What is at stake in sublimation is not limited to a form representation ‘in spite of’ a destructive, conflictual tension entailed in creativity,²⁹⁷ nor to the cancellation of destructivity through the work of writing. The challenge of sublimation is to make *something fruitful* of that ineliminable destructiveness (those “obscure forces”, as Kafka calls them [B 384]) that haunts the creative process. The question, therefore, is how to construct through destructivity, how to transform “death into absence.”²⁹⁸ “Das Schreiben ist ein süßer wunderbarer Lohn, aber wofür?” wonders Kafka in a letter to Max Brod dated July 5, 1922, written just few weeks after finishing the first draft of *Ein Hungerkünstler*:

In der Nacht war es mir mit der Deutlichkeit kindlichen Anschauungsunterrichtes klar, daß es der Lohn für Teufelsdienst ist. Dieses Hinabgehen zu den dunklen Mächten, diese Entfesselung von Natur aus gebundener Geister, fragwürdige Umarmungen und was alles noch unten vor sich gehen mag, von dem man oben nichts mehr weiß, wenn man im Sonnenlicht Geschichten schreibt. Vielleicht gibt es auch anderes Schreiben, ich kenne nur dieses: in der Nacht, wenn mich die Angst nicht schlafen läßt, kenne ich nur dieses. [...] Die Definition des Schriftstellers, eines solchen Schriftstellers, und die Erklärung seiner Wirkung, wenn es eine Wirkung überhaupt gibt: Er ist der Sündenbock der Menschheit, er erlaubt den Menschen, eine Sünde schuldlos zu genießen, fast schuldlos.“ [B 384, 386]²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ Green, TN, 302; WoN, 219. The whole passage reads: “On the one hand sublimation appears to be a vicissitude of the sexual drive, a purified form which has its place among other possible vicissitudes but which remains within the patrimony of Eros, and, on the other, sublimation is the adverse counterpart of Eros which, far from serving its aims, sides with those forces which are antagonistic to its purposes.”

²⁹⁷ We may also add that the conflictual dimension that Neumann detects in *Ein Hungerkünstler*—between the ‘new’ established by the hunger artist and the “rejected dominant culture”—has long been recognized in psychoanalysis as a constitutive element of creation. See Didier Anzieu, “Les traces du corps dans l’écriture: une étude psychanalytique du style narratif.” *Psychanalyse et Langage. Du corps à la parole* (Paris: Dunod, 1977), 172-187, as well as Green’s *La réserve de l’incréable* (D, 317-318).

²⁹⁸ Green, FP, 100.

²⁹⁹ “Writing is a sweet and wonderful reward, but for what? In the night it became clear to me, as clear as a child’s lesson book, that it is the reward for serving the devil. This descent to the dark powers, this unshackling of spirits bound by nature, these dubious embraces and whatever else may take place in the nether parts which the higher parts no longer know, when one writes one’s stories in the sunshine. Perhaps there are other forms of writing, but I know only this kind; at night, when fear keeps me from sleeping, I know only this kind. [...] The definition of writer, of such a writer, and the explanation of his effect, if there is any effect at all: he is the scapegoat of humanity, he allows humanity to innocently enjoy sin, almost innocently.” In this regard, let us read what Green writes with regards to sublimation (TN, 328): “La sublimation – comme tous les effets de la civilisation – a une action atrophiante vis-à-vis de la sexualité. Le sacrifice qu’elle réclame est exorbitant. Est-il sans contrepartie? Il semble que l’on néglige un peu trop le plaisir tiré des activités sublimées pour ne considérer que le renoncement qui en est le prix. [...] Au vrai, la sublimation ne garantit rien, ne protège de rien. Elle permet seulement de jouir ‘autrement’ dans un partage commun d’émotions, créant un espace particulier de relations ‘civilisées’, mais qui n’ont aucun pouvoir de supprimer d’autres modalités à l’origine de satisfactions beaucoup plus brutes.” WoN, 238-239: “Sublimation—like all effects of civilisation—has an atrophying effect on sexuality. The sacrifice it demands is exorbitant. Are there any compensations? It would seem that not enough consideration is given to the pleasure derived from sublimated activities with too much emphasis being placed on the renunciation which is the price to be paid. [...] In truth, sublimation guarantees nothing, protects one against nothing. It simply permits one to find satisfaction ‘differently’ in a common sharing of emotions, creating a special realm of ‘civilised’ relations but which have no power to suppress other forms of much cruder satisfaction.”

To “capture death in life,”³⁰⁰ in the words of Green. That is, to transform destructivity to such an extent that it can acquire not quite a *sense*, but above all a role, a place in the psychic economy by coexisting ‘otherwise’, enmeshed into a structure, a frame that the very work creates. For the sake of clarification, and to avoid misunderstandings often occurring as far as the question of the death drive is concerned, we must add that such destructiveness is not simply what we may refer to as violent, damaging, or hurtful, or at least not in the first place. It is the process of unbinding [*déliaison*] that we have in mind here, with Freud and Green, that is the counteracting role of a de-structuring element *within* the dynamics of representation.

Read as such, the process of *sub-limation* allows to underscore once more a textual economy of the *limit* operating in writing—what Kafka calls “Ansturm gegen die Grenze” [KKAT 878]. In our analysis of *Eine kleine Frau*, we referred to the notion of negative hallucination as ‘representation of the absence of representation,’ and considered it in relationship with style and writing. In the case of *Ein Hungerkünstler*, we can push this reading even further by exploring how the text *embodies* an absence, a lost object: this embodiment is not representational *per se*, but rather creates *a possibility* for it to re-emerge in the text as an ineliminable, haunting, yet inaccessible corporeal remnant. A limit, within the limit.

These remarks on the drive process and sublimation reveal themselves all the more crucial, in that they enable us to highlight a polysemy inscribed in the *Hunger* of the hunger artist, and to grasp the specific way in which the Negative is here at work. I claim that the hunger of the *Hungerkünstler* can be read as a sounding board of a corporeal trace which keeps eluding the structure of language, for such a trace does not accept to be “bounded” to the linearity and to the “homogenisation” of the linguistic components.³⁰¹ “Versuche, jemandem die Hungerkunst zu erklären!—we read in *Ein Hungerkünstler*—Wer es nicht *fühlt*, dem kann man es nicht *begreiflich* machen“ [KKAD 347 emphasis mine]. “Try to explain to someone the art of hungering! Who doesn’t *feel* it simply cannot grasp it.” The verb *fühlen* is here pivotal: such ‘feeling’ ought to be understood in the context of the writing process as that which remains of the body, in the body of writing. It is in this sense that *Ein Hungerkünstler* restores the dignity of a corporeal remnant which, through the process of sublimation, survives as an *affective* trace in writing, as an otherness irreducible to language.³⁰²

We take therefore leave from Neumann’s *Verweigerung* in favour of a work of the Negative that cannot be assimilated to the jurisdiction of consciousness,³⁰³ nor to the dimension of

³⁰⁰ Green, WoN, 230; TN 317.

³⁰¹ Cfr. Kohon and Perelberg, (Ed.), *The Greening of Psychoanalysis*, 119 ff.

³⁰² Green, FA, 204-228; DV, 279-311. With regards to the book *Ein Hungerkünstler*, Neumann speaks of a “metamorphosis of the expiring body in literary writing” (Neumann, *Kafka-Lektüren*, 115).

³⁰³ Green, TN, 67; WoN, 43.

language,³⁰⁴ for it is marked by the uncancellable heterogeneity of the *incréable*. This heterogeneity stems not only from the conjuncture of elements that the *incréable* puts into play—such as, indeed, affect and primal repression—but also from the very characteristic of the *incréable* of imposing the limit to its accessibility as condition *sine qua non* of subjectivity and creativity.³⁰⁵

The function of the Negative is here twofold: the ‘no’ of the work of the Negative organises and structures an absence that keeps calling for a form of signification; but, in turn, it represents the very process of deferring the signification of that trace. We can see here again in what terms the death drive operates in writing: as an open possibility of representation that is constantly deferred. As such, the work of the Negative unfolds the space of a “wake on an absent sense,” while embodying the continuous withdrawal characteristic of the *incréable*, in a continuous reconfiguration of the limit.

What is then the price for the survival of such affective element into the text, in spite of the text, and yet as its inaccessible reserve? How can we better describe it? And what does this *hunger* suggest about Kafka’s representational processes?

To answer these questions, we first must reflect on what sort of hunger are we dealing with here. It is significant that, unlike *Forschungen eines Hundes* [KKANII 467], the term “fasting” [fasten] does not appear in *Ein Hungerkünstler*. It seems quite clear that the *Hunger* of the hunger artist is something radically different from a ‘therapeutic’ fasting as much as from a suicidal or self-destructive form of starvation. Hunger, unlike fasting, cannot be prescribed, nor imposed or relieved.³⁰⁶ While being something more radical, more fundamentally *organic* and constitutive of the structure of subjectivity, its reverberations take us far away, in the distance: from the drive, we might say, towards sublimation.

³⁰⁴ We may in this sense refer to Freud’s definition of *Verneinung* (Freud, GW XIV, 12), according to which negation is a way “of taking cognizance of what is repressed, indeed it is already a lifting of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed,” in which a separation between “intellectual function” and “affective process” occurs: “Die Verneinung ist eine Art, das Verdrängte zur Kenntnis zu nehmen, eigentlich schon eine Aufhebung der Verdrängung, aber freilich keine Annahme des Verdrängten. Man sieht, wie sich hier die intellektuelle Funktion vom affektiven Vorgang scheidet. Mit Hilfe der Verneinung wird nur die eine Folge des Verdrängungsvorganges rückgängig gemacht, daß dessen Vorstellungsinhalt nicht zum Bewußtsein gelangt. Es resultiert daraus eine Art von intellektueller Annahme des Verdrängten bei Fortbestand des Wesentlichen an der Verdrängung.“

³⁰⁵ Green, D, 322.

³⁰⁶ Machosky, in “Fasting at the Feast of Literature”, 290, writes: “Fasting is an intentional act, a grasping. One *hungers* without intent, or despite intent. One *hungers* for no one, for no purpose. One *fasts* in face of desire; one *hungers* in the face of absence. Fasts are broken; hunger is only momentarily relieved – that is the nature of hunger, it always threatens to return. Fasts are for show. When the hunger artist breaks his fast – is forced to break his fast – he becomes a representation of himself. He comes the image captured in the impressario’s [*sic*] photographs, in which appears to be all that he is not. The dream of the hunger artist is to hunger continuously, to leave the realm of representation entirely, to be unrepresentable.”

Pasley has observed in *Asceticism and Cannibalism* how Kafka's existence has been characterized by "an emotional and spiritual hunger which remained always unsatisfied, [...] a compelling need for some sustenance that the world seemed unable to provide."³⁰⁷ A hunger which, continues Pasley, animates also many Kafka's characters in their search for another, unknown form of nourishment that, however, remains the "absent object of a longing."³⁰⁸ Pasley's remark is not only valid as far as Kafka's life and fictional characters are concerned: it can be extended to his own writing, to his representational strategies. Indeed, *Ein Hungerkünstler* seems to go beyond simply telling the unfortunate and pathetic story of a starving artist in decline. On a far deeper level, it tells of the vicissitudes of a hunger for writing, by means of writing.

Early traces of the imbrication between hunger and writing can actually be detected, among other, in a decisive page from Kafka's *Tagebücher* dated January 5, 1912. Let us return for a moment to this diary entry:

In mir kann ganz gut eine Konzentration auf das Schreiben hin erkannt werden. Als es in meinem Organismus klar geworden war, daß das Schreiben die ergiebigste Richtung meines Wesens sei, drängte sich alles hin und ließ alle Fähigkeiten leer stehn, die sich auf die Freuden des Geschlechtes, des Essens, des Trinkens, des philosophischen Nachdenkens der Musik zu allererst richteten. Ich magerte nach allen diesen Richtungen ab. Das war notwendig, weil meine Kräfte in ihrer Gesamtheit so gering waren, daß sie nur gesammelt dem Zweck des Schreibens halbwegs dienen konnten. Ich habe diesen Zweck natürlich nicht selbständig und bewußt gefunden, er fand sich selbst [...]. [KKAT, 341]³⁰⁹

A "concentration towards writing," so Kafka names that intensity, that discipline channelling all the strength of body and psyche of the writing subject. Such form of corporeal election ("Als es in meinem Organismus klar geworden war"), such hunger for writing comes, however, with a high, necessary price, i.e., that "atrophying effect"³¹⁰ through which those "faculties" directed to the "joys of sexuality, of eating, of drinking, of philosophical reflection, of the music" are "left vacant," in a certain sense disqualified from the psychic horizon of the subject. While it would certainly be possible to recognize here a sacrificial dimension embedded in the work of writing, "torn between the [...] forces of life and death, [...] between objectalisation and disobjectalisation,"³¹¹ there is also another important element to keep in mind, and to which we

³⁰⁷ Pasley, "Asceticism and Cannibalism," 102.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ "In me it's easily possible to recognize a concentration towards writing. As it became clear in my organism that writing was the most fruitful direction of my being, everything rushed towards it and left empty and vacant any abilities directed to the joy of sex, eating, drinking, philosophical reflection, of music above all. I atrophied in all those directions. That was necessary, since my forces were in their totality so slight that only if gathered could they even halfway serve the purpose of writing. Of course, I didn't find that purpose independently and consciously; it found itself." KD 1910-13, 211, translation modified.

³¹⁰ Cfr. Green, TN, 328; WoN, 238.

³¹¹ Green, WoN 240; TN, 330.

referred in the first paragraph of this chapter. Kafka writes: “Ich habe diesen Zweck natürlich nicht *selbständig* und *bewußt* gefunden, *er fand sich selbst.*” [KKAT 341, emphasis mine] The writing subject recognises here, in a way, of being *subjected* not to the text, nor to the work yet to come, but rather to the very process of writing. The process of writing, marking the lines, the limits of the subject (“Ich magerte nach allen diesen Richtungen ab”), exposes a diffraction within the creative process. A diffraction, which, as we saw in *Eine kleine Frau*, implies the role of an alterity, whose realm is inaccessible to the writing subject, and that is the object of a continuous work of resignification *a posteriori*.

Here we could also attempt to formulate a hypothesis for a possible reason why Kafka decided to discard the episode of the *Menschenfresser* from the final draft of the text. This ‘character,’ perhaps, was not and could not be allowed, in the end, to take the place or a role that was deemed to be left absent, vacant. A role that only the writing process could play. In this respect, we can see how the intertwining of writing and hunger cannot be confined in Kafka to a ‘stylistic appetite’, i.e., a search for formal perfection, a hunger for the ‘right words’ to say the irrepresentable on the page, or for a satisfaction that can be obtained by means of writing. Hunger and writing are linked by a synecdochical thread: they are both connected in an intimate *corporeal* way to an absence which hunger as much as writing *have to preserve, in its persistence and inaccessibility*. This parallel can be developed even further by saying that both hunger and writing push to the limit the capability of enduring the subtraction of the ‘body’ from the body, beyond the body, towards an “*Unbegreifliches*” [KKAD 339], that element that constantly escapes capture. Like the hunger artist, who feels to have no limit in his capability of hungering [KKAD 339] and who, interrupted in his hunger, protests against the attempt of carrying him away from his cage, the writer Kafka does not accept to be distracted from writing—to the point of, literally, holding on to the desk with the teeth [B 386].³¹² And yet, no hungering nor writing can be possible without body: the torment, the struggle that the hunger artist and the writer share is that the corporeal limits are also the limits of the possibility of giving form to that blank core of the creative process. The body of writing, and the body of the hunger artist, in a certain sense, embody the *incr able* as the absence *of* the body, *within*, and *through* the body.

³¹² “[...] das Dasein des Schriftstellers ist wirklich vom Schreibtisch abh ngig, er darf sich eigentlich, wenn er dem Irrsinn entgehen will, niemals vom Schreibtisch entfernen, mit den Z hnen mu  er sich festhalten” [B 386] “[...] the being of the writer really depends from [the writing desk, if he wants to escape madness, he is actually not allowed, ever, to leave the desk, he must hold on to it with his teeth.”

In a passage of *La diachronie en psychanalyse*, Green catches us off guard with a vertiginous reflection:

Quinze volumes sont nécessaires à Marcel Proust pour retrouver le temps perdu, réveillé par le goût d'une madeleine. Encore faut-il rappeler que ce temps ne se retrouve que pour se perdre définitivement avec ce que le lecteur devine de la mort prochaine de l'écrivain. Je dis bien de l'écrivain et pas de l'auteur. Mort qui survient alors qu'il commence à entrevoir comment il faudrait écrire l'œuvre qu'il poursuit dans cette recherche, pourtant déjà écrite et déjà lue par nous, faisant coïncider son terme avec son début.³¹³

Pages and pages are necessary to Kafka too, night after night, wake after wake spent at his desk, in order to give form to a hunger for writing and that, through writing, incarnates a movement of excavation towards an object that does not cease to escape, remaining constantly the object of an otherness [KKAT 341]. Years and years, sleepless night after night are also necessary, in turn, to the hunger artist to give place to an absence that keeps evading his hunger, the endurance of the body notwithstanding, in preparation for an encounter with the plenitude of an 'other' form of nourishment that, like the encounter with the 'extra-textual' figure of the *Menschenfresser*, never takes place:

"Du hungerst noch immer?" fragte der Aufseher, "wann wirst du denn endlich aufhören?" "Verzeih mir alle", flüsterte der Hungerkünstler; nur der Aufseher, der das Ohr ans Gitter hielt, verstand ihn. "Gewiß", sagte der Aufseher und legte den Finger an die Stirn, um damit den Zustand des Hungerkünstlers dem Personal anzudeuten, "wir verzeihen dir." "Immerfort wollte ich, daß ihr mein Hungern bewundert", sagte der Hungerkünstler. "Wir bewundern es auch", sagte der Aufseher entgegenkommend. "Ihr sollt es aber nicht bewundern", sagte der Hungerkünstler. "Nun, dann bewundern wir es also nicht", sagte der Aufseher, "warum sollen wir es denn nicht bewundern?" "Weil ich hungern muß, ich kann nicht anders", sagte der Hungerkünstler. "Da sieh mal einer", sagte der Aufseher, "warum kannst du denn nicht anders?" "Weil ich", sagte der Hungerkünstler, hob das Köpfchen ein wenig und sprach mit wie zum Kuß gespitzten Lippen gerade in das Ohr des Aufsehers hinein, damit nichts verloren ginge, "weil ich nicht die Speise finden konnte, die mir schmeckt. Hätte ich sie gefunden, glaube mir, ich hätte kein Aufsehen gemacht und mich vollgegessen wie du und alle." Das waren die letzten Worte, aber noch in seinen gebrochenen Augen war die feste, wenn auch nicht mehr stolze Überzeugung, daß er weiterhungre. [KKAD 348-349]³¹⁴

³¹³ Green, DP, 33: "Fifteen volumes are demanded to Marcel Proust to find the lost time, awaken by the taste of a madeleine. Again, we have to recall that that time is not found if not to be lost again once and for all with what the reader anticipates as being the upcoming death of the writer. I emphasize: the writer and not the author. Death, which comes as soon as he begins having a glimpse as of how he will have to write the work that he pursues in that quest, work that is nonetheless already written and has been read from us, making end and beginning coincide."

³¹⁴ "What, you're still hungering?" asked the supervisor. "When are you finally going to stop?" "Forgive me everyone," whispered the hunger artist; only the supervisor, who kept his ear to the cage, could understand his words. "Of course," said the supervisor, pointing his finger at his forehead, as a sign to the attendants of the hunger artist's state of mind, "we forgive you." "I always wanted you to admire my hungering," said the hunger artist. "And we do admire it," said the supervisor, obligingly. "But you shouldn't admire it," said the hunger artist. "Well, then we won't admire it," said the supervisor. "Why shouldn't we admire it?" "Because I have to hunger; I cannot do otherwise," said the hunger artist. "Well, now," said the supervisor, "why can't you do otherwise?" "Because," said the hunger artist, lifting his frail head slightly and speaking with lips puckered as if for kissing, right into the supervisor's ear so that not a word was lost, "because I could not find the food that was to my taste. If I had found it, believe me, I would not have caused a stir, and would have eaten my fill, like you and everybody else." These were his last words, but his exhausted eyes still held the firm, though no longer proud, conviction that he was still continuing to hunger."

“I have to hunger; I cannot do otherwise,” the hunger artist whispers lifelessly into the ear of the supervisor who discovers what is left of him, “because I could not find the food that was to my taste. If I had found it, believe me, I would not have caused a stir, and would have eaten my fill, like you and everybody else.” What is he trying to tell us, at the “last earthly limit” of his life? The hunger artist here, I would argue, is not quite “confessing” that the ‘true’ nature of his art consists in a form of betrayal, or in an illusion rooted in his compulsion to hunger, as suggested by Peter-André Alt.³¹⁵ Indeed, no ultimate truth can be drawn from the words of the hunger artist but only, if any, an approximation of the “truth,” an allusion. And neither is he struck by a realization, nor illuminated by a new understanding of the nature of his art. As soon as the hunger artist seems to be able to make sense of his struggle with his body to carry the mark of an absence, it is already too late. Abandoned by the audience and by the staff of the circus in which he hungers until and beyond his last breath, he is outlived by his own hunger [weiterhungern], as much as the hunger for writing outlives the text, the work, writing itself. Hunger lasts, endures, survives, in spite of the death of the character, in spite of the closure of the text, even despite the entrance of the magnificent panther, creature which, unlike the hunger artist, “does not miss anything” [KKAD 349].

This passage of *Ein Hungerkünstler* challenges the idea according to which the hunger artist is “consciously refusing to eat” suggested by Neumann. The hunger artist is here rather spoken and written, without him knowing it, by a hunger whose object cannot be reduced to the immediacy of signification, but remains continuously *en souffrance* in writing, in the wider economy of the text. This extract of *Ein Hungerkünstler* is therefore significant in that it highlights how the *polysemy* of *Hunger* cannot be separated from a form of *polychrony* which impresses on the page the opacity of the subject of writing. Language, as well as the subject, comes always too late, or rather always retroactively, to the *rendez-vous* with the body. Their diffraction, indeed, the diffraction between “event” and “signification of the event”,³¹⁶ unfolds according to the temporality of the *Nachträglichkeit*. *Ein Hungerkünstler* is haunted by a representational element that does not cease to delay its re-presentation. This element is the gap, the limit that the body creates between language and writing: an affective remnant that dwells on the page without ceasing of promising its representation in a deferred dimension.

If thus far my analysis of *Eine kleine Frau* emphasized the paradoxical, unbreakable link between writing and representation, *Ein Hungerkünstler* rather revolves around the relationship

³¹⁵ Peter-André Alt, *Franz Kafka. Der ewige Sohn. Eine Biographie*, 2., durchgesehene Auflage. (München: Beck, 2008), 650-651.

³¹⁶ Green, AC. We shall return to this aspect in our analysis of *Josefine, die Sängerin* in the next section of this work.

between writing and affect. In order to say in more precise terms what the affect is here, it is vital to take into consideration what Green calls the “*heterogeneity of the psychoanalytic signifier*.” By that, Green refers—in close dialogue with Freud and in response to Lacan—to elements such as bodily states, body language, gestures, silences, acts, which are not reducible to the linguistic signifier.³¹⁷ These elements, which are the “echo of something else” do nonetheless have a crucial role in the analytic settings: in their link with the drive, they form the polyphonic “texture” of that “living discourse” [*discours vivant*], which articulates the relationship between analyst and analysand.³¹⁸ Green writes:

Ce serait évidemment une erreur de croire que l’interprétation ne se réfère qu’aux éléments langagiers. Depuis toujours, le problème du langage est de se faire “l’écho d’autre chose.” Soit, mais quelle est cette autre chose? C’est ici que se nouent pour un psychanalyste les rapports du langagier avec le pulsionnel.[...] Pendant longtemps, on a cru que le langage parlait du monde et s’efforçait de le comprendre. Mais avec quoi parlait-il ? Sûrement pas avec des mots seulement, mais avec des mots investis d’affect, sous-tendus par des représentations pulsionnelles, dynamisés par les motions qui l’animent.³¹⁹

How can we conceive this heterogeneity in writing? We cannot but attempt a temporary answer to this question. There is no doubt that writing differs from the act of speech, from the most common one to that which contributes to the creation of the analytic setting. While it seems trivial to speak of the role of body language in verbal communication, the question of the role of corporality in writing—in the act of writing, but also as far as the *effects* of the text on the author and on the reader are concerned—arises as quite significant here. Where does the body go when one writes and creates? The answer “in the text” may not satisfy our curiosity. One among the elements that does distinguish language as a medium of development and expression of thoughts, feelings, ideas, and language in writing is not merely the relationship with the body, but also the vicissitudes of the discharge that linguistic articulation entails. While in the former case every uttered word or thought is result of a discharge,³²⁰ the written word is rather the outcome of a transformation of such discharge into a new form of corporality *in absentia*, from the irreducible multidimensionality of living speech to the apparent

³¹⁷ Green is referring here not to the linguistic concept of “signifier” *per se*, but rather to Lacan’s loose use of the concept in psychoanalysis. André Green, “Langue, parole psychanalytique et absence,” *Revue française de psychanalyse* (Vol. 71, 2007/5), 1461-1471, 1462-1463, particularly footnote 2.

³¹⁸ Green, DV, especially 237-245; FA 171-177. See also Kohon and Perelberg, *The Greening of Psychoanalysis*, 119 ff.

³¹⁹ Green, “Langue, parole psychanalytique et absence,” 1463: “Obviously, it would be a mistake to believe that interpretation refers only to linguistic elements. Since always, the problem of language is to become ‘echo of something else.’ Of course, but what is this ‘something else’? It is there that a psychoanalyst establishes the relations between the linguistic element and the drives process [...] For a long time, it has been believed that language spoke of the world and attempted to understand it. But with what does it speak? Surely, not only with words, but rather with words invested with affect, underpinned by drive representations [...] energized by the motions that animate them.”

³²⁰ Green, DV 240-241; FA, 174.

bidimensional surface made of ink and paper. Writing ‘imprisons’ in the linearity of language something that exceeds language, and that yet cannot but be expressed, or impressed, but with the instruments of language. The function of the text, Green writes, is to “resuscitate all that which it has absorbed during the work of writing.”³²¹ We may therefore refer to the affect as that element allowing the “resuscitation” of the lost corporeal dimension in writing: an element that has a memory—although it is a memory which is always ‘of the Other’—and a rhythmic—which is always a retroactive one.

It is no accident that in *Le discours vivant* Green calls the affect “the flesh of the signifier and the signifier of the flesh.”³²² Thereby, Green reminds us also of the disorganising, destructuring aspect of the affect: an “energetic upsurge that invades language and may destructure it to the point that it becomes unintelligible.”³²³ Affect marks as such the “return of the corporal raw material into language.”³²⁴ In other words, affect has to be grasped at once in its binding and unbinding quality, in its structuring and destructuring value, i.e., as the trace of a lost memory that is “property of an otherness,” of a thirdness, and in its upheaving, raw energetic power, which threatens to disrupt the necessary linearity proper, in our case, of the written text.

The affect is thus also ‘torn’ between its articulating the fingerprint left by the subject in the process of representation, and its being what threatens to take the place of representation as a disruptive, deferring, disorganising force. The affective fingerprint of the subject must therefore remain the unreadable mark of a relationship with an absence, with a lost trace of a memory that language fails to contain, and which remains ‘stored,’ we might say, in the body of writing.

“[...] Aber noch in seinen gebrochenen Augen war die feste, wenn auch nicht mehr stolze Überzeugung, daß er *weiterhungre*.” The price for such “reserve” of representation to survive in the text is its continuous delay, its being ultimately inaccessible to the subject. The body of the hunger artist and the body of writing seem thus to coincide, inasmuch as they both harbour the *incrédible* as burden and chance of representation. The corporal remnant articulated by the hunger artist, inaccessible to him, is hosted and stored in the fabric of writing beyond and in spite of the subject. There is no doubt that in the closing paragraphs of the text the hunger artist as well as Kafka are questioning in a radical, destructive way their own work. This paragraph of *Ein Hungerkünstler* seems to declare writing, and its affective fabric, as a form of

³²¹ Green, D, 54.

³²² Green, DV 240-241; FA, 174.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid.

intempestivity: a setback that the subject itself composes and narrates to himself tirelessly, and sleeplessly. Writing composes the wait as much as the announcement of the ‘inconsumable other’; the place of the encounter as well as the desert that separates the subject from the *incréable*. But if the *incréable* indeed survives as that irreducible, inconsumable reserve of representation, we may wonder, for whom does it survive? That is a question that we shall address in the following paragraph, devoted to Kafka’s last work: *Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse*.

2.4 *Josefine, die Sangerin oder Das Volk der Mause. The Temporality of the Increable between Transfert d’Existence and Evenement Negatif*

L’œuvre [...] est dans ce no man’s land, cette espace potentiel, transitionnel (Winnicott), lieu d’une communication transnarcissique o le double du lecteur – ces fantmes qui ne se montrent jamais – communiquent par l’écriture.

Andr Green³²⁵

Was hast Du mit dem Geschenk des Geschlechtes getan?

Franz Kafka [KKAT, 879]³²⁶

Ohne Vorfahren, ohne Ehe, ohne Nachkommen, mit wilder Vorfahrens-, Ehe- und Nachkommens-lust. Alle reichen mir die Hand: Vorfahren, Ehe und Nachkommen, aber zu fern fr mich.

Fr alles gibt es knstlichen, jammerlichen Ersatz: fr Vorfahren, Ehe und Nachkommen. In Krampfen schafft man ihn und geht, wenn man nicht schon an den Krampfen zugrunde gegangen ist, an der Trostlosigkeit des Ersatzes zugrunde.

Franz Kafka [KKAT, 884-885]³²⁷

Following the thread of the *increable*, we characterized the work of the Negative in Kafka’s last collection *Ein Hungerknstler* as meta-representational invention of a journey towards sublimation: as a writing of sublimation and upon sublimation. Analyses of *Eine kleine Frau* and *Ein Hungerknstler* have allowed us to pinpoint vicissitudes of such a journey. The *increable* emerges therein as an organising, structural representational element of unconscious order (“d’ordre inconscient”)³²⁸ that defies representation itself, while embodying that which makes representation possible. The representational process harbours an ineliminable destructive and de-structuring component—i.e. the death drive—that is nonetheless constitutive of sublimation. The work of the Negative is thus responsible for an apparently paradoxical and contradictory dynamic. On the one hand, writing opens the space of articulation of an absence, an otherness that dwells at the core of the creative process. On the other hand, writing is

³²⁵ Green, D, 56. “The work [...] is in this no-man’s-land, this potential, transitional space (Winnicott), this site of a trans-narcissistic communication where the author’s and reader’s doubles – ghosts which never reveal themselves – communicate through the writing.”

³²⁶ “What have you done with the gift of your sex / of your generation?”

³²⁷ “Without forebears, without marriage, without descendants, with a wild longing for forebears, marriage, and descendants. They all stretch their hands to me: forebears, marriage, descendants, but too far for me. / For everything there is an artificial, miserable substitute: for forebears, for marriage, for descendants. Spasmodically you contrive these substitutes, and if the cramps did not yet kill you, the hopelessness of the substitutes will.”

³²⁸ Green, C, 5.

simultaneously that very bluffing (*Eine kleine Frau*) and that very limit (*Ein Hungerkünstler*) which continuously delays the encounter with such absence. As much as the *incr able* demands to be aim of investment [*Besetzung*] for the subject, it only accepts to resonate in the creative process at the condition that the subject does not violate the borders protecting the kernel of the lost link with the maternal object. The *incr able*, at once pole of attraction and ultimate limit of creation and creativity, allows exclusively “effets de bord,” as Green observe: “only what occurs at the periphery of that kernel will become object of intensive elaboration whose result will be representation”.³²⁹ Access to the *incr able* remains forbidden, otherwise that centre “becomes silent”.³³⁰ In rethinking such crucial theoretical element by Green, furthermore, we deliberately kept the original French to convey the incommensurability and untranslatability of that remnant of representation that accounts for “the representation of the absence of representation.”

Such a constellation of elements recurs to be sure also in the last work of the author, *Josefine, die S ngerin oder das Volk der M use* (1924). With the following paragraph, however, we shall further extend our analysis of the work of the Negative in Kafka’s writing by exploring other crucial aspects of the *incr able* which surfaces with peculiar intensity in the final writing of the author.

In the closing remarks to our commentary to *Ein Hungerkünstler*, we suggested how the verb *weiterhungern* at the end of the text could hint, in the general economy of the book, at a far-reaching entanglement between the survival³³¹ of an inaccessible reserve of representation and the work of filiation through writing. Precisely for this reason, Kafka’s last work plays an essential role in our exploration of the work of the Negative. On the one hand, it represents a ‘last step’ in Kafka’s own “negative adventure”³³²; on the other hand, however, such a ‘last step’ of a farewell from life towards the “life of writing” ought not to be understood, I argue, as a sort of ‘final destination’ or ‘absolute goal’ of the work, but rather as an undoing of any accomplishment of a journey. In this sense, *Josefine* embodies, to borrow another expression by Green, a continuous *retournement de la fin sur le debut*, i.e., a revolving of the end upon the beginning.³³³ By means of such vertiginous movement, whose semantic tension is graspable at every turn of Kafka’s ironic and moving last text, the work challenges and revokes its own

³²⁹ Green, D, 322.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ For a different perspective as for the question of survival and finitude see also Dominik Zechner, “Precarious Futures: Kafka’s Prose of Survival,” *The Yearbook of Comparative Literature*, Volume 63 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 113-137.

³³² Green, AN.

³³³ Green, D, 319.

being ‘finished’. Is not *Josefine, die Sangerin oder das Volk der Mause* perhaps, from this point of view, also an attempt as sublime as desperate to delay by means of writing the inevitable and ultimate encounter with death? As such, this text sets off as an object ‘underway’, embracing a rhythmic of the interminable—in the light of mortality, of the limits of life. That is particularly evident in the final paragraphs of Kafka’s last work:

[...] dieses Volk zieht weiter seines Weges. / Mit Josefine aber mu es abwarts gehn. Bald wird die Zeit kommen, wo ihr letzter Pfiff ertont und verstummt. Sie ist eine kleine Episode in der ewigen Geschichte unseres Volkes und das Volk wird den Verlust iberwinden. Leicht wird es uns ja nicht werden; wie werden die Versammlungen in volliger Stummheit moglich sein? Freilich, waren sie nicht auch mit Josefine stumm? War ihr wirkliches Pfeifen nennenswert lauter und lebendiger, als die Erinnerung daran sein wird? War es denn noch bei ihren Lebzeit mehr als eine bloe Erinnerung? Hat nicht vielmehr das Volk in seiner Weisheit Josefinens Gesang, eben deshalb, weil er in dieser Art unverlierbar war, so hoch gestellt? / Vielleicht werden wir also gar nicht sehr viel entbehren, Josefine aber, erlost von der irdischen Plage, die aber ihrer Meinung nach Auserwahlten bereitet ist, wird frohlich sich verlieren in der zahllosen Menge der Helden unseres Volkes, und bald, da wir keine Geschichte treiben, in gesteigerter Erlosung vergessen sein wie alle ihre Bruder. [KKAD 376-377]³³⁴

Josefine becomes here, indeed, what she has perhaps always been: an ever-present, “unverlierbar” (unlosable) absence in the ‘amnesic’ memory of the Mouse people. In her being nothing more than “a small episode in [their] eternal story”, she creates, with her loss, the possible conditions for a new relationship with time (“soon the time will come”): a new openness that unchains imagination in that creative process which is remembering. Thereby, Josefine outlives herself as she gives birth anew, with her loss, to the mouse people, whilst the latter does not cease to reinvent her memory. In a certain sense, her “falling silent” is the price that the unconscious of the text has to pay to allow the inauguration of a new way of conceiving time, surfacing in writing as that ‘unachieved-unachievable’ which creates the conditions for transmission.

In such impossibility of closure in Kafka’s “negative adventure”, therefore, the *increable* sets off, with *Josefine*, towards the genealogical and the generational. The ‘no’ of the work of the Negative operates here as a continuous opening of a space in which the reinvention of a new bond between the generations becomes possible through writing: as a passing, a channel towards an unknown and unknowable elsewhere or otherness.

³³⁴ “[...] this people continues on its way. / But with Josefine, things are bound to go downhill. Soon the time will come when her last peep will sound and fall silent. She is a small episode in the eternal story of our people, and we will get over her loss. It will not be easy for us; how will our assemblies be possible, held in total silence? Weren’t they silent, though, even with Josefine? Was her real piping truly any louder and livelier than our memory of it will be? Even when she was still alive, was it anything more than a mere memory? Isn’t that rather the very reason why our people in their wisdom have placed Josefine’s song on such a high pedestal, because in this way it could never be lost? / So perhaps we won’t be missing all that much. Josefine, on the other hand, delivered from the earthly torment which in her opinion is the lot of those who are elected, will lose herself happily in the numberless multitude of our people’s heroes, and, since we pursue no history, she will soon be forgotten in heightened redemption along with all her brethren.”

In the following pages, I shall expand on the hypothesis according to which the ‘main subject’, or rather, the subterranean protagonist in Kafka’s *Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse* is not, for instance, the nature of art, or the relationship between individual and community,³³⁵ but something far more fundamental: temporality. My aim is to show in which terms, with *Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse*, the *incréable* expresses a temporal dimension. Or better: a relationship with Time which, as Green suggests, is embedded in creation,³³⁶ “every work” implying “the couple creator-creature,”³³⁷ unified and separated, at once, through the process of creation. The peculiar character of such temporality can be more effectively grasped, in this case, by considering side by side the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* and Kafka’s possible creative reception of linguistic aspects of Hebrew language in the last years of his life.

In order to contextualize specifically Kafka’s last text in our reading of the Negative, the question of temporality ought to be envisaged as a structural and structuring element. It is therefore vital to insist on how not quite the past, nor the present, and neither the future are at stake in this form of temporality, but rather time as an associative matrix in which the subject creates himself while creatively reinventing time through writing. In strict correlation with this question, moreover, I shall address, in the last pages of this paragraph, the relationship between Kafka’s last text and the failure of his “Phantasie” [KBM 319] of emigrating to Palestine. To do so, I will consider Green’s concept of “negative event”, bridging in this way the reverberations of a psychic work on absence—most specifically, of an event that does not take place—with the creative process of writing and the dynamics of sublimation.

In *Josefine* these issues emerge with unprecedented force. What is indeed, from this point of view, Josefine? Perhaps she is the unwritable of literature, the unthinkable of Western thinking, the unspoken of an infancy of language, the unreachable shore of an elsewhere that, as a sort of magnetic pole, shapes the world anew. Josefine is all that and no doubt even more, for Josefine is that unwritable, that unthinkable, that *incréable* which lays at the core of the creative process, an irrepresentable remnant of the subject, trace of first and last things.

In the closing pages of her ground-breaking study *Kafka and the Yiddish Theater*, Evelyn Torton Beck writes: “It is impossible to guess how Kafka’s writing might have developed had he not become familiar with the Yiddish theatre, and it is equally difficult to know what other

³³⁵ For an overview of the main interpretative trends upon Kafka’s last work see Engel und Auerochs, *Kafka-Handbuch*, 323-329.

³³⁶ Green, DP, 174.

³³⁷ Id. D, 313 ff.

factors helped to produce Kafka's literary breakthrough in 1912."³³⁸ A similar concern, *mutatis mutandis*, underlies the present paragraph. Despite the impossibility of guessing how Kafka's writing might have developed had he actually succeeded in his project of emigrating to Palestine, the question is far from being merely anecdotal. It invites us to reflect on the relationship between Kafka's last text and the failed encounter with a factual, possible elsewhere of the Jewish people. Precisely that missed encounter, represents, I claim, the blank core, that *letzte irdische Grenze* [KKAT 878] around which Kafka's last text unconsciously organises. In the impossibility of finding any harbour in a territorial *Land*, Kafka's last work shapes a "*Grenzland*" between time and space, "solitude and community" [KKAT 871] which becomes, as such, the only inhabitable one, the only inventible one. From such a core of absence, Kafka's final literary work establishes a transgenerational testimony of the living, perhaps his most 'representative' tale: a work whose subject is the storytelling of his own writing,³³⁹ of his venturing beyond the limits of life.

From the philological reconstruction of the *Kritische Ausgabe*—based on the contractual developments with publishing house "Die Schmiede", the author's private correspondence, as well as Robert Klopstock's account—we know that Kafka drafted his very last work between March 18 and the early days of April 1924 in Prague [KKAD A 462]. The text first appeared in the *Prager Presse* (Nr. 110) on April 20, 1924, with the title *Josefine, die Sägerin*. It was not until May 1924, during the final proofreading stage of the book *Ein Hungerkünstler*—to which Kafka devoted himself until his last breath—that the author changed the title of the work as we know it today. In one of the *Gesprächsblätter* that Kafka, meanwhile no longer able to speak, used to communicate with the medical personnel and the loved ones attending him at the sanatorium in Kierling (especially Max Brod, Robert Klopstock, Dora Diamant) we read:

Die Geschichte bekommt einen neuen Titel / Josefine, die Sägerin / oder / Das Volk der Mäuse
/ Solche oder-Titel sind zwar nicht sehr hübsch / aber hier hat es vielleicht besondern / Sinn, es hat
etwas von einer Wage [KKAD A, 462-463].

In spite of its conciseness, this handwritten text is a capital document from Kafka's late creative season. As a matter of fact, over the last decades, it has become the recurrent, nearly customary subject of commentaries emphasizing the critical role of the particle *oder* in the newly adopted title. Scholars have observed how Kafka's "Oder-Titel" casts a playful irony

³³⁸ Evelyn Torton Beck, *Kafka and the Yiddish Theater*, Madison (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), 210.

³³⁹ I thereby reformulate Green's thesis in AN, 50.

upon the whole narration,³⁴⁰ functioning as a “balancing pole” [*Waage*] between Josefine and the mouse people.³⁴¹

From my point of view, this brief handwritten testimony is significant on two further accounts. First, it is an important signal of the author’s return, in *après-coup*, to his work—an aspect that also marks the composition of *Ein Hungerkünstler*. That, however, does not simply confirm an essential kinship between the two works which extends beyond their respective thematic sphere. Why then insist on this ‘return’ of the author to the text? Because this movement allows us to highlight how the inexhaustible non-linearity of the creative process is reflected in the *only apparent* linearity of the textual dimension. Both the creative process as well as the text ‘reproduce’ and represent, from a meta-literary point of view, the dynamics of the drives in the process of sublimation. Kafka’s last text, as such, carries the traces of an ‘other’ temporal dimension that disjoints time in its continuity, in order to make room for a “temporal generative potentiality [...] of semantic kind [d’ordre sémantique].”³⁴² As we anticipated, such retrospective reactivation of the creative process entails a deferred [*nachträglich*] restructuration that “splits the moment of the experience and that of signification.”³⁴³ Green observes that the concept of *après-coup*

[...] conteste absolument l’idée d’une conception développementale linéaire. C’est-à-dire toute démarche fondée sur la continuité [...] Il s’oppose également à l’idée d’une saisie momentanée unique d’un quelconque instant du développement, puisqu’il est pris non pas dans une continuité mais dans une structure qui fait sens et qui est basée sur une rupture de la démarche progressive. Il relativise donc la démarche observationnelle, et ce qui est extrêmement important [...] il présuppose dans le psychisme une potentialité générative temporelle, une potentialité d’ordre sémantique, c’est-à-dire que tout énoncé est gros de quelque chose d’autre qui reste à venir, et qui peut concerner tel ou tel élément du passé que tel fantasme de l’avenir.³⁴⁴

³⁴⁰ Evelyn Torton Beck traces back Kafka’s title to the didactic tradition of Yiddish theatre: “While the first part [of the title] carried the name of the hero or heroine, the subtitle revealed the essence of the play. In giving to ‘Josefine the Singer’ the subtitle ‘The Mouse Folk,’ Kafka seems to be (most uncharacteristically, although possibly ironically) underlining the fact that the true focus of the story is not the individual, but the community.” Torton Beck, *Kafka and the Yiddish Theater*, 207-208.

³⁴¹ See Sylvain, Guarda, “Kafkas ‚Josefine oder das Volk der Mäuse:‘ Das Kindlich-Mütterliche im Existenzkampf,” *Monatshefte*, Summer 2013, Vol. 105, No. 2, 267-277; Bernhard Greiner, “‘This Nothing of a Voice’: Kafka’s Josefine Narrative as a Modern Reflection on Revelation and Language,” *Naharaim*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2021), 73-88, stresses the importance of the openness of Kafka’s formulation as far as the relationship between the two parts is concerned. Such openness, he claims, makes the two inseparably intertwined, to the extent that it is impossible to speak of the one without considering the other. See on this point also Clayton Koelb, “Kafka Imagines His Readers: The Rhetoric of ‘Josefine Die Sängerin’ and ‘Der Bau,’” *A Companion to the Works of Franz Kafka*, edited by J. Rolleston (New York: Camden House, 2002), 347–360, here 356.

³⁴² Green, AC, 22.

³⁴³ Green, DP, 27-30.

³⁴⁴ Green AC, 22: “[the concept of *après-coup*] absolutely questions the idea of a linear developmental conception. That is, of every process based on continuity: it equally opposes to the idea of a unique, momentary acquisition of a given instant of development, for it does not constitute a continuity, but rather a structure that creates sense and which is based upon a breakage of the progressive approach. It relativises thus the observational approach; and what is extremely important [...] it presupposes within the psychic apparatus a temporal generative potentiality, a potentiality of semantic kind. That means that every utterance stands for something else which is yet to come, and which pertains that or that element of the past, as well as that given phantom of the future.”

In this respect, we may argue, Kafka's new title comes into being as if marking a constantly belated (re-)encounter between the writing subject and the elusive traces of a subject of writing. We find here once more the disseminated vestiges of an alterity entangled in the textual web, surviving as a sort of 'ineliminable other from whom I shall be written on the page.' If, as we already remarked, the work of writing cannot be conceived without a revolvment of 'writing one' and 'written one,' such revolvment is always aleatory, we must add: a *rendez-vous* cannot take place but by virtue of an erasure of identity, i.e. in the light of an identity *as* difference.³⁴⁵

In other words, Kafka's *Gesprächsblatt* can be read as an attempt of recomposing a subjectivity in front of the text by re-signifying the latter retrospectively, under the sign of a new filiation, a further textual re-invention. It therefore expresses an effort of coping with an alterity that was 'already there,' unbeknownst to the author. The writing subject reinvents, discovers anew the text as marked by the trace of an uncancellable other that, *unheimlich*, haunts the page [B 384, 386].³⁴⁶

The question 'who is such alterity?' cannot be answered other than in an approximated way. We are indeed confronted with an overdetermined complexity, with a polyphony which is at once a polychrony, interlacing through language different 'scenes' of Kafka's life and creative journey. As such, the representational process expresses not only a form of counterfactuality, but also a virtuality, another way of being of the subject by means of writing. As Evelyn Torton Beck suggests, we may speculate that at least two 'Kafkas' are meeting here, in a deferred, unfathomable dimension. One, the ghost of a stupefied young writer attending the shows of the Yiddish theatre company, and the other, an older mortally-ill Kafka yearning for wandering towards a new yet unborn territorial land.³⁴⁷ In Kafka's final work, experiences and vestiges that underlie the relationship with *his* Judaism flow together, on the one hand, through the human and affective prism of Yiddish theatre, and on the other hand through his failed phantasy of emigrating to Palestine. From this point of view, one would almost be tempted to hear resonating in this "Menge," in this "mixed multitude" (*erev rav* in 2. Book of Moses 12:38) of "unnumerable I,"³⁴⁸ summoning on Kafka's page at the border between presence and absence, the "gedankenlose" squeak of the Mouse people, gathering one more last time to attend Josefine's appearing on the stage.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁵ Green, DP, 27-30.

³⁴⁶ Another example of such 'uncancellable other' is epitomised by the hallucinatory acoustic presence-absence that haunts the narrating creature in *Der Bau*.

³⁴⁷ See Torton Beck, *Kafka and the Yiddish Theater*, 208.

³⁴⁸ Green, DP, 28.

³⁴⁹ Greiner, "'This Nothing of a Voice'", 73-88.

This leads to a second element that is worth highlighting in Kafka's *Gesprächsblatt*. The openness of his formulation suggests that not only the "Oder-Title", but also the particle *oder* itself, in its considerable semantic density, acquires in the author's eyes further nuances, the importance of which might have been hitherto underestimated. These nuances are, I argue, the outcome of a work of linguistic reinvention in Kafka's creative imagination, in which the confrontation with Hebrew and other "Jewish languages" (Suchoff) is decisive. A closer analysis of these elements can enable us to give account of that "besondern Sinn" Kafka is alluding to in his short communication, and to speculate about a possible 'absent sense' or remnant of signification on which the particle *oder* is 'waking' and preserving, enclosed in the title of his last text.

The *Grimm Wörterbuch* tells us that, along with a disjunctive function (as in *entweder / oder*), *oder* designates in many other cases, "alike the Latin *sive* or *vel*, a minimal difference or the undecidability and open choice between two possible things." Furthermore, it may function "as a separation between objects, that can vary or be equivalent, particularly to mention different names and predicates of the same thing." Finally, between different sentences or part of the same sentence, *oder* expresses "the uncertainty, the undecidability of a judgement, the possibility of an open choice between two or more cases."³⁵⁰ The peculiar connotation that the particle acquires in Kafka's *Gesprächsblatt* is enhanced by the term *Waage* [*Wage* in the original Kafka's handwritten text]. While etymologically referring to an (oscillatory) movement in purely abstract terms ["*bewegung, in rein abstracter auffassung*"], *Wage / Waage* concretely indicates the *lever*, the *balance* as instrument of measuring ["*als gerät zum wägen*"]. There is however a further interesting nuance for us, which the *Grimm Wörterbuch* registers: *Wage* (and so also the verb *wagen*) stands for *dare*, *hazard*, a *bet*, or a *venture* whose outcome is uncertain, impossible to establish.³⁵¹ For this reason, I would propose a different translation of the fragment: "The story gets a new title / Josefina, the Singer / or / The Mouse-People / These *oder*-titles are to be sure not particularly pretty / but here it may have a special / meaning, it has something of a venture."

The etymological and syntactic interaction between these two elements of the sentence—*oder* and *Wage*—, as well as the temporal mark of the *Nachträglichkeit* we highlighted in Kafka's *Gesprächsblatt*, give us a lot of food for thought. Whilst *oder* certainly suggests a

³⁵⁰ "ODER, conj.," *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm, digitalisierte Fassung im Wörterbuchnetz des Trier Center for Digital Humanities*, Version 01/21, <<https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=O00844>>, abgerufen am 30.09.2021.

³⁵¹ "WAGE, f.," *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm, digitalisierte Fassung im Wörterbuchnetz des Trier Center for Digital Humanities*, Version 01/21, <<https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=W01371>>, abgerufen am 30.09.2021.

“balance,” an “equivalence,” even an “undecidability” between the two ‘poles’ represented by Josefine and the Mouse people, the term *Wage*—read *a posteriori* in the complex associative web evoked by this text—hints at an interminable errancy of signification. A “nothing of a voice”, a “nothing in achievement”, as we read in Kafka’s text: an unexpected, unexplored thirdness situated at the heart of the work, standing, as Green writes, “for something else which is yet to come.”³⁵²

Dieses Pfeifen, das sich erhebt, wo allen anderen Schweigen auferlegt ist, kommt fast wie eine Botschaft des Volkes zu dem Einzelnen; das dünne Pfeifen Josefinens mitten in den schweren Entscheidungen ist fast wie die armselige Existenz unseres Volkes mitten im Tumult der feindlichen Welt. Josefine behauptet sich, dieses Nichts an Stimme, dieses Nichts an Leistung behauptet sich und schafft sich den Weg zu uns, es tut wohl, daran zu denken. [KKAD 362]³⁵³

Suchoff has rightfully observed how Kafka’s prose was shaped by a “sense of an enlivening exchange between languages,” which allowed him “to explore the multiple sources of Jewish and other identities that preceded the emergence of what later came to be known as a singular national voice.”³⁵⁴ In the case of Josefine, we could push this thought even further by saying that it is in the continuous interference between *Fremdwörter* (foreign words) and *Fremdklänge* (foreign sounds) that keeps unlocking the margin in which the reinvention of the forgetting inhabiting every and each language appears to be possible.

But that is not all. Interestingly, the particle *oder* occurs also in a well-known, crucial page of the fourth *Oktavheft* (February 25, 1918), which I have already referred to. In it, Kafka reflects on his own condition as a Jew in between worlds and in between generations. The passage reads:

Ich habe von den Erfordernissen des Lebens gar nichts mitgebracht, so viel ich weiß, sondern nur die allgemeine menschliche Schwäche, mit dieser – in dieser Hinsicht ist es eine riesenhafte Kraft – habe ich das Negative meiner Zeit, die mir ja sehr nahe ist, die ich nie zu bekämpfen sondern gewissermaßen zu vertreten das Recht habe, kräftig aufgenommen, an dem geringen Positiven sowie an dem äußersten, zum Positiven umkippenden Negativen hatte ich keinen ererbten Anteil. Ich bin nicht von der allerdings schon schwer sinkenden Hand des Christentums ins Leben geführt worden wie Kierkegaard und habe nicht den letzten Zipfel des davonfliegenden jüdischen Gebetmantels noch gefangen wie die Zionisten. Ich bin Ende oder Anfang. [KKANII 97-98]³⁵⁵

³⁵² Green, AC, 22.

³⁵³ “This piping, which rises when silence is imposed on everyone else, comes almost as if it were a message from the people to the single one; Josefine’s thin piping in the midst of hard decisions is almost like the miserable existence of our people in the midst of the tumult of a hostile world. Josefine asserts herself; this nothing of a voice, this nothing in achievement asserts itself and makes its own way to us—it is good to think on that.”

³⁵⁴ David Suchoff, *Kafka’s Jewish Languages: The Hidden Openness of Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 7.

³⁵⁵ “I have brought none of life’s requirements, so far as I know, but only the universal human weakness; with this – in this respect it is a enormous strength – I have strongly registered the negative of my age, an age which is very close to me, and which I have no right to combat but in a certain sense the right to represent; I had no inherited share in the scanty positive aspect nor in the extreme negative that turns into the positive. I was not led into life by the sinking hand of Christianity, like Kierkegaard, nor did I catch the tip of the Jewish prayer-shawl as it flew away, like the Zionists. I am End or Beginning.”

The use of *oder* in the sentence *Ich bin Ende oder Anfang* helps us expanding the semantic complexity of this particle by rethinking it in an unexpected temporal context. Although *oder* does not have, strictly speaking, any similar connotation, it seems to me significative how Kafka extends here the use of the particle, pushing it into unexplored linguistic territories, thus venturing towards a new, unknown creation of sense. Maletta has emphasized how, in the case of “*Ich bin Ende oder Anfang*”, *oder* acquires a “copulative” function, opening to an “other logic, no more merely bivalent, exclusive, or simply denying.”³⁵⁶ Keeping in mind the final paragraphs of *Josefine*, we might also add that it is precisely the “copulative” nuance detectable in Kafka’s use of *oder* that seems to open, retroactively, a temporal dimension escaping the linearity of the sequence “past-present-future.” With this operation, we can detect a shift in the focus from a time articulated through verbal tenses towards a temporality characterized by verbal *aspects*, particularly in terms of closure and openness: “*Ende oder Anfang*”.

As anticipated, my claim is that such retrospective reverberation of the particle *oder* in temporal terms may resonate a distinctive influence of Kafka’s affective elaboration in his learning process of Hebrew.³⁵⁷ Commenting on the features of the linguistic expression of *consecution temporum* in Hebrew, George Steiner writes:

It had long been established that the Indo-Germanic framework of threefold temporality—past, present, future—has no counterpart in Semitic conventions of tense. The Hebrew verb views action as incomplete or perfected. Even archaic Greek has definite and subtly discriminatory verb forms with which to express the linear flow of time from past to future. No such modes developed in Hebrew. In Indo-European tongues “the future is preponderantly thought to lie before us, while in Hebrew future events are always expressed as coming after us”.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁶ Maletta, “L’avventore intempestivo”, 154.

³⁵⁷ Towards the end of his life, from 1917 onwards, Kafka intensified his Hebrew studies also thanks to the frequentation with Puah Ben-Tovim (1903-1991), an 18-year-old mathematics student from Jerusalem who, with the help of Shmuel Hugo Bergman, arrived in Prague in late 1921. Not differently from Dora Diamant, Kafka’s lover in those final years, Puah Ben-Tovim would represent a sort of messenger from the distance, in many ways reminiscent of the lively figures of the Yiddish theatre company from Lemberg (Lviv) that the author encountered as a young man between 1911 and 1912. Through them, Kafka first discovered a way of living, thinking, and experiencing Judaism which was completely different from that of a family of assimilated Jews in Prague’s cultural context. If Yiddish theatre and language had represented for him a virtual threshold for a new encounter with Eastern European Jewry, the ‘native’ *ivrit* spoken by Puah Ben-Tovim—a pupil of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda in Jerusalem—incarnated a linguistic feeling which was fundamentally distant from the nationalism and from the ideologic moroseness of many Zionist exponents. The living mother tongue that Ben-Tovim took to Prague and taught Kafka twice a week for about a year was a language *in the making*: all but a textbook idiom, most importantly, because “as it drew from different sources in its renaissance, [it] exposed the comedy of establishing a single origin for any language or individual.” (Suchoff, *Kafka’s Jewish Languages*, 170) Jiri Langer reports how, when Kafka spoke Hebrew in Prague, he took great comic pleasure in exploring the coinages created through the encounter of transnational sources. (Suchoff, *Kafka’s Jewish Languages*, 170 ff.)

³⁵⁸ George Steiner, *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation* (London-Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 157.

Would it be possible, for a moment, to substitute here the words *Ende* and *Anfang* with verbal aspects such as “perfected” and “imperfected” or “incomplete”? In this sort of thought experiment, we may conceive Kafka’s writing as the means of invention of a retrospective awareness of a new relationship with time as a creative, associative web. Through writing, the *being* of the subject acquires a new, transformed structure. We can envisage this as the temporality of a work in progress in which the unachieved and the unachievable—as figures of the work of the Negative³⁵⁹—play a crucial organising role in the elaboration of sense. It is a temporality of *sub-limitation*, that as such continuously implies the role of a limit, namely of the *incréable*. The unachieved and the unachievable uncover the capability of the text of going beyond the intentionality of language, beyond what language *wants* to say. In other words, purpose of the *oder* appears to be here not only of keeping open—i.e., undecidable—the relationship between *Ende* and *Anfang*, but of relentlessly transforming the ‘created’ into ‘uncreated’, the ‘creatable’ into ‘uncreatable’. *It delineates a temporality of a wait in which closure and openness can convert into each other*. A temporality that transcends the subject, making the text a “traveling voice” (borrowing an expression by Suchoff).³⁶⁰

In this direction, Green’s study *La reserve de l’incréable* offers us a further concept of capital importance:

L’œuvre est le résultat d’un *transfert d’existence*. Ceci rend compte du fait que pour le créateur, la question de l’existence de l’œuvre d’art – où son narcissisme le plus essentiel est engagé – passe avant tout, jusques et y compris, ce qui dans son appareil psychique reste soumis aux pulsions d’autoconservation. La nécessité d’être de l’œuvre d’art qui implique sa reconnaissance par un tiers toujours présent à travers son absence, même si l’œuvre ne sera jamais imprimée, exposée, ou entendue, fait de son destinataire la condition même de son existence. Qui est ce destinataire : masse de la foule anonyme, arbre généalogique des Maîtres, chaîne des pairs, meute des critiques, objet d’amour dédicataire ? Cela est indécidable, car il est un pour tous et tous pour un. Le regard sur l’œuvre est le véritable père de celle-ci, en tant qu’il la légitime et reconnaît cet autre parent qui est son créateur immanent.³⁶¹

Green’s “transfer of existence” allows to give account not only of that ‘sacrifice’ *for and in the name* of the work, according to which the writer devotes his life to creation, literally dissolving into it; but also of that form of transformation of the “limits of life” into the “life of

³⁵⁹ See Green, DP, 233-267.

³⁶⁰ See Suchoff, *Kafka’s Jewish Languages*, 205 ff.

³⁶¹ “The work is the outcome of a *transfer of existence*. That gives account of the fact that, for the creator, the question of the existence of the work of art—in which his most essential narcissism is invested—comes before everything, up to and including what in the psychic apparatus is subject to the instinct of self-preservation. The necessity of being of the work of art that implies its recognition from a third always present by means of its absence—even though the work will never be published, exposed, or understood—makes of its addressee the very condition of its existence. Who is such addressee? The anonymous mass, the genealogical tree of the Masters, the chain of peers, the pack of the critics, the love object to which the work is dedicated? That cannot be established because it is one for all and all for one. The gaze towards the work of art is the real father of that, insofar as it legitimizes it and recognizes that other genitor who is its immanent creator.” Green, D, 314.

writing.”³⁶² We have one more chance to highlight here how the implications of this concept pertain not Kafka’s biography *per se*, but what we have called, with Green, the “symbolization of the generation.”³⁶³ Therefore when Kafka writes in his diary “Was hast Du mit dem Geschenk des Geschlechtes getan?” [KKAT, 879] we have good reasons to think that what he means by the gift of the “Geschlechtes” is at once the *generational* and the *sexual*, i.e., the temporal *limits of the community*, as well as the *limits of the subject*. Through sublimation, Kafka’s transforms these forms of finitude and continuity into a new form of filiation, which rather than occurring as the birth of a child takes place as literary creation. Speaking through his writing for a whole generation of European Jews, Kafka’s literature invents a new way to voice the transgenerational and the subject in the act of creation.³⁶⁴

In this sense writing sets out beyond the subject, towards an alterity that is unknown addressee and possible, albeit uncertain, receiver of the text. Furthermore, the concept of transfer of existence reminds us of how the work is not only what is *created*, but also *what would have been found*³⁶⁵ from the writing subject as well as from a reader (an aspect that is all but secondary, considering the vicissitudes of Kafka’s writings).

The creative process, in a certain sense, does not arrest with the work being written; the dynamics of signification extend beyond the boundaries of the subject inasmuch as the writing invokes an otherness interrogating the text with an act of reading. The transfer of existence is, to that extent, a ‘genealogical’ concept. Through the prism of his own work, the author reactivates and, literally, reinvents time as a mesh of affects, unfathomable connections, traces and announcements, desires and failures, absences, and presences. There, the subject rediscovers himself as a channel: receiver and transient. In this respect, an unachieved, unachievable element does not only constitute the indecipherable core of the work, but also the “copulative” element around which the generations interlace a new bond, through the acts of reading, writing, interpreting. The work of writing itself escapes its own completeness, fuelled by a continuous temporal generative process that is constitutive part of the text itself.

Let us return for a moment to the question of Kafka’s relationship with Hebrew language. In an unpublished paper written a few years ago, I advanced the hypothesis according to which Kafka’s use of the particle *oder* may be understood, in the two *oder*-sentences we referred to above, as if echoing aspects of the so called *waw hahipuch*—“waw of reversal,” or “waw

³⁶² See Green, AN 10.

³⁶³ Green, “Transcription d’origine inconnue,” 31.

³⁶⁴ Meghnagi, “A cultural event within Judaism,” 60, 61

³⁶⁵ See Green LM 112.

consecutive,” a narrative structure characteristic of biblical Hebrew that, however, does not survive in modern *ivrit*. Moses Rath’s *Lehrbuch der Hebräischen Sprache für Schul- und Selbstunterricht* (originally published in 1917) represented one of the main textual references in Kafka’s Hebrew learning. Reproposing the definition of Wilhelm Gesenius’s *Hebräische Grammatik* (first appeared in Halle in 1813), Rath describes the *waw hahipuch* as a syntactic and grammatical phenomenon in which, in the “representation of a series of past events, only the first verb stands in the perfect, and the narration is prosecuted in the imperfect.” Conversely, continues Rath “the representation of a series of future events begins with the imperfect, and is continued in the perfect.”³⁶⁶ In a narrative concatenation, the *consecutio temporum* of the *waw hahipuch* allows to perceive an apparently accomplished action as if transformed through the narrative flow in an open one, situated after us, yet to be accomplished; and, *vice versa*, an imperfected action, as if it were completed, accomplished.

Now, in spite of the difficulties of demonstrating with solid arguments the validity of this hypothesis, I think it might be interesting to consider its possible implications in Kafka’s last work, on the condition that we clarify an important point. I am not claiming here that Kafka deliberately uses the *oder* as if influenced from the study of Hebrew verbal structures. What I mean is rather that unconscious reverberations of his studies in Hebrew—almost a daily commitment in Kafka’s last years of life—may allow, as in the case of *waw hahipuch*, a deeper insight into elements of his last work which can hardly be reduced to an oppositional, exclusive logic. From this point of view, the most interesting aspect of the *waw hahipuch* consists precisely in the way it may possibly affect a different perception of time in juxtaposition with the tense-based verbal categories of Indo-European languages.

The Hebrew that Kafka learned was not exclusively the biblical iteration, nor a ‘modern’, standardized *ivrit* as it is known, spoken, and written today. It was a linguistic field of transnational, transcultural, and foremost diachronic tensions, characterized by a multiplicity of influences, interferences, layers: a language which was itself in process of formation and reinvention, carrying in its womb a fruitful semantic, cultural, symbolic potential.

The research of scholars such as Binder,³⁶⁷ Bodenheimer,³⁶⁸ or Suchoff³⁶⁹ on Kafka’s relationship with Hebrew (and more broadly speaking with the “Jewish languages” he encountered in his life) has increased our attentiveness towards the role of crucial acoustic

³⁶⁶ Moses Rath, *Lehrbuch der Hebräischen Sprache für Schul- und Selbstunterricht*, Fünfte, verbesserte Auflage (Wien: Selbstverlag des Verfassers, 1920), 86-87.

³⁶⁷ Hartmut Binder, “Kafkas Hebräischstudien,” *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, XI (1967), 527-556.

³⁶⁸ Alfred Bodenheimer, “A Sign of Sickness and a Symbol of Health: Kafka’s Hebrew Notebooks,” *Kafka, Zionism, and Beyond*, edited by M. H. Gelber (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2004), 259-270, here 263 ff.

³⁶⁹ Suchoff, *Kafka’s Jewish Languages*.

interferences of Hebrew and Yiddish structures in shaping his linguistic sensitivity. The coexistence of different linguistic territories in Kafka's writing, as we mentioned above, has been well documented by Suchoff; and the study of Bodenheimer, which draws directly from the Hebrew notebooks of the author, has reposed important questions on the learning process of the author. As we reread some of Kafka's remarks on the Yiddish *Jargon*, it seems quite apparent how, beyond the mere question of linguistic knowledge, or of meaning and sense, his attention and imagination were precociously captured by the interaction between different linguistic territories [KKANI 193].

Kafka's relationship with Hebrew was indeed less fuelled by a philological interest than by a living passion for a language 'of the threshold:' a language which could represent the promise of a new life. His intellectual appetite for Hebrew was inseparable from a deeply human and an affective core that enclosed and transcended, at once, the promise of a journey to Palestine. With his fantasy being bound to fail, Hebrew would remain for Kafka the language of a possible elsewhere that remained unknown and unknowable. In this respect, I think that Bodenheimer's thesis according to which "learning everyday-Hebrew" represented for the author "not so much a preparation" but "a substitute for the journey to Palestine" cannot be properly appreciated if we fail to consider the role of writing in such process of substitution. For it is writing that created for Kafka that dynamic structure in which such substitution—or better: transformation—was ultimately possible.

Furthermore, let us keep in mind how Kafka might have received the linguistic phenomenon of the *waw hahipuch*, and what such a phenomenon could provoke and inspire for a representative of a generation of Jews that, in its own way, came to be deeply concerned with the survival of a cultural heritage that he had to rediscover. Like many other European Jews of his generation, Kafka was confronting himself with an old-new language which harbored a new way of thinking and perceiving time. The idea that language—in this case, the transnational Hebrew Kafka absorbed through manifold sources—could convey grammatical structures capable of transforming time perception, making of something closed a threshold towards an action yet to take place, and *vice versa*, may have had a fundamental impact on the way he envisaged his own cultural peregrination. Kafka's last work is in this sense permeated by the feeling that a 'past'—or, as in this case, a bond with a people—is not merely severed or lost. It can also be reinvented³⁷⁰ in the form of a creative relationship with time that allows the fruitful

³⁷⁰ Cavarocchi was among the firsts to emphasize how Kafka's relationship with Judaism may be understood in terms of a "testimony of Judaism as *forma mentis* that seems to survive its religious expression by transforming in cultural expression." Marina Cavarocchi, *La certezza che toglie la speranza. Contributi per l'approfondimento dell'aspetto ebraico in Kafka* (Firenze: Giuntina, 1988), 15-62, notably 57-62.

intempestivity³⁷¹ of an event to take place elsewhere, otherwise, unbeknownst to the subject, called from a distance:³⁷²

Hier in den dürftigen Pausen zwischen den Kämpfen träumt das Volk, es ist, als lösten sich dem Einzelnen die Glieder, als dürfte sich der Ruhelose einmal nach seiner Lust im großen warmen Bett des Volkes dehnen und strecken. Und in diese Träume klingt hie und da Josefinens Pfeifen; sie nennt es perlend, wir nennen es stoßend; aber jedenfalls ist es hier an seinem Platze, wie nirgends sonst, wie Musik kaum jemals den auf sie wartenden Augenblick findet. Etwas von der armen kurzen Kindheit ist darin, etwas von verlorenem, nie wieder aufzufindendem Glück, aber auch etwas vom tätigen heutigen Leben ist darin, von seiner kleinen, unbegreiflichen und dennoch bestehenden und nicht zu ertötenden Munterkeit. Und dies alles ist wahrhaftig nicht mit großen Tönen gesagt, sondern leicht, flüsternd, vertraulich, manchmal ein wenig heiser. Natürlich ist es ein Pfeifen. Wie denn nicht? Pfeifen ist die Sprache unseres Volkes, nur pfeift mancher sein Leben lang und weiß es nicht, hier aber ist das Pfeifen freigemacht von den Fesseln des täglichen Lebens und befreit auch uns für eine kurze Weile. Gewiß, diese Vorführungen wollten wir nicht missen. [KKAD 366-367]³⁷³

It is in these terms that Josefine's singing can articulate that "no man's land," which Green addresses in the quote we put as *exergue* to the present paragraph. It is a gap measuring the obscure, latent temporal distance *separating* and *connecting* at once the generations; an unlost that defies representation, and that as such transmits itself: as a piping whose meaning and sense is constantly questioned and unsolvable. It survives through writing as an inaccessible, a-signifying acoustic trace bearing a potentiality of signification, an otherness of language that resonates through language. As irreducible sound, Josefine's singing can indeed save what language inevitably forgets, what language cannot help missing, for language is what comes always too late, only "once out of the infancy".³⁷⁴ "Something of our poor, brief infancy is in it, something of a lost happiness, never to be found again, but something of our busy present life is also in it, something of its small, incomprehensible cheerfulness, which abides and cannot be destroyed."

³⁷¹ "Der Messias wird erst kommen, wenn er nicht mehr nötig sein wird" [KKANII 56] wrote once Kafka: "The Messiah will first come when he won't be necessary anymore."

³⁷² On October 18, 1921 Kafka writes: "Ewige Kinderzeit. Wieder ein Ruf des Lebens. // Es ist sehr gut denkbar, daß die Herrlichkeit des Lebens um jeden und immer in ihrer ganzen Fülle bereitliegt, aber verhängt, in der Tiefe, unsichtbar, sehr weit. Aber sie liegt dort, nicht feindselig, nicht widerwillig, nicht taub. Ruft man sie mit dem richtigen Wort, beim richtigen Namen, dann kommt sie. Das ist das Wesen der Zauberei, die nicht schafft, sondern ruft. [KKAT, 866] "Eternal childhood. Again a call of life. It is well conceivable that life's splendour forever lies in wait about each one of us in all its fullness, but veiled, deep down, invisible, far away. It is there, though, not hostile, not reluctant, not deaf. If you call it by the right word, by its right name, it will come. This is the essence of magic, which does not create but calls."

³⁷³ "Here, in the brief pauses between battles, the people dream; it is as if the limbs of each single one relaxed, as if the restless might for once stretch out at his pleasure in the great warm bed of the people. And now and again, Josefine's piping chimes into these dreams; she calls it trilling, we call it upsetting; but anyway it is in its rightful place here, as it is nowhere else, in the way music hardly ever finds the right moment waiting for it. Something of our poor, brief infancy is in it, something of a lost happiness, never to be found again, but something of our busy present life is also in it, something of its small, incomprehensible cheerfulness, which abides and cannot be destroyed. And truly, this is not said in grand tones, but lightly, in a whisper, intimately, sometimes rather hoarsely. Of course it is piping. What else? Piping is the language of our people. Only there are some who pipe all their lives and don't know it. But here, piping is freed of the fetters of daily life, and it also sets us free, for a short while. It is certain: we would not want to miss these shows."

³⁷⁴ See Lyotard, "La prescription," 241-242.

At this crossroad, where temporal openness and closure, affects, language, sounds and writing intertwine, the question of Kafka's failed fantasy, I suggest, can be read from a new perspective, in terms of what Green calls *événement négatif*, or "negative event." Green writes: "[...] l'événement négatif ce n'est plus l'accident, si exceptionnel qu'il soit, d'une vie, c'est la vie même de l'écriture, qui ne fait rien advenir dans la vie mais qui fait de ce Rien, l'événement indéfiniment répété de la vie de l'écriture."³⁷⁵ Green's formulation summarises in certain sense the motives that I tried to analyse in Kafka's final text. The double recurrence of "nothing" and "Nothing" is here all but accidental. By that, Green expresses a fundamental feature of sublimation. Through the work of writing the absence, the negation, is reacquired in a different form in the textual dimension: as a name that stands for the absence of all names, for the incommensurability of a loss, and for its reinvention as a blankness at the core of creation.

As early as October 1923 [KBM 319] Kafka was aware that he would have never been able to physically accede Palestine. Berlin temporally represented, if not an intermediary stop in preparation to an impossible journey, at least a temporary refuge. The metropolis allowed him to experience a new closeness to a different Jewish context, as well as a necessary distance from the oppressive familiar household.

Still, we would be mistaken to consider the *événement négatif* as having a role on a conscious level. The negative event rather traces *a posteriori* a necessary structural element of the unconscious reasoning of the text. Kafka was not aware, captured in his *furor scribendi*, that he was writing on the page the otherness of a failure. It was indeed up to the work of writing to create the conditions through which the phantom of a loss could convert into an unsaturable representational possibility—and yet nothing but a possibility.

In this respect, Josefina—her "nothing of a voice", "nothing in achievement"—incarnates, perhaps, the negative event of Kafka's life, transforming it in a never-ending pursuit of a lost object. But not only. Josefina encapsulates the promise of Judaism as *incrédible*, uncreatable: a question constantly open at the heart of his work. A question that as such, in all its irreducibility, demands to be transmitted.

The intertwining of *transfert d'existence* and of *événement négatif* marks what we have called 'the entanglement between the survival of an inaccessible reserve of representation and the work of filiation through writing.' As such, they partially delineate the psychic room of that working-through in which Kafka's last text stems from, at the intersection of the life of the

³⁷⁵ "[...] the negative event is not anymore the accident, however important, of a life, it is the life itself of writing, which makes 'nothing' happen in real life, and yet it does make of that 'Nothing' the indefinitely repeated event of the life of writing." Green, AN, 50.

author and the life of the work. They express the space of an encounter that takes place elsewhere, otherwise. Writing, in this space, represents a time of conversion from the achievable into the unachievable. The fatal closure of a life turns into the interminable openness of the work. From this vantage point, Kafka's last text unconsciously embodies, through sublimation, the promise of both an achievement and a failure.

CHAPTER 3

THE DEATH DRIVE AT THE UMBILICAL OF THE POETIC: THE WORK OF THE NEGATIVE IN PAUL CELAN'S LATE POETRY

3.1 'An Other Blank.' Towards a New Understanding of the Work of the Negative in Paul Celan's Late Poetry

*Welches der Worte du sprichst –
du dankst
dem Verderben.*

Paul Celan [NKG, 86]

Following the publication of Georg-Michael Schulz's 1977 seminal work *Negativität in der Dichtung Paul Celans*,³⁷⁶ much has been written about the Negative in the work of the Bukovinan poet. At least two major research trends on this topic are preliminarily discernible. Firstly, scholars such as Schulz, and more recently Nixon,³⁷⁷ Feldman,³⁷⁸ Buhanan,³⁷⁹ and Weller,³⁸⁰ have attempted to understand Celan's Negative from a literary, stylistic, and philosophical standpoint, examining it in the context of the transformations of poetic expression under the *caesura* of the Shoah. The topics of historical trauma representation,³⁸¹ of the poetic wound, of loss, of nothingness, of a radical *mise en question* of the poetic subject, as well as of the "ethico-aesthetic" articulation of the limits of language in relationship with the modernist "language scepticism"³⁸² are only some of the many aspects of the Negative that have received ample attention.

Secondly, other scholars have approached the question of secularization, the transformation of theological categories, tropes, and imagery in Celan's writing, emphasising the prominent

³⁷⁶ Georg-Michael Schulz, *Negativität in der Dichtung Paul Celans* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1977). It arguably represents the first study specifically devoted to the Negative encompassing the entirety of Celan's oeuvre known and accessible at the time. As for Celan's last creative period, Schulz only refers to the posthumous book *Schneepart*: any bibliographical reference to *Zeitgehöft* results absent, no doubt for mere chronological reasons. Celan's last posthumous book was published in 1976, i.e. one year after the completion of Schulz's work—accepted as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Tübingen in 1975, and officially published two years later.

³⁷⁷ Mark. Nixon, "'Text-void:' silent words in Paul Celan and Samuel Beckett," *Beckett's Literary Legacies*, ed. by M. Feldman and M. Nixon (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 152-168.

³⁷⁸ Daniel Feldman, "Negation and Subjectivity in the Holocaust Poetry of Paul Celan and Dan Pagis," *Comparative Literature* (Fall 2014), Vol. 66, No. 4, 438-458.

³⁷⁹ Kurt Buhanan, "A-voiding Representation: *Eräugnis* and Inscription in Celan." *Semiotica*, vol. 2016, no. 213, 601-623.

³⁸⁰ Weller, *Language and Negativity*, 158-186.

³⁸¹ See for instance Ulrich Baer, *Remnants of Song: Trauma and the Experience of Modernity in Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

³⁸² Weller, *Language and Negativity*, 161.

role of negative theology. Contributions by Wolosky,³⁸³ Lesch,³⁸⁴ Franke,³⁸⁵ and Lipszyc³⁸⁶ show how specific aspects and structures of Jewish mystical lore (rediscovered through the interpretations of i.a. Gershom Scholem, Franz Rosenzweig, and Martin Buber) but also of Christian mysticism (e.g., through the writings of Meister Eckhart) survive in Celan's poetry in a "questioned, distorted, spectralized" form.³⁸⁷

Interestingly enough, the sharp distinction we intended to draw within the research on the Negative in Celan turns out to be not only a fairly arbitrary one, but also misleading. The motives of "language crisis," subjectivity, and poetic "inexpressibility" under the sign of Auschwitz cannot ultimately be severed from pressing theological (i.e. theological-political-juridical) issues such as that of transcendence, the divine, and the survival of specific cultural-religious structures in literary forms. The creation of "a poetic style and unique model of subjectivity" challenging the "preeminent ontological theories of [Celan's] era"³⁸⁸ hence goes hand in hand with the question of what remains of Judaism and of its individual and collective rearticulation after Auschwitz. That is particularly true in the case of Celan, as the work of excavation with and within the German language—at once maternal idiom and language of the murderer—that his poetry made possible entails in turn the very possibility of survival of a remnant of European Judaism under the sign of unthinkable catastrophes.³⁸⁹

A broader look at the scholarship investigating the Negative in Celan's works suggests, however, a further element of interest: the limitations of the research to literary, philosophical and/or theological interpretative approaches seem to correspond to a narrowing of the analytic focus on a selected, in a way more 'canonical' set of primary texts.³⁹⁰ A canon from which the *Nachlass* is too often excluded. In spite of the considerable amount of publications that appeared between 2019 and 2020 on the occasion of the anniversary of both Celan's birth in 1920 and of his death in 1970, his late poetry has hardly been the subject of a thorough

³⁸³ Shira Wolosky, *Language Mysticism. The Negative Way of Language in Eliot, Beckett, and Celan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

³⁸⁴ Walter Lesch, "im glühenden Leertext. 'Negative Theologie und Sprachmagie bei Paul Celan,'" *Gott und Götze in der Literatur der Moderne*, Hrsgg. von R. Sorg und S. Bodo Würffel (Stuttgart: Fink Verlag, 1999), 165-182.

³⁸⁵ William Franke, "The Singular and the Other at the Limits of Language in the Apophatic Poetics of Edmond Jabès and Paul Celan," *New Literary History*, vol. 36, no. 4 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 621-638.

³⁸⁶ Adam Lipszyc, "The Stylus and the Almond: Negative Literary Theologies in Paul Celan." Michael Fagenblat (Ed.) *Negative Theology as Jewish Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 304-322.

³⁸⁷ Lipszyc, "The Stylus and the Almond," 309.

³⁸⁸ Feldman, "Negation and Subjectivity," 446.

³⁸⁹ Wolosky, *Language Mysticism*, 267-268.

³⁹⁰ On this point, see also Thomas C. Connolly's remarks on textual conformism and "critical consensus" in Celan's scholarship in *Paul Celan's Unfinished Poetics. Readings in the Sous-Oeuvre* (Oxford: Legenda, 2018), 1-29.

investigation on the Negative (let alone from a specific psychoanalytic standpoint).³⁹¹ To put that in other terms, this raises the question as to what extent the exploration of the Negative in Celan has been hitherto informed, if not even legitimized, by privileged references to works such as *Sprachgitter* (1959), *Die Niemandrose* (1963), and *Atemwende* (1967), in which allusions to e.g., theology and mysticism are not only more prominent, but also more recognizable and ‘accessible to interpretation.’³⁹² That changes, however, if we try to push the debate forward, towards a less familiar ground, both in textual and conceptual terms. Celan’s last creative season—not as ‘digestible’ to readers as earlier stages of his writing—seems to display, in this sense, a rarefaction, if not a complete vanishment (or better, a radical ‘transformation’) of hermeneutical ‘footholds’ graspable from an aesthetic-philosophical and theological standpoint.³⁹³

In his book, Schulz has extensively reflected on how Celan’s final creative season radically questions the “interpretability” of the very poems to such an extent that interpretation itself is problematized by the text and within the text. “Negativity—so Schulz—in Celan’s late lyrics manifest itself foremost [...] in the increasingly problematic relationship between reader and poem, as a sort of barricade [Sperre], by which the impeded identification of the subject of the poem makes difficult, at the same time, the identification of the reader with the poem.”³⁹⁴ While this remark attests what is nowadays the recurring motive of the “inaccessibility” of Celan’s poetry, Schulz did actually touch a nerve here. In fact, it is not only the question of the “interpretability” that Celan’s last poems put at stake. His *Nachlass* is an unprecedented ‘limit’ of his own writing, a *terra ignota* that his poetry at once unveils, discovers, and attains through

³⁹¹ Celan’s late production still seems to remain a fairly neglected territory in comparison to other creative seasons of the author. See especially the case of the first cycle in *Zeitgehöft* in Markus May, Peter Goßens und Jürgen Lehmann (Hrsgg.), *Celan Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung. 2. aktualisierte und erweiterte Auflage* (Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag, 2012), 123. An exception is represented by the so called “Jerusalem Zyklus”—which includes some twenty poems written concomitantly with the first and only visit of the author in Israel in October 1969. See Chiara Caradonna and Vivian Liska (Hrsgg.), *Zäsuren / Caesurae. Paul Celan Spätwerk / Paul Celan’s Later Work. Deutsch-Englische Ausgabe* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2022). Among the most prominent contributions appeared in Germany between 2019 and 2020, we can count at least two new biographical works, four critical monographies, and a new edition of selected letters from 1934 to the year of his death: Paul Celan. *»etwas ganz und gar Persönliches«: Briefe 1934-1970*, ausgewählt, Hrsg. und kommentiert von Barbara Wiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2019); Wolfgang Emmerich. *Nahe Fremde: Paul Celan und die Deutschen* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2020); Hans-Peter Kunisch, *Todtnauberg: Die Geschichte von Paul Celan, Martin Heidegger und ihrer unmöglichen Begegnung* (München: dtv, 2020); Klaus Reichert, *Paul Celan. Erinnerungen und Briefe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2020); Petro Rychlo, *Mit den Augen von Zeitgenossen: Erinnerungen an Paul Celan* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2020); Thomas Sparr, *Todesfuge. Biographie eines Gedichts* (München: Deutsches Verlags-Anstalt, 2020).

³⁹² For an implicit confirmation of that, see Ulisse Dogà, *Un tempo altro, estraneissimo. Studio sul futuro composto in poesia* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2021), 79 and ff.

³⁹³ An example of that is Buhanan’s paper, whose argument is based on an “negative visuality”, according to which the “image of the negative” in Celan (in poems such as *Mandorla*) can be conceived as “that which a-voids representation, but which is also structurally necessary to representation itself.” Buhanan, “A-voiding Representation,” 602.

³⁹⁴ Schulz, *Negativität in der Dichtung Paul Celans*, 267.

an unprecedented reinvention of language. In the last years of his life, Celan must have been well aware of having reached in his late works a new poetical summit, an unparalleled degree of precision and force.³⁹⁵ A *unicum* that could have no antecedent nor descendant, nor could accept or allow comparisons of any sort.³⁹⁶ Precisely because of the scandalous exceptionality of it, Celan's poetry opens an immedicable narcissistic wound in the history of literature in German language, and beyond.

Far more than any other period of his creative life, Celan's later works prompt the reader to a confrontation on a conscious, but foremost unconscious level with psychic representational remnants of an absence which is so radical, so irrepresentable, so unthinkable that it challenges our "ordinary modes of thought,"³⁹⁷ as well as our way of creating meaning and re-structuring, through reading, the mesh of affective and semantic elements operating in the text. In this respect, the poems Celan wrote during the last three years of his life compel us to both develop a new approach to the topic, and to envisage the matrix of 'another' Negative, the specificities of which go beyond the ground covered so far from most of the research.

Whilst Schulz's remark may be read, in a certain sense, as an apt comment on the reluctance of many scholars to address the Negative in Celan's late poetry, Maletta's study on Celan's "poetics of absence"³⁹⁸ is an important exception in this context—and the only veritable precedent for my investigation. Focusing on the metonymic register of the whiteness-blankness (associated with the milk, the snow, the ice, the crystal, the breath) her research shows from a psychoanalytic perspective how the insisting recurrence of omissions, interruptions, and vacancies betrays, in Celan's poems, a radical absence that deeply invests the representational process. These elements are, in Maletta's reading, signals of a "poetics of negative hallucination,"³⁹⁹ through which Celan exposes the mental blank space of denial and suppression that characterizes the politics of memory of the Shoah after the Second world war in Germany and, more generally, in Europe. To this space of denial that Celan's own poetry

³⁹⁵ See a letter to Ilana Shmueli: "In die Rue d'Ulm gefahren, in den Manuskripten gelesen: der Band nach dem nächsten [Fadensonnen] ist wohl das Stärkste, Kühnste, das ich geschrieben habe. (Geschrieben zwischen Dezember 67 und Oktober 68.)" "I went to Rue d'Ulm and I read my manuscripts: the collection after then ext one is certainly the strongest, the most audacious that I have written." In Paul Celan und Ilana Shmueli, *Briefwechsel*, Hrsgg. von I. Shmueli und T. Sparr (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), 86.

³⁹⁶ See Celan's reaction to Gerhard Neumann's "Die 'absolute' Metapher. Ein Abgrenzungsversuch am Beispiel Stéphane Mallarmés und Paul Celans," *Poetica* 3, nos. 1-2 (1970), 188-225. The episode is reported in Gerhart Baumann, *Erinnerungen an Paul Celan* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), 84 ff.

³⁹⁷ Green, PM, 17 ff; FP, 35-62.

³⁹⁸ Rosalba Maletta, "'Nessuno / testimonia per il / testimone'. Paul Celan e le poetiche dell'assenza," *Strumenti critici*. A. XXI, Fascicolo 2 (Bologna: Il Mulino, maggio 2006), 207-234.

³⁹⁹ See Rosalba Maletta. "'... AUCH KEINERLEI'. Inerti freudiani in un testo celaniano," *Studi germanici*. Nuova Serie N. 14 (2018), 127-149, here 134.

unmasks—reflecting the failure of the Western civilization to process and take responsibility for the catastrophe of a vanished world—his poetics of absence juxtaposes “another blankness:” the space of a deeper, irreconcilable absence that wounds the poem from within. It is in such other blank that Celan prepares, poem after poem, an organising and framing structure in which a new capability of thinking absence may be developed. What is therefore at stake in the whiteness-blankness that haunts Celan’s text is at once the harsh precept of a memory that the poem has to carry as a “vergiß du, dass du vergißt” [NKG, 205] i.e., a ‘negativization of the Negative,’ and its conversion into a margin capable of preparing an ethics of representation of the absence of representation.

Expanding Green’s reflections on negative hallucination, Maletta reaches far beyond what Aris Fioretos has called that “materiality of language, which cannot be translated into the spoken language of voice without an unaccountable remainder.”⁴⁰⁰ What is involved here is not properly the gap between what can be written and what can be spoken—or to be more precise, the irreducible difference between that which remains written beyond any oral pronunciation. Maletta rather describes the representational value of an irrepresentable, i.e. unbound remnant of the drive in the passage from the somatic to the semantic, from the body to the poetic *corpus*.

From this point of view, Maletta’s analysis not only provides important insights into the representational strategies of absence in Celan’s poetry. She reads Celan’s poetry as “poetry of his time,”⁴⁰¹ showing how Celan’s creative endeavour is driven by an ethical concern that, through poetry, expresses the inexhaustible attempt to write on the page an interminable mourning: the negative of any monumentalization. Celan’s poetry is, indeed, “wirklichkeitswund und Wirklichkeit suchend” [GW III, 186]: “reality-wounded and reality-searching.”

In a letter to Sigfried Unseld dated April 7, 1970, Celan reflects on the last collection of poems he managed to personally hand in to Suhrkamp, *Lichtzwang* (1970). He writes:

Meine Gedichte sind weder hermetischer geworden noch geometrischer; sie sind nicht Chiffren, sie sind Sprache; sie entfernen sich nicht noch weiter vom Alltag, sie stehen, auch in Ihrer Wörtlichkeit [...] im Heute. Ich glaube, ich darf sagen, daß ich mit diesem Buch ein Äußerstes an menschlicher Erfahrung in dieser unserer Welt und dieser Unserer Zeit eingebracht habe, un verstummt und auf dem Wege zu Weiterem.⁴⁰²

⁴⁰⁰ See Aris Fioretos, “Nothing. History and Materiality in Celan,” Id. (Ed.) *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 295 ff.

⁴⁰¹ Barbara Wiedemann (Hrsg.) *Paul Celan – Die Goll-Affäre. Dokumente zu einer ‘Infamie’* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 820-860, here 854.

⁴⁰² “My poems have not become more hermetic nor more geometrical; they are not codes, they are language; they do not distance themselves from the all-day life, they stay, also in their literality [...] in the Today. I think, I may say so, that with this book I brought an utmost of human experience in this world and this time of ours, unsilenced and underway to something further.” Quoted in Wiedemann, *Paul Celan – Die Goll-Affäre*, 860.

Celan's late poetry is constantly on alert [NKG 485-486] and relentlessly vigilant. Until the very end, such poetry feels the social, cultural, and political pulse of the world, precisely because it articulates a form of memory that does not follow preestablished paths and categories. To the scotoma which dominates the mental landscape of the West, the Negative operating in Celan's work responds with a 'negative of the Negative:' the bitter, harsh fruit of a close confrontation of the poet with the tribulation of a people, with the deafness of a world that suppresses and disavowed "das, was geschah" ("that which happened," to use Celan's own euphemism taken from his 1958 Bremer speech [GW III, 186]), and not least, with the survival of antisemitism after the Second world war.

The disturbing tone of comments and observation whereby many scholars spoke or keep speaking of Celan's psychological conditions in the last ten years of his life—especially since the exacerbation of the defamatory campaign instigated by Yvan Goll's widow, Claire Goll—still reveals the depth of the narcissistic wound that his poetry opened. Tactlessly misunderstood or deliberately misinterpreted as the "paranoid"⁴⁰³ product of a sick soul, Celan's writing showed to what extent the culture of the time was not only unprepared to listen or understand, but foremost ready to react aggressively in order to protect itself. In fact, with the lucidity of his poetry, Celan exposed a condition embodied in the psychic horizon of post war Germany. In connection to that, we may read a pertinent observation by Green—who, if he was ever aware of Celan's work, he never explicitly addressed it, to my knowledge, in his own writing:

Ce n'est peut-être pas pour rien que l'écriture d'aujourd'hui suggère l'analogie avec le langage psychotique. A ce titre elle est bien l'écriture du temps, comme l'époque de la naissance de la psychanalyse fut peut-être surtout celle de la névrose. Il ne manque pas de voix pour clamer haut que *c'est le monde d'aujourd'hui qui est psychotique et par voie de conséquence psychotisant.* [emphasis mine]⁴⁰⁴

On this point, it is also significant that in the years in which Celan suffered a difficult, debilitating series of psychiatric hospitalisations, Green was about to conceptualize the *psychose blanche* (*blank psychosis*). But to such aspect, we will return in the last section of the present chapter.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰³ See James K. Lyon, "Judentum, Antisemitismus, Verfolgungswahn: Celans ‚Krise‘ 1960-1962," *Celan-Jahrbuch* 3, Hrsg. von H.-M. Speier (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1990), 175-204. For a more recent discussion of the topic, see Connolly, *Paul Celan's Unfinished Poetics*, 15 and ff.

⁴⁰⁴ Green D, 41; PM, 358: "There may be substance in the suggestion of an analogy between contemporary writing modes and psychotic language. If so, these modes are truly consonant with the current era, just as the period which saw the advent of psychoanalysis was perhaps mostly the era of neurosis. There is no dearth of voices to proclaim emphatically that *it is today's world that is psychotic and, by way of consequence, psychosis-inducing.*"

⁴⁰⁵ From 1962 to 1969, Celan was officially hospitalized six times in different psychiatric clinics. Theo Buck, in his *Celan und Frankreich*, *Celan-Studien* V (Aachen: Rimbaud 2002), 101, note 160, reports the following dates

The “other blankness” that Celan articulates in his poetry, and that Maletta was able to highlight in her studies, represents an important point of departure for my analysis. Pursuing this line of investigation, the following chapter expands on the representational dimensions of the Negative in Celan’s late work, more specifically in the two posthumously published collection of poems: *Schneepart* (*Snowpart*, 1971) and *Zeitgehöft* (*Timestead*, 1976). These two volumes represent without a doubt a particularly challenging part of Celan’s *corpus*, not simply because of the intrinsic, scandalous density and richness of the texts, but also for the questions irremediably left open as to the ‘final’ organisation of the manuscripts.

Schneepart survived in two versions, namely a typoscript with handwritten revisions and a paginated fair copy organised and ordered in five cycles (dated September 22, 1969). This second copy, which Celan prepared for his wife Giselle LeStrange, was then used by Suhrkamp for the preparation of the first 1971 edition. *Zeitgehöft* reached us in the form of a single copy revised typoscript divided in three sections. While in the former case we deal with a collection of texts which is structurally almost complete—although the author was not able to hand it in personally to his publisher—in the latter, Celan never gave a final *imprimatur* for the publication. We can presume that the author would have returned to both texts for further revisions, corrections, and (surely in the case of *Zeitgehöft*, since many poems attest conspicuous handwritten corrections directly on the typoscript) reorganization of some texts, had he not ended his life in April 1970. In addition, a considerable number of scattered poems not included in the manuscripts attest once more to openness, an unfinishedness that haunts in a particular way Celan’s last creative period.⁴⁰⁶

In my analysis, it is essential to emphasize how such an openness, an unachieved and unachievable marking Celan’s late work is not merely accident dictated by the death of the poet.

and locations: from 31.12.1962 to 17.1.1963 in Epinay-sur-Seine; 8-21.5.1965 in Le Vésinet; after threatening to kill his wife with a knife, from 28.11.1965 to 11.6.1966 in Garches, Suresnes and Sainte Anne in Paris; from 30.1 to 13.2.1967 in Hopital Boucicaut, Paris, after a suicide attempt; from 13.2 to 17.10.1967 again in the clinic Sainte Anne, Paris (after April he was granted occasional exit permits); from 15.11.1968 to 3.2.1969 in Epinay-sur-Orge. During his last hospitalization at the Sainte Anne psychiatric clinic in Paris—where also Jacques Lacan studied, specialized, and later on, from 1953 to 1964, held his seminars—Celan was patient of Professor Jean Delay, a crucial figure in the history of psychiatry. See Maletta, “... AUCH KEINERLEI,” 127-149, especially 132-133 and 133, footnote 20. Also in the same years, Green was involved in many clinical and research activities connected with Sainte Anne hospital and coordinated by Professor Delay. In the context of his psychoanalytic consultations with the psychiatric service at that hospital, Green later on wrote, in collaboration with [Jean-Luc Donnet](#), *L’Enfant de ça. Psychanalyse d’un entretien: la psychose blanche* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1973) [E]. In this respect, our focus on Celan’s *Nachlass* will lead us to both reflect on the transformation of the work of the Negative, and on the transformation of psychoanalysis in general in relationship with the history of psychology and psychiatry.

⁴⁰⁶ See the *Editorisches Nachwort* in Paul Celan, *Die Gedichte aus dem Nachlaß*, Hrsgg. von B. Badiou, J.-C. Rambach und B. Wiedemann, Anmerkungen von B. Wiedemann und B. Badiou (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 331-343.

It rather represents a pivotal *structural* and *organising* feature of his *Spätwerk*: a signal of what we have already called, with Green and Maletta, a framing structure for the representation of the absence of representation. In this very case, the blank of the negative hallucination marks the impossibility of a closure within the work, i.e., of making of it a monolithic, completed *opus*.⁴⁰⁷ The work of the Negative articulates here a poetic filiation that claims and demands to be unfinishable and unachievable. Such impossibility of closure structurally characterizing the work retrospectively remains on the page as a signature, an inscription of the irreconcilable overlapping of the death drive and sublimation. Matrix and umbilicus of the articulation of an unsaturable loss, this blank is not limited anymore to the space of the text ('type space' or 'print area') but determines the form of the poem from within and without:

“Die Form des Gedichts ist längst nicht mehr die ~~seiner~~ seiner Verse und Strophen; ~~eine~~ ein viel weiteres Weiß als die seines Satzspiegels bestimmt die Konturen” [M, 99].⁴⁰⁸

Celan is not referring here to the white page of Stéphane Mallarmé, i.e., to a page which is blank because of the absence of the written sign, thus manifesting the *horror vacui*, the plenitude of a mutism of the word, of the voice, of writing. It is rather a broader, more distant blank (in time as well as in space) that Celan's poetry compels us to address: a blank which is both *weit* and *weiter*, 'farther' and 'further,' 'far underway' and 'other,' as if at the distant margin of the margin of the poem [GW III, 197]. As such, this blank—which encloses the whiteness as one of its *Gestalten*,⁴⁰⁹ without being limited to it—alludes to a neglected remnant of representation that does not pertain figurability [Darstellung].⁴¹⁰ From this point of view, irrepresentability—let us say it once more with Green—is indeed not “that of which the subject has no awareness or consciousness at a precise moment,” nor has to do simply with repression or an unconscious phantasy. Irrepresentability pertains here “something which does not succeed in binding in the representational chain.”⁴¹¹ It thus has to be envisaged as an element *of* and *within* representation: therefore implying mechanisms and dynamics which common matrix can be detected in negative hallucination: “[...] not the absence of representation as is suggested by the absence of the image in the mirror, but the *representation of the absence of representation*.”

⁴⁰⁷ Significantly, a well-known poem from the *Nachlass*, *Wolfsbohne* (dated October 21, 1959; a second version of the text is dated April 25, 1965) opens with two quotes, one from Hölderlin's *Vom Abgrund nemlich*, the other from Jean Paul's *Das Kampaner Tal*: “... wie an den Häusern der Juden (zum Andenken des ruinirten Jerusalem's), immer etwas *un v o l l e n d e t* gelassen werden muß...”

⁴⁰⁸ “[...] The form of the poem is long not anymore that of his verses and strophes; [...] a much wider blankness/whiteness that that of print area defines the contours of it.”

⁴⁰⁹ On the semantic bifurcation implied in the terms blank and white see for instance Green, N, 173-176; Id. LN, 111-113.

⁴¹⁰ See Rosalba Maletta, “Eterotassie del Novecento. Dalla mela di Benjamin al pasto di neve di Celan,” *PsicoArt – Rivista on line di arte e psicologia*, 3, 3, 2013, 1-60. <https://psicoart.unibo.it/article/view/3670/3012> .

⁴¹¹ Urribarri, *Dialoguer avec André Green*, 45.

L'hallucination négative n'est pas un phénomène pathologique. Elle n'est pas l'absence de représentation comme le suggère l'absence de l'image dans le miroir, mais représentation de l'absence de représentation. L'hallucination négative est le concept théorique qui est la précondition à toute théorie de la représentation, qu'il s'agisse du rêve comme de l'hallucination. Sans doute, rêve et hallucination ne sont-ils pas superposables. L'hallucination négative est leur matrice commune.⁴¹²

In this sense, the title of the collection *Schneepart* (the first collection we will explore in this chapter, before tackling *Zeitgehöft*) does not only refer, metonymically speaking, to the 'role' played by an irrepresentable, blank element in the economy of poetic writing. It also evokes the idea of an irrepresentable "part" drifting away from the whiteness of the snow, as an unbounded, irreconcilable "piece," that as such remains pulsating at the heart of the poem.⁴¹³ The *Schneepart* constitutes that element that the text has to carry within, and which, at the same time, does not cease to jeopardize the very fabric of the poetic: mark of an incision, of an *incrédible* around which the poetic structures the 'binding of an unbinding.'

5 WAS NÄHT
 an dieser Stimme? Woran
 näht diese
 Stimme
 diesseits, jenseits?

 Die Abgründe sind
 eingeschworen auf Weiß, ihnen
 entstieg
 die Schneenadel

10 schluck sie [...]

[NKG, 487-488]⁴¹⁴

The blank we are therefore attempting to highlight here, and with it the Negative in Celan's late *Nachlass*, embodies, on a multiplicity of registers, the inter- and intrapsychic interweaving of *déliation* and *liaison*, of *unbinding* and *binding processes*.⁴¹⁵ At the heart of such a poetry of exceptional, irreducible overdetermination, sublimation becomes the time and the space of a

⁴¹² Green, TN, 384; WoN, 276: "Negative hallucination is not a pathological phenomenon. It is not the absence of representation as is suggested by the absence of the image in the mirror, but the *representation of the absence of representation*. Negative hallucination is the theoretical concept which is the precondition for any theory of representation, whether it is dreams or hallucination which is concerned. Undoubtedly dreams and hallucination cannot be superimposed. Negative hallucination is their common matrix."

⁴¹³ Maletta, "Eterotassie del Novecento."

⁴¹⁴ BT, 329: "What sews / at this voice? On what / does this / voice / sew / hither, beyond? // The chasms are / sworn in on White, from them / arose / the snowneedle, // swallow it [...]"

⁴¹⁵ As we will see, and as Green warns us, "It would be too simple to identify Eros with binding and to postulate that the destructions drive are illustrated by unbinding. In fact, I think it would be more logic to consider that Eros operates a combination which includes bindings and unbindings, or to put it otherwise, that entanglement and disentanglement can occur within the psyche animated from a dynamic point of view. [...] Once we are dealing with the predominance of destructive drives, one encounters the prevalence of the unbinding alone." See Green, PC, 330.

wrestling with the death drive,⁴¹⁶ the latter being both constitutive to the very creative process, as well as belonging to the “air” that Celan’s poetry “has to breath” [GW III, 192] and ruminate: “dieses / Brot kauen, mit / Schreibzähnen.”—“to chew / this bread, / with writing-teeth” [BT, 345] as we read in a poem from *Schneepart* dated February 21, 1968 [NKG, 493].

As such, I suggest, unachievable and unachievability are representational marks of a poetic that *must* ingest and harbour destructivity—“ihnen / entstieg / die Schneenadel // schluck sie [...]”—, restructuring it in a stylistic matrix without abolishing or ‘neutralizing’⁴¹⁷ it; thereby *exposing* poetry and subjectivity itself to the dangers of such destructivity. “*La poésie ne s’impose plus, elle s’expose,*” [Mikr., 58] reads a well-known aphorism penned by Celan on March 26, 1969, almost a year before drowning in the Seine, on a folder also bearing the inscription: “Schneepart | /Handschriften/” [Snowpart; Manuscripts] [Mikr., 445]. The last two years and a half of Celan’s life are characterized by an intense, unprecedented, almost daily commitment to writing: the poet is, in spite of all, more than ever holding firm through his writing (the verb *stehen* recurs more and more often in Celan’s late work), engaged in a relentless struggle to give form through poetry to such an unachievability.

But what does remain of the subject in such an exposure, in such an endeavour, and for such a poetry to be possible? In order to address these questions, I propose in the following a new approach to Celan’s late creative season: to begin with, by tackling Celan’s work of the Negative from the angle of narcissism in its ambivalent relationship with sublimation and writing.

⁴¹⁶ It is not an accident, we might also add, that in several preparatory notes of *Der Meridian* Celan explicitly refers to Freud’s *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* in relationship with the anorganic element of his own poetry. See for instance M, 99, 100.

⁴¹⁷ I use the term neutralize, in this case, with no direct reference to Green’s concept of “Neutre.” Green, LN, 3-47.

3.2 Celan's "Being for Poetry." The Poem as Transnarcissistic Object

*Le blanc est la douleur de la Mère*⁴¹⁸

José Ángel Valente

On December 6, 1967, Celan handed in to Suhrkamp Verlag the manuscript of *Fadensonnen*, the last volume of poems to be published during his lifetime [GCL II, 574].⁴¹⁹ Less than two weeks thereafter, on December 16, the poet flew from Paris over Frankfurt am Main to Berlin, in occasion of a public reading organised by Walter Höllerer on behalf of the *Literarisches Colloquium* at the Akademie der Künste. The following day, he read a selection of his poems during a special session of Peter Szondi's seminar, in front of a small audience of students and faculty members of the Institute for comparative literature of the Freie Universität Berlin [GCL II, 407-408].⁴²⁰ If Celan's readings, and particularly the one at the Akademie der Künste, turned out to be a great success both in terms of audience response and press reception [GCL I 596; GCL II 407-408], his stay in Berlin was by no means less meaningful on a further personal as well as creative level.

For the first time in almost thirty years, the poet was returning to (West)Berlin after passing through the German metropolis by train in 1938. In that occurrence, as it is known, he was travelling from his native Czernowitz to Paris, to reach then Tours, where he was about to begin his preparatory studies for the faculty of medicine. The eighteen years old Paul Antschel arrived at the Anhalter Bahnhof in the early morning hours of November 10, the day after *Kristallnacht*.⁴²¹ The verses of his lyric *La Contrescarpe* (composed between September 1962 and March 1963 and published in *Die Niemandrose*) encapsulate traces and announcements of that passage, in which individual vicissitudes and collective tribulations of the Jewish people intertwine through poetry: "[...] Durch die Schotten / blutet die Botschaft, Verjährtes / geht

⁴¹⁸ "White is the sorrow of the Mother." José Á. Valente, *La Pierre et le Centre*. Traduit de l'espagnol par J. Ancet, José Corti, 1991, 23. Quoted in GCL II, 604.

⁴¹⁹ Excepted for the small cycle of poems *Schwarzmaut*, published on March 19, 1969. The same day Celan also wrote the closing poem of *Lichtzwang*, *Wirk nicht voraus*, the collection which appeared shortly after his death, in 1970.

⁴²⁰ The reading at the Academy of Arts was scheduled for December 18; the one at the FU Berlin for December 19. During his stay, Celan was also invited by Ernst Schnabel to record a reading of Shakespeare's sonnets for *Sender Freies Berlin*. Due to a strong and painful laryngitis [GCL I, 596] the recordings were postponed to December 28. *Paul Celan liest Shakespeare-Sonette* was broadcasted on June 26, 1968 [GCL II, 408]. For a more complete account of Celan's stay in Berlin in relationship with the texts composed in those days, see i.a. Peter Szondi, "Eden," *Celan-Studien* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1972), 113-125; Marlies Janz "'... noch nichts Interkurrierendes.'" Paul Celan in Berlin im Dezember 1967," *Celan-Jahrbuch* 8 (2001/02), Hrsg. von H.-M. Speier (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 2003), 335-345; Sparr, *Todesfuge*, 237-241; Emmerich, *Nahe Fremde*. 253-265.

⁴²¹ Israel Chalfen, *Paul Celan. Eine Biographie seiner Jugend* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), 78-79; Sparr, *Todesfuge*, 38-39.

jung über Bord: // Über Krakau / bist du gekommen, am Anhalter / Bahnhof / floß deinen
Blicken ein Rauch zu, / der war schon von morgen. [...]“ [NKG, 165]⁴²². If with his trip to
Berlin Celan was venturing, as Emmerich maintains, towards the “heart of darkness” of
European history,⁴²³ the poet was thereby foremost re-visiting the traces of a possible place of
inception of that wound that his work could not cease articulating: not the origin itself, nor a
wound among the others, but rather the representational umbilicus of his poetry.

Following his arrival in Berlin, on December 23, Celan wrote in a letter to his wife Gisèle:
“Il a fait froid et j’ai vu, pour la première fois depuis vingt ou vingt-deux ans, un hiver fait de
neige et de neige.” [GCL I 591] “It’s cold and I have seen, for the first time after twenty or
twenty-two years, a winter made of snow and snow.” Celan’s formulation is extremely
interesting: in it, we find a trace of that irreconcilable ‘other blank’ we addressed in the previous
paragraph, which represents the backbone of Celan’s “poetics of absence”⁴²⁴ from the early
lyrics up to the late work. The intensity and the evocative tone of his words, most notably the
repetitions “vingt ou vingt-deux ans” and “de neige et de neige”, suggests here a powerful
affective mesh in which the whiteness of the snow is not merely *perceived*, but becomes a space
of representational organisation. In the negative movement from perception (the white of the
snow: colour-no-colour) to re-presentation (the blank), in which we recognize the mark of
negative hallucination, “the absent traces become the traces of an absence.”⁴²⁵ The winter
landscape of the metropolis in which the poet arrives forms a blank screen upon which, as on
an associative matrix, distant times and spaces of his life (and work) overlap.⁴²⁶ The winter
landscape of the Bukovina, where Celan spent his youth; the inaccessible winter landscape of

⁴²² “Through the bulkheads / bleeds the message, what is time-barred / goes young overboard: // Via Kracow / you
came, at the Anhalter / Station / a smoke flowed towards your glance / that was already from tomorrow.”

⁴²³ See Emmerich, *Nahe Fremde*, 253 ff.

⁴²⁴ Maletta, “Nessuno / testimonia per il / testimone.”

⁴²⁵ See Maletta, “Poesia come resilienza,” 62 ff.

⁴²⁶ See Maletta, “Nessuno / testimonia per il / testimone,” 206 ff. In one of Celan’s early poems, *Schwarze
Flocken (Black Flakes)*, such a sorrowful associative fabric is already present, vibrant, in the form of a shawl that
the son waves through the text in order to inscribe in the body of the writing the trace of the maternal absence. The
metonymic chain of association allows us to see in the shawl also the blank page of a work yet to be written,
interlacing together loss, filiation, and poetry: “[...] Kind, ach ein Tuch, / mich zu hüllen darein, wenn es blinket
von Helmen, / wenn die Scholle, die rosige, birst, wenn schneeig stäubt das Gebein / deines Vaters, unter den
Hufen zerknirscht / das Lied von der Zeder... / Ein Tuch, ein Tüchlein nur schmal, daß ich wahre / nun, da zu
weinen du lernst, mir zur Seite / die Enge der Welt, die nie grünt, mein Kind, deinem Kinde!‘ // Blutete, Mutter,
der Herbst mir hinweg, brannte der Schnee mich: / Sucht ich mein Herz, daß es weine, fand ich den Hauch, ach
des Sommers, / war er wie du. / Kam mir die Träne. Webt ich das Tüchlein.“ [NKG, 19]. I refer here to Felstiner’s
translation in *Paul Celan. Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1995), 18-19: “[...] ‘[...]
Oh for a cloth, child, / to wrap myself when it’s flashing with helmets, / when the rosy floe bursts, when snowdrift
sifts your father’s / bones, hooves crushing / the Song of the Cedar . . . / A shawl, just a thin little shawl, so I keep
/ by my side, now you’re learning to weep, this anguish, / this world that will never turn green, my child, for your
child!’ // Autumn bled all away, Mother, snow burned me through: / I sought out my heart so it might weep, I
found—oh the summer’s breath, / it was like you. / Then came my tears. I wove the shawl.”

Transnistria, in which his parents were murdered, emerge and imbricate into that of a lacerated city, disseminated with ruins, where the wounds left by National socialism are still open and not as extensively obliterated by the process of monumentalization as in the years following the fall of the Wall. It is the city in which Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were assassinated in the night between January 15 and 16, 1919; the city of the *Kristallnacht*, which impressed his mark on Celan's *La Contrescarpe*; the city in which the Wannsee conference took place on January 20, 1942, and of the Plötzensee Prison, where the conspirators of July 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler were brutally executed. This complexity of elements at once temporal and spatial, semantic and affective coalesce into a creative frame, at once polychronic and polytopic, heterochronic and heterotopic: there, the poetic sets into motion.

Such enmeshed frame will play a crucial role for the material that Celan would compose while staying in Berlin. Of the total of four lyrics that the poet wrote from December 16 until December 29, I will consider here particularly three of them. The first one, in chronological order, is *Ungewaschen, unbemalt*, a poem actually written on the flight from Frankfurt to Berlin, on December 16:

UNGEWASCHEN, UNBEMALT,
in der Jenseits-
Kaue:

5 da,
 wo wir uns finden,
 Erdige, immer,

 ein
 verspätetes
 Becherwerk geht
10 durch uns Zerwölkte hindurch
 nach oben, nach unten,

 aufrührerisch
 flötets darin, mit Narren-
 beinen,

15 der Flugschatten im
 irisierenden Rund
 heilt uns ein, in der Sieben-
 höhe,

20 eiszeitlich nah
 steuert das Filzschwanenpaar
 durch die schwebende
 Stein-Ikone

[NKG, 485]⁴²⁷

⁴²⁷ “UNWASHED, UNPAINTED, / in Hereafter’s / pithead: // there / where we find ourselves / Earthy, always, // a / belated / bucket conveyor pierces / us cloudtorn / upward, downward, / // seditious / piping inside, on Fool’s / legs, // the flightshadow in / the iridescing round / heals us in, into seven- / heighth, // ice-age-close / the feltswan pair steers / through the hovering / stone-icon” [BT 321]

The second and third poems, *Du liegst* and *Lila Luft*, were written during the stay in the city, in the days immediately preceding Christmas' Eve—"Deux poèmes, dont un sur Karl Liebknecht et Rosa Luxemburg (assassinés ici le 16 janvier 1919)", Celan informs the wife Gisèle in a letter from December 23 [GCL 595]:

DU LIEGST im großen Gelausche,
umbuscht, umflockt.

5 Geh du zur Spree, geh zur Havel,
geh zu den Fleischerhaken,
zu den roten Äppelstaken
aus Schweden –

Es kommt der Tisch mit den Gaben,
er biegt um ein Eden –

10 Der Mann ward zum Sieb, die Frau
mußte schwimmen, die Sau,
für sich, für keinen, für jeden –

Der Landwehrkanal wird nicht rauschen.
Nichts
stockt. [NKG, 485-486]⁴²⁸

LILA LUFT mit gelben Fensterflecken,
der Jakobstab überm
Anhalter Trumm

5 Kokelstunde, noch nichts
Interkurrierendes,
vor der
Stehkneipe zur
Schneekneipe. [NKG, 486]⁴²⁹

The fourth poem, *Brunnengräber*, dated December 25, shall not be addressed here directly; I will return to it in the next paragraph, in order to develop my reading of the question of temporality in Celan's late poetry:

⁴²⁸ "YOU LIE in the great listening, / ambushed, snowed in. // Go to the Spree, go to the Havel, / go to the butcher hooks, / to the red apple stakes / from Sweden— // Here comes the table with the presents, / he turns around an Eden— // The man became a sieve, the woman / had to swim, the sow, / for herself, for none, for everyone— // The Landwehr canal will not roar / Nothing / stalls." [BT 323]

⁴²⁹ "LILAC AIR with yellow windowstains, // Orion's belt above the / Anhalter ruin, // flamehour, nothing / intercurrent yet, // from / standing bar to / snow bar." [BT 323, 325]

BRUNNENGRÄBER im Wind:

es wird einer die Bratsche spielen, tagabwärts, im Krug,
es wird einer kopfstehn im Wort Genug,
es wird einer kreuzbeinig hängen im Tor, bei der Winde.

5 Dies Jahr
rauscht nicht hinüber,
es stürzt den Dezember zurück, den November,
es gräbt seine Wunden um,
es öffnet sich dir, junger
10 Gräber-
brunnen,
Zwölfmund.

[NKG, 486-487]⁴³⁰

Let us notice how the reference to the winter landscape—and foremost: its representational kernel—persists, more or less explicitly, in all these texts (“eiszeitlich nah”; “umflockt”; “Schneekneipe”; “es stürzt den Dezember zurück, den November”). The title of the draft of *Du liegst* was originally *Winterreime* (*Winterrhyme*) before the author opted for a revision and changed the title in *Wintergedicht* (*Winterpoem*). Subsequently, the *Winter*-title were crossed off and corrected with date and place of composition. The final version of the text eventually presented only the incipit of the first verse in small capital letters, a common characteristic of Celan’s publications. Notably, another crucial element was corrected, or rather subtracted, during the composition of this particular text. An intermediate draft illustrating the development of the poem shows how the “I” of the subject (“*Ich lag im großen Gelausche*” [emphasis mine]) has been deleted. Instead of an “Ich,” a “Du” situates at the beginning of the poem, while the verb is conjugated in the present tense, rather than in the preterit [BCA, 10.2, 60-61].

The existing literature has extensively investigated the historical and genetical dimensions of these poems (particularly *Du liegst* and *Lila Luft*), reconstructing (along the lines of Szondi’s and Janz’s studies) their “process of crystallization” from the lived, attested experience [“bezeugtes Erlebnis”] to the text.⁴³¹ My main concern here is to explore the representational

⁴³⁰ “WELLDIGGER in the wind: // someone will play the viola, day downward, in the jug, / someone will stand on his head in the word Enough, / someone will hang crosslegged in the gateway, next to the winch. // This year / does not roar across, / it throws back December, November, / it turns up its wounds, / it opens up to you, young / grave- / well, twelvemouth.” [BT, 325, translation modified]

⁴³¹ Szondi, “Eden,” *Celan-Studien*, 115-116. Szondi’s and Janz’s works were instrumental in the reconstruction of Celan’s itinerary, the places he visited, his meetings, his readings, most notably the newly published study on the Luxemburg-Liebknicht assassination: Elisabeth Hannover-Drück und Heinrich Hannover (Hrsgg.), *Der Mord an Rosa Luxemburg und Karl Liebknecht, Dokumentation eines politischen Verbrechens* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967). Kelletat’s contribution on *Lila Luft* sheds light on important linguistic references that determined Celan’s lexical choices: Alfred Kelletat, “‘Lila Luft’—ein kleines Berlinense Paul Celans“ *Paul Celan. Text+Kritik*, 53/54, Hrsg. von H. L. Arnold (München: Text+Kritik, 1976, 18-25). And yet, as Szondi remarks, the question of the relationship between contextual and/or biographical knowledge and poem has to be considered carefully as well as critically, since Celan’s work does not create a private/documentary-like account, and neither a “topography of terror”.

processes which structure and link together *Ungewaschen, unbemalt, Du liegst*, and *Lila Luft*. These three poems form in my reading a cohesive, distinct unity, and for this reason I will focus on their intertextual relationships, on what do they *do* in representational terms, rather than confining to a separate analysis of each of them.

The choice of focusing on just three of the four poems written in Berlin—especially in the case of a poet such as Celan, whose poetry is characterized by a prominent intertextuality—is motivated by different factors. While all four poems were composed one after the other in a brief period of time, and occupy a relevant, inaugural position in *Schneepart* (as such, they open the late creative season of the poet as well as the very book), *Ungewaschen, unbemalt, Du liegst*, and *Lila Luft* belong to the few texts from that volume that were actually printed separately, as Celan was still alive, in a tribute to the German poet Peter Huchel.⁴³²

But there is another element that motivates my interest in reading these three poems together as parts, traces and fragments of a wider structural organization extending, indeed, to *Schneepart* as a whole. The poems articulate a progressive movement of subtraction and erosion of the subject, organising around the vicissitudes of a blank space, a vacancy left for the sake of another subjectivity which remains unfathomable, *in absentia*. In this dynamic it is possible to detect the traces of a work of the Negative emerging in the transformation of the *narcissistic structure of the subject into the narcissistic structure of the work*—more specifically, in the passage from the “death narcissism” of the creating subject into the “life narcissism” of the poetic *corpus*.

In the first chapter of this work, I covered Green’s expansion of the metapsychological role of narcissism—which represents a relatively brief, although highly relevant conceptual parenthesis in Freud’s thinking.⁴³³ Green rethinks this concept in the light of the second ‘topography,’ i.e., after Freud’s discovery and introduction of the death drive. To be sure, as Green remarks, a subtle link between narcissism and destructivity was foreshadowed in Freud’s work as the latter defined, for instance, melancholy as “an expression of a pure culture of the death drive.”⁴³⁴ The development of the concepts of “death narcissism” or “negative narcissism” was, however, one of Green’s most important achievements. The author summarizes it as follows:

⁴³² In that case, as we anticipated, the three poems were published with indication of place and date of composition, which was not kept in the final version, respectively: *Frankfurt am Main/Berlin. 16.12.1967 (Ungewaschen, unbemalt)*; *Berlin 22/23.12.1967 (Du liegst)*; *Berlin 23.12.1967 (Lila Luft)*. See Otto F. Best (Hrsg.), *Hommage für Peter Huchel* (München, Piper, 1968), 15-17. Peter Huchel – who from 1949 to 1962 was also chief editor of the influential review *Sinn und Form* – met Celan in October 1957 in Wuppertal, in occasion of a conference on the topic “Literary criticism – critically examined” [*Literaturkritik – kritisch betrachtet*] [GCL II, 507].

⁴³³ Green, N 10 ff.; LN, IX ff.

⁴³⁴ Green, LN, XI; Id., N 12.

Je me suis attaché à défendre l'idée que l'on ne peut valablement accepter la deuxième topique en faisant l'économie de la dernière théorie des pulsions. [...] En outre, il me semble que la cohérence théorique comme l'expérience clinique nous permettent de postuler l'existence d'un *narcissisme négatif*, double sombre de l'Éros unitaire du narcissisme positif, tout investissement d'objet, comme du Moi, impliquant son double inversé qui vise à un retour régressif au point zéro. [...] le narcissisme négatif va vers l'inexistence, l'anesthésie, le vide, le *blanc* (de l'anglais *blank*, qui se traduit par la catégorie du neutre), que ce blanc investisse l'affect (l'indifférence), la représentation (l'hallucination négative), la pensée (psychose blanche).⁴³⁵

In my reading, death narcissism offers a tool to consider from a new perspective the phantom of a *déliation subjectale* (“subjective unbinding”) unfolding through the creative process as a reverberation of what Green describes as the “atrophying effect on sexuality”⁴³⁶ of sublimation. In these terms, the ego of the writing subject falls prey to an unbinding process, a disinvestment, whose tendency is the point zero of subjectivity. What is peculiar in Celan’s case is that this radical disinvestment (disobjectalising process) of the subject, which we may consider as an attack on the cohesive forces of the ego, is at once outcome and counterpart of a powerful investment, of a form of *liaison objectale* directed towards the work. The objectalising function articulated through writing⁴³⁷ intervenes here putting the object—indeed, the writing, the poem—in a relationship of antagonism with regards to the ego of the author. Against the death narcissism oriented towards the writing subject, the life narcissism of the work reacts with a new structural cohesion, which is a product of transference.

Conversely, the life narcissism that marks the work makes of the latter a new self-sufficient, autonomous unity:⁴³⁸ the price for the affirmation of such autonomy is the renunciation to the relation with its ‘original’ object: the creator. This does not mean, however, that the work claims its absolutism detaching from the creative process, nor that *a* subject has entirely vanished. The survival of a subject by means the work is possible, although only at the condition that such subject persists as a vacancy around which the text organises. It is for this reason that, with Green, I call Celan’s work a “transnarcissistic object”.

⁴³⁵ Green, N, 41-42; Id., LN, 10: “I have attempted to defend the idea that one cannot legitimately accept the second topography while leaving the final drive theory to one side. [...] Moreover, it seems to me that, on the grounds of theoretical coherence, as well as clinical experience, we are justified in postulating the existence of a *negative narcissism*, the dark double of the unitary Eros of positive narcissism; all object or ego-cathexis containing within it its inverted double which aims at slipping back regressively towards the point zero. [...] Negative narcissism tends towards non-existence, anaesthesia, emptiness, the *blanc* (from the English ‘blank’ which refers to the category neuter); whether this blank cathects affect (indifference), representation, (negative hallucination) or thought (blank psychosis).” We shall return to the concept of *psychose blanche* in the last paragraph of this chapter.

⁴³⁶ Green, WoN, 238; TN, 328.

⁴³⁷ See Green, KI, 222: “The objectalising function is not [...] limited to the transformations of the object, but elevates psychic functions to the status of object, on the condition that they are always the vehicle of a *meaningful investment*. It is thus the investment itself which can be objectalized.”

⁴³⁸ Green, NP, 145.

The notion of a “transnarcissistic object” gives account of how writing becomes place of an investment through which the writing subject is exposed to its own erosion insofar as the latter prepares a new form of subjectivity fromwithin the text: the unreachable, aleatory object of the work. An object that does not belong to the author anymore, but rather offers a space of potential encounter with an otherness, elsewhere and elsewhen. We see here how sublimation proves itself to be a field of conflictual tensions between death drives and Eros, between objectalising and disobjectalising functions, whose intricacy is hosted in the work as poetic kernel.

In this regard, Celan’s intervention on the draft of *Du liegst*, most notably the effacement of the “Ich” towards the “Du,” is all the more relevant if we consider that on December 15, 1967 (the day before beginning his trip to Berlin) Celan drafted a testamentary note. In it, he wished to settle the question of his literary remnants, including the poems preceding the 1948 collection *Der Sand aus der Urnen*, as well as a huge body of translations from seven different languages.⁴³⁹ The note was written, significantly, in French: the other “mother-tongue” of his all-day life, a linguistic alterity of the language of his poetry, and idiom of the present affects (his wife Gisele, and his son Eric, for instance [GCL II, 8-12]). In these terms, the testamentary note is remarkable because it shows the expression of a *transfer of existence*⁴⁴⁰ as it unfolds on the page. The note reads:

45 rue d’Ulm / 15. 12. 67 // S’il m’arrivait quelque chose: / tout ce j’ai fait [sic] – le manuscrit / de ‘Schwarzmaut’ et les poèmes d’avant / ‘Der Sand aus den Urnen’ inclus, est à mon / Fils Eric. / Je souhaite qu’une édition de mes poèmes / et de mes traductions de poésie anglaise, russe, / française paraisse aux Editions Suhrkamp et / je prie Beda Allemann d’y apporter son aide et / son savoir. // Paul Celan [GCL I, 574]⁴⁴¹

If I decided to repropose here an explicit reference to a concept that we already addressed with regards to Kafka’s writing, it is not only because the *transfert d’existence* helps us to highlight a series of aspects of the narcissistic structure operating at the core of Celan’s writing. The *transfer of existence* acquires in his poetry a unicity, an intensity which is absent in Kafka’s work, due to the irreducibility of the respective circumstances that informed their works, and consequently of their respective stylistic peculiarities.

⁴³⁹ Published in Vienna by A. Saxl Verlag, *Der Sand aus der Urnen* was Celan’s first publication in German language. The book contained, however, so many misprints that the author decided to withdraw the remaining copy from the market. Until the publication of the critical edition, the collection as such was never reprinted in its original form. Poems from *Der Sand aus der Urnen*, including *Todesfuge*, were eventually republished in the homonymous section in *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (1952).

⁴⁴⁰ Cfr. Green, D, 314 ff.

⁴⁴¹ “If something happens to me: / everything that I have written—including the manuscript / of ‘Schwarzmaut’ and the poems before / ‘Der Sand aus den Urnen’—belongs to / my son Eric. / I wish that an edition of my poems / and of my translations of poems from English, Russian, / and French appears with Suhrkamp publishing house / and I beg Beda Allemann to contribute to it with his help and knowledge. // Paul Celan”.

If we were willing to see in Kafka's work a 'sacrificial' dimension intimately intertwined with the question of writing,⁴⁴² in Celan's case this is not possible anymore. And yet, Celan's testamentary note is anything but the utterance of an "irremediably sick man"⁴⁴³ affected by "persecution mania,"⁴⁴⁴ or the alleged proof of the premeditation of a future suicide.⁴⁴⁵ Quite on the contrary, this brief text allows us to see Celan's last creative season from the point of view of an objectalising function which invests poetic writing as the only thing keeping Celan alive. Poetry is Celan's rigour and discipline: a chance and an unbearable burden at the same time. It is not only a form of testimony and survival, but also a form of organisation of a subjectivity who has lost everything and whose origin has turned into ashes. If there is any sacrifice in Celan, that 'sacrifice' already took place: his poetry comes after, but there is no 'after' Auschwitz for the author of such poetry. The poem gives Celan a *forma mentis*, a form of structuring of the psyche. Poetry is what enables the subject to stay in the world as *a limit* of the world, as a remnant which is all that remains of Auschwitz: a remnant which is intolerable for the West—a subject to exorcise, hospitalize, and label as "paranoid" and "sick."

It is in this sense, that Celan's poetry has nonetheless a high ethical value, because it is an extreme form of exposition of the destruction of a subjectivity which, in spite of all, takes place through poetry. The objectalising function that Celan's poetry expresses is, as suggested by the title of the present paragraph, a radical 'being for poetry' which stems from destruction, but capable of creating life, poetry indeed: a 'being for poetry,' which is projected in a transgenerational tension.⁴⁴⁶

As we may recall, the *transfer of existence* is explored by Green in the wider context of a meditation on the relationship between *body* and *being* from a psychoanalytic standpoint. The concept of 'being' is not present in Freud's conceptual repertory—just as the verb "I am" is syntactically absent in Hebrew. Only with the works of Lacan and especially Winnicott it is introduced in the psychoanalytic terminology.⁴⁴⁷ It is therefore important to clarify once more the concept of 'being' in psychoanalysis as profoundly different to that forged by Martin

⁴⁴² A 'sacrificial dimension' that, nonetheless, ought to be considered from the point of view of a christological sacrifice, but rather from the point of view of the *Akedat Yitzhak* (the "Binding of Isaac"). It is precisely the "binding," the relationship with literature and with the creative act which is here prominently involved.

⁴⁴³ So Heidegger on Celan in occasion of a public reading in Freiburg in March 1970. Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, 282.

⁴⁴⁴ See Lyon, "Judentum, Antisemitismus, Verfolgungswahn."

⁴⁴⁵ In these terms, I disagree with Hans-Michael Speier, who reads it as if attesting the "Umgekommen-Sein" of the author—as if Celan's last poems were speaking in a voice from "the other side," or from afterlife. See Hans-Michael Speier, "Paul Celan, Dichter einer neuen Wirklichkeit. Studien zu 'Schneepart' (I)," *Celan-Jahrbuch* 1, Hrsg. von H.-M. Speier, (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1987), 65-79, here 65-66.

⁴⁴⁶ Michael G. Levine, in *A Weak Messianic Power: Figures of a Time to Come in Benjamin, Derrida, and Celan* (New York: Fordham University Press), 2014, 97-123, has attempted a reading of the motive of sacrifice in Celan, most notably articulated in the relationship to poetry and his son Eric.

⁴⁴⁷ Green, D, 314.

Heidegger. The former puts the accent on a process of development that cannot be foreshadowed nor exhausted, as signalled by the verbal form in the present continuous, and whose origin is lost, *untraceable*. Lyotard grasped this radical alterity between the Heidegger's *Sein* and Celan's 'being for poetry' by reflecting on the question of the "oblivion of being," as he wrote: "'Celan' n'est ni le commencement ni la fin de Heidegger, c'est son manque: ce qui lui manque, ce qu'il manque, et dont le manque lui manque."⁴⁴⁸ The psychoanalytic 'being' is not only a "être se faisant ou en train de se faire"⁴⁴⁹ but also the gift, and the property [in the sense of *feature*: "propriété"] of another: the mother. The psychoanalytic 'being,' incorporating creativity as its crucial characteristic, implies that the 'being of a subject' cannot be conceived other than by reflecting on its inseparability with the object relation. We do not only 'create' objects,⁴⁵⁰ nor simply are we in turn affected and modelled by the objects we create and find, and from the relationships we establish with them. The object survives the subject in that it 'objectifies' (i.e., makes an object of) the creation of a structural matrix of subjectivity. As such, the object is not something that the subject simply 'possesses,' nor is it reduceable to the horizon of expectations of subjective projections. The object must be conceived in the sense of a radical, opaque, irreducible alterity.

As we know, for Green, the work is the result of a *transfer of existence* in that "the question of the existence of the work of art—in which [the] most essential narcissism [of the creator] is invested—comes before everything, up to and including that which within the psychic apparatus is subject to the instinct of self-preservation."⁴⁵¹ In Celan's case, that does not only mean that the poetic work becomes, literally, more important than the very life of the writing subject. Celan's last will denote a shift in the psychic economy, in favour of a fundamental dedication to his own poetry, towards the demand of the work to be, to exist, and outlive its creator.

Such a demand, however, is not for poetry's sake only. Green reminds us that the *transfert d'existence*, while representing a shape [*figure*] of the work of the Negative, also incarnates a form of love whose intensity can be compared only to that of the mother for the child. Poetry, for Celan, is the space opened by the severing of the generational bond and the place of its (im)possible rebinding. In this sense, it is accidental that Celan chooses to name his son Eric as

⁴⁴⁸ Lyotard, *Heidegger et les "juifs,"* 153. See Id. *Heidegger and "the jews,"* translation by A. Michel and M. S. Roberts. Foreword by D. Carroll (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 94: "'Celan' is neither the beginning nor the end of Heidegger; it is his lack: what is missing in him, what he misses, and whose lack he is lacking."

⁴⁴⁹ Green, D, 314.

⁴⁵⁰ I use here the verb "to create" in a wider sense, of which literary creation is a more specific connotation. See Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 87-114.

⁴⁵¹ Green, D, 314.

heir and guardian of his poetic filiation⁴⁵²— of what he has *done* through poetry, as we read in the testamentary note.⁴⁵³ On the one hand, while throwing a retrospective, vigilant gaze upon his work⁴⁵⁴ (a work which remains, as a whole, still invisible, because “yet to come”) the poet seems to evoke, with Eric Celan, a new possible generation of readers, towards whom poetry is “underway”—as the poet wrote in his *Meridian* speech: “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?*“ [GW III, 198] Conversely, by handing and entrusting his work to his son (who, significantly, did not speak German) Celan wants in a way to ensure the survival of his work as an object unbounded by the destiny of the writing subject, who has nonetheless dedicated any possible resource, every drop of life, to give form to it. The ‘being’ of the subject has been transformed and transferred upon the body of the work, from which, however, the writing subject as such, has no access. This bitter, sometimes sardonic ambivalence is particularly prominent in Celan’s late writings. As Ulisse Dogà eloquently illustrated, his late poetry is characterized by a shift from the aleatory hope inscribed in the poem towards a threatening, corrosive sarcasm.⁴⁵⁵ Yet, in spite of all, Celan’s poetry attempts to stand, to expose itself, to be ‘underway,’ and to survive as a form of rigorous resistance within and through language.

Let us notice that the terminological constellation we just mentioned—the “gaze”, the “vigilant look upon the work”; the “solitariness of the poem”—leads us, again, to the core of the conceptual field of narcissism in its entanglement with the *transfer of existence*. Through the *transfer of existence*, the gaze of the ego of the subject is not reflected anymore in the mirror of the waters, like in the myth of Narcissus, but confronted with “the invisible shadow of the subject’s image,” that very “empty structure” [“appareil vide”],⁴⁵⁶ which the work creates. In Celan’s words: “Das Gedicht entsteht durch den Umgang mit einem uns {U}unsichtbar bleibenden: im Umgang mit der Sprache.” “The poem emerges through the dealing with something that to us remains invisible: in the dealing with the language” [M, 105] We could say that the work occupies, in this case, the space of scopic perception—without which narcissism is unthinkable⁴⁵⁷—, the written page taking the place of the mirroring image of the

⁴⁵² Green, D, 316.

⁴⁵³ Cfr. also Celan’s letter to his wife dated 14.1.1970 [GCL I, 687] to which we shall return in the closing paragraph.

⁴⁵⁴ Green, D, 314: “Le regard sur l’œuvre est le véritable père de celle-ci, en tant qu’il la légitime et reconnaît cet autre parent qui est son créateur immanent.” “The gaze upon the work of art is the real father of that, insofar as it legitimizes it and recognizes that other genitor who is its immanent creator.”

⁴⁵⁵ See Ulisse Dogà, *Der Entreimte: über Paul Celans Spätwerk* (Aachen: Rimbaud, 2007) and more recently Id. *Un tempo altro, estraneissimo*, 79 ff.

⁴⁵⁶ Green, D, 62.

⁴⁵⁷ And that, both on a genetic as well as conceptual level; see Green, LN, 4-5.

subject, whose monadic, unitary, indeed narcissistic tension is transferred on the work, with its unicity and stylistic peculiarities.

Also in this sense, the work represents a transnarcissistic object, for the structural features of the unity and cohesion of the subject are transferred and reorganised in a different form through the creative work. In this reorganization of narcissistic structures entailed in the work of writing, through which the textual matrix takes the place of the reflecting surface, we can also detect a transformation of the narcissistic object into a new special category of object: a “transitional cultural object.” This in turn creates a new liminal space, at the border between presence and absence, internal and external, at once to be searched, created, and found.⁴⁵⁸ In it, not the ego of the author becomes target of a powerful libidinal investment, but rather the “representation of the absence of representation” of another subjectivity emerging from the text: the subject of the work, “Etwas aus *meinem* / und *keinerlei* Stoff.” [NKG, 494, emphasis mine]

Green summarizes this point eloquently, as he writes:

Tout écrivain est pris entre le double et l'absent: le double qu'il est en tant qu'écrivain, qui donne à voir une autre image de lui-même (auteur presque anagramme d'autre) est dans un autre monde; il est absent, celui qui émerge du silence et retourne au silence, aussi essentiel à la constitution de l'œuvre que le précédent.⁴⁵⁹

The meta-representational traces of this intricated narcissistic conflict between ‘transitivity’ (*liaison objectal* proper of the work) and ‘intransitivity’ (*déliation subjectal* attacking the creating subject) emerge with peculiar intensity in Celan’s Berlin poems. The erosion of the subject is, in this sense, instrumental to the preparation of a new corporeity of the poetic, which becomes fabric apt to the reception of a multiplicity of phantasmatic interferences and spectral traces.⁴⁶⁰

It is in such terms that we can reconsider, for example, the two final verses of *Du liegst*: “Nichts / stockt.” First, let us notice that the term “Nothing,” *Nichts*, can be understood not only as an adverb, but also as a substantive:⁴⁶¹ this *Nichts* stands for the name of an absence which “stagnates,” “thickens,” “arrests” on the page between veiling and unveiling. If we are willing to read *Du liegst* by paying particular attention to the vertical tension created between the first

⁴⁵⁸ Let us recall, with Green, that the concept of narcissism cannot “be thought about and interpreted in isolation while neglecting object relations and the general problem of the ego’s relations with the erotic and destructive libido.” Cit. Green, LN, XIII; Id., N, 14.

⁴⁵⁹ Cit. Green D, 62; Id. PM, 326: “Any writer is caught between the double and the absent: the double that he is, as a writer who produces another image of himself (*author* being almost an anagram of *other*), exists in another world, and he is absent, he who emerges from silence and returns to silence. His absence is as essential to the constitution of the work as is his duality.” [translation modified f.c.]

⁴⁶⁰ See also Anders Olsson, “Spectral Analysis. A commentary on ‘Solve’ and ‘Coagula,’” *Word Traces*, 267-279.

⁴⁶¹ See here also Emmerich, *Nahe Fremde*, 261-263.

verse “Du liegst im großen Gelausche” (“You lie in the great listening”) and the last two “Nichts / stockt,” we may conceive the body of this lyric as a sort of spatial and temporal fabric capable of intercepting remnants and only remnants of memory—vestiges of an irreducible alterity. Thus, the word “Gelausche”—a deverbal noun deriving from *lauschen* and reinforced by the prefix *ge-* (and which means “to listen with great, tense attention, in such a way that no sound or word may be lost”)⁴⁶²—operates in the text. It represents a sort of ‘sensorial organ’ of the body of the poetic. Such alertness, such readiness oriented towards the unexpected interception of traces is but one of the elements that structure the poem.

If we consider once more the drafts of the text, we can also see that the final verse read, in a first stage of development: “Du stockst.”, before being replaced by “Was stockt”; and eventually corrected in “Nichts stockt” (the two words divided by and *enjambement*) [BCA 10.2, 61]. The composition of the poem carries the traces of the very process of sublimation that allowed it to be on the page as such: proceeding, subtraction after subtraction, from an open Alterity (“Du”) to open questions (“Was”), towards absences that remain absences (“Nichts / stockt”), literally “representation of the absence of representation.” The price to host such traces is precisely the erosion of the subject that we attempted to envisage with Green: the effacement of an *Ich* in order to make space for a thirdness, a *Du* which is “double” and “absent,” to use Green’s words in *Le double et l’absent*.⁴⁶³ A double and absent one listening, in alert, there where the silence of History leaves no witness.

Notoriously, many scholars have identified in the final verses of this poem a fairly precise reference to one of the closing scenes of Georg Büchner’s drama *Danton’s Tod*. In the light of these remarks, the words “Alles stockt” pronounced by Lucille in this scene right after assisting to the public decapitation of Danton may acquire a new, unexpected value:

LUCILE.

Es ist doch was wie Ernst darin.

Ich will einmal nachdenken. Ich fange an so was zu begreifen. Sterben – Sterben –

Es darf ja Alles leben, Alles, die kleine Mücke da, – der Vogel. Warum denn er nicht? Der Strom des Lebens müßte stocken, wenn nur der eine Tropfen verschüttet würde. Die Erde müßte eine Wunde bekommen von dem Streich.

Es regt sich Alles, die Uhren gehen, die Glocken schlagen, die Leute laufen, das Wasser rinnt uns so so Alles weiter bis da, dahin – nein! es darf nicht geschehen, nein – ich will mich auf den Boden setzten und schreien, daß erschrocken Alles stehn bleibt, Alles stockt, sich nichts mehr regt.

(*Sie setzt sich nieder, verhüllt sich die Augen und stößt einen Schrei aus. Nach einer Pause erhebt sie sich.*)

⁴⁶² “lauschen” auf *Duden online*, URL: <https://www.duden.de/node/150706/revision/1288627> (Abrufdatum 26.05.2022)

⁴⁶³ Green, D, 43-67.

Das hilft nichts, da ist noch Alles wie sonst, die Häuser, die Gasse, der Wind geht, die Wolken ziehen. – Wir müssen's wohl leiden.⁴⁶⁴

The possible reference to this extract from *Danton's Tod* has, in my reading, a powerful meta-textual, meta-poetic role, for it makes us feel the weight, the necessity of literary creation, and the intensity of its demand. By writing poetry, and by keeping writing it, Celan does not accept to succumb to the murderers and to the devastation of History. The poem has to survive, the poem has to be written, in spite of what erodes and consumes the body of the subject. The poem, foremost, has to carry within this remnant, this unbound element of representation as the glowing kernel of its own 'being.' Such kernel, such *uncreatable (incréable)* has to be kept alive for it is what keeps alive the poet. Poetry thus is not simply life, destiny, but life's endeavour and creation of a destiny. "Wir müssen's wohl leiden" reads Lucille's closing sentence: "Die Welt ist fort, ich muss dich tragen" [NKG, 214] answers Celan's poetry: "The world is gone, I have to carry you." [BT, 97] Celan encloses in just one verse the unfinishable process of transformation of the *Nichts* that the Shoah left in the subject to the *Nichts* that lie at the core of the poem, around which the poem organises itself, attempting a response to destruction, in order to remain 'underway.'

What remains of the creature in all this? What remains of the dead? Can we still read Büchner's lines under the sign of Auschwitz and of the Shoah with the same lightness of the one who knows that, once the book is closed, these words will not come to haunt us?

Never in his lifetime, and most notably at this stage of his life, could Celan have afforded such lightness. Indelibly marked by the signs of the Shoah, his poetry had to carry an arrest, a hiatus within time, to which nonetheless time, and humanity, in a way, survived, and kept flowing. "Das Gedicht als das sich buchstäblich zu-Tode-Sprechende"—so reads a note from the materials of *The Meridian* [M, 113]. This quote, "The poem as that which speaks itself literally to death," poses the question whether the torments of Celan's last creative years may lay in the awareness of "speaking himself to death," through writing, in order to give form to poetry. To be sure, much was at stake in this writing: at his own's life risk, Celan's poetry represented more and more that dangerously lasting "Kokelstunde"—that "hour, in which one

⁴⁶⁴ Büchner, *Danton's Tod* in *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, 150-151: "There must be something serious in it though. I want to think about that. I'm beginning to understand such things. Dying—dying! —Everything has the right to live, everything, this little fly here—that bird. Why not he? The stream of life would have to stagnate if even a drop were spilt. The earth would suffer a wound from such a blow. —Everything moves on, clocks tick, bell peal, people go, water flows, and so on and on to—no, it mustn't happen, no, I want to sit on the ground and scream, that all things remain still in fear, that everything stops, that nothing moves anymore. (She sits on the ground, covers her eyes and screams. After a short break she rises.) It doesn't help, everything is as always, the houses, the streets, the wind blows, the cloud pass. —We must bear it."

plays with fire”⁴⁶⁵—that the subject enters, unable to do otherwise, in order to testify for life, to prepare by means of writing the possibility of a form of memory, even if it were just for a “noch nichts / Interkurrierendes”—a “nothing yet / intercurring.” This “nothing,” this *Nichts* is perhaps the rest of a subject invested by the death narcissism and transformed into a vacant, white space of the work and at work to articulate a “bounding of the unbound.” A nothing, to be sure, but nonetheless “intercurring.”

In German, however, *Interkurrent* does not allude only to the ‘intercurring of something,’ or to the ‘presence of an interference.’ In medical sciences, *Interkurrent* is a technical term that translates the so called *morbus intercurrents*, referring to those illnesses which manifest themselves during the treatment of another condition. In this mesh of associations we can detect, I claim, that ‘illness,’ that ‘condition’ of the destructive drives that the human inevitably harbours despite all the attempts of liberation and the promises of beauty that sublimation seems to convey.

Green writes:

*Le travail du négatif ne concernera pas désormais l'activité psychique telle qu'on peut l'imaginer hors des aspects positifs de la conscience, il choisira comme enjeu la relation à l'objet pris entre les feux croisés des pulsions de destruction d'une part, de vie et d'amour de l'autre. Le travail du négatif se résume alors à une question: comment, face à la destruction qui menace toute chose, trouver une issue au désir de vivre et d'aimer? Et réciproquement, comment interpréter tout résultat du travail du négatif qui habite ce conflit fondamental: le dilemme qui nous saisit entre l'enclume de la satisfaction absolue dont l'omnipotence et le masochisme sont les témoins, et le marteau du renoncement dont la sublimation serait une issue possible?*⁴⁶⁶

It is thus here that the “endgame” of Celan’s last creative season takes place: in an unsolvable conflict that situates at the heart of the process of sublimation and radically puts it into question. Celan’s sublimation does not “poeticize” or “romanticize,” but inscribes on the page a conflict that does not cease to call us upon, today more than ever: far from reducing to a private dimension, Celan’s poems touch the depths, the reasons and the contradictions lying at the heart of Western culture—that which made Auschwitz possible.

⁴⁶⁵ See Kelleter’s eloquent explanation of the verb “kokeln”, characteristic of Berlin’s dialect, in “‘Lila Luft’—ein kleines Berolinense Paul Celans.” 20-21 and ff.

⁴⁶⁶ Green, TN, 255; WoN, 185: “*The work of the negative will no longer involve psychical activity as it can be imagined independently of the positive aspects of consciousness; it will concern itself with the relation to the object caught in the cross-fire of the destructive drives on the one hand, and the life or love drives on the other. The work of the negative thus comes down to one question: how, faced with the destruction which threatens everything, can a way be found for desire to live and love? And reciprocally, how should we interpret the results of the work of the negative which inhabits this fundamental conflict, i.e., the dilemma which we are caught in between the anvil of absolute satisfaction, to which omnipotence and masochism bear witness, and the hammer of renunciation for which sublimation is a possible outcome?*”

Celan resided in Paris from 1948 until his death and returned to visit Germany on many occasions for meetings and public readings. For the first time in almost thirty years on his way back to Berlin, towards the nerve centre of the annihilation machinery of the Third Reich, what could a poet such as Celan find, if not the vertiginous absence of an entire people, of a vanished world? Again: absence of traces which become traces of an absence.

“Kein schöner Land in dieser Zeit / als hier das unsre weit und breit, / *wo wir uns finden* wohl untern Linden / zur Abendzeit“ [emphasis mine]. So reads the first stanza of a popular song belonging to the canon of German’s *Volkslieder*—as collected and edited by Anton Wilhelm von Zuccalmaglio.⁴⁶⁷ According to Barbara Wiedemann, this *Lied* is quoted, with bitter sarcasm, in the poem Celan composed on the flight from Paris to West Berlin, *Ungewaschen, unbemalt*. However, the parodic reference to this popular song does not stop there: “in dieser Zeit” in Zuccalmaglio’s *Abendlied* is converted in a “Jenseits- / Kaue”, rendered by Joris as “pithead:” in German, this term means “Gebäude über der Schachtöffnung eines Bergwerks” (“pithead,” indeed). It identifies the structure in which miners change and wash themselves after finishing their shift. If we also consider that the German term *Kaue* derives from the Middle High German *kouwe*, in turn deriving from the Latin *cavea* (“hollow”; “cave”; “cage”; “dig”), we can see how the poem unfolds in front of us, as we read it, like a cavity, a mouth of an abyss, in which something or someone is confined, “unwashed” and “unpainted” or “unembellished.”⁴⁶⁸ While we can recognize recurrent features of Celan’s poetic landscape, a particular element seems not to appear anywhere else in the work of the author:

[...]
 ein
 verspätetes
 Becherwerk geht
 10 durch uns Zerwölkte hindurch
 nach oben, nach unten,
 [...]

⁴⁶⁷ Anton Wilhelm von Zuccalmaglio, *Deutsche Volkslieder mit ihren Original-Weisen*. Zweiter Theil (Berlin: Vereins-Buchhandlung, 1840), 494 f. See also Waltraud Linder-Beroud und Tobias Widmaier, “Kein schöner Land in dieser Zeit.“ In *Populäre und traditionelle Lieder. Historisch-kritisches Liederlexikon*. URL: <http://www.liederlexikon.de/lieder/kein_schoener_land_in_dieser_zeit/>. Abrufdatum: 24.05.2022.

⁴⁶⁸ The preparatory notes that Celan took before the composition of the text allowed the reconstruction of many relevant details concerning the frame of reference of the poem. Such is the case of the allusion to the open cast coal mines in Fulda and Eisenach, over which Celan’s plane flew, and that the poet could see from the plane through the layers of clouds; or the hint at a white “Filzschwanenpaar” steering and navigating through a stone-icton, which seems to have been inspired by the visit of an exposition with the title *L’Art russe des scythes à nos jours* (Russian Art from the Scythians to our Days) at the end of November 1967. See NKG, 1132-1133.

Becherwerk: a bucket conveyor, used in the mines in order to transport extracted bulk material from one place to the other. Such *Becherwerk* communicating upwards and downwards and piercing through “us cloudborn,” ‘we, those reduced, disintegrated to clouds,’ represents the backbone along which Celan’s poems (and his poetry) meta-poetically work. Such a device, so unexpectedly embedded almost at the centre of the poem, connects subterranean dimensions with higher ones, extracting and exchanging materials, interferences, unburied spectres. There, between the deepest depths of the poem, and the most sublime highs of the poetic: something, an “empty structure,” moves, operates, communicate. Despite its belatedness [verspätet], or perhaps precisely because of that.

3.3 “Another Time.” Temporality and the Work of the Negative

L'inconscient ignore le temps, mais le conscient ignore que l'inconscient ignore le temps; il ignore même que le temps à sa portée est misérablement pauvre.

André Green⁴⁶⁹

[...] die Dinge im Gedicht haben etwas von solchen “letzten“ Dingen [...] könnten, man weiß es nie, die “letzten“ Dinge sein [...].

Paul Celan [M, 56]⁴⁷⁰

The conceptual prism of narcissism developed by André Green has enabled us to pinpoint a series of features of the Negative in Celan's late *Nachlass*. Specifically, an analysis of the “intricacies” (Green) between negative narcissism and positive narcissism, objectalising and disobjectalising functions, death drive and sublimation has allowed us to shed new light on the relation that the creating subject develops with the work. It has become evident, however, that an investigation of the work of the Negative in Celan's poetry would reveal itself unsatisfactory if we fail to consider another capital matter: *the question of temporality*. This has emerged since the very early pages of the previous paragraph through the contextualization of the poems that Celan wrote in Berlin in late December 1967, namely as we evoked the heterochronic and polychronic fabric of affective, semantic, and temporal layers overlapping in the texts.

Poetry and, more broadly speaking, what Balsamo calls the “area of the poetic,” opens and creates a new particular relation with time, liberating it from the hinges of a linear, vectorial homogeneity.⁴⁷¹ Poetry is, on its own, a venture through and within the depths of time(s), in constant tension with the linearity and verticality of written language. Entailing linguistic and extra-linguistic elements, known and unknown, representation and irrepresentability, subject and object, the relation between poetry and time does not only express a crucial feature of the creative dimension whereby the “area of the poetic” foreshadows “analytic and systematic thinking.” It also implies a “heterogeneity of signification” that is proper to poetic language: a “surplus of sense” which goes beyond the object and the subject of the creative act.⁴⁷² This residual dimension of signification ought to be conceived in terms of a temporal virtuality of the poetic: a structural arborescence which is congenitally *polysemic as well as polychronic*. To

⁴⁶⁹ Green, TE, 51: “The unconscious ignores time, *but the conscious ignores that the unconscious ignores time*; it also ignores that the time within its reach is miserably poor.”

⁴⁷⁰ “The things in the poem have something of these ‘last’ things [...] they could be, one never knows, the ‘last’ things.”

⁴⁷¹ Maurizio Balsamo, “Il campo del ‘poetico’ nelle situazioni limite della cura analitica.” *Rivista di psicoanalisi*, 2014, LX (2), 295-316.

⁴⁷² Balsamo, “Il campo del ‘poetico,’” 267.

be sure, that does not simply pertain interpretation but, most importantly, the power of the work to address an otherness in space and time: an otherness within—within the author, the work, the reader—and which the very work gives shape to. We have discussed some features of such “temporal generative potentiality”⁴⁷³ in our analysis of Kafka’s last text *Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse* (1924), specifically by reading *a posteriori* what we have referred to as the “negative event” of Kafka’s ‘failed’ fantasy of emigrating to Palestine. Celan’s case, however, compels us to take a step further by considering temporality in light of the specific challenges that his poetry poses not only to the reader, but to poetry itself: indeed, by putting the accent on that *other time—i.e., other forms of temporality*—which, as I maintain, Celan’s poetry dictates and invites us to read.

The question of temporality is not simply one among others for Celan, but in its own right it represents, we may say, a ‘meridian’ of his work.⁴⁷⁴ This association, although partially misleading at first, is by no means accidental. If Celan’s poetics and poetry are notoriously characterized by a series of spatial references, as it is the case for the “meridian,” it is also true that this spatial dimension—no matter how evanescent, untraced and untraceable on a geographic map [M, 12]—conceals a complex relation with temporality.⁴⁷⁵ It is in fact in an intertwining of affective, linguistic, and indeed, temporal aspects that the meridian acquires its elusive materiality: in the imponderable, abyssal distance it allows to measure as inscription of an absence, as trace which acquires body and range, poem after poem, throughout the work. As much as what we named Celan’s “being for poetry,” the meridian escapes ontological categories, for it constitutes a virtual structure of the work, at once *in fieri* and *in statu nascendi*. In this sense, many preparatory notes for *Der Meridian* remind us that, albeit camouflaged under the guise of ‘space,’ the question of time haunts Celan’s poetry in manifold ways.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷³ Green, AC, 22.

⁴⁷⁴ A considerable body of literature has already explored this topic, shedding light on its possible theological and philosophical sources (Meister Eckart, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger) and implications, and emphasizing explicit or implicit recurrences throughout the *corpus* of the author. Among others: Axel Gellhaus, “Das Datum des Gedichts. Textgeschichte und Geschichtlichkeit des Textes bei Celan,” Gellhaus, Axel, und Lohr, Andreas (Hrsgg.), *Lesarten. Beiträge zum Werk Paul Celans*. Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1996, 177-196; Sandro Zanetti, “Zeitoffen.“ *Zur Chronographie Paul Celans* (Stuttgart: Fink Verlag, 2006); Manuel Maldonado-Alemán. “Niemand zeugt für den Zeugen”. *Temporalidad y memoria en la poesía de Paul Celan.* *Revista de Filología Alemana*, July 24, 2016, 103-122; Inga Bartkuvienė, “Abejoti dėl laiko. Belaikiškumas vėlyvojoje Paulio Celano kūryboje,” [“Disbelief about the time. Timelessness in the late works of Paul Celan”] *Literatūra*, vol. 61(4) (Vilnius: Vilnius University Press, 2009), 27–43; Adam Lipszyc, “The Time of the Poem. Poetry as Messianic Action in Paul Celan’s *Meridian*.” *Bamidbar. Journal for Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 2,2, 2012, 57-74; Levine, *A Weak Messianic Power*, 97-123; Leonard Olschner, “‘Tief / in der Zeiteinschrunde:’ Reading Time in Paul Celan’s Poetics,” *German Life and Letters* 73:4 October 2020, 642-658; Dogà, *Un tempo altro, estraneissimo*, 79-113; Camilla Miglio, *Ricerca per verba. Paul Celan e la musica della materia*, (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2022).

⁴⁷⁵ Jacques Derrida already noticed that in *Schibboleth pour Paul Celan*, Galilée, 1986, 25. See also Olschner. “‘Tief / in der Zeiteinschrunde,’” 642-658.

⁴⁷⁶ See for instance the section of materials with the title *Das Gedicht als Sprach-Gitter* in *M*, 99-107.

Temporality is far from being limited to a mere thematic thread either. In fact, it ought to be read, I claim, according to that *semantic relevance* [*semantische Relevanz*] that Celan so perceptively grasped in resonance with the poetry of Osip Mandelstam. In his radio-essay *Die Dichtung Ossip Mandelstamms* (a coeval text with *Der Meridian*) broadcasted on March 19, 1960, on Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR), Celan writes:

1. *Sprecher*: Diese Gedichte sind die Gedichte eines Wahrnehmenden und Aufmerksamen, dem Erscheinenden Zugewandten, das Erscheinende Befragenden und Ansprechenden; sie sind *Gespräch*. Im Raum dieses Gesprächs konstituiert sich das Angesprochene, vergegenwärtigt es sich, versammelt es sich um das es ansprechende und nennende Ich. Aber in diese Gegenwart bringt das Angesprochene und durch Nennung gleichsam zu Du Gewordene sein Anders- und Fremdsein mit. Noch im Hier und Jetzt des Gedichts, noch in dieser seiner Unmittelbarkeit und Nähe läßt sich es seine Ferne mitsprechen, bewahrt es das ihm Eigenste: seine Zeit.

2. *Sprecher*: Es ist dieses Spannungsverhältnis der Zeiten, der eigenen und der fremden, das dem mandelstamm'schen Gedicht jenes schmerzlich-stumme Vibrato verleiht, an dem wir es erkennen. (Dieses Vibrato ist überall: in den Intervallen zwischen den Worten und den Strophen, in den Höfen, in denen die Reime und die Assonanzen stehen, in der Interpunktion. All das hat semantische Relevanz. Die Dinge treten zueinander, aber noch in diesem Beisammen spricht die Frage nach ihrem Woher und Wohin mit – eine "offenbleibende", "zu keinem Ende kommende", ins Offene und Besetzbare, ins Leere und Freie weisende Frage.

1. *Sprecher*: Diese Frage realisiert sich nicht nur in der "Thematik" der Gedichte; sie nimmt auch – und ebendadurch wird sie zum "Thema" – in der Sprache Gestalt an: das Wort – der Name! – zeigt eine Neigung zum Substantivischen, das Beiwort schwindet, die "infiniten", die *Nominalformen* des Zeitworts herrschen vor: das Gedicht bleibt *zeitoffen*, Zeit kann hinzutreten, Zeit *partizipiert*. [M, 216]⁴⁷⁷

Precisely such "tension" between different times, such "openness" towards time leading towards the "empty" and the "free", is the focus of this paragraph. My analysis will not be confined, however, to different tenses or linguistic time forms, nor simply to rhythmical or prosodic features of versification, but also considers omissions, textual blank spaces, and erasures. In my reading, these elements are vestiges of the process of structuration of the poem,

⁴⁷⁷ See Paul Celan, *The Meridian: Final Version – Drafts – Materials*, edited by B. Böschstein and H. Schmall, translated and with a preface by P. Joris (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 216: "1. *Speaker*: These poems are the poems of someone who is perceptive and attentive, someone turned toward what becomes visible, someone addressing and questioning: these poems are a *conversation*. In the space of this conversation the addressed constitutes itself, becomes present, gathers itself around the I that addresses and names it. But the addressed, through naming, as it were, becomes a you, brings its otherness and strangeness into this present. Yet even in the here and now of the poem, even in this immediacy and nearness it lets its distance have its say too, it guards what is most its own: its time. // 2. *Speaker*: It is this tension of the times, between its own and the foreign, which lends that pained-mute vibrato to a Mandelstam poem by which we recognize it. (This vibrato is everywhere: in the interval between the words and the stanza, in the 'courtyards' where rhymes and assonances stand, in the punctuation. All this has *semantic relevance*.) Things come together, yet even in this togetherness the question of their Wherefrom and Whereto resounds – a question that 'remains open,' that 'does not come to any conclusion,' and points to the open and catheaxable, into the empty and the free. // 1. *Speaker*: This question is realized not only in the 'thematics' of the poems; it also takes shape in the language – and that's why it becomes a 'theme' – : the word – the name! – shows a preference for noun-forms, the adjective becomes rare, the 'infinitives,' the *nominal forms* of the verb dominate: the poem remains *open to time*, time can join in, time *participates*."

emerging as affective traces of that ‘wounded life’ that Celan’s poetry did not cease to testify for and to construct, verse after verse.

The purpose of this section of my work is therefore to explore the representational modalities whereby temporality “participates” in Celan’s late poems in relationship with the work of the Negative, *both in its organising and disorganising functions*.⁴⁷⁸ The question at this point is: what is disorganising and/or organising what, and what does such disorganisation allow in representational terms? After all, Celan was well aware of how the “no” could not be separated from the “yes:” “Sprich – / Doch scheide das Nein nicht vom Ja.” [NKG, 89]

My point of departure is a small group of texts Celan sent to his wife Gisèle in a letter dated January 8, 1968 [GCL I, 603-607, here 605]. The poems there collected are *Treckschutzenzeit*,⁴⁷⁹ *Lila Luft*, *Brunnengräber*—a text mentioned in the previous paragraph, and to which we will devote particular attention here—and two short lyrics dated respectively January 2 and January 5, 1968: *Das angebrochene Jahr*, and *Unlesbarkeit dieser Welt* [NKG 486-487]. Attached to the lyrics Celan sent a brief message: “Je t’envoie cinq poèmes – excuse-moi de ne pas te les traduire, je le ferai une autre fois. J’espère qu’ils te parleront, d’eux-mêmes.” [CGL I, 603] In English the passage reads: “I send you five poems – please excuse me if I do not translate them, I will do it another time. I hope they will speak to you, of and for themselves.”

⁴⁷⁸ A “participation,” which, as it is the case, has many forms, shapes, sources, layers, among which the ‘historical’ one, for instance, plays here a crucial role. If Celan has always been a lucid observer of the world he lived in, the last years of his writing are notoriously characterized by a peculiar attention towards current events, international political transformations, and sociocultural developments. Especially in *Schneepart*, Celan’s poetry is feeling, like never before, the pulse of history in its unfolding. Or, to put it otherwise, a historical complexity felt and rhythmically shaped anew through the pulse of poetry. In August 1968, Celan writes to his wife: “The problems of poetry arise in me with great acuity, the events—you can imagine how affected am I from what is going on in Czechoslovakia—urge me amidst what I’m writing, what I am attempting to write.” [CGL I, 631] We may mention a few examples: the socio-political turmoil in Czechoslovakia and the Prague Spring; the violent conflicts in the near east threatening the survival of the new-born State of Israel; the vicissitudes of space exploration; the war in Vietnam, and last but not least, the protests of 1968 student movement worldwide, and especially in Paris. All these historical events that Celan witnesses in first person—either in the Parisian streets or from his small apartment in Rue Tournefort—sediment in his poetry, showing us an author who never ceased to write under the “angle of incidence of his own existence:” interrogating, day by day anew the world, the culture, the anthropological transformations, in all its contradictions. It is not accidental, in this sense, that *Schneepart* (in particular) and *Zeitgehöft* are the two only collections of the author in which the inner organisation of the lyrics reflects almost exactly the chronology of the composition of the texts. And yet, that aspect does not make of Celan’s late work a sort of poetic diary, nor a form of lyrical chronicle. See also Speier, “Paul Celan, Dichter einer neuen Wirklichkeit,” 66.

⁴⁷⁹ Written on December 3, 1967, and later collected in the sixth and closing section of the book *Lichtzwang* [NKG 308]. Particularly in light of the complex references to the work of Meister Eckhart this poem shall not be addressed in detail here. It is worth mentioning, however, that *Treckschutzenzeit* was the last text that Celan wrote while still living with Gisèle and Eric in their apartment in Rue de Longchamp [NKG 1022-1023], before moving, on November 20, 1967, in a small furnished apartment in Rue Tournefort. The poet will live there until October 1969. This solution was adopted on the request of Gisèle and after a long discussion between the two which started as early as April 1967. The year 1967 had been extremely difficult for the poet and his family: on January 30, 1967, the poet attempted suicide with a knife, barely missing the heart and injuring his left lung. He was saved *in extremis* by his wife. Shortly thereafter, he was hospitalized at the psychiatric clinic Sainte Anne, in Paris, from February 13, 1967, until October 17, 1967. From April, Celan was occasionally granted permissions to leave the clinic.

Celan's intention of providing his wife with a French translation of these texts remained unfulfilled—or at least not documented. In the context of his letter, the poet could only offer a few terminological elucidations—yet essential to illuminate aspects of these poems. However, the poet's expression "J'espère qu'ils te parleront, d'eux-mêmes" (i.e., "of themselves," "on their own initiative," or "willingly," but also "de même:" "nevertheless", "equally") betrays something remarkable, which goes beyond the communicative intent or the private circumstances.

In the last years of his creative journey, Celan *seems* to become increasingly incapable (or reluctant to the idea) of translating his work, demonstrating perhaps his awareness of the intrinsic untranslatability of his poetry.⁴⁸⁰ This presents not only an important signal of the linguistic threshold that his work was reinventing and transcending. It also expresses a necessity that his poetry is pursuing, namely, of leaving a trace, while preserving intact the weight of the imponderable rupture that made such trace possible. These poems must speak, address themselves, for themselves, nevertheless, no matter what: *d'eux-mêmes* and *de même*.

In a different way than his son Eric, Gisèle too was the addressee and the guardian of Celan's poetic peregrination, of his attempt to inscribe the traces of a destiny through poetry. A destiny that the poet did not choose, but which he was compelled to put into poetry. She did represent in this sense not only the interlocutor of a lifetime, both in a creative and affective way, but a witness of that sole form of "possible autobiography" left to the poet.⁴⁸¹ What is at stake in such a form of "autobiography" is nothing less than the reasons, the possibilities, the limits, the task of poetry. For this reason, instead of using the term "autobiography," I would rather speak in terms of construction of a *poetic diachrony of the subject*. With this concept I intend to highlight how Celan's poetry, being both the ultimate form of defence and the perpetual opening of a wound, represents the only possible way to give *durable forms* to the vicissitudes and to the remnants of a subject for whom "das, was geschah" represents the absolute loss.

But let us return one more time to Celan's letter. Let us notice how in "another time"—"une autre fois"—one can also overhear the expression "another faith" [une autre foi]. Another *time* and another *faith* would be required to translate these particular poems in the mother tongue of the wife, but in fact in any other language. 'Another time' that for the poet cannot have any place in his poetry since that would represent a time *beyond* the unsurmountable wound of annihilation, an 'after;' and 'another faith' that Celan could not conceive nor make his own as a form of salvation, since that would mean to abandon the struggle, to accept defeat. Bounded,

⁴⁸⁰ A few poems included in the first cycle of *Zeitgehöft* [NKG 557-567] represent a significant exception.

⁴⁸¹ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, 254.

in his “being for poetry,” to the blank of the page that his verses outline, the “other time” of his poetry cannot avoid carrying the mark of Auschwitz, a frozen time; a time which is, itself, *part of snow*—*Schneepart* and yet *Zeitgehöft*, *Timestead*, place, container for time and of an “other time.”

Considering these remarks, in the following I will not only argue that Celan’s work of the Negative cannot be properly grasped without a closer investigation of the question of temporality which emerges from the specificity of his poetry. Moreover, I contend that the question of time in Celan’s poetry cannot be properly grasped unless we consider it from the angle of the Negative—more particularly in the psychoanalytic framework developed through Green’s studies.

Green has insistently addressed the question of temporality, devoting to the subject a significant number of contributions, *Le temps éclaté* and *La diachronie en psychanalyse* being among the most important.⁴⁸² In these works, Green argues that the question of time represents at once the veritable object of psychoanalysis, and situates, even if latently, at the core of Freud’s work. In the arc of over forty years, Freud has advanced many different hypotheses regarding the conception of time. For instance, he proposed a theory of development (the libido theory), and reflected on the question the timelessness in the unconscious (which, at least to a certain extent, ought to be understood as an “invulnerability of desire to the test of time,” i.e. a “timelessness” of desire).⁴⁸³ In addition to that, he formulated the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* (present since the very beginning of psychoanalysis) and, as a major theoretical asset of the second topic, the compulsion to repeat (a major theoretical asset of the second topic). Eventually, he also addressed the issue of historical truth in *Der Mann Moses* (1939). Criticizing the reductionist tendency of contemporary psychoanalysis, which has often flattened the issue of temporality to a developmental, linear conception, Green has expanded on the manifold hypotheses put forward by Freud. By so doing, he reclaims the richness of a diachronic heterogeneity that he calls *temps éclaté* (i.e., “fragmented,” “shattered,” or “exploded” time). The expression “temps éclaté,” which will lead our reading in the following, eloquently displays the issue that time poses to our investigation: specifically, it by being the expression of figures

⁴⁸² André Green, *Time in Psychoanalysis. Some Contradictory Aspects* translated by A. Weller (London: Free Association Books, 2002); Id., *Diachrony in psychoanalysis*, translated by A. Weller (London: Free Association Books, 2003). The two books are deeply intertwined, and in many ways complementary: the latter is a collection of papers published in a time span of more than twenty years; the former, a more organic work systematically exploring key issues of temporality in psychoanalysis moving from a detailed analysis of the different formulations that the topic acquires in Freud’s *corpus*.

⁴⁸³ See Green, DP, 14 ff.

of a temporality which is irreducible to totality, homogeneity, and linearity. A temporality which not only is impossible to recompose or grasp in its entirety, but that is characterized by, as we read in the following quote:

[...] l'accentuation de l'hétérogénéité diachronique de l'appareil psychique, du fait de la différence de structure entre les instances et de la façon dont les divers modes de temporalité y inscrivent leurs effets. Le temps n'est plus seulement en pièces, ses parties sont en tension les unes avec les autres. Entre les divers aspects qui le composent: temps de la biologie marqué par l'évolution, temps de la culture marqué par l'histoire des civilisations, de leur parcours incertain et hasardeux, il y a moins synergie que difficultés d'harmonisation entre les composés, et même antagonisme.⁴⁸⁴

These forms of temporality reflect the complex heterogeneity of the psyche as envisaged by Green: as such they constitute the field of tensions between two inseparable dimensions: a “diachrony” whose counterpart is not a “synchronic axis,” but a “structural” one.⁴⁸⁵

Many researchers have already investigated the role of loss and absence in relationship with the question of historical and existential time, specifically in connection with the task of memory and testimony in Celan's poetry.⁴⁸⁶ In this paragraph I shall give account of a series of structural “anti-temporal,”⁴⁸⁷ or rather “negative temporal” elements which distinctively emerge in Celan's representations of time, in the creative process as well as in the text. In this case, it is important to underscore that such “negative temporal” elements are not to be understood as unrelated to the process of representation. On the contrary, they express the binding of an unbindable element within the chain of representation. They ought therefore to be envisaged as temporal expressions of that “representation of the absence of representation” constituting the kernel of the work of the Negative. These “anti-temporal” elements are in my reading vestiges of a “mortiferous stagnation,”⁴⁸⁸ i.e., structural traces of the death drive emerging in all its destructive force, threatening by means of the compulsion to repeat the survival and the integrity of the poem.

Green reminds us that psychoanalysis enables us to give account of representational dimensions of time which necessarily entail antagonistic, erosive, even “inorganic” tensions with regards to temporality itself. The concepts of *Nachträglichkeit* and repression

⁴⁸⁴ Green, TE, 37: “[...] The accent [goes] on the diachronic heterogeneity of the psychic apparatus, as a result of the structural difference between the psychic agencies and their way in which the different modes of temporality express their effect on them. Time is not only in pieces, but its parts are also in tension one with the other. Between the different aspects that compose them, i.e., the time of biology marked by evolution, the time of culture marked by the history of civilizations, of their uncertain and hazardous paths, there is less synergy than difficulties of harmonisation between the components, and even antagonism.”

⁴⁸⁵ See Green, DP, 13 and ff.; Id., TE, 37-38.

⁴⁸⁶ See for instance Olschner, “‘Tief / in der Zeitenschrunde,’” 648, 651.

⁴⁸⁷ Green, TE, 139-145.

⁴⁸⁸ Green, TE, 142.

[*Verdrängung*] may be considered, among others and for different reasons, illustrative examples of this tendency. In the former case, as we know, we are presented with a “temporal generative potentiality” congenital to the psyche, based on discontinuity and on a structural capability of semantic order that “splits the moment of the experience and that of signification.”⁴⁸⁹ In the latter, we deal with psychic material that, precisely because repressed, situates “hors temps, inusable, inaltérable, gardé intact, insensible aux outrages des jours qui se suivent; mais en revanche, il peut feindre les apparences du changement par nécessité des se travestir lorsqu’il parvient au voisinage de la conscience.”⁴⁹⁰

Temporality in psychoanalysis—and in this particular case in relationship with writing, creation, and the process of subjectivation—does acquire a specificity which radically differs from a phenomenological point of view. By postulating the unconscious as the most authentic component of the psyche, psychoanalysis offers a perspective on temporality which cannot be reduced to key philosophical concepts such as “phenomenon” and “event,” nor to perceptions and representations of time limited to consciousness.⁴⁹¹ It rather has to be conceived in terms of a constant, creative, germinative relationship with an absent otherness, with a “not knowing of not knowing”: “The unconscious ignores time—as we read in the *exergue* we chose for this paragraph—but *the conscious ignores that the unconscious ignores time*; it also ignores that the time within its reach is miserably poor.”⁴⁹²

Precisely these “anti-temporal” elements acquire for Celan a new, paramount role, in that they “participate,” indeed, on a structural, representational level, to the construction of that “diachrony of the subject” we alluded to above. The diachrony here in question, therefore, not only transcends, through the poetic, the individual perception and experience of time (being therefore irreducible to a form of autobiography). Also, caught between the two poles of Eros and the death drive on the one hand (the intrapsychic) and the question of the object-relation on

⁴⁸⁹ Green, DP, 27-30, here 28.

⁴⁹⁰ Green, TE, 51: “[That which is repressed is] outside time, unusable, inalterable, kept intact, insensible to the violence [outrages] of the days that follow one another; but, on the other hand—Green continues—it can feign the appearances of changing if confronted with the necessity of disguising itself as soon as it reaches the proximity of consciousness.” It is necessary to point out that Green refers to an “anti-temporal tendency of the compulsion to repeat” in the context of the border-line cases. I am therefore reading such “anti-temporal” tendency in wider and arguably less rigorous terms than Green’s. Whether Green himself would agree with the position I am defending or recognize its validity remains an open question.

⁴⁹¹ On this point see also Green’s closing remarks in the paper *Théorie Générale de la représentation* [*General Theory of Representation*] in SD, 58-60. There, Green discusses the theories of Anne Denis, who postulates the existence of a “archaic or primitive temporality,” “which differs from the characteristics of the preconscious-conscious, and thus is closer to the unconscious” and to primary processes. In these terms, we could even interpret the “anti-temporal” elements that we claim detecting in Celan’s work as traces of a “protolinguistic temporality” (I would even dare to say: a temporality linked to the drive) surviving as interferences in the secondary processes—thus in language.

⁴⁹² Green, TE, 51.

the other hand (the interpsychic), it harbours a destructivity that tends towards the inorganic, the lost primeval traces of the creature. There, where the limits between the geological, the mineral, the inorganic, and the biological, start to tremble:

Der Stein, das Anorganische, Mineralische, ist das ältere, das aus der tiefsten Zeitschicht, aus der Vorwelt – die auch des Menschen Vorwelt ist, dem Menschen Entgegen- und Gegenüberstehende. Der Stein ist das Andere, Außermenschliche, [...] mit seinem Schweigen gibt er dem Sprechenden Richtung und Raum; [...] Der Stein [M, 98]⁴⁹³

In Celan's poetry such inhospitable "wordscapes"⁴⁹⁴ populated by stones, minerals, everlasting glaciers, and inorganic rests create a further dimension, a channel with that "other time" that his poetry harbours and which is essential to the (impossible) attempt of (re)construction, indeed of *poiesis* of the subject. In this sense, the poem embodies a new organization of residual elements which do not simply follow the patterns of signification, but rather circumscribe an unrecoverable, frozen object that *has* to be carried within, surviving in the text as useless, a-significant, disorganizing remnants of a temporal "representation of absence of representation." A time of the poetic that, we might say, is also "other" to poetry itself.

If until now I have focused on a *spatial blank*, moving forward I shall underscore a *temporal blank*—although such temporal blank cannot ultimately be separated from a spatial dimension, and *vice versa*. It is from this *temporal blank* that a new temporal germination 'begins.' I will thus advance remarks on a conception of time that belongs and stems from the poem, not seldomly unbeknownst to the author; not only to its intention, but significantly, unbeknownst to a temporality of the "human." By so doing, I shall shed light on what the inorganic, the mineral, an *anti-time*, can tell us of a temporality of the "creatural," a temporal trace of a lost origin inscribed in the poetic.

Let us now to return to the poem *Brunnengräber* and read it once more:

BRUNNENGRÄBER im Wind:

es wird einer die Bratsche spielen, tagabwärts, im Krug,
es wird einer kopfstehn im Wort Genug,
es wird einer kreuzbeinig hängen im Tor, bei der Winde.

5 Dies Jahr
rauscht nicht hinüber,
es stürzt den Dezember zurück, den November,

⁴⁹³ "The stone, the inorganic, the mineral is the oldest, coming from the deepest layer of time, from the prehistoric world – which is also the prehistoric world of mankind, standing against and in front of mankind. The stone is the other, extrahuman, [...] with its silence it gives to the one who speaks direction and space; [...] The stone."

⁴⁹⁴ "Gedichte als Wortlandschaften," as we read in a fragment from *Der Meridian* [M, 102].

10 es gräbt seine Wunden um,
 es öffnet sich dir, junger
 Gräber-
 brunnen,
 Zwölfmund.

[NKG, 486-487]⁴⁹⁵

An irreducible fabric of allusions, references, associations, and intertextual traces is interwoven in these twelve verses.⁴⁹⁶ Many scholars have already highlighted the ambivalence underlying the title-word *Brunnengräber*, which can be read not only as the plural of the term *Brunnengrab* (a burial practice typical of the Etruscan sepulchral custom until the 6th century B.C.E), but also as “well or fountain digger.”

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre has offered a further insight in this regard: not only has he remarked how *Brunnengrab* may represent the inversion of Celan’s well-known image of the “Grab in den Lüften” [“a grave in the air”] recurring in *Todesfuge* [NKG, 46-47]. Lefebvre has also pointed out how the process of excavation of a well or of a tomb in the wind can be understood, meta-poetically, as excavation into the breath of the word, of the verse, and I would add, of the white of the page.⁴⁹⁷ If we further extend such a meta-poetic association, we might relate both “wind” and “breath” to the Hebrew term *ruah*, which leads us to the biblical scene of creation—*Bereshit*—and by extension, to the scene of literary *poiesis*. In this sense, the inaugural verse of the poem seems to encompass a temporal dimension which stretches from an inaccessible scene of creation towards a blank left in the air, in the wind, in the breath. In such mesh of references something is in motion, someone is ‘underway,’ traveling through that air: the place and the time of an inexhaustible search.

The one who excavates into the wind, into the breath, in the attempt to reach out towards a form of lost origin—a source or a spring [Brunnen], and simultaneously a tomb excavated deep into the incorporeal and yet fertile “soil” of a wind, of a *ruah*—ventures towards the heart of an absence. And while the *incipit* of the lyric gives new form to the harsh work of excavating in

⁴⁹⁵ “WELLDIGGER in the wind: // someone will play the viola, day downward, in the jug, / someone will stand on his head in the word Enough, / someone will hang crosslegged in the gateway, next to the winch. // This year / does not roar across, / it throws back December, November, / it turns up its wounds, / it opens up to you, young / grave- / well, twelvemouth.” [BT, 325, translation modified]

⁴⁹⁶ A thorough intertextual analysis of this poem, notably from the perspective of the Jewish numerological and linguistic mystical imagery is offered by Irene Fußl, “*Geschenke an Aufmerksame. Hebräische Intertextualität und mystische Weltauffassung in der Lyrik Paul Celans* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2008), 108-114. Interestingly, none of the studies about this poem have considered Aleksander Blok’s Двенадцать (*Die Zwölf*) as a possible source for analysis. Originally composed by Blok in January 1918, Celan intensively worked on this poem in 1958 and published a translation of it via Fisher Verlag. Notwithstanding the considerable temporal gap between Celan’s translation and the composition of *Brunnengräber*, it seems to me that the two texts are linked by a striking recurrency of images that may not be accidental.

⁴⁹⁷ See Paul Celan, *Partie de neige*, édition bilingue, traduit de l’allemand et annoté par J.-P. Lefebvre (Paris : Édition du Seuil, 2007), 172-173.

Celan did not” continues Felstiner “underline the rest of that sentence in the Hölderlin biography: ‘but mostly his apocalyptic star glitters wondrously.’”⁵⁰⁰

It is remarkable how, in spite of the absence of any tense or verb constructions, the *incipit* of *Brunnengräber* can unearth such rich polysemy and polychrony within the poem. While creating a temporal tension which intertwines life and work, starting from and yet beyond the life and the work of the author—from the childhood in Bukovina until Celan’s last reading before his death—the first verse of the poem also speaks about and for the poetic. It testifies, in meta-representational terms, for the task of poetry as descent into the depths of a *caesura*. But the poem, as Celan did not cease to remark in *Der Meridian*, also stretches towards an otherness, a reader who, in turn, will have been called upon to confront such absence and to be, in the volatile body of poetry, a *Brunnengräber im Wind*. This confrontation with the blank abyss inscribed in the page is what Celan’s poetry prompts us to pursue.

Actual verb constructions explicitly appear in *Brunnengräber* only in the second and third stanzas. Here, the intertwining between time and poetic condensed in the first verse explodes, literally, on the page. The threefold repetition of the future tense “es wird...” creates a further temporal tension, a friction which is literally turned upside down in the third stanza, that seems to embody an interruption, even a regression in which time is turned over like soil. The year—*this* year—throws back “December, November,” turns up “its wounds,” and opens up to an otherness, a “young / grave- / well,” “twelvemouth”—where “Mund” (“mouth”) phonetically recalls “Mond” (“moon”): perhaps, a new sequence of twelve moons, or months.

In this multidirectional, multi-layered tension disrupting the linearity and the verticality of the text itself, between progression, arrest, regression, omen and traces, we can recognize a fragmentation, a shattering of temporality on the surface of the page: a *temps éclaté*, as Green calls it. Precisely in this explosion, in this compulsion to repeat, time acquires new life, pulsating on the page as if from a hole in time and space. The poem constitutes that field of

⁵⁰⁰ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, 287. The passage Celan read and underlined, quoted in Wilhelm Michel, *Das Leben Friedrich Hölderlins* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963), 556, is a quote from a letter regarding Hölderlin that Clemens Brentano wrote to Philipp Otto Runge on January 21, 1810. In the original German, the unabridged passage quoted by Michel reads: “Niemals ist vielleicht hohe betrachtende Trauer so herrlich ausgesprochen worden. Manchmal wird dieser Genius dunkel und versinkt in den bitteren Brunnen seines Herzens; meistens aber glänzet sein apokalyptischer Stern Wermut wunderbar rührend über das weite Meer seiner Empfindung.“ To say with uttermost certainty what Celan may have read in this quote is impossible. We may advance here the hypothesis that Celan may have encountered here the glowing trace of the *incrédible* of his work: a depth, a blank time *and* space too dangerously close to the mortiferous, frozen core that moves his poetry. There, where the absence of representation coincides with a *nothing* beyond any representation, of any form of thinkability or possibility of mental operations—see Green’s reading of the difference between *no-thing* (“non-chose”) and *nothing* (“rien”) in Wilfred Bion, Green, SD, 102. Or perhaps, Celan had exhausted with his poetry the possibility of the poetic of granting for him a harbour, an anchor, which could allow him to hold on and firm without being subjugated to the yoke of a reality which still harboured Auschwitz in it—as the personalities surrounding the *Goll-Affaire* do not cease to remind us—and with which he did not accept any compromise whatsoever.

tension in which traces and fragments can reorganise themselves and leave the mark of their effect on the page.

November and December are two symbolically eventful months in Celan's life. In the cold, frozen months of late autumn 1942 the young Celan (born November 23, 1920) was informed of the death of the parents—of his father Leo Antschel, of the beloved mother Friederike “Fritzi” Schragger (born December 1, 1895) [CGL II, 472]. Between November and December 1951 we can situate the beginning of the romantic relationship with Celan's future wife, Gisèle Lestrangé. The two would eventually marry on December 23, 1952 [CGL II, 487, 491], and almost exactly fifteen years later, during his 1967 Berlin stay, Celan would write *Du liegst, Lila Luft*, and *Brunnengräber*. From Celan's marriage, two children would be born: François, who died few hours after birth [CGL II 493], and Eric (June 6, 1955 [CGL II 501]), who at the time in which the poet penned *Brunnengräber* was *twelve years old*.

As Szondi stated in the context of the long debate concerning the relevance of biography in the understanding of Celan's poetry,⁵⁰¹ the identification of these mesh of elements, among many others, does not constitute on its own an interpretation of the text.⁵⁰² We are dealing with a plethora of allusions which cannot be reduced to the references we are able to discern, nor to the specificity of our approach to the text. Also in this sense, the poem will always overcome the expectations of the interpretative act. As poetry cannot be reduced to a private matter, nor to a mere form of communication or chronicle—as the poet remarked in numerous occasions⁵⁰³—the elements we can detect do not provide an understanding of the totality of the references: rather, they are useful to grasp the structural and representational processes underlying Celan's poetry. The relevance of these details, thus, ought to be understood at once within and without the biographical data (i.e., beyond a “biography” or “autobiography”) as well as beyond a mere “chronology” of the subject.

We may recall how Green, in his paper *Le double et l'absent*, observed that “the function of the text, reduced to the linearity of written language, is to resuscitate all that it has absorbed by the work of writing.”⁵⁰⁴ Green's remark may be seen as encompassing the core of the relationship between text and time, in that it allows to feel the weight of an absence that haunts the creative process as much as the text. But what does Celan's text absorb in the work of

⁵⁰¹ Marko Pajević, “Paul Celan: (Ich kenne dich. Das Gedicht als ‚Lebensschrift,““ *Paul Celan. Biographie und Interpretation / Biographie et interprétation*, Hrsg. von / sous la direction de A. Corbea-Hoisie (Bucarest: Hartung-Gorre, Editions Suger, Polirom, 2000), 214-224.

⁵⁰² See Szondi, “Eden,” *Celan-Studien*, 113-125.

⁵⁰³ On this topic see also Giuseppe Bevilacqua, “Wegspuren zum Nichts im Spätwerk von Paul Celan,” *Paul Celan. Biographie und Interpretation / Biographie et interprétation*, 225-235.

⁵⁰⁴ Green, D, 54.

writing? Is it just the “biographical data” itself? What can be “resuscitated” [“ressusciter”] here? And what does remain readable of such biographical data? It is perhaps a structural matrix, a temporal “transitional potentiality,” we may say, that develops from an absent core, and which remains at once present and absent in the mesh of linguistic, affective, representational elements, as if *in reserve* in the unique way in which the poem speaks of itself and for itself.

The question that arises here pertains the function of the poem as a protective container, a sort of linguistic ‘skin,’ in which time may participate as a potentiality: an open, empty structure where temporality is indeed a creative element, an absence which puts in motion the matrix, inasmuch as the linguistic structure *simultaneously* offers a place of organization of such absence. No diachrony *per se* is ever given. Poetry has the task to prepare the conditions of a possible temporalization, allowing the creation of such a diachrony, and that precisely from a blank. The text transforms the fragmentation of time into a temporal tension between representatives of an absence. The fact that in Celan such a blank is as wide as a world, as *the world* give us much to think regarding the magnitude of his attempt to shape a “suture,”⁵⁰⁵ which *is* and *must* remain *impossible*.

That Celan’s poetry can be understood in relation with temporality in terms of a protective and creative ‘container’ emerge in explicit terms throughout his work. Let us think, for instance to the well-known image of the *Flaschenpost*, that Celan draws from Osip Mandelstam. In a poem written on January 23, 1968, we read:

DIE NACHZUSTOTTERNDE WELT,
bei der ich zu Gast
gewesen sein werde, ein Name,
herabgeschwitzt von der Mauer,
5 an der eine Wunde hochleckt. [NKG, 490]

THE TO-BE-RESTUTTERED WORLD,
whose guest I
will have been, a Name,
sweated down from the wall,
5 on which a wound leaks upwards.

My choice in the translation of the final verse, most notably of the verb *hocklecken*, requires an explanation. *Hocklecken* is actually a neologism by Celan, formed by the prefix *hoch-* (which in verbal constructs indicates an ascending movement or gesture) and the verb *lecken*: the construction has been hitherto understood by critics and translators alike in the sense of “to lick

⁵⁰⁵ Green, DP, 18-19.

up,” “to lick upwards.”⁵⁰⁶ In my translation, I am considering the homograph and homophone regular verb *lecken* i.e., “durch ein Leck Flüssigkeit herauslaufen lassen” as in the construct “leck sein”⁵⁰⁷ or “to leak”). Interpreted in this way, the verb describes the opening of a wound [Wunde] elevating from a wall (a draft version of the text actually reads: “aus dem Nichts,” “from Nothingness” [BCA, 10.2, 90]), from which simultaneously a “Name” “sweats down” [herab-schwitzen].⁵⁰⁸ The generic English verb “open,” that I have chosen in my translation, puts the accent on the image of an opening wound, as an orifice from which a poetic word flows or leaks out.

Structurally speaking, the future in the past (vv. 2-3) situates *de facto* as an umbilical centre of the lyric. The first verse, as well as the last two, converge towards the centre, as if they were folding and refolding in order to create a linguistic container for a poetic seed. To the world to “to-be-restuttered” (which is perhaps all that remains to articulate of a prophecy for a poet under the sign of Auschwitz [NKG, 137]) corresponds a wound, the limbs of which open upwards, as if they were revealing the lips of a mouth.⁵⁰⁹ In this double vectoriality, and from that core of absence, from that “Name of the absence of any name,” Celan reorganises the loss, creating a space in which an unknown temporality may “participate.” Such unknown temporality reactivates itself in the form of an otherness yet to come, yet to be named, there, where subject and verb are horizontally severed (see the *enjambement*, vv. 2-3) but vertically united. In this tension between times, which is also a tension through time, we find that “opening,” that vacancy of which we read in Celan’s *Die Dichtung Ossip Mandelstamms*, and which also characterizes Green reflections on temporality. For a moment indefinitely echoing, Celan allows us here to grasp the ‘future in the past’ of nomination—a “Name” that is always *pro-*

⁵⁰⁶ See for instance Pierre Joris’ translation of the last two verses: “sweated down the wall / up which a wound licks.” [BT, 335]. In Italian, Bevilacqua’s translation similarly reads “su cui s’alza lambente / la lingua di una piaga.” Paul Celan, *Poesie*, a cura e con un saggio introduttivo di G. Bevilacqua (Milano: Mondadori, 1998), 1127. Cfr. also Lefebvre’s French version (“sué par le mur / qu’une blessure lèche vers le haut.” Celan, *Partie de neige*, 37), and Reina Palazón’s (“rezumado hacia abajo por el muro, / en el que una herida lame hacia arriba.” Paul Celan, *Obras Completas*, prólogo de C. Ortega. Traducción de J. L. Reina Palazón (Madrid: Trotta Editorial, 1999), 361.

⁵⁰⁷ “lecken” auf *Duden online*, URL: <https://www.duden.de/node/150800/revision/1421356> (Abrufdatum 27.05.2022).

⁵⁰⁸ Lefebvre points out in his notes to the text how in the verb “herabgeschwitzt” echoes the word “Auschwitz.” See *Partie de neige*, 181.

⁵⁰⁹ The same image recurs also in another poem from the same time (dated January 2, 1968), that the poet sent to his wife in the above quoted letter from January 8: “DAS ANGEBOCHENE JAHR / mit dem modernden Kanten / Wahnbrod. // Trink / aus meinem Mund.” [NKG, 487]. “THE BREACHED YEAR / with the moldering crust / delusion bread. // Drink / from my mouth.” Let us also notice here the recurrence of the semantic constellation that we can detected in *Bunnengräber* too: the year, the mouth, the breaking (the verb “anbrechen” meaning “to begin,” “to dawn,” but also to “break into pieces, without destroying completely,” and “to broach,” “to open a bottle or a container”), and foremost, the container.

nominal—in the impossible attempt to recompose and trace the errancy of the subject through time and space: from these fragments, from these traces.

But whose *I/Ich* can be harboured in the verses of these poems? The *I* of the poet, who retrospectively discovers himself mother, father, and son of his own work? The *I* of a witness embodied by a reader-receiver of this harsh poems? Or are we here rather dealing with a potential alterity, i.e., an alterity as potentiality of the poem of unfolding for a new reader, elsewhere, elsewhen? The answers to these questions remain unwritten and unwritable: still, the text does not cease to call us upon, to read, to give time to these verses to find their way through us, reading after reading.

For Celan, poetry remains, in his own words, ineludibly ascribed to its “20 January”, to those dates of which the poem cannot but be “unforgetful of” [M, 8]. However, what Celan shows us can be related not only to a date, but to the structural value of a *caesura* in the organisation of what we have called a ‘diachrony of a subject.’ A subject that can articulate and hold firm only through these poems of shattered time and disseminated, frozen, petrified vestiges. The poem, both fragmenting time and harbouring such fragmentation as a tension, creates as such a form of temporality, an “other time.” An “other time” is put into motion within the poetic, a new attempt to *gain time* and to save it for a world which has *yet* to be “restuttered,” again and again. It is a desperate effort to counterbalance the mortality of the writing subject, to escape or delay the death to which the poet is bound as a ‘survivor,’ until the last verses will have been written.

Those last verses were arguably penned by Celan between April 1 and 13, 1970, just a few days before his death the Seine. In a poem with the title *Rebleute (Vinegrowers)*, which powerfully echoes *Brunnengräber*, we read:

REBLEUTE graben
die dunkelstündige Uhr um,
Tiefe um Tiefe,

du liest,

5 es fordert
der Unsichtbare den Wind
in die Schranken,

du liest,

10 die Offenen tragen
den Stein hinterm Aug,
der erkennt dich,
am Sabbath.

Once again, in just *twelve* verses (*Zwölfmund*) Celan is able to put on the page the peregrination of creation and of the text, rewriting a beginning and an end, those “first and last things” that painfully animate his poetry: “The things in the poem have something of these ‘last’ things [...] they could be, one never knows, the ‘last’ things.” [M, 56]. Celan’s parents were arrested on June 27, 1942, during a Sabbath, with Celan escaping capture by miracle. Returning home the following Monday morning, he found his parents’ house sealed from the outside and empty.⁵¹¹ April 13, 1970, was also a Monday: Celan might have penned his very last lyric concomitantly with a Sabbath. Once more, Celan composes an excavation towards the depths of the first and last reasons of his poetry, from the inception of the wound until the last breath that acquires new form in the verse. Writing and reading are inseparable terms, both are instrumental to a renewal and a continuity of a bond between the generations. What intertwines them is not only the power of textual exegesis, through which new meanings and possibilities within the world may be opened. More importantly, writing and reading shape time, they are a form of participation to the creation of a rhythmic of transmission.

In this poem the stone, the inorganic, the mineral, emerge one last time in Celan’s oeuvre: a crucial word, *Stein*, inhabiting his poetic landscape since the beginning, appears carried behind the eye of “the Open Ones.” It is perhaps through this particle, through this lens of petrified temporality exudated in verses that Celan urges us too to read his poems—and the time which can only be written and read as the “invisibleness of the page.”

⁵¹⁰ “VINEGROWERS dig up dig / under the darhoured watch, / depth for depth, // you read, // the invisible / one commands the wind / to stay in bounds, // you read, // the Open Ones carry / the stone behind the eye, / it recognizes you, / on a Sabbath.” [BT, 454-457]

⁵¹¹ Cfr. Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, 14 ff., ivi, 284 ff., and especially Maletta, “Nessuno / testimonia per il / testimone,” 229-234.

3.4 *Der Unsichtbare*, or the ‘Invisible of the Page.’ The Poem between *Psychose Blanche* and *Incréable*

The word of the LORD came to me: What do you see, Jeremiah? I replied: I see a branch of an almond tree.

The LORD said to me: You have seen right, For I wake upon My word to realize it.

Jeremiah 1, 11-12

Death and life are in the hand of the tongue.

Proverbs 18, 21

What does it mean to write and to read the ‘invisibleness’—or the Invisible⁵¹²—‘of the page’? Foremost, what do I mean by the ‘invisible of the page’? The act of seeing, gazing, and sighting—in a word: the ‘visual’—obstinately recurs in several forms in Celan’s work. Felstiner, pointing out the relevance of this aspect,⁵¹³ remarks that “throughout Celan’s writing, eyes gaze from or at the Jewish dead, and *Aug* is used twice as often as any other noun.”⁵¹⁴ A new ‘scopic dimension’ re-emerges, however, with unique intensity in the poems that Celan composed from February 1969 until the end of his life, and more specifically those collected in the first and third cycles of *Zeitgehöft*.⁵¹⁵ In this respect, along with terms referring to the semantic field of visual perception [NKG 558 ff.], or of a failure of it,⁵¹⁶ and verbs such as “erkennen” [to recognize; to identify; to discern], and “sehen” [to see],⁵¹⁷ a crucial term appears in *Rebleute*, the poem that closes Celan’s oeuvre. The term I’m referring to is *der Unsichtbare*:

⁵¹² See Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, 284.

⁵¹³ For more recent and quite diverging analyses of the visual dimension in Celan’s poetry, see Paweł Moskała, “Das Sehen des Anderen in Paul Celans ‚Schliere im Auge,“” *Studia Litteraria Universitatis Jagellonicae Cracoviensis*, 8 (2013), z. 3, 119–127; Buhanan. “A-voiding Representation”; Jacob McGuinn, “‘Into without Image:’ Paul Celan reading the moving Image,” *MLN* 136, no. 5, (2021), 1237-1260.

⁵¹⁴ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, 86.

⁵¹⁵ Celan began working on this of poems almost immediately after the end of his last stay at the clinic of Vaucluse in Epinay-sur-Orge (Essonne) [NKG, 1219], in which he was hospitalized from November 15, 1968 until February 3, 1969. The first cycle of the unfinished book, actually the only one bearing the title *Zeitgehöft*, includes texts written between February 25, 1969, and September 17, 1969; the third cycle was composed between February 6, 1970, and April 13, 1970, a few days before his death. Unlike the second cycle—also known as “Jerusalem Cycle” or “Ilana” [Shmueli]—the first and the third sections of the book have so far never been subject of a specific commentary. Furthermore, the tone, the atmosphere, the stylistic peculiarities and the imagery prevailing in the *Jerusalem Zyklus* make of it a *unicum* in Celan’s *Spätwerk*. For this reason, the following paragraph shall focus exclusively on poems from the first and third section of *Zeitgehöft*.

⁵¹⁶ As in the case of the term “Blendung,” “to make someone blind” and “to dazzle,” which we can associate with the German adjective “blank” (“shining,” “gleaming” [NKG 557; BT 610-611]).

⁵¹⁷ To which we might also add, for extension, the verb “berühren” [to touch]. See Green, TN, 329-330: “Nous serions prêts à avancer l’hypothèse qu’une particularité de la catégorie du visible (couplée à l’invisible) est de réaliser les conditions d’un ‘toucher-sans contact,’ à distance, toucher ‘métaphorisé’ (transporté-transféré) de telle sorte que sa non-réalisation dans l’ordre du toucher aurait pour contrepartie la dynamique du détournement-attraction, mobilisatrice de son orientation sur des buts non sexuels avec conservation (transformée) de sa charge libidinale, sans que cette dernière s’accomplisse sur le mode de la satisfaction pulsionnelle et sans que cette transformation ne lui fasse perdre la qualité qui continue de la rattacher à la catégorie des phénomènes

REBLEUTE graben
 die dunkelstündige Uhr um,
 Tiefe um Tiefe,

du liest,

5 es fordert
 der Unsichtbare den Wind
 in die Schranken,

du liest,

10 die Offenen tragen
 den Stein hinterm Aug,
 der erkennt dich,
 am Sabbath.

[NKG, 577]⁵¹⁸

How are we to conceive this scopic dimension in Celan's latest poems? I defend the thesis according to which the visual dimension of Celan's late poetry ought to be understood not so much in terms of 'sight' or of sensorial, visual perception of an image, but rather in 'representational' terms. It is a 'visual sphere' that involves less the eye as organ of perception (let alone as a means of 'testimony') or a figurative image, than a mental, psychic 'envisaging.' In these terms, I attempt to go beyond a nonetheless crucial difference between 'sight' as sensorial perception and 'vision' as intellectual, emotional, or affective imagination [Vorstellung]. What is indeed critical to underscore here is that such form of 'visualization' is, in Celan's work, *made possible by the poem and through the poem*. It is therefore inseparable from the processes of writing and reading, of creating and receiving a text. Such dimension has to be consequently thought in its relationship with sublimation and with the transformative process that it entails between body and psyche.⁵¹⁹

pulsionnels." See id., WoN, 239: "We wish to put forward the hypothesis that a distinctive feature of the category of the visible (coupled with the invisible) is to create the conditions of a 'touching-without contact,' at a distance, i.e., touching 'metaphorised' (transported-transferred) in such a way that its non-realisation in the context of touching would be compensated by the dynamic of diversion-attraction, mobilising its orientation towards non-sexual aims with the preservation (transformed) of its libidinal investment, without the latter occurring along the lines of drive satisfaction and without this transformation making it lose the quality which continues to link it to the category of drive phenomena." Let us also remember that, while bringing us back to the question of narcissism, the dimension of vision leads us to the crucial remarks on sublimation in Freud's *Eine Kindheitserinnerung des Leonardo da Vinci* (1910) (Green, TN, 297 ff; WoN, 215 ff) as well as to the distinction between *scopophilia* and *epistemophilia* we introduced with Green in the first chapter of this work.

⁵¹⁸ "VINEGROWERS dig up dig / under the darkhoured watch, / depth for depth, // you read, // the invisible / one commands the wind / to stay in bounds, // you read, // the Open Ones carry / the stone behind the eye, / it recognizes you, / on a Sabbath." [BT, 454-457]

⁵¹⁹ Green, D, 24: "Lire, écrire ne sont pas au regard de la psychanalyse des activités premières, mais des produits d'acquisition tardive, issu de l'apprentissage mais utilisant des pulsions partielles domestiquées par l'éducation, l'action 'civilisatrice'. Lire, écrire sont des sublimations, c'est-à-dire que les pulsions partielles sont inhibées quant au but, déplacées et déssexualisées." Id., PM, 342: "Reading and writing, in terms of psychoanalysis, are not primary processes, but complex activities acquired relatively late; they come as a result of training, making use of

From this point of view, *Der Unsichtbare*—significantly: a substantive, a noun⁵²⁰—does not simply circumscribe the Negative of visual, conscious perception [sehen]. It puts into play a form of latency that cannot be seen or sighted by the ‘naked eye’, and which ought to be ‘envisaged’ by means of a different sort of ‘organ,’ the written word. As such, *Der Unsichtbare* is not a lyrical or rhetorical image: it names and impresses on the page the blank mental, representational space-time that we attempted to give account of in this chapter as framing structure for the representation of the absence of representation. Escaping sensorial perception and consciousness,⁵²¹ such blank makes us feel *otherwise* the lasting weight of an absence, of an empty space which cannot be filled nor occupied, and which is therefore continuously “*unbesetzbar*.” A negative which resists any ‘positivisation’.

By expanding the line of research first put forward by Maletta,⁵²² the present paragraph aims to explore the ‘visual sphere’ in Celan’s late poems along the axis of negative hallucination, notably in a double connotation: on the one hand, that of the relationship between negative hallucination and sublimation in the creative process; on the other hand, that of the link between negative hallucination and what Green calls *blank psychosis*.

One of my primary purposes is to show how the common matrix of negative hallucination can offer two different outcomes concurrently. This is with the goal of highlighting far more than the versatility of the notion of negative hallucination. This paragraph aims also to enhance our understanding of the peculiarity of the work of the Negative in Celan’s poetry by bringing together elements of Green’s theory that have never been juxtaposed in such terms. If on the one hand, negative hallucination may lead towards the process of sublimation, to the representation of absence of representation fruitfully emerging through the creative process, on the other hand, negative hallucination also constitute the matrix of what may develop into a “blankness” which is, indeed, psychotic⁵²³ and a condition for a “paralysis of thought”⁵²⁴—or to use another pregnant expression in Celan’s case: a psychotic “*sidération de la pensée*” [“*sideration of thought*”].⁵²⁵ While in the former case we find the *possible germ of literary creativity*—in Green’s words, the *incréable*—, in the latter we are confronted with the *germ of*

partial drives tamed by education and the ‘civilizing’ process. Reading and writing are sublimations, which means that the underlying partial drives are inhibited from attaining their goals, displaced, and desexualized.”

⁵²⁰ In fact, the adjective *unsichtbar* recurs a few times throughout Celan’s work, but only in one other occasion we can find it as a noun, namely in the poem *Hüttenfenster*, collected in *Die Niemandrose* [NKG 161].

⁵²¹ Green stresses how “negative hallucination is not limited to nonperception but is completed by the unconsciousness of non-perception.” See Green, *WoN* 195.

⁵²² Which we discussed in the first section of this chapter. See Maletta, “Nessuno / testimonia per il / testimone,” 207-234 and *Id.*, “... AUCH KEINERLEI”. Insetti freudiani in un testo celaniano.”

⁵²³ Green et Donnet, *E*, 228.

⁵²⁴ Green et Donnet, *E*, 270.

⁵²⁵ Green et Donnet, *E*, 240.

psychosis. It is at the crossroad between these two blanks, or rather at the threshold separating two different vicissitudes of hallucinatory activity (literary creation and psychosis), which Celan's struggle for "those last things" [M, 56] takes place.

But what is blank psychosis? In the words of Green and Donnet:

La psychose blanche est [...] cette psychose sans psychose où l'analyse nous fait accéder à l'ombilic de la psychose : structure matricielle comme condition de possibilité de l'élaboration psychotique sans que nécessairement une telle élaboration s'ensuive. [...] Blanche, la psychose l'est ici en tant que la banalité commune de ces "symptômes" est telle qu'on pourrait à bon droit leur contester cette qualification. Ces symptômes sont tout juste "symptomatiques", il faut les prendre à la lettre pour les analyser. Z⁵²⁶ est déprimé comme peut l'être un sujet normal [...]. Mais cette "blancheur" est psychotique.⁵²⁷

Green and Donnet describe blank psychosis as displaying a set of symptoms with "no readily identifiable clinical manifestation."⁵²⁸ Such an apparent triviality betrays in fact what, significantly, alone an analysis in *après-coup* of the written text of the interview with the patient (Z) may unearth: a psychotic structure which is "latent, *invisible*, in negative."⁵²⁹ It is, in other words, a *structural* "psychotic potentiality,"⁵³⁰ i.a., "characterized by blocking of thought processes, the inhibition of the functions of representation."⁵³¹ But how can such a "psychotic potentiality" actually develop into a psychosis? Green and Donnet write:

Il n'y a pas de fatalité psychotique, parce que l'élaboration psychotique est facteur de paramètres qui ne sont pas uniquement "endogènes." Il n'y a pas de destin psychotique, mais une potentialité psychotique qui s'actualise ou ne s'actualise pas selon les conjugaisons des séries complémentaires issues du psychotique potentiel et des rencontres qu'il fera ou ne fera pas avec les objets et les événements qui auront pour sens de dévoiler ou de voiler davantage cette potentialité.⁵³²

This quote is paramount, and we will see right away why so. But before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify one point. The relevance of the notion of blank psychosis is not motivated

⁵²⁶ With the letter "Z" Green and Donnet call the patient whose case and corresponding analysis would have led to the conceptualization of blank psychosis.

⁵²⁷ Green et Donnet, E, 225, 228: "The blank psychosis is [...] that psychosis without psychosis, the analysis of which allows us to access the nombril [or the umbilical] of psychosis: matrix structure as condition of the possibility of psychotic elaboration without that such an elaboration actually follows. [...] This psychosis is here blank in that the common triviality of these 'symptoms' is such that one could rightfully contest that a qualification. These symptoms are indeed simply 'symptomatic,' they have to be taken literally in order to analyse them. Z is depressed like any other normal subject can be depressed [...] But that 'blankness' is psychotic."

⁵²⁸ Michel Demangeat, "Blank/Nondelusional Psychoses," *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis. Encyclopedia.com*. URL: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/psychology/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/blanknondelusional-psychoses>. Last access November 30, 2022

⁵²⁹ Duparc, *André Green*, 48.

⁵³⁰ Green et Donnet, E, 226.

⁵³¹ Green, PM, 40.

⁵³² Green et Donnet, E, 226: "There is no psychotic inevitability, because the psychotic elaboration is a factor conditioned by parameters which are not exclusively "endogenous." There is no psychotic destiny, but rather a psychotic potentiality which takes place or not depending on the conjugations of the complementary series derived from the potentially psychotic subject and the encounters that the latter will or will not make with those objects or events that may or may not result in an unveiling or in a veiling of such a potentiality."

by the fact that it may help us understand Celan's psychological state in the last year of his life and during the creative process—far from it.⁵³³ The *psychose blanche* rather proves to be insightful in order to grasp what Celan's poetry could *touch* at the heart of the collective psyche of Europe in the aftermath of the Shoah. He discloses an *invisible* psychotic core, linked to the impossibility, indeed the denial to give thinkable form or structure to “das was geschah” [GW III, 186]. Celan's poetry is, in this regard, precisely that unexpected, surviving object, to say it with Green and Donnet, which can generate the development of blank psychosis in the reader: the ‘exogenous factor,’ excrescence of the annihilation process of the concentration camps, which haunts the page.

With this hypothesis I push the theoretical implications of blank psychosis far beyond the primary frame of reference that Green and Donnet adopted. Nevertheless, blank psychosis acquires a significant explicative power, in that it offers a clinical-theoretical model to tackle a crucial failure in the collective mental functioning of European culture in the aftermath of the Shoah. From this point of view, Celan's poetry touches the nerve of a foreclosure [Verwerfung] within Europe after Second World War: the rejection of giving thinkable, representable form to the annihilation of the Jewish people.⁵³⁴

An interesting parallel can be drawn here between Celan and Green in relation to the historical relevance of their respective works and legacies is concerned. If the former represents an unprecedented limit, a *unicum* in the history of literature in German language and beyond, Green's work is not only a breakthrough in the investigation of the borderline cases but, specifically with the study of the *psychose blanche*, a major development in the history of psychoanalytic movement in a crucial cultural conjuncture.

By establishing this parallel I do not simply imply that their works mark a turning point in their respective fields; far beyond that, while challenging in a new way the narcissistic integrity of Western European culture, they were able to give expression (almost concomitantly) to a mutation process in the representational manifestations of the unconscious. A mutation, indeed, not so much of the unconscious ‘itself’—for nothing can be known with regard to the unconscious unless we attempt to consider a specific psychoanalytic theory of representation.⁵³⁵ With their works they rather unveil a new ‘symptomatology’ of cultural representations,

⁵³³ Much has already been written about the psychological conditions of Celan's last years of life. Many hypotheses have been put forward as to how such psychological suffering might or not have affected his late poetry. Only a few scholars, however, seem to have been able to resist the temptation of labelling Celan's psychological pain as a mere form of psychosis—not to mention the many attempts of romanticizing it. See on this matter the important remarks in Wiedemann, *Paul Celan*, 820-860.

⁵³⁴ See Maletta, “Nessuno / testimonia per il / testimone,” 207-234.

⁵³⁵ Green, SD, 31-60.

whereby such a transformation can become retrospectively graspable by analysing new forms of expression of the conflicts between unconscious and conscious, affecting thinking processes and informing the *Kulturarbeit*. I will resume these remarks in the conclusion of my work, extending them also to the work of Franz Kafka, to underline how, with their respective works, these three authors were able to show through different forms of literary expressions, the significance of the role of absence as an ineliminable element in the organization of a framing structure for representation.

This constellation of topics emerging from the study of the different vicissitudes of negative hallucination coexisting in Celan's poetry will enable me to address an aspect that has been overlooked by the research: the ethical dimension of negative hallucination. Ultimately, negative hallucination in Celan's poetry poses a series of questions, in which "what is at stake [...] is the relationship to reality"⁵³⁶—and by extension, to memory, culture, futurity. A relationship with that *Wirklichkeit* that, put to the proof of representation, creation, denial, delirious rejection, Celan had to conquer back through language, in order to impress it on the page in all its 'invisibleness.'

Whether it leads us to the question of the *incr able* as the invisible, inaccessible affective trace of the relationship of the infant with the body of the mother, or to the linguistic and representational *Versagung* of thought processes, i.e., to the failure of the politics of memory in the collective mind of an allegedly "denazified" *Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, negative hallucination allows to read not quite the "unthought" of the West. Rather, it presents something the West 'does not know of not thinking'—of not 'envisaging'. In both cases, the role of the death drive is crucial to grasp the relationship between creativity and ethics, and more generally speaking, between absence and the possibility of representation. It is precisely the capability of showing that remnant—that *waste*—of thinking and representation invisible to Western culture that constitutes the specific feature of a form of Jewishness emerging through Celan's poetry—what the author called the "pneumatic concern" of his work in relationship with Judaism."⁵³⁷ What is at issue here is not only the work of the Negative in its different vicissitudes, but its relevance in highlighting irreconcilable approaches to the question of memory, transmission, loss, and the shaping cultural dynamics.

Let us return to Celan's very last poem to respectively reconstruct of the last months of his writing through the spectrum of negative hallucination so far outlined. The double recurrence

⁵³⁶ Green, TN, 235; WoN, 170.

⁵³⁷ See the letter written to Gershom Schocken on February 5, 1970, in Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, 280.

of the verb “to read” in this text is noteworthy. I propose to consider here *lesen* both as a transitive and intransitive verb. The transitive value of the present indicative “du liest” — “you read”—emerges first of all in that the act of reading necessarily requires an object, a form of textuality, in this case the poem. The poem becomes the object of a reading subject. To be more precise (and to speak with Winnicott and Green) the poem becomes a cultural transitional object, which is neither external nor internal, but rather creates a transitional area, a third, intermediate space between author and reader.⁵³⁸ “Du liest” expresses in this sense a demand for a *vis à vis* with the text which stems from the text itself, the present and the absent one, the written and the unwritten, unwritable one. Celan’s well-known letter to Hans Bender—dated May 18, 1960—evokes a meaningful image for our purpose:

Handwerk – das ist Sache der Hände. Und diese Hände gehören wiederum nur *einem* Menschen, d.h. einem einmaligen, sterblichen Seelenwesen, das mit seiner Stimme und seiner Stummheit einen Weg sucht. Nur wahre Hände schreiben wahre Gedichte. Ich sehe keinen prinzipiellen Unterschied zwischen Händedruck und Gedicht.⁵³⁹

Poem and handshake, writing and reading imply a double vectoriality that connects not only writer and reader, but the process of reading and writing, as hands reciprocally reaching from the page outwards and inwards towards the page. “You read” embodies therefore an invitation to a form of encounter—one that may or may not take place—through which each and every text acquires new life: a re-actualization in the voice of a new reader, a new form of resonating in it over and over again.

While referring to the poem, to the process of reading, of interrogating these texts and these pages, “du liest,” implicitly poses another vital question: ‘What are we reading through this writing?’ ‘What may we read through these poems?’ From this vantage point, the verb *lesen* seems to operate in a very specific “intransitive” sense: reading is transformed into a gaze directed towards something that is apparently not ‘there’ and yet alphabetically outlined, profiled on the page in all its “invisibleness.” Green’s remarks on the link between reading, writing, and voyeurism, in the paper *La déliaison*, show how “l’écriture est une représentation arbitraire (graphique) de l’absence de représentation figurée (imaginaire). La perception de l’écriture comme telle ne renvoie qu’à elle-même, seul le déchiffrement de l’écriture donnera

⁵³⁸ See Green, TN 324 ff.; WoN, 235 ff.

⁵³⁹ GW III, 177: “Handwork—it is a matter of hands. And these hands belong to *one* person, i.e., a unique, mortal soul searching for its way with its voice and its dumbness. Only truthful hands write true poems. I cannot see any basic difference between a handshake and a poem.”

accès à une représentation.”⁵⁴⁰ Let us insist for a moment on this interesting quote and on the verb “to decipher”—“*déchiffrer*” in the original French. At first glance, the verb chosen by Green might sound inappropriate if applied to the work of Paul Celan. And it does, especially if we consider how the latter firmly rejected any criticism regarding his poetry as being “hermetic,” “encoded,” or indeed “undecipherable.”⁵⁴¹

This is perhaps not the only way to grasp Green’s quote: Celan’s poetry—and particularly the intransitive value of Celan’s “*du liest*” underscored here—enable us to illuminate another connotation *en souffrance* in the verb chosen by Green. Of course, *déchiffrer* means “to decode,” “to interpret,” or “disclose” the hidden meaning of a text, of a code, or of a message (for instance, by using a key). An etymological analysis of the word, however, reminds us that the term “cipher” originally designates, according to Arabic algebra, the empty structure containing arithmetic representation. The Arabian term *sifr* refers to an arithmetical symbol or character of no value by itself “but which increases or decreases the value of other figures according to its position.”⁵⁴² Also, let us notice that the prefix *de-* in *déchiffrer* does not indicate only an “undoing,” but also a descending movement (“the senses of the Latin prefix include: down, down from, down to”), like other compound verbs of Latin origin such as *de-ponere* (to depone) or *de-scendere* (to descent)⁵⁴³ The verb “de-cipher” can be thus further understood as a sort of pathway alluding, literally, to a textual descend towards the ‘degree zero of representation.’ To use Green’s words: to the framing structure for the representation of the absence of representation.

From these remarks we can deduce that Celan’s “*du liest*” urges us to go beyond a ‘simple’ operation of deciphering. The verb *lesen* is charged with an absence which leads us to envisage the framing structure of representation: a framing structure that does not allow us to see but to *read*, to *feel through reading* an unreplaceable void on the page. As such, the poem has the task to trace as accurately as possible not quite an object in its ‘decipherability’ but a blank empty space as heavy as the body of a people, as loud as a scream lost in a gasp. Celan’s “you read”

⁵⁴⁰ Green, D, 26; PM, 344: “[...] The written word is a (graphic) representation of absence of representation (i.e., the imaginary). The perception of the written word as such refers only to itself: the deciphering alone will open the way to representation.”

⁵⁴¹ See Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, 253-264. Cfr. also the Celan’s letter to Siegfried Unseld, dated April 7, 1970, in which, significantly, the term “Chiffre” is employed—quoted in Wiedemann, *Paul Celan*, 860.

⁵⁴² I quote here from the Oxford English Dictionary: “cipher, n.: old French *cyfre*, *cyffre* (modern French *chiffre*) = Spanish *cifra*, Portuguese *cifra*, Italian *cifra*, medieval Latin *cifra*, *cifera*, *ciphra*, < Arabic *ṣifr* the arithmetical symbol ‘zero’ or ‘nought’ (written in Indian and Arabic numeration ۰), a substantive use of the adjective *ṣifr* ‘empty, void’, < *ṣafara* to be empty. The Arabic was simply a translation of the Sanskrit name *śūnya*, literally ‘empty.’” “cipher, n.” *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, September 2022), www.oed.com/view/Entry/33155. Accessed December 4, 2022.

⁵⁴³ “de-, prefix.” *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, September 2022), September 2022, www.oed.com/view/Entry/47600. Accessed December 4, 2022.

conveys therefore a far more difficult, harsh mandate: he confronts us with the darkness, an impenetrable, inaccessible silence that still finds its way in the poem. What to do with such unbearable, irreducible blank that this work outlines at the heart of poetry? Felstiner has in my opinion grasped in depth this question in Celan, as he wrote, regarding his very last text:

[...] *liest*, besides “read,” means “gather.” Years earlier, Celan had vintagers “press down on time like their eye.” Now *du liest*, coming hard upon the labor of “Vinegrowers,” tells you to do more than read: it might work to first say “you read,” then flip the “d” and the next time say “you reap.”⁵⁴⁴

Building upon Felstiner’s remark, it is indeed this long, difficult, painstaking work of harvesting, reaping, and gathering that Celan’s poetry does, in spite of all, against all odds, and that at the same time is demanded of us: “to do more than read,” by means of reading. To harvest, to reap, to gather from the text a handful of fragments of such a blank, distillation of the work of the poetic, crafted through hundreds and hundreds of verses. On this point, Maletta observed that what is at stake at the very core of Celan’s poetry is the creation of a space in which absence may be thought *without falling into the trap of a tautological reference* to the empty space left by those who were annihilated.⁵⁴⁵ Celan’s work creates a representational space which—under the sign of Auschwitz—reclaims and elaborates a new relationship with blankness and loss: a space-time at the margin of the *incr able*. The absence that Celan confronts us with is not tautological but inhabited, animated, put on the page through the work of the poetic.

The reiteration of “du liest” can therefore be considered in meta-representational terms as a repetition whose function is to articulate at once an invitation to encounter, to read the poem, while giving a corporeal weight to the abyssal void that such text has to carry. Reading and writing are, as such, exponential processes for Celan, they interrogate the very processes of reading and writing, and the dynamics of sublimation that underlie them. In this context, we can attempt to translate the transitive and intransitive aspects we recognize in Celan’s use of the verb *lesen* in the context of the *objectalising* and *disobjectalising functions*, thus relating directly to the processes of binding and unbinding, and to the different outcomes of destructivity in the text.

On the side of the objectalising function, the act of reading is invested, becoming the very object of the work of sublimation, towards the creation of a place of vigilance and alert in which to feel, to ‘see,’ through the eyes of writing, the representation of the absence of representation. On the other hand, nevertheless, the disobjectalising function involves the disinvestment of any

⁵⁴⁴ Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, 285.

⁵⁴⁵ Maletta, “Nessuno / testimonia per il / testimone.” 212.

representational process through reading. The reader is here presented with the excruciating incapability of giving representational form to such absence of representation that Celan's poetry inscribes on the page. Let us think, for example, of how Celan has been repeatedly labelled as paranoid, sometimes celebrated as a visionary surrealist experimentalist,⁵⁴⁶ other times denigrated by critics and detractors, or of how his later work has been rejected—until recently mostly ignored or considered impenetrable. Seen from this standpoint, all these elements, judgements, and reactions suggest the extent of the foreclosure Celan was striking (and still does) in his struggle for putting into poetry the search for a testimonial *Wirklichkeit*—the liminal, mortiferous reality marked by the extermination process.

By reflecting upon the process of writing and reading through the objectalising and disobjectalising functions, and upon the effects of Celan's work on the reader, we are able to grasp the vicissitudes of the death drive in his poetry, its diversions—we could say, its remodelling. In the case of the *incr able*, destructivity is fruitfully put into a representational frame as trace of an absence. Destructivity is thereby converted in the creation of a limit, a protecting boundary marking the inaccessible affective kernel of the relationship with the body of the mother—constituting, as we know, the core to which the creative process will not cease to return, unconsciously. We can detect here, again, the role of both parental figures through the work of sublimation. The *caesura* operated by the fatherly figure leaves its mark on the affective core of the *incr able*, generating the condition, the necessary space, for the return of the creating subject towards the periphery of that germ of loss. That *germinating loss* which took place before any language or speech, but which made language, speech, and creation, possible. In such poetic space enclosing the *incr able*—unreachable *space-time* which we could also call a *Zeitgeh ft* or *Timestead*—Celan is able to reclaim and recreate a nourishing relationship with the paternal and maternal element of creation.

On the side of the blank psychosis, the destructive drives attack the binding processes necessary for representation and thinking, thus making way for a mental dimension in which emptiness prevails. It is worth emphasizing, again, that what Celan's poetry does reaches significantly beyond a form of 'incommunicability,' or 'speechlessness.' The blank his poetry touches reaches a far deeper layer. His poetry challenges the reader by exposing a "blank thought," in which the death drive literally besieges the thinking process in its relationship with language. What is lost, in this case, is the capability of perceiving words as tools for thinking. Such "blank thought" reveals the failure of "thoughts perception" as an impossibility of establishing relationships between words and their meaning "in accordance with the reference

⁵⁴⁶ Emblematic is the case of the reception of his poem *Todesfuge*.

to the unconscious.”⁵⁴⁷ That is the point that Green makes in the following passage of *Le Travail du négatif*:

J’ai de mon côté essayé de comprendre les mécanismes du blanc de la pensée. Il me semble qu’on pourrait les comprendre si on arrivait à imaginer une pensée, non seulement sans images – sans représentation –, mais aussi sans mots pour percevoir ce que l’on pense. C’est à ce titre que le langage est à la fois une représentation et une perception, il représente les relations entre les choses et les relations de relations de la pensée et il permet à celle-ci d’être perçue. Aussi l’hallucination négative de la pensée se manifeste-t-elle dans la situation analytique par une impossibilité de s’exprimer avec les mots qui n’est pas le silence de l’émission de parole mais celui de la formation des mots comme outils de pensée, ou celui de la relation entre la morphologie et la sémantique des mots. Les mots peuvent être alors à la rigueur sensoriellement perçue, mais ce qui est perdu c’est la relation des mots à leur sens selon la référence à l’inconscient.⁵⁴⁸

Two vicissitudes of negative hallucination, then, corresponding to two vicissitudes of the death drive. For Celan, what is at stake in sublimation is the transformation of the impossibility, of the incapability, of the absence of representation into the representation of absence of representation. The *Unsichtbares*, the invisibility of the page, embodies the bet that the poetic must accept in order to face ‘otherwise’ absence and the abyss of the page. Celan’s poems prompt us to consider the problem of the object of writing—of the cultural, transitional, and transnarcissistic object—as something that is never given for granted but has to be thought from that irreducible, ambivalent blank linguistically outlined on the page.

“Something shall be, later,” reads the first verse of another poem from the third cycle of *Zeitgehöft* written on December 13, 1969:

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

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

[NKG 574]⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁷ Green, TN, 271; WoN, 197.

⁵⁴⁸ Green, TN, 270-271; WoN, 196-197: “For my part, I have tried to understand the mechanisms involved in blank thought. I think that we would be able to understand it if we could imagine thinking, not only without images – without representation – but also without words to perceive what one thinks. It is in this respect that language is both a representation and a perception; it represents the relation between things and the relations of thought relations making it possible for the latter to be perceived. The negative hallucination of thought also manifests itself in the analytic situation in the inability to express oneself with words. This is not the silence of an absence of speech but that of the formation of words as tools for thinking, or of the relation between the morphology and semantics of words. Words can in this case just about be perceived on a sensory level, but what is lost is the relation of the words to their meaning in accordance with the reference to the unconscious.” These remarks, formulated keeping in mind the analytical situation, can be extended, I claim, also to Celan’s poetry.

⁵⁴⁹ “Something shall be, later, / that fills itself with you / and lifts itself / to a mouth // Out of shattered / madness / I raise myself / and watch my hand / as it draws the one / single / circle.” [BT, 443-443]

Celan sent this poem both to Ilana Shmueli on December 15, 1969 and to his wife Gisèle, in the latter case as a birthday present, on March 19, 1970, just a few weeks before he ended his life. “Something shall be, later:” this verse expresses the mandate of filiation through poetry, the creation of a new potential generation of sense that *may* come, later. The work of poetry as act of resistance, of permanence of a Jewish trace in the world, surviving the immedicable wound Auschwitz left.

With growing awareness of his closeness to death, of the closure of the circle, an *I* watches, or rather “envisages” a hand drawing “the one / single / circle:” the lifelong passion of poetry. The third cycle of the unfinished work *Zeitgehöft*—which closes with *Rebleute*—opens with a poem about writing as an attempt to protect, to enclose: to create a new skin, a new shell, a new container for something that “shall be” in a deferred dimension. The recreation of an ‘*incréable*’ link, a fruitful relationship with the loss, is an endeavour that takes, for Celan, more than 30 years of writings.

By allowing us to grasp the impenetrable borders of the *incréable*, as a protective circle that Celan traces within the blank field of the “sideration of thought,” these poems show the ambivalence of negative hallucination, and of the representational processes through writing. It would be a tremendous simplification to oppose the work creation (the *incréable*) and psychosis in a sort of dialectic. The question is more intricated than that, for the two vicissitudes are not only inseparable, like the different threads of a common fabric: the death drive at work in negative hallucination is rather an element essential both to the *incréable*, as well as to the blank psychosis. Celan’s poem is capable of inhabiting this ambivalent blank liminal space, outlining the *incréable* of his own work, while critically exposing the *psychose blanche* of the *Kulturarbeit*.

Celan, however, never fell prey of the psychotic tendency his poetry exposed. If anything, the potential psychotic kernel of Celan’s poetry regards less the poet or the work of writing, than a reader, a culture, a world. Until the end, Celan could resist through poetry, as a way to arise from the “shattered madness,” “Aus dem zerscherbten / Wahn,” and to resist, firmly, until the death he voluntarily sought in the Seine.

I spoke above of a double vectoriality of the verb “you read,” alluding to the image, dear to Celan, of writing, scriptural hands, reaching outwards and inwards. “Du liest,” is that *du* also perhaps the poem itself? May this invitation to an encounter through the poem also hide a sardonic address to a reader? Celan was aware of the intrinsic difficulties that his work posed,

of the resistance that his poetry created in the reader. Although Celan's poetry relentlessly searched for that other reader and listener, such "other" was never given for granted. These texts, as such, do not cease reading us, regarding us, compelling us to both feel and reflect upon them, and to search for ways of thinking the human and the responsibilities that the human carries in front of the other.

Celan's poetry makes 'visible' a profound wound within European post-war culture. A wound, of which the *Kulturarbeit* seems to be still as of today narcissistically unaware: the incapability of conceiving irrepresentability as an ineliminable element in the representational processes. Celan's writing shows as such the limits of the dichotomy between "representation" and "absence of representation," subverting the equation "irrepresentability = no representation."

With his work, Celan confronts the Negative of Western history and culture as a work of suppression, foreclosure, and ultimately, of physical and cultural annihilation of the Jewish people as "otherness." A work of the Negative that reveals itself as the utopia of a continent without "other." In *The Destruction of the European Jews* Raul Hilberg, considering the historical unicity of the Shoah, probes the heart of the 'negativity of the West' towards the Jew. The Shoah represents the culmination—unique and unprecedented—of a process that started long before, and whose traces can be detected in the persecutions perpetrated by the Holy Inquisition, in expulsion of the Jews from the Iberic Peninsula (1492-1493), and in the assimilation process. With the concentration camps, the gas chamber, and the physical annihilation of the body of the culture and of the people, Nazi Germany reached an unprecedented stage:

The Nazi destruction process did not come out of a void; it was the culmination of a cyclical trend. We have observed the trend in the three successive goals of anti-Jewish administrators. The missionaries of Christianity had said in effect: You have no right to live among us as Jews. The secular rulers who followed had proclaimed: You have no right to live among us. The German Nazis at last decreed: You have no right to live.⁵⁵⁰

Under the sign of such a tragedy, Celan has given form with his poetry to a work of the Negative that survives on the page as something that cannot and does not want to be assimilated: a Judaism that resists as a unsolvable rest, both individual and collective, as a spectre haunting the West.

In a certain sense, a form of blank psychosis has long been deeply rooted in the West as an incapability of thinking and representing the other as "otherness" in its irreducibility. Celan was

⁵⁵⁰ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, revised and definitive Edition (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), Vol. I, 8-9.

able to make us see and feel in a unique way the work of the Negative as persistence of an unsolvable alterity within the poetic: a manifestation of a Negative that is radically irreconcilable with the West, and which persists within the poetic, and finding expression *as the poetic*.

These poems do not cease to remind us how the creative process, as inseparable from the vicissitudes of the drive, entails a work which cannot be exhausted, a work whose ethical legacy cannot be satisfied by sublimation itself. “Das Gedicht – eine endlose Vigilie” [M, 91], writes Celan in his preparatory notes to *Der Meridian*, commenting on a passage by Kafka.⁵⁵¹ “The poem—an interminable vigil,” poetry as a form of constant attentiveness, of wake and wait: a relentless critical exercise which informs the ethical value of the creative process, of the work, of poetry itself. From such a form of vigilance, Celan invites us to read and to write, think and to construct, verse after verse, a legacy for the future.

⁵⁵¹ See Maletta, “Poesia come resilienza,” 105.

CONCLUSIONS

Filiations of the Negative

Tam ve-lo nishlam

Finished but not concluded

The prospect of writing a conclusion for a study devoted to the work of the Negative cannot but sound, in many ways, counterintuitive. One may indeed wonder how such a work can be concluded if, as we have seen, the unfolding of the work of the Negative is indissolubly bound to a temporal dimension that never ceases to show its underlying complexity in *après coup* as a restructuration of irrepresentable elements which are vital to the work of creation. Is there a ‘limit’ to this very work of transformation of the limit and at the limit of representation which I called, with Green, the work of the Negative? Where does one draw the line of a closure? Can we speak, as Freud did with regards to the question of the “analysis,” of a ‘terminable’ and ‘interminable’ Negative?

These resistances at work compelled me to use as exergue to this last section the phrase *Tam ve-lo nishlam*. It is an old Hebrew expression which can colloquially be translated as “to be continued.” More precisely, it means “finished (or perfected) but not completed.” I first encountered this phrase many years ago in a work by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud’s Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable*.⁵⁵² This book, and most notably the last chapter, *Monologue with Freud*, left a durable impression, setting for me a high standard in terms of style, erudition, inspiration, and richness of content.

The last chapter of Yerushalmi’s work allows us to *read* the epistemophilic tension of the drive in all its transgenerational value. A form of transmission is here at work, on a profoundly subjective as well as cultural level. By literally giving tangible shape to an absence, revolving around a blank core, this conclusive part of *Freud’s Moses* embodies in turn Freud’s famous passage in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*: “Die Schrift ist ursprünglich die Sprache des Abwesenden.” “Writing is originally the language of the absent.”⁵⁵³ As such, *Tam ve-lo nishlam* echoes an inexhaustible journey of exploration inseparable from the work of the Negative.

A conclusion may well be impossible, yet it is necessary and inevitable for the work to be continued. As far as the “cultural experience” is concerned, to borrow Winnicott’s words, the work of the Negative surely cannot be exhausted by the enterprise of a single. While

⁵⁵² Yosef H. Yerushalmi, *Freud’s Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 96.

⁵⁵³ Freud, GW XIV, 450.

constituting the structure framing subjectivity, the work of the Negative exposes at the same time the troubling erosion of an identity. A cut, a *cesura* is required and imposed in order for the subject to become such: one has to say ‘no’ to the object—at once limit (or container) and stimulus awakening the drive—in order to say ‘yes’ to the possibility of subjectivation.

With this doctoral thesis I have attempted to reconstruct a journey—a journey through the work of the Negative and on the Negative—in which sublimation is at once a protagonist, a vicissitude, and a form of expression of the unconscious through the creative process. By following Kafka’s, Celan’s, and Green’s “negative adventures,” I have tried to create an original itinerary through their works. This journey, however, should be understood neither as a linear development, nor as a conscious form of achievement—be it in the guise of ‘absolute knowledge,’ or as the consciousness of a subterranean ‘history of the Negative.’

The writing subject is in turn written by the work of an unconscious which defies at every given step the categories of consciousness, its ‘positivity.’ Unlike Hegel’s conscious path leading towards the *Absoluter Geist*, sublimation, as vicissitude or destiny of the drive, is never given for granted, nor in any definitive sense ‘satisfactory:’ sublimation “guarantees nothing, protects against nothing.”⁵⁵⁴ Because of its ineliminable link with the drive and with the compulsion to repeat, sublimation, and more generally the work of the Negative, can never be considered as a final stage of achievement.⁵⁵⁵

Kafka, Celan, and Green were also well aware of how sublimation was *per se* not enough. Asking whether sublimation should be considered “an enrichment in the accomplishments of psychical life, a new pleasure which the psychical apparatus is capable of, or does it simply pave the way for the progression of the death drive?”⁵⁵⁶ Green knew that he was posing a question that after the Shoah had no easy answer. He was aware that the debate on the role of the death drive, of destruction and destructivity, needed to be kept alive, and not to be occulted by easy forms of reconciliations. Green put in new words the same dilemma that, in different forms, lies at the core of Kafka’s and Celan’s writings. National Socialism took place at the heart of European civilisation, among people who regarded the achievements of the sublime with outmost respect and reverence. In this respect, the writings of these authors are of enormous political and social importance, for they never cease to pose fundamental questions as for the role of culture and creativity in the way people, individual, communities exist and coexist.

⁵⁵⁴ Green, *WoN*, 239; *TN*, 330.

⁵⁵⁵ Green, *TN*, 58-60; *WoN*, 36-37.

⁵⁵⁶ Green, *WoN*, 238.

If the *incr able* describes the irrecoverable trace of an original link with the body of the mother, therefore alluding to a homeostatic state in which the *infans* is not a subject yet, what does the *incr able* correspond to on a social and collective level? Is it a form of universal, utopian peace, a messianic world in which the extinction of all inequalities and injustices prevails, or rather death, the extinction of the humankind, non-life? Even if the *incr able* is not explicitly discussed in a cultural or social sense by Green, the oedipal structure, which the *incr able* entails, suggests that a possible answer to this question cannot be seen neither in the first option nor, fortunately, in the second one. It is no accident that the *incr able* has to remain ‘uncreatable:’ the *incr able* entails on a social and political level, if we want to put it so, a form of responsibility intimately linked with the fact that the Negative cannot be separated from a form of ‘work’—of transformation, of rebounding, of reinvention.

The *incr able*, as a figure of such creative *work of the Negative*, reminds us that a possible response to the issues posed by coexistence is more complex than what political and social discourses may lead us to believe. Perhaps no answers, but rather well formulated questions have to be continuously searched for by drawing to the bonding forces of Eros, in the awareness that destructivity is constitutively ineliminable to the human condition and entertains a complex relationship with Eros itself. I wonder if Hannah Arendt had something similar in mind, as she wrote:

The life span of man running toward death would inevitably carry everything human to ruin and destruction if it were not for the faculty of interrupting it and beginning something new, a faculty which is inherent in action like an ever-present reminder that men, though they must die, are not born in order to die but in order to begin.⁵⁵⁷

* * *

With this work, I less aimed to create a bridge between different textual shores than to offer a new way of envisaging the specificity of these authors as bound to the work of the Negative, both as articulators and representatives of it, in different and yet deeply intertwined cultural-historical contexts. A journey at once to be reconstructed and undertaken, thus, in which Kafka, Celan, and Green reveal different elements and features of this complex constellation.

For Kafka the question of literary representation assumes an unprecedented value: his last collection of texts, *Ein Hungerk nstler* can be read as an attempt to narrate the vicissitudes of an irrepresentable element through the process of sublimation, from the suffering body to the

⁵⁵⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, second edition, with an introduction by M. Canov (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 246.

page, and beyond. As I have shown, this ‘metarepresentational storytelling’ does not exhaust in itself. It is rather linked with a complexity of historical, cultural, and literary issues finding new shape and force in his writing. The *incréable*, being the magnetic core of Kafka’s work and at the same time the limit creation cannot cross, offers far more than an aesthetical category. It is the kernel of the creative process in its corporeal link with the trace of an absence: a blank which is deeply, intimately close, imponderably remote, inaccessible.

With his last writings, Kafka did not merely give new dignity to a dying body by reinventing it and recovering it in another form through the process of sublimation. That corporeal remnant that Kafka articulated in his writing was, furthermore, no less linked with that limit, that remnant of a Judaism which the author, as well as an entire generation of Jews, could not perceive as their own. Freud’s *Unheimliches*, as Meghnagi pointed out, can be read in these terms and in strict correlation with Kafka’s writings. Kafka’s work represents therefore also a search for new means to cope with the cultural crisis of European Judaism, with the loss of traditional ways of transmission. As such it is an attempt to give new form, by means of literature, to an irrepresentable element within tradition itself.

Only four years separate Celan’s birth in 1920 (significantly, the same year of publication of Freud’s *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*) from Kafka’s death in 1924. And yet, the context in which the two authors worked were dramatically different. The threshold from Kafka to Celan leads us through what Daniel Sibony called “Le meurtre du Nom,”⁵⁵⁸ “the slaughter of the Name.” With the Shoah and with Celan’s work, the question of the Negative undergoes a deep mutation which also reflects a change in the representational modes of the unconscious. A mutation which keeps defying as of today the representational limits of Western civilisation.

Celan’s poetry confronts us with unprecedented challenges and compels us to think the specificity of the work of the Negative in his *oeuvre* through other conceptual tools. His poetry flows out from the wound of an unprecedented catastrophe in human history, which took place at the core of the *Kulturarbeit*. His writing confronts the reader with something unbearable on a social, political, collective level no less than on an individual one: the death drive at the core of the work of culture and civilization. Celan’s verses are in our time more significant than ever in order to rethink the question of an ethics from the point of view of literature. With his poetry, Celan revealed how the question of the Shoah was all but solved in Germany, and more broadly in Europe. The phrase “*La poésie ne s’impose plus, elle s’expose*,” [Mikr., 58] showcases as

⁵⁵⁸ Daniel Sibony, “Le meurtre du Nom,” (2008), URL: <https://danielsibony.typepad.fr/danielsibony/2009/01/le-meurtre-du-nom.html>. Accessed Mai 5, 2023.

such the core of Celan's work. Poetry *exposes itself* to the abyss of the human, as much as *poetry exposes*, under the sign of Auschwitz, the destructivity at the core of the cultural processes.

Celan's poetry embodies a different stage of the work of the Negative, in which the question of sublimation appears in all its complex ambivalence: his poetry must keep alive the *incréable* of a vanished world. While this very endeavour to put into poetry an immedicable loss keeps the poet alive, it also pushes the subject towards a mortal exposure to the death drive. As we observed, this endeavour must not be confused with a sacrificial dimension but pertain to the intricacies between objectalising and disobjectalising functions, between life narcissism and death narcissism, between the passion of poetry and its harsh mandate.

Green's work of theoretical investigation of the Negative allowed us to shed new light on Kafka and Celan's writings, emphasizing a dimension of the Negative still at best unexplored by the research, and at worst denied and disavowed by Western civilization. In addition to a theoretical and conceptual dimension, his own work is also pervaded by the Negative in metarepresentational terms. The work of the Negative does not represent for Green simply an object of investigation, but also the structural matrix of his work, his clinical approach, his theory, his writing. By saying 'no' to the dogmatism of post-Freudian schools, Green was able to create a new intellectual path, whose importance and legacy do not cease to unfold, today more than ever. Also, his claim according to which the complexity of the psyche and of mental functioning cannot be explained by just one model is a clear signal of how the Negative is deeply at work in his own thinking. It is however on a deeper level that the originality of Green's ideas reveals its connection with the work of the Negative. Again, the *incréable* is here at stake, and open to a temporal dimension. With this concept, Green allows us to see at once the statute of psychoanalytic epistemology in relationship with literature and with the creative power of the psyche. But thereby, Green also gives a new role to remnants of a dimension of infancy in which the subject, indeed, as *in-fans*, has no access to language. The *incréable* measures in this sense a distance which language cannot cover; a distance around which, nonetheless, the writing process does not cease to revolve.

The English verses of a poet Green loved, Jorge Luis Borges, seem to me quite appropriate to enclose what I am trying to say:

I offer you that kernel of myself that I have saved, somehow –
the central heart that deals not in words, traffics not with

dreams, and is untouched by time, by joy, by adversities.⁵⁵⁹

With the epochal turning point of the year 1920, which for Freud marks the introduction of the death drive and the remodelling of his theory, the unconscious becomes a psychic quality extended to the different agencies of the psyche. Whose *I* is here saving what of whom? Whose Self is here implied, here? Who is being written and who is actually writing in the works we just read?

The *incr able* was already inscribed here, *offered* to us by an unknown subject, unbeknownst to the writing subject itself, in these verses that Green did surely know at some point during his life. Pages and pages had to be written in order to give theoretical status and form to that significant kernel which marks the limit of inaccessibility of the subject to its remotest cell. The subject has always been, potentially, there, yet elsewhere, there where it did not know to be.

As far as psychoanalytic epistemology is concerned, these verses enclosing the *incr able* show to what extent the work of the Negative is operative in the process of theoretical creation—what we have called ‘poetics of the theory.’ From this standpoint, the *incr able* reveals a dimension of delay, of retrospectivity, which defies the perception of a linear, homogeneous time. Psychoanalysis, also in its metapsychological dimension, allows us to see the *temps  clat *, the time fragmented, exploded, exposed to its own, irreducible multiplicity: the temporalities of the subject, of the object, of the dream, of the work of creation, in tension with the time of history, just to name a few. Also for that reason, the “adventures of the Negative” that I researched in this work, are not reducible to a chronology; they constitutively entail the possibility of a continuous restructuration of an irrepresentable element.

We have remarked how the concept of filiation, in relationship to the work of the Negative, takes the form of a working through around an absence, a kernel of irrepresentability, which extends beyond the limits of the individual, of the subject in a given space and time. But what is the object of such work of transmission?

Something has to be lost, a link has to be missing, in order for the creation to be such. The limit has to be transformed, reconfigured, recreated, otherwise, elsewhere. But that is not new, of course. To that we must add a further element, namely the absence, the loss, *the transformation of the loss*. This becomes the unconscious object of the process of transmission at the heart of the works of the authors I have presented. The work of the Negative has to be

⁵⁵⁹ Borges, *Obras Completas*, 862.

understood here not quite as a content, but rather as a matrix, an empty structure organising that emptiness which structures the object of transmission.

The work of writing, in this sense, is not only a means to attempt the recreation of a link with a loss object. The work of writing is the delay and the limit of such a work, the very barrier that forbids the access to that trace, to that lost core of a link that precedes us as part of a relationship of which we were not aware.

What is transmitted in this interminable work is ultimately that very absent core, that matrix of irrepresentability which every generation has the task to receive and to rediscover as the object of the creative endeavour. *The object of transmission as such remains inescapably the object of another subject, of an alterity and for an alterity that has to rediscover, to reinvent and to devise it, again and again, in new ways.*

The sublimated object embodies an ineliminable dimension of thirdness, a limit which, as we have highlighted, composes the transitional area between generations, between two others. Psychoanalysis has addressed in a unique way the problematics of the object relation, especially with regards to the question of the object “founded-created.” This question is paramount for us, particularly in the case of cultural objects such as works of literature and of art. In *Le Travail du négatif*, in a passage that clearly bears witness of Green’s intellectual debt towards Winnicott’s theory of transitional phenomena, we read:

S’efforçant de localiser l’expérience culturelle dans la topique psychique, Winnicott donne asile aux objets culturels dans l’espace intermédiaire entre réalité extérieure et intérieure, espace qu’il avait déjà défini comme celui abritant les objets et les phénomènes transitionnels. [...] La problématique de trouver-crée est avancée ici. Winnicott désigne par le dilemme qui se rapporte à ce qui, existant dans la réalité, est simplement trouvé, par opposition à ce qui est créé par le sujet. Autre manière de parler de l’objet objectivement perçu (trouvé) et de l’objet subjectif (créé). On le voit l’accent se déplace du côté de la création. L’intérêt de la démarche de Winnicott est multiple. Il donne un statut psychique singulier aux productions culturelles du côté du transitionnel, aire intermédiaire (entre dedans et dehors), champ de la symbolisation (lieu de la réunion potentielle à l’endroit même où la séparation a eu lieu), du paradoxe (l’objet transitionnel est et n’est pas... le sein), etc.⁵⁶⁰

The cultural transitional objects that Kafka, Celan, and Green could create, each with its specific form and stylistic peculiarity, may accompany us in the new millennium, and help us

⁵⁶⁰ Green, TN, 325; WoN, 235: “Attempting to locate cultural experience in psychical topography, Winnicott provides a sanctuary for cultural objects in the intermediate area between external and internal reality, an area which he had already defined as accommodating objects and transitional phenomena. [...] The problematics of finding-creating are developed here. By this Winnicott is referring to the dilemma relating to that which, because it exists in reality, is simply found in contrast to that which is created by the subject. This is another way of speaking of the object objectively perceived (found) and of the subjective object (created). It can be seen that there is a shift in emphasis towards creation. Winnicott’s approach is of interest on several accounts. He gives a specific psychical status to cultural productions in the transitional, intermediate area (between inside and outside), the symbolic field (a place of potential union at the very point where the separation occurred), of paradox (the transitional object both is and is not ... the breast), etc.”

reflect upon a new ethics that, alike the work of the Negative, stems from the loss, from an absence, from an interruption that inhabits us since always. The destiny of their works is far from being independent from our individual and collective responsibility. It shall also depend on the place that we will be able to find and to create for them, on our capability of finding them anew, recreating a new relationship with them—in the liminal, transitional space that, through these works, we share with an otherness that calls us from the distance, underway in time.

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