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Sovereignties in Question  
*The Poetics of Paul Celan*

EDITED BY THOMAS DUTOIT AND OUTI PASANEN

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## Rams

### *Uninterrupted Dialogue—Between Two Infinities, the Poem*

Will I be able to bear witness, in a just and faithful fashion, to my admiration for Hans-Georg Gadamer?

Mingled with the gratitude and affection that have for so long characterized this feeling, I sense, somewhat obscurely, an ageless melancholy.

This melancholy, I dare say, is not only historical. Even if, thanks to some event still difficult to decipher, it had a historical reference, this would be in a manner that is singular, intimate, nearly private, secret, and still in reserve. For its first movement does not always orient it toward the epicenters of seisms that my generation will have perceived most often in their effects rather than their causes, only belatedly, indirectly, and in a mediated fashion, unlike Gadamer, who was their great witness, even their thinker. And not only in Germany. Every time we spoke together, always, it's true, in French, more than once here in Heidelberg, often in Paris or in Italy, through everything he confided to me, with a friendliness whose warmth always honored, moved, and encouraged me, I had the feeling of understanding better a century of German thought, philosophy, and politics—and not only German.

Death will no doubt have changed this melancholy—and infinitely aggravated it. Death will have sealed it. Forever. But underneath the petrified immobility of this seal, in this difficult to read but in some way blessed signature, I have a hard time distinguishing what dates

from the death of the friend and what will have preceded it for such a long time.<sup>1</sup> The same melancholy, different but also the same, must have overcome me already in our first encounter, in Paris in 1981. Our discussion must have begun by a strange interruption—something other than a misunderstanding—by a sort of prohibition, the inhibition of a suspension. And by the patience of indefinite expectation, of an *epochē* that made one hold one's breath, withhold judgment or conclusion. As for me, I remained there with my mouth open. I spoke very little to him, and what I said then was addressed only indirectly to him. But I was sure that a strange and intense sharing [*partage*] had begun. A partnership, perhaps. I had a feeling that what he would no doubt have called an “interior dialogue” would continue in both of us, sometimes wordlessly, immediately in us or indirectly, as was confirmed in the years that followed, this time in a very studious and eloquent, often fecund, fashion, through a large number of philosophers the world over and in Europe, but above all in the United States, who attempted to take charge of and reconstitute this still virtual or suspended exchange, to prolong it or to interpret its strange caesura.

## I

In speaking of *dialogue*, I use a word that I confess will remain, for a thousand reasons, good or bad (which I will spare you), foreign to my lexicon, as if belonging to a foreign language, whose use would provoke translations a bit off, requiring precautions. By specifying above all “interior dialogue,” I am delighted to have already let Gadamer speak in me. I inherit, literally, what he said in 1985, shortly after our first encounter, in the conclusion to his text “*Destruktion and Deconstruction*”:

Finally, that dialogue, which we pursue *in our own thought* and which is perhaps enriching itself in our own day with great new partners who are drawn from a heritage of humanity that is extending across our planet, should seek its partner everywhere—just because this partner is other, and especially if the other is completely different. Whoever wants me to take deconstruction to heart and insists upon difference stands at *the beginning of a dialogue*, and not at its end.<sup>2</sup>

What is it that remains, even today, so *unheimlich* about this encounter, which was, to my mind, all the more fortunate, if not successful, precisely for having been, in the eyes of many, a missed

encounter? It succeeded so well at being missed that it left an active and provocative trace, a promising trace, with more of a future ahead than if it had been a harmonious and consensual dialogue.

I call this experience, in German, *unheimlich*. I have no French equivalent to describe in one word this affect: in the course of a unique and therefore irreplaceable encounter, a peculiar strangeness came to mingle indissociably with a familiarity at once intimate and unsettling, sometimes disquieting, vaguely spectral. I also use this untranslatable German word, *unheimlich*, to revive, even as I speak in French and you can read me in German,<sup>3</sup> our common sensitivity to the limits of translation. I also use it in memory of Gadamer's diagnostic concerning what many of our friends hastily interpreted as an originary misunderstanding. According to him, errors in translation had been one of the essential causes of that surprising interruption in 1981. At the opening of *Deconstruction und Hermeneutics*, in 1988, not long, I assume, after our second public debate—right here in Heidelberg, with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Reiner Wiehl, about Heidegger's political commitments—Gadamer situated in these terms the test of translation and the always-threatening risk of misunderstanding at the border of languages: "My encounter with Derrida in Paris three years ago, which I had looked forward to as a dialogue between two totally independent developers of Heideggerian initiatives in thought, involved special difficulties. First of all, there was the language barrier. This is always a great difficulty when *thought or poetry* strives to leave traditional forms behind, trying to hear new orientations drawn from within their own mother tongue."<sup>4</sup>

The fact that Gadamer names "thought or poetry," rather than science or philosophy, is not fortuitous. That is a thread we ought not to lose track of today. Moreover, in "The Boundaries of Language" (1984), which came before the essay I just quoted from 1988, but which is closer to our meeting in 1981, Gadamer dwells at length on what links the question of translation to poetic experience. The poem is not only the best example of untranslatability. It also gives to the test of translation its most proper, its least improper, place. The poem no doubt is the only place propitious to the experience of language, that is to say, of an idiom that forever defies translation and therefore demands a translation that will do the impossible, make the impossible possible in an unheard-of event. In "The Boundaries of Language," Gadamer writes, "this [he has been speaking of the "phenomenon of foreign language"] is valid especially when it is a question of translation [a note refers to his essay "Reading Is like

Translating”<sup>5</sup>]. And in that case, poetry, the lyrical poem, is the great instance for the experience of the ownness and the foreignness of language.”<sup>6</sup>

Supposing that all of poetry belongs *directly and simply* to what we call art or the fine arts, let us also recall what Gadamer specifies more than once, notably in his *Selbstdarstellung*.<sup>7</sup> He underlines the essential role of what he calls “the experience of art” in his concept of philosophical hermeneutics, next to all the sciences of comprehension that serve him as a starting point. Let us never forget that *Truth and Method* opens with a chapter devoted to “the experience of art,” to an “experience of the work of art” that “always fundamentally surpasses any subjective horizon of interpretation, whether that of the artist or that of the recipient.”<sup>8</sup> Concerning this horizon of subjectivity, the work of art never stands there like an object facing a subject. What constitutes its being a work is that it affects and transforms the subject, beginning with its signatory. In a paradoxical formula, Gadamer proposes reversing the presumed order: “The ‘subject’ of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it, but the work itself.”<sup>9</sup>

But this sovereign authority of the work—for example, what makes the poem (*Gedicht*) a given order and the dict of a dictation—this sovereign authority of the work is also a call for a responsible answer and for dialogue (*Gespräch*). You will have recognized the title of a work Gadamer published in 1990, *Gedicht und Gespräch*.

I do not know if I have the right, without presumption, to speak of a dialogue between Gadamer and me. But should I aspire to it at all, I would repeat that this dialogue was first of all interior and *unheimlich*. The secret of what sustains [*entretient*] this *Unheimlichkeit*, here, at this very instant, is that this interior dialogue has probably kept [*gardé*] alive, active, and auspicious the tradition of that which seemed to suspend it outside, by which I mean, in particular, in the public sphere. I want to believe that, in a heart of hearts that can never be closed, this conversation [*entretien*] kept [*a gardé*] the memory of the misunderstanding with a remarkable constancy. This conversation cultivated and saved the hidden sense of this interruption uninterruptedly, whether silently or not—and for me, more often than not, in an interior and apparently mute way.

One speaks often and too easily of interior monologue. Yet an interior dialogue precedes it and makes it possible. Dividing and enriching the monologue, such dialogue commands and orients it. My

interior dialogue with Gadamer, with Gadamer himself, with Gadamer alive, still alive, if I dare say, will not have ceased since our meeting in Paris.

No doubt this melancholy stems, as always with friendship, at least this is how I experience it each time, from a sad and invasive certainty: one day death will necessarily separate us. A fatal and inflexible law: one of two friends will always see the other die. The dialogue, virtual though it may be, will forever be wounded by an ultimate interruption. Comparable to no other, a separation between life and death will defy thought right from a first enigmatic seal, which we will endlessly seek to decipher. No doubt the dialogue continues, following its course in the survivor. He believes he is keeping the other in himself—he did so already while the other was alive—but now the survivor lets the other speak inside himself. He does so perhaps better than ever, and that is a terrifying hypothesis. But survival carries within itself the trace of an ineffaceable incision. Interruption multiplies itself, one interruption affecting another, in abyssal repetition, more *unheimlich* than ever.

Why insist so much on interruption already? What is the remembrance that most vividly disturbs my memory today? Well, it is what was said, what was done or what happened, after the last of the three questions that, in 1981 in Paris, I had dared to ask Gadamer. This question marked at once the test, if not the confirmation, of the misunderstanding, the apparent interruption of the dialogue, but also the beginning of an interior dialogue in each of us, a dialogue virtually without end and nearly continuous. At that time, indeed, I called for a certain *interruption*. Far from signifying the failure of the dialogue, such an interruption could become the condition of comprehension and understanding. Allow me just once to recall my question, the third and last of a series, about goodwill in the desire for consensus and about the problematic integration of psychoanalytic hermeneutics into a general hermeneutics.

Third question: bearing still on this axiomatics of goodwill. Whether with or without psychoanalytic afterthoughts, one can still raise questions about this axiomatic precondition of interpretative discourse that Professor Gadamer calls *Verstehen*, “understanding the other” and “understanding one another.” Whether one speaks of consensus or of misunderstanding (as in Schleiermacher), one needs to ask whether the precondition for *Verstehen*, far from being the continuity of “rapport,” as was said

last night, is not rather the interruption of rapport, a certain rapport of interruption, the suspension of all mediation.<sup>10</sup>

The melancholic certainty of which I am speaking thus begins, as always, in the friends' lifetime Not only by an interruption but by a speaking of interruption. A *cogito* of adieu, this salut without return signs the very breathing of the dialogue, of dialogue in the world or of the most interior dialogue. Hence mourning no longer waits. From this first encounter, interruption anticipates death, precedes death. Interruption casts over each the pall of an implacable future anterior. One of us two *will have* had to remain alone. Both of us knew this in advance. And right from the start. One of the two *will have* been doomed, from the beginning, to carry alone, in himself, both the dialogue, which he must pursue beyond the interruption, and the memory of the first interruption.

And carry the world of the other, which I say without the facility of a hyperbole. The world after the end of the world.

For each time, and each time singularly, each time irreplaceably, each time infinitely, death is nothing less than an end of *the* world. Not *only one* end among others, the end of someone or of something *in the world*, the end of a life or of a living being. Death puts an end neither to someone in the world nor to *one* world among others. Death marks each time, each time in defiance of arithmetic, the absolute end of the one and only world, of that which each opens as a one and only world, the end of the unique world, the end of the totality of what is or can be presented as the origin of the world for any unique living being, be it human or not.

The survivor, then, remains alone. Beyond the world of the other, he is also in some fashion beyond or before the world itself. In the world outside the world and deprived of the world. At the least, he feels solely responsible, assigned to carry both the other and *his* world, the other and *the* world that have disappeared, responsible without world (*weltlos*), without the ground of any world, thenceforth, in a world without world, as if without earth beyond the end of the world.

## II

That would be one of the first ways, doubtless not the only one, to let resound within us, before or beyond verifiable interpretation, a line [*vers*] of poetry by Paul Celan: "Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich tragen."



Pronounced like a sentence, in the form of a sigh or a verdict, so goes the last line of a poem that we can read in the collection *Atemwende*. Shortly before his death, Celan gave me a copy of it at the École Normale Supérieure, where he was my colleague for several years. Another split, another interruption.

If I make his voice be heard [*entendre*] here, if I hear it in me now, that is above all because I share Gadamer's admiration for this other friend, Paul Celan. Like Gadamer, I have often attempted, in the night, to read Paul Celan and to think with him. With him toward [*vers*] him. If, once again, I wish to encounter this poem, it is, in fact, in order to attempt to address, or at least to make as if I am addressing, Gadamer himself, himself in me outside myself. It is in order to speak to him. Today I would like to pay homage to him in a reading that will also be an uneasy interpretation, quavered or quavering, perhaps even something wholly other than an interpretation. In any case, on a path that would cross his.

GROSSE, GLÜHENDE WÖLBUNG

mit dem sich  
hinaus- und hinweg-  
wühlenden Schwarzgestirn-  
Schwarm:

der verkieselten Stirn eines Widders  
brenn ich dies Bild ein, zwischen  
die Hörner, darin,  
im Gesang der Windungen, das  
Mark der geronnenen  
Herzmeere schwillt.

Wo-  
gegen  
rennt er nicht an?

Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich  
tragen.

VAST, GLOWING VAULT

with the swarm of  
black stars pushing them-  
selves out and away:

onto a ram's silicified forehead  
I brand this image, between  
the horns, in which,  
in the song of the whorls, the  
marrow of melted  
heart-oceans swells.

In-  
to what  
does he not charge?

The world is gone, I must carry you.<sup>11</sup>

We will re-read this poem. We will attempt to listen to it, and then respond in a responsible fashion to what Gadamer often called the *Anspruch* of the work, the claim it makes upon us, the demanding call a poem sets up, the obstinate but justified reminder of its right to stand up for its rights. But why do I get ahead of myself? And why have I quoted first a last line, all alone, before any other, isolating it in a no doubt violent and artificial fashion: "Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich tragen"?

No doubt, so as to acknowledge its charge. I will try to weigh [peser] the import [*la portée*]<sup>12</sup> of this charge in a moment, in order to evaluate [*soupeser*] it, in order to endure its gravity, if not to think [penser] it. What is called weighing [peser]? An operation of weighing [*Une pesée*]? To think [penser] is also, in Latin as in French, to weigh [peser], to *compensate*, to *counterbalance*, to *compare*, to *examine*. In order to do that, in order to think and weigh, it is thus necessary to carry (*tragen*, perhaps), to carry in oneself and carry upon oneself. Supposing that we could wager everything on etymology, something I would never do, it appears that we in French are without the luck of having this proximity between *Denken* and *Danken*. We have a hard time translating questions like those that Heidegger raises in *What Is Called Thinking?*: “That which is thought, the thought [*Gedanc*], implies the thanks [*Dank*]. But perhaps these assonances between thought and thanks or gratitude are superficial and contrived. . . . Is thinking a giving of thanks? What do thanks mean here? Or do thanks consist in thinking?”<sup>13</sup>

But if we are not lucky enough to have this collusion or this play between thought and gratitude, and if the commerce of thanking always risks remaining a compensation, we do have in our Latin languages the friendship between thinking and weighing (*penware*), between thought and gravity. And between thought [*pensée*] and the reach or grasp [*portée*] of someone. Whence the *examination*. The weight of a thought calls for and is always called the *examination*, and you know that *examen* is, in Latin, the hand of a scale. We count on this hand to measure the accuracy [*justesse*] and perhaps the justice of a judgment concerning what we give it to bear.

Another reason why I believed I had to begin by quoting, and then by repeating, the last line of this poem, “Die Welt is fort, ich muß dich tragen,” was so as to follow faithfully, indeed, even to attempt to imitate, up to a certain point and as far as possible, a gesture that Gadamer repeats twice in his book on Celan, *Who Am I and Who Are You?: A Commentary on Celan’s ‘Atemkristall.’*<sup>14</sup>

Gadamer had announced that “following the hermeneutical principle,” he would begin with the final line, which bears the stress of a poem that he was in the process of interpreting: “wühl ich mir den / versteinerten Segen.”<sup>15</sup> As he explains: “For it contains evidently the core of this short poem.”<sup>16</sup>

We are here today between two breaths or two inspirations, *Atemwende* and *Atemkristall*. Gadamer accompanies with a commentary this little poem by Celan:

WEGE IM SCHATTEN-GEBRÄCH  
deiner Hand.

Aus der Vier-Finger-Furche  
wühl ich mir den  
versteinerten Segen

PATHS IN THE SHADOW-ROCK  
of your hand

Out of the four-finger-furrow  
I grub for myself the  
petrified blessing<sup>17</sup>

No doubt this poem says something about the chance for a benediction or blessing (*Segen*), for a petrified blessing, like the seal that fascinated me an instant ago, and for a blessing under whose sign I would like to inscribe this moment. This sign is written by the same hand, by the same fingers, as so many other blessings of Celan. For example, “Benedicta”:

Ge-  
segnet seist du, von weit her, von  
jenseits meiner  
erloschenen Finger.

Be—  
be thou blessed, from afar, from  
beyond my  
guttering fingers.<sup>18</sup>

As you will have noticed, the *wühlen* of the other poem, the one from *Atemwende* (“mit dem sich / hinaus-und hinweg- / wühlenden Schwarzgestirn-Schwarm”) seems to echo the *wühlen* of this poem, collected in *Atemkristall* (“Wühl ich mir den / Versteinerten Segen”).

*Wühlen*: isn’t that the same unsettled burrowing, every time the movement of a pushing that is subversive and seeking, curious and pressed to know? Gadamer insists upon this word more than once. The blessing is not given, it is sought for; it seems to be extracted by hand. It exerts a questioning pressure. It strives to open the hand clenched into a fist and closed upon its meaning. A hand would keep hidden the message of blessing. The hand that blesses thus makes reading available, but it also calls for a reading of what it conceals from reading. The hand both gives and withdraws the meaning of the message. It retains the blessing itself, as if a blessing acquired in advance, a blessing that you can count upon, a verifiable, calculable, and decidable blessing, were not a blessing at all. Shouldn’t a blessing, mustn’t a blessing always remain improbable?

This poem, therefore, poses a first problem of interpretation. Gadamer proposes a hypothesis: “The closeness and charity of the benefactor is foregone to such an extent that the blessing is present only in petrification. Now, the poem says: This blessing of the benefactory hand is sought after with the grubbing and despairing fervor of an indigent.”<sup>19</sup>

He then takes a bold, adventurous step. Through this vision, he proposes a reading of the scene of reading as one of subversion and

reversal. What this poem gives to be read might also be the scene of reading, that is, the provocation that calls for a reading of what the poem itself gives to be read: "Accordingly, the benefacting hand is inverted boldly into the hand where palm-reading can reveal a message of beneficent hope."<sup>20</sup>

The blessing *of* the poem: this double genitive says well the gift of a poem that both blesses the other and lets itself be blessed by the other, by the receiver or the reader. But this address to the other does not exclude self-referential reflection, for it is always possible to say that the poem speaks *of itself*, of the scene of writing, of the signature and of the reading that it inaugurates. This specular and autotelic reflection does not close upon itself. Without any possible return, it is simultaneously a blessing granted to the other, the giving of a hand, *at once open and folded shut*.

What is the hand? What is *this* hand here, the hand of *this* poem? How could its openness and its being folded be represented at once, here, in an image or a tableau (*Bild*)? Already in his first sentence, Gadamer announces, I repeat, that "following the hermeneutical principle," he will begin with the last line of the poem, the one that bears the accent, where, in his view, "the core of this short poem is contained." Let us accept, at least provisionally and without question, that this would be the hermeneutical principle, and this its evidence. Let us postulate that the last line carries the meaning of the whole poem. In following these two axioms, Gadamer acknowledges very quickly, and explicitly, that his interpretive reading must take more than one interruption into account. His reading must also leave in suspense a series of questions that are so many interruptions in the decipherment of meaning.

These first interruptions initially follow folds that are also furrows for reading. As Gadamer writes:

The context tells us what "shadow-rock" means. When the hand is clenched a little and the creases cast shadows, then, in the "strata" of the hand, that is, in the lattice of interrupted and folded lines, the breaks [the ruptures] interpreted by the palm-reader become visible. The palm-reader reads from them the language of destiny or of character. The "four-finger-furrow" is thus the continuous transverse crease which, without the thumb, joins the four fingers into a unity.<sup>21</sup>

Gadamer first describes, it seems, a sort of interruption that is multiple but wholly interior, that which, inside the hand, is both given and

refused to reading: “in the lattice of interrupted and folded lines, the breaks interpreted by the palm-reader become visible. The palm-reader reads from them the language of destiny or of character.” These lines of rupture are already situated *in* a text that is stretched out and given up. Here, the text is a hand that blesses. But it is one that, along these *internal* lines, threatens to deny itself, to conceal itself, to disappear. Without this threat, this risk, without this improbability, without this impossibility of proving—which must remain infinitely, and which must not be saturated or closed by any certainty—there would be neither reading nor giving nor blessing.

Further on, there is the sudden *interruption* of an edge, one that this time does not traverse the inside of the text. Rather, it surrounds the text. An *external* border delineates a suspensive interruption. After a series of sketched-out readings and venturesome questions, notably on the subject of the “I”—the “I” of the poet or of the reader in search of a blessing or a blessed reading—Gadamer leaves a series of questions undecided, undecidable, on the threshold. Far from stopping interpretive reading, these questions open and liberate the very experience of such reading. This time, it will concern the “you” no less than the “I.” Placed under the question mark, these many affirmations link the possibility of blessing and the future of interpretation to a pensive and suspensive interruption. In order to underline the firm decision to leave the undecidable undecided, allow me to quote the entire paragraph, which concludes without concluding. The right to leave things undecided is recognized as belonging to the poem itself, not to the poet or the reader.

Whose hand is it? It is difficult to see in this benefactory hand that no longer blesses anything but the hand of the hidden God, whose abundance of blessedness has become indiscernible, and only accessible to us as if in petrification, albeit in the reified ceremony of religion or the reified power of human faith. But, once again, the poem *does not decide* who “You” is. Its only message is the urgent need of the person who seeks a blessing from “your” hand, regardless of whose it is. What he finds is a “petrified” blessing. Is that still a blessing? An ultimate blessing? From your hand?<sup>22</sup>

I want to tell you now what, rightly or wrongly, I most want to keep alive in the echo of these last questions. More than the indecision itself, I admire the respect Gadamer shows for the indecision. This

indecision seems to interrupt or suspend the decipherment of reading, though in truth it ensures its future. Indecision keeps attention forever in suspense, breathless, that is to say, keeps it alive, alert, vigilant, ready to embark on a wholly other path, to open itself up to whatever may come, listening faithfully, giving ear, to that other speech. Such indecision hangs upon the breath of the other speech and of the speech of the other—right where this speech might still seem unintelligible, inaudible, and untranslatable. Interruption is indecisive, it undecides. It gives its breath to a question that, far from paralyzing, sets in motion. Interruption even releases an infinite movement. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer feels a need to underline what he calls the “boundlessness of the dialogue.”<sup>23</sup> In “The Boundaries of Language,”<sup>24</sup> he names at least twice the “infinite process.” *On the one hand*, the infinite process characterizes dialogue in general: from “the hermeneutical standpoint,” dialogue “is never finished until it has led to a real agreement.” If “no dialogue has ever really been finished,” that is because a “real” agreement, a “perfect agreement between two people contradicts the very essence of individuality,” a situation wherein Gadamer recognizes the sign of finitude itself. I would even say that interruptive finitude is what calls for the infinite process. *On the other hand*, the “infinite process” is named again, two pages further on, in order this time to characterize the interminable dialogue of the translator with himself.

In these last questions about what the poem leaves undecided, what I am determined to keep alive is the singular and no doubt intentional way in which Gadamer’s rhetoric turns things. In truth, it is something other than rhetoric or a turn. Beyond any trope, Gadamer literally says that the poem *itself* will decide nothing. The poem is indeed here the “*subjectum*” we evoked a little while ago. If the poem retains an apparently sovereign, unpredictable, untranslatable, almost unreadable initiative, that is also because it remains an abandoned trace, suddenly independent of the intentional and conscious meaning of the signatory. It wanders, but in a secretly regulated fashion, from one referent to another—destined to outlive, in an “infinite process,” the decipherments of any reader to come. If, like any trace, the poem is thus destinally abandoned, cut off from its origin and from its end, this double interruption makes of the poem not just the unfortunate orphan Plato speaks of in the *Phaedrus* when he discusses writing. This abandonment—which appears to deprive the poem of a father, to separate and emancipate it from a father who would expose

calculation to the incalculability of interrupted filiation—this immediate unreadability is also the resource that permits the poem to bless (perhaps, only perhaps), to give, to give to think, to give cause to think, to give the possibility of weighing the charge or the import, to give rise to reading, to speaking (perhaps, only perhaps).

From the heart of its solitude and through its immediate unreadability, the poem can always speak—itsself of itself, sometimes in a transparent fashion, sometimes resorting to esoteric tropes that require an initiation and a reading technique. This self-reference always remains an appeal (*Anspruch*) to the other, even if only to the inaccessible other in oneself. This self-reference in no way suspends the reference to the inappropriable.

Even where the poem names unreadability, its own unreadability, it also declares the unreadability of the world. Another poem of Celan's thus begins: "UNLESBARKEIT dieser / Welt. *Alles doppelt*"; "UNREADABILITY of this world. All things twice over."<sup>25</sup> And, just a bit further on, one hesitates to identify the "you" whom this poem apostrophizes: no matter whom, more than one, the poem itself, the poet, the reader, the abyssal profundity of this or that other singularity forever encrypted, any or an entirely other, God, you or me ("Du, in dein Tiefstes geklemmt").

### III

Will we know how to read, will we have the ability to translate the succession or substitution of definite articles (masculine, feminine, or neuter) and, above all, of personal pronouns (*ich, er, dich*), so as to attempt to respond to them or to answer for them? Articles and pronouns that name the living as well as the dead, animals, humans or gods, and that so skillfully punctuate this poem, which ends:

Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich tragen.

I will re-read it one more time. It would be necessary to do so endlessly. I'll underline now the personal pronouns in it, as if to suggest that the *Anspruch* of this poem also evokes Gadamer's book on Celan: *Who Am I and Who Are You?* It is as if I were permitting myself timidly to slip in a postscript. Over every stanza, and this will not have escaped either your eyes or your ears, stands guard, as it were, the sentry of a different personal pronoun: in the first three stanzas, *sich, ich, er*; in the last line, *ich* and *dich*. The last line says something about the import (*tragen*), which we are going to attempt to think

through. It will run the risk of finding itself charged with carrying all the meaning of a poem that one might be quick to believe is there only to prepare for or to illustrate the meaning of the last line. The last line happens, however, to be dissociated and separated by the abyssal duration of a blank silence, like a disjointed aphorism, the sentence or verdict of another time, after a perceptible interruption, longer than any other, which we might be tempted to saturate, indeed, to overburden endlessly with virtual discourses, significations, or meditations.

GROSSE, GLÜHENDE WÖLBUNG  
mit dem *sich*  
hinaus- und hinweg-  
wühlenden Schwarzgestirn-Schwarm:

der verkieselten Stirn eines Widders  
brenn *ich* dies Bild ein, zwischen  
die Hörner, darin,  
im Gesang der Windungen, das  
Mark der geronnenen  
Herzmeere schwillt.

Wo-  
gegen  
rennt *er* nicht an?

Die Welt ist fort, *ich* muß *dich* tragen.

Throughout what I will now have the temerity to venture, listen only to the calls for help.<sup>26</sup> I am not sure of anything, even if I am also sure—but I draw no advantage from it—that no one has the right to be sure of anything here. The certainty of a guaranteed reading would be the first inanity or the worst betrayal. This poem remains for me the place of a unique experience. The calculable and the incalculable are allied there not only in the language of another but in the foreign language of another who gives me (what a fearsome present!) the occasion to countersign the future as much as the past: the unreadable is no longer opposed to the readable. Remaining unreadable, it secretes and keeps secret, in the same body, the chances of infinite, unfinished readings.

When I first discovered the poem—I confess this as a possible misdeed—my fascinated reading pounced right away on the last line. By hypotheses that I will tell you later, I avidly appropriated for myself a number of significations like so many scenes, stagings, and possible worlds, like so many addresses in which the *I* and the *you* were able



to alight upon anyone and anything in the world, beginning with the poet, the poem, or their receiver, either in the history of literature or in life, between the world of the poem and the world of life, even beyond the world that is no more.<sup>27</sup> I thus tried first to translate the last line into French. Its grammatical present carries within it more than one time or tense. “Die Welt ist fort”: the world has gone, already, the world has left us, the world is no more, the world is far off, the world is lost, the world is lost from sight, the world is out of sight, the world has departed, farewell to the world, the world has died, and so on.

But what world, what is *the* world? And, sooner or later: what is *this* world? So many inevitable and far-reaching questions. Of course, I will come back to these first steps, and to the “ich muß dich tragen” (I must carry you; it is necessary for me to carry you), which is in appearance easier to translate, but just as difficult to interpret.

I will not unfold here—I would not have the time to do so, and I have attempted to do so elsewhere—protocols of an apparently theoretical or methodological nature. I will say nothing, directly, of the insurmountable but always abusively surmounted border between, *on the one hand*, indispensable formal approaches, thematic, polythematic approaches that are attentive, as any hermeneutic must be, to the explicit and implicit folds of meaning [*sens*], to ambiguities and overdeterminations, to the rhetoric and to the intentional meaning [*vouloir-dire*] of the author, to all the idiomatic resources of the poet, of the language, and so forth, and, *on the other hand*, a disseminal reading-writing that, endeavoring to take all this into account, to account for all this, to respect its necessity, also directs itself [*se porte*] toward an irreducible remainder or excess. The excess of this remainder escapes any gathering in a hermeneutic. This hermeneutic is made necessary, and also possible, by the excess. Likewise, excess here makes possible, among other things, the trace of the poetic work, its abandonment or its survival, beyond any signatory and any specific reader. Without this remainder, there wouldn’t even be the *Anspruch*, the injunction, the call, the provocation that sings or makes one sing in any poem, in what one could, with Celan, name “Singbarer Rest,” “Singable Remnant,” the title or the *incipit* of another poem from *Atemwende*.<sup>28</sup>

Of course, we must do everything to attempt to know the determinable meaning of this poem that ends or is signed in this way: “Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich tragen.” But even supposing that we knew how to comprehend and identify what Celan *meant to say*, supposing

that we knew what dated event, in the world or in his life, he is bearing witness to, that we knew to whom he dedicates or addresses the poem, who the *I*, the *he*, or the *you* is for the poem as a whole and, for this may be different in each of its lines, well, even then we wouldn't exhaust the trace of this remainder, the very remaining of this remainder, which makes the poem both readable and unreadable to *us*. Besides, who is this "us"? What is its place, since it is certainly called but keeps silent, or, in any case, never presents itself *as such* in this poem, which always and only names *I*, *you*, and *he*. Its *shibboleth* is exposed to us and escapes from us, it awaits us; we are still awaiting one another, precisely where "Niemand / zeugt für den / Zeugen"; "No one / bears witness for the / witness."<sup>29</sup>

On the edge of an abyss, after the blank space of a pause of perhaps infinite duration, the last breath, the expiration of the poem, "Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich tragen," is no doubt a line that appears disjoined. But it is also adjoined and conjoined by Celan, by the oeuvre that he bequeathed to us. For Celan fixed the form of this oeuvre in the public realm, even though this line disjoined from the poem could have appeared elsewhere, in which case it would not have lost its resources of meaning and would have called for other readings. The breath of this sigh, in *Atemwende*, is, certainly, the support, in the sense of the medium (Gadamer would perhaps say, and perhaps too quickly, the *subject* of the poem), but, in its very notation, in the music borne by it, it is sustained, supported, even prompted by what precedes, announces, and engenders it.

Now, to begin with the surest and simplest of observations, the formal arrangement of *thirteen* lines *plus one*—let us pay attention to this—seems remarkably skillful. In the orchestral architecture of its composition, I will pick out just four principal traits.

1. Grammatically, each of its verbs is conjugated in the *present* tense. Everything happens as if speech never left the presence of a present, even if—I'll get there in an instant—this grammatical appearance conceals the very heterogeneous temporalities it actually puts into operation.

2. Among these present tenses, but in a four-time rhythm, the punctuation marks the poem in a very visible fashion, visually differentiating it in its layout: (a) a *colon* [deux points] after the first stanza (so that, after a sort of implicit "that is to say," the second appears as the explanation or translation of the first); (b) a *period* [un point] after the second stanza, which comes to close a presentation; (c) a *question mark* [point d'interrogation] after the third stanza of three lines, the

poem's only question; (d) a *final period* [un point final], at the end, after the sentence, the *Spruch* of the *Anspruch*, the sentence, decision, or final appeal, the saying or the dict, indeed, the verdict of the poem, which looks like a *verdictum*, the truth of the *Dichtung*.

3. If, after the grammatical verb tense and the punctuation, we analyze the alternation of grammatical persons and personal pronouns, we will notice that, between the initial *sich* and the final *dich*, *er* follows *ich* ("brenn ich . . . Wo- / gegen / rennt er nicht?") in an interro-negative convolution. This interro-negative form or turn of phrase imprints upon the whole poem a torsion, I will even say a convulsive torment that leaves in advance its painful mark in the signature of the last line.

4. Finally, whether one analyzes them for the tense of their utterance or for the time of their statements, all of these grammatical present forms refer not only to different presents but, each time and for each one, to radically heterogeneous temporalities, to incommensurable chronological calendars or timetables that remain irreducibly anachronous to each other. And therefore untranslatable. Disproportioned. Untranslatable the one into the other, without analogy. In other words, one can only *attempt* to translate them, the one into the other. That is no doubt what this poem itself does, what it writes, what it signs and enjoins. Thus the poem happens by dint of translating itself—by pushing to the point of breathlessness the "infinite process" of translation we were talking about, if I can still say this in French, *tout à l'heure*, just now.<sup>50</sup> What comes to pass between its four disjoined and adjoined temporalities, which are attuned to their disadjoined writing?

A. First, without verb, the mute and silent presence of a *tableau* (image or painting):

GROSSE, GLÜHENDE WÖLBUNG  
mit dem *sich*  
hinaus- und hinweg-  
wühlenden Schwarzgestirn-Schwarm:

B. Then, an *action*: the present performative of a first person:

der verkieselten Stirn eines Widders  
brenn *ich* dies Bild ein, zwischen  
die Hörner, darin,  
im Gesang der Windungen, das  
Mark der geronnenen  
Herzmeere schwillt.

After the tableau, in the background of the *tableau*, but also in order to describe or explain the action of which it is like theatrical scenery, after the colon, an action presents itself as the duration of a narrative sequence.

C. After the tableau *and* the action, after the scenery and a sort of performative narrative, everything points to a negative question, distinguished by the question mark

Wo-  
gegen  
rennt *er* nicht an?

D. Finally, feigning, at the very least, to be the indirect response to a negative, worried, question, between the dread and the admiration before what appears so *unheimlich*, here is the present of responsibility, the sentence between the duty and the promise to carry the other, to carry *you*, the truth of the verdict on the edge of the end of the world

Die Welt ist fort, *ich* muß *dich* tragen.

One could pursue the analysis of this formal arrangement, and, to take one possible example among so many others, bend one's ear toward what could be called a syllabary put on the airwaves. Its letters are murmured, whispered, breathed out, sighing or whistling: between the *sch*—between (*zwischen*) *schwa*- and *schw**i* (*Schwarzgestirn*, *Schwarm*, *zwischen*, *schwillt*)—the *w* (*Wölbung*, *weg*, *wühlenden*, *Welt*), and in still more determined fashion, the *wi* (*Widders*, *Windungen*, *schwillt*).

This formal analysis can be taken very far. It must, in fact. But it hardly seems risky. It belongs to the order of calculable guarantees and decidable evidence. It is not the same for the hermeneutical response to the *Anspruch* of the poem or the interior dialogue of the reader or counter-signatory. This response, this responsibility, can be pursued to infinity, in uninterrupted fashion, going from meaning to meaning, from truth to truth, with no calculable law other than that which the letter and the formal arrangement of the poem assign to it. But even though overseen by the same law, forever subjected to it, every bit as responsible, the experience that I call disseminal undergoes and takes on, in and through the hermeneutic moment itself, the test of an interruption, of a caesura or of an ellipsis, of an inaugural cut or opening. Such a gaping belongs neither to the meaning, nor to the phenomenon, nor to the truth, but, by making these

possible in their remaining, it marks in the poem the hiatus of a wound whose lips will never close, will never draw together. These lips form around a speaking mouth that, even when it keeps silent, appeals to the other without condition, in the language of a hospitality that can no longer be subject to a decision. Because these lips will never again join, because the joining-together of what is to be joined no longer benefits from the assurance of a saturable context, the process remains forever infinite, certainly, but this time in discontinuous fashion. That is to say, differently finite and infinite. It is perhaps there that, alone in the distancing of the world, the poem hails or blesses, bears (*trägt*) the other, I mean “you”—as one might bear the grief of mourning or else bear a child, from conception through gestation to its delivery into the world. In gestation. This poem is the “you” and the “I” that is addressed to “you,” but also to any other.

#### IV

Let’s try now to be faithful, as much as is possible, to the hermeneutical demand itself, but also to this singular alterity that carries the demand itself beyond itself, in itself beyond itself. Let’s timidly start out by reading the constellation of this poem, which is also the poem of a certain constellation, the configuration of stars in the sky, above the earth, even beyond the world. If this constellation never really gathers together, it seems promised or heralded in the first stanza, the one I have termed the tableau. Luminous, radiant, twinkling, incandescent, the arching of the celestial vault (*Grosse glühende Wölbung*) is animated with animal life. The black, star-spangled swarm carries the poem away in a hurried, hurrying, headlong movement of properly *planetary errancy*. The Greek noun leaves its trace there. Errancy is bound to be planetary. *Planētēs* means “wandering,” “nomadic,” and it is sometimes said of errant animals, as a matter of fact. *Planētikos* means unstable, turbulent, agitated, unpredictable, irregular; *planos* is used to describe an errant course but also a digression, for example, in the articulation of a discourse, of a written text, and so also of a poem. If this constellation appears animated, even animal, is it only because of the swarm? No. It is also because a ram (*Widder*) will soon bound into the poem: sacrificial animal, battering ram, the bellicose ram [*bélier*] whose rush breaks down the doors or breaks through the high walls of fortified castles (*Mauerbrecher*); the ram is, in addition, an animal whose name is a sign of the zodiac (21st of March, Ram or Aries). The zodiac (from *zōdion*, the diminutive of

*zōon*, animal) makes it possible to read [*lire*] both the hour [*l'heure*] (according to the light [*lueur*] that appears on the ecliptic plane) and the date. In the astral conjunction of a birth, the horoscope *shows*. As its name indicates, *horoscopy* lets *the hours be seen* by announcing the destiny of an existence. One is thus witness to the becoming-calendar of a celestial vault, whose tableau is the very background of the poem. Elided here is an interminable meditation about what Heidegger named datability (*Datierbarkeit*). In this calendar, one can always seek, find or never find, along a path I explored in “Shibboleth,”<sup>31</sup> all the secret dates (anniversaries, the returns of singular and crypted events, birth, death, etc.). We are unable to do here what we really *ought to do*, to wit, listen to this poem in the echo-chamber of the whole of Celan’s work, through what he inherits while reinventing it, in each of its themes, tropes, terms even, which are sometimes forged or coupled in the unique occurrence of a poem. That could extend to a syllabary. To limit myself to one example among so many possible others, the zodiacal vault recalls or announces many other horoscopic constellations. Thus, in *Die Niemandrose*, the poem “Und mit dem Buch aus Tarussa” (following its epigraph taken from Tsve-taeva: “All poets are Jews”) opens with “Of the / constellation of Canis [*Vom / Sternbild des Hundes*].”<sup>32</sup> This time, the star is light-colored (*vom Hellstern darin*). It is perhaps a yellow star (my yellow spot, my blind spot, my Jew’s spot, *mein Judenfleck*, as another poem by Celan puts it<sup>33</sup>). The ghetto is not far away. After an allusion to the three stars of Orion’s belt (*drei Gürtelsternen Orions*), Celan mentions again the “map of the sky [*auf der Himmelskarte*].” In “Hüttenfenster” (“Tabernacle Window”), here is how man would dwell as poet if all poets were Jews:

geht zu Ghetto und Eden, pflückt	goes to ghetto and Eden, gathers
das Sternbild zusammen, das er,	the constellation which they,
der Mensch, zum Wohnen	humankind, need for dwelling,
braucht, hier,	here,
unter Menschen	among humankind <sup>34</sup>

After the colon, as if to narrate the action that unfolds against the background or, rather, under the backdrop of this celestial vault teeming with animal life, here is the six-line stanza, the longest. Its plurivocity would demand hours and years of decipherment. It would be necessary to quote from one end to the other, among other things, both the Bible and Celan’s corpus. The silicified forehead of the ram recalls, first, the black constellation (*Stirn, Schwartzgestirn*) of

the celestial vault, then also the motif of petrification we saw earlier (*Versteinerten Segen*), a motif whose spectacular recurrence can be followed throughout Celan's work.

On the forehead of this enigmatic ram (because he could also be—this is one of the meanings of *Widder*—a sphinx-ram whose message remains to be deciphered), what is this image, this tableau (*Bild*) that “I” stamp, inscribe, and sign with fire (“brenn ich dies Bild ein”), between the horns? Surely, this inscription can always be a figure or a form (*Bild*) of the poem itself, which produces *itself* by *saying*, in an auto-deictic and performative fashion, as it were, its signature or its sealed secret, its seal. The allusion to song, indeed, to turns of phrase, to tropes and strophes or stanzas (“im Gesang der Windungen”) cannot help but say something too about the poem in general, and singularly about *this* poem. There is no auto-telia closed upon itself in this hypothesis, certainly, but, while never forgetting it, let us not stop there for too long. Between the most animalistic life, which is named more than once, and the death or mourning that haunts the last line (“Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich tragen”), the ram, its horns and the burning, recall and revive, no doubt, the moment of a sacrificial scene in the landscape of the Old Testament. More than one holocaust. Substitution of the ram. Burning. The binding of Isaac (Genesis 22). After having said a second time “Here I am,” when the angel sent by God suspends the knife Abraham had raised to slit Isaac's throat, Abraham turns around and sees a ram caught by its horns in a bush. He offers it as a holocaust in the place of his son. God then promises to bless him and to multiply his seed like the stars of heaven, perhaps also like the stars of the first stanza. They can also become, in the poem, terrible yellow stars. And it is again a ram, in addition to a young bull, that God, speaking to Moses after the death of Aaron's two sons, commands Aaron to offer as holocaust in the course of a grand scene of atonement for the impurities, infamies, and sins of Israel (Leviticus 16). The ram was often sacrificed on other occasions (peace offerings, offerings for atonement, to ask forgiveness, etc.). We have many representations of this in stone sculptures. Very often you see the ram's horns seeming to coil in upon themselves, perhaps on the animal's silicified forehead (“der verkieselten Stirn eines Widders”). Throughout the whole culture of the Old Testament, the horns of the ram become the instrument with which music prolongs breath and carries voice. In what resembles a song punctuated like a sentence, the summons blown from the *shofar* rises to the sky: it recalls the holocausts and resounds in the memory of all the Jews of

the world. This song of heartrending joy is inseparable from the visible form that secures its passage: the strange spires, twists and turns, torsions or contortions of the horn's form. "Im Gesang der Windungen" perhaps alludes to this turned form of breath, I dare not say *Atemwende*. The most famous rite, but by no means the only one, is repeated on the first date of the calendar, on the Jewish New Year's Day, when the tale of the binding of Isaac is read in all the synagogues of the world (Genesis 22). The *shofar* also announces the end of Yom Kippur. Consequently, it is associated, for all the Jews of the world, with confession, with atonement, with forgiveness requested, granted, or refused. To others or to oneself. Between these two charged dates, between New Year's Day and the Day of Atonement, the writing of God can, from one hour to the next, in the book of life, carry some and not carry others. Every Jew feels he is on the edge of every thing, on the edge of the whole, between life and death, as if between rebirth and the end, between the world and the end of the world, that is, between the world and the mournful annihilation of the other or of himself.

What happens after the punctuation of this second stanza? The stanza ends with the first period in the poem, placed after the action or dramaturgy of a sacrificial operation that is organized by a poet in the first person, who stamps and burns, in the same gesture, his image ("brenn ich dies Bild"). After this first period, here is the question, and the poem's only question mark: "Wo- / gegen / rennt er nicht an?" If the alliteration recalls the violence of the sacrifice ("das Mark der *geronnenen* Herzmeere schwillt"), the charge or battering of the ram could describe the movement of the animal just as well as that of the battering ram, the wooden beam, the tree trunk. Their stroke, their pushing, their rush, precipitates them, headlong, to attack or defend themselves, in order to weaken the adversaries' defenses. There is war, and the ram, the ram made of flesh or of wood, the ram on earth or in the sky, throws itself into the fray. It strikes out so as to strike down the adversary. It is a charge ("In- / to what / does he not charge?" to quote Michael Hamburger's judicious translation). Is not this *charge* — the ambiguity between languages here creates more than one opportunity — also an accusation or a price to pay ("charge," in English), and thus the discharge of a debt or the atonement of a sin? Doesn't the ram charge the adversary, a sacrificer or a wall, with every crime? For the question, as we noted earlier, is in the interro-negative form: Against what does he *not* strike? Against



what does he *not* charge? Able to butt in order to attack or to seek revenge, the ram can declare war or respond to sacrifice by protesting in opposition against it. Its burst of indignant incomprehension would not spare anything or anyone in the world. No one in the world is innocent, not even the world itself. One imagines the anger of Abraham's and Aaron's ram, the infinite revolt of the ram of all holocausts. But also, figuratively, the violent rebellion of all scapegoats, all substitutes. Why me? Their adversity, their adversary, would be everywhere. The frontline, the forehead of this protest would hurl the ram against sacrifice itself, against men and God. The ram would, finally, want to put an end to their common world. It would charge against everything and against whomever, in all directions, as if blinded by pain. The rhythm of this stanza, "Wo- / gegen / rennt / er nicht an?," articulates the staccato movement of these blows. When you recall that Aaron included young bulls in the sacrifice of the ram, you might think of the last rush of the animal before it is put to death. The toreador also resembles a sacrificing priest.

That makes for many hypotheses, and for much indecision. That remains forever the very element of reading. Its "infinite process." Caesura, hiatus, ellipsis—all are interruptions that at once open and close. They keep access to the poem forever at the threshold of its crypts (one among them, only one, would refer to a singular and secret experience, wholly other, whose constellation is accessible only through the testimony of the poet and a few others). The interruptions also open, in a disseminal and non-saturable fashion, onto unforeseeable constellations, onto so many other stars, some of which would perhaps still resemble the seed that Yahweh told Abraham, after the interruption of the sacrifice, he would multiply like the stars: the abandon of traces left behind is also the gift of the poem to all readers and counter-signatories, who, always under the law of the *trace at work*, and of *the trace as work*, would lead to or get led along a wholly other reading or counter-reading. Such reading will also be, from one language to the other sometimes, through the abyssal risk of translation, an incommensurable writing.

Isn't what is valid for the lines we've just quoted also valid, *a fortiori*, for the last line? "Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich tragen" is the sentence Celan chose (by what decision? whence was it dictated to him?) to leave the last word, as if it were an eschatological signature. We can *pronounce* it in our turn, rightly, only after the most pronounced interruption, the longest one marked in the poem. We need to hold a long time, the time of our breath, we need to catch our

breath, the profound respiration of a wholly other breath (it's like another turn, a revolution, a reversal of breath, *Atemwende*), in order to sigh or expire: "Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich tragen." A possible answer to the question "Wo- / gegen / rennt er nicht an?" is perhaps there, but one will never know, and no one has the power to decide.

The sentence is all alone. It stands, it supports itself, it carries itself all alone, on a line between two abysses. Isolated, islanded, separated like an aphorism, the sentence no doubt says something essential about absolute solitude. When the world is no more, when it is on the way to being no longer *here but over there*, when the world is no longer near, when it is no longer right *here (da)*, but over there (*fort*), when it is no longer even present there (*da*) but gone far away (*fort*), perhaps infinitely inaccessible, then I must carry *you*, you alone, you alone in me or on me alone.

Unless one inverts, around the pivotal axis of an "I must" (*ich muß*), the order of the propositions or of the two verbs (*sein* and *tragen*), that is, inverts the consequence of *if, then*: if (where) there is necessity or duty toward you, if (where) *I* must, myself, carry you, yourself, well, then, the world tends to disappear. The world is no longer there or no longer here, "Die Welt ist fort." As soon as I am obliged, from the instant when I am obliged *to you*, when I *owe*, when I owe it *to you*, owe it *to myself* to carry *you*, as soon as I speak to you and am responsible for you, or before you, there can no longer, essentially, be any world. No world can any longer support us, serve as mediation, as ground, as earth, as foundation or as alibi. Perhaps there is no longer anything but the abyssal altitude of a sky. I am alone in the world right where there is no longer any world. Or again: I am alone in the world as soon as I owe myself to you, as soon as you depend on me, as soon as I bear, and must assume, head to head or face to face, without third, mediator, or go-between, without earthly or wordly ground, the responsibility for which I must respond in front of you for you, and for which I must answer in front of you for you. I am alone with you, alone to you alone; we are alone: this declaration is also an engagement. All the protagonists of the poem are also its virtual signatories or counter-signatories, whether they are named or not: *ich, er, du*, the ram, Abraham, Isaac, Aaron, and the infinite seed of their descendants, even God, each addressing him or herself, when the world is *fort*, to the absolute singularity of the other. All the protagonists hear themselves called, as does then the reader or the receiver of the poem, myself, ourselves here, as soon as the poem is entrusted, sole survivor, to our care, and as soon as

we must, in our turn, carry it, save it at any price, be it beyond the world. The poem still speaks of itself, certainly, but with neither autotelia nor self-sufficiency. On the contrary, we hear it entrust itself to the care of the other, to our care, and put itself secretly within the range of the other. To bear this poem is to put oneself within its grasp, to put it within the other's grasp, to give it to the other to bear.

## V

I wouldn't want to abuse your patience. So as not to make myself too unbearable, I will hasten, in my turn, toward a simulacrum of conclusion by situating, on a virtual map, the *five* obligatory points of passage on a potentially infinite course, in an "infinite process," as Gadamer would have said. Two of these points would halt us forever at the word *tragen*, the three others would halt us evermore at the word *Welt*.

1. *Tragen*, first. What does this verb *tragen* signify? And what is it made to *do* here, for example, by signing this poem? No one will decide with total certainty concerning the destination of the final sentence, the good-bye or the sending off to the other. On the one hand, the *dich* can designate a living being, a human or non-human animal, whether *present* or not, including the poet, to whom the poem could also be addressed through a return apostrophe, and including the reader and any receiver of this trace in general. The *dich* can also designate a living being *to come*. The *I must* (*ich muß*) must necessarily be turned toward the future. It orients itself in thought, as Kant would say, toward the orient of what comes, remains to come, of what rises or ascends in the sky. Above the earth. *Tragen*, in everyday usage, also refers to the experience of *carrying* a child prior to its birth. Between the mother and the child, the one in the other and the one for the other, in this singular couple of solitary beings, in the shared solitude between one and two bodies, the world disappears, it is far away, it remains a quasi-excluded third. For the mother who carries the child, "Die Welt ist fort."

2. But, to continue, if *tragen* speaks the language of birth, if it must address itself to a living being present or to come, it can also be addressed to the dead, to the survivor or to the specter, in an experience that consists in carrying the other in the self, as one bears mourning—and melancholy.

3. Consequently, these *two* potential senses of *tragen* exchange their diverse possibilities with at least *three* ways of thinking the

world, three thought-worlds of the world, three manners in which the world is *fort*, there rather than here, far away, departed, suspended, neutralized—or absent and annihilated. “Die Welt ist fort”: that can remain an essential and permanent truth, but it can also happen a single time, singularly, in a history, and this occurrence would then be recorded in a narrative, like an event, and entrusted to someone. The present tense of the poem (“Die Welt *ist* fort”) does not permit us to decide between these two hypotheses. Likewise, “the world” can designate the totality of beings or “all the others,” “everybody” (*tout le monde, alle Welt*), the world of human beings or the world of living beings.

Here I must, at least by algebraic economy, pronounce three great proper names whose discourses would be both confirmed and contested, *countersigned*, in a paradoxical sense of this word, by the sending of this poem. In the first place, the name of Freud, both because of the allusion that we have just made to mourning and melancholy, and in order to remove the analysis, albeit interminable, from the order of consciousness, from self-presence and from the ego, from all egology. According to Freud, mourning consists in carrying the other in the self. There is no longer any world, it’s the end of the world, for the other at his death. And so I welcome in me this end of the world, I must carry the other and his world, the world in me: introjection, interiorization of remembrance (*Erinnerung*), and idealization. Melancholy welcomes the failure and the pathology of this mourning.<sup>35</sup> But if *I must* (and this is ethics itself) carry the other in me in order to be faithful to him, in order to respect his singular alterity, a certain melancholy must still protest against normal mourning. This melancholy must never resign itself to idealizing introjection. It must rise up against what Freud says of it with such assurance, as if to confirm the norm of normality. The “norm” is nothing other than the good conscience of amnesia. It allows us to *forget* that to keep the other within the self, *as oneself*, is already to *forget* the other. Forgetting begins there. Melancholy is therefore *necessary*. At this point, the suffering of a certain pathology dictates the law—and the poem dedicated to the other.

4. Isn’t this retreat of the world, this distancing by which the world retreats to the point of the possibility of its annihilation, the most necessary, the most logical, but also the most insane experience of a transcendental phenomenology? In the famous paragraph 49 of

*Ideas I*, doesn't Husserl explain to us, in the course of the most rigorous demonstration, that access to the absolute egological consciousness, in its purest phenomenological sense, requires that the existence of the transcendent world be suspended in a radical *epokhē*? The hypothesis of the annihilation of the world does not threaten, by right and in its meaning, the sphere of phenomenological and pure egological experience. On the contrary, it would open access to this sphere: it would make such access thinkable in its phenomenal purity. The sending of our poem repeats without weakening this phenomenological radicalization. It pushes to the limit this experience of the possible annihilation of the world and of what remains of the world or still survives it, to wit, its sense for "me," for a pure *ego*. But on the eschatological edge of this extreme limit, the sending of our poem encounters what was also the most worrisome test for Husserlian phenomenology—for what Husserl called its "principle of principles." In this absolute solitude of the pure *ego*, when the world has retreated, when "Die Welt ist fort," the *alter ego* that is constituted in the *ego* is no longer accessible in an ordinary and purely phenomenological intuition. Husserl must concede this in his *Cartesian Meditations*. The *alter ego* is constituted only *by analogy*, by *appresentation*, indirectly, inside of me, who then carries it there where there is no longer a transcendent world. I must then carry it, carry *you*, there where the world gives way: that is my responsibility. But I can no longer carry the other or you, if *to carry* means to include in oneself, in the intuition of one's own egological consciousness. It's a question of carrying without appropriating to oneself. *To carry* now no longer has the meaning of "to comprise" [*comporter*], to include, to comprehend in the self, but rather *to carry oneself for bear oneself toward* [*se porter vers*] the infinite inappropriability of the other, toward the encounter with its absolute transcendence in the very inside of me, that is to say, in me outside of me. And I only am, I can only be, I *must* only be starting from this strange, dislocated bearing of the infinitely other in me. I must carry the other, and carry *you*, the other must carry me (for *dich* can designate *me* or designate the poet-signatory, to whom this discourse is also addressed in return), even there where the world is no longer between us or beneath our feet, no longer ensuring mediation or reinforcing a foundation for us. I am alone with the other, alone to him and for him, only for you, that is, yours: without world. I am left with the immediacy of the abyss that engages me on behalf of the other wherever the "I must"—"I must carry you"—

forever prevails over the “I am,” over the *sum* and over the *cogito*. Before *I am*, I *carry*. Before *being me*, I *carry the other*. I carry *you* and must do so, I owe it to you. I remain *before* [*devant*], *owing*, in debt and owing to you before you. I must keep myself in your reach, but I must also be your grasp. Always singular and irreplaceable, these laws or injunctions remain untranslatable from one to the other, from some to others, from one language to another, but that makes them no less universal. *I must* translate, transfer, transport (*übertragen*) the untranslatable in another turn even where, translated, it remains untranslatable. This is the violent sacrifice of the passage beyond—*Übertragen: übersetzen*.

5. This poem says the world, the origin and the history of the world, the archeology and eschatology of the concept, the very *conception* of the world: how the world was *conceived*, how it is born and straightaway is no longer, how it goes away and leaves us, how its end is announced. The other proper name I must pronounce here is the name of someone with whom Gadamer’s interior dialogue was, I believe, always engaged, in uninterrupted fashion, as was Celan’s, before and after the caesura of *Todtnauberg*: Heidegger, the thinker of Being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*), not only put forward, more than once, an indispensable meditation upon the genealogy—Christian or not—of the concept of *cosmos* and of world or of its “regulative idea” in the Kantian sense. He not only said the *welten* of the world, its becoming-worldly [*mondanisation*], indeed, its worldization or globalization [*mondialisation*]. He also made us think the re-moval or de-severance (*Ent-fernung*) that distances and dis-distances what is near. Let us recall also the lexicon that gathers around *tragen* (*Übertragung*, *Auftrag*, and *Austrag*), which, in *Identity and Difference*, not far from an allusion to the *Ent-fernung* that distances and disdistances by bringing near, names the in-between (*Zwischen*): “in which the overwhelming and the arrival are held toward one another, are borne away from and toward each other. The difference between Being and beings, as the differentiation between overwhelming and arrival, is the perdurance [*Austrag*] of the two in *unconcealing keeping in concealment*. . . . On our way there we think of the perdurance of overwhelming and arrival.”<sup>36</sup>

Above all, Heidegger attempted to distinguish among what is *weltlos*, what is *weltarm*, and what is *weltbildend*. This is the only series of propositions I can retain here. It concerns a group of three “theses” that Heidegger presents, shortly after *Being and Time*, in a seminar

from 1929–30 on the world, finitude, and solitude (*Welt-Endlichkeit-Einsamkeit*): “der Stein ist weltlos, das Tier ist weltarm, der Mensch ist weltbildend”; “the stone is without world, the animal is poor in world, the human is a builder of worlds.”<sup>57</sup>

For reasons I cannot develop here, nothing appears to me more problematic than these theses.

But what would happen if, in our poem, the departure, the *Fort-sein* of the world, in its proper instance, did not answer to any of these theses or categories? What if the *Fort-sein* exceeded them, from a wholly other place? What if it were everything save deprived of the world (*weltlos*), poor in world (*weltarm*), or world-forming (*weltbildend*)? Isn't it the very thought of the world that we would then have to rethink, from this *fort*, and this *fort* itself from the “ich muß dich tragen”?

This is one of the questions that, appealing to him for help, I would have liked to ask Gadamer in the course of an interminable conversation. In order to orient our thinking, in order to help us with this fearsome task, I would have begun by recalling how much we need the other and how much we will still need him, need to carry him, to be carried by him, there wher he speaks, in us before us.

Perhaps I should have, for all these reasons, begun by quoting Hölderlin, from “Die Titanen”: “Denn keiner trägt das Leben allein”; “For no one bears this life alone.”

2. Braces {} indicate translator's interpolations beyond glosses from the original French.

3. Glenn's translation of the sentence as "in the mystery of the encounter" is noted by hand by Derrida in the manuscript.

4. English translation modified to agree with Launay's French translation. Glenn's translation, which Derrida notes in the margin of his manuscript, runs: "they are a tribute to the majesty of the absurd, which bears witness to mankind's here and now."

5. Launay draws on the German critical edition of the "Meridian"—Paul Celan, *Der Meridian: Endfassung—Entwürfe—Materialien*, ed. Bernhard Böschstein and Heino Schmall (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1999) for his translation and notes.

6. Trans. modified.

7. Glenn's translation of *unheimlich* as "mysterious" is noted by hand by Derrida in the manuscript.

8. The expression used here is "le terriblement inquiétant de l'étranger." An earlier French standard translation for the Freudian *unheimlich*, the "uncanny," was *l'inquiétante étrangeté*, whereas a more recent standard is *l'inquiétant*. Both of these expressions are alluded to here.

9. The English translation of Heidegger's *Einführung in die Metaphysik* used here is *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959).

10. The French translation of Heidegger's *Einführung in die Metaphysik* to which Derrida refers is *Introduction à la métaphysique*, trans. Gilbert Kahn (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958); Manheim's translation has been modified to reflect the French version.

## 5. Rams

NOTE: [This text, under the title "Le Dialogue ininterrompu: Entre deux infinis, le poème" ("Uninterrupted Dialogue: Between Two Infinities, the Poem") was delivered as a public lecture in memory of Hans-Georg Gadamer on February 5, 2003, at the University of Heidelberg. The English translation was prepared for public delivery in Jerusalem, where parts 3, 4, and 5 were presented on June 20, 2003. After this lecture, Jacques Derrida changed the title to "Béliers" ("Rams"), keeping the original title as subtitle—Trans.]

1. [In French, this and the preceding sentence begin "À jamais. Mais." Derrida frequently associates the phonically and semantically similar *à jamais* ("forever"), *jamais* ("never"), and *mais* ("but")—Trans.]

2. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1990– ), 2:372; "Destruction and Deconstruction," trans. Geoff Waite and Richard Palmer, in *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, ed. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 113, trans. modified.



Emphasis mine [JD]. [Here “dialogue,” not “conversation,” translates Gadamer’s *Gespräch*, since the French translation chooses *dialogue*—Trans.]

3. [Derrida delivered this lecture in French, and the audience had a German translation available.—Trans.]

4. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dekonstruktion und Hermeneutik*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, 10:138–47; “Letter to Dallmayr,” trans. Diane Michelfelder and Richard Palmer, in *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, 93, trans. modified. Emphasis mine [J.D.].

5. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Lesen ist wie Übersetzen,” *Gesammelte Werke*, 8:279–85.

6. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Grenzen der Sprache,” *Gesammelte Werke*, 8:350–61; “The Boundaries of Language,” trans. Lawrence K. Schmidt, in *Language and Linguisticity in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000), 16, trans. modified. [“Ownness,” *propriété* in the French translation, translates Gadamer’s *Eigenheit*, from *eigen* as “own” or “proper”—Trans.]

7. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Selbstdarstellung,” *Gesammelte Werke*, 2:478–508; “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” trans. Richard Palmer, in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Hahn, Library of Living Philosophers (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 3–63.

8. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Vorwort zur 2. Auflage” (1965), *Wahrheit und Methode*, in *Gesammelte Werke* 2:441; “Preface to the Second Edition [1965],” *Truth and Method*, trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (New York: Crossroad, 1985), xix.

9. *Ibid.*, *Gesammelte Werke*, 1:108; *Truth and Method*, 92.

10. Jacques Derrida, “Three Questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer,” trans. Diane Michelfelder and Richard Palmer, in *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, 53, trans. modified.

11. Paul Celan, *Atemwende* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1967), 93. As of the date when this speech was written and delivered, no French translation of *Atemwende* existed. Fortunately, a remarkable bilingual edition has since appeared: *Paul Celan: Renverse du souffle*, trans. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre (Paris: Seuil, 2003). Our poem can be found on p. 113. [For a complete English translation of *Atemwende*, see *Breathturn*, trans. Pierre Joris (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1995); this poem appears on p. 233. The poem is also translated by Michael Hamburger in *Poems of Paul Celan* (New York: Persea Books, 1988), 267. A third English version is that by Walter Billeter, in *Paul Celan, Prose Writings and Selected Poems*, trans. Walter Billeter and Jerry Glenn (Carlton, Vic.: Paper Castle, 1977), 83. The Hamburger translation is given in the text—Trans.]

12. [The word Derrida uses, *portée*, has a wide range of meanings, including “carry” in the sense of “range,” the “carrying distance” or “carrying capacity” of a projectile, the “import,” “importance,” “implications,” “significance,” or “meaning” of an idea or an action, but also the “impact” or

“consequence” of words or of writings. It is also the “reach,” “scope,” or “capacity” of a mind to conceptualize or understand, someone’s physical or intellectual “level.” Depending on the context, *portée* may also be translated as “stave”—a word that, interestingly, refers both to music (the lines which bear musical notation) and poetry (“a verse or stanza of a song, poem, etc.,” *O.E.D.*, s.v. “stave”). In architectural lingo, *portée* covers such ideas as “loading,” “span,” and “bearing.” The word also describes a group of animals born to the same mother at the same time (a “litter”). In the French text of “Rams,” a whole galaxy of verbs clusters around *portée*, including, for instance (and only for instance): *porter, importer, exporter, déporter, reporter, rapporter, emporter, transporter, supporter*. In this essay, *portée* is semantically connected to the German word *tragen*.—Trans.]

13. Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray and F. Wieck (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1968), 139, trans. modified. The German is: “Zum Gedachten und seinen Gedanken, zum ‘Gedanc’ gehört der Dank. Doch vielleicht sind diese Anklänge des Wortes ‘Denken’ an Gedächtnis und Dank nur äußerlich und künstlich ausgedacht. . . . Ist das Denken ein Danken? Was meint hier Danken? Oder beruht der Dank im Denken?” (*Was heißt Denken?* [Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1954], 91). [In the French translation cited by Derrida, *Qu’appelle-t-on penser?*, trans. A. Becket and G. Granel (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959) 144–45, *reconnaissance*, a word used in the French text of “Rams,” translates Heidegger’s *Dank*, “thanks” or “gratitude”—Trans.]

14. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wer bin ich und wer bist du? Kommentar zu Celans ‘Atemkristall,’* rev. ed. (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1986). [The title by Gadamer appears in English in *Gadamer on Celan: “Who Am I and Who Are You?” and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Richard Heinemann and Bruce Krajewski, with introduction by Gerald L. Bruns (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997). *Atemkristall* is translated there as *Breathcrystal*—Trans.]

If time and daring hadn’t failed me, I would have attempted to read together, in order to give an account of the hands and the fingers, “Aus der Vier-Finger-Furche” and, in “Aschenglorie” (in *Atemwende*), “ASCHENGLORIE / hinter / deinen erschüttert-verknoteten / Händen am Dreiweg / . . . / Aschen- / glorie hinter / euch Dreiweg- / Händen” (68); “ASH-GLORY behind / your shaken-knotted / hands on the three-forked road / . . . / behind your three-forked hands” (*Speech-grille and Selected Poems*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel [New York: Dutton, 1971, 240). [Other English translations of this poem appear in: *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 261; and *Breathturn*, trans. Pierre Joris (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1995), 177—Trans.]

I have proposed a reading of this poem in “Poetics and Politics of Witnessing,” pp. 65–96 of this volume.

15. [Celan, “WEGE IM SCHATTEN-GEBRÄCH,” *Atemwende*, 14—Trans.]

16. [Gadamer on Celan, 95—Trans.]

17. Celan, *Atemwende*, 14; trans. Michael Hamburger, quoted in *Gadamer on Celan*, 95. [For an alternative English version, see Joris, *Breathturn*, 69—Trans.]

18. In Paul Celan, *Die Niemandrose*, in *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), 1:249; hereafter *GW*. [Trans. Felstiner, *Selected Poems*, 175; another English version can be found in Neugroschel, *Speech-Grille and Selected Poems*—Trans.]

19. *Gadamer on Celan*, 95.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, 96.

23. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, xxii.

24. From *Language and Linguisticity*, in *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 16, trans. modified.

25. Paul Celan, *Schneepart* (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer, 1971), and *GW* 2:338; Hamburger, *Poems*, 321, trans. modified. [Also translated in Felstiner, *Selected Poems and Prose*, 333, and in *Paul Celan: Selections*, ed. Pierre Joris (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 131—Trans.]

26. These appeals no doubt began when I devoted a seminar to this poem a few months ago in New York (New York University, 2002). They occasioned exchanges with my friends Avital Ronell and Werner Hamacher, whom I thank here.

27. [*Voire au-delà du monde qui n'est plus*: Lost in any translation of *voire* is the homophone *voir*, “to see,” implying the sense of “to see beyond the world that is no more”—Trans.]

28. [“Singable remnant” in *Breathturn*, trans. Joris, 101; “Singable remainder-trace” in *Glottal Stop: 101 Poems by Paul Celan*, trans. Nikolai Popov and Heather McHugh (Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 20; “Singable remainder” in Neugroschel, *Speech-Grille*, 231—Trans.]

29. “ASCHENGLORIE,” in *Atemwende*, 68; Neugroschel, *Speech-Grille*, 240. [Also translated in: Joris, *Breathturn*, 177; Joris, *Selections*, 105 (changed from from “Nobody” to “Noone” on the basis of Derrida’s “Poetics and Politics of Witnessing”); and Felstiner, *Selected Poems*, 261—Trans.] See above, n. 14.

30. [The expression *tout à l'heure*, disjoined from any context, refers in French both to the recent past and/or to the near future. One could use *tout à l'heure* to say in a “moment from now,” but also a “moment ago.” Furthermore, the expression can also be construed as meaning “right now” (*tout de suite*), thus conflicting with the idea of an “infinite process.” All these senses seem to occur in the same moment: “all at once” or “all on time”—Trans.]

31. “Shibboleth: For Paul Celan,” pp. 1–64 in this volume. On “datability,” notably in reference to Heidegger, see pp. 194–95, note to p. 15, in this volume.

32. Celan, *Die Niemandsrose*, *GW* 1:287. [Trans. Neugroschel, in Joris, *Selections*, 93—Trans.]

33. “Eine Gauner- und Ganovenweise / Gesungen zu Paris emprès Pontoise / par Paul Celan / de Czernowitz près de Sadigore,” in Celan, *Die Niemandsrose*, *GW* 1:229–30. *Macula*, the word for the spot (yellow, at the back of the eye) clearly retains this connotation of a mark sullyng the immaculate; this mark spots or charges the immaculate, like an original sin of sight.

34. [Hamburger, *Poems*, 215. Also translated in Felstiner, *Selected Poems*, 199—Trans.]

35. [In the two previous sentences, the French verb is *accueillir*. It could also be translated “to receive,” “to take in,” “to accommodate” —Trans.]

36. Martin Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1957), 62–63; *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (1969; rpt. New York, Harper, 1974), 65.

37. Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt—Endlichkeit—Einsamkeit, Gesamtauagabe*, 29–30 (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1983), 273 ff.; *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 284 ff.

## 6. The Truth That Wounds

1. [JD’s neologism, meaning “capable of being exhibited as an object” —Trans.]

2. “The Double Session,” in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). See especially Derrida’s commentary on Jean-Pierre Richard’s *L’univers imaginaire de Mallarmé* (246–62) and his conclusion: “If there is thus no thematic unity or total meaning to reappropriate beyond the textual instances, no total message located in some imaginary order, intentionality, or lived experience, then the text is no longer the expression or representation (felicitous or otherwise) of any *truth* that would come to diffract or assemble itself in the polysemy of literature. It is this hermeneutic concept of *polysemy* that must be replaced by *dissemination*” (262).