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ANABASIS. PSYCHOGRAM OF WONDERING THE UNCHARTED TERRITORIES

I tried to write poetry in this language those years. Writing to speak, to look for reference points, to find out where I was and where I was going, to map the reality out for myself. It was, you see, an event, a movement. Being on the road was an attempt to determine a direction.

Paul Celan

Paul Celan, whose centenary was celebrated in 2020, is a key figure for the study of those tragedies, cracks and traumas that are imprinted in the collective body of humanity of the twentieth century and prompt questions today regarding the search for new biopolitical forms of coexistence in the present world. So how did Celan become a key figure? Let's start from afar. The Enlightenment project was an inescapable utopia, the apotheosis of which was the modernity. The Enlightenment desacralized everyday life, emancipated the subject, brought the masses into the arena of history, buried God and the figure of the Master, and eliminated rigid hierarchies in art, politics, and culture in general. But as a result, we have received a neuroticized subject who is unable to appropriate the pleasure of the freedom that has been bestowed upon him. The imaginary master as well as the imaginary slave are today alienated on an equal footing, which means that the old dispositions of Marxism have been revoked. We are in a state of diffused cynicism (P. Sloterdijk's term), in which everyone is aware of being cheated, but continues to passively accept the dispositions of power on both the political and the everyday level. Something has gone wrong...

1.

In the 19th century, the phrase "If there is no God, then everything is permitted" was so true. And in the 20th century, Jacques Lacan turns it upside down and says: "If there is no God, then nothing is permitted". If there is no God, the spectacle remains. The subject plunges into melancholy. And "Me_alone_holy" must be comforted. Death must be silenced. Peter Zapffe calls this reaction "anchoring", throwing an anchor, closing off from death. The brain understands too much about reality and constantly undermines itself. Whilst reality is ghostly. Jacques Lacan showed how the protocols of the unconscious work, how anxiety is displaced into the unconscious, and most importantly the causes of this very anxiety. Celan is the figure through whose heart all these cracks run (K. Marx's expression). Birth on the edge of the empire in Chernivtsi, the loss of his parents in Transnistria, the tragedy of the Shoah (Celan never said Holocaust or Shoah, preferring to say "what happened"), emigration through Romania and Vienna to Paris. At the beginning of his exile_tation along the Bucharest-Vienna-Paris line there was no question of "To be or not to be," the question was on the plane of Marcel Proust's "To belong or not to belong". But to whom? If you are a Jew, from an Austrian province, your parents were killed in your mother tongue, and you live in Paris. The isolation, the dizzying state of immeasurable loneliness. "Sticking out like a

splinter, Life" ("Steckst du mit einem / Splitter / Leben"). Celan seems to be all cut from these fragments of solitude – "isolates". And this seems to be the fee charged to anyone who understands anything about the real state of the world. He has been known to reinvent the German language. He uses absolute metaphors, hermetic constructions of composites, which can be seen even in the titles of his poetry collections "Die Niemandrose" (The No-One's-Rose), "Atemwende" (Breathturn), "Fadensonnen" (Fibrous Suns), "Lichtzwang" (Lightduress), "Schneepart" (Snow part), "Zeitgehöft" (Homestead of Time), and there are also "Herzstein" (Heart-Stone) and "Herzzeit" (Time of heart). These are clots, shards and crystals about "having nowhere to live and only thinking into the head" (Platonov's expression) and feeling into the heart (to add from us). Celan is absolutely homologous to reality, is isomorphic in its texts-crystals. These are the apotheosis of the traumatic modernity to which humanity has been heading for so long but recoiled when it saw the consequences of the catastrophe. Celan sang revolutionary songs to his son Eric, was sympathetic to the leftist movement, like virtually all French intellectuals, and supported May '68. But, nevertheless, his poetics is already a disbelief in collective humanity. And instead of big utopias, micro-utopias. In one of his letters, we read: "Tonight I will read them poems, over their heads, as if I wanted to find an audience not among them, but in some other reality that I am going to give them." And "...there are still songs to sing beyond mankind." (es sind noch Lieder zu singen jenseits der Menschen).

2.

It doesn't sound like frustration with people. It is difficult to demand that people be held in a state of "falling into understanding" while in this, an abnormal wandering of uncharted territories. From the very beginning, Celan stakes on the ultimate micro-sensibility. In place of We, You increasingly transpire: "...I stood in the middle of you" (Es stand / der Feigensplitter auf deiner Lippe / es stand / Jerusalem um uns / es stand / der Hellkiefernduft / überm Dänenschiff, dem wir dankten / ich stand / in dir), Rimbaud in the "letters of the seer" (voyant) wrote: "The poet determines (establishes) the measure of the unknown of his era". And then the programmatic statement: "The poet is an abnormality, gravitating toward the norm. The poet enters the unknown and, even if he does not understand his own visions, he nevertheless sees them. He may perish in a gigantic leap over the unheard and nameless: other, terrible workers will start from the horizon where he crashed". Celan replies: "You who measure the depth of the wound with an eyelash" (du, mit der die Wunde auslotenden Wimper). In any case, after the disaster, Celan raises the stakes so high that the bottle with the message – the poem (Celan quotes Mandelstam here) that the poet sends to nowhere – cannot be caught by everyone. And understanding the message even less so. There is always hope, though, which is why poems are written after Auschwitz. Just in a different language and by different means. Heiner Müller once remarked in an interview that after Auschwitz, poetry (art) is the only thing that makes sense in the world. Language structured us. Accordingly, a new language (Celan's language, for example) constructs a being of a different kind. Let's recollect Ted Chan's story called "The Story of Your Life".

3.

If one has a tool for knowing the World-in-itself at all, it is not science, but art. M. Heidegger wrote "science does not think." Which certainly does not diminish its value to the world. Exact science is doomed to literalism – you can describe an eagle mathematically, but a mathematical model of an eagle will not fly. On the contrary, one strong metaphor can decode any thing through another in their essential juxtaposition. "we crumbled apart, we brittled back together" (wir bröckelten auseinander / und bröselten wieder in eins). We are

crumbs. And further, "the Lord broke bread, the bread broke the Lord" (der Herr brach das Brot / das Brot brach den Herrn). Perhaps the act of breaking of bread means launching the universe. But a few billion years have passed, and something has gone wrong. We are destroying each other for no reason. And to have a reason, a justification for destruction, is probably even worse. Modernity has demystified everything that was previously in a sphumatized state. God is discounted. Although some believe that perhaps God is not dead, but is yet to come (Q.Meillassoux).

4.

Reality is unravelled. So what? The configuration of contradictions thickened even more. Clarification turned into an even greater darkening. A demon emerged from all corners. And it's not that there is nowhere to hide, but that man has nothing to hide. Very few people realized this: Nietzsche, Artaud, Mandelstam, Beckett, Celan – all of them either went mad, or were deeply melancholic and depressed, or committed suicide. The 20th century invented imagined communities, nation states and the concept of the nation has emerged. Nation and identity: "I - dent I Fuck nation!" Once large-scale fictions were generated (hyperstition, as Nick Land calls it), we got a cascade of disasters. Identity wars, racial supremacy, the nation, the imagined community... As Gilbert Simondon, philosopher of technology, pointed out, the individual is an incorrect naming for the human being. The in_dividual is the Indivisible. A person, as it turns out, is a crystal. But it is not. We are rather "fluid" mutants and "floating" cyborgs. Individuals are a table, a glass, because their form and essence are already unchanging, while ours can contingently mutate at any time. We are not inDVDs, we are DVDs. The subject is not an atomized individual, but an assemblage, an assembly, a collision of forces and components of quite different natures, from chemical reactions and viruses to metaphysical discourses and gender performances. We are not encapsulated entities. Therefore, identity is something static, fictitious, artificial, and therefore doomed in advance. Donna Haraway has discerning reflection. "Every knowledge is contaminated. It is contaminated by the tools used (optical, discursive and imaginary, by social and material relations, by the intersections of oppression, power and resistance. All these elements affect not only the knowledge produced, but also the production of the subject of knowledge itself. Identities are the effects of optical tools". Simultaneously without optics, we run the risk of slipping into anarch_aos.

5.

Consider the following example. "Companion" comes from the Latin cum panis ("with bread"). Companions at the table. Food is the basis of companionship, which is a long chain of mutual digestion. The food we eat transforms us, and we ourselves become food for others as we die. Companionship is inextricably linked to what Haraway calls compost-ability (the ability to digest and be eaten) or inclusion in the process of mutual reconfiguration in the context of nature culture. Companionship lay at the foundation of biological life and interspecies relatedness when, millions of years ago, colonies of cells joined together in a tube to absorb food. When discussing the corporeality and subjectivity of animals, people, and plants, Francesca Ferrando observes that the English word "human" comes from the Latin humanus, "human," which is an adjective related to humus, "earth, soil". Human is a compost, something processed, digested, part of an ecosystem that nourishes and constitutes its wealth. At the end of the 20th century, philosophy and sociology, in particular Bruno Latour and posthumanism, were known to criticize anthropocentrism and the false separation between nature and culture. People, objects, and animals are actors woven into networks through the operation of translation. Technology is not hostile to man. And the ideal technical invention is comparable to natural phenomena

(Simondon again). Today we return to more fluid, hybrid states and build new networks within nature. Donna again: "Objective knowledge is an open knowledge that can connect and interact with other partial perspectives, experiences and positions, while not merging into some whole, but forming unstable aggregates and assemblages."

6.

In this sense, one of the ambitions of this project and my curatorial vision is to explore through digital media models of the posthumanist imagination, using on the one hand the poetics of P. Celan's method of wandering uncharted territories – "anabasis", his composite thinking, where objects and non-human agents coexist with the human in a strange way (it is no accident that his texts appeal to botanics, geology, biology), and on the other hand to apply the optics of posthumanism (D. Haraway, R. Braidotti), object-oriented ontology, speculative realism (G. H. Harman, J. Bogost, L. Bryant, J. Bennett) and dark ecology (T. Morton). Celan was attentive to the appeal of the famous call "back to objects: "The poem is dark, first of all by virtue of its handiness, its subjectivity, its thing-density: dark, therefore, in the sense of the phenomenal opacity peculiar to every object; that is, in the sense that it must be understood from itself, as something handi-nalistic." He goes on to ask about the direction, the anabasis, the cartography of this World-in-itself: "Things approach one another, but even in this coherence of them the question is announced about their Where from and Where to, a question which remains open, which leads to no goal, but draws away into the open and accessible, into emptiness and gaping". And elsewhere he quotes a letter from Flaubert to Louise Collet: "Looking at a stone, an animal, a painting, I felt as if I had entered them." In his notebooks, Celan writes: "To make things solid, the ultimate thingness in a poem is the yard of time! Things always stand in their ultimate thingness." As a rule, Celan is seen in the disposition of the Holocaust and adjacent territories. But he is hardly limited to the theme of the "Todesfuge" or "Stretta" where a nuclear catastrophe is already implied. No one testifies for the witness. Yet there is something else about him. It is an actor-network intimacy and sensuality. This is what we will try to explore.

Celan's psychogram will become for us a beacon, a spark, a compass on the path of wandering the uncharted territories, where man is open to a world of weird and eerie objects, a world of instability, hybridity, and ultimate sensuality. The expanded reality of posthumanism, where the human and the nonhuman coexist in symbiotic hybrid states, looks utopian today, and in conjunction with Celan, suicidal. But, following T. Adorno, art is a model of the future life of society. Art is today, in symbiosis with philosophy and science, a laboratory of imaginary, sensual production of truth, in which what is known to exist in nature is not so much discovered as constructed.

Bialystok, April 2021

Sebastian Unger

Du suchst Zuflucht
beim unauflöslchen
Erbstern – sie wird dir
gewährt. Jetzt
überlebst du dein zweites
Leben

(Paul Celan, *Pariser
Gedicht-Nachlaß, 1948–1970*)

ANABASIS-PROJECT

In the role of being "a victim" *in* and *of* (the) history, today, especially in retrospect of the great and systematic violations of human rights in the 20th century, there seems to be something like a turning point, a breaking point of the wave (the wave of destruction). Thereby, the forces at work, with which the victim seeks refuge in (its) identity, seem to be always the same, with a similar reflux as waves pull their predecessors back into the sea, but where now, however, and this would be the fraction, all materials, over which the water rushes back, the shards and debris, of which the personality of a historically perceived human being is composed, could just as well refuse to be recombined, a refusal of the material itself.

Thus, the rushing back would have to continue infinitely as a sound – if remaining by the image of the branding – and withstand the piling up of new waves with a language of the matter, precisely with the sound of those elements which can refuse the formative in the reformation (the old within the new), and which, as material itself take over the role of the fluid, the role of the speaking in order to finally cut off the tongue of the waves.

In the same or similar way, the vision of New Materialism could perhaps be transferred as an image when applied for the crux of identity politics. The impulse for this would be the revolutionary act of deconstruction – as a present-day ability. The potency felt in it, or even the felt necessity, arises in the knowledge that the formula of the subject as an identity narration, with its racial, ethnic, gender, social, and cultural markings of whatever kind, does already contain the possibility of its historical appropriation, its external determination and objectification, and thus also its oppression: The victim, as an identity construction that exists through ascriptions by others and oneself, is already in danger of being on the escort route of the deed that was performed on it.

This does not mean, as it happens much too often, to retroactively enter the causal nexus of the deed in one's own and/or others' perception through one's own fault, but the other way around: that taking refuge in the substances of identity can imply, in a certain way, to be taken on a leash by the deed and its identitarian logic – in a structural sense (as waves are never one and the same and yet have a better structural memory of themselves than anything solid) –, and thus importing it, the deed, into the space to which one has fled from it. Identity politics is thus both: the curse and the vanishing point of identity, and hence both in one.

To take just one example from the present time, which is so dominated by questions of identity: It becomes clear only upon a closer look that the demand circulating after the

racist assassinations in Hanau: "Say their names!" wisely takes into account the complexity of this matter. This happens as the chosen formula does not just simply want to prevent that those murdered lose their face and identity behind the numbers, which would be the usual reflex of commemoration politics – to oppose forgetting with means of identity. But that here, in addition and also vice versa, the most actual cipher of identity, the name, which is no ordinary noun, and the face, which is a sign that, as a token, is never absorbed into its types, thus precisely with the most intimate and outermost means of identity, a shielding against an identitarian appropriation is provided.

So it is not primarily Germans with a migration background, or visitors to a shisha bar in a certain milieu, in a certain German city, who became victims, but first and foremost people with a unique and irreplaceable identity, who posthumously proclaim their right as human beings to be protected from being taken over by identities, especially when they already became victims of such allocations. Could we therefore say: One becomes belonging in the absolute sense only in the quality of unbelonging?

This should not mean taking refuge in the unreadability of the human being, and that it is not at the same time necessary to be involved in identity constructions, i.e. in the awareness of their existence as a form of reading, insofar as it is necessary to actively combat exclusion and discrimination. But the perspective becomes questionable from the moment on the individual's sovereignty over the signs, over the material, is lost, and the deeds, of all things, continue to play a decisive role in the identitarian profiling of the victims. The social exclusion of the deed could be so much more radical.

All this, however, is a present-day impulse, a contemporary freedom to be able to think it this way, to answer destruction with deconstruction. An ability that is about not letting the game and the fight with the material get out of one's hands (a human right that refers to a technology of infinite unfinishedness). From here on it is already a description of Celan's poems, regarding the topos of identity.

Let's confidently overstretch the strain in one sentence: It is about the ability to let the material from which one exists and wants to exist, but cannot stand it, or from which one is forced to exist, and which becomes unstable precisely because of its enforceability (material fatigue), or to whose existence one would like to be devoted out of comfort, but does not allow oneself to do so, or by whose inventorial character one is frightened, or the material into which one is driven, exactly because one resists, or to which one just happens to belong, because one recognized one's own kind in others, but not oneself, or into which one is thrown by one's body and one's ancestry, but without letting oneself be deprived of the chance to cause ancestry oneself, or to which one feels lustfully attracted in a forbidden way, precisely because it is an unacknowledged secret to want to belong, a dark temptation to enter suicidally into the fate that history prepares (as Celan can be seen in his poems in today's light), this material with its sadness – at least not to let itself be solidified from the outside, to defy its attempts at hardening and ossification, thus to declare a question of sovereignty over consistence, the unrefined in it, to be the goal of masterful production, the solid as raw material, but the fluid of the signs as a product, and to at least not let oneself be carried away to the extreme to lose one's restlessness in this question, or as Haraway puts it: "Staying with the trouble".

That would mean in the present context to conduct the painful unmanageability of its identity materials as a kind of heightened art form. And it is therefore worth the effort to look for a form of utopia in the theoretical approaches implied here (Dark Ecology, Speculative Realism), and to make these hybrid, object-oriented worlds fruitful for this sujet as well, for the question of identity in art.

On the other hand, the question arises: How much confrontation with oneself can such approaches withstand? Isn't there at the same time a gap involved, an irreconcilable contradiction to the commemorative culture, if we start to deal on such basis with the enormous fields of the dead in the 20th century, the unknowns, the mass graves that have swallowed up those who no longer have a name, the people who have been dislocated forever? A dislocation like in Celan's poem "Midnight":

Im Schilf, da stehn die Stunden – wo steht das Schilf?
Es steht in deinen Augen,
die ich nicht seh
[...]
Ich habe keinen Namen. (Der fault im Menschenmoor.)

(Celan, *Mitternacht*, 1961)

It is a paradox: To commemorate the victims we used to uphold their identity in order not to forget, in order to make it never happen again, in order to prevent indifference in both senses, as a lack of empathy and as the process of relativization that lies in every perspective of comparison. The memorial act was an act of underlining, alongside with the singularity of the event, the one of the violated identity. And how does one want to hold together this narration of the terrible as a necessary transmission of experience?

Following the theoretical approaches of Posthumanism and New Materialism that culminate in sentences like Haraway's: "We are *humus*, not Homo, not Anthropos; we are compost, *not* posthuman" (SwT: 2016, p. 55) a compelling consequence might be, even here, on that scale, that even the victim's (his) story must not allow itself to be woven into a web of solid "carrier bags" that narrate its identity. But at the same time this sentence, carried straight to the edge of the mass grave, is nothing but very frightening, since the metaphor has already been redeemed here: to let go of what has brought you there, dug up into the non-I, composted, but which, at the same time, can refuse what was done to its identity, simply by not returning in forms of identity-based consolation, perhaps the most powerful way to counteract the act of destruction.

In this productively insoluble conflict (the limbo in the difference between holding the dead in order to protect their dignity and bringing them closer to the final consequence of their condition: To be present), in which first and foremost the living finds himself, in the question where to go when searching for its own identity, Paul Celan might give us a hint with his poem *Anabasis*.

Celan, whose centenary was celebrated in 2020, is a crucial figure to scrutinize those tragedies, cracks and traumas that are imprinted on the collective body of humanity in the twentieth century. His multi-layered oeuvre is particularly suitable for investigating the question of the centrifugal forces to which the formation of the individual's identity is exposed when self-attribution and the attribution by others prove to be both a blessing and a curse – forces that mutually stipulate and exclude each other in a productively restless and motivically irredeemable process.

Dieses
schmal zwischen Mauern geschriebne
unwegsam-wahre
Hinauf und Zurück

(Celan, *Anabasis*, 1961)

In the search of a steadfast identity the poem shows us a drifting apart of what is identical in identity, the double logic of recourse and allocation, but written only on one foil, the foil of a landscape (culminating along a path at the edge of the mass graves), aiming at the same spot: the very nature of one's own heritage. Both of which are mutually exclusive narrative modes but overlapping and fluidising the topography, forming an uncharted land, that the victim has to go through restlessly in the process of searching (recombining) and rejecting (deconstructing) the formation of its own identity.

Badiou's analysis of the term "anabasis" based on an interpretation of Xenophon's historiographical work with the same title outlines three characteristics for this type of identity migration, which he then relates to Celan's poem.

1. The lostness in the landscape: After the Greek war troops described by Xenophon had defeated their opponent in Persia, they were exposed in the landscape without the identity-creating feature of the other (the opponent) and with the question of their own identity (the meaningful stay in an empty territory) or left to fend for himself as a narrator (identity without difference).

2. Discipline: A technique of self-cohesion, of identifying oneself from nowhere in the foreign landscape by means of self-attribution of properties. Instead of content, however, this seems to be more of a structural term that could also refer to the refusal to face one's opposite: to be hasty at the goal, to be someone different from oneself (deprivation becomes a disempowerment of the signs).

3. Liquefaction of the signs (new materialism): To find the way back home (up and back = anabasis) in an uncharted area, without reliable clues, so that fluid signs, the sea, can form such a clue, when the Greek troops climb up and the familiar sign of the sea without being identical with the sea of the original "identity". (Security in the uncertain).

Silben-
mole, meer-
farben, weit
ins Unbefahrne hinaus.

(Celan, *Anabasis*, 1961)

On this perspective, seven poems by Celan are to be selected in a next step, in which nature and landscape do not appear thematically or motivically, also not iconographically in the sense of a fixed identity foil but are set in a structural movement of the Anabasis, as a form of wandering. Can the game of fluid signs in the interplay of refuge and attribution (allocation), the game of fleeting identity, be captured and artistically processed? How can landscape based identity structures be represented, so that the boundary between subject and space, between animal and human, between movement and firmness in the roots of plants are not understood statically, but as a form of locomotion? The landscape itself wanders. The unknown terrain is not a place, but the lack of stability in the signs, a deconstruction, a persecution, in a double sense, in the sense of a search, in the sense of an escape (the mountains of a flat ontology). And can the three characteristics of Badiou's anabasis be identified in the poems and incorporated into the visual work as a formal component? The motif remains the structure itself, which subsumes nature. If the subject does not move, the flow speed of the landscape overtakes it. And conversely, it withdraws as soon as it becomes the target.

Berlin, April 2021