

To briefly outline how the following curatorial dialogue is structured: We begin by considering the theme of identity in the context of Paul Celan's work and the philosophy of posthumanism that was the starting point of the Anabasis project as a whole. Then we move on to the works of the artists who were taking part in the Anabasis residency and wandering around the themes.

I. Paul Celan in the Context of Identity Issues and Limits of Posthumanism

Oleksandr Sushynskii. Starting with the conceptual part of our project it is to be understood that there were two main sources of inspiration: the “Anabasis” poem by Paul Celan and the essay by Alain Badiou with the same title whose idea of “wandering uncharted territories” gave us the basic curatorial impulse. As a curator and art-historian, I was primarily interested in “re-actualising” Celan as one of those who most accurately reflected the 20th century in his poetics and, in looking at him from the unexpected perspective of posthumanism, object oriented ontology, and speculative materialism. You, in turn, as a contemporary German poet and curator of this project, supported this idea in general and brought in some additional perspective. Could you first specify why “re-actualising” Celan nowadays was attractive for you?

Sebastian Unger. What is really interesting about Paul Celan, in this context, is that he somehow manages to evade any determination in the question of identity. It is ironic for someone whose poetry has been perceived very much in the light of this question, in the light of the broken identity, the identity of the *victim*, and in the light of exile, also of homelessness in between languages, to the point of homelessness in the language itself. Celan, in particular, is someone who overcomes the very

To evade any determination in the question of identity.

categories contained in these questions, and this is not just a matter of refusing to answer the question of identity. More importantly, finding a way to not pose the question in such a way that the expected answers (even if personally never attainable again) nevertheless confirm these categories. So instead of asking for identity in a categorical way, and instead of answering it in the sense of a victim who can no longer answer, but who at the same time allows ruptures and injuries to her or his identity to solidify into an “identity of rupture and injury”, Celan poses the question of itself irredeemably, playfully, even with humour. There is something at work here that is hypermodern. And at the same time, he keeps the pain present, without adapting to any pressure of just handling the injury, of an arrangement with “having to survive”.

Celan treats all this debris of identity as a kind of boiling material that does not harden again into a solid form, not even to that of “the victim”. Written almost on top of the whole poetics could be the sentence: “I am not your Jew!”, and he does not mean only the perpetrators.

‘I am not your Jew!’

Such an approach interests me, I am, for example, against language politics, but one must escape the trap of being upset about it in the sense of a “changing world”, but to complain that the properly conceived change, on the contrary, is not executed consistently enough, because it drives itself also in language into counter-identities and new objectifications. One can show with Celan that identity, language, and vulnerability politics cannot cope up with the required complexity when they are no longer on par with the degree of reflection of their own tools. The deconstruction deals, however, with infinity effects, with insoluble, processual problems, with the unavailability of life. The trick, then, is a performative way out of the question of identity, which foregrounds the origin of deconstruction not as an authority but in the same questionability with which it is applied as a negating instrument. Deconstruction is more a methodology than a method, the infinite reflection on what a method without any fixed basic assumptions could be, which is what makes it so interesting for art.

The properly conceived change is not executed consistently enough, because it drives itself into counter-identities and new objectifications.

That's what I discovered for myself in the poems when I reread them preparing for the residency, and I think that Celan fits so well into present discussions precisely because he doesn't create identity artworks, but offers ways for escaping them. Thus, you can almost invert the answer: Posthumanist approaches not only can help us understand Celan better, but he himself makes a decisive contribution to the debate.

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One can learn from *him*. I would even say that he goes a step further and even points out some limits to posthumanism, or, thinking of Donna Haraway, limits to overcoming the categorical (specicist) humanism. But perhaps we should first define this more precisely?

OS. In my opinion, after Benedict Anderson’s “Imagined communities” (1983) and Eric Hobsbawm’s “Invention of traditions” (1983), it is almost impossible to talk about identity without accepting the fact that identity politics itself is an ideological and fictional construct to hold masses together. Identity is not only a specific set of patterns of behaviour, language, and adherence to specific protocols, but also some sort of negation. I am by not being something else (I am Ukrainian and simultaneously I’m not Russian). Celan eludes overly simplified identification constructs as you mentioned. Being a Jew, by origin, writing in German, he at the same time translated among others Osip Mandelstam and Guillaume Apollinaire. Even this might be enough to doubt any particular identity of Celan if we consider “identity” as a singularity but not as a wide immeasurable multitude.

Going through Celan’s paradox of “closed openness”, let’s recall also the phrase from his letter to Hans Bender: “I cannot see any basic difference between a handshake and a poem.”¹ At the first view he manifests openness to the Other. On the flip side, Celan, in my opinion, is a poet of “unprecedented darkness”. How to reach this hand in pure darkness? I believe that Celan’s hand is outstretched, but it is approaching from an unattainable height just like the hand of a gallow, which only few people are able to reach. That’s why we are doomed to be in this position of “not-yet-understanding” Celan. But the paradox also lies in the fact that he did not isolate himself from the world after the War and the Shoah, having lost his parents and friends. He went on writing and regularly publishing new poetry and received prestigious awards, such as the Büchner Prize. After “Poppy and Memory”, his poetry became more and more hermetic. But it was not a strategy in order to be incomprehensible. Prof. Petro Rychlo clarified this aspect during the theoretical part of our residency emphasising that Celan did not darken his poetry deliberately. In my opinion, (t)his hermeticism also cannot be explained with resentment against the language of the “Master from Germany”. Even though Celan had after all a special right to feel so. A sign given to the Other, a handshake, speech without the utterance, in which the angle of

“I cannot see any basic difference between a handshake and a poem.”

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¹ Axel Englund, *Still Songs: Music in and around the poetry of Paul Celan*, Routledge, 2012, p. 138

inclination, the appeal, attention finally become more important than the content of speech. “The mirror cracks, I am an Other, and I always was.”²

Another question is how he produced it. In this regard, I think Jacques Derrida in his essay on Celan, caught it better than anyone else, seeing in Celan's poetic strategy what he calls “Shibboleth” – a password, a cipher that only few understand. In the end of his “Anabasis” essay Badiou also underlined: “Celan breaks with the theme of an empty and self-sufficient wandering. Something must be encountered.”³ He was looking for the Other. We could say that the theme of alterity replaces the theme of Fraternity. And furthermore Badiou gives us a hint about the important difference between fraternity and togetherness. I dare to say, following him, that togetherness doesn't mean everyone or the whole nation within the definite identity and roots. According to Celan, I suspect, togetherness-in-alterity evokes the connection of those who consciously intend to share the “His-story”⁴, memory, future and a handshake at least. There are multitudes of alterities.

The optics of posthumanism, in turn, invites us to abandon singular identities in favour of planetary thinking, a common deal, and policy of salvation. So maybe from this point we should go deeper into the question of what you meant by saying that Celan “goes a step further, and even points out limits to posthumanism”?

SU. I think that every theory that is concerned with negation, and perhaps every poetics that is radical at a certain level, has a secret. And just as I would imply that philosophies which today are occupied with the deconstruction of the concept of nature (and therein also of the conceived human being as a species) have the secret that an intact paradigm of nature continues to operate in them, which they have simply displaced to the level of tools, to the underground (“*résistance*”), the humus, the root system, the symbiosis, the rhizomes, the swarms – that is, a “nature of the tool”. In Celan's case a certain “concept of dignity” coupled to the human being continues to operate, precisely in the paradox of not “gluing” back together the materials of identity in the state of destruction, the shards in the heart of destruction.

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² Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*. London: Repeater Books, 2016. p. 12

³ Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. with commentary and notes Alberto Toscano, USA: Polity Press, 2007, p. 95

⁴ Fredy Perlman, *Against His-Story, Against Leviathan*, St Petersburg, Florida; Black & Red, 2002, 296 p.

And, in this comparative juxtaposition of posthumanist approaches with Celan, it is possible to contrast the differences of both approaches and to show what I mean by the limits of posthumanism. They can be pointed out with Celan, precisely because he is indeed a “real” victim of the atrocities of the 20th century and, at the same time, a pioneer of the abandonment of concepts of identity. And precisely, then, when it touches the extreme, one can examine how consistently a method stands up to the negation of fixed forms when it becomes serious (“stands up” in the sense of being consistent, because such a secret at the heart of a method, poetics, or theory is not simply an internal contradiction in itself, but the question of merit). So one can ask: How much human and humanity based is a “concept of dignity” and how much humanity gains a philosophy or poetics that denies humanity as a category? The most consistent “No” allows for a “Yes”.

Limits of posthumanism.

The most consistent “No” allows for a “Yes”.

Thus, let us take a question that directly brings together the concepts and ask: “How would a posthumanist perspective deal with cultures of remembrance, with a certain humanistic concept of dignity (the culture of commemoration – which is so important in Germany) when we stand, for example, at a mass grave of the 20th century? Especially, when it is to a critical degree, an anonymous event, when we do not know the identity of the victims, or we lose sight of the identities because of the historical distance or the sheer dimension of the crime. Aren’t, then, the contours of the “human being”, as a form of a humanistic objectification, not the only thing we have in which the memorial act can manifest itself? Can a mass grave be a “queer” situation (even in terms of the present gender debate), as it is beginning to appear in contemporary art?

Cultures of remembrance.

Can a mass grave be a “queer” situation?

And I think, although this can only be a thesis at this point, which would actually have to be substantiated in more detail, that these newer variants of anti-binary philosophies, which abandon the category of the human as if it were a pure construction of subject philosophy, are not yet (or not anymore) up to the degree of such questions. Celan, however, is, although he resembles them in the negation of entities, even in radicality, even in the approach of a performative irredeemable identity. He nevertheless stops in front of these graves with a concept of human dignity. By not searching for stability in new orders that transcend the category of the human, he creates dignity out of the infinity of dissolution. The dignity, thus, becomes a shadow of the human, kept present in absence. In the way Celan dissolves the human identity as the

He creates dignity out of the infinity of dissolution.

fate (the ascriptions) to which it is condemned, he creates forms of an occupied vacancy and the *humane* human appears stronger than before. Posthumanism denies the nucleus of identities and, with the bonding joy of chemical elements, wanders outwards into ever larger and more flexible trajectories of functional contexts that are no longer meant to exclude anyone. But where is one to arrive if one does not keep oneself present as the one left behind?

The *humane* human appears stronger than before.

Perhaps it can be said in conclusion that a radical negating theory or radical poetics either disintegrates into irony or dissolves into triviality if it is not aware of the mystery of its opposite that it carries within its core (the search for the human[e] in the process of its negation). And this is where art can go further.

OS. I can see even another arguable thing at the very heart of posthumanism that makes it more a philosophy of melancholy than a program of human salvation. How could posthumanism overcome Martin Heidegger's three guiding theses: "the stone is worldless, the animal is poor in world, man is world-forming"⁵ ("der Mensch ist weltbildend, der Stein ist weltlos, aber das Tier ist weltarm")? This judgment is scandalously irresistible for the theory of posthumanism.

"The stone is worldless, the animal is poor in world, man is world-forming".

Moreover, I have an assumption that some sort of a time bomb is built inside posthumanism. I call this bomb a "weak death drive". When we attempt to equalise the status of human and non-human agents, we risk dissolving and launching the self-destruction machine. This is reminiscent of Roger Caillois's famous analysis of mimicry. He was the first who noticed that some insects and animals mimic not because they want to defend and hide from a predator, but because they strive to dissolve themselves in the surrounding reality, they intend to cease existing. This is an unconscious "weak death drive" embedded into us. Posthumanism contains something similar. Timothy Morton appeals to this by the following:

"Melancholy is an object-like presence that our psyche finds hard to digest. It is literally the footprint of another entity of whatever kind, whose proximity was experienced as a trauma. Existence is coexistence, and coexistence is melancholy. Mourning is that attunement in which

"Mourning is that attunement in which one entity is digested by another, and then the very footprint, the trace of that entity, is also digested."

⁵ Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics World, Finitude, Solitude*, Indiana University Press Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1996, p. 176

one entity is digested by another, and then the very footprint, the trace of that entity, is also digested.”⁶

II. Delving into the Residency's Artworks

SU. So eventually we should start to talk about the artworks now, about the great artists who participated in the Anabasis residency, and show more precisely how they deployed the above mentioned topics of identity, posthumanism and politics of memory!

OS. We talked about memory related to the Holocaust and what Alain Badiou called the tragic realization of the 19th century ideas (communism, fascism) in the 20th century, and these topics are reflected on in concrete works created during our residency. I'm thinking of the projects by **Oscar Lebeck** and **Vitaly Yankovy**.

Oscar makes in a series of pictures invisible things visible. His work created during the Anabasis residency is also a part of this series. I would call this a *hauntology* method: Ghosts that are no longer alive, but have not died either, are made present. As a rule, ghosts can only be humans or in some exceptional cases, animals. His ghostly transparent carriages and barracks are objects – ghost objects, signs of death. But maybe you, Sebastian, also have something to add to this.

Vitaly's project “**Profound, profane memory**” focuses on a completely different aspect of the same topic. At first, he juxtaposes a geotag and a weird (“unheimliches”) black object in sites of memory and places of entertainment. Secondly, he offers us to play with parameters and indicators of fear, hope, grief and guilt. His artwork poses a rather uncomfortable question: How is it possible that representation of the tragedy of the Holocaust has been incorporated into the industry of tourism, entertainment and even forced leisure? Isn't there a kind of levelling that results in neglecting? On the other hand, how can we construct a special mode of perception of such topics in contemporary society? In Ukraine this is a very arguable and controversial topic nowadays. If we take the example of Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial

⁶ Timothy Morton, *Melancholy Objects: If Stones Were Lacanian* // Lacan and the Posthuman, Palgrave MacMillan, 2018, p. 194

Center, we see that the discussions are spinning around the format of representation of the tragedy. Is it allowed to show such things in the frame of an immersive project on the verge of entertainment? I don't want to suggest we should forget the problem of remembrance, but would plead for alternative formats when dealing with the past – more uncomfortable, procedural without objectivisation. For example, I would rather choose nine hours “Shoah” by Claude Lanzmann rather than the convenient documentary film on TV about the Holocaust.

The last thought concerning this aspect brings me to Robert Antelme. Together with his wife Marguerite Duras he took part in “La Résistance” and was arrested by the Gestapo, passed through the concentration camps Buchenwald, Gandersheim, Dachau. After the War, he was accidentally discovered half-dead in Dachau by his friend in the Résistance, François Mitterrand, who organised his return to Paris. Antelme formulates an ontological position in his book “The Human Race” (1947), accordingly, the camp experience is not a tragic deviation from the direct route of improving human and mankind, but a natural consequence of the conditions of existence in which the human race still lives. He recognised that there is no inherent difference between the “normal” system of man's exploitation and that of the camps. “That the camps are simply a sharpened image of the more-or-less hidden hell in which most people still live.”⁷ From my point of view, this is a very deep thought for understanding the catastrophe that had happened in the 20th century.

“That the camps are simply a sharpened image of the more-or-less hidden hell in which most people still live.”

SU. I see your point, but we definitely can spot the potential of new forms in this context when looking at the works of our artists. Three works, that by Vitali Yankovy and Oscar Lebeck you mentioned, and a video by **Tiny Domingos** deal directly with the topic of death in the context of Celan himself and/or with the commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust. All three works, in my view, employ a process that breaks with conventional structures, object-focuses, and identity politics of the commemoration culture. They experiment with the dissolution of categories, even of space and time, of places, and the local embedding of events without abandoning most importantly the claim to dignity and remembrance attached to those categories.

Let me go a bit into detail on this. For example, in Oscar's work “**Trek**”

⁷ Daniel Dobbels, ed., On Robert Antelme's The Human Race, Essays and Commentary, trans. Jeffrey Haight, Evanston, Illinois, IL: The Marlboro Press, 2003, p. 22

with his artificial cubes created by superimposing photographs that are transposed railroad cars on the tracks of deportation routes into the landscape, I see not only the effect you mentioned, that a “ghost” is created, or a ghost of memory is made visible in an absent field (an architecture of absence). What is at stake here, and in Oscar's other works as well, in my eyes, is not so much the function of created shapes and “rooms” in terms of encircled interior spaces (vessels pointing inward), saying, “Here it was, and is no more...”, but a much larger operational movement in the landscape around it (a work towards the exterior categories), a rearrangement of the axes in the landscape around these objects, which conversely look out onto these spaces. So you can say that it is rather about the outer walls of these cubes, before it points inwards. It is a game with the gaze.

In fact, the cross-fading technique creates the effect that “nature”, which is actually behind these spaces (the cubes) that are ghostly projected into it, suddenly attaches to these outer walls and inside the cubes. This integration into the place of “over-focusing” (into the interior of memory) as a previously loose and self-referential context of “nature” (exterior) is realised. As a poet, I would say, this is an uncanny power to break the silence of the trees. Nature, actually a silent witness, remembers by interfering in an absent space... That's what Oscar's technique can do in relation to the Holocaust, so to speak, not only to create the place like a monument (or a “*lieu de mémoire*”), but to make the problem of remembering (commemoration) itself a place.

And a second example: The work “**Jenseits der Mirabeau-Brücke**” (Beyond the Mirabeau bridge) of our artist Tiny Domingos, is thematically and in its motifs linked to the circumstances of Paul Celan's suicide (Celan jumped from the Pont Mirabeau into the Seine, assumingly on June 20, 1970).

It is the colourful and creative power that ironically emerges here as a concept of life behind suicide. Suicide as a poetological act of leaping towards the “super-personal”. And further it is the colour and light contrasts of these two stations before and behind the jump (I say it with spatial terms as a “behind” because it is synchronised, and different image layers are overlapping), what makes this approach so intriguing. It is the contrast of jumping down from the dark bridge over the Seine, which in its darkness comes from the life contexts of the “here-world”, into a light system, which as an extension of the jump appears precisely

The interior of memory.

Break the silence of the trees.

Not only to create the place like a monument, but to make the problem of remembering (commemoration) itself a place.

Leaping towards the “super-personal”.

not as a “private” (identity linked) jump into darkness, but a leap into the width, into the clay, as a golem, in unconditional barefootedness, into a context and the matter of creation. The black water of the river, as a consistent condensation of this process in the language of the bereaved, is left behind (the personal suicide motives, the inescapable fate, in the sense of a constriction [*Stretto*] of the person, as a jump into the “unliving” death).

Without being religious, without being kitschy, without the prospect of salvation and out of life’s historical constrictions (exile, sacrifice, homeland, nation, Jew, trauma), the work dares a leap into the posthistoire – and how colourful, almost Latin American strong and moving it is, restless image particles, a membrane, circulation of blood through the images, like a skin surface that does not simply flicker digitally, but under whose multi-organismic patina a heart beats. The heart of the cyborg?

The insertion of images in the picture also blurs, as I said, the context of whether it’s a “before” or an “after.” The depiction of the jumping on two of these images is an important clue that it is not a “whence” but a “whither.” But the “whither” of this jumping is thereby definitely something that “preceded” death as a poetics, so that it opens up out of death as a poetics of life, and describes the search, the substances, the materialities into which this poetics could advance as a sign of life. Here, it is nevertheless a “whence”, but in the sense of a “whither”. One’s own death thus becomes a part of the extended search, a kind of perfecting.

And this plays with the confusability of “whence” and “whither” as well as with the “before” and “after” of the leap into death. And thereby it enters into a structural congeniality with the time conundrum in the refrain of Apollinaire’s poem: “Pont Mirabeau”. The poem was translated by Celan and thus anticipates not only the bridge (as a physical entity), but also the “grammatical construction” from which Celan jumped: “Vienne la nuit sonne l’heure / Les jours s’en vont je demeure”⁸.

The balance is quite well kept here: One is not decomposed as a “body” after such a leap by ecological forces, neither “secured” in the cycles of

The materialities into which this poetics could advance as a sign of life.

One’s own death thus becomes a part of the extended search, a kind of perfecting.

⁸ Guillaume Apollinaire, *Le Pont Mirabeau* in: *Alcools. Poems by Guillaume Apollinaire*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, CT, 1995, p. 12

life, in the digestion by other organisms, or does not pass as an individual soul into the eternal “hunting grounds”, but it maps a poetics which dissolves the body of all bodies (the identities) and still does not arrive at “God”, but remains Celan (again: the hidden core of the method, the human[e] posthuman).

Dissolves the body of all bodies (the identities) and still does not arrive at “God”, but remains Celan.

OS. Posthumanism though, as we emphasised above, is mostly a planetary thinking, while at the micro level there are still many particular, unresolved problems (e.g. “gender troubles”, or postcolonialism issues) which I would like to talk about more deliberately in the following artworks.

Firstly I’m going to speak about the **Neue Judische Kunst** group. **Garry Kraevets** and **Nikolai Karabinovich** (members of NJK) created some kind of a radio play named “**Oscillating broken pillars**” in which four wind instruments got into a broken magic items shop where the owner's grandson wants to socialise them. During all the play the instruments are crying: “But we don’t want that! We don’t believe in that! We’re other, we’re different! We don’t want to be like you!” A psychoanalyst comes to the store and deliberately shouts out fragmentary expressions from its professional vocabulary: “Geste à peau! dénégation! aliénation! jouissance!” Ultimately, everything ends in a way of “pogrom”. Someone says: “We left our unbearable homeland that has broken us, but we don’t need any repair!” The message of this work was for me: leave us alone, we do not need to be cured and instilled by your values.

“We left our unbearable homeland that has broken us, but we don’t need any repair!”

Today we inevitably face an unsolvable dilemma. Either we are assimilated by force and become a part of a global system, including erased identity (e.g. the regime of social networks “transparency”, conditions of precarity and instability) or we reject it in favour of a vulnerable separateness and “uniqueness”. The only problem is that isolationism seems to be a false alternative because, as Claude Lévi-Strauss and other anthropologists have shown, at the structural level within even the most closed tribes of Amazonia or Australia, the same patterns are observed – hierarchy, regimentation and repression. I would say identity is as dead as God is. You expressed this more gracefully at the very beginning, when you were talking about Celan and his overcoming the identity construct. While omitting the neoliberal regime of capitalism we put ourselves right into the “*Midsommar*” (2019)⁹.

Identity is as dead as God is.

⁹ I mean the recent Swedish horror film by Ari Aster, where one can see juxtaposition between civilised and natural ways of living and its consequences.

Moreover, the apology of Nature by Jean-Jacques Rousseau was debunked and carefully deconstructed by Jacques Derrida, who showed how naive and even dangerous it is to think about the human out of the culture, language and structures. This inextricable dilemma and hopelessness is the key mood of the artwork by Neue Judische Kunst in my opinion.

As for **Yana Bachinska's** video, I'd say his work entitled "**What is to be done?**" embraces the key contradiction of our time, namely the confusion, rupture and crisis of the subject (human) being stuck in tectonic faults and cracks of history between the uncertain past and future, which looks like a drift in an unknown direction. What should we do today? What are the stakes? Appropriation, inclusion, mission, vision, socialism, hope, faith, love... Mother Mary or the ghost of Communism? Should, for example LGBTQ+ communities struggle for equal rights and fight for the legalisation of same-sex marriage, but then integrate into a repressive system of disciplinarity? Or vice versa, elude and pose the question whether the institution of marriage itself is a leftover and ideological instrument of the past? The heroines of the film address this doubt: "We have to take some other actions. Cards do not help anymore."

SU. But what could these other actions be? What happens with the human tendency to always force changes into a new version of the old?

OS. Undoubtedly, every epoch has its constraints. The 20th century brought incredible results of social and political emancipation and set up a "subtle discourse" of critique. But, at the same time, we have also encountered more subtle resistance within the system of capitalism. Perhaps we just need to throw the dice again rather than bring something new from the outside. This is the way the artwork "**Swiss-knife man**" by **Bohdan Svyrydov** could be perceived. I see here some sort of ironic approach to transhumanistic attempts to enhance the human body, thus, to remain a human as it is. The main problem of transhumanism, and thus different to posthumanist thinking, is an obsessive attempt to prolong human life and overcome death. In the past people used to deal with rituals prolonging life, *post mortem* preparations, connecting themselves to a divine instance ("religare", linking with a God). Nowadays, this idea has been transformed into enhancing the matter, body or speculations around AI and digital immortality. However, I'd like to emphasise one important thing

regarding post-, transhumanism by reminding of Haraway's term *chthulucene* which is, according to her, "a compound of two Greek roots (khthôn and kainos) that together name a kind of timeplace for learning *to stay with the trouble* of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth."¹⁰

"Timeplace for learning *to stay with the trouble* of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth."

It is noteworthy that posthumanism intends to reduce the role of human influence on the planet, while transhumanism, on the contrary, tries to strengthen this role. "This means going beyond what is human, stepping into a realm which is turned toward the human, but uncanny — the realm where the monkey, the automatons, and with them ... oh, art, too, seem to be at home."¹¹

SU. I am not sure whether this juxtaposition is so correct, whether posthumanism does not also fulfil a human dream in thinking away the categorical human, and to let in exchange the human being be represented also by the things which were not the human being before.

But this question, how consistently this approach is, is so important regarding Celan's way of searching for the human/humane. In the last consequence the mystery inside a method (let's call it: the secret of a "hidden contrary") no longer contradicts it, but represents a higher level of its affinity.

To make this easier to understand, let me give an example from the theoretical phase of the residency. During the second week, I had posted a series of poems from Daniel Falb called "Der abgeschliffene Würfel" (lit.: "The Abraded Dice") as additional material for our artists to illustrate a certain principle of amplification through hybridity. Falb uses an AI based language simplifier as a poetic writing tool. It's very strange but while reading this hybrid AI language I can feel the writer's hand in these poems even more intensely than in the "normal enclosure" of a totally human made poem. It's a paradox: reading a poem is also related to a kind of trust in its "automation" within a person's way of thinking, to assume that the writer will speak anyway, even if I don't listen or understand. But here, knowing that the verses were translated by AI into simple language, – and thus also translated into whatever AI-

Feel the writer's hand.

¹⁰ Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, p. 2

¹¹ Kligerman Eric, *Sites of the uncanny: Paul Celan, specularly and the visual art*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007, p. 116

imagined form of a philosophy of “simple” is implied (which is of course an abyss of complication!) – you can see the human actor (agent) within the poem “moving around”, not only as a poem, holistically, but almost spatially and physically, operating *in* and *at* the poem. By arranging it, editing the verses, selecting its beauty and its sadness, and so on, the writer is “helplessly” and at the same time “confidently” co-working on the poem's questionability, and thus exposing the underlying philosophy of the machine. So in this hybrid forms, but within the loneliness of being alone in the room with a machine, you can even more feel the present of a human that just passed by, becoming the enclosed core of it, but hidden, by acting at or with it, from the outside, like a sound in the staircase or a shadow, the half-sidedness of cyborg maybe, making a human trace visible as a problem and as a presence, humanhood as a sign itself. Our artist **Hana Yoo** commented on this and said: “In the same sense, I sometimes think that posthumanism is more humanism than (just)humanism.”

The present of a human that just passed by.

“I sometimes think that posthumanism is more humanism than (just)humanism.”

So returning to our discussion, to say that “*God* is dead”, and in a derivative or a historically updated sense also “*identity* is dead”, is only valid as a proposition, when it is uttered on the edge of its invalidity. For if such propositions were valid, their meaning would dissolve, not as propositional statements (content), but as the propositions themselves (ability to say so). So it is a matter of the degree of awakesness of a method that asserts this proposition by engaging in the search of its negation (the struggle of a method with itself).

OS. Could you clarify this moment, please?

SU. Sure, here we can again bring up artworks created within the framework of our residency, which have made precisely this conflict of non-self-sufficient propositions to their programme.

What this thin “line” in between statement and inexpressibility means, and how it inflates – not as the one, nor the other, but as the struggle (“*Staying with the trouble*”) in between the two – can be seen, for example, in **Dovilė Aleksaitė’s** video work “**Brilliance Injured**”.

The aspect I would highlight here is that she does not just simply use materials to “show something third” with them (in an appropriative way of showing), but how she goes into the conflict of the concept of

“material” by approaching it in a kind of reverse, by literally immersing oneself into it.

Through the chosen textile background, for example, she not only makes the fusion of digital and analog materials very tricky, but almost defines a concept of material that breaks through the visual dimension itself (the solely representative) by soaking it in the fabric and making this three-dimensional, haptic, mysterious and peculiar way of dissemination of the liquid palpable (the inevitable, merciless of nature).

And here comes the struggle we are talking about into play. It creates the great effect of being able to contrast and counteract the dispersion path of the colour in the material with what one puts into it, as a viewer, like a counter-control, when as a human being one has the tendency to always want to “close off” forms (like identity), to think in framing out-“lines”, to always add a further concluding element or another final contour to fantasy formations of natural origin (clouds or dispersion paths of liquids and materials or forms and growth processes in nature). Only then, it becomes a fully valid thing in the human world, a concept, a thing, a notion, a participant, and so on.

But this conflict is arranged here in a way that the different aspects of materiality are not simply dialogical opposites. The willfully drawn line does not simply become an over-shaping-force of the propagation path of natural substantiality. The mutual overtrumping of “form-giving will” and “will-less form” is stopped by a nature that itself eludes the outlines and the politics of outlining. Thus, the conceiving of substances and materials as entities are questioned, not even by rejecting (negating) the “line” that frames everything, but rather integrating it into this questioning, into the liquefied narration (deleting by confirming, integrating instead of declining). This is, at a formal level also a reference to the divination text, which was one of the sources of inspiration for this work (the “I Ching”), or to the paradox of meditation in general, the *attempt* to think nothing, which only succeeds when it forgets itself as an attempt.

Nature that itself eludes the outlines and the politics of outlining.

However, something opens up that is applicable and explorable beyond this work, a dimension that fits perfectly into our Anabasis themes, in a way, that the technical aspect of it is itself already a result of so many interesting preliminary considerations.

Or let's take **Paul Wiersbinski's** work “**PIA16881**”. The dynamics of

absurd disproportionality are impressive here, a kind of music video of evolution, including the technical self-overhaul (the transhumanisation) of the human.

Very inspiring ideas are e.g. the igniting man/god, or in general, the connection of arson and life (big bang?), sparks and ash flying as pollen in the courtyard of a summer day. Flags that take the sun they reflect as their sole sign, “reflection” as a primary statement (that in turn does not recognize itself) is mirrored in pop - which is then mirrored again in car polish, in technologies, in tautologies that technically resonate, rhythmize, have consequences. Or the water that is not only “photographed” but has reversely photographed itself in the face of a person taken out of the developer-bath (of the river), the “*de-imaged*” man who would have felt himself recognised and reflected in it, in the sense of his poetics...

Tautologies that technically resonate.

The “*de-imaged*” man.

OS. Absolutely riveting, Sebastian! I have always been fascinated by the ability of a human to think over such intertwined complexities and boundaries of imagination. Humans are able to ask questions that cannot be answered by themselves. Once I remember how Quentin Meillassoux stunned me by the following thought: “God could really come about in the future.”¹² In particular, these questions relate to the existence of God, about whom one of our participants – **Bohdan Bunchak** – was contemplating in his project “**The gift, the answer, the forgiveness, and the miracle**”. This work induced me to think about the possibility of preserving the divine dimension in the context of posthumanism. Is there a place for God in the posthuman world (the World-for-Us, pointed out by American dark philosopher Eugene Thacker)? Most likely, the domain of religion will retain its position as long as there is even a crumb of humanity remaining in a human. Interestingly, Paul Celan in the poem “Tenebrae” peculiarly reversed the relationship between God and a human. He wrote the following: “Pray God / Pray to us / We are nigh.”¹³

“God could really come about in the future.”

SU. In Bohdan’s film, the ambivalence that emanates from the trailed branch is a very interesting balance between dark vigour, in which it is trailed as a gesture of empowerment, like a claw, or the fateful hand of nature, the apocalyptic trombone. But itself as an object it is already conceived in decay, unstable as a stick is, already dead wood, and only

¹² Quentin Meillassoux, Spectral dilemma, Journal Collapse Volume IV, Urbana-Champaign, p. 269

¹³ Paul Celan, Selections, ed. by Pierre Joris, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, p. 61

trailed, not paving the way, leaving no trace on this foliage of the forest. Seen from this perspective this it is a walk on the narrow division line between history and nature, in such a way that they are dissolved as a pair of opposites, rather appearing as the “nature of history”, the “horror of history” and it's indifference towards what makes it powerful at the same time when it comes to the “stick” of objectification.

OS. G(o)od. We can also use this as a bridge. Since at the very end we should come to the category of landscape. It seems to me that the notion of landscape in the artwork of **Hana Yoo “Wir fingen den Schattenfisch, seht!”** (We caught the shadow fish, look!) somehow links all the points of posthumanism, Paul Celan and the crucial idea of Anabasis, that we conceptually tried to encircle – wandering uncharted territories.

SU. Yes, I think so too, and within our discussion her work can also refer to the keyword of the “secret opposite” in the core of a method, i.e. to make something visible, not only on the level of a simple negation or simple opposition, but in a lost, mysterious sense.

If you look at some crucial details within the “landscape” she created, it is very interesting how Hana manages to “play off” the work with categories against their pictorial representation: That “up” is “down” and “front” is “back” also means that gravity is put out of action by heavy objects; that anchors not only do not sink, but do not find rest in “un-gravity” as well, rather have undirected buoyancy in the air; that the background does not approach and puts its inaccessibility in the foreground instead of simply staying behind...

“Un-gravity.”

OS. It seems to me that this work shows a rather weird moment, on which Quentin Meillassoux draws attention. He uses the concept of contingency, which is a kind of accident that can happen to the world and to us at any time. According to him the world could suddenly change its properties. Suddenly, we could wake up in a world without gravity. Where “might” perhaps be no longer meaningful. The effect of black swans, in a way. If for billions of years the sun has risen and set, it does not mean that the next day it will rise again. It sounds strange, but the probability of this, albeit small, remains. This is what we can see in Hana’s art work.

SU. In addition I can see a kind of doubling effect here. It is not simply a

reversal of directions and physical characteristics as a big “upside down”, changed like electrical polarity, but a kind of deep tautology: that the background “remains” behind as foreground. There are actually three steps in this process, which makes it very philosophical. Hana succeeds here in making the pictorial dimension and the wording of concepts questionable in a way that images and concepts themselves literally “go under” (in a landscape), drowning in the liquid categories of their embedding. So it hits the concept of wandering in uncharted territories, as we understood it when dealing with Celan’s poem “Anabasis”. A spaceless space beyond representations – but still being a “space”, since the “questioning” argues with itself in a spatial mode. Regarding the landscape it traces all these themes of Anabasis at their source and can at the same time also serve to illustrate what I mean by the mystery within a method involving itself into the questionability of its targeted objects instead of just being applied to them, to underline what by its absence creates a maelstrom effect of its presence (that “posthumanism is more humanism than (just)humanism”).

To underline what by its absence creates a maelstrom effect of its presence.

OS. As we pointed out, Celan’s poetics anticipated posthumanism in terms of planetary thinking. But not in a way of panpsychic religious thinking, frolicked in a joy and optimism that everything is permeated with the divine spirit, and God lives in every stone. At one of the lectures, Hana asked me about this. What are the differences between posthumanism and panpsychism? For Celan, the landscape and its elements are like the signs of injury and pain. “Porphyry (igneous) rock pains too”¹⁴. The poem treats the body as a planet or sphere that serves the memory traces. Prof. Rochelle Tobias, who was speaking at our residency, emphasised this moment: “Geology is of significance for Celan’s poems in as much as it is the science of sediment, that is, the science of ash, dust, and sand, which is what remains of the victims.”¹⁵ This is a world in which erosion has left its mark, a world that thus bears witness not to the past but to its erasure or passing. If the past comes into the foreground, it is as that which disappeared and which as a result is visible only in the scars imprinted on the landscape, which are simultaneously the lines of the text in a given moment.

“Geology is of significance for Celan’s poems in as much as it is the science of sediment, that is, the science of ash, dust, and sand, which is what remains of the victims.”

¹⁴ Rochelle Tobias, *The Discourse of Nature in the Poetry of Paul Celan*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, p. 81

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15

III. Departing from Categories.

Summarising the Residency

SU. How to bring all this together, the link between today's discourses and talking about Paul Celan? I think one can learn from Celan how not to tighten the spiral of counter-identities like a screw with counter-rotating threads, but to turn around the game of motifs and their mode of locomotion through history, even playfully, to extend the victim's falling into infinity and make it a force of withdrawal, or a method of evading injury by refusing to "heal". The inconsolability in the face of the injury becomes at the same time a rejection of any identitary self-repair and is thus the sign of a departure from the categories, a sign of life over which it gains poetological control, a kind of wandering without arrival. Our artists have taken part in this game, in this migration between motifs/motives and methods of identity construction. I think they succeeded in various degrees of their engagement with discourses of our time. Despite their intriguing diversity they are all united in this structural consideration that motives can no longer be overcome by motifs, if it is not supposed to become a game of cards. And it was very interesting to explore these ideas with artistic means. For herein lie the techniques of overcoming contours, a concept of truth of practice.

Refusing to "heal".

OS. Probably any experimental project can be called wandering through uncharted territories, but our residency deliberately chose the idea of wandering as the key in this difficult and unpredictable journey. Fortunately, everyone has survived. First of all, our trip started back in April and finished in November. It was a long journey with its obstacles, impasses, "sorrow-buoy" deviations from the course. Recalling Celan: "we crumbled apart / and brittled back together". Secondly, it's rather difficult to talk about the topic of identity nowadays, since we have been living in a hybrid world with uncertain goals for a while, where almost nothing is clear. If we add posthumanism, object-oriented ontology, dark ecology and a sprinkle Celan on the top, we would get a rather strange constellation consisting of exquisite elements. Nevertheless, looking at the ten projects of our artists, we have seen how productive this configuration was. I think, as well, that there was also a very powerful theoretical part of the residency with invited experts from Germany, the USA, the Netherlands, and Ukraine. They were very helpful in constructing vectors for future artistic research. It is also important for me that we, as a project team, were able to make our specific contribution to Paul Celan from the perspective of posthumanism and

new materialism. Anyway, I hope this project will find its *Others*, to whom it could shake hands. But where to find them, how to signal them, and at last where to go together?

“This narrow sign between walls
the impassable-true
Upward and Back
to the heart-bright future”¹⁶.

Oleksandr Sushynskii and Sebastian Unger

Berlin – Chernivtsi
8th Nov - 19th Dec 2021

¹⁶ Paul Celan: *Anabasis*, in: Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. with commentary and notes Alberto Toscano, USA: Polity Press, 2007, p. 88.