

Filiations of the Negative

Reading Franz Kafka and Paul Celan with
André Green

Francesco Adriano Clerici



Milano University Press

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Author's statement about the cover image: "I acknowledge the Tehuelche people and their forefathers as the custodians of the land on which this photograph was taken. The stencilled handprints and hunting scenes at *Cueva de las Manos* are expressions of early Patagonian cultures and their profound connection to this landscape. These artworks stand as a powerful testament to the enduring presence and legacy of Indigenous peoples in the region. I pay my respects to Tehuelche Elders—past, present, and emerging—who continue to uphold and share these histories and cultural responsibilities. This image was taken on ancestral Tehuelche territory—*el territorio sigue siendo ancestral y no cedido.*"



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Jean Paul famously wrote that books are corpulent, thick letters to friends. In presenting *The Structure Of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas S. Kuhn also described his book as an «attempt to explain to [himself] and to friends» how he happened to be «drawn from science to its history in the first place.» I have been blessed with friends and friendships. As they gifted me with what Kafka called *die Herrlichkeit des Lebens*—the splendour of life—they also urged me to seek further and deeper into the questions that have engaged me for many years. To these many friends and interlocutors—close or distant—who accompanied me from the earliest stages of this journey, between Milan and Berlin and beyond, I owe more than explanations. In more ways than one, I owe them the passion of a life: Luca, Simone, Valerio, Nicola, Martina, Alessandro, Chiara, Paul, Isa, Christian, Marco, Rebecca, Florian, Omar, Valerio, Marta, Simon, Laura, Megane, Mario, Enrico, Jörn... I thank them—and many others—for their patience and, above all, for their time. Thank *you* for always being there, while I was elsewhere.

I thank my students who, unbeknownst to them, keep teaching me so much.

With the love that only a soulmate can give, Tessa took me by the hand in the final stages of this work: from another hemisphere of the world and of the mind,

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

John Donne

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

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

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

André Green

Verstand geht dem Blödesten auf. Um die Augen beginnt es. Von hier aus verbreitet es sich. Ein Anblick, der einen verführen könnte, sich mit unter die Egge zu legen. Es geschieht ja nichts weiter, der Mann fängt bloß an, die Schrift zu entziffern, er spitzt den Mund, als horche er. Sie haben gesehen, es ist nicht leicht, die Schrift mit den Augen zu entziffern; unser Mann entziffert sie aber mit seinen Wunden. Es ist allerdings viel Arbeit [...]

Franz Kafka

Gedichte sind ja irgendwo auch ein Wiedererinnern, manchmal sogar ein Vorerinnern. Und bei diesem Vorerinnern, wenn ich das Wort gebrauchen darf, lebt man den Gedichten irgendwie nach. Damit sie wahr bleiben.

Paul Celan

To find a New Tongue, a New Name

Introduction

*Un libro que no encierra su
contralibro es considerado incompleto.*
Jorge Louis Borges (1974: 439)¹

«Il y a quelque temps déjà que le travail du négatif a commencé à faire parler de lui.» «The work of the negative has been a subject of debate for some time now.» (Green 1993: 9; Green 1999b: 1) So writes the French-Jewish psychoanalyst André Green, key figure of contemporary psychoanalysis,² at the beginning of *Le Travail du négatif*—first published in 1993 in France. In a time span of more than thirty years, Green’s sentence remains a cogent actuality. His ground-breaking work anticipated a wave of renewed interest for the question of the Negative that extends beyond psychoanalysis. Expanding the metapsychological, epistemological, and clinical horizon of this field of research Green has provided new fundamental and insightful perspectives that prosecute and rethink Freud’s work, accompanying psychoanalytic thought into the third millennium.

1 «A book which does not contain its counterbook is considered incomplete.»

2 André Green was born on March 12, 1927, to a family of Sephardic descent in Cairo, Egypt. The mother was of Spanish origin (her maiden name was Barcelona), the father Portuguese. The youngest child of four, born fifteen years after his first sister, Green grew up in a progressive and cosmopolitan environment animated by manifold cultural and linguistic influences, such as Arabic, English, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Armenian, Greek ones. French remained the language of domestic daily life as well as of the Jewish community in which Green grew up, at once the idiom of his formative years and the tongue of a “myth of the origin.” His profound fascination for French culture led him to move to Paris after the Second World War, in 1946, where he studied medicine, psychiatry, and later completed his training as a psychoanalyst. In 1953, he begins his residency at the Sainte-Anne Hospital in Paris, during which he encounters for the first time the insurmountable opacity of mental illness. Close relationship with Julián De Ajuriaguerra and Henri Ey. Initially close to Lacan, he begins his training analysis with Maurice Bouvet (SPP) in 1956—prematurely interrupted due to Bouvet’s death in May 1960. Thereafter, Green undergoes two further analyses: a second one with Jean Mallet, and a third and final one with Catherina Parat. Defending his intellectual freedom and autonomy, he gradually takes distance from Lacan. As early as 1961, Green establishes a first contact with the British Psychoanalytic Society. The encounter with the works of Donald Winnicott and Wilfred Bion has a fundamental impact on his thought and theoretical developments. He worked and lived for the rest of his life in Paris, where he died on January 22, 2012. Among the most important biographical sources see Duparc (1996); Green (1994; 2000c: 9-15; 2006a) and Scuderi (2015).

Over the last ten years, a remarkable number of international publications have appeared on the topic, attesting the vitality of the contemporary debate on the Negative. Green's contribution, however, is still widely unknown if not ignored by many scholars from diverse fields of study. In *Die Arbeit des Negativen: Negativität als philosophisch-psychoanalytisches Problem*, a collection of essays of international authors edited by Emil Angehrn and Joachim Küchenhoff (2014), Green's name appears only once—in footnote. In another volume of contributions with the title *Negativität: Kunst, Recht, Politik* (Khurana *et al.* 2018) Green is, significantly, not even cited once. Admittedly, the absence of explicit references to an author in scholarly literature does not necessarily imply that ideas and theories of the latter are not being subtly received and further developed. This, however, does not seem to be the case at all.

Whereas in the American psychoanalytic sphere the interest in Green continued to grow even prior to the first edition of *The Work of the Negative* in 1999, and while in Europe, Great Britain, and South America, notably in Argentina, the importance of his research has long been established, his work lacks a proper reception in Germany to this day. The reasons for that are multiple, complex, and difficult to summarise. They are arguably intertwined with the historical and political vicissitudes of psychoanalysis, which after the *Anschluss* of Austria by Nazi Germany in 1938 took the way of the exile towards new countries, idioms, and cultural contexts. Sigmund Freud's hopes of seeing in Carl Gustav Jung the potential symbolic heir of psychoanalysis outside the Jewish context in which the latter had flourished were long vanished, and Jung took a different path that led him far away from Freudian thinking and dangerously close to National socialism (cfr. Meghnagi 2015: 60-73).

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

Also in the case in which Green is object of study, his work on the Negative has often been read in relationship with Hegel, or more generally reduced to a philosophical perspective that does no justice to the unicity of his theory (De Leon 2014: 13-27). This is not only a symptom of the resistance that Green's work still faces but also a manifestation of the inadequacies of cultural and intellectual categories characterizing the confrontation with his writings in Germany. In 2018, Erwin Kaiser presented a paper at the Karl-Abraham-Institut in Berlin

titled “Hinter dem Gesetz. Eine Deutung von Franz Kafkas *Türhüterlegende*,” (Kaiser 2022) an interpretation of Kafka’s text *Vor dem Gesetz* advanced with reference to Green’s concept of the *dead mother* [*la mère morte*]. After the presentation, many questions were posed from the audience, among which one about the reception of Green’s theory of the Negative in Germany, and of why Green’s *Le Travail du négatif* was still basically unknown to German psychoanalysts in spite of its relevance. The answer left a durable impression on me: «Wahrscheinlich, weil Greens Werk so *philosophisch anspruchsvoll* ist...»—«Perhaps because Green’s work is so *philosophically demanding*...»

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

Une hypothèque hégélienne a pesé sur la psychanalyse, qu’il convient de lever. Mais un emprunt terminologique ne saurait à lui seul aliéner un titre de propriété. Celui que rencontre le travail du négatif désigne autre chose que ce dont parle la *Phénoménologie de l’Esprit*. Les psychanalystes peuvent venir au travail du négatif sans que Hegel ait jamais été pour eux l’objet de la moindre réflexion. C’est le cas de la tradition qui règne dans la Société britannique de psychanalyse. (Green 1993: 15)³

With his research Green has developed a fruitful dialogue with diverse fields of knowledge but has also expressed criticisms toward attempts of establishing the foundations of psychoanalysis on other disciplines, such as linguistics, philosophy, or anthropology:⁴

3 Green 1999b: 4-5: «Psychoanalysis was burdened with its Hegelian antecedents which needed jettisoning. But borrowing terminology is not enough in itself to alienate a title of ownership. Anyone who has come across the work of the negative will have something different in mind from that which is spoken of in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is possible for psychoanalysts to come to the work of the negative without ever having studied Hegel at all. The tradition which prevails in the British Psycho-Analytic Society is a case in point.»

4 To be clear, it is not a question of defending a “puristic” view of psychoanalysis, but rather of recognising different epistemological horizons. If philosophy can surely count on the intellectual rigour granted by operating on the level of ideas, the clinical practice and experience, which are at the foundation of psychoanalytic theory, involve the irreducible opacity of another person’s psyche: «It is far from easy to make psychoanalysts themselves understand what the category of the negative refers to in psychoanalysis, although they are in an ideal position to observe it. When one employs current concepts to illustrate the way they refer to a patent or allusive negativity, there is a serious risk of increasing the abstract element inherent in any concept and thus to obfuscate what one had wanted to clarify by theorising about it. Perhaps the main difficulty lies in the fact that psychoanalysis, in contradistinction to philosophy, does not operate purely on the level of ideas – which, it is recognised, contain their own coherence and consistence and therefore are worthy of consideration in their own right on account of their intellectual rigour. The psychoanalytic approach always refers to an experience which is seen initially from the point of view of positivity and the constraints

To put the emphasis on interpretation, whether it concerns patients or reading Freud, does not mean, for all that, that I share the views of some who see psychoanalysis as a branch of hermeneutics. [...] I do not believe that all interpretations have the same value, or that their relation to the truth depends solely on one's point of view. The wish to minimize the importance of the discoveries of psychoanalysis underlies this attitude which relativizes our psychoanalytic knowledge, perhaps excessively so. The area of our certitudes is limited, for sure; however, one should not confuse critical debate with theologians' quarrels. Nor do I believe those who speak, in my opinion lightly, of the science of psychoanalysis; or one should state clearly, at any rate, that the official criteria of science considerably limit its interest, from the point of view of the study of the human psyche. *I am convinced that contemporary psychoanalysis has to find its own tongue, which is neither that of religious theology nor that of scientific positivism; neither that of the irrational nor that of narrow reason. There is a logic, or rather logics, of the unconscious which we have begun to understand better and better since Freud, perhaps to an extent that he never suspected.* (Green 1997: 14, m. e.)

For Green, psychoanalysis needed to rediscover the distinctiveness of its own methods, theories, models, practices, and way of thinking: in a word, the distinctiveness of its own *heterogeneity*. To do so, it was necessary to articulate the gaps between clinical experience and theory, on the one hand, and between Freud's text and the post-Freudian developments marking the journey of psychoanalysis on the other. As we will see, in the historical and intellectual context in which Green began working, marked by a deep, melancholic crisis in psychoanalysis, such a need represented an interminable work of mourning, in search for a lost origin.

The lack of reception of Green's work constitutes a limitation in today's debate on the Negative and represents what I consider as a closure to new explorative and analytic possibilities. The present work aims at contributing to the ongoing debate on the Negative through a new interdisciplinary approach between psychoanalysis, literature, and Jewish studies. Within this framework, *Filiations of the Negative* investigates the works of two major German speaking Jewish authors of the 20th century: Franz Kafka and Paul Celan—two names for whom the association with the category of negativity is of primary importance.⁵ Providing a new elaboration of Green's theory, my work analyses the

involved. While a philosopher's thinking arises purely from its debates with itself and the world, the work which stems from it is the proof that the difficulties encountered have been surmounted – however partial and temporary this may be. There is no doubt that the solution was facilitated by bringing together under a single figurehead the identities of the one who questions and the one who answers. Here, Plato is not just a model but a paradigm. On the contrary, psychoanalysis speaks of the opacity of another person's psyche which can never be overcome and is irreducible.» Green 1999b: 14-15.

5 A detailed discussion of the secondary literature on the topic is provided at the beginning of each of the two chapters devoted to the authors. The *status quaestionis* introducing respectively

role of the Negative in Kafka's and Celan's late writings, how it emerges in their texts and in their specific representational dynamics. While deepening new dimensions of Kafka's and Celan's works, it thus also explores Green's theory in a new setting, by rethinking it in the context of 20th century Judaism and literary creativity. This double movement, as we will see, reflects the different layers of analysis intertwining in my book.

«From the Adjective to the Noun»

Among his numerous publications, *Le Travail du négatif* (1993) is the most comprehensive work Green has devoted to the Negative. His investigation on the topic, however, did not begin with this book, nor did it come to an end with it. The Negative is a key bonding force of Green's work and stands out as his «most original contribution to contemporary psychoanalysis» (Urribarri 2018: 65). The traces of such a «passion for the Negative» (Baldassarro 2018) emerge—in a more explicit or indirect way—in essays, books, seminars, talks, and other works that appeared since the early Sixties.⁶

Le Travail du négatif articulates in this sense decades of research and work in a new organic exposition, reorganising and conjugating different stages of thinking, expanding on new intuitions and implications, and delving into clinical and theoretical sources—which, notably with Freud's notion of *negative Halluzination* [*negative hallucination*], reach back to the very roots of psychoanalysis, indeed to the days preceding its discovery (Green 2005: 212). The publication of this multifaceted, capital work marked a breakthrough which prepared Green's theoretical «turning point of the year 2000» (Urribarri 2018: 67), centred on the elaboration of new metapsychological fundamentals for contemporary psychoanalysis. Works completed just before his death in 2012, such as *Pourquoi les pulsions de destruction ou de mort?* (2010)—in which Green explores the metapsychological role of the death drive and destructiveness in contemporary psychoanalysis, and in the *Kulturarbeit*⁷—or *Du signe au discours. Psychanalyse et théories du langage*

Kafka's and Celan's chapters evaluates the limits of the existing research and discusses the novelty of my approach. This decision allows me not only to focus on the scholarship of every single author but also to refer case by case to different theoretical and conceptual tools of Green's that I consider more appropriate to explore the stylistic peculiarity of the texts. It is important to highlight that, despite the significant contributions that have appeared in recent years on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Celan's birth (1920–2020), the 50th anniversary of his death (1970–2020), and the 100th anniversary of Kafka's death (1924–2024), no relevant work on the question of the Negative in these authors has been published.

6 In a footnote to *Le Travail du négatif* (Green 1993: 287, fn. 43; Green 1999b: 400) Green notes that one of the first expression he employed in reference to the Negative, «moment négatif» [*negative moments*] dates back to the discussion of the report by J. Laplanche and S. Leclair during the Bonneval Conference in 1960. See also Duparc 1996: 41, where, however, the date of the discussion seems to be reported incorrectly.

7 This important book has lately been published with the title *On the Destruction and Death Drives* (2023).

(Green 2011)—devoted to the question of language and of a psychoanalytic theory of representation⁸—are unconceivable without *The Work of the Negative*, and they ought to be considered in direct relationship with it.

For Green, the development of the theory of the Negative proceeds in this sense parallel to the question of the creative filiation of a new psychoanalytic paradigm: a metapsychology for the new millennium—indeed, what we can retrospectively envisage as the third great metapsychological reorientation, after Freud’s and Lacan’s. The relevance of the theory of the Negative in the history of psychoanalysis cannot be properly grasped if we fail to consider how this theory arises also from a reflection on the historical dimension of psychoanalysis itself, as a mode of thought and practice evolving through time and space, confronted with new challenges, and directed towards an uncertain future. What is at stake in the theory of the Negative in historical terms is therefore also the question of the metatheoretical role of the subject, in relationships with the complexity of the psychoanalytic tradition(s): with masters and teachers, with unsolved questions of the past, of the present and of the future.

Far from representing only a crucial thematic focus, the Negative is in turn at work in Green’s thinking and runs through the ways he envisages psychoanalysis and most importantly, as we shall see, works *psychoanalytically*. Evoking his professional and human relationship with Green, Maurizio Balsamo recalls his insistence on the need of continuously opening new alternative paths to conceive and observe the complex functioning of the psyche. «Moi, j’aurais dit plutôt...» «I would have rather said...» (Balsamo 2019: 10): so Green used to emphasise the importance of embracing the virtuality and the paradoxical character of the psyche also in a theoretical sense, allowing different possibilities of interpretation to coexist, interact, and reverberate with each other, without imposing a monolithic, definitive, conciliating position. Through such a *negative capability* which leads from Keats through Freud to Bion, Winnicott, and beyond (Green 1993: 18-21; 1999b: 6-9), thinking opens itself not only to uncertainty or contradiction, but also to a dimension of thirdness that stands for that which is *not yet false nor yet true*. «The third [*tiers*] [...] precisely because of its fluctuating form, is essentially a question mark, representing something that does not require an immediate answer, but that is motor of the psychic activity» (Green in Cupa 2008: 24). Such thirdness embodies a proliferating, creative element, a question mark inhabiting thinking on a multiplicity of layers. Green’s decision to put the accent on the component of the *work*, of the *Travail*—accordingly written, in the title of his book, in capital letter (Green 1993)—well reflects such pivotal passage «from the adjective to the noun» (Green 2005: 212 ff.). This change of status is crucial, for it bears the mark of the work of sublimation. It signals how

8 A paper of this collection, “Le langage au sein de la théorie general de la représentation” (Green 2011: 36-60), appeared in Levine 2023.

the Negative becomes for Green an object of investment: a product of that *objectalising function* capable of transforming an object of investigation into a noun to name the complexity and the heterogeneity of the psyche.

Indeed, if with Freud and the discovery of the unconscious we are already witnessing to what extent the work of the Negative is inseparable from psychoanalysis, it is only with Green that psychoanalytic thinking attains a theoretically founded representation of the relevance of the Negative, its extension and its specificity. With *Le Travail du négatif* Green finds a new tongue, a new voice (cfr. Green 1997: 14) for that «logic of the shadow» (Green 1999: 37) that haunts psychoanalysis since the beginning, and that inhabits the human.

In retrospect, I am become aware of how this attempt of nomination characterises in many different ways my own work on Kafka, Celan, and Green. My decision of referring to the Negative with capital letter responds not only to a need to emphasise the original, specific features of my elaboration, distinguishing it from other forms of negativity analysed in the writings of Kafka and Celan by other scholars. It also articulates the attempt to rethink and extend a concept, a theory, to find a new name, a new voice to call something that has already been there—in the filiation with Green.

In what follows, my purpose is therefore not provide an exhaustive presentation of Green's studies on the Negative. While Green's legacy does not cease to call for new developments, the arborescent richness of it, as well as the prismatic variety of approaches from which it can be explored, compel me to limit my investigation to a more specific focus. After concisely introducing the general features of Green's theory,⁹ I shall rather venture in a reading of what I consider as a key figure of the Negative: the *incréable* (Green 1992: 313-340). This term was first created by Green in a paper called *La réserve de l'incréable* (published in 1982) and designates the maternal kernel of artistic creativity—an affective, corporeal trace, remnant of the Oedipal structure in the unconscious of the creator. The work of creation is for Green indissolubly, perpetually linked to this core of absence, to this limit which ultimately encompasses the origin, the possibility, and the vicissitudes of creativity itself.

The *incréable* represents a compelling and emblematic case, in which metapsychology and “applied psychoanalysis” enter in a fertile field of tensions. By focusing on the *incréable*, I intend to dwell on a particular vicissitude of the

9 Along with *Le Travail du négatif* as primary reference of my investigation, I shall also consider other texts providing a more concise, albeit by no means less effective definition of the Negative. Lately, numerous works have not only established the solidity of Green's theoretical *corpus* but have shed light, from a variety of perspectives, on its relevance, exploring its stages of development as well as clinical and metapsychological implications. Among the most prominent contributions: Duparc (1996: 40-56); Kohon (1999); Green (2004a); Richard (2005); Green (2006a); Urribarri (2013); Kohon and Perelberg (2017); Baldassarro (2018); Reed and Levine (2018); Balsamo (2019).

Negative, by putting Green's own conceptual tools to work in the context of sublimation and representational processes. This strategy has a double advantage: first, it allows to highlight the main features of the work of the Negative by addressing a specific case in Green's writings—a concept, I must add, to which the research has not yet devoted appropriate attention. Furthermore, it gives me the chance to develop an original approach to Green's Negative by reflecting in meta-theoretical terms on its conceptual tools, between *poetics* and *theory*. After many years of study, I can say that the *incréable* is, for me, the name that—like nothing else—brings to life my way of receiving, reading, and transmitting Green's Negative from the standpoint of literary representation and creativity: a new memory, a new representation, a new filiation of the work of the Negative.

Re-presentation(s): The Work of the Psyche and the Work of Writing

Green defines the work of the Negative as the ensemble of the psychic operations of which the *Verdrängung* [*suppression* or *repression*] is the prototype; in addition to that, he extends the field of the Negative beyond the drive theory to the question of the object relation. By articulating the gap between the first and the second Freudian topographical models (the latter characterised by the introduction of the death drive), Green was able to offer a theoretical conceptualization of the Negative as matrix of the process of structuring of subjectivity—a process in which interpsychic and intrapsychic dimensions are inseparable. It is essential to remark, as we shall see in the first chapter of this book, that Green's theory cannot be reduced to a theory of subjectivity but has rather to be envisaged as a *theory of the limit*. The relationship with an otherness (the object) is vital to the constitution of subjectivity, precisely for the persistence of an ineliminable liminal, transitional area of transformation (Winnicott).

The question leading my work is how the limits of subjectivity are transformed and reorganised through the process of sublimation into a stylistic fingerprint (phonematic, graphic, prosodical), into form of writing which is foremost creation of a *subject of writing*—and that, by means of an object which is not only writing itself, but also *the process of writing* as object of psychic, affective, and corporeal investments. We may say that the style of an author, being the recreation and reinvention of a corporeal dimension otherwise, i.e. in methonimic and synechdochic terms, does not only re-present the unique way in which a subject inhabits the body, its limits in relationship with the world. Style also tells us something about the way a subject is capable of representing and sustaining the absence of a corporeal dimension by means of writing, thus transforming the need, the hunger, the thirst, the breath of the creature into the inexhaustible desiring dimension that marks the human condition.

Green's theory presupposes and requires the coexistence of multiple layers of analysis. The works of Franz Kafka and Paul Celan shall be explored according to three interwoven dimensions. A first, crucial element is the focus on the *representational dynamics* through which the creating subject gives form to writing. The question of representation, to which we shall continuously return in the book, is paramount to grasp the complexity of Green's theory as well as the innovative textual approach that my work puts forward.

Green considers *representation* [*représentation*] as a synonym of the psyche [*psychisme*]. We can know the complexity (but *not* the totality) of the psychic activity and mental functioning only inasmuch as the psyche can be grasped through the spectrum of its representational modes and dynamics (starting with the «framing structure of representation» through the negative hallucination of the mother, which for Green is precondition of the hallucinatory wish fulfilment) and its representatives (e.g., the drive, which is in turn a “representative” of the link between the body and the psyche).¹⁰ Green underlines that representation is not confined to the dimension of “sense,” but has to be grasped in terms of a complex heterogeneity entailing elements such as bodily states, affects, drives, and of course, traces and vestiges of unconscious order. In an interview with Fernando Urribarri, Green affirms how much of his work has been devoted to the extension and re-elaboration of this question, with the aim of developing a psychoanalytic theory of representation:

Je pense que la théorie de la représentation (qui est implicite chez Freud et que j'ai cherché à réélaborer) est absolument fondamentale. / L'existence d'une telle théorie dans mon œuvre est due à l'extension que j'opère sur le champ de la représentation. La représentation est au fond quasi synonyme du psychisme, car telle que je l'entends, elle ne s'arrête pas au domaine du sens mais déborde aussi du côté de la force. (C'est justement ce qui la distingue de la «représentation» de la philosophie ou du signifiant linguistique.) / Avec cet élargissement du champ de la représentation qui fonde ma théorie de la représentation généralisée, je propose que l'on considère les différentes relations de la psyché: avec le corps, avec

10 Green (1994: 181-182) highlights how the theory of representation encompasses three heterogeneous aspects: what Freud calls the psychic representative of the drive [*Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*]; the object's thing-presentation [*Dingvorstellung*]; and finally, the word-presentation [*Wortvorstellung*]. These three fields bring into confrontation, correspondingly, three dimensions, namely the body, the world, and the other. Through the confrontation of these three different dimensions, each with its own demands, psychoanalytic theory gains its coherence. See also another formulation in Green 2005: 128: «The spectrum of modes of representation that we have defined [i.e., the psychical representative of the drive, thing- or object-representations (unconscious and conscious), word-representations, and the representatives of reality in the ego, implying relations with thought] merely corresponds to the range of psychic manifestations that are connected, on the one hand, with the body, and, on the other with reality and thinking. Going even further, one could conceive of the whole psyche as an *intermediate formation* between soma and thinking»

l'autre-semblable et avec le monde. L'essentiel, c'est qu'à partir de chacune de ces relations, de ces «matériaux,» la psyché produira divers types de représentations. Le fonctionnement psychique se définit alors par le travail avec des matériaux hétérogènes. Par conséquent, l'hétérogénéité es la clé de cette réélaboration où la notion de limite acquiert un sens: celui d'un territoire de passage, c'est à dire de transformation. (Urribarri 2013: 43)¹¹

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

Such form of *being* is, in psychoanalysis, inseparable from that *doing* that only the creation through writing makes possible (Green 1992: 340). By not ceasing to hint at the constitutive heterogeneity characterizing mental functioning, writing shows the transformative capability of the psyche of reinventing itself, of assuming new forms and shapes, of creating objects and investing processes, even creative activities (such as writing itself) and therefore of modifying the “status” of the writing subject as well as of that object which is the text.

The literary text is as such the outcome of a relentless work of recreation of the complexity of the functioning of the psychic apparatus—a complexity which we may call the “virtuality” of the psyche in its relationship with the body—towards that form of homogenization, of linearity which is the written language. A homogenization which embodies linguistic and non-linguistic or seemingly a-significant elements. These refer to modes of representation which

11 «I think that the theory of representation (which is implicit in Freud and which I tried to re-elaborate) is absolutely crucial. / The existence of such a theory in my work is based on the extension that I propose of the area of the representation. [...] Representation is essentially a synonym of the psychic, because the way I envisage it, that does not confine to the area of the sense but extends beyond it also to the area of force (and it is precisely what it distinguishes it from the “representation” in philosophy.) / With this extension of the field of representation which lay at the heart of my generalised theory of representation, I propose to consider the different relationships of the psyche, with the body, with the “seemingly-other”, and with the world. The essential thing to keep in mind, is that from each of these relationships, of these “materials,” the psyche will create different kinds of representations. The functioning of the psyche is defined therefore by its operating with heterogenic materials. Consequently, the heterogeneity is the key to this re-elaboration of mine, in which the notion of the limit acquires a new sense: that of a territory of crossing, i.e., of transformation.»

are other to linguistic signification or sense, and that nonetheless persist as dynamically active, embedded into the fabric of language, in the text. Green has observed that the complexity of the life of the psyche cannot be reduced to a single model. Correspondingly, we can also say that the dynamics of creation and creativity cannot be limited to linguistic models without giving account of the panoply of elements of organization and disorganization that exceed the linear, homogenic logic of language.

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

At the turn of the 20th Century, German speaking Jews in Europe experienced an unprecedented cultural crisis that represented, on the one hand, an outcome of the assimilation process and, on the other, the early stage of a wave of renewal. While in those days German speaking Jews were facing the loss of means of intergenerational cohesion and cultural identification, they were also developing new cultural options to cope with the challenges that assimilation posed to the dynamics of tradition and transmission (Meghnagi 1993: 57-72).¹²

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

In both contexts, literature provided for many Jews a new peculiar and crucial function. Kafka’s literature can be read in the pre-Shoah context as a struggle for the representation of a loss, of an emptiness at the margins of Judaism (Weidner 2000: 234-249). Celan’s writing embodies the attempt to testify for what remains of Judaism under the sign of Auschwitz, and to put forward a radical questioning of the cultural dynamics that made the concentration camps possible at the heart of Europe (Maletta 2008: 31-106).

My book thus offers a reading of Kafka’s and Celan’s writings as intergenerational and transgenerational resources not only to articulate the laceration of traditional transmission dynamics, but also to attempt to reinvent a form of transmission, voicing the work of mourning for a people, for a world. Their poetic efforts represent a new vital attempt to shape an ethics of literature

12 Also Gershom Scholem’s reflection on this topic (1976) are as of today of great relevance.

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

To these two layers of analysis, we must add a further element informing my work: the meta-representational dimension of the creative process. This allows me to highlight how the writings of Kafka and Celan (and, as we will see, also Green) can be read as an endeavour to reflect through the creative process upon the dynamics of the *Kulturarbeit*. It is important to stress how that goes beyond a simply "meta-literary" concern, pertaining less to literature *per se* than to literary writing as an expression of the work of the unconscious, in its organising and disorganising, structuring and destructuring motions. The place of the Negative is, also in this case, absolutely crucial. If as Green has shown, the death drive is not only an antagonist of Eros but also intertwines with the latter in the process of sublimation, the works of these three authors can be read as a meditation on the role of destructivity in cultural dynamics, in a critical confrontation with their historical context. Also, this meta-representational dimension should not be confined to an authorial awareness of political, social or cultural issues, nor to a conscious cultural-critical *engagement*. It has to be read in term of a reflection of language and writing upon themselves, as if in retrospect (*après-coup*, or in terms of what Freud called *Nachträglichkeit*) language and writing were speaking *of* themselves and *about* themselves: «Le langage parle du langage. Ce qu'il montre le mieux, c'est ce que vous en faites» (Meschonnic 1989: 15) «Language speaks about language. What it shows the best is what one makes of it and with it.»

By that, I am not implying that Kafka, Celan, and Green were detached from the cogent themes of their time and did not share a deep concern as for the question of destructivity in culture and civilization—quite the contrary. My point here is another one. What interests me is how the Negative at work in the creative process enabled these authors—from different perspectives and cultural contexts—to interrogate through their writings the process of writing itself, the process of sublimation as vicissitude of the drive towards non-sexual goals and purposes. The creative work of the unconscious, as such, implies a social and cultural component. Sublimation puts in deep relationship and the individual and the collective unconscious, reopening the critical question of the possibility of a social bond based on an ethics of literature.

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

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

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

Structure Encadrante: the Structure of the Work

This book is composed by four main chapters. The first one tackles the theory of André Green, presenting the theoretical premises and my reelaboration of Green’s metapsychology from the perspective of the *incréable*. The fundamental assumption of my work sees in literary and poetic writing the shaping of a wound, of an absence constitutive not only of the representational process, but also of subjectivity. Such wound is not medicated nor repaired through the work but rather persists *in* the writing and *by means* of writing, becoming at once the centripetal and centrifugal core of the work itself: object of transmission and filiation. From this vantage point, Green’s work represents a double element of originality: it offers a heterogeneous interpretational matrix which overcomes the stagnating categorization of the Negative from “mystical,” “theological,” and “philosophical” perspectives. Green’s Negative allows a multi-layered exploration of the subjective stylistic representational dynamics

of absence and their reverberations on an inter-/intra-subjective as well as collective, cultural dimension. In psychoanalysis, the work of the Negative defines the capability of the psyche to respond to absence through representation. Negativity is here not a dialectical position or a moment of consciousness in the process of self-perception, but rather gives account of the intricacies between structuration and destructuration, organisation and disorganisation, life and death drives. It therefore concerns the limits of the subject in relationship with the otherness of the object.

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

It is such "framing structure" that I intend to highlight in the writings of Franz Kafka and Paul Celan as that which circumscribes, literally, the presence of an absence inherent in each and every creative process. That is particularly significant in the case of Kafka and Celan, who for historical, cultural, existential, and linguistic reasons are always dislocated in an *elsewhere*.¹³

The writings of these authors reveal an attempt of recentering of the subject, a way to sustain the boundaries of subjectivity. This search for a presence,

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

for a shape, for a lost origin displays in fact its constitutive, fruitful absence, leaving space for that *elsewhere of creativity and the unconscious that inhabits the human*.

In the second chapter (*Writing the Incréable: A Journey towards Sublimation*), my analysis focuses on Franz Kafka's collection *Ein Hungerkünstler* (*A Hunger Artist*), published in 1924 by Max Brod with the consent of the author. I shall consider in particular three texts of this collection, which have seldomly been read together: *Eine kleine Frau* (*A little Woman*), *Ein Hungerkünstler* (*A Hunger Artist*), and *Josefine, die Sängerin, oder das Volk der Mäuse* (*Josefine, the Singer, or the Mouse-Folk*). Particularly *Eine kleine Frau* constitutes the keystone of an innovative reading of Kafka's late work, according to which the "protagonist" of such writing may not quite be the relationship between artist and life, or artist and audience, but rather representation itself.

Overcoming the limits of an interpretative trend based on biographism, autobiographism, or theological and philosophical aspects, I examine how Kafka's late work is not only an outcome of sublimation, but also as a work upon sublimation, highlighting the meta-representational dimension of his writing and considering it in relationship with the historical and cultural *milieu* in which he created. From this point of view, Kafka's *Ein Hungerkünstler* represents the meta-representational invention of a journey towards sublimation, a "narration" of the vicissitudes of the body, of the subject and of representation through sublimation and the work of writing.

The third chapter (*The Navel of the Poetic and the Death Drive*) offers a close reading of the work of the Negative in Paul Celan's late poetry. I shall tackle a selection of poems composed between the years 1967-1970 from the posthumously published collections *Schneepart* (*Snowpart*, 1971), and *Zeitgehöft* (*Timestead*, 1976). In Celan's poetry, the Negative acquires a new specificity, which cannot be separated from the tragic loss of an entire world. This chapter offers a new approach to Celan's last creative season by examining the question of narcissism, destructivity and the tendency to the degree zero of the psyche in relation with sublimation.

What emerges is that the unsaturable dimension of absence that marks Celan's work is what constitutes the object of transmission of writing itself. Transcending forms of language scepticism characterizing modernism and late modernism, the Negative becomes in the matrix of a work of critical interrogation of sublimation, indeed a wrestling with the death drive in its being intimately intertwined with sublimation itself. Here, I show how the fabric of Celan's poetry is capable of "intercepting" remnants of a work of mourning which is interminable and irreducible to the process of historicization., while exposing the disavowal [*Verleugnung*] perpetuated by the West towards the Shoah after the Second World War. Celan's poetry shows to what extent the death drive

inhabiting the West is not collateral but rather intrinsic to the cultural process. In this sense, the “other blank” of his poetry is the starting point of a radical interrogation of the cultural and institutional politics of memory of Western civilization.

The last chapter of the book—*Poetics of the Psyche*—offers a further development of my research. In it, I shall return specifically to André Green to shed new light on the link between literature and the structuration of psychoanalytic thought. I shall reconsider the *incréable* from a meta-theoretical perspective to tackle its epistemological reverberations in Green’s theory, highlighting the importance of the psychoanalytic investigation of literary and poetic texts for the development of his metapsychology.

* * *

Note to the text

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

Chapter 1.

André Green's Work of the Negative from the Standpoint of the Creative Processes

L'inconscience ne supprime pas le travail psychique.
André Green (1993: 393)¹

*La permanence du souvenir est la preuve
que rien n'est définitivement disparu, que
rien ne saurait être vraiment mort.*
André Green (1993: 348-349)²

The Negative and the Matrix of Human Life: Drive, Object, Limit

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

[...] l'ensemble des opérations psychiques dont le refoulement est le prototype et qui a ultérieurement donné naissance à des variantes distinctes telles que la négation, le désaveu et la forclusion. [...] Faut-il rattacher le travail du négatif au seul moi et à ses mécanismes de défense? On pourrait le penser au premier abord. Je soutiendrai au contraire que le travail du négatif s'étend à l'ensemble des instances de l'appareil psychique. Soit encore que l'analyse nous amène à distinguer le non du moi, le non du surmoi et le non du ça. J'envisagerai également les incidences de la réponse de l'objet sur la constitution des rapports oui-non. (1993: 373)³

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- 1 «Unconsciousness does not do away with psychical work.» (Green 1999b, 282) The quote is from the *Séminaire sur le travail du négatif*, the transcription of a seminar given in 1988 at the Paris Psychoanalytic Institute. The text is included in the appendices of *Le Travail du négatif* both in the original French edition as well as in the English one.
 - 2 Cfr. Green 1999b: 251-252: «The permanence of memory is proof that nothing has disappeared definitively, that nothing can really be dead.»
 - 3 Green 1999b: 269: «[...] I proposed to designate as “the work of the negative” all the psychical operations of which repression is the prototype and which later gave rise to distinct variations such as negation, disavowal and foreclosure. [...] Should the work of the negative be related to the ego alone and its mechanisms of defence? One might think so at a first approach. I would maintain on the contrary that the work of the negative extends to the agencies of the psychical apparatus as a whole. In other words, an analysis of it leads us to distinguish the no of the ego, the no of the super-ego and the no of the ide I shall also envisage the effects of the object's response on the constitution of yes-no relations.»

This description offers a preliminary point of access to Green's theory of the Negative. To begin with, let us focus on the first part of the excerpt. There are at least two essential elements that need to be pointed out. The first one is the *structural, organisational* role of the *Verdrängung*—and of other psychical operations such as negation [*Verneinung*], disavowal [*Verleugnung*, also translated as *splitting*] and foreclosure [*Verwerfung*], as further configurations of the prototypical model of suppression. The second element into play here, which is directly linked with the defence mechanisms of the psychic apparatus, is the ineliminable relationship between the work of the Negative and the drive processes [*motions pulsionnel*] (Green 1993: 58 ff; Green 1999b: 36 ff.). In a more general sense, we may say that the defence mechanisms ought to be understood as operations allowing the constitution and the modulation of a barrier, of a limit which protects and “contains” the psychic apparatus.⁴ A border which is not pre-existing: its structural fundamental matrix has to be created in the early stages of

4 Let us notice—as Urribarri has also shown—how these two elements, i.e., the structuring dimension of the defence mechanisms and especially the role of the drive and of the drive motions [*le pulsionnel*], are present from the outset in Green's thinking, and constitute indispensable aspects to envisage the work of the Negative beyond a philosophical standpoint. In *Le Travail du négatif*, Green devotes an ample chapter to this question (Green 1993: 45-75; Green 1999b: 26-49), but his reflections on the subject reach as back as to the early Sixties. In “L'inconscient freudien et la psychanalyse freudienne contemporaine” (1962) Green discusses what he sees as the «reductionist» position of Lacan's approach defended by Laplanche and Leclaire. Green asserts that: «Notre position tient à mettre davantage en valeur le rôle des pulsions dans ses aspects économiques et ses organisations basales et cherche, tout en tenant compte du rôle structurant fondamental du refoulement, à saisir les manifestations du sujet dans son conflit entre la positivité et la négativité.» (Green 1962 : 373). In one of the footnotes at the end of his paper, Green also observes: «En fait la reconstruction de Freud à travers Lacan se situe sur des bases radicalement différentes de celles du fondateur de l'analyse. Lacan semble poursuivre un dessein particulier qui est la recherche d'un statut ontologique de la psychanalyse, sur des fondements d'une cohérence philosophique d'où tout un aspect du freudisme est à réinterpréter. Celui qu'on a coutume de qualifier de naturaliste. Malgré les impasses où il peut paraître conduire, son maintien semble indispensable, car cette perspective représente une des rares tentatives – sinon la seule – pour *donner corps* à la réalité psychique sans la substantifier.» (Green 1962: 379, fn 26). See Urribarri's translation of these two quotes—which he condenses in one—in Urribarri 2018: 68: «In contrast to Lacan's position, ours tends to place more value on the role of drives in their economic aspects and in their basic organization, and aims, while also considering the fundamental structuring role of repression, to grasp the subject's manifestations in the conflict between positivity (drives) and negativity (defences). Actually Lacan's reconstruction of Freud is built upon grounds that differ radically from those of the founder of psychoanalysis. Lacan seems to follow a particular desire: to find an ontological status for psychoanalysis based on philosophical consistency, which requires the reinterpretation of a whole aspect of Freudism: everything that is usually labelled as biologicistic. In spite of the impasses to which this apparently leads, it seems to me to be indispensable to preserve it, since this perspective is the only attempt to give psychic reality *body* without reifying it.» Let us remind that, according to Freud's formulation in his 1915 essay *Trieb- und Triebsschicksale* (1948, vol. 10: 214), the drive is that concept «on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating

infancy. A major breakthrough in the development of the Negative envisaged from a structural and organizational perspective was marked by Green's first paper on narcissism, *Narcissisme primaire: structure ou état*, first published in 1967 (1983: 88-147; 2001: 48-90). It is not accidental that Green attains to a crucial step forward in the formulation of the Negative by investigating this concept. One of the main purposes of this paper was to overcome a description of narcissism in terms of clinical «state,» and to further explore the role of the death drive in the psychic apparatus. Green juxtaposes here two models of narcissism developed by Freud: a «primary narcissism»—an absolute form of narcissism that aims to a minimal tension within the psychic apparatus (hinting at the so called «Nirvana principle»)—and a «secondary narcissism»—outcome of the construction of the Ego, the goal of which is conservation and representation. Green defends the hypothesis according to which narcissism ought to be conceived in terms of a structure facilitating the binding process of the death drive. To illuminate this point, he refers to Freud's concept of *Reizschutz*—the protection barrier against stimulation—developed in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920). It is through this multi-layered membrane, which allows the binding processes and the neutralisation of the death drive, that living matter acquires its structural limits (Duparc 1996: 42 ff).

This key step forward is accompanied by another critical development. By analysing the concept of narcissism, Green shows that the exclusive reference to the *pulsionnel*, i.e., to the drive processes, or to the notion of drive *per se*, is actually insufficient in order to come to grips with the complexity of the Negative—and more generally with the structuring, organisation and functioning of the psyche. That leads us to consider now the second part of Green's excerpt from his 1986 paper. In it, Green extends the area of the Negative not only to the articulation between the first and the second topography in Freud's work, but also to the articulation of the drive theory with the object relation theory—the latter an area of research explored mostly by British psychoanalysts. In order to overcome the opposition between drive theory and object relation theory, Green proposes to conceive the object as a «révélateur de la pulsion,» articulating the notion of the drive and of the object through a novel conceptualization of the limit (Green 1990: 103-140; 1997: 60-83). In dialogue with Fernando Urribarri, Green summarises the question as follows:

L'objet a dès le début une double fonction: d'une part, stimuler la vitalité du sujet, stimuler et être révélateur de la pulsion; d'autre part, promouvoir la symbolisation, la représentation, en dispensant adéquatement les soins et en régulant le rythmes entre présence et absence – c'est-à-dire en rendant tolérable l'excitation parce qu'il la diffère. Ce délai demandé à la satisfaction n'est tolérable que si le sujet peut

from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body.»

avoir recours à une autre scène, la scène inconsciente, dans laquelle il retrouve, ou plutôt réinvestit, le traces de l'objet, sa représentation – c'est possible pour le sujet dans la mesure où l'objet l'a aidé à créer cette internalisation qui constitue ce que j'appelle la «structure encadrante,» laquelle surgit comme espace de la représentation. (Urribarri 2013: 48)⁵

Let me insist on this crucial point, for it shows at once the crucial role of the absence in the psychic structuring, as well as the role of the category of limit with regards to the function of the object. In this respect, as Duparc also points out, Green's originality consists in having shown that the condition *sine qua non* for the framing structure of the psyche of the subject has to be thought from «the absence on the background of presence:» from an empty and «mortified» [*mortifiée*] shell, we might say with Duparc (1996: 44), that the subject creates in a negative relationship with the object. The primary object that allows the development of such framing structure is the mother. It is indeed what Green calls «the negative hallucination of the primary object» that enables the infant to negativise the presence of the mother, and to internalise it as such.⁶ This passage is essential for the creation of what Green calls «framing structure» and the formation of an empty representational space, on which new representations and autoerotic tendencies are to be inscribed (Duparc 1996: 45). The role of the object in this context is summarised as follows by Green:

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

5 «The object has since the beginning a dual function: on the one hand, to stimulate the vitality of the subject, to stimulate and reveal the drive; on the other hand, it promotes symbolisation, representation, providing appropriate care [*en dispensant adéquatement les soins* – here Green seems to be referring to the object as metonymic extension of the motherly figure, f.c.] and regulating the rhythm between presence and absence—that means to make tolerable the excitation in order to delay it [*parce qu'il la diffère*]. This delay demanded in satisfaction is only tolerable if the subject can turn to another scene, the unconscious scene, in which the subject rediscovers, or rather reinvest the traces of the object, its representation. And that is possible for the subject only insofar as the object has helped creating such internalisation that constitutes what I call the “framing structure,” which emerges as the space for representation.»

6 See Green 1983: 139 «*La mère est prise dans le cadre vide de l'hallucination négative, et devient structure encadrante pour le sujet lui-même. Le sujet s'édifie là où l'investiture de l'objet a été consacré au lieu de son investissement. Tout est alors en place pour que le corps de l'enfant puisse venir se substituer au monde extérieur.*» Cfr. Green 2001: 85: «*The mother is caught in the empty frame of negative hallucination and becomes a framing structure for the subject himself. The subject constructs himself in the place where the object's investiture has been consecrated to the locus of its investment. Everything is then in place so that the infant's body can take the place of the external world.*»

muler, pour éveiller la pulsion et en même temps pour la contenir. (Green 1993: 389-390)⁷

The space in which the primary object gives the illusion of effacing itself, of being absent from the perceptive field of the subject is indeed the space of the negative hallucination. The role of negative hallucination, in this regard, is not that of being a mere container without content, but rather of circumscribing the limits of a space *that appears to be empty*, and which is occupied instead by the very *absence of representation*. This is, for Green, one of the necessary conditions for the creation of a structure framing representation.⁸

The extensions of Green's Negative, therefore, goes beyond the domain of conscious thinking, of a particular agency of the psyche, or the explanation of a pathological state to become condition for human life:

[Le travail du négatif] apparaît d'abord comme condition à la vie humaine, à la vie sociale. Car il faut bien contenir la «force brute» – cette force qui est la donnée de base du psychisme du fait de sa relation avec les pulsions. Du coup, le négatif consiste premièrement à dire «non» à certaines pulsions. / Le non est fondamental pour s'organiser. Il peut être «dit» à plusieurs choses et il opère à différents niveaux. Un premier niveau, lié au rôle des pulsions, correspond à l'organisation interne. Un deuxième niveau renvoie au plan intersubjectif, celui des relations avec les objets. Il faut dire «non» à l'objet pour pouvoir dire «oui» à soi-même, pour devenir un sujet. (Urribarri 2013: 21-22)⁹

7 Green 1999b: 279: «[...] that object which is absolutely necessary for the elaboration of psychical structure should efface itself. Its role as a constituent of psychical structure should be forgotten about; it exists in the shape of illusion which is not constitutive of psychical structure but presents itself as being different from it, as an object of attraction or repulsion. [...] *The intrinsic function of the object is paradoxical: the object is there to stimulate, to awaken the drive and at the same time to contain it.*» (tr. mod.)

8 Green 1993: 384: «L'hallucination négative n'est pas un phénomène pathologique. Elle n'est pas l'absence de représentation comme le suggère l'absence de l'image dans le miroir, mais *représentation de l'absence de représentation*. L'hallucination négative est le concept théorique qui est la précondition à toute théorie de la représentation, qu'il s'agisse du rêve comme de l'hallucination.» Green 1999b: 276: «Negative hallucination is not a pathological phenomenon. It is not the absence of representation as is suggested by the absence of the image in the mirror, but the *representation of the absence of representation*. Negative hallucination is the theoretical concept which is the precondition for any theory of representation, whether it is dreams or hallucination which is concerned.»

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

Green's theory of the Negative may be envisaged as a structural model of the psychic activity and functioning in its heterogeneity.¹⁰ The complexity of such structure cannot be properly grasped if we fail to consider the *ineliminable conflictuality* that characterises the psychic apparatus. This theory gives account of the dynamics of *organization and disorganization*, of *structuring and destructuring* inhabiting the subjective constitution and indeed creating the «condition for the existence of the structuring psychic apparatus,» (Kohon and Perelberg 2017: 19) in the articulation of the intrapsychic (the drives) and interpsychic (object relation).¹¹

The Work of the Negative and Its Subversion

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

Or la subversion du travail du négatif, que l'on rencontre dans les cas-limites, consiste à se dire non à soi-même. Mais ce n'est pas un «non» au sens du refoulement ou du renoncement à l'objet incestueux en réponse à l'exigence du Surmoi. Le mouvement est plus extrême : il consiste à négativer le désir en attaquant les liens à l'objet jusqu'aux fondements de l'éros dans le Moi. / Ces sujets peuvent alors utiliser dans des buts destructeurs n'importe quelle variante (de la simple négation à la forclusion) de ce travail du négatif – destruction de leur propre structure psychique et de toute forme d'évolution vers une prise de conscience de ce qu'ils sont, de leur désir, du rôle de leur histoire, du rôle des facteurs qui les constituent [...]. Voici donc le paradoxe du travail du négatif: Comment quelque chose qui fait partie de l'«équipement humain», si l'on peut dire, peut-il se retour-

10 See in this regard also Balsamo (2019: 10 ff.), who describes André Green as a «thinker of the connections,» pointing out the peculiar «reticular» dimension that characterises his thinking.

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

ner contre soi-même? (Urribarri 2013: 22)¹²

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

The *Incréable*

Let us now consider Green's theory of the Negative from the angle of the creative processes through writing. What I wish to show is how the work of the Negative can enable us to give account not only of the sources, or better of a possible *origin* of creation and creativity, but also of the *originality* of the representational strategies that characterise the work of an author. Otherwise formulated, the question I would like to address is how Green's theory can enable us to envisage the specificity, the uniqueness of a work and of the work of writing—as trace of a process of subjectivation—by reconstructing *après-coup* the matrix characterizing *the possibility* of literary creation. A process of subjectivation, whose outcome, as we shall see in the following, is not limited to the creating subject, but rather involves *another form of subjectivity*. From a psychoanalytic perspective, as Green remarks, the questions of creation, of creativity, of its goal and of its end, lead us to investigate the relationship between *body* and *being* (Winnicott) and their transformations occurring in the process of sublimation (Green 1992: 314).

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

In it, Green engages in a close reading of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927), with a focus on *Le Temps retrouvé*, posthumously published in 1927. The fact that Green develops this paper by tackling Proust's work is surely of no secondary importance. The validity of his formulations,

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

however, are not to be confined to the particular case of Proust only. Quite on the contrary: with this essay, Green attempts to go to the roots of creativity by investigating what he elsewhere (Green 1992: 57) calls that unknown wound, that inarticulable loss, that form of mourning which every creative work presupposes. An unsaturable absence, of which the work shall be the transformation, the tangible product.

The term *incr able*, that Green introduces in the psychoanalytic vocabulary by adverbializing the French adjective *incree* (uncreated), defies to a great extent translation.¹³ To be sure, it is possible to render it with the English adverb *un-creatable*. For the purpose of my analysis, however, I deem of particular importance to leave the *name*, the signifier *incr able* untranslated. By so doing, I intend to put the accent on an “untranslatability,” a “non-paraphrasability” resisting—*reserved*—at the core of the poetic, of the literary, of the psychoanalytic, and ultimately of the infancy of the creature—of what is created.

For a French-speaking Jewish psychoanalyst born in Cairo—“foreign” in a language that he perceives intimate, oddly familiar, and yet as the idiom of an idealised elsewhere—*incr able* may echo in retrospect the question of the loss of an origin, an attempt to name and call an untranslatable “unknown” deeply inscribed in body and psyche. With the *incr able*, Green attempts to give thinkable form to what remains inaccessible and inarticulable to the subject in spite of its proximity, and which only the work of creation is capable of *re-presenting* to the subject in new, acceptable—i.e. cultural—terms. As a linguistic trace of that which the subject “does not know *not* to know,” the *incr able* is crucial to reflect upon the relationship between the complex role of the oedipal structure and the question of the transitional cultural objects (Green 1993: 324 ff; Green 1999b: 235 ff). What concerns here Green is therefore how sublimation intervenes in the process of transformation of a *cesura*, a severed link, into the creation of a new cultural bond through the creation of objects which are neither created nor uncreated, internal or external, existing or non-existing, but rather *un-create-able*. In other words, the term *incr able*—in which we may also hear resounding the word *incroyable*, i.e., unbelievable—invites us to consider from a new point of view the question of subjectivity, cultural experience and of the place in which cultural objects situate. As such, the *incr able* transcends the category of the judgement of existence, for literature, poetry, and more generally art and creation give indeed form to something which in spite of its apparent inexistence, is perceived as particularly, effectively, and affectively *real*.

For these reasons, the *incr able* is not simply a concept: it is an encounter «between concept and affect» (Green 2005: 208-210), a neologism that defies the limits of representation of the psyche—there where we cannot yet discern

13 This paper is still untranslated in English.

the *most remote* from the *deepest*. It constitutes a sort of “theoretical hieroglyph:” a product of sublimation on its own, that epitomises the level of creativity, of *poiesis*, at work in Green’s “clinical thinking.” And indeed, this word touches something which is pre-ontological (in the sense of Winnicott’s *being*), although *not* pre-corporeal, and whose “language” is pre-verbal:

Qu’est donc l’incréable? L’incréable, c’est pour le créateur, le noyau maternel, le noyau de la relation du corps de la mère: le représentant psychique de la pulsion, sous forme d’affect lié à la relation au corps maternel qu’il s’agit de représenter autrement, par le travail de l’art. Non le corps, mais l’affect, c’est-à-dire la trace du rapport au corps de la mère. L’action de représentation (qu’on peut appeler la représentation) est liée à la perte de l’objet maternel, au deuil, et à l’évocation du souvenir dans l’absence. Cette perte est liée à la coupure instaurée par le père entre l’enfant et sa mère. Le lien avec le corps de la mère est alors définitivement rompu. Cette coupure va laisser subsister des investissements érotiques et agressifs ; sensuels et tendres, les premiers étant soumis au refoulement, les autres conservés parce qu’ils sont inhibés quant à leur but. Mais il y a quelque chose que le père ne réussit pas à faire disparaître. C’est le mouvement auto-érotique de cette relation au corps de la mère qui perdure comme un noyau protégé, dynamiquement actif et inabordable. Le refoulement primaire recouvre cela. (Green 1992: 321-322)¹⁴

By *incréable*, Green refers to that remnant of the maternal core, to that affective trace of the relationship with the body of the mother around which the subject shall asymptotically revolve by means of the creative process, without any possibility of accessing or possessing it. Let us notice that in this definition we can recognise all the elements constituting his theory of the Negative: the structuring role of the defence mechanisms; the drive motions; the narcissistic structuring (auto-erotic investments); the object relation; and ultimately, although not explicitly mentioned, the work of negative hallucination emerging in the loss of the maternal object. The representation of the absence of representation is what also allows, in this context, the protection of that affective «knot,» «dynamically active and unapproachable.»

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

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

Serait-ce la création artistique? On peut à bon droit en douter. Car, tout être humain possède un tel noyau, et s'il est vrai que la créativité humaine dépasse de beaucoup les limites de la créativité artistique, il n'en reste pas moins que celle-ci demeure l'apanage de certains. Mais il me fallait d'abord aller à la source de cet appel à l'objet, au plus profond de l'inconscient, pour tenter d'éclairer le processus. La création commence au moment où ayant réussi à mettre le Moi en contact avec ce noyau maternel le sujet va se livrer à une transaction à la fois violente et subtile, par un jeu d'allers et retours, de reconnaissances et de dénis, d'affirmations et de négations, de persécutions et d'idéalisations par et de ce noyau. Ces relations donnent lieu à la formation d'un simulacre qui va passer pour vrai, et qui sera le point de départ de la réalité artistique. (Green 1992: 322)¹⁵

Two further conditions are required for the work of creation to come into being. The *incréable* may represent the maternal kernel [*noyau maternel*] as primary source of creativity only inasmuch as it is preserved in a field of tension of affirmations and negations, contacts and separations, bounding and unbounding processes, i.e., at the condition that any access to such «inviolable sanctuary» [*sanctuaire inviolable*] is interdicted. Moreover, for the act of creation to be possible, this kernel must be invested and undergo the working-through of the process of sublimation (Green 1992: 321-323).

As a possible vicissitude of the sexual drive «onto a non-sexual aim and onto objects of high social value» (Green 1993: 301; Green 1999b: 218), sublimation constitutes, as Green has eloquently shown, not simply a process of diversion, but of radical transformation of the drive in terms of *neg-sexuality*. The desexualisation of the drive involves, in our specific case, a transformation of the *somatic* dimension into a *semantic* one. The work of the Negative gives form, through sublimation, to that process of «representing otherwise» the «représentant psychique de la pulsion, sous forme d'affect lié à la relation au corps maternel» (Green 1992: 321).

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

The term *otherwise* is here pivotal precisely because it leads us to the question of language and style in literary representation and creation: in other words, to the specific materials through which the subject shapes anew a relationship with an elsewhere and an elsewhere of a lost origin. In order to think the passage from Green's theory of the Negative into that «negative adventure» (Green 2009) that writing composes and represents for an author, we need to insist therefore on the structuring-destructuring and organising-disorganising value of the *limit*.¹⁶

Before moving further, I hasten to add that the analytic standpoint I am proposing by drawing from Green's research should not be mistaken for the category of *Grenzüberschreitung* [*border crossing*, or *border transgression*] that in the last decades gained momentum in many research fields in cultural studies. The approach I am developing does not centre on the act or process of factual or symbolic border crossing *per se*; nor does it refer, for instance, to the implications of moral transgressions. It focuses instead on the ineliminable role of the limit as a «fluctuating and moving» frontier (Green 1992: 57; 1990: 103-140; 1997: 60-83), on its transformational potential for the subject in the context of the representational processes of the work of writing. This transformational potential of the content of the drive's initial expression is rooted in the concept of *Trieb* itself and, as we have seen, further expanded by Green with regards to the object relation theory. In order to highlight this aspect, Green insists in many occasions on the role of the «demand of the work» [*Arbeitsanforderung*] in Freud's definition of the drive in *Trieb und Triebchicksale* (cfr. Green 1996: 839 ff.).

Reflecting *a posteriori* on the metapsychological relevance of the limit in his theoretical and clinical work, Green explains:

[...] J'ai proposé la notion de limite en essayant d'en introduire une élaboration en tant que concept métapsychologique. *La limite n'est pas une simple ligne, c'est toute une zone de transformations entre le dedans et le dehors, ainsi qu'entre les instances psychiques.* Il n'y a pas de psychisme sans limite. Il n'y a pas de sujet sans limite.¹⁷ (Urribarri 2013: 24, m. e.)

16 Duparc 1996: 40-41: «In order to better give account of the innovative aspect of Green's thinking, it would be necessary to define the negative as that which situates at the limits of representation; as an effect of the unconscious on the one hand, and as destructivity on the other. [...] But Green's originality consist in having suggested the possible transformation of these limits of representation into a container, into the limits of the representative apparatus in its complexity, thanks to the work of the negative.»

17 «I proposed the notion of limit, with the purpose of introducing an elaboration of it in terms of metapsychological concept. *The limit is not simply a line, it is a zone of transformations between the inside and the outside, as well as between the psychic agents [or instances].* There is no psychic without limit. There is no subject without limit.» (m. e.) The conceptualization of the limit as a third, intermediary potential space of transformation, is pivotal for Green. In it, at least three prominent intertwining sources are recognisable (four, if we also consider the role of the Freudian matrix underlying his work): the fruitful exchange between clinical investigation and theoretical reflection of borderline cases (Green 1990: 103-140; 1997: 60-83); the creative

The process of writing, by means of which the creating subject plays and copes with *limits and resources of language*, entails a rhythmical *re-organisation* of the subject on the page.¹⁸ What is essential to understand in this respect is that the limit is not only an «area of transformation between the inside and the outside, as well as between the different agencies of the psyche.» The limit is also that which has to be transformed in the creative act, an element which does not cease to resist and to remain, no matter how mutated or altered, as condition of creation. The process of writing involves a transformation of the complexity of the psychic-corporeal dimension of the subject, i.e. of the limits of the subject, into the linearity of the written text. Thereby, a new liminal dimension finds new form in writing, re-emerging as a stylistic, rhythmic, prosodic fingerprint. On this matter, in the paper *Le double et l'absent* (1973), Green emphasises how:

Le texte est une suite de phrases qui se différencie du discours vivant de la parole. Tout se passe comme si, loin des conditions de production de la parole vive, divers processus de transformations – qui seront toujours autant de décantations, même si elles se veulent incantatoires – auront produit cette succession de séquences grammaticales du langage écrit qui rendent méconnaissables leurs énoncés originaires [...] Le texte a pour fonction, réduit à la linéarité du langage écrit, de ressusciter tout ce qu'il a absorbé par le travail de l'écriture. (Green 1992: 50, 54)¹⁹

To write means, in a certain sense, to say “no” to corporeal, sensorial components—we may well use the adjective “sexual”—through a process of subtraction, of *decantation*, as Green writes. In this process of transformation, such “no” of the work of the Negative constitutes a new organising principle—again, a new *structure encadrante*, or *framing structure*—which while expressing a form of antagonism towards the subject (in terms of «neg-sexuality», Green 1993: 305-308; Green 1999b: 221-222) also shapes a new object: the work. The question is thus, in other words, of *being otherwise* through the work of writing in

reception of Donald Winnicott's theories (2005). To these sources, as we shall see below, I would add the work on literary and poetic texts.

18 Here we cannot but refer the reader to the important work of another author, whose investigation contributed to shed light on this transformative element of the body in the creative process: Henri Meschonnic (particularly 1989; 1995).

19 «The text is a succession of phrases which differs from the living discourse of speech. Everything happens as if, far from the conditions of carnal speech, certain transformations (which will always be so many decantations, even if they masquerade as incantations) had produced this succession of grammatical sequences of written language that don't allow to recognise their original enunciations. [...] The function of the text, reduced to the linearity of written language, is to resuscitate all that it has absorbed by the work of writing.» I use here the verb «to absorb,» which I believe can better translate the French «absorber,» instead of the term «to kill,» chosen by J. F. Houis in the English version of this text (Green 1997: 320).

order to preserve a link, a relationship with the maternal kernel, of reinventing it without “possessing” it or violating its limits.

Here we can see a further transformation of the *réserve de l'incréable* into the “reserve of the work:” for there is indeed a continuity between the general matrix of the functioning of representation—achieved through the internalisation of the maternal frame thanks to the negative hallucination of the mother—and the more specific matrix of the representational processes of the creative work. The common thread uniting the two is a gap, a blank spot, the structural value of which emerges, in the former, in the cut operated by the father in the relationship between infant and mother. In the latter case, such cut, point of separation and, nonetheless, of proximity, is created by language, remodelled and reinvented by the subject through the process of writing. The recreation of such a *cesura*, the reestablishment of this liminal dimension, of this framing structure “with other means” embodies precisely that *being otherwise* through which the work of the Negative inscribes its mark in the structuring of the subject.

As outcome of a transformation from the “living corporality” to the “corporality of writing,” the work becomes furthermore a container: a *reserve* or receptacle *for something that remains inaccessible* (*réserve*, indeed, also in the sense of *limitation*) to the conscience of the creating subject, and that only the unconscious, stylistic dimension of the work shall reveal in *après-coup*—*nachträglich*. As Green formulated this very matter in a *postscriptum* to the English translation of *Le discours vivant*: «The absence of the body [is] replaced by the body of words» (Green 1999a: 292-342, here 307).²⁰

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

The *incréable* is that which cannot be created without destroying the possibility of creation itself. It is what representation must lack—i.e., that which must be continuously unbound from the chain of representation—in order to make representation possible. Entertaining a fundamental relationship with corporality, the *incréable* leads back to a link, a state of undifferentiation which cannot persist, otherwise the subject would not be. In order to be such, the subject has to venture in a *doing*, through the peregrination of creation, in an impossible and yet necessary work of rediscovery and reinvention. The work is as such

20 This text is not included in the French original version of the work (Green 1973).

the space in which the attempt of recovering an unrecoverable link with a lost origin does not cease to take place: there, where «everything begins» and where also «everything remains to be done» (Green 1992: 323).

These remarks lead to a further point. In *La réserve de l'incréable* Green writes:

[...] il y a de l'incréable, parce que la création ne saurait franchir certaines limites, à savoir accomplir un certain type de transgression sans compromettre définitivement la créativité c'est-à-dire le pouvoir créateur du sujet. Ce point est celui-là même où son statut de sujet, c'est-à-dire d'être séparé, est ancré dans le corps de sa créatrice: la mère. C'est l'incréable parce que cette réserve est la propriété d'un autre, ou d'une autre qui ne détient ce pouvoir à son tour que par les facultés créatrices de tiers, eux-mêmes créés *ad infinitum*. Tout œuvre suppose la couple créateur-créature unis par le processus de création. Ceci m'amènera à revenir à nouveau sur l'origine de la création, la créativité et la fin de la création c'est-à-dire son but et son terme. (Green 1992 : 313-314)²¹

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

Now, this crucial passage allows us to show from a new perspective why Green's theory of the Negative cannot be confined to a theory of subjectivity or of subjectivation. The process of subjectivation incepted and put into motion by the work of the Negative cannot be conceived but in the twofold relationship with the drive, as well as with the object: an object that, as we have seen, has a crucial role not only as a presence, but also and most importantly as an absence, as a trace inscribed in the psychic apparatus. If anything, therefore, Green's work of the Negative should rather be envisaged, in its complexity, as a theory of the limit: of the limits of representation, and of their

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

transformation into a container for the absence of representation, linked to the loss of the object. As such, the *incréable* proves how a psychoanalytic theory of representation—and in this particular case in its extension to literary representation—*cannot be conceived without a theory of the limit* (Green 2011: 44-45) in all the heterogeneity and plurality of its forms and manifestations. Indeed, not only both the intrapsychic as well as the interpsychic dimensions are at work, in their intricacies, in the creative process; but also different, heterogeneous modes of representations (Green 1994: 181 ff.) converge into the linearity of the text, affecting it, and shaping the unique *discours vivant* through which an author will have nominated the future of the past of his own subjectivation.

With the notion of *heterogeneity of the psychoanalytic signifier* at the core of Green's extended theory of representation, the limit—as a moving, fuzzy, and fluctuating frontier—becomes the defining structural element of psychic functioning, to the extent that the whole psyche may even be conceived as an intermediate, liminal formation between *soma* and *thinking*:

The spectrum of modes of representation [...] [i.e., the psychical representative of the drive, thing- or object-representations (unconscious and conscious), word-representations, and the representatives of reality in the ego, implying relations with thought] corresponds to the range of psychic manifestations that are connected, on the one hand, with the body, and, on the other with reality and thinking. *Going even further, one could conceive of the whole psyche as an intermediate formation between soma and thinking.* (Green 2005: 128, m. e.)

Significantly, in *Le langage au sein de la théorie générale de la représentation* (Green 2011: 31-60), arguably one of the most important texts that Green has written to the question of representation in psychoanalysis, we find a relevant variation to this formulation: «Vous voyez qu'on peut considérer toute la formation psychique *comme un intermédiaire entre soma et réel*, comme si le rapport entre le soma et le réel était beaucoup trop dramatique et qu'il fallait insérer justement quelque chose pour métaboliser ce qui se passe entre eux» (Green 2011: 44).²² Even if for the moment we have to refrain from further commenting on this significant difference,²³ it seems clear to me that the implications of the role of the limit emerging here are of cardinal importance. In the light of these reflections by

22 «As one can see, the psychic formation as a whole can be considered *as an intermediary formation between soma and reality*, as if the relationship between soma and reality were too dramatic and a were necessary to introduce something in-between in order to metabolise what happens between them.»

23 The concept of reality in psychoanalysis is by no means simple nor simply given for granted: indeed, the core of the question may be tracked back to the relationship between judgement of attribution and judgement of existence, the former chronologically preceding in Freud's view the latter. Green (2005: 128) summarises this point as follows: «Such is the coherence of psychoanalytic thought which sees, in the work of the psychical apparatus, first the distinction between good (that which can be incorporated) and bad (that which can be expelled),

Green, we can say that the relationship between limit and literary representation ought not to be envisaged exclusively in terms of “limits of representation.” Rather, the representational process, writing itself, become *an intermediate formation*, a limit of accessibility to an irrepresentable element surviving in the creative process as well as in the text (and the analysis of Kafka’s and Celan’s texts shall allow us to further explore this liminal element of representation). In this respect, if on the one hand the representational process constitutes an attempt to approach and reconstruct a relationship with the «affective kernel of the relationship with the body of the mother» (Green 1992: 321), such attempt is on the other hand deemed to fail, for the process of representation reconfigures that limit, that separation forbidding the possibility of access to the *reserve de l’incréable*.

L’incréable, Cultural Objects and Cultural Experience

The *incréable* enabled us to tackle the work of the Negative from the specific standpoint of literature and of the creative process. As we have seen, many different questions converge here: primary repression [*Urverdrängung*], the relationship with loss and separation, the transformation and resignification of the oedipal structure through the creative act, the origin between Eros and destructiveness, infancy and language, the power of representation, and most importantly, the question of the limit.

What the *incréable* allows us to show is how the literary work shapes an immedicable wound, a constitutive absence which lies at the core not only of representational processes, but also of the creating subject—a wound that writing itself re-presents and convey as ineliminable in and through the process of representation itself. This picture, however, would be incomplete if we fail to reflect also on a further dimension of the *incréable* in connection with the question of culture, *filiation*, transmission, and the status of cultural objects.

In Green’s paper *La sexualité a-t-elle un quelconque rapport avec la psychanalyse?* (1996: 829-848) we find an insightful formulation in this regard. Discussing the role of sexuality and addressing the question of its decreasing importance in the contemporary theoretical and clinical horizon, Green writes that the peculiar focus of psychoanalysis is to shed light on «l’enracinement corporel du psychique lié aux objets, *l’ensemble étant immergé dans une culture.*» (m. e.) He continues: «[...] il est impossible de considérer isolément les pulsions ou l’objet. La véritable relation met en rapport un Ça constitué de pulsions et un objet.» (Green 1996: 840-841)²⁴

according to purely internal criteria. It is only later that it is decided if the objects thus classed are the pure product of its functioning or if they also exist in reality.»

24 The English text (Green 1995: 871-883) reads: «[...] the roots of the mind attached to the body and linked to objects, immersed in a culture. [...] it is impossible to consider separately

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

In this light, the *incréable* cannot be reduced, evidently, to an individual sphere: if on the one hand it allows us to reflect on the roots of creativity and representation, on the other hand such reflection is only possible if we extend the field of investigation and conceive the creative process as reinvention and re-discovery of the human through time. As the blank kernel of human creativity, the *incréable* becomes a term, a noun, a signifier at the border between the generations: limit, barrier, and threshold at once. This is, according to Green, the power of sublimation: «[...] le travail de sublimation est un travail qui *transforme*. Et ces transformations constituent la négativité la plus riche, la plus féconde, la négativité parle à tous» (Green 2007b: 158). «[...] the work of sublimation is a work which *transforms*. And such transformations constitute the richest negativity, the most fruitful one, the negativity which speaks to everyone.» Sublimation therefore does not only transform metonymically the «experience of separation» (Maletta 2003: 12) of the subject in the gravitational pole of the work of writing but also creates a tension between different forms of temporality: between the future in the past of the creating subject, coping with the loss of an origin, and the transgenerational.

In other words, the *incréable* leads us from the transitional phenomena of the subject to the transitional phenomena that constellate the relationship between generational and transgenerational communication. With the *incréable*, the work of the Negative ventures through time and space, separating and yet connecting generations in an interminable process of signification and resignification of the wound of the human.

The *incréable* acquires as such a crucial metarepresentational role in the wider horizon of the cultural processes and transformations. What is at stake here is the role that the creating subject plays by means of his creative endeavour in unveiling what we may call the *incréable* of a world, of a culture, of a society through that *transitional cultural object* which is the work. If, on an individual level, writing may be seen as an object articulating the attempt to reconstruct a link with the trace of an absence, the question of the cultural relevance of the *incréable* compels us to consider a sort of *transmission of unknown origin*, an unconscious dimension of the creative process which transforms into an unconscious of the *Kulturarbeit*. To be more precise, the *incréable* may be read as representative of

the drives alone or the object. The true relationship connects an id made of drives and an object.» (Green 1995: 878)

the transmission of a loss which shapes the cultural dynamics through the work of the Negative, a loss which survives in the shaping of culture as an irrepresentable element.

This very reference to the cultural context and to sublimation is of primary importance, because it informs my approach to the question of cultural filiation in relationship with the Negative. Between “theory of the limit” and “theory of representation,” the work of the Negative configures a work of reinvention and shaping of a blank which has a foundational role in the process of cultural transmission.

From this new “framing structure” to explore the work of the Negative, we may proceed with the analyses of Kafka and Celan’s writings. The question of the *transitional cultural objects*, which Green derives from his reading of Winnicott, shall be further addressed in the conclusive part of this work, although will emerge again and again in the following.

Chapter 2

Franz Kafka's *Ein Hungerkünstler*. Writing the *Incréable*: A Journey towards Sublimation

Revisiting the Question of the Negative in Kafka's Work

The question of the Negative represents a crucial and intricated topic in Kafka's scholarship across the fields of i.a., religious, philosophical, and literary studies. While recurring in countless contributions and from a variety of points of view, only a handful of studies to date have been specifically devoted to it. A review of the scholarly literature on the topic suggests that the Negative has often been the subject of erratic analyses, as if it were characterised by a sort of elusiveness and resistance to interpretation (Bloom 1987: 7). Other times, scholars have considered the Negative as being so organically interlocked with Kafka's writing that no actual investigation of its features seemed to be required, resulting in a general overlooking and underappreciation of its specificity. And yet, many prominent examples throughout the twentieth century show that Kafka's writing has provided a fertile territory for the investigation of the Negative in its complexity: from the groundbreaking reflections animating the correspondence between Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem (1985);¹ to the 1953 essay *Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka (Notes on Kafka)* by Theodor W. Adorno (1997); to many inspired pages by Maurice Blanchot (1981), Jean-François Lyotard (1988; 1991: 239-254), and Harold Bloom (1987; 1995: 447-462), to name only a few. Only in recent years scholars such as Rosalba Maletta (2002: 109-155; 2017: 131-157; 2018: 62-81) and Shane Weller (2019) have specifically addressed the question of the Negative in Kafka's writing, respectively from a psychoanalytic and a stylistic-comparative vantage point.

We are in other words confronted with a somewhat paradoxical state of research, in which the question of the Negative seems to be as pervasive as much as elusive. In light of this background, this section of my book aims to discuss the limits of prevailing interpretative trends of the Negative, while advancing a new work hypothesis based on Green's work, which shall be developed throughout the following chapter. It is interesting to note that especially in recent decades scholars have generally overlooked Green's original

1 On Scholem's reception of Kafka, particularly through the specific spectrum of a «Jewish negativity» see Bloom 1987.

theoretical contribution to the current research on the Negative—and this occurs also when psychoanalytical concepts or approaches are adopted (for instance Sokel 2002; Kaus 2004;² Neumann 2013). Furthermore, in those cases in which Green's theories are taken into consideration, such as in Kaiser's study on the *Türbüterlegende* and on Green's concept of the *dead mother* (2022: 66-85), the question of the Negative remains in the background. Indeed, few important exceptions notwithstanding,³ the reception of Green's work on the Negative constitutes not just a neglected, but foremost an unwritten chapter in Kafka scholarship in general.

For this reason, in the present section I will not focus specifically on psychoanalytical investigations of the Negative but opt for a wider approach. Given the extension of Kafka's research, it is necessary to limit this overview to a few relevant works, and to postpone a detailed analysis of other important contributions in each of the following sections of this chapter, case by case. In order to orient in the *mare magnum* of scholarship, I shall organise the present survey by following the development of three intertwined axis in some of the most representative publications available. The first axis refers to the subject of investigation itself ("what is the Negative?"); the second one considers the theoretical sources and the methodological approach ("how can I read the Negative?"). The third one relates to the primary Kafka texts each commentator relies on ("where can I detect the Negative?").

As Green points out in one of the few explicit references to the Bohemian author (Green 2006a: 227), we cannot say what Kafka had in mind as he refers to the Negative in his writings. Also, it is not possible to establish with certainty whether or not Kafka was alluding to any particular authorial or theoretical source.⁴ I hasten to add that these aspects are of secondary importance for the present study: what do we suppose Kafka had in mind or which author do we believe he refers to with regards to the Negative does not satisfy the purpose

2 In *Literaturpsychologie und Literarische Hermeneutik. Sigmund Freud und Franz Kafka*, Kaus tends for instance to limit his reading to patho-biographic elements by considering negative-oedipal conflicts or Kafka's *Vaterkomplex*.

3 Kohon's studies at the crossroads of psychoanalysis, aesthetics, and clinical thinking (2016) constitute a rich example of reception of Green's work, establishing a profound filiation with his legacy. Especially the last chapter of the book is a remarkable meditation on aesthetics, literature and figurative arts, and the work of the Negative (138-153). For a reception of Green in the context of German studies, see especially the work of Maletta (2002: 109-155; particularly 2003). Also, Meghnagi's *Il padre e la legge* (2015), originally published in 1992, deserves to be mentioned here for the attentive depiction of the intellectual and cultural context in which authors such as Freud and Kafka lived and worked, as well as for the rich parallels drawn between them as for the question of the relationship between the process of writing, sublimation, and Judaism. See also Meghnagi 1993: 57-72.

4 On this point, however, much ground has been covered thanks to the work of Ritchie Robertson (1985: 185-217) and, most recently, of Peter North (2015).

of my investigation. Foremost, this does not offer an enriching insight of the complexity of this specific matter as it emerges in Kafka's work. On this point, it is worth recalling how Adorno grasped this aspect in his influential essay *Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka*.⁵ In a significant passage, we read:

Der Künstler ist nicht gehalten, das eigene Werk zu verstehen, und man hat besonderen Grund zum Zweifel, ob Kafka es vermochte. [...] Kafkas Gebilde hüteten sich vor dem mörderischen Künstlerirrtum, die Philosophie, die der Autor ins Gebilde pumpt, sei dessen metaphysischer Gehalt. Wäre sie es, das Werk wäre totgeboren: es erschöpfte sich in dem, was es sagt, und entfaltete sich nicht in der Zeit. Vorm Kurzschluß auf die allzu frühe, vom Werk schon gemeinte Bedeutung vermöchte als erste Regel zu schützen: alles wörtlich nehmen, nichts durch Begriffe von oben her zudecken. Die Autorität Kafkas ist die von Texten. Nur die Treue zum Buchstaben, nicht das orientierte Verständnis wird einmal helfen. (Adorno 1997: 246)⁶

Bearing in mind Adorno's remark, I will show in this chapter a side of the Negative in Kafka's writing which has not been properly explored by the research: a work of the Negative that cannot be reduced to a conceptual tradition (e.g. negative theology, or Hegelian dialectic)⁷ nor to an intentional or conscious expression of themes and concepts—i.e. to a projectuality inscribed *a priori* in the text (as already shown by Maletta 2002: 109-155; 2017: 131-157). If it is fair to assume that Kafka's Negative has been limited to a thematic core or to the subject of theoretical meditation, that is to some extent related with a certain approach towards the textual sources on which many scholars have focused their studies.

Some of the most important and direct references to «das Negative» in Kafka's *corpus* can be tracked down in “non-fictional” texts and fragments, such as the *Zürauer Aphorismen*. This series of aphorisms was written between September 1917 and April 1918 in a small village in the western region of Bohemia, where the author was trying to recover from tuberculosis, the illness

5 Along with Beckett and Celan, Kafka is notoriously among those authors who had a striking impact on the development of Adorno's *Negative Dialektik* and, more generally, on his thinking. The richness of Adorno's reading, however, extends beyond the specificity of philosophical research. Also thanks to the peculiarity of his reception of the Freudian text (Kaltenbeck 2015: 84-94), it provides elements of great actuality to revisit the Negative in Kafka's writings.

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

7 Also Bloom (1987) insists on the difference between Kafka's and Hegel's Negative.

which will ultimately have proved fatal a few years thereafter, on June 3, 1924. «Das Negative zu tun, ist uns noch auferlegt, das Positive ist uns schon gegeben» (1992: 47, 119), writes Kafka in a well-known excerpt: «To do the Negative, that's what is still required of us, the positive is already given.» Another page from the *Oktavhefte*, contains another important reflection:

Ich habe von den Erfordernissen des Lebens gar nichts mitgebracht, so viel ich weiß, sondern nur die allgemeine menschliche Schwäche, mit dieser – in dieser Hinsicht ist es eine riesenhafte Kraft – habe ich das Negative meiner Zeit, die mir ja sehr nahe ist, die ich nie zu bekämpfen sondern gewissermaßen zu vertreten das Recht habe, kräftig aufgenommen, an dem geringen Positiven sowie an dem äußersten, zum Positiven umkippenden Negativen hatte ich keinen ererbten Anteil. Ich bin nicht von der allerdings schon schwer sinkenden Hand des Christentums ins Leben geführt worden wie Kierkegaard und habe nicht den letzten Zipfel des davonfliegenden jüdischen Gebetmantels noch gefangen wie die Zionisten. Ich bin Ende oder Anfang. (Kafka 1992: 98)⁸

I will return to these crucial passages by the author in a later moment to provide a more detailed commentary. For the moment, what is important to note is how the recurrence of such themes in Kafka's "non-fictional" texts has induced scholars to interpret the Negative in the context of a theoretical (no matter how "a-systematic") construction,⁹ or as an intellectual project, whose framework would later substantiate the late prose of the author. This approach pursued for instance by Robertson (1985: 185-217) and North (2015), risks more generally to relegate Kafka's writing to the "performative" endeavour of an accomplished aesthetics, as if the text were the result of a translation of a systematic and coherent thinking on the page.

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

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

9 North speaks of «atheological-political treatise» (2015: 5).

an object of transmission. Furthermore, as Robertson (1985: 187) claims, these texts constitute a threshold to the last creative season, for they encapsulate themes, motives, stylistic and semantic features of Kafka's *Spätwerk*.

However, both Robertson and North seem to underestimate that, before being a "theorist," Kafka was first and foremost a writer. The question that concerns us here is not whether Kafka "applied" or "expressed" his genius through a particular genre, nor whether he formulated his thoughts in a more or less systematic way. What I intend to highlight is how the creative dynamics of writing, rather than those of theoretical, systematical or speculative thinking, shaped his imagination, his psychic life, and his representational capabilities. In a letter to Felice Bauer, dated August 14, 1913, Kafka writes: «Nicht einmal das "künstlerische Interesse" ist wahr, es ist sogar die falschste Aussage unter allen Falschheiten. Ich habe kein litterarisches Interesse sondern bestehe aus Litteratur, ich bin nichts anderes und kann nichts anderes sein.» (Kafka 1999: 261)¹⁰ And more than a year and a half prior to this letter, on January 5, 1912, Kafka wrote in his *Journal*:

In mir kann ganz gut eine Konzentration auf das Schreiben hin erkannt werden. Als es in meinem Organismus klar geworden war, daß das Schreiben die ergiebigste Richtung meines Wesens sei, drängte sich alles hin und ließ alle Fähigkeiten leer stehn, die sich auf die Freuden des Geschlechtes, des Essens, des Trinkens, des philosophischen Nachdenkens der Musik zu allererst richteten. Ich magerte nach allen diesen Richtungen ab. Das war notwendig, weil meine Kräfte in ihrer Gesamtheit so gering waren, daß sie nur gesammelt dem Zweck des Schreibens halbwegs dienen konnten. Ich habe diesen Zweck natürlich nicht selbständig und bewußt gefunden, er fand sich selbst und wird jetzt nur noch durch das Bureau, aber hier von Grund aus gehindert. (Kafka 1990b: 341)¹¹

This does not imply, of course, that Kafka did not reflect through his writing upon issues of his time, nor that his work cannot be appreciated from a speculative and theoretical perspective. Yet, the peculiarity of Kafka's "thinking," or "meditative moment," cannot be conceived but through an effort of articulation that does not saturate in the movement of a conscious subject, or in the

10 «Not even the "artistic interest" is true, this is actually the falsest statement among all falsities. I don't have any literary interests, I rather consist of literature, I'm nothing else and cannot be nothing else.»

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

present tense of the act of writing: «I didn't find that purpose *independently* and *consciously*—writes Kafka—*it found itself*» (m. e.). To paraphrase Adorno, the work of writing does not exhaust itself in «what it says» it rather «unfolds itself in time.» This «unfolding» [*entfalten*] entails a peculiar form of temporality, that, as we will see, can be understood from the angle of the psychoanalytic concept of *Nachträglichkeit* [*Afterwardness*]. The “scene of thinking” seems to come, in this respect, *après-coup*, i.e., in a belated dimension with regards to the “scene of writing”. The writing therefore constitutes a creative framing structure, interlocked with the work of the Negative.

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

As surprisingly as it may sound, we will be more likely to encounter the work of the Negative where Kafka does not explicitly address it. Not the misleading lexical presence will therefore guide the analysis, but the investigation of the traces of a subjectivity impressed in the stylistic feature of the text. In this sense, the very term «Negative» may arguably be conceived as a sort of *Provisorium* (Kafka 1998: 338)—to use «just an image» (1990b: 878) of Kafka's—for something that is still unbeknownst to the author, that does not belong to consciousness, and which will have been unfolded, retrospectively, in the work of writing. A key passage from an entry of his *Tagebücher*, written on January 31, 1922, seems to suggest Kafka's own perplexities:

Das Negative allein kann, wenn es noch so stark ist, nicht genügen, wie ich in meinen unglücklichsten Zeiten glaube. Denn wenn ich nur die kleinste Stufe erstiegen habe, in irgendeiner, sei es auch der fragwürdigsten Sicherheit bin, strecke ich mich aus und warte bis das Negative – nicht etwa mir nachsteigt –, sondern die kleine Stufe mich hinabreißt. Darum ist es ein Abwehrinstinkt, der die Herstellung des kleinsten dauernden Behagens für mich nicht duldet und zum Beispiel das Ehebett zerschlägt, ehe es noch aufgestellt ist. (Kafka 1990b: 898)¹²

12 «The Negative, on its own, even though it is still so strong, cannot suffice, as I did believe in my unhappiest moments. For when I have climbed only the tiniest step onward, I won no matter what security, be it also the most doubtful one, I stretch myself out and wait until for the Negative to not quite run after me, but rather to drag me out from the tiny step. Hence

This quote is particularly significant also for another reason: the word *Abwehr-Instinkt* leads us back to Green's definition of the work of the Negative as ensemble of «all the psychical operations of which repression is the prototype.» (Green 1993: 373; Green 1999b: 269) On this point, it is important to recall that Freud first used the word «Abwehr» to refer to what he later called «Verdrängung» (Freud 1948, vol. 10: 48). Of course, it would be erroneous to simplify this occurrence as a direct reference to Freud—a reference which, also, cannot be properly corroborated by evidence. How could we explain, after all, the presence of the word «Instinkt,» knowing of the clear difference that Freud establishes between the concepts of *Trieb* and *Instinkt*? What is relevant here is that Kafka's expression allows us to establish a link between the question of the limit and representation, the intertwining of which constitutes the core of the process of sublimation as form of organization and structuration of subjectivity through the work of writing. I shall return to this point in the following discussion.

The work of Harold Bloom, who described Kafka as the «literalist of the Negative» (Bloom 1995: 460), represents a capital step forward in the research. Particularly in *The Strong Light of the Canonical* (1987), Bloom advanced a reading of Kafka's role as «revisionist» of the Jewish cultural and intellectual horizon, focusing his analysis precisely on the question of the Negative. Bloom has also established fruitful connections between the work of the author and those of Sigmund Freud and Gershom Scholem. One of the most important findings of Bloom's study consists in the recognition of specific features of Kafka's Negative, which he reads as a new way of conceiving and transmitting a remnant of Jewish tradition in front of the challenges of assimilation and cultural dispersion.¹³ As such, Kafka's Negative has to be clearly distinguished from Hegel's or Heidegger's negativity.

In Bloom's essay, however, two fundamental issues remain open for discussion. First, Bloom's intuitions lack a substantial stylistic analysis of the dynamics of the work of the Negative in Kafka's work. Secondly, Bloom confines the question of the Negative to an intellectual and cultural horizon, thus failing accounting for the unconscious dynamics taking place in the context of literary creativity—what Jean Guillaumin (1998: 72-106) called «the conscious work of the unconscious in sublimation.» Also, Bloom's comparison with the Freudian *Verneinung* [Negation] and Scholem's negative symbolism offers a limited idea of the Negative at work in Kafka's writing. Let us recall indeed that Freud's 1925 decisive essay on negation, *Die Verneinung* (1948, vol. 14: 11-15) represents an essential and yet advanced stage of theorization of a question whose roots

it is a defence instinct in me that won't tolerate my having the slightest degree of lasting case and smashes the marriage bed, for example, even before it has been set up.»

13 In this regard, see also Schmidt's theological-literary analysis of Kafka's «Negativität» (Schmidt 2012: 151-164).

reach back to *Studien über Hysterie* (*Studies on Hysteria*, 1895). In Green's terms, the Negative is indeed «*co-naissant*,» or «con-genital» to psychoanalysis, and promptly emerges, as we have seen, in the defence mechanisms such as repression [*Verdrängung*], the discovery of which marks the birth of psychoanalysis (Green 1993: 23, 75-116; Green 1999b: 12, and 50-80). That is also to say that negativity in psychoanalysis cannot be reduced exclusively to a linguistic register, for it must be envisaged in the light of that corporeal, affective trace that the *incréable* veils and unveils at once.

Since Bloom's work, much ground has been covered on the question of the Negative in Kafka's writing, also thanks to the works of Weller and Maletta. Their studies constitute the most advanced stages of the research on the Negative in Kafka's work and provide for different reasons an important precedent.

Weller reads Kafka's work in the broader cultural, political, and artistic context of European Modernism of the twentieth century history. He defines the writings of the Czech-Jewish author as one of—if not *the*—landmark of «linguistic negativism» in the interwar period, which would have a major impact on authors such as Beckett, Sebald, and most notably Celan (Weller 2019: 6). Weller's reconstruction of the vicissitudes of the Negative in Kafka follows the diachronic development of stylistic recurrences, as well as lexical, morphological, syntactical forms of negations. He argues that, in the context of European Modernism, linguistic negativism serves a threefold purpose: «the enactment of language scepticism in literary work»; «the representation of experience by way of the negative, in accordance with the principle that any positive representation of the experience of modernity would be a deformation of that experience» (5). According to Weller, linguistic negativism incarnates an either explicit or implicit critique of modernity, and of its dehumanizing and alienating effects (*ibid.*).

Here, I will push Weller's research a step further, by bringing together the attention for the stylistic features of Kafka's writing with an analysis of the metapsychological, metaliterary, and ethical implications of the Negative in the creative work of the author—whose importance is only suggested in Weller's analysis. In contrast to Weller, however, I will not read Kafka's Negative from a “performative” angle—a term which etymologically conveys the idea of completion and fulfilment (from the Old French *par-fornir*)¹⁴—but rather as an interminable work in progress that allows us to reflect on at least two crucial aspects: the «ethical and gnoseological statute of the subject» (Maletta 2002: 115), and the «phantom of self-generation» [*sfantasma di autogenerazione*] m. e.] through writing (Maletta 2018a: 67). Understood as such, writing creates not only a

14 Weller translates with *to perform* the German verb *tun* in «Das Negative zu tun, ist uns noch auferlegt» (Kafka 1992: 47, 119) after Malcolm Pasley's rendition of the famous aphorism: «To perform the negative is what is still required of us, the positive is already ours.» (Kafka 1994: 8).

literary world, a form of “fiction,” but foremost invents a form of subjectivity which unveils itself inasmuch as it escapes disclosure through the text. This sort of subjectivity, that we will read as the subject of the unconscious of the text, becomes recognisable only in a deferred dimension of the work. In that respect, the literary text constitutes a form of filiation unfathomable to the author, a threshold wherein the writer is at once father, mother, and son of the work. By defining Kafka's «linguistic negativism» as a commitment «to the impossible» and «to communicate an experience of unknowing, insecurity, incapacity, and uninterpretability», Weller (2019: 87) highlights particularly a stylistic dimension of the Negative in the context of linguistic scepticism and expressive crisis of the early twentieth century, failing to consider what these stylistic traces do tell us of the representational processes leading to the text.

Maletta's research on Kafka is one of the few examples of a critical and attentive reception of Green's work and of the historical plurality of post-Freudian developments. One of the most important aspects of Maletta's work is the focus on the transgenerational dimension of an ethics of literary representation, which she studies by exploring the stylistic devices of Kafka's writing. This interdisciplinary approach on the question of creativity provides important insights on the specific ways wherein the writer copes with the limits and the resources of language. Conveying the trace of an irreducible subject in time and space—or, in Meschonnic's terms: a rhythmical *re-organisation* of the subject through language (Meschonnic 1989; 1995)—the style of the author is always an interminable work *at* and *with* the limits of representation.

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

By so doing, I intend to bridge what I consider to be a major gap in the research on the Negative. Such gap lies in the failure of showing how the work of the Negative acquires at once specific literary and stylistic features, which stem from the uniqueness of Kafka's work, while representing the mark of an engagement with Judaism that also animates his writing. From this point of view, Green's concept of *incréable* is pivotal to investigate Kafka's attempt to recreate an impossible, *uncreatable* link with that corporeal matrix from which creativity originates. At the same time, the *incréable* marks Kafka's endeavour to establish a relationship with a lost, absent cultural "origin," in a relentless confrontation with the most cogent issues that engaged the Jewish cultural life at the turn of the past century in Europe. In this regard, Kafka was capable of reinventing the childhood of a language within a heterogenic literary and cultural tradition, at the border between different worlds and languages, between the challenges of assimilation and the aspirations of renewal that animated European Judaism and its intellectual protagonists. At the threshold of the catastrophe that in less than twenty years would have invested Europe and the world, Kafka imagined a new childhood of a people by giving form and literary dignity to an absence, a void, which was unsaturable, abyssal. Indeed, through his writing, he was capable of giving transmissible form to such absence within the creating subject as well as within the body of a people, turning it in the pulsating heart of an extraordinary literary peregrination. As such, as we shall see, irrepresentability and transmission are inseparably intertwined in Kafka's work, coalescing notably in that crucial, final, perhaps even "testamentary" text that is *Josefine, die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse* (1924).

There is an interesting recurrence is Kafka's *Tagebücher*, which has not been properly considered by other scholars, and that allows to trace the dynamics of sublimation as a veritable *fil rouge* running through Kafka's work as a whole. On March 28, 1911, Kafka recalls part of a private meeting with the Austrian thinker, theosophist, and later founder of the Anthroposophical Society Rudolf Steiner at the Hotel Victoria, on the Jungmannstraße Nr. 18 (Jungmannova) in Prague:¹⁵

[...] Ich fühle wie ein großer Teil meines Wesens zur Teosophie hinstrebt, gleichzeitig aber habe ich vor ihr die höchste Angst. Ich befürchte nämlich von ihr eine neue Verwirrung, die für mich sehr arg wäre, da eben schon mein gegenwärtiges Unglück nur aus Verwirrung besteht. Diese Verwirrung liegt in Folgendem: Mein Glück, meine Fähigkeiten und jede Möglichkeit irgendwie zu nützen liegen seit jeher im Litterarischen. Und hier habe ich allerdings Zustände erlebt (nicht viele)

15 The excerpt represents one of altogether three entries dedicated to Steiner in Kafka's *Journal*, and as such they bear witness to an initial curiosity towards the Berlin theosophist. See on this point the works of Binder (1995: 214-233; 1996: 106-150) and Stach (2014: 453-469).

die meiner Meinung nach den von Ihnen Herr Doktor beschriebenen hellseherischen Zuständen sehr nahestehen, in welchen ich ganz und gar in jedem Einfall wohnte, aber jeden Einfall auch erfüllte und in welchen ich mich nicht nur an meinen Grenzen fühlte, sondern an den Grenzen des Menschlichen überhaupt. (Kafka 1990b: 33-34)¹⁶

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

[...] Dieses Jagden nimmt die Richtung aus der Menschheit. Die Einsamkeit, die mir zum größten Teil seit jeher aufgezwungen war, zum Teil von mir gesucht wurde – doch was war auch dies anderes als Zwang – wird jetzt ganz unzweideutig und geht auf das Äußerste. Wohin führt sie? Sie kann, dies scheint am Zwingendsten, zum Irrsinn führen, darüber kann nichts weiter ausgesagt werden, die Jagd geht durch mich und zerreißt mich. Oder aber ich kann – ich kann? – sei es auch nur zum winzigsten Teil mich aufrechterhalten, lasse mich also von der Jagd tragen. Wohin komme ich dann? «Jagd» ist ja nur ein Bild, ich kann auch sagen «Ansturm gegen die letzte irdische Grenze» und zwar Ansturm von unten, von den Menschen her und kann, da auch dies nur ein Bild ist, es ersetzen durch das Bild des Ansturmes von oben, zu mir herab. // Diese ganze Litteratur ist Ansturm gegen die Grenze und sie hätte sich, wenn nicht der Zionismus dazwischen gekommen wäre, leicht zu einer neuen Geheimlehre, einer Kabbala entwickeln können. Ansätze dazu bestehn. Allerdings ein wie unbegreifliches Genie wird hier verlangt, das neu seine Wurzeln in die alten Jahrhunderte treibt oder die alten Jahrhunderte neu erschafft und mit dem all en sich nicht ausgibt, sondern jetzt erst sich auszugeben beginnt. (Kafka 1990b: 877-878)¹⁷

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

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

This recurrence is noteworthy for it allows to trace a sort of “signifier” of Kafka’s creative venture. The double occurrence of the constellation of the «literary,» the «human,» and the «limit» seems to embody a sort of return of representation upon itself, tracing a trajectory which anticipates that “writing of sublimation” and “upon sublimation” which will have been, I claim, the collection *Ein Hungerkünstler*. In other words, it “fictionalises” not quite the psychic and corporeal movement of the process of creation, but rather the traces of such process as they sediment through the work of writing at the border between past and future, conscious and unconscious, and the different agencies of the writing subject in relationship with the object-writing. Also in temporal terms, the text might be read as if expressing a double movement, a double limit: a field of tension. On the one hand, as an *après-coup* of the thoughts articulated in the aftermath of the encounter with Rudolf Steiner; on the other, as a sort of “announcement,” without any “divinatory” value, of the literary endeavour to come. To use Green’s words: «L’écrit devient [...] fantasme organisateur de la vie à venir. Non de ses événements mais de l’expérience intérieure qui en ordonnera les données.» (2009: 61) «Writing becomes [...] organising phantom of the life to come. Not quite of its events, but of the inner experience which will order its contents.»

As the diary pages from March 1911 represent a farewell from esoterism towards the discovery of another form of rationality by means literature, Kafka’s 1922 entry put in words a leave from the earth, the somatic, animal body (Green 1993: 305-306; Green 1999b: 221), as also suggested by the term *Jagd*, towards a new liminal territory that literature opens to host that limit of the world and between worlds that the subject *is*. The writing acquires the function of an organising, structuring principle beyond the subject, towards the work itself as receptacle of *a* subject to come.

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

In this respect it is interesting to compare the solutions both [Freud and Kafka] found for a problem that was of historical as well as existential significance. Both Freud and Kafka were aware that their writings were a place for sublimation of the anxieties of a whole generation. [...] In Kafka, literature and Jewishness coincide, and the loss of a sense of roots, even though these may be wandering roots, becomes unhappy literary wandering. (Meghnagi 1993: 60, 61)

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

A “double limit,” therefore, marking his struggle to represent a remnant of Judaism between the «impossibilities» of writing (Kafka 1998: 337-338) and the «mandate» of literature (Kafka 1992: 320); between the psyche in its attachment to the body (i.e., the drive) and its textual vicissitudes; between the subject and that otherness which is the subject of writing and *the* writing itself as a cultural object, underway. A cultural object stretching between the generations, from within «humanity» outwards and back, through literature, to reinvent the human: towards sublimation, through sublimation.

It is at these borders of Kafka's writing that our own journey begins.

End of November/December 1923 – January 1924. *Eine kleine Frau*

A Neglected Text

Eine kleine Frau (*A little Woman*, Kafka 1996: 321-333) was composed between the end of November 1923 and January 1924, approximately in the same time span during which also *Der Bau* was penned (Kafka 1996 Apparataband: 420). Unlike other works of the late creative season, however, *Eine kleine Frau* has received far less critical attention, and except for a few relevant cases, it has long been a neglected text in Kafka scholarship (Engel und Auerochs 2010: 322). Indeed, *Eine kleine Frau* appears to be an anomaly in the context of a work such as *Ein Hungerkünstler*, which has been systematically interpreted as a collection of «artists stories» dealing with the tormenting dichotomy between the public and the artist, or between life and art (Engel und Auerochs 2010: 320).¹⁸ Another aspect that no doubt contributed to the limited critical fortune of *Eine kleine Frau* lies in the challenges that the text poses to interpretation. Somehow to an even greater, bewildering extent than other pieces of the same collection, *Eine kleine Frau* seems to escape any analytic approach, no matter how sophisticated, especially if based on the assumption that the text itself may be constructed as a riddle, a puzzle, or a coded message.¹⁹ In this respect, it exposes the ineffectiveness of a way of reading still strongly attached to an

18 Scholars like Wirtz (1999: 306-322), Kleinwort (2013: 244-251), and Neumann (2013: 115, 119, 556 ff.) have undertaken the task of overcoming such view by proposing new interpretative approaches that highlight the role of *Eine kleine Frau* in *Ein Hungerkünstler* beyond the well-established interpretation of the question of art and artistry. Kleinwort, for instance, expanding Wirtz's thesis (1999: 317) according to which *Eine kleine Frau* functions as a sort of «hinge» or «joint,» has remarked how a new link between *Eine kleine Frau* and the other texts of *Ein Hungerkünstler* can be detected in other common themes apparently less prominent, such as that of dissatisfaction, physical pain, suffering, as well as failure and omission.

19 Cfr. on this point the perceptive analyses by Pasley (1976: 112-131; 1995: 61-83) and Robertson (1985: IX), to which we shall return in the following.

idea of literary representation and figurability that the irony of Kafka's writing relentlessly erodes, thus betraying a conciliatory, "allegorical" expectation from the side of the reader/interpreter.

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

Diese kleine Frau nun ist mit mir sehr unzufrieden, immer hat sie etwas an mir auszusetzen, immer geschieht ihr Unrecht von mir, ich ärgere sie auf Schritt und Tritt; wenn man das Leben in aller kleinste Teile teilen und jedes Teilchen gesondert beurteilen könnte, wäre gewiß jedes Teilchen meines Lebens für sie ein Ärgernis. Ich habe oft darüber nachgedacht, warum ich sie denn so ärgere [...] warum leidet sie so sehr darunter? (Kafka 1996: 322)²⁰

To this question no explicit answer will be given throughout the text; but this is of secondary importance for our purpose. Indeed, the relationship between the narrator and the little woman seems to "exist" only insofar as it is denied, repeatedly contradicted (e.g. the recurrence of expressions such as «ja gar», «ja niemals») and altogether seemingly ungraspable. And if nothing is changed, decided, or solved of such ambiguous relationship,²¹ if *nothing* seems to be happening in this story, that is indeed because what does unfold in this text is precisely that "nothing" around which the writing process revolves and that Kafka's writing, in turn, does not cease to give form to:

Es besteht ja gar keine Beziehung zwischen uns, die sie zwingen würde, durch mich zu leiden. Sie müßte sich nur entschließen, mich als völlig Fremden anzusehen, der ich ja auch bin und der ich gegen einen solchen Entschluß mich nicht wehren, sondern ihn sehr begrüßen würde, sie müßte sich nur entschließen, meine Existenz zu vergessen, die ich ihr ja niemals aufgedrängt habe oder aufdrängen würde – und alles Leid wäre offenbar vorüber. (Kafka 1996: 322-323)²²

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

21 See Kafka 1996: 330-331: «Aber nichts von Entscheidung, nichts von Verantwortung, Frauen wird leicht übel, die Welt hat nicht Zeit, auf alle Fälle aufzupassen. Und was ist denn eigentlich in all den Jahren geschehn? Nichts weiter, als daß sich solche Fälle wiederholten, einmal stärker, einmal schwächer, und daß nun also ihre Gesamtzahl größer ist.» «But nothing of a decision, nothing of responsibility, women readily feel ill; the world has no time to keep an eye on every case. And what has actually happened in all these years? Nothing else but such cases repeating themselves, now stronger, now weaker, so now their sum total is the greater.»

22 «There is absolutely no relationship between us at all that would compel her to suffer on my account. She would only have to make up her mind to look on me as a complete stranger,

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

[...] diese unreine Sache auch noch vor der Öffentlichkeit zu besprechen, das wäre für ihre Scham zu viel. Aber es ist doch auch zu viel, von der Sache ganz zu schweigen, unter deren unaufhörlichem Druck sie steht. Und so versucht sie in ihrer Frauenschlauheit einen Mittelweg; schweigend, nur durch die äußern Zeichen eines geheimen Leides will sie die Angelegenheit vor das Gericht der Öffentlichkeit bringen. (Kafka 1996: 324)²³

This scandalous [*ärgerlich*—*Ärgernis*] “nothing,” this *Sache*²⁴ for which there seems to be no name yet to be found, becomes at once centre and object of the creative process as well as of the very text. What “happens” of crucial in *Eine kleine Frau* does not lie on the level of the textual content (i.e. of what the author seems to be writing about), but rather, on a stylistic and meta-textual level. *Eine kleine Frau* opens in this sense a potential, liminal space, literally a *Mittelweg*, (Green 1992: 56; Green 1997: 322) in which the unconscious dimension of writing operates in its ambiguous and disturbing dynamics, while turning into the very object of representation.

The Exponential Work of Sublimation

To shed light on this representational shift emerging in *Eine kleine Frau*, I propose to consider it in the context of those «scriptural transformations» upon which Green reflects in his essay *La déliaison* (Green 1992: 30 ff.; Green 1997: 348 ff). In it, Green tackles the question of the relationship between the transformations of literary representation and the changes of the metapsychological, clinical, therapeutical horizons in psychoanalysis. The psychoanalytic reading of literary texts becomes as such a way to reflect on the evolution of psychoanalysis itself.

For the present matter let us just recall how Green detects in modern writing an unprecedented tension towards non-representability and the “evacuation of figurability.”²⁵ In this representational mutation, Green discerns two

which after all I am, and I wouldn't defend myself against such a decision, but welcome it; she has only to make up her mind to forget my existence, which after all I have never forced upon her, nor would I ever do so—and all her suffering would clearly be over.»

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

24 Etymologically, *Sache* means a «subject of a dispute» between two parts (cfr. “Sache, f.”).

25 By «modern writing» let us understand, in this case, emblematic texts of European literature produced, roughly speaking, after the birth of psychoanalysis. The fact that Green,

developments, or rather two poles between which contemporary writing has become “disjointed”: on the one hand we encounter a «writing of the body» [*l'écriture du corps*»] that does not cease to reflect and articulate its own fragmentation and transitory states. Green explicitly refers in this case to authors such as Antonin Artaud and Samuel Beckett. Here a «short circuit occurs between body and thought,» which turns thought into a fractured «corporeal organ;» the new object of such writing «is the state of the body proper in its most violent manifestation,» in its physiological and metabolic processes, in its bare sufferance. Confronted with its impotence, language cannot but expose the failure to communicate in the writing process a rendering of such corporeal fragmented dimension (Green 1992: 34; Green 1997: 352).

On the other hand, Green pinpoints the emergence of a way of writing that he names «of the sublimated text» [*de l'écrit sublimés*] (Green 1992: 34; Green 1997: 352). The attribute «sublimated» may in this context be open to a variety of interpretations, whose implications we will not be able to explore in detail now. We have good reason to assume that it does not refer exclusively to the level of abstraction of these texts, but to the exponential nature of the sublimation of which they represent an outcome. Since a literary text, and indeed any form of artistic creation or intellectual enquiry (epistemophilia), can be interpreted, psychoanalytically speaking, as a product of sublimation, how can we closer define a «sublimated text»?

In Green's words, the «sublimated text»

[...] s'efforce de rien ne dire d'autre que ce qui est le procès même de l'écriture [...]. Ici l'absence de figurabilité fait de l'écriture la seule matière à représentation [...]. Son but ultime est, en abolissant toute trace de la représentation, de parvenir à une écriture blanche. Elle efface au fur et à mesure qu'elle trace. La dérive d'un texte, son écart progressif avec la représentation inconsciente qui fait du texte un produit de transformation d'un fantasme, a disparu pour ne laisser place qu'à un texte absent. Le texte sur l'absence est devenu l'absence de texte. Tout texte est absolument, intégralement texte fléché vers son silence. (Green 1992: 35 ff)²⁶

coherently with his clinical interests, considers the texts he mentions in *La déliaison* as literary “borderline-cases” is implicitly suggested by names of the likes of Artaud and Beckett. With regards to Kafka, and with no explicit reference to Green, Maletta (2002: 110, ff) describes in terms of «a-mimesis» this sort of «evacuation» of the image, of «unbinding» of the text from the figurative power of writing, an aspect which she reads in relationship and continuity with the prohibition on graven images rooted in Jewish tradition.

26 Green 1997: 353: «[The sublimated text] strives to say nothing beyond the mere statement of the writing process. [...] Here the absence of figurability makes the script the only representation. [...] Its ultimate goal is, through the eradication of all representation, to reach a state of total blankness. It deletes the very lines it forms as it moves along. The drifting of a traditional literary text, its progressive lag away from unconscious representation which makes it a transformation product of fantasy, has disappeared to make way for an absent text.

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

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

[...] Écrire, par le fait même que toute écriture est une trace visible puisque lisible, et c'est son destin d'être lue, c'est encore représenter. Écrire est pris entre la non-représentabilité de l'écriture et son inévitable représentation. Un livre blanc, c'est encore un livre, fût-il sans écrivain, sans titre et sans caractères [...]. (Green 1992: 37)²⁷

Green remarks lead us to one of the most important motives that accompanies Kafka's late writings. Along with the question of the legitimacy, the authority, the limits of creation, and of its accessibility, another common thread runs through the texts of *Ein Hungerkünstler*. Kafka's late writing seems to relentlessly deny its very right of “being” as writing, its legitimacy to transmit itself as a text, as if haunted by the very uncertainty of its vicissitudes (Maletta 2008: 74 ff.).

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

The text celebrating absence has become the absence of any text. All such text is absolutely, integrally, pointing toward its own silence.» (tr. mod.)

27 Green 1997: 355: «[...] For to write, due to the very fact that all writing is a visible trace – visible because legible, and indeed it is destined to be read – is still, one way or another, to represent. Writing is caught between the non-representability of the writing process and the inevitability of its representation. A blank book is still a book, be it an authorless, titleless, and typeless book [...].» (tr. mod.)

that this very unavoidability of “evacuating representation” becomes the very object that haunts, like a spectre, the text itself, namely through an exponential work of sublimation?

To be sure, *Eine kleine Frau* does not entirely fall into the second category of texts indicated by Green. It presents other relevant elements that initially push also towards a writing «of the fragmented body.» Especially at the beginning of the text, the “description” of the little woman seems to allude constantly to a corporeal fragmentation articulated through writing (Kafka 1996: 321-322). In fact, if the text of *Eine kleine Frau* appears at times to swing back and forth between the two poles that Green describes; other times, it gradually detaches itself from a corporeal dimension towards the opposite end of the *spectrum*, there where the body is but a distant remnant in the text. It is however not my intention to insist on a categorical description of this work, but rather to re-think Green’s insights²⁸ in order to put *Eine kleine Frau* in a perspective that has not been considered thus far.

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

All these aspects are crucial to grasp the work of the Negative in Kafka’s late writing, and they recur especially in *Ein Hungerkünstler* and *Josefine, die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse*. It is therefore pivotal to tackle *Eine kleine Frau* not just as an isolated text, but to rethink it as a crucial, specific link in the textual economy of the collection. If in *Erstes Leid*, the prose that opens the book, we read of a *Trapezkünstler* who literally converts his lifestyle to the dizzying heights of

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

his artistic practice, and if the hunger artist relentlessly hosts in his body an unsaturable absence, the question of the role of *Eine kleine Frau* remains in this context open for discussion.

It is perhaps the seemingly marginal, *liminal* [«*Mittelweg*»] position of this text that keeps awakening the curiosity and the fascination of the reader. We read the text again and again, searching for an unexpected association to present, a word overlooked enlightening the meaning of a sentence, but without fruition. One may also wonder why Kafka wanted to include such an apparently “anonymous,” strange prose in a collection populated by so many vividly parabolic, powerful, and yet elusive images. It is almost as if the memorable, however evanescent images of the trapezist in *Erstes Leid*, of the hunger artist and of Josefine were functioning as some sort of “traps” for the attention of the reader, deflecting it away from a kernel that writing protects as much as it reveals. Interestingly, Pasley mentions a diary entry in which Max Brod recalls how, after reading *Eine kleine Frau* to his friend, Kafka would have said: «Die Erzählung ist verschleiert,» «the story is veiled,» but also «concealed,» «disguised» (Pasley 1995: 61-83, here 76). The discrepancy between chronological order of the texts' composition and internal organisation of the collection represents also an important hint, for it suggests a hidden link, a continuity between the texts which may have become clear to Kafka only retrospectively.²⁹ These elements give rise to the suspicion that *Eine kleine Frau* plays a far more relevant role than one might expect. *Eine kleine Frau* is in my perspective the hinge³⁰ around which a new reading of the work of the Negative in Kafka's late writing becomes possible. By articulating the exponential work of the sublimation highlighted with Green, *Eine kleine Frau* marks a crucial stage in the inner economy of *Ein Hungerkünstler*, for it prepares that representational “re-turn” in the writing which characterises the two last proses of the collection. Indeed, from *Erstes Leid* to *Josefine, die Sängerin*, the collection of *Ein Hungerkünstler* as a whole shall show us the trajectory of a subject working and reworking the relationship between representation and living suffering corporality, towards the sublimation of the body—and notably of its broken, laboured breath—in the stylistic dimension of the text. As such, in all its irony, *Eine kleine Frau* unconsciously voices a question that, almost obsessively, reverberates also in the last two texts of the collection: *how can reach, attain to and circumscribe the minimal trace of subjectivity, in search for the lost origin of creation—by writing?*

Before developing this point, however, we must yet address a few relevant issues concerning the scholarly reception of *Eine kleine Frau*. This shall lead me to the core of my argument.

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

30 Wirtz (1999: 317) speaks of «Scharnierfunktion.»

Beyond Biographism: The Life of Writing

The critical reception of this text is still strongly limited to a semi-biographical standpoint. Scholars have generally considered *Eine kleine Frau* as being inspired by Kafka's irritating relationship with a no better specified Frau Hermann (Stach 2008: 567), the landlady of the one-room apartment the author was sharing with Dora Dymant in Berlin Steglitz (Miquelstraße 8), before moving to the two rooms apartment of Grünewaldstraße 13 (Kafka 1990a: 35)³¹ Needless to say, the spark from which the story presumably came into being does not pay justice to its complexity, nor to the paramount role that we can attribute to this text.

Even psychoanalytic interpretations of this text are not exempt from the temptation of biographism and patho-biographism. Lange-Kirchheim (1986) and Moser (1986) claim that the intricate relationship of the narrator with the little woman reflects Kafka's own relationship with the "maternal" and "femininity." Drawing a comparison with *Brief an den Vater*, Lange-Kirchheim (1986: 180-193) suggests that *Eine kleine Frau* may be read as a concealed, poetic representation [*Darstellung*] of Kafka's relationship with his mother. Moser, on the other hand, maintains that the feminine figure of the text can be interpreted as a both internal and external projection of Kafka's relationship with his feminine side (1986: 194-206). Such is also the point of departure of Kaus' patho-biographic and psycho-sexual study (2002). Following the recurring pattern of a «negative irony,» Kaus extends the relationship with the little woman in the text to the wider question of the relationship with otherness.³² He defends the hypothesis according to which the structural-relational «problem of the you,» projected towards the outside in the guise of the main feminine figure. Kaus asserts this masks an attempt of «protection from paranoia in form of its representation» [*Darstellung*], which may be interpreted as signal of repressed homosexuality (2002: 70-71).

Consistently with my focus on the stylistic strategies and the meta-literary implications of the dynamics of sublimation, what interests me here is neither the role of the feminine and masculine components of the author's personality *per se*, nor simply the maternal or the fatherly aspects emerging in the text from an autobiographical perspective. If anything, what would rather draw our attention here is how the "maternal" (eine kleine *Frau*) and the "fatherly" (Frau Her[r]Mann—a name which undeniably echoes the name of Kafka's father) may intervene as significant to be sublimated, as alphabetic traces, remnants susceptible of reinscription in the creative process. With the *incrédible*, Green has indeed shown how both the affective link with the trace of the body of the

31 See also Dora Dymant's text *Mein Leben mit Franz Kafka* (Koch 1995: 178).

32 Kaus (2002) notably explores a possible relationship between Kafka's work and Martin Buber's *Ich und Du* (1923).

mother, as well as the *cesura* that the father imposes to such relationship, are elements of equal importance in the creation of that frontier which protects the kernel of creativity and representation. In this sense, the oedipal structure, if understood in a broader sense, goes beyond the limited dimension of biography or biographism and rather lays the foundations of that «family romance» constituting the «symbolization of the generation.» The word «generation» can be understood here both as “generational” and “creation.” (Green 1977: 31) The issue at stake is therefore how the writing subject can transform the oedipal structure and the affective traces connected to it through sublimation, making of the text at once the outcome of a filiation that transcends the individual biography and an attempt to create a contact with an origin that remains lost: *incréable*. An origin which is covered as much as uncovered by the work of writing, constantly elsewhere, protected, safe, and inaccessible. «Plongéant aux sources de l'origine, l'originaire donne naissance à l'original.» writes Green: «Plunging into the sources of the origin, the primal gives birth to the original.» (Green 1992: 317) By giving birth to the work (cfr. also Hammond 2016: 61-79) the subject becomes at once father, mother, and child of the very work of creation he has put into motion through the deflection and the negativization of the sexual drive.

If sublimation represents an attempt of the re-creation *otherwise* of a relationship with an origin, the turn towards a meta-representational component characterizing Kafka's late season allows to pinpoint a further subtle allusion (mostly overlooked by the research)³³ in the title *Eine kleine Frau*: namely to the pages on the *kleine Litteratur*, penned in 1911 in the *Tagebücher* (Kafka 1990b: 312-315, 326). The pertinence of this reference is not quite linked to the socio-political implications of the *kleine Litteratur* but rather to a childhood of the literary in his writing. It is almost as if, approaching the end, Kafka were able to recover and revisit with his pen the distant traces of a lost origin of his own work. This link, however, does not justify *per se* the claim that beyond the intricate web of allusions of *Eine kleine Frau* lies the fantasy, or the “phantasm” [*fantasme*] of a lost origin, of a lost “object-literature.” In order to substantiate this hypothesis, we have to leave behind the limits of biographism and tackle this work otherwise.

In sharp contrast with this biographical interpretative trend,³⁴ Malcom Pasley has suggested that *Eine kleine Frau* can be read in comparison with texts such as

33 Indeed, scholars tend to consider the pages on the *kleine Litteratur* in relationship with texts such as *Ein Hungerkünstler* or *Josefine, die Sängerin*. See for instance Pott (1979: 435-450) and Neumann (2013: 402-421).

34 Pasley (1995: 150-151) has called biographism «the actual original sin of Kafka's interpretation,» thereby criticizing the assumption that the author had deliberately wanted to embody, in his writing, specific real occurrences from his past, people, places, episodes, institutions. Again, in “Kafka's Semi-private Games,” Pasley (1976: 127) remarks: «[...] The pointing out

Elf Söhne and *Die Sorge des Hausvaters*, in which the motives of sublimation and filiation by means of literature assume a prominent role.³⁵ He claims that «the image of the little woman was developed, like that of Odradek, from the author's contemplation of some actual literary product, some concrete expression of his literary self that he had before his eyes.» Such literary object, continues Pasley, «did not merely serve as the starting point for the fantasy, but remains present in the story as a secret point of reference.» *Eine kleine Frau*, *Elf Söhne*, and *Die Sorge des Hausvaters* thus articulate a common imaginative trajectory, a stylistic strategy through which, «while pursuing his exploratory personification, the author retains at the same time a network of hidden reference back to his figure's inanimate origin» (Pasley 1976: 127; 1995: 77 ff. See also Robertson 2006: 181).

Pasley explores how in *Eine kleine Frau* the materiality of writing meets the playfulness, the unpredictable fantasy of the writing process: «the little woman is essentially an image of what literature meant to Kafka, an image of his “literary part” [...]» (Pasley 1976: 126). In this meta-representational fantasy, literature, the process of writing, and in a wider sense, the material support (pages, sheets) as well as the graphic inscription, thus become living creatures (and not necessarily an anthropomorphic one, as in the case of Odradek). The handwriting, the ink, the notebook, even the simplest typographic elements of a publication are not mere “things” anymore. They become, we may add, living objects of an emotional, affective, creative investment, within and without the subject.

Robertson, furthermore, has noticed how the figure of the little woman may be understood as «an image of the art, namely as embodiment of the artistic conscience or of an artistic super-ego relentlessly criticising and supervising the empirical self of the artist» (2006: 181). In this regard, we may say, if Pasley underscores the “pleasure principle” of Kafka's relationship with the materiality

of such private allusions on Kafka's part, whether to his literary work, or to his lungs, or to his friends, or to events in his life, does not and cannot constitute an interpretation of the stories in which such allusions occur.» Like Green (2009: 10, 50) Pasley stresses the distinction between *biography* as a ‘private’, auto-referential object of the work and *life*—the lived, un-lived, imagined, hallucinated, even neglected one—as source of creativity (Winnicott 2005: 87-114) as well as in its transformative potential in literature. The works of scholars such as Pasley and Robertson (2006: 180-191) are in this respect instrumental to overcome the *impasse* of biographism.

35 See also Kafka's journal entry from February 11, 1913 (Kafka 1990b: 491), in which he retrospectively reflects upon the creative process of *Das Urteil*. We read: «Anlässlich der Korrektur des “Urteils“ schreibe ich alle Beziehungen auf, die mir in der Geschichte klargeworden sind, soweit ich sie gegenwärtig habe. Es ist dies notwendig, denn die Geschichte ist wie eine regelrechte Geburt mit Schmutz und Schleim bedeckt aus mir herausgekommen, und nur ich habe die Hand, die bis zum Körper dringen kann und Lust dazu hat [...]» «In occasion of the proof reading of the “Judgement” I register all the relationships that have become clear to me in the story as far as I remember them. This is necessary because story came out of me as a downright birth, covered with filth and slime, and only I have the hand that can reach to the body itself and the strength of desire to do so [...]»

of writing and literature (the sensorial involvement of touch, smell, motion, gestural repetitions vehiculating the tension of the whole body in its transformation in the writing process), Robertson grasps no doubt the persecutory element of Kafka's passion for literature. If we value Robertson's and Pasley's readings we can grasp in the following passage an allusion to the tyrannic imperiousness of the moment of inspiration, to the bloodthirsty exigence of literature that constantly imposes itself on the subject, and to the seductive, burning passion of the creating *impetus* in its persecutory character:

Immer wieder werde ich etwa im Glück der ersten Morgenstunden aus dem Hause treten und dieses um meinwillen vergräme Gesicht sehn, die verdrießlich aufgestülpten Lippen, den prüfenden und schon vor der Prüfung das Ergebnis kennenden Blick, der über mich hinfährt und dem selbst bei größter Flüchtigkeit nichts entgehen kann, das bittere in die mädchenhafte Wange sich einbohrende Lächeln, das klagende Aufschauen zum Himmel, das Einlegen der Hände in die Hüften, um sich zu festigen, und dann in der Empörung das Bleichwerden und Erzittern. (Kafka 1996: 328)³⁶

The function of the ideal in its link with sublimation (Green 1993: 307 ff.; Green 1999b: 222 ff.) opens here a space in which emerge not only the expectations, the discipline of writing, and the concerns regarding the vicissitudes of the work,³⁷ but also Kafka's confrontation with the body of a tradition [*«Überlieferungen»*]³⁸—a canon of the literary in which the author enters as heir as much as a heretic figure:

[...] mag sein, daß alles an mir ihrem Schönheitssinn, ihrem Gerechtigkeitsgefühl, ihren Gewohnheiten, ihren Überlieferungen, ihren Hoffnungen widerspricht, es gibt derartige einander widersprechende Naturen, aber warum leidet sie so sehr darunter? (Kafka 1996: 322)³⁸

Pasley and Robertson's remarks seem to be consistent with a reading *Eine kleine Frau* as a meta-representation of the passion of writing and of the vicissitudes of representation, caught in the field of tensions between a tendency to "evacuation" and dissolution, and its inevitable "return on the page."

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

37 «[...] die Welt hat nicht Zeit, auf alle Fälle aufzupassen.» (Kafka 1996: 331); «[...] the world has no time to keep an eye on every case.»

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

What is indeed pivotal in *Eine kleine Frau*—and both Pasley and Robertson, in this sense, fail to grasp this point—is how two irreducible dimensions of writing emerge and coexist, unsolvable, namely as signals of a radical alterity at work within the text.

Handwritings. The Unconscious of the Text and Negative Hallucination

«*Es ist eine kleine Frau*» (Kafka 1996: 321, m. e.) we read, at the beginning of the work: «*It is a little woman,*» we may translate word for word. Significantly, this syntactic structure,³⁹ and even more so the use of the neutral personal pronoun *es* in function of *Platzhalter*—or placeholder—seem to hint at something more than a simple discrepancy within the subject of the text. Indeed, this is not only what Pasley qualifies as the «Doppelbödigkeit» of many Kafka's writings—i.e., an ambiguous and inextricable mixing of humorous and serious elements (Pasley 1995: 79). Rather, the *pro*-noun *es* is standing as *Stellvertreter*, *in stead* of a noun—or even of an entirely other form of “text”—, as an absence which does not attain the layer of language: as a trace of the unconscious process through which creativity emerges on the conscious level of the text. It is important to stress how this unconscious element does not just represent a mere disturbance in the creative process, but an “other” form of rationality (i.e. a negative form of consciousness) unfolding in the writing process and making it possible. This emerges with particular intensity in the following passage of the text:

Den Eindruck, den ihre Hand auf mich macht, kann ich nur wiedergeben, wenn ich sage, daß ich noch keine Hand gesehen habe, bei der die einzelnen Finger dertart scharf voneinander abgegrenzt wären, wie bei der ihren; doch hat ihre Hand keineswegs irgendeine anatomische Merkwürdigkeit, es ist eine völlig normale Hand.⁴⁰

The hand of the little woman, rightfully identified by Pasley as a playful allusion in form of a pun to handwriting [*Hand-Schrift*] (Pasley 1976: 130), can be read from another perspective, namely as a *writing hand*. Many critics have focused their attention on this passage, on the anatomical oddity of it, yet overlooking what this hand might *represent*: a hand which *impresses* [*eindrücken*] a surface as the hand of otherness. It is a hand that writes as much as it comes into being by means of writing, inscribing signs which are perceivable, and yet irreproducible, inaccessible to the narrating voice, to the writing subject, as well

39 See for instance the opening of *In der Strafkolonie* (Kafka 1996: 201-248).

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

as to the reader. These are spectral written and writing signs of an absence, of a corporality dissolving as it leaves on the page a blank script.

What we can read here, in the trace of the writing hand is the signal of a deep affective investment associated with the work of writing: «Wieviel Tage sind wieder stumm vorüber; heute ist der 29. Mai. Habe ich nicht einmal die Entschlossenheit, diesen Federhalter, dieses Stück Holz täglich in die Hand zu nehmen» writes Kafka in 1910 (Kafka 1990b: 16-17).⁴¹ Many entries from the *Tagebücher* show indeed an intricate associative and imaginative mesh expressing, in all its ambivalence, the torments, the joys, and the passion of writing. At times, a writing hand turns into a reaching one, a hand that stretches, through writing, between the generations. On January 21, 1922, Kafka writes: «Ohne Vorfahren, ohne Ehe, ohne Nachkommen, mit wilder Vorfahrens-, Ehe- und Nachkommens-lust. Alle reichen mir die Hand: Vorfahren, Ehe und Nachkommen, aber zu fern für mich.» (Kafka 1990b: 884)⁴² In desperate times,⁴³ Kafka's writing hand traces lines on the empty surface of the page to inhabit the absence of the affects, transforming it not quite into *the* work, but rather into a filiation of a work which is counterfactually underway from an irreducible distance.⁴⁴ This role of writing is intensely embodied in *Eine kleine Frau*, insofar as it shows a writing which learns to write anew, with a new hand, with a new body reimaged through the unconscious: through an other grammar, a new syntax that do not belong to graphism but function as bridge between what is other than language and language.

And what is the *hand-writing*, after all, if not the echo, the trace of that very hand which protects the body of the infant, marking that *structure encadrante*

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

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

43 See also the journal entry from October 19, 1921 (Kafka 1990b: 867) in which the writing hand literally registers and bears witness [ein-tragen] from among the ruins of life.

44 In this sense, another interesting passage can be found in a diary entry from September 14, 1915. Kafka puts here on the page the impressions of his visit to Rabbi of Žižkov. The hand of the *Wunderrabbi* unleashes a series of associations in which the whiteness of the skin makes possible the encounter between infancy and the transgenerational, as if taking place in the space untouched by writing on a blank page: «Schmutzig und rein, Eigentümlichkeit intensiv denkender Menschen. Kratzt sich am Bartansatz, schneuzt durch die Hand auf den Fußboden, greift mit den Fingern in die Speisen – wenn er aber ein Weilchen die Hand auf dem Tisch liegen läßt, sieht man das Weiß der Haut, wie man ein ähnliches Weiß nur in Vorstellungen der Kindheit gesehn zu haben glaubt. Damals allerdings waren auch die Eltern rein.» (Kafka 1990b: 752) «Dirty and pure, a characteristic of people who think intensely. Scratches in his beard, blows his nose through his fingers, reaches into the food with his fingers – but when he leaves the hand resting on the table for a little while you see the whiteness of his skin, a whiteness such as one thinks having seen before only in the representations of childhood. Back then however the parents too were pure.»

which allows the world to be perceived as the elsewhere of the body? A hand that binds, a hand that relates, historiating the future in the past of the subject. That hand is in this sense a very common and unique hand: the motherly hand leaving a mark, a sign on the *infans*. An origin which the writing to come shall not cease to confront itself with.

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

Von wo aus also ich es auch ansehe, immer wieder zeigt sich und dabei bleibe ich, daß, wenn ich mit der Hand auch nur ganz leicht diese kleine Sache verdeckt halte, ich noch sehr lange, ungestört von der Welt, mein bisheriges Leben ruhig werde fortsetzen dürfen, trotz allen Tobens der Frau. (1996: 333)⁴⁵

The gesture that closes *Eine kleine Frau* encloses not only the text, but metonymically speaking, the writing process as a movement of covering and simultaneously of uncovering. The hand embodies the twofold role of “writing hand” and “written hand,” articulating a *bluffing* (cfr. Maletta 2015: 147-174, here 151)⁴⁶, i.e., a continuous dislocation of the “kernel,” around which writing revolves. It is a hand that, to borrow Green’s words in *La déliaison*, «[...] efface au fur et à mesure qu’elle trace»—«[it] deletes the very lines it forms as it moves along» (Green 1992: 36; Green 1997: 353). But we would be mistaken to think that this bluffing does not represent anything other than the malevolent nature of a writing whose purpose is solely of deceiving the reader. This “bluff,” in a broader sense, is rather signal of the interlocking of negative hallucination and work of writing. The notion of negative hallucination precedes the birth of psychoanalysis and can be traced back to the prime time of hypnotism and to the demonstrations of Charcot and Bernheim at the Hôpital de la Salpêtrière (Green 1993: 223-224; Green 1999b: 161). The term appears in Freud as early as 1890 in an article called *Psychische Behandlung* (1890) and is presented by establishing a link between hallucination and negation. For Freud, it is not a matter of a simple lack in the perceptive field. Negative hallucination is rather described as a psychic mechanism that constitutes the counterpart to hallucination, and can be induced, unbeknownst to the subject, by an external force as

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

46 To *bluff*, from the Dutch *bluffen* «to brag, boast,» or *verbluffen* «to baffle, mislead» means «to deceive (opponents), especially by betting heavily and with a confident air on a *worthless hand* to make them “fold”» (Harper, m. e.).

well as an internal one. Green summarises the difference between positive hallucination and negative hallucination as follows: «à l'en-plus de l'hallucination positive ("perception sans objet") correspondrait l'en-moins de l'hallucination négative ("non perception d'un objet")» (Green 1993: 223-224).⁴⁷

In his work, Green extends and redefines the importance of this neglected psychic mechanism, turning it into a cornerstone of the theoretical constellation of the Negative (Green 2005: 221). What is important to highlight here is the role of negative hallucination in *Eine kleine Frau* and its explanatory potential in the light of the meta-representational turn that this text undertakes. Indeed, negative hallucination may help us further define what we called the "blankness" of the text, which constitutes the ever-absent kernel of the vicissitudes of creation: the very "non-object" of this «sublimated text.»

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

[...] Ce que l'on tente d'évacuer par cette écriture [du texte sublimé], c'est la relation au signifié, au profit du seul signifiant. L'écriture pure, délivrée du signifié, libérée de la représentation, a rompu ses amarres avec l'objet, elle est son propre objet. *Par une comparaison qui, comme toutes les comparaisons, est imparfaite, nous dirons que la réalisation hallucinatoire du désir qui fait apparaître l'objet absent a cédé le pas à l'hallucination négative.* Il s'agit non seulement de tuer dans l'œuf la représentation de l'objet, mais aussi celui pour qui un objet existe comme objet de désir. Le seul désir est le désir d'écrire, sans objet. (Green 1992: 36, m. e.)⁴⁸

Imperfect as it may be, this comparison is quite fruitful for the purpose of our investigation and deserves to be elucidated before moving forward. Green defines negative hallucination as «the non-perception of an object or of a perceptible psychical phenomenon.» It is, in other words, «a phenomenon involving the erasure of what should be perceived.» (Green 2005: 218) In the context of *Eine kleine Frau*, negative hallucination allows to read Kafka's writing as a means of articulation *and* erasure, at the same time, of a non-object, an object which is blank. As writing unfolds on the page, the object of writing is subjected to an erasure for which the very writing is responsible. If we consider literary style

47 Green 1999b: 161-162: «In positive hallucination ("perception without an object") there is something in excess [...] which corresponds to what is lacking [...] in negative hallucination ("non perception of an object").»

48 Green 1997: 353-354: «[...] what one is trying to evacuate through this type of writing [sublimated text] is the relation to the signified for the sole benefit of the signifier. The pure script, unfettered by the signified, set free from representation, has severed its moorings to the object; it has become its own object. *To use a comparison which, like most comparisons, is imperfect, we propose that the hallucinatory fulfilment of desire which conjures up the absent object has yielded to a negative hallucination.* The purpose is not only to kill representation in the egg, but also him for whom an object exists as object of desire. The only desire left is the desire to write, without object.»

as a means to make possible the creation of a counterfactual world, allowing its aesthetical “resensorialisation” and “perception” through the act of reading (hence Green’s aforementioned reference to the hallucinatory fulfilment of desire), negative hallucination operates in Kafka’s writing in a double sense. First, as a device for the perception of an absence, which, nonetheless, cannot be made present or conjured up. Such absence remains, literally, a blank hole in the “perceptive field” of the text. In this sense, negative hallucination functions as a necessary limit of the perceptive field that writing creates. Concurrently, however, in relationship with the stylistic dimension of the text, negative hallucination allows a form of representation, in spite of all, creating the framing structure for the impression of an erasure—as representation of the absence of representation.

The question that concerns us is, more specifically, what this absence may be. In order to attempt an answer this question, we have to push a little farther the image of the writing hand at the end of the text. Metonymically speaking, the writing hand of *Eine kleine Frau* is and is not the writing hand of the author. To be more precise, it is the fingerprint the author leaves through language as his own unique stylistic mark. Such fingerprint is indeed the representation of an erasure, of a diffraction which invests the writing subject (Green 2004a: 98). The motion of this writing hand tells the story of the effacement of a writing hand as a metonym of the subject of writing. If a form of subjectivity may survive in the text, it is surely not only that of the author, for the author, in its corporality, transforms into a new body: the written trace on the page. A remnant of the subject survives as that otherness which, reciprocally, writes itself and the subject: an otherness—an *es*, we may say—which inscribes itself as *a* subject.

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

We meet here, once more, the *incréable*: the blank space *in* and *of* the text, which writing does not cease to represent as the “uncreatable” of the work. Writing is what may get us closer (always in the sense of an *as if*) to an origin

insofar as it covers up and obliterates *the* origin. Subjectivation, i.e., the fact of *being separated from an object*, as well as literary creation, are inconceivable without this very rupture, which the writer will continuously revisit and delineate. The *incréable*, that unreachable «kernel of the relationship with the body of the mother,» is what the subject is now called upon to represent «otherwise, through the work of writing» (Green 1992: 321). Sublimation thus conveys the traces of that first, inaccessible wound of the body, reactivating it in the repetition of writing, and transforming it in a new framing structure.

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

May 1922 – First Months of 1924. *Ein Hungerkünstler*

Veiller sur le sens absent.

Maurice Blanchot (1980: 72)⁴⁹

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

Georg Büchner (2012: 201)⁵⁰

To Write the Omission

«Vorgestern, H.-K.», reads a page from Kafka’s *Tagebücher* dated May 25th, 1922 (1990b: 922). This laconic journal entry is widely regarded as marking on May 23rd (the «day before yesterday») the composition of one of the masterpieces of Kafka’s late creative season (Kafka 1996 Apparataband: 332. Alike *Erstes Leid, Ein Hungerkünstler* (1996: 333-349) was penned in a hiatus during the writing process of the unfinished novel *Das Schloss*, and first appeared on the *Neue Rundschau* in the October issue of 1922.

However, as Pasley remarks, Kafka would return to *Ein Hungerkünstler* after completing *Eine kleine Frau*—that is, around the beginning of 1924—supposedly with the intention of expanding, perhaps even of restructuring the text printed in the *Neue Rundschau* before sending the work to the *Die Schmiede Verlag*

49 «To keep watch over an absent sense.»

50 The quote, from *Leonce und Lena*, can be translated as: «Everything begins in retrospect» or «a posteriori All begins.»

(Pasley 1966: 102-113, here 104 ff.).⁵¹ Eventually, the author would reject the additions he introduced. Kafka's alterations, corresponding to almost «a third of the whole» (Pasley 1966: 104, ff.), featured two sections: one describing the exchange between the hunger artist and a spectator—*Besucher* in the original text (Kafka 1996 Apparatband 441-442)—and a much longer passage in which the *Hungerkünstler* receives the uncanny visit of a *Menschenfresser*, or man-eater (1992: 646-649).

Had Kafka resolved to leave these additions, today we would be reading a different text. Of the two sections that he retrospectively attempted to integrate in the work and then discarded, the episode of the *Menschenfresser* has no doubt most drawn scholarly attention. It has been remarked that specifically the presence of the “counter-figure” of the *Menschenfresser* would have damaged the consistency of the prose and «pushed it over the border into the grotesque» (Pasley 1966: 103-104). The two passages can nonetheless be compared in that they both portray the encounter of the hunger artist with antagonistic figures of some sort. On the one hand, the *Besucher*, who questions the integrity and flawlessness of his hunger (Kafka 1996: 442); on the other hand, the man-eater, who challenges the hunger artist with his vitality and «childlike voracity» (Cfr. Maletta 2015: 150-151).⁵² We can suppose that the integration of these new sections, in particular that of the *Menschenfresser*, would have clipped the wings of a representational economy that seems to accept no reduction to any sort of game of opposites. In this sense, the *Menschenfresser* would represent perhaps that “bone of writing” (cfr. Maletta 2013: 160-161) that necessarily has to remain an «absent reference,» (Green 1992: 51) exiled from the text, unseizable, irreconcilable, “undevourable” in order for the text to be such. We shall return to this hypothesis. For the moment, we can say that, by refraining from including such textual additions, Kafka seems to impress in the work the mark of an omission: a form of “hunger” which acquires a meta-representational role in that it alludes, again, to an absent core of the creative process in which the *incréable* dwells insofar as it remains unreachable—indeed the very object of an interminable wake.

Furthermore, it is meaningful that Kafka has retrospectively attempted to revisit his work after the first print on the *Neue Rundschau*⁵³—something that, if I am not mistaken, never occurs, at least not to such an extent, except for the

51 For the German translation of this text see “*Die Schrift ist unveränderlich...*” (Pasley 1995: 21-34).

52 Interestingly, Kafka does not use here the term anthropophagus, nor cannibal; with *Menschenfresser* he rather seems to prefer a linguistic register more proper to child stories and fairy tales.

53 Shortly thereafter, the text was published in the daily paper *Prager Presse* (Nr. 279, Oct. 11, 1922); part of it also appeared after a few weeks on the Sunday paper of the *New Yorker Volkszeitung*, (Nr. 45, Nov. 5, 1922), on *Vorwärts. Wochenblatt der New Yorker Volkszeitung* (Nov. 11, 1922) and again on *Vorbote. Unabhängiges Organ für die Interessen des Proletariats* (Nr. 45, Nov 15, 1922).

relevant case of *Josefine, die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse*. This suggests the retrospective reactivation of a creative process of re-writing that concerns not only the specific piece, but the wider economy and organization of the collection. Although the last version of the text apparently retains no trace of the revisions that the author attempted in the early months of 1924, we have reason to believe that the piece had undergone a deep transformation in Kafka's mind, acquiring a new relevance that he probably did not perceive, or at least not immediately, after finishing the very first draft.⁵⁴

It is therefore between the two poles of an unsaturable hunger for and through writing (Blanchot's «to keep watch over an absent sense» in the exer-gue) and of the rhythmic of the *Nachträglichkeit* (Büchner) that the subject of the present section unfolds. These two poles circumscribe an “other” scene of a writing which does not cease to put into words a deferred form of signification. In representational terms, I understand this “other” scene as the unconscious counterpart of Kafka's conscious resolution of omitting the two aforementioned passages in favour of a textual economy of subtraction. Whereas the latter (i.e., the “conscious scene” of this work) has been the subject of a considerable number of studies, the former has hardly been taken into consideration by the research.

Before tackling this “other” scene of writing, which sheds light on the unconscious of the text (Green 1992: 57-58), I will advance two preliminary remarks. First, what I call here the “other,” or unconscious scene of writing, does not entertain with the “conscious” scene a relationship of mere opposition. As Green maintains, «L'inconscient n'est [...] pas seulement l'opposé du conscient, mais ce qui en est séparé – par le refoulement.» «The unconscious is not only the opposite of consciousness but that which is separated from it by repression.» (Green 1993: 67; Green 1999b: 43) Although we shall not refer explicitly and in detail to repression *per se*, we ought to bear in mind that the *Urverdrängung* (i.e., primal repression), while laying the foundation of the unconscious (building the matrix and the magnetic pole of secondary repression [*Verdrängung*]) is also intimately involved in the creative process in reason of its relationship with the *incrèable*—and therefore with the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* (Green 1992: 321). The *Urverdrängung* notably covers the “original” core of repressed material—indeed, that irremediably lost, inaccessible original scene—linked to the loss of the corporeal relationship with the maternal object through the rupture operated by the father. As we know, there is something that the *caesura* of the father could not entirely sever: the narcissistic movement of the relationship with the

54 Let us also keep in mind that, at this point in his life, Kafka had yet to write what will actually be his last work, (*Josefine, die Sängerin*) as also indicated by an early version of the contract drafted by ‘Die Schmiede’ dated March 7, 1924, in which only three texts are mentioned with slightly different titles (Kafka 1996 Apparataband: 391, 462).

body of the mother (322). Thus the *Urvedrängung* constitutes the blank spot of a severed link to a primal object, towards which the subject will subsequently funnel the affective investment at the basis of the creative process. From this point of view, the question of repression allows us to consider the work of the Negative not quite in its “oppositional” aspect, but rather as expression of a radically «different mode of being» (Green 1993: 58; Green 1999b: 36)—that of the unconscious—which ceases to be identifiable as such by the parameters of consciousness. The conscious does not and cannot “fore-see” [*deviner*] the unconscious (1993: 64; 1999b: 41).

To this we must add that such “scenes” are not linked by a chronological or developmental relationship of progressive, linear continuity. In other words, the one is *not* the consequence or the cause of the other, and *vice versa*. Their relationship ought rather to be envisaged from the angle of that deferred structuring of sense which is the product of the «temporal generative potentiality» proper of the *Nachträglichkeit* (Green 2004b: 22; Green 2000a: 11-39). Their relationship revolves around a continuous rearrangement of their articulation in a frame that the subject constructs as much as it is constructed by it. That represents the kernel of a diachronic heterogeneity, as Green calls it, which is constantly open to resignification, thus essentially questioning the linearity of the chain past-present-future—such is the case of the “future in the past”. The inscriptions of these “scenes” are therefore not inert and crystallised, nor fixed in time or ultimately bonded to their “chronologic” value. They are instead the material of a work of construction that springs from a discontinuity (i.e., a negation of continuity): a work which modifies the perception of time as relationship between experience and signification, exposing them to a transformation of their roles, the one informing and affecting the inscriptions of the other. (Green 2004b: 23)

Neumann’s *Hungerkünstler und Menschenfresser*: A Critical Reading

Along with *Josefine, die Sängerin, Ein Hungerkünstler* has been the focus of privileged scholarly attention, as shown by the considerable number of contributions, corresponding to just as many interpretative approaches, readings, and analyses. A notoriously long-established trend of research has addressed in *Ein Hungerkünstler* motives such as the ambiguous relationship between artist and public,⁵⁵ or between the figure of the Impresario and the hunger artist. Also the questions of truth and deception of the artistic endeavour, sanctity and impurity, ascetism and consumption represent topics of extensive investigation (see Neumann, 2013, 248-286). While contributions such as Bauer-Wabnegg’s (1986: 166-176) traced the possible sources behind the historical phenomenon

55 This trend consolidated since the late fifties with works such as Benno von Wiese (1956: 325-342). For an overview of the reception of Kafka’s *Ein Hungerkünstler* see Engel und Aurochs 2010: 322-323, 328.

of fasting in the context of *variété*, freakshows, and circuses at the beginning of last century, scholars like Efraim Sicher (2004: 3-15) enriched the path opened by Jack Riemer (1961: 16-20), exploring *Ein Hungerkünstler* within the specificity of a «Jewish hermeneutics,» and considering its kinship with the storytelling of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav (Robbins 1986: 265–84; Oron 1987: 113–121; Kamenetz 2010). In the last decades, moreover, consistently with the new intellectual, cultural, and socio-political challenges of the third millennium new studies have expanded the interpretative horizon, reading Kafka's poetics in the context of anthropocene and in ecocritical perspectives (Wilke and Wilke-Gray 2017: 147-164), or finding in it a conceptual source to interrogate the transformations of the role of literature in the humanities (Machosky 2005: 288-305).⁵⁶

Gerhard Neumann's essay *Hungerkünstler und Menschenfresser* surely represents a turning point in the research.⁵⁷ What is here of particular interest for my investigation is Neumann's exploration of the category of «refusab» [*Verweigerung*], i.e., the hunger artist's «refusal to eat» [*Essensverweigerung*]. Neumann reads it as a «desperate attempt to affirm the peculiarity [*Eigentümlichkeit*] of the subject against the double strategies of family's upbringing (which is indeed an upbringing «for life») through the rules of eating» (2013: 248-286, here 254). Neumann jointly reflects on the relationship between the «ritualisation of the act of eating» (264) as an «act of foundation of the law» (266)—not only in a religious sense, but more broadly in terms of parental authority and socio-cultural conventions—and the textual semiotic system that *Ein Hungerkünstler* subverts.

For Neumann, Kafka's text «enthrones» for the first time in the history of literature the category of refusal, elevating it to an aesthetic principle which is at once anti-symbolic and anti-oedipal (270-273). He claims that what the hunger artist strives to create through his «*Kunstakt*» is indeed a «paradoxical construction» of an «absolute sign» [*absolutes Zeichnen*], which reveals an «apocryphal counter-aesthetic.» In contrast to the «transfigurational» principle [*Verklärung*] of the dominating Christian and Western culture (ibid.), the «poetology» of refusal in *Ein Hungerkünstler* attempts to «establish a reversed history

56 While these different interpretative perspectives do not exclude each other, their variety rather speaks for the richness of a text that, ironically enough, do not lend itself to any definitive «interpretative performance.» Resistance to the «performance» from the hunger artist and resistance to «interpretative performance» from the text go hand in hand in Kafka's *Ein Hungerkünstler*, as much as in *Josefine, die Sängerin*. Interpretation becomes itself a theme of Kafka's writing, as Sicher has rightfully observed (2004: 3). Again, with «performance» I refer here not only to the artistic performance of the hunger artist, but foremost to the etymological sense of «accomplishment,» «perfection,» «closure of the circle.» Kafka's creatures do not reflect any integral image in the mirror of the West. And in this sense, perhaps, many of his characters are somehow akin to some biblical figures of the Old Testament, inasmuch as they give somehow new life to the comic side of that «sacrifice» which is interpretation itself.

57 Auerochs even considers it as «one of the few definitive achievements of Kafka scholarship» (Engel und Auerochs 2010: 323).

of salvation» [«*eine umgekehrte Heilsgeschichte*»] as «return of the sign to the body after their separation through the original sin, as if such original sin had never happened» (271). Paraphrasing Neumann's thesis, we might say that in a world marked by humanity's disobedience to God's prohibition of feeding on the tree of knowledge, the path towards redemption begins with the refusal to eat. This regressive dynamic of the «*Kunstakt*» is paradoxical, argues Neumann, in that the «enactment» [«*Inszenierung*»] of an «absolute sign» would inevitably lead also to the «enactment» of an absence of language, i.e., to the absence of sign. And yet, for Neumann, Kafka's achievement consists precisely in carrying out such *Inszenierung* «in the language» and «with the language» (267). Thus, by showing through writing «the process of the self-dissolution of the sign,» Kafka's text ultimately «represents the irrepresentable,» or following the semantics of the *Inszenierung* evoked by Neumann, «stages what cannot be staged» [«*das Nichtdarstellbare darstellen*»] (ibid.).

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

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

It is almost as if the hunger artist transforms in Neumann's pen into a philosophical subject: «conscient, unified, voluntary.» A subject «who knows what he says, does what he knows, and knows what he does,» to say it with Meschonnic (2001: 13). In Neumann's terms: «“Wenn jede Speise“ – *sagt sich der Hungerkünstler* – „schon das Stigma des Sündenfalls trägt, ist der Verzicht auf sie das Paradies.“» (2013: 267, m. e.) «“If every food” – *says to himself the hunger artist* – “carries already the stigma of the Fall, the renunciation to it is the Paradise.”»

Turned into a monadic “performer,” in which corporality and sign allegedly identify, Kafka’s character loses its poetic opacity for the sake of an intellectual and culturally disruptive “program” that somehow echoes the Hegelian idea of a “fulfilment of History”—in this case towards a prelapsarian state. Despite Neumann’s attempt to free the hunger artist from the constraints of Western culture, the “hero” that we are confronted with appears instead to be taking his place among the heirs and advocates of the West.

To that extent, there is indeed another cogent point of criticism of particular interest, concerning what Neumann calls the «anti-oedipal» and «anti-symbolic» (2013: 285) status of the «pure negativity» that the hunger artist expresses with his «*Kunstakt*.» Even though it is not my purpose to venture in a study of the psychology of the main character of *Ein Hungerkünstler*, or in an evaluation of educational practices through food and upbringing,⁵⁸ we cannot but be struck by a problematic contradiction ingrained in Neumann’s thesis. As Green reminds us, one of the most remarkable achievements of the Oedipus complex consists in the successful transformation of *hostility* into *identification* (Green 2005: 193). Now if we consequently follow Neumann’s argument, that is, if we accept to regard the «artistic enactment» of the hunger artist as an attempt to establish a fatherless, «anti-oedipal,» «anti-symbolic,» «counter-cultural» aesthetics (2013: 285), we also must acknowledge the possibility that the hunger artist can indeed successfully convert his hostility in a new form of order, no matter how supposedly «counter-cultural,» «counter-mythical,» «anti-oedipal» or «anti-symbolic» it may be. In other words, through his «*Kunstakt*,» the hunger artist ultimately and unavoidably identifies, thus I read Neumann’s interpretation, with the very metonymical target of his refusal. The attempt of the hunger artist does not liberate him from the cultural and familial order he refuses with his «*Essensverweigerung*.» Furthermore, his «foundational act of an a-cultural aesthetic» [«*Begründung einer akulturellen Ästhetik*»] does not escape the orbit of the “dominant” semiotic, cultural order either. Rather, it recreates it in a disguised fashion, in which the Oedipus survives as a vestige, a potential presence of the father, transformed in the hunger artist’s own artistic gesture. Caught in the crossfire of his very artistic «act of foundation,» rooted in the refusal of the cultural system through nourishment, the hunger artist incarnates a new fatherly figure: no more a saturnine one who devours his sons, but rather a fatherless, sonless father, whose “no” remains, however, sterile and ineffective in rejecting the «dominant culture.» Totality does not tolerate any heir.

Neumann’s underestimation of the complexity of the oedipal frame and structure is a prominent limit of his interpretation.⁵⁹ The main issue at stake

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

59 Neumann also seems to overlook the crucial role that the oedipal complex plays in the process of subjectivation. See Green 1992: 321-322.

here remains nonetheless that, from the specificity of a psychoanalytic standpoint, the concept of *Verweigerung* constitutes an intentional, voluntary form of refusal which is still unavoidably anchored in a psychology of consciousness. In other words, the concept of *Verweigerung* does not allow any “access” to that liminal concept which is the drive (Green 1993: 50; Green 1999b: 30),⁶⁰ and therefore to the drive process [*le pulsionnel*] that, alongside with the compulsion to repeat, represents a paramount reference underlying the work of sublimation and of the Negative (Green 1993: 58 ff.; Green 1999b: 36 ff.).

That brings us to an important distinction worth elucidating before moving forward. I allude to Neumann’s claim about Freud’s 1907 essay *Der Dichter und das Phantasieren* (1948, vol. 7: 213-223). For Neumann, also psychoanalysis—the arguments of which, he argues, are founded «under every circumstance on the basis of the desires [*Wünsche*] of the body»—would basically affirm the «transfigurative function» [*«verklärende Funktion»*] of «traditional» aesthetics (2013: 271 fn. 33). Yet, *Phantasieren* is not artistic creation *per se*—and we can rest assured that Freud did not dispose of the issue so naively. Most importantly, we should bear in mind that whereas the *Verklärung* involves the transfiguration of the body into the divine glory and the celestial, sublimation—etymologically, *the highest reachable point before the limits of the heavens*—operates in a different way. On the one hand, sublimation represents a possible vicissitude of the sexual drive (and *not* of desire) «onto a non-sexual aim and onto objects of high social value» (Green 1993: 301; Green 1999b: 218). On the other hand, as Green has shown by reflecting upon Freud’s theoretical turn of the year 1920 (Green 1993: 296-354; 1999b: 215-256), «sublimation is the adverse counterpart of Eros, which far from serving its aims [of Eros], sides with those forces which are antagonistic to its purposes»—i.e., the death drive (Green 1993: 302; 1999b: 219)

D’une part la sublimation apparaît comme un destin de la pulsion sexuelle, une forme épurée qui a sa place parmi d’autres destins possibles mais qui reste dans le patrimoine d’Eros, de l’autre, elle en est la contrepartie adverse qui, loin de servir ses buts, se range du côté des forces qui lui sont antagonistes. (Green 1993: 302)⁶¹

60 It is important to underscore that I am not referring here to the drive *per se*—since the drive is *per se* unknowable—but rather to Freud’s cardinal definition exposed in *Trieb und Triebchicksale* (Freud 1948, vol. 10: 214), according to which the drive is a «liminal concept between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body.» See also Green’s commentary on such definition (1996: 839 ff.).

61 Green 1999b: 219. The whole passage reads: «On the one hand sublimation appears to be a vicissitude of the sexual drive, a purified form which has its place among other possible vicissitudes but which remains within the patrimony of Eros, and, on the other, sublimation is the adverse counterpart of Eros which, far from serving its aims, sides with those forces which are antagonistic to its purposes.»

We can now see why our approach to *Ein Hungerkünstler* cannot be confined to a dialectic or a game of mutually excluding oppositions, but rather confronts us with the paradoxical dimension at the heart of the psyche (Green 1993: 326; 1999b: 236). What is at stake in sublimation is not limited to a form representation in spite of a destructive, conflictual tension entailed in creativity,⁶² nor to the cancellation or reparation of destructivity through the work of writing. One of the challenges of sublimation is to make *something fruitful* of that ineliminable destructiveness—those «obscure forces,» as Kafka calls them (1998: 384)—that haunts the creative process. The question, therefore, is how to construct through destructivity, how to transform «death into absence.» (Green 1990: 100) «Das Schreiben ist ein süßer wunderbarer Lohn, aber wofür?» wonders Kafka in a letter to Max Brod dated July 5, 1922, written just few weeks after finishing the first draft of *Ein Hungerkünstler*:

In der Nacht war es mir mit der Deutlichkeit kindlichen Anschauungsunterrichtes klar, daß es der Lohn für Teufelsdienst ist. Dieses Hinabgehen zu den dunklen Mächten, diese Entfesselung von Natur aus gebundener Geister, fragwürdige Umarmungen und was alles noch unten vor sich gehen mag, von dem man oben nichts mehr weiß, wenn man im Sonnenlicht Geschichten schreibt. Vielleicht gibt es auch anderes Schreiben, ich kenne nur dieses: in der Nacht, wenn mich die Angst nicht schlafen läßt, kenne ich nur dieses. [...] Die Definition des Schriftstellers, eines solches Schriftstellers, und die Erklärung seiner Wirkung, wenn es eine Wirkung überhaupt gibt: Er ist der Sündenbock der Menschheit, er erlaubt den Menschen, eine Sünde schuldlos zu genießen, fast schuldlos. (Kafka 1998: 384, 386)⁶³

62 We may also add that the conflictual dimension that Neumann detects in *Ein Hungerkünstler*—between the “new” established by the hunger artist and the «rejected dominant culture»—has long been recognised in psychoanalysis as a constitutive element of creation. See Anzieu’s “Les traces du corps dans l’écriture” (1977: 172-187), as well as Green’s *La réserve de l’incroyable* (1992: 317-318).

63 «Writing is a sweet and wonderful reward, but for what? In the night it became clear to me, as clear as a child’s lesson book, that it is the reward for serving the devil. This descent to the dark powers, this unshackling of spirits bound by nature, these dubious embraces and whatever else may take place in the nether parts which the higher parts no longer know, when one writes one’s stories in the sunshine. Perhaps there are other forms of writing, but I know only this kind; at night, when fear keeps me from sleeping, I know only this kind. [...] The definition of writer, of such a writer, and the explanation of his effect, if there is any effect at all: he is the scapegoat of humanity, he allows humanity to innocently enjoy sin, almost innocently.» In this regard, let us read what Green writes with regards to sublimation (1993: 328): «La sublimation – comme tous les effets de la civilisation – a une action atrophiante vis-à-vis de la sexualité. Le sacrifice qu’elle réclame est exorbitant. Est-il sans contrepartie? Il semble que l’on néglige un peu trop le plaisir tiré des activités sublimées pour ne considérer que le renoncement qui en est le prix. [...] Au vrai, la sublimation ne garantit rien, ne protège de rien. Elle permet seulement de jouir “autrement” dans un partage commun d’émotions, créant un espace particulier de relations “civilisées,” mais qui n’ont aucun pouvoir de supprimer d’autres modalités à l’origine de satisfactions beaucoup plus brutes.» Green 1999b: 238-239: «Sublimation—like all effects of civilisation—has an atrophying effect on sexuality.

To «capture death in life,» in the words of Green (1993: 317; 1999b: 230). That is, to transform destructivity to such an extent that it can acquire not quite a *sense*, but above all a role, a place in the psychic economy by coexisting “otherwise,” enmeshed into a structure, a frame that the very work creates. For the sake of clarification, and to avoid misunderstandings often occurring as to the question of the death drive, we must add that such destructiveness is not simply what we may refer to as violent, damaging, or hurtful, or at least not in the first place. It is the process of unbinding [*déliaison*] that we have in mind here, with Freud and Green, that is the counteracting role of a de-structuring element *within* the dynamics of representation.

Read as such, the process of *sub-limation* allows to underscore once more a textual economy of the *limit* operating unconsciously in writing—what Kafka calls «Ansturm gegen die Grenze» (Kafka 1990b: 878). In our analysis of *Eine kleine Frau*, we referred to the notion of negative hallucination as «representation of the absence of representation,» and considered it in relationship with style. In the case of *Ein Hungerkünstler*, we can push this reading even further by exploring how the text *embodies* an absence, a lost object: this embodiment is not representational *per se*, but rather creates a *possibility* for it to re-emerge in the text as an ineliminable, haunting, inaccessible corporeal remnant. In other words, *Ein Hungerkünstler* will show us once more the bivalent soul of sublimation animating Kafka’s writing. As a vicissitude of the sexual drive towards civilization and culture, sublimation preserves traces of the transformation of the drive, of its sexual, corporeal source. The dimension of the limit is as such ineliminable from sublimation, for sublimation, in a way, does not cease to re-inscribe a trace of the drive—a remnant of the body—otherwise, inexhaustibly. But at the same time sublimation entails a desexualizing element which is expression of the death drive operating within the subject against the limits holding the subject together. A limit, within the limit.

Hunger, Affect, and the Deferred Reserve of Representation

These remarks on the drive process and sublimation enable us to highlight a polysemy inscribed in the *Hunger* of the hunger artist, and to grasp the specific way in which the Negative is here at work. The hunger of the *Hungerkünstler* can be read as a sounding board of a corporeal trace which keeps eluding the structure of language, for such a trace does not accept to be “bounded” to

The sacrifice it demands is exorbitant. Are there any compensations? It would seem that not enough consideration is given to the pleasure derived from sublimated activities with too much emphasis being placed on the renunciation which is the price to be paid. [...] In truth, sublimation guarantees nothing, protects one against nothing. It simply permits one to find satisfaction “differently” in a common sharing of emotions, creating a special realm of “civilised” relations but which have no power to suppress other forms of much cruder satisfaction.»

the linearity and to the «homogenisation» of the linguistic components (cfr. Kohon and Perelberg 2017: 119 ff.). «Versuche, jemandem die Hungerkunst zu erklären!—we read in *Ein Hungerkünstler*—Wer es nicht *fühlt*, dem kann man es nicht *begreiflich* machen» (Kafka 1996: 347, m. e.). «Try to explain to someone the art of hungering! Who doesn't *feel* it simply cannot grasp it.» The verb *fühlen* is here pivotal: such “feeling” ought to be understood in the context of the writing process as that which remains of the body, in the body of writing. It is in this sense that *Ein Hungerkünstler* restores the dignity of a corporeal remnant which, through the process of sublimation, survives as an *affective* trace in writing, as an otherness irreducible to language (Green 1999a: 204-228; Green 1973: 279-311).⁶⁴

We take therefore leave from Neumann's *Verweigerung* towards a work of the Negative that cannot be assimilated to the jurisdiction of consciousness (Green 1993: 67; Green 1999b 43), nor to the dimension of language,⁶⁵ for it is marked by the uncancellable heterogeneity of the *incréable*. This heterogeneity stems not only from the conjuncture of elements that the *incréable* puts into play—such as, indeed, affect and primal repression—but also from the very characteristic of the *incréable* of imposing the limit to its accessibility as condition *sine qua non* of subjectivity and creativity (Green 1992: 322).

The function of the Negative is here twofold: the “no” of the work of the Negative organises and structures an absence that keeps calling for a form of signification; but, in turn, it represents the very process of deferring the signification of that trace. We can see here again in what terms the death drive operates in writing: as an open possibility of representation that is constantly deferred. As such, the work of the Negative unfolds the space of a «wake on an absent sense» (Blanchot 1980: 72), while embodying the continuous withdrawal characteristic of the *incréable*, in a continuous reconfiguration of the limit.

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

64 With regards to the book *Ein Hungerkünstler*, Neumann speaks of a «metamorphosis of the expiring body in literary writing» (Neumann 2013: 115).

65 We may in this sense refer to Freud's definition of *Verneinung* (1948, vol. 14: 12), according to which negation is a way «of taking cognizance of what is repressed, indeed it is already a lifting of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed,» in which a separation between «intellectual function» and «affective process» occurs: «Die Verneinung ist eine Art, das Verdrängte zur Kenntnis zu nehmen, eigentlich schon eine Aufhebung der Verdrängung, aber freilich keine Annahme des Verdrängten. Man sieht, wie sich hier die intellektuelle Funktion vom affektiven Vorgang scheidet. Mit Hilfe der Verneinung wird nur die eine Folge des Verdrängungsvorganges rückgängig gemacht, daß dessen Vorstellungsinhalt nicht zum Bewußtsein gelangt. Es resultiert daraus eine Art von intellektueller Annahme des Verdrängten bei Fortbestand des Wesentlichen an der Verdrängung.»

To answer these questions, we first must reflect on what sort of hunger are we dealing with here. It is significant that, unlike *Forschungen eines Hundes* (Kafka 1992: 466-467), the term «fasting» [v. fasten] does not appear in *Ein Hungerkünstler*. It seems quite clear that the *Hunger* of the hunger artist is something radically different from a “therapeutic” fasting as much as from a suicidal or self-destructive form of starvation. Hunger, unlike fasting, cannot be prescribed, nor imposed or relieved.⁶⁶ While being something more radical, more fundamentally *organic* and constitutive of the structure of subjectivity, its reverberations take us far away, in the distance: from the drive, we might say, towards sublimation.

Pasley has observed in *Asceticism and Cannibalism* how Kafka’s existence has been characterised by «an emotional and spiritual hunger which remained always unsatisfied, [...] a compelling need for some sustenance that the world seemed unable to provide» (1966: 102). A hunger which, continues Pasley, animates also many Kafka’s characters in their search for another, unknown form of nourishment that, however, remains the «absent object of a longing» (ibid.). Pasley’s remark is not only valid as far as Kafka’s life and fictional characters are concerned: it can be extended to his own writing, to his representational strategies. Indeed, *Ein Hungerkünstler* seems to go beyond simply telling the unfortunate and pathetic story of a starving artist in decline. On a far deeper level, it tells of the vicissitudes of a hunger for writing, by means of writing.

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

In mir kann ganz gut eine Konzentration auf das Schreiben hin erkannt werden. Als es in meinem Organismus klar geworden war, daß das Schreiben die ergiebigste Richtung meines Wesens sei, drängte sich alles hin und ließ alle Fähigkeiten leer stehn, die sich auf die Freuden des Geschlechtes, des Essens, des Trinkens, des philosophischen Nachdenkens der Musik zu allererst richteten. Ich magerte nach allen diesen Richtungen ab. Das war notwendig, weil meine Kräfte in ihrer Gesamtheit so gering waren, daß sie nur gesammelt dem Zweck des Schreibens halbwegs dienen konnten. Ich habe diesen Zweck natürlich nicht selbständig und bewußt gefunden, er fand sich selbst [...]. (Kafka 1990b: 341)⁶⁷

66 Machosky (2005: 290) writes: «Fasting is an intentional act, a grasping. One *hungers* without intent, or despite intent. One hungers for no one, for no purpose. One fasts in face of desire; one hungers in the face of absence. Fasts are broken; hunger is only momentarily relieved – that is the nature of hunger, it always threatens to return. Fasts are for show. When the hunger artist breaks his fast – is forced to break his fast – he becomes a representation of himself. He comes the image captured in the impressario’s [*sic*] photographs, in which appears to be all that he is not. The dream of the hunger artist is to hunger continuously, to leave the realm of representation entirely, to be unrepresentable.»

67 «In me it’s easily possible to recognise a concentration towards writing. As it became clear in my organism that writing was the most fruitful direction of my being, everything rushed

A «concentration towards writing,» so Kafka names that intensity, that discipline channelling all the strength of body and psyche of the writing subject. Such form of corporeal election—«Als es in meinem Organismus klar geworden war»—, such hunger for writing comes, however, with a high, necessary price, i.e., that «*atrophying effects*» (Green 1993: 328; Green 1999b: 238, m. e.) through which those «faculties» directed to the «joys of sexuality, of eating, of drinking, of philosophical reflection, of the music» are «left vacant,» in a certain sense disqualified from the psychic horizon of the subject.

While one may recognise here a “sacrificial” dimension embedded in the work of writing, «torn between the [...] forces of life and death, [...] between objectalisation and disobjectalisation,» (Green 1993: 330; Green 1999b: 240) there is also another important element to keep in mind. Kafka writes: «Ich habe diesen Zweck natürlich nicht *selbständig* und *bewußt* gefunden, *er fand sich selbst.*» (Kafka 1990b: 341, m. e.) The writing subject recognises here, in a way, of being *subjected* not to the text, nor to the work yet to come, but rather to the very process of writing. The process of writing, marking the lines, the limits of the subject—«Ich magerte nach allen diesen Richtungen ab»—, exposes a diffraction within the creative process. A diffraction, which, as we saw in *Eine kleine Frau*, implies the role of an alterity, whose realm is inaccessible to the writing subject, and that is the object of a continuous work of resignification *a posteriori*.

Here we could also attempt to formulate a hypothesis for a possible reason why Kafka decided to discard the episode of the *Menschenfresser* from the final draft of the text. This “character,” perhaps, was not and could not be allowed, in the end, to take the place or a role that was deemed to be left absent, vacant. A role that only the writing process could play. In this respect, we can see how the intertwining of writing and hunger cannot be confined in Kafka to a “stylistic appetite,” i.e., a search for formal perfection, a hunger for the “right words” to say the irrepresentable on the page, or for a satisfaction that can be obtained by means of writing. Hunger and writing are linked by a synecdochical thread: they are both connected in an intimate *corporeal* way to an absence which hunger as much as writing *have to preserve, in its persistence and inaccessibility*. This parallel can be developed even further by saying that both hunger and writing push to the limit the capability of enduring the subtraction of the body from the body, beyond the body, towards an «*Unbegreifliches*» (Kafka 1996: 339), that element that constantly escapes capture. Like the hunger artist, who feels to have no limit in his capability of hungering (339) and who, interrupted in his hunger,

towards it and left empty and vacant any abilities directed to the joy of sex, eating, drinking, philosophical reflection, of music above all. I atrophied in all those directions. That was necessary, since my forces were in their totality so slight that only if gathered could they even halfway serve the purpose of writing. Of course, I didn't find that purpose independently and consciously; it found itself.»

protests against the attempt of carrying him away from his cage, the writer Kafka does not accept to be distracted from writing—to the point of, literally, holding on to the desk with the teeth (Kafka 1998: 386).⁶⁸ No hungering nor writing can be possible without body: the torment, the struggle that the hunger artist and the writer share is that the corporeal limits are also the limits of the possibility of giving form to that blank core of the creative process. The body of writing, and the body of the hunger artist, in a certain sense, embody the *incréable* as the absence of the body, *within*, and *through* the body.

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

Quinze volumes sont nécessaires à Marcel Proust pour retrouver le temps perdu, réveillé par le goût d'une madeleine. Encore faut-il rappeler que ce temps ne se retrouve que pour se perdre définitivement avec ce que le lecteur devine de la mort prochaine de l'écrivain. Je dis bien de l'écrivain et pas de l'auteur. Mort qui survient alors qu'il commence à entrevoir comment il faudrait écrire l'œuvre qu'il poursuit dans cette recherche, pourtant déjà écrite et déjà lue par nous, faisant coïncider son terme avec son début. (Green 2000a: 33)⁶⁹

Pages and pages are necessary to Kafka too, night after night, wake after wake spent at his desk, in order to give form to a hunger for writing and that, through writing, incarnates a movement of excavation towards an object that does not cease to escape, remaining constantly the object of an otherness (Kafka 1990b: 341). Years and years, sleepless night after night are also necessary, in turn, to the hunger artist to give place to an absence that keeps evading his hunger, the endurance of the body notwithstanding, in preparation for an encounter with the plenitude of an “other” form of nourishment that, like the encounter with the “extra-textual” figure of the *Menschenfresser*, never takes place:

«Du hungerst noch immer?» fragte der Aufseher, «wann wirst du denn endlich aufhören?» «Verzeiht mir alle,» flüsterte der Hungerkünstler; nur der Aufseher, der das Ohr ans Gitter hielt, verstand ihn. «Gewiß,» sagte der Aufseher und legte

68 «[...] das Dasein des Schriftstellers ist wirklich vom Schreibtisch abhängig, er darf sich eigentlich, wenn er dem Irrsinn entgehen will, niemals vom Schreibtisch entfernen, mit den Zähnen muß er sich festhalten.» «[...] the being of the writer really depends from the writing desk, if he wants to escape madness, he is actually not allowed, ever, to leave the desk, he must hold on to it with his teeth.»

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

den Finger an die Stirn, um damit den Zustand des Hungerkünstlers dem Personal anzudeuten, «wir verzeihen dir.» «Immerfort wollte ich, daß ihr mein Hungern bewundert,» sagte der Hungerkünstler. «Wir bewundern es auch,» sagte der Aufseher entgegenkommend. «Ihr sollt es aber nicht bewundern,» sagte der Hungerkünstler. «Nun, dann bewundern wir es also nicht,» sagte der Aufseher, «warum sollen wir es denn nicht bewundern?» «Weil ich hungern muß, ich kann nicht anders,» sagte der Hungerkünstler. «Da sieh mal einer,» sagte der Aufseher, «warum kannst du denn nicht anders?» «Weil ich,» sagte der Hungerkünstler, hob das Köpfchen ein wenig und sprach mit wie zum Kuß gespitzten Lippen gerade in das Ohr des Aufsehers hinein, damit nichts verloren ginge, «weil ich nicht die Speise finden konnte, die mir schmeckt. Hätte ich sie gefunden, glaube mir, ich hätte kein Aufsehen gemacht und mich vollgegessen wie du und alle.» Das waren die letzten Worte, aber noch in seinen gebrochenen Augen war die feste, wenn auch nicht mehr stolze Überzeugung, daß er weiterhungre. (Kafka 1996: 348-349)⁷⁰

«I have to hunger; I cannot do otherwise,» the hunger artist whispers lifelessly into the ear of the supervisor who discovers what is left of him, «because I could not find the food that was to my taste. If I had found it, believe me, I would not have caused a stir, and would have eaten my fill, like you and everybody else.» How can we read these words that we encounter at the «last earthly limit» (Kafka 1990b: 878) of his life? The hunger artist here, I would argue, is not quite «confessing» that the “true” nature of his art consists in a form of betrayal, or in an illusion rooted in his compulsion to hunger, as suggested by Peter-André Alt (2008: 650-651). Indeed, no ultimate truth can be drawn from the words of the hunger artist but only, if any, an approximation of the “truth,” an allusion. And neither is he struck by a realization, nor illuminated by a new understanding of the nature of his art. As soon as the hunger artist seems to be able to make sense of his struggle with his body to carry the mark of an absence, it is already too late. Abandoned by the audience and by the staff of the circus in which he hungers until and beyond his last breath, he is outlived by his own hunger [*weiterhungern*], as much as the hunger for writing outlives the text,

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

the work, writing itself. Hunger lasts, endures, survives, in spite of the death of the character, in spite of the closure of the text, even despite the entrance of the magnificent panther, creature which, unlike the hunger artist, «does not miss anything» (Kafka 1996: 349).

This passage of *Ein Hungerkünstler* challenges the idea according to which the hunger artist is «consciously refusing to eat» suggested by Neumann. The hunger artist is here rather spoken and written, without him knowing it, by a hunger whose object cannot be reduced to the immediacy of signification, but remains continuously *en souffrance* in writing, in the broader economy of the text. This extract of *Ein Hungerkünstler* is therefore significant in that it highlights how the *polysemy* of *Hunger* cannot be separated from a form of *polychrony* which impresses on the page the opacity of the subject of writing. Language, as well as the subject, comes always too late, or rather always retroactively, to the *rendez-vous* with the body. Their diffraction, indeed, the diffraction between «event» and «signification of the event» (Green 2004b: 23)⁷¹ unfolds according to the temporality of the *Nachträglichkeit*. *Ein Hungerkünstler* is haunted by a representational element that does not cease to delay its re-presentation. This element is the gap, the limit that the body creates between language and writing: an affective remnant that dwells on the page without ceasing of promising its representation in a deferred dimension.

If thus far my analysis of *Eine kleine Frau* emphasised the paradoxical, unbreakable link between writing and representation, *Ein Hungerkünstler* rather revolves around the relationship between writing and affect. In order to say in more precisely what the affect may be here, it is vital to take into consideration what Green calls the «*beterogeneity of the psychoanalytic signifier*.» By that, Green refers—in close dialogue with Freud and in response to Lacan—, to elements such as bodily states, body language, gestures, silences, acts, which are not reducible to the linguistic signifier.⁷² These elements, which are the «echo of something else» do nonetheless have a crucial role in the analytic settings: in their link with the drive, they form the polyphonic «texture» of that «living discourse» [*discours vivant*], which articulates the relationship between analyst and analysand (Green 1973: 237-245; Green 1999a: 171-177).⁷³ Green writes:

Ce serait évidemment une erreur de croire que l'interprétation ne se réfère qu'aux éléments langagiers. Depuis toujours, le problème du langage est de se faire «l'écho d'autre chose.» Soit, mais quelle est cette autre chose? C'est ici que se nouent pour un psychanalyste les rapports du langagier avec le pulsionnel. [...] Pendant longtemps, on a cru que le langage parlait du monde et s'efforçait de le

71 We shall return to this aspect in our analysis of *Josefine, die Sängerin*.

72 Green is referring here not to the linguistic concept of “signifier” *per se*, but rather to Lacan's loose use of this concept in psychoanalysis (Green 2007a: 1462-1463 fn. 2).

73 Cfr. also Kohon and Perelberg (2017: 119 ff.)

comprendre. Mais avec quoi parlait-il? Sûrement pas avec des mots seulement, mais avec des mots investis d'affect, sous-tendus par des représentations pulsionnelles, dynamisés par les motions qui l'animent. (Green 2007a: 1463)⁷⁴

How can we conceive this heterogeneity in writing? We cannot but attempt a temporary answer to this question. There is no doubt that writing differs from the act of speech, from the most common one to that which contributes to the creation of the analytic setting. While it seems trivial to speak of the role of body language in verbal communication, the question of the role of corporality in writing—in the act of writing, but also as far as the *effects* of the text on the author and on the reader are concerned—arises here as quite significant. Where does the body go when one writes and creates? The answer «in the text» may not entirely satisfy our curiosity. One among the elements that does distinguish language as a medium of development and expression of thoughts, feelings, ideas, and language in writing is not merely the relationship with the body, but also the vicissitudes of the discharge that linguistic articulation entails. While in the former case every uttered word or thought is result of a discharge (Green 1973: 240-241; Green 1999a: 174), the written word is rather the outcome of a transformation of such discharge into a new form of corporality *in absentia*, from the irreducible multidimensionality of living speech to the apparent bidimensional surface made of ink and paper. Writing “imprisons” in the linearity of language something that exceeds language, and that yet cannot but be expressed, or impressed, but with the instruments of language. The function of the text, Green writes, is to «resuscitate all that which it has absorbed during the work of writing» (Green 1992: 54) We may therefore refer to the affect as that element allowing the «resuscitation» of the lost corporeal dimension in writing: an element that has a memory—although it is a memory which is always “of the Other”—and a rhythmic—which is always a retroactive one.

It is no accident that in *Le discours vivant* Green calls the affect «the flesh of the signifier and the signifier of the flesh.» (Green 1973: 240-241; Green 1999a: 174) Thereby, Green reminds us also of the disorganising, destructuring aspect of the affect: an «energetic upsurge that invades language and may destructure it to the point that it becomes unintelligible.» (ibid.) Affect marks as such the «return of the corporal raw material into language.» (ibid.) In other words, affect has to be grasped at once in its binding and unbinding quality, in its structuring and destructuring value—i.e., as the trace of a lost memory that is «property

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

of an otherness,» (Green 1992: 314) of a thirdness—and in its upheaving, raw energetic power, which threatens to disrupt the necessary linearity proper, in our case, of the written text.

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

«[...] Aber noch in seinen gebrochenen Augen war die feste, wenn auch nicht mehr stolze Überzeugung, daß er *weiterhungre*.» The price for such «reserve» of representation to survive in the text is its continuous delay, its being ultimately inaccessible to the subject. The body of the hunger artist and the body of writing seem thus to coincide, inasmuch as they both harbour the *incréable* as burden and chance of representation. The corporal remnant articulated by the hunger artist, inaccessible to him, is hosted and stored in the fabric of writing beyond and in spite of the subject. There is no doubt that in the closing paragraphs of the text the hunger artist as well as Kafka are questioning in a radical, destructive way their own work. This section of *Ein Hungerkünstler* seems to declare writing, and its affective fabric, as a form of intempestivity: a setback that the subject itself composes and narrates to himself tirelessly, and sleeplessly. Writing composes the wait as much as the announcement of an “inconsumable other;” the place of the encounter as well as the desert that separates the subject from the *incréable*. But if the *incréable* indeed survives as that irreducible, inconsumable reserve of representation, we may wonder, for whom does it survive? That is a question that we shall address in the following paragraph, devoted to Kafka’s last work: *Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse*.

March – April/May 1924. *Josefine, die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse*

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

André Green (1992: 54)⁷⁵

Was hast Du mit dem Geschenk des Geschlechtes getan?

Franz Kafka (1990b: 879)⁷⁶

Obne Vorfahren, ohne Ehe, ohne Nachkommen, mit wilder Vorfahrens-, Ehe- und Nachkommens-lust. Alle reichen mir die Hand: Vorfahren, Ehe und Nachkommen, aber zu fern für mich. Für alles gibt es künstlichen, jämmerlichen Ersatz: für Vorfahren, Ehe und Nachkommen. In Krämpfen schafft man ihn und geht, wenn man nicht schon an den Krämpfen zugrunde gegangen ist, an der Trostlosigkeit des Ersatzes zugrunde.

Franz Kafka (1990b: 884-885)⁷⁷

Following the thread of the *incréable*, we characterised the work of the Negative in Kafka's last collection *Ein Hungerkünstler* as meta-representational invention of a journey towards sublimation: as a writing of sublimation and upon sublimation. Analyses of *Eine kleine Frau* and *Ein Hungerkünstler* have allowed us to pinpoint vicissitudes of such a journey. The *incréable* emerges therein as an organising, structural representational element of unconscious order—«d'ordre inconscient» (Green 2006b: 5)—that defies representation itself, while embodying that which makes representation possible. The representational process harbours an ineliminable destructive and de-structuring component—the death drive—that is nonetheless constitutive of sublimation. The work of the

75 «The work [...] is in this no-man's-land, this potential, transitional space (Winnicott), this site of a trans-narcissistic communication where the author's and reader's doubles – ghosts which never reveal themselves – communicate through the writing.»

76 «What have you done with the gift of your sex / of your generation?»

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

Negative is thus responsible for an apparently paradoxical and contradictory dynamic. On the one hand, writing opens the space of an absence, an otherness that dwells at the core of the creative process. On the other hand, writing is simultaneously that very bluffing (*Eine kleine Frau*) and that very limit (*Ein Hungerkünstler*) which continuously delays the encounter with such absence. As much as the *incréable* demands to be aim of investment [*Besetzung*] for the subject, it only accepts to resonate in the creative process at the condition that the subject does not violate the borders protecting the kernel of the lost link with the maternal object. The *incréable*, at once pole of attraction and ultimate limit of creation and creativity, allows exclusively «effets de bord,» as Green observes: «only what occurs at the periphery of that kernel will become object of intensive elaboration whose result will be representation» (Green 1992: 322). Access to the *incréable* remains forbidden, otherwise that centre «becomes silent.» (ibid.) In rethinking such crucial theoretical element by Green, furthermore, we deliberately kept the original French to convey the incommensurability and untranslatability of that remnant of representation that accounts for «the representation of the absence of representation.»

Such a constellation of elements recurs to be sure also in the last work of the author, *Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse* (1924). With the following paragraph, however, I shall further extend my analysis of the work of the Negative in Kafka's writing by exploring other crucial aspects of the *incréable* which surfaces with peculiar intensity in the final writing of the author.

In the closing remarks to the commentary to *Ein Hungerkünstler*, I suggested how the verb *weiterhungern* at the end of the text could hint, in the general economy of the book, at a far-reaching entanglement between the survival⁷⁸ of an inaccessible reserve of representation and the work of filiation through writing. Precisely for this reason, Kafka's last work plays an essential role in the exploration of the work of the Negative. On the one hand, it represents a "last step" in Kafka's own «negative adventure» (Green 2009); on the other hand, however, such a "last step" of a farewell from life towards the «life of writing» ought not to be understood, I argue, as a sort of final destination or absolute goal of the work, but rather as an undoing of any accomplishment of a journey. In this sense, Josefine embodies, to borrow another expression by Green, a continuous «retournement de la fin sur le debut,» i.e., a revolving of the end upon the beginning (Green 1992: 319). By means of such vertiginous movement, whose semantic tension is graspable at every turn of Kafka's ironic and moving last text, the work challenges and revokes its own being finished. Is not *Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse* perhaps, from this point of view, also an attempt as sublime as desperate to delay by means of writing the inevitable and ultimate

78 For a different perspective as for the question of survival and finitude see also the work of Dominik Zechner (2017: 113-137).

encounter with death? As such, this text sets off as an object underway, embracing a rhythmic of the interminable—in the light of mortality, of the limits of life. That is particularly evident in the final paragraphs of Kafka's last work:

[...] dieses Volk zieht weiter seines Weges. / Mit Josefine aber muß es abwärts gehn. Bald wird die Zeit kommen, wo ihr letzter Pfiff ertönt und verstummt. Sie ist eine kleine Episode in der ewigen Geschichte unseres Volkes und das Volk wird den Verlust überwinden. Leicht wird es uns ja nicht werden; wie werden die Versammlungen in völliger Stummheit möglich sein? Freilich, waren sie nicht auch mit Josefine stumm? War ihr wirkliches Pfeifen nennenswert lauter und lebendiger, als die Erinnerung daran sein wird? War es denn noch bei ihren Lebzeit mehr als eine bloße Erinnerung? Hat nicht vielmehr das Volk in seiner Weisheit Josefines Gesang, eben deshalb, weil er in dieser Art unverlierbar war, so hoch gestellt? / Vielleicht werden wir also gar nicht sehr viel entbehren, Josefine aber, erlöst von der irdischen Plage, die aber ihrer Meinung nach Auserwählten bereitet ist, wird fröhlich sich verlieren in der zahllosen Menge der Helden unseres Volkes, und bald, da wir keine Geschichte treiben, in gesteigerter Erlösung vergessen sein wie alle ihre Brüder. (Kafka 1996: 376-377)⁷⁹

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

In such impossibility of closure in Kafka's «negative adventure,» therefore, the *incréable* sets off, with *Josefine*, towards the genealogical and the generational. The work of the Negative operates here as a continuous opening of a space in

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

which the reinvention of a new bond between the generations becomes possible through writing: as a passing, a channel towards an unknown and unknowable elsewhere or otherness.

The Temporality of the *Incréable*

In the following pages, I shall expand on the hypothesis according to which the “main subject,” or rather, the subterranean protagonist in Kafka’s *Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse* transcends the themes traditionally identified in this text⁸⁰ but something far more fundamentally ingrained in the question of writing: temporality. My aim is to show in which terms, with *Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse*, the *incr able* expresses a temporal dimension. Or better: a relationship with Time which, as Green suggests, is embedded in creation (Green 2000a: 174), «every work» implying «the couple creator-creature,» (1992: 313 ff.) unified and separated, at once, through the process of creation. The peculiar character of such temporality can be more effectively grasped, in this case, by considering side by side the concept of *Nachtr glichkeit* and Kafka’s possible creative reception of linguistic aspects of Hebrew language in the last years of his life.

In order to contextualise specifically Kafka’s last text in our reading of the Negative, the question of temporality ought to be envisaged as a structural and structuring element. It is therefore vital to insist on how not quite the past, nor the present, and neither the future are at stake in this form of temporality, but rather time as an associative matrix in which the subject creates himself while creatively reinventing time through writing. In strict correlation with this question, moreover, I shall address, in the last pages of this paragraph, the relationship between Kafka’s last text and the failure of his «Phantasie» (Kafka 2011: 319) of emigrating to Palestine. To do so, I will consider Green’s concept of *negative event*, bridging in this way the reverberations of a psychic work on absence—most specifically, of an event that *does not take place*—with the creative process of writing and the dynamics of sublimation.

In *Josefine* these issues emerge with unprecedented force. What is indeed, from this point of view, Josefine? Perhaps she is the unwritable of literature, the unthinkable of Western thinking, the unspoken of an infancy of language, the unreachable shore of an elsewhere that, as a sort of magnetic pole, shapes the world anew. Josefine is all that and no doubt even more (and even less), for Josefine is that unwritable, that unthinkable, that *incr able* which lays at the core of the creative process, an irrepresentable, irreducible remnant of the subject, trace of first and last things.⁸¹

80 For an overview of the main interpretative trends upon Kafka’s last work see Engel und Auerochs 2010: 323-329.

81 Significantly, *Josefine’s* texts presents a remarkable recurrence of the adverb *freilich* (with the dual meaning of *certainly, of course, and/or admittedly, however*). The suffix *-lich* is homograph

In the closing pages of her ground-breaking study *Kafka and the Yiddish Theater*, Evelyn Torton Beck (1971) writes:

It is impossible to guess how Kafka's writing might have developed had he not become familiar with the Yiddish theatre, and it is equally difficult to know what other factors helped to produce Kafka's literary breakthrough in 1912. (210)

A similar concern, *mutatis mutandis*, underlies the present part of my work. Despite the impossibility of guessing how Kafka's writing might have developed had he actually succeeded in his project of emigrating to Palestine, the question is far from being merely anecdotal. It invites us to reflect on the relationship between Kafka's last text and the failed encounter—with a factual, possible elsewhere of the Jewish people. Precisely that missed encounter, represents, I claim, the blank core, that *letzte irdische Grenze* (Kafka 1990b: 878) around which Kafka's last text unconsciously organises. In the impossibility of finding any harbour in a territorial *Land*, Kafka's last work shapes a *Grenzland* between time and space, between «solitude and community» (871) which becomes, as such, the only inhabitable one, the only inventable one. From such a core of absence, Kafka's final literary work establishes a transgenerational testimony of the living, perhaps his most “representative” tale: a work whose subject is the storytelling of his own writing⁸² as it ventures beyond the limits of life.

From the philological reconstruction of the *Kritische Ausgabe*—based on the contractual developments with publishing house “Die Schmiede”, the author's private correspondence, as well as Robert Klopstock's account—we know that Kafka drafted his very last work between March 18 and the early days of April 1924 in Prague (Kafka 1996 Apparataband: 462). The text first appeared in the *Prager Presse* (Nr. 110) on April 20, 1924, with the title *Josefine, die Sängerin*. It was not until May 1924, during the final proofreading stage of the book *Ein Hungerkünstler*—to which Kafka devoted himself until his last breath—that the author changed the title of the work as we know it today. In one of the *Gesprächsblätter* that Kafka, meanwhile no longer able to speak, used to communicate with the medical personnel and the loved ones attending him

with the Middle High German lexeme *Lich* (*body*, *soma*, *body shape*—cfr. the English “like” and the German “gleich”), and related to the German term *Leich*—*corpse*, *dead body* (“Leiche, f.”). The unusual frequency of the ambivalent term *frei-lich* seems to hint at the liberation from the suffering body the author yearns for, the farewell from the mortal coil—place of that first sorrow (*Erstes Leid*)—towards the minimal remnant of a subjectivity in writing. *Frei-lich* captures in just one word, in just a sequence of sounds terminating with the voiceless palatal fricative /ç/, the last breath of life and the work of sublimation, the trace of the departing body towards the presence of its absence in the corporality of writing. Interestingly, *Leiche* is in German also a typographical technical term for a missing letter or and involuntarily omitted sentence or word (Maletta 2008: 60, fn. 62).

82 I thereby reformulate Green's remarks in *L'Aventure négative* (2009: 50).

at the sanatorium in Kierling (especially Max Brod, Robert Klopstock, Dora Diamant) we read:

Die Geschichte bekommt einen neuen Titel / Josefine, die Sangerin / oder / Das Volk der Mause / Solche oder-Titel sind zwar nicht sehr hubsch / aber hier hat es vielleicht besondern / Sinn, es hat etwas von einer Wage (Kafka 1996 Apparatband 462-463).

In spite of its conciseness, this handwritten text is a capital document from Kafka's late creative season. As a matter of fact, over the last decades, it has become the recurrent, nearly customary subject of commentaries emphasizing the critical role of the particle *oder* in the newly adopted title. Scholars have observed how Kafka's «Oder-Titel» casts a playful irony upon the whole narration,⁸³ functioning as a “balancing pole” [*Waage*] between Josefine and the mouse people (Guarda 2013: 267-277).⁸⁴

From my point of view, this brief handwritten testimony is significant on two further accounts. First, it is an important signal of the author's return, in *après-coup*, to his work—an aspect that also marks the composition of *Ein Hungerkunstler*. That, however, does not simply confirm an essential kinship between the two works which extends beyond their respective thematic sphere. Why then insist on this return of the author to the text? Because this movement allows us to highlight how the inexhaustible non-linearity of the creative process is reflected in the *only apparent* linearity of the textual dimension.

Both the creative process as well as the text “reproduce” and represent, from a meta-literary point of view, the dynamics of the drives in the process of sublimation. Kafka's last text, as such, carries the traces of an other temporal dimension that disjoints time in its continuity, in order to make room for a «temporal generative potentiality [...] of semantic order [*d'ordre sémantique*].» (Green 2004b: 22) As we anticipated, such retrospective reactivation of the creative process entails a deferred [*nachtraglich*] restructuring that «splits the moment of the experience and that of signification.» (Green 2000a: 27-30) Green observes that the concept of *après-coup*

[...] conteste absolument l'idée d'une conception développementale linéaire. C'est-à-dire toute démarche fondée sur la continuité [...] Il s'oppose également

83 Evelyn Torton Beck (1971: 207-208) traces back Kafka's title to the didactic tradition of Yiddish theatre: «While the first part [of the title] carried the name of the hero or heroine, the subtitle revealed the essence of the play. In giving to “Josefine the Singer” the subtitle “The Mouse Folk,” Kafka seems to be (most uncharacteristically, although possibly ironically) underlining the fact that the true focus of the story is not the individual, but the community.»

84 Greiner (2021: 73-88) stresses the importance of the openness of Kafka's formulation as far as the relationship between the two parts is concerned. Such openness, he claims, makes the two inseparably intertwined, to the extent that it is impossible to speak of the one without considering the other. See on this point also Koelb (2002: 347-360, particularly 356).

à l'idée d'une saisie momentanée unique d'un quelconque instant du développement, puisqu'il est pris non pas dans une continuité mais dans une structure qui fait sens et qui est basée sur une rupture de la démarche progressive. Il relativise donc la démarche observationnelle, et ce qui est extrêmement important [...] il présuppose dans le psychisme une potentialité générative temporelle, une potentialité d'ordre sémantique, c'est-à-dire que tout énoncé est gros de quelque chose d'autre qui reste à venir, et qui peut concerner tel ou tel élément du passé que tel fantasme de l'avenir. (Green 2004b: 22)⁸⁵

In this respect, Kafka's new title comes into being as if marking a constantly belated (re-)encounter between the writing subject and the elusive traces of a subject of writing. We encounter here again more the disseminated vestiges of an alterity entangled in the textual web, surviving as a sort of "ineliminable other from whom I shall be written on the page." If the work of writing cannot be conceived without a revolvment of "writing one" and "written one," such revolvment is always aleatory, for a *rendez-vous* cannot take place but by virtue of an erasure of identity, i.e. in the light of an identity *as* difference (Green 2000a: 27-30).

Kafka's *Gesprächsblatt*, in other words, can be read as an attempt to recompose a subjectivity in front of the text by re-signifying the latter retrospectively, under the sign of a new filiation, of a further textual re-invention. It expresses an effort of coping with an alterity that was "already there," unbeknownst to the author. The writing subject reinvents, discovers anew the text as marked by the trace of an uncancelable other that, *unheimlich*, haunts the page (Kafka 1988: 384, 386).⁸⁶ The question "Who is this alterity?" can only be answered in an approximate way. We are indeed confronted with an overdetermined complexity, with a polyphony which is at once a polychrony, interlacing through language different scenes of Kafka's life and work. As such, the representational process expresses not only a form of counterfactuality, but also a virtuality, another way of being of the subject by means of writing. As Evelyn Torton Beck suggests, we may speculate that at least two "Kafkas" are meeting here, in a deferred, unfathomable dimension. One, the ghost of a stupefied young writer attending the shows of the Yiddish theatre company, and the other, an older mortally-ill

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

86 Another example of such "uncancelable other" is epitomised by the hallucinatory acoustic presence-absence that haunts the narrating creature in *Der Bau*.

Kafka yearning for wandering toward a new yet unborn land (Torton Beck 1971: 208). In Kafka's final work, experiences and vestiges that underlie the relationship with *his* Judaism flow together, on the one hand, through the human and affective prism of Yiddish theatre, and on the other hand through his failed phantasy of emigrating to Palestine. From this point of view, one would almost be tempted to hear in this «Menge»—in this «mixed multitude»⁸⁷ of «unnumerable I» (Green 2000a: 28) calling, at the border between presence and absence, from Kafka's page—the «gedankenlose» squeak of the Mouse people as it gathers one more last time to attend Josefina's appearing on the stage (Greiner 2021: 73-88).

This leads to a second element worth highlighting in Kafka's *Gesprächsblatt*. The openness of his formulation suggests that not only the «Oder-Title,» but also the particle *oder*, in its considerable semantic density, acquires in the author's eyes further nuances, the importance of which might have been hitherto underestimated. These nuances are, I argue, the outcome of a work of linguistic reinvention in Kafka's creative imagination, in which the confrontation with Hebrew and other «Jewish languages» (Suchoff 2012) is decisive. A closer analysis of these elements may be useful to give account of that «besondern Sinn» Kafka is alluding to in his short communication, and to speculate about a possible absent sense or remnant of signification which the particle *oder* is preserving, enclosed in the title of this last text.

The *Grimm Wörterbuch* tells us that, along with a disjunctive function (as in *entweder / oder*), *oder* designates in other cases, «like the Latin *sive* or *vel*, a minimal difference or the undecidability and open choice between two possible things.» Furthermore, it may function «as a separation between objects, that can vary or be equivalent, particularly to mention different names and predicates of the same thing.» Finally, between different sentences or part of the same sentence, *oder* expresses «the uncertainty, the undecidability of a judgement, the possibility of an open choice between two or more cases» (“oder, conj.”). The peculiar connotation that the particle acquires in Kafka's *Gesprächsblatt* is enhanced by the term *Waage* [*Wage* in the original Kafka's handwritten text]. While etymologically referring to an (oscillatory) movement in purely abstract terms [«*bewegung, in rein abstracter auffassung*»], *Wage / Waage* concretely indicates the *lever*, the *balance*—or *scale*—as instrument for weighing [«*als gerät zum wägen*»]. If this makes us think about the responsibility of weighing words in order to call and name the world, the *Grimm Wörterbuch* reports a further interesting nuance that complicates the whole picture: *Wage* (and so also the verb *wagen*) stands for *dare*, a *bet*, a *venture*, or even a *struggle* [«*etwas ungewisses, dessen ausgang unsicher ist, z. b. auf*

87 For this reference to the *erev rav* cfr. Suchoff (2012: 93 ff.) in which this particular passage from the Exodus (12:38) is highlighted with regards to Kafka's *Der Verschollene*.

einen Kampf]) whose outcome is uncertain, impossible to establish (“Wage, f.”). For this reason, I would propose a different translation of the fragment: «The story gets a new title / Josefina, the Singer / or / The Mouse-People / These *oder*-titles are to be sure not particularly pretty / but here it may have a special / meaning, it has something of a venture.»

The etymological and syntactic interaction between these two elements of the sentence—*oder* and *Wage*—, as well as the temporal mark of the *Nachträglichkeit* we highlighted in Kafka's *Gesprächsblatt*, give us a lot of food for thought. Whilst *oder* certainly suggests a «balance,» an «equivalence,» even an «undecidability» between the two “poles” represented by Josefina and the Mouse people, the term *Wage*—read *a posteriori* in the complex associative web evoked by this text—hints at an interminable errancy of signification, at a struggle to write on the page a «nothing of a voice,» a «nothing in achievement,» as we read in Kafka's text. An unexpected, unexplored thirdness situated at the heart of the work, standing perhaps «for something else yet to come» (Green 2004b: 22):

Dieses Pfeifen, das sich erhebt, wo allen anderen Schweigen auferlegt ist, kommt fast wie eine Botschaft des Volkes zu dem Einzelnen; das dünne Pfeifen Josefina's mitten in den schweren Entscheidungen ist fast wie die armselige Existenz unseres Volkes mitten im Tumult der feindlichen Welt. Josefina behauptet sich, dieses Nichts an Stimme, dieses Nichts an Leistung behauptet sich und schafft sich den Weg zu uns, es tut wohl, daran zu denken. (Kafka 1996: 362)⁸⁸

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

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

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

nisten. Ich bin Ende oder Anfang. (Kafka 1992: 98)⁸⁹

The use of *oder* in the sentence *Ich bin Ende oder Anfang* helps us expanding the semantic complexity of this particle by rethinking it in an unexpected temporal context. Although *oder* does not have, strictly speaking, any similar connotation, it seems to me significative how Kafka extends here the use of the particle, pushing it into unexplored linguistic territories, thus venturing towards a new, unknown creation of sense. In this regard, Suchoff has rightfully observed how Kafka's prose was shaped by a «sense of an enlivening exchange between languages,» which allowed him «to explore the multiple sources of Jewish and other identities that preceded the emergence of what later came to be known as a singular national voice» (2012: 7). In the case of *Josefine*, we could push this thought even further by saying that it is in the continuous interference between *Fremdwörter* (foreign words) and *Fremdklänge* (foreign sounds) that keeps unlocking the margin in which the reinvention of the forgetting inhabiting every and each language appears to be possible. Maletta has moreover emphasised how, in the case of «Ich bin Ende oder Anfang», *oder* acquires a «copulative» function, opening to an «other logic, no more merely bivalent, exclusive, or simply denying» (Maletta 2002: 154). Keeping in mind the final paragraphs of *Josefine*, we might also add that it is precisely the «copulative» nuance detectable in Kafka's use of *oder* that seems to open, retroactively, a temporal dimension escaping the linearity of the sequence “past-present-future.” With this operation, we can detect a shift in the focus from a time articulated through verbal tenses towards a temporality characterised by verbal *aspects*, particularly in terms of closure and openness: «Ende oder Anfang.»

Such retrospective reverberation of the particle *oder* in temporal terms may resonate a distinctive influence of Kafka's affective elaboration in his learning process of Hebrew.⁹⁰ Commenting on the features of the linguistic expression of *consecution temporum* in Hebrew, George Steiner writes:

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

90 Towards the end of his life, from 1917 onwards, Kafka intensified his Hebrew studies also thanks to the frequentation with Pua Ben-Tovim (1903-1991), an 18-year-old mathematics student from Jerusalem who, with the help of Shmuel Hugo Bergman, arrived in Prague in late 1921. Not differently from Dora Diamant, Kafka's lover in those final years, Pua Ben-Tovim would represent a sort of messenger from the distance, in many ways reminiscent of the lively figures of the Yiddish theatre company from Lemberg (Lviv) that the author encountered as a young man between 1911 and 1912. Through them, Kafka first discovered a way of living, thinking, and experiencing Judaism which was completely different from that

It had long been established that the Indo-Germanic framework of threefold temporality—past, present, future—has no counterpart in Semitic conventions of tense. The Hebrew verb views action as incomplete or perfected. Even archaic Greek has definite and subtly discriminatory verb forms with which to express the linear flow of time from past to future. No such modes developed in Hebrew. In Indo-European tongues «the future is preponderantly thought to lie before us, while in Hebrew future events are always expressed as coming after us.» (Steiner 1976: 157)⁹¹

Would it be possible, for a moment, to substitute here the words *Ende* and *Anfang* with verbal aspects such as “perfected” and “imperfected”—or “incomplete”? In this sort of thought experiment, we may conceive Kafka’s writing as the means of invention of a retrospective awareness of a new relationship with time as a creative, associative web. Through writing, the *being* of the subject acquires a new, transformed structure. We can envisage this as the temporality of a work in progress in which the unachieved and the unachievable—as figures of the work of the Negative (Green 2000a: 233-267)—play a crucial organising role in the elaboration of sense. It is a temporality of *sub-limation*, that as such continuously implies the role of a limit, namely of the *incréable*. The unachieved and the unachievable uncover the capability of the text of going beyond the intentionality of language, beyond what language *wants* to say. In other words, purpose of the *oder* appears here to be not only of keeping open—i.e., undecidable—the relationship between *Ende* and *Anfang*, but of relentlessly transforming the “created” into “uncreated,” the “creatable” into “uncreatable.” *It delineates a temporality of a wait in which closure and openness can convert into each other.* A temporality that transcends the subject, making the text a «traveling voice» (Suchoff 2012: 205 ff.).

Between *Transfert d’Existence* and *Evenement Négatif*

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

of a family of assimilated Jews in Prague’s cultural context. If Yiddish theatre and language had represented for him a virtual threshold for a new encounter with Eastern European Jewry, the ‘native’ *ivrit* spoken by Pua Ben-Tovim—a pupil of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda in Jerusalem—incarnated a linguistic feeling which was fundamentally distant from the nationalism and from the ideologic moroseness of many Zionist exponents. The living mother tongue that Ben-Tovim took to Prague and taught Kafka twice a week for about a year was a language *in the making*: all but a textbook idiom, most importantly, because «as it drew from different sources in its renaissance, [it] exposed the comedy of establishing a single origin for any language or individual» (Suchoff 2012: 170). Jiri Langer reports how, when Kafka spoke Hebrew in Prague, he took great comic pleasure in exploring the coinages created through the encounter of transnational sources (Suchoff 2012: 170 ff.).

91 Steiner quotes here Thorlief Boman’s *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (1960: 130).

L'œuvre est le résultat d'un *transfert d'existence*. Ceci rend compte du fait que pour le créateur, la question de l'existence de l'œuvre d'art – où son narcissisme le plus essentiel est engagé – passe avant tout, jusques et y compris, ce qui dans son appareil psychique reste soumis aux pulsions d'autoconservation. La nécessité d'être de l'œuvre d'art qui implique sa reconnaissance par un tiers toujours présent à travers son absence, même si l'œuvre ne sera jamais imprimée, exposée, ou entendue, fait de son destinataire la condition même de son existence. Qui est ce destinataire : masse de la foule anonyme, arbre généalogique des Maîtres, chaîne des pairs, meute des critiques, objet d'amour dédicataire ? Cela est indécidable, car il est un pour tous et tous pour un. Le regard sur l'œuvre est le véritable père de celle-ci, en tant qu'il la légitime et reconnaît cet autre parent qui est son créateur immanent. (1992: 314)⁹²

Green's *transfer of existence* allows to give account not only of that "sacrifice" for and in the name of the work, according to which the writer devotes his life to creation; but also of that form of transformation of the «limits of life» into the «life of writing.» (Green 2009: 10) We have one more chance to highlight here how the implications of this concept pertain not Kafka's biography *per se*, but what we have called, with Green, the «symbolization of the generation.» (Green 1977: 31) Therefore, when Kafka writes in his diary «Was hast Du mit dem Geschenk des Geschlechtes getan?» (Kafka 1990b: 879), we have good reason to think that what he means by the gift of the «Geschlechtes» is at once the *generational* and the *sexual*, i.e., the temporal *limits of the community*, as well as the *limits of the subject*. Through sublimation, Kafka's transforms these forms of finitude and continuity into a new form of filiation, which rather than occurring as the birth of a child takes place as literary creation. Speaking through his writing for a whole generation of European Jews, Kafka's literature invents a new way to voice the transgenerational and the subject in the act of creation (Meghnagi 1993: 60, 61).

In this sense writing sets out beyond the subject, towards an alterity that is unknown addressee and possible, albeit uncertain, receiver of the text. Furthermore, the concept of transfer of existence reminds us of how the work is not only what is *created*, but also *what would have been found* (Green 2004a: 112)

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

from the writing subject as well as from a reader (an aspect that is all but secondary, considering the vicissitudes of Kafka's writings).

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

Let us now return for a moment to the question of Kafka's relationship with Hebrew language. In an unpublished paper written a few years ago, I advanced the hypothesis according to which Kafka's use of the particle *oder* may be understood, in the two *oder*-sentences we referred to above, as if echoing aspects of the so called *waw habipuch*—"waw of reversal," or "waw consecutive," a narrative structure characteristic of biblical Hebrew. Moses Rath's *Lehrbuch der Hebräischen Sprache für Schul- und Selbstunterricht* (originally published in 1917) represented one of the main textual references in Kafka's Hebrew learning. Reproposing the definition of Wilhelm Gesenius's *Hebräische Grammatik* (first appeared in Halle in 1813), Rath (1920: 86-87) describes the *waw habipuch* as a syntactic and grammatical phenomenon in which, in the «representation of a series of past events, only the first verb stands in the perfect, and the narration is prosecuted in the imperfect.» Conversely, continues Rath, «the representation of a series of future events begins with the imperfect, and is continued in the perfect» (1920: 86-87). In a narrative concatenation, the *consecutio temporum* of the *waw habipuch* allows to perceive an apparently accomplished action as if transformed through the narrative flow in an open one, situated after us, yet to be accomplished; and, *vice versa*, an imperfected action, as if it were completed, accomplished.

Now, in spite of the difficulties of demonstrating with solid arguments the validity of this hypothesis, I think it might be interesting to consider its possible implications in Kafka's last work, on the condition that we clarify an important point. I am not claiming here that Kafka deliberately uses the *oder* as if influenced from the study of Hebrew verbal structures. What I mean is rather that unconscious reverberations of his studies in Hebrew—almost a daily commitment in Kafka's last years of life—may allow, as in the case of *waw habipuch*, a

deeper insight into elements of his last work which can hardly be reduced to an oppositional, exclusive logic. From this point of view, the most interesting aspect of the *naw bahipuch* consists precisely in the way it may possibly affect a different perception of time in juxtaposition with the tense-based verbal categories of Indo-European languages.

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

The research of scholars such as Binder (1967: 527-556), Bodenheimer (2004: 259-270), or Suchoff (2012) on Kafka’s relationship with Hebrew (and more broadly speaking with the “Jewish languages” he encountered in his life) has increased our attentiveness towards the role of crucial acoustic interferences of Hebrew and Yiddish structures in shaping his linguistic sensitivity. The co-existence of different linguistic territories in Kafka’s writing, as we mentioned above, has been well documented by Suchoff; and the study of Bodenheimer, which draws directly from the Hebrew notebooks of the author, has re-proposed important questions on Kafka’s learning process. As we reread some of Kafka’s remarks on the Yiddish *Jargon*, it seems quite apparent how, beyond the mere question of linguistic knowledge, meaning and sense, his attention and imagination were precociously captured by the interaction between different linguistic territories (Kafka 1993: 193).

Kafka’s relationship with Hebrew was indeed less driven by a philological interest than by a living passion for a language of the threshold: a language which could represent the promise of a new life. His intellectual appetite for Hebrew was inseparable from a deeply human and an affective core that enclosed and transcended, at once, the promise of a journey to Palestine. With his fantasy being bound to fail, Hebrew would remain for Kafka the language of a possible elsewhere that remained unknown and unknowable. In this respect, I think that Bodenheimer’s idea according to which «learning everyday-Hebrew» represented for the author «not so much a preparation» but rather «a substitute for the journey to Palestine» (2004: 270) cannot be properly appreciated if we fail to consider the role of writing in such process of substitution. For it is writing that created for Kafka that dynamic structure in which such substitution—or better: transformation—was ultimately possible.

Furthermore, let us keep in mind how Kafka might have received the linguistic phenomenon of the *naw bahipuch*, and what such a phenomenon could provoke and inspire for a representative of a generation of Jews that, in its own way, came to be deeply concerned with the survival of a cultural heritage that he had to rediscover. Like many other European Jews of his generation, Kafka

was exploring an old-new language which harboured a new way of thinking and perceiving time. The idea that language—in this case, the transnational Hebrew Kafka absorbed through manifold sources—could convey grammatical structures capable of transforming time perception, making of something closed a threshold towards an action yet to take place, and *vice versa*, may have had a fundamental impact on the way he envisaged his own cultural peregrination.

Kafka's last work is in this sense permeated by the feeling that a "past"—or, as in this case, a bond with a people—is not merely severed or lost. It can also be reinvented⁹³ in the form of a creative relationship with time that allows the fruitful intempestivity⁹⁴ of an event to take place elsewhere, otherwise, unbeknownst to the subject, as if called to life from a distance.⁹⁵

Hier in den dürrtigen Pausen zwischen den Kämpfen träumt das Volk, es ist, als lösten sich dem Einzelnen die Glieder, als dürfte sich der Ruhelose einmal nach seiner Lust im großen warmen Bett des Volkes dehnen und strecken. Und in diese Träume klingt hie und da Josefinens Pfeifen; sie nennt es perlend, wir nennen es stoßend; aber jedenfalls ist es hier an seinem Platze, wie nirgends sonst, wie Musik kaum jemals den auf sie wartenden Augenblick findet. Etwas von der armen kurzen Kindheit ist darin, etwas von verlorenem, nie wieder aufzufindendem Glück, aber auch etwas vom tätigen heutigen Leben ist darin, von seiner kleinen, unbegreiflichen und dennoch bestehenden und nicht zu ertötenden Munterkeit. Und dies alles ist wahrhaftig nicht mit großen Tönen gesagt, sondern leicht, flüsternd, vertraulich, manchmal ein wenig heiser. Natürlich ist es ein Pfeifen. Wie denn nicht? Pfeifen ist die Sprache unseres Volkes, nur pfeift mancher sein Leben lang und weiß es nicht, hier aber ist das Pfeifen freigemacht von den Fesseln des täglichen Lebens und befreit auch uns für eine kurze Weile. Gewiß, diese Vorfürungen wollten wir nicht missen. (Kafka 1996: 366-367)⁹⁶

93 Cavarocchi was among the firsts to emphasise how Kafka's relationship with Judaism may be understood in terms of a testimony of Judaism as *forma mentis* that seems to survive its religious expression by transforming in cultural expression (Cavarocchi, 1988: 15-62, notably 57-62).

94 «Der Messias wird erst kommen, wenn er nicht mehr nötig sein wird» (Kafka 1992: 55) wrote once Kafka: «The Messiah will first come when he won't be necessary anymore.»

95 On October 18, 1921 Kafka writes: «Ewige Kinderzeit. Wieder ein Ruf des Lebens. // Es ist sehr gut denkbar, daß die Herrlichkeit des Lebens um jeden und immer in ihrer ganzen Fülle bereitliegt, aber verhängt, in der Tiefe, unsichtbar, sehr weit. Aber sie liegt dort, nicht feindselig, nicht widerwillig, nicht taub. Ruft man sie mit dem richtigen Wort, beim richtigen Namen, dann kommt sie. Das ist das Wesen der Zauberei, die nicht schafft, sondern ruft.» (Kafka 1990b: 866) «Eternal childhood. Again a call of life. It is well conceivable that life's splendour forever lies in wait about each one of us in all its fullness, but veiled, deep down, invisible, far away. It is there, though, not hostile, not reluctant, not deaf. If you call it by the right word, by its right name, it will come. This is the essence of magic, which does not create but calls.»

96 «Here, in the brief pauses between battles, the people dream; it is as if the limbs of each single one relaxed, as if the restless might for once stretch out at his pleasure in the great warm bed of the people. And now and again, Josefine's piping chimes into these dreams; she calls it trilling, we call it upsetting; but anyway it is in its rightful place here, as it is nowhere else, in the way music hardly ever finds the right moment waiting for it. Something of our poor,

It is in these terms that Josefine's singing can open that «no man's land,» Green refers to with Winnicott: that site «where the author's and reader's doubles – ghosts which never reveal themselves – communicate through the writing» (Green 1992: 54). It is a gap measuring the obscure, latent temporal distance *separating* and *connecting* at once the generations; an unlost that defies representation, and that as such transmits itself: as a piping whose meaning and sense is constantly questioned, questioning, interrogating us, unsolvable. It survives through writing as an inaccessible, a-signifying acoustic trace bearing a potentiality of signification, an otherness of language resonating through language. As irreducible sound, Josefine's singing can indeed save what language inevitably forgets, what language cannot help missing, for language is what comes always too late, only «once out of the infancy» (Lyotard 1991: 242): «Something of our poor, brief infancy is in it, something of a lost happiness, never to be found again, but something of our busy present life is also in it, something of its small, incomprehensible cheerfulness, which abides and cannot be destroyed.»

At this crossroad, where temporal openness and closure, affects, language, sounds and writing intertwine, the question of Kafka's failed fantasy, can perhaps be read from a new perspective, in terms of what Green calls *événement négatif*, or *negative event*. Green writes:

[...] l'événement négatif ce n'est plus l'accident, si exceptionnel qu'il soit, d'une vie, c'est la vie même de l'écriture, qui ne fait *rien* advenir dans la vie mais qui fait de ce *Rien*, l'événement indéfiniment répété de la vie de l'écriture. (Green 2009: 50, m. e.)⁹⁷

Green's formulation summarises in certain sense the motives that I tried to analyse in Kafka's final text. The double recurrence of «nothing» [*«rien»*] and «Nothing» [*«Rien»*] is here all but accidental. By that, Green expresses a fundamental feature of sublimation. Through the work of writing the absence, the negation, is reacquired in a different form in the textual dimension: as a name that stands for the absence of all names, for the incommensurability of a loss, and for its reinvention as a blankness at the core of creation.

brief infancy is in it, something of a lost happiness, never to be found again, but something of our busy present life is also in it, something of its small, incomprehensible cheerfulness, which abides and cannot be destroyed. And truly, this is not said in grand tones, but lightly, in a whisper, intimately, sometimes rather hoarsely. Of course it is piping. What else? Piping is the language of our people. Only there are some who pipe all their lives and don't know it. But here, piping is freed of the fetters of daily life, and it also sets us free, for a short while. It is certain: we would not want to miss these shows.»

97 «[...] the negative event is not anymore the accident, however important, of a life, it is the life itself of writing, which makes *nothing* happen in real life, and yet it does make of that *Nothing* the indefinitely repeated event of the life of writing»

As early as October 1923 (Kafka 2011: 319) Kafka was aware that he would have never been able to physically accede Palestine. Berlin temporally represented, if not an intermediary stop in preparation to an impossible journey, at least a temporary refuge. The metropolis allowed him to experience a new closeness to a different Jewish context, as well as a necessary distance from the oppressive familiar household. Still, we would be mistaken to consider the *événement négatif* as having a role on a conscious level. The negative event rather traces *a posteriori* a necessary structural element of the unconscious reasoning of the text. Kafka was not aware, captured in his *furor scribendi*, that he was writing on the page the otherness of a failure. It was indeed up to the work of writing to create the conditions through which the phantom of a loss could convert into an unsaturable representational possibility—and yet nothing but a possibility. In this respect, *Josefine*—her «nothing of a voice,» «nothing in achievement»—incarnates, perhaps, the negative event of Kafka's life, transforming it in a never-ending pursuit of a lost object. But not only. *Josefine* encapsulates the promise of Judaism as *incréable*, uncreatable: a question constantly open at the heart of the work. A question that as such, in all its irreducibility, demands to be transmitted.

The intertwining of *transfert d'existence* and of *événement négatif* marks the entanglement between the survival of an inaccessible reserve of representation and the work of filiation through writing. As such, they partially delineate the psychic room of that working-through in which Kafka's last text stems from, at the intersection of the life of the author and the life of the work. They express the space of an encounter that takes place elsewhere, otherwise. Writing, in this space, represents a time of conversion from the achievable into the unachievable. The fatal closure of a life turns into the interminable openness of the work. From this vantage point, Kafka's last text unconsciously embodies, through sublimation, the promise of both an achievement and a failure.

Chapter 3

Paul Celan's *Schneepart* and *Zeitgehöft*. The Navel of the Poetic and the Death Drive

“An Other Blank.” For a New Reading of the Negative in Celan's Work

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

Paul Celan (2018: 86)¹

Following the publication of Georg-Michael Schulz's 1977 seminal work *Negativität in der Dichtung Paul Celans*,² much has been written about the Negative in the work of the Bukovinan poet. At least two major research trends on this topic are preliminarily discernible. Firstly, scholars such as Schulz, and more recently Nixon (2007: 152-168), Feldman (2014: 438-458), Buhanan (2016: 601-623), and Weller (2019: 158-186), have attempted to understand Celan's Negative from a literary, stylistic, and philosophical standpoint, examining it in the context of the transformations of poetic expression under the *caesura* of the Shoah. The topics of historical trauma representation (Baer 2000), of the poetic wound, of loss, of nothingness, of a radical *mise en question* of the poetic subject, as well as of the «ethico-aesthetic» articulation of the limits of language in relationship with the modernist «language scepticism» (Weller 2019: 161) are only some of the many aspects of the Negative that have received ample attention.

1 «Whichever word you speak – / you owe / to destruction.» (Felstiner 1995: 71)

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

Secondly, other scholars have approached the question of secularization, the transformation of theological categories, tropes, and imagery in Celan's writing, emphasising the prominent role of negative theology. Contributions by Wolosky (1995), Lesch (1999: 165-182), Franke (2005), and Lipszyc (2017: 304-322) show how specific aspects and structures of Jewish mystical lore (rediscovered through the interpretations of i.a. Gershom Scholem, Franz Rosenzweig, and Martin Buber) but also of Christian mysticism (e.g. Meister Eckhart) survive in Celan's poetry in a «questioned, distorted, spectralized» form (Lipszyc 2017: 309).

Interestingly enough, the sharp distinction we intended to draw within the research on the Negative in Celan turns out to be not only a fairly arbitrary one, but also misleading. The motives of language crisis, subjectivity, and poetic inexpressibility under the sign of Auschwitz cannot ultimately be severed from pressing theological (i.e. theological-political-juridical) issues such as that of transcendence, the divine, and the survival of specific cultural-religious structures in literary forms. The creation of «a poetic style and unique model of subjectivity» challenging the «preeminent ontological theories of [Celan's] era» (Feldman 2014: 446) hence goes hand in hand with the question of what remains of Judaism and of its individual and collective rearticulation after Auschwitz. That is particularly true in the case of Celan, as the work of excavation with and within the German language—at once maternal idiom and language of the murderer—that his poetry made possible entails in turn the very possibility of survival of a remnant of European Judaism under the sign of unthinkable catastrophes (Wolosky 1995: 267-268).

A broader look at the scholarship on the Negative in Celan's works suggests, however, a further element of interest: the limitations of the research to literary, philosophical and/or theological interpretative approaches seem to correspond to a narrowing of the analytic focus on a selected, in a way more “canonical” set of primary texts.³ A canon from which the *Nachlass* is too often excluded. In spite of the considerable number of publications appeared between 2019 and 2020 on the occasion of the anniversary of both Celan's birth in 1920 and of his death in 1970, his late poetry has hardly been the subject of a thorough investigation on the Negative.⁴ To put that in other terms, this raises the ques-

3 On this point, see also Connolly's remarks on textual conformism and critical consensus in Celan's scholarship in *Paul Celan's Unfinished Poetics* (2018: 1-29).

4 With the exception of Dogà's *Un tempo altro, estraneissimo* (2021: notalby 79 ff.). Celan's late production still seems to remain a fairly neglected territory compared to other creative seasons of the author—especially the case of the first cycle in *Zeitgehöft* (May, Goßens und Lehmann 2012: 123)—if we exclude the so called *Jerusalem Zyklus*, which includes some twenty poems written concomitantly with his only visit in Israel in October 1969 (Caradonna and Liska 2024). Among the major contributions appeared in Germany between 2019 and 2020, we can count at least two new biographical works (Reichert 2020, Rychlo 2020), four critical monographies (Böttiger 2020; Emmerich 2020; Kunisch 2020; Sparr 2020), and a new edition

tion as to what extent the exploration of the Negative in Celan has been hitherto informed, if not even legitimised, by privileged references to works such as *Sprachgitter* (1959), *Die Niemandrose* (1963), and *Atemwende* (1967), in which allusions to e.g., theology and mysticism are not only more prominent, but also more recognisable and accessible to interpretation. That changes, however, if we try to push the debate towards a less familiar ground, both in textual and conceptual terms. Celan's last creative season—not as “digestible” to readers as earlier stages of his writing—seems to display, in this sense, a rarefication, if not a complete vanishment (or better, a radical “transformation”) of hermeneutical “footholds” graspable from an aesthetic-philosophical and theological standpoint.

In his book, Schulz has extensively reflected on how Celan's final creative season radically questions the interpretability of the very poems to such an extent that interpretation itself is problematised by the text and within the text. «Negativity—so Schulz—in Celan's late lyrics manifest itself foremost [...] in the increasingly problematic relationship between reader and poem, as a sort of barricade [*Sperre*], by which the impeded identification of the subject of the poem makes difficult, at the same time, the identification of the reader with the poem» (1977: 267). While this remark attests what is nowadays the recurring motive of the inaccessibility of Celan's poetry, Schulz did actually touch a nerve here. In fact, it is not only the question of the interpretability that Celan's last poems put at stake. His *Nachlass* constitutes a new *limit*, a new frontier of his own writing, a *terra ignota* that his poetry unveils through an unprecedented reinvention of language. In the last years of his life, Celan must have been well aware of having reached in his late works a new poetical summit, an unparalleled degree of precision and force.⁵ A *unicum* that could have no antecedent nor descendant, nor could accept or allow comparisons of any sort.⁶ And precisely because of its scandalous exceptionality, Celan's poetry opens an immedicable narcissistic wound in the history of literature in German language and beyond.

Far more than any other period of his creative life, Celan's later works prompt the reader to a confrontation on a conscious, but foremost unconscious level with psychic representational remnants of an absence which is so radical, so irrepresentable, so unthinkable that it challenges our «ordinary modes of thought,» (Green 1997: 17 ff.) as well as our way of creating meaning and

of selected letters from 1934 to the year of his death (Celan 2019). Badiou's *Bildbiografie* was published only in 2023.

- 5 See a letter to Ilana Shmueli from January 24, 1970: «In die Rue d'Ulm gefahren, in den Manuskripten gelesen: der Band nach dem nächsten [Fadensonnen] ist wohl das Stärkste, Kühnste, das ich geschrieben habe.» (Celan und Shmueli: 86) «I went to Rue d'Ulm and I read my manuscripts: the collection after then next one is certainly the strongest, the most audacious that I have written.»
- 6 See Celan's reaction to Gerhard Neumann's paper “Die ‘absolute’ Metapher” (1970: 188-225). The episode is reported in Baumann 1992: 84 ff.

re-structuring, through reading, the mesh of affective and semantic elements operating in the text. In this respect, the poems Celan wrote during the last three years of his life compel us to both develop a new approach to the topic, and to envisage the matrix of “another” Negative, the specificities of which go beyond the ground covered so far from most of the research.

Whilst Schulz’s remark may be read, in a certain sense, as an apt commentary on the reluctance of many scholars to address the Negative in Celan’s late poetry, Maletta’s study on Celan’s «poetics of absence» (Maletta 2006: 207-234) is an important exception in this context—and the only veritable precedent for my investigation. Focusing on the metonymic register of the whiteness-blankness (associated with the milk, the snow, the ice, the crystal, the breath) her research shows from a psychoanalytic perspective how the insisting recurrence of omissions, interruptions, and vacancies betrays, in Celan’s poems, a radical void that deeply invests the representational process. These elements are signals of a «poetics of negative hallucination» (Maletta 2018b: 134) through which Celan exposes the mental blank space of denial and suppression that characterises the politics of memory of the Shoah after the Second world war in Germany and, more generally, in Europe. To this space of denial that Celan’s own poetry unmasks—reflecting the failure of the Western civilization to process and take responsibility for the catastrophe of a vanished world—his poetics juxtaposes an “other blankness:” the space of a deeper, irreconcilable absence that wounds the poem from within. It is in such other blank that Celan prepares, poem after poem, an organising and framing structure in which a new capability of thinking absence may be developed. What is therefore at stake in the whiteness-blankness that haunts Celan’s text is at once the harsh precept of a memory that the poem has to carry as a «vergiß du, dass du vergißt» (Celan 2018: 205) i.e., a “negativization of the Negative,” and its conversion into a margin capable of preparing an ethics of representation of the absence of representation. Expanding Green’s reflections on negative hallucination, Maletta describes the representational value of an irrepresentable, i.e. unbound remnant of the drive in the passage from the somatic to the semantic, from the body to the poetic *corpus*.

From this point of view, Maletta’s analysis not only provides important insights into the representational strategies of absence in Celan’s poetry. She reads Celan’s poetry as «poetry of his time» (Wiedemann 2000: 854), showing how Celan’s creative endeavour is driven by an inexhaustible ethical concern to write on the page an equally interminable mourning, the Negative of any monumentalization: «wirklichkeitswund und Wirklichkeit suchend» (Celan 2000: 186), «reality-wounded and reality-searching.»

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

Meine Gedichte sind weder hermetischer geworden noch geometrischer; sie sind nicht Chiffren, sie sind Sprache; sie entfernen sich nicht noch weiter vom Alltag, sie stehen, auch in Ihrer Wörtlichkeit [...] im Heute. Ich glaube, ich darf sagen, daß ich mit diesem Buch ein Äußerstes an menschlicher Erfahrung in dieser unserer Welt und dieser Unserer Zeit eingebracht habe, unverstummt und auf dem Wege zu Weiterem. (Wiedemann 2000: 860)⁷

Celan's late poetry is constantly on alert (Celan 2018: 485-486), relentlessly vigilant. Until the very end, it feels the social, cultural, and political pulse of the world, precisely because it instills into the page a form of memory that does not follow preestablished paths and categories. To the scotoma dominating the mental landscape of the West, the Negative in Celan's work responds with the bitter, harsh fruit of a close confrontation with the tribulation of a people, with the deafness of a world that suppresses and disavows «das, was geschah»⁸—and not least, with the survival of antisemitism after the Second world war.

The disturbing tone of comments and observation whereby many scholars spoke or keep speaking of Celan's psychological conditions in the last ten years of his life—especially since the exacerbation of the defamatory campaign instigated by Yvan Goll's widow, Claire Goll—still reveals the depth of the narcissistic wound that his poetry opened. Tactlessly misunderstood or deliberately misinterpreted as the «paranoid» (Lyon 1990: 175-204)⁹ product of a sick soul, Celan's writing showed to what extent the culture of the time was not only unprepared to listen or understand, but foremost ready to react aggressively in order to protect itself. In fact, with the lucidity of his poetry, Celan exposed a condition embodied in the psychic horizon of post war Germany. In this light, we may read an observation by Green:

Ce n'est peut-être pas pour rien que l'écriture d'aujourd'hui suggère l'analogie avec le langage psychotique. A ce titre elle est bien l'écriture du temps, comme l'époque de la naissance de la psychanalyse fut peut-être surtout celle de la névrose. Il ne manque pas de voix pour clamer haut que *c'est le monde d'aujourd'hui qui est psychotique et par voie de conséquence psychotisant*. (Green 1992: 41, m. e.)¹⁰

7 «My poems have not become more hermetic nor more geometrical; they are not codes, they are language; they do not distance themselves from the all-day life, they stay, also in their literality [...] in the Today. I think, I may say so, that with this book I brought an utmost of human experience in this world and this time of ours, unsilenced and underway to something further.»

8 «That which happened,» to use Celan's own euphemism taken from his 1958 Bremer speech (Celan 2000: 186).

9 For a more recent discussion of the subject, see Connolly 2018: 15 and ff.

10 Green 1997: 358: «There may be substance in the suggestion of an analogy between contemporary writing modes and psychotic language. If so, these modes are truly consonant with the current era, just as the period which saw the advent of psychoanalysis was perhaps mostly the era of neurosis. There is no dearth of voices to proclaim emphatically that *it is today's world that is psychotic and, by way of consequence, psychosis-inducing*.»

If Green was ever aware of Celan's work, to my knowledge he never explicitly addressed it in his own writing. And yet, it is significant that, as will see below, in the same years in which Celan suffered a difficult, debilitating series of psychiatric hospitalisations, Green was about to elaborate the concept of *psychose blanche* (*blank psychosis*).¹¹ In this respect, Celan's *Nachlass* will lead us to both reflect on the transformation of the work of the Negative and of psychoanalysis in relationship with the history of psychology and psychiatry.

Taking as point of departure the "other blankness" of Celan's poetry, the following chapter expands on the representational dimensions of the Negative in the two posthumously published collections of poems: *Schneepart* (*Snowpart*, 1971) and *Zeitgehöft* (*Timestead*, 1976). These two volumes represent no doubt a particularly challenging part of Celan's *corpus*, not simply because of the intrinsic, scandalous density and richness of the texts, but also for the questions irremediably left open as to the final organisation of the manuscripts.

Schneepart survived in two versions: a typescript with handwritten revisions and a paginated fair copy organised and ordered in five cycles (dated September 22, 1969). This second copy, which Celan prepared for his wife Giselle Lestrangé, was then used by Suhrkamp for first 1971 edition. *Zeitgehöft* reached us in the form of a single copy revised typescript divided in three sections. While in the former case we deal with a collection of texts which is structurally almost complete—although the author was not able to hand it in personally to his publisher—in the latter, Celan never gave a final *imprimatur* for the publication. We can assume that the author would have returned to both texts for further revisions, corrections, and (surely in the case of *Zeitgehöft*, since many poems attest conspicuous handwritten corrections directly on the typescript) reorganization of some texts, had he not ended his life in April 1970. In addition, a considerable number of scattered poems not included in the manuscripts bear once more witness to an openness, an unfinishedness that haunts in a particular way Celan's last creative period (Celan 1997: 331-343).

11 From 1962 to 1969, Celan was officially hospitalised six times in different psychiatric clinics. Theo Buck (2002: 101, n. 160), reports the following dates and locations: from 31.12.1962 to 17.1.1963 in Epinay-sur-Seine; 8-21.5.1965 in Le Vésinet; after threatening to kill his wife with a knife, from 28.11.1965 to 11.6.1966 in Garches, Suresnes and Sainte Anne in Paris; from 30.1 to 13.2.1967 in Hôpital Boucicaut, Paris, after a suicide attempt; from 13.2 to 17.10.1967 again in the clinic Sainte Anne, Paris (after April he was granted occasional exit permits); from 15.11.1968 to 3.2.1969 in Epinay-sur-Orge. During his last hospitalization at the Sainte Anne psychiatric clinic in Paris—where also Jacques Lacan studied, specialised, and later on, from 1953 to 1964, held his seminars—Celan was patient of Professor Jean Delay, crucial figure in the history of psychiatry (Maletta 2018b: 132-133, and footnote 20). In the same years, Green was involved in many clinical and research activities connected with Sainte Anne hospital and coordinated by Professor Delay. In the context of his psychoanalytic consultations with the psychiatric service at that hospital, Green later on wrote, with Jean-Luc Donnet, *L'Enfant de ça. Psychanalyse d'un entretien: la psychose blanche* (1973).

In my analysis, such openness, unachieved and unachievable characterizing Celan's late work is not merely accident dictated by the death of the poet. It rather represents a pivotal *structural* and *organising* feature of his *Spätwerk*: a signal of what we have already called, with Green, a framing structure for the representation of the absence of representation. In this very case, the blank of the negative hallucination marks the impossibility of a closure within the work, i.e., of making of it a monolithic, completed *opus*.¹² The work of the Negative articulates here a poetic filiation that claims and demands to be unfinishable and unachievable. Such impossibility of closure structurally ingrained in the work retrospectively remains on the page as a signature, an inscription of the irreconcilable overlapping of the death drive and sublimation. Matrix and navel of of an unsaturable loss, this blank determines the form of the poem from within and without:

Die Form des Gedichts ist längst nicht mehr die ~~seiner~~ seiner Verse und Strophen; ~~eine~~ ein viel weiteres Weiß als die seines Satzspiegels bestimmt die Konturen" (Celan 1999b: 99).¹³

Celan is not referring here to the white page of Stéphane Mallarmé, i.e., to a page which is blank because of the absence of the written sign, thus manifesting the *horror vacui* of the mutism of the word, of the voice, of writing. It is rather a broader, more distant blank (in time as well as in space) that Celan's poetry compels us to address: a blank unearthed in writing, by writing. A space which is both *weit* and *weiter*, "farther" and "further," "far underway" and "other," as if at the distant margin of the margin of the poem (Celan 2000: 197). As such, this blank—which encloses the whiteness as one of its *Gestalten*¹⁴—alludes to a neglected remnant of representation that does not pertain figurability [*Darstellung*] (see Maletta 2013: 1-60). Let us recall that, for Green, irrepresentability is indeed not «that of which the subject has no awareness or consciousness at a precise moment,» nor has to do simply with repression or an unconscious phantasy, but rather «something which does not succeed in binding in the representational chain» (Urribarri 2013: 45). It thus has to be envisaged as an element *of* and *within* representation, therefore involving mechanisms and dynamics which common matrix can be detected in negative hallucination:

12 Significantly, a well-known poem from the *Nachlass*, *Wolfsbohne* (dated October 21, 1959; a second version of the text is dated April 25, 1965) opens with two quotes, one from Hölderlin's *Vom Abgrund nemlich*, the other from Jean Paul's *Das Kampaner Tal*: «... wie an den Häusern der Juden (zum Andenken des ruinirten Jerusalem's), immer etwas *u n v o l l e n d e t* gelassen werden muß...»

13 «[...] The form of the poem is long not anymore that of his verses and strophes; [...] a much wider blankness/whiteness than that of print area defines the contours of it.»

14 On the semantic bifurcation implied in the terms "blank" and "white" see Green (1983: 173-176; 2001: 111-113).

L'hallucination négative n'est pas un phénomène pathologique. Elle n'est pas l'absence de représentation comme le suggère l'absence de l'image dans le miroir, mais représentation de l'absence de représentation. L'hallucination négative est le concept théorique qui est la précondition à toute théorie de la représentation, qu'il s'agisse du rêve comme de l'hallucination. Sans doute, rêve et hallucination ne sont-ils pas superposables. L'hallucination négative est leur matrice commune. (Green 1993: 384)¹⁵

In this sense, the title of the collection *Schneepart* does not only refer, metonymically speaking, to the role played by a white, blank element in the economy of poetic writing. It also evokes, synecdochically, the idea of an irrepresentable “part” drifting away from the whiteness of the snow, as an unbounded, irreconcilable “piece,” that as such remains pulsating at the heart of the poem (Maletta 2013: 1-60). The *Schneepart* constitutes that element that the text has to carry within, and which, at the same time, does not cease to jeopardise the very fabric of the poetic: mark of an incision, of an *incréable* around which the poetic structures the “binding of an unbinding.”

WAS NÄHT
an dieser Stimme? Woran
näht diese
Stimme
diesseits, jenseits?

Die Abgründe sind
eingeschworen auf Weiß, ihnen
entstieg
die Schneenadel

schluck sie [...]

(Celan 2018: 487-488)¹⁶

15 «Negative hallucination is not a pathological phenomenon. It is not the absence of representation as is suggested by the absence of the image in the mirror, but the *representation of the absence of representation*. Negative hallucination is the theoretical concept which is the precondition for any theory of representation, whether it is dreams or hallucination which is concerned. Undoubtedly dreams and hallucination cannot be superimposed. Negative hallucination is their common matrix.» (Green 1999b: 276)

16 «What sews / at this voice? On what / does this / voice / sew / hither, beyond? // The chasms are / sworn in on White, from them / arose / the snowneedle, // swallow it [...].» (Celan 2014: 329).

The blank we therefore intend to highlight here, and with it the Negative in Celan's late *Nachlass*, embodies, on a multiplicity of registers, the inter- and intrapsychic interweaving of *déliasion* and *liaison*, of *unbinding* and *binding processes*.¹⁷ At the heart of such a poetry of exceptional, irreducible overdetermination, sublimation becomes the time and the space of a wrestling with the death drive,¹⁸ the latter being both constitutive to the very creative process, as well as belonging to the «air» that Celan's poetry «has to breath» (Celan 2000: 192) and ruminate: «dieses / Brot kauen, mit / Schreibzähnen» (Celan 2018: 493)—«to chew / this bread, / with writing-teeth» (Celan 2014: 345), as we read in a poem from *Schneepart* dated February 21, 1968.

As such, unachievable and unachievability are representational marks of a poetic that *must* ingest¹⁹ and harbour destructivity—«ihnen / entstieg / die Schneenadel // schluck sie [...]»—, restructuring it in a stylistic matrix without abolishing or neutralizing it.²⁰ By so doing, Celan *exposes* poetry and subjectivity itself to the dangers of this destructivity within the poetic. «*La poésie ne s'impose plus, elle s'expose,*» (Celan 2005: 58) reads a well-known aphorism penned by Celan on March 26, 1969, almost a year before drowning in the Seine, on a folder also bearing the inscription: «Schneepart | /Handschriften/» [*Snowpart; Manuscripts*] (Celan 2005: 445). The last two years and a half of Celan's life are characterised by an intense, unprecedented, almost daily commitment to writing: the poet is, in spite of all, more than ever holding firm through his writing (the verb *stehen* recurs more and more often in Celan's late work), engaged in a relentless struggle to give form through poetry to such an unachievability.

But what does remain of the subject in such an exposure, in such an endeavour, for such a poetry to be possible? In order to address these questions, I will first tackle Celan's work of the Negative from the angle of narcissism in its ambivalent relationship with sublimation and writing.

17 Indeed, as Green writes, «[i]t would be too simple to identify Eros with binding and to postulate that the destructions drive are illustrated by unbinding. In fact, I think it would be more logic to consider that Eros operates a combination which includes bindings and unbindings, or to put it otherwise, that entanglement and disentanglement can occur within the psyche animated from a dynamic point of view. [...] Once we are dealing with the predominance of destructive drives, one encounters the prevalence of the unbinding alone.» See Green 2002b: 330.

18 It is not an accident, we might also add, that in several preparatory notes of *Der Meridian* Celan explicitly refers to Freud's *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* in relationship with the anorganic element of his own poetry (Celan 1999b: 98-100).

19 On this point, see also Dogà (2021: 88).

20 I use in this case the term neutralise with no direct reference to Green's concept of «Neutre» (1983: 33-86; 2001: 3-47).

22/23 December 1967. DU LIEGST; LILA LUFT

El blanco es el dolor de la Madre
José Ángel Valente (2006: 279)²¹

Vielleicht hilft Schnee ja, Perception verstehn.
Durs Grünbein (2003: 14)²²

«A Winter Made of Snow and Snow»

On December 6, 1967, Celan handed in to Suhrkamp Verlag the manuscript of *Fadensonnen*, the last volume of poems to be published during his lifetime (Celan et Celan-Lestrange, vol. 2: 574).²³ Less than two weeks thereafter, on December 16, the poet flew from Paris over Frankfurt am Main to Berlin, in occasion of a public reading organised by Walter Höllerer on behalf of the *Literarisches Colloquium* at the Akademie der Künste. The following day, he read a selection of poems during a special session of Peter Szondi's seminar, in front of a small audience of students and faculty members of the Institute for comparative literature of the Freie Universität Berlin (Celan et Celan-Lestrange, vol. 2: 407-408).²⁴ If Celan's readings, and particularly the one at the Akademie der Künste, turned out to be a great success both in terms of audience response and press reception (Celan et Celan-Lestrange, vol. 1: 596; vol. 2: 407-408), his stay in Berlin was by no means less meaningful on a further personal as well as creative level.

For the first time in almost thirty years, the poet was returning to (West) Berlin after passing through the German metropolis by train in 1938. In that occurrence, as it is known, he was travelling from his native Czernowitz to Paris, to reach then Tours, where he was about to begin his preparatory studies

21 «The white [the blank] is the sorrow of the Mother.» Quoted in the French translation of J. Ancet in Celan et Celan-Lestrange (vol. 2: 604): «Le blanc est la douleur de la Mère».

22 «Perhaps snow indeed helps understanding perception.»

23 Excepted for the small cycle of poems *Schwarzmaut*, published on March 19, 1969. The same day Celan also wrote the closing poem of *Lichtzwang*, *Wirk nicht voraus*, the collection which appeared shortly after his death, in 1970.

24 The reading at the Academy of Arts was scheduled for December 18; the one at the FU Berlin for December 19. During his stay, Celan was also invited by Ernst Schnabel to record a reading of Shakespeare's sonnets for *Sender Freies Berlin*. Due to a strong and painful laryngitis (Celan et Celan-Lestrange, vol. 1: 596) the recordings were postponed to December 28. *Paul Celan liest Shakespeare-Sonette* was broadcasted on June 26, 1968 (Celan et Celan-Lestrange, vol. 2: 408). For a more complete account of Celan's stay in Berlin in relationship with the texts composed in those days, see Szondi (1972: 113-125), Janz (2003: 335-345), Sparr (2020: 237-241), Emmerich (2020: 253-265).

for the faculty of medicine. The eighteen years old Paul Antschel arrived at the Anhalter Bahnhof in the early morning hours of November 10, the day after *Kristallnacht* (Chalfen 1983: 78-79; Sparr 2020: 38-39). The verses of his lyric *La Contrescarpe* (composed between September 1962 and March 1963 and published in *Die Niemandrose*) encapsulate traces and announcements of that passage, in which individual vicissitudes and collective tribulations of the Jewish people intertwine:

[...] Durch die Schotten
blutet die Botschaft, Verjährtes
geht jung über Bord:

Über Krakau
bist du gekommen, am Anhalter
Bahnhof
floß deinen Blicken ein Rauch zu,
der war schon von morgen. [...]

(Celan 2018: 165)²⁵

If with his trip to Berlin Celan was venturing towards the «heart of darkness» of European history (Emmerich 2020: 253 and ff.), the poet was thereby foremost re-visiting the traces of a possible place of inception of that wound that his work could not cease articulating: not the origin itself, nor a wound among the others, but rather the representational navel of his poetry.

Following his arrival in Berlin, on December 23, Celan wrote a letter to his wife Gisèle, which reads: «Il a fait froid et j'ai vu, pour la première fois depuis vingt ou vingt-deux ans, un hiver fait de neige et de neige.» (Celan et Celan-Lestranger, vol. 1: 591) «It's cold and I have seen, for the first time after twenty or twenty-two years, a winter made of snow and snow.» Celan's formulation is extremely interesting: in it, we find a trace of that irreconcilable "other blank" which represents the backbone of Celan's «poetics of absence» (Maletta 2006: 207-234) from the early lyrics up to the late work. The intensity and the evocative tone of his words, most notably the repetitions «vingt ou vingt-deux ans» and «de neige et de neige,» suggests a powerful affective mesh in which the whiteness of the snow is not merely *perceived*, but becomes a space of representational organisation. In the negative movement from perception (the white of the snow: colour-no-colour) to re-presentation (the blank), in which we recognise the mark of negative hallucination, «the absent traces become the traces of an

25 «Through the bulkheads / bleeds the message, what is time-barred / goes young overboard:
// Via Kracow / you came, at the Anhalter / Station / a smoke flowed towards your glance
/ that was already from tomorrow.»

absence» (Maletta 2008: 62 ff.). The winter landscape of the metropolis forms a blank screen upon which, as on an associative matrix, distant times and spaces of his life and work overlap (cfr. Maletta 2006). In one of Celan's earliest poems, *Schwarze Flocken* (*Black Flakes*), such a sorrowful associative fabric is already present, vibrant, in the form of a shawl that the son weaves through the text in order to inscribe in the body of writing the trace, the wound of the maternal absence. The metonymic chain of association allows us to glimpse in the shawl also the blank page of a work yet to be written, there where poetry interlaces loss and filiation:

«[...]... Kind, ach ein Tuch,
 mich zu hüllen darein, wenn es blinket von Helmen,
 wenn die Scholle, die rosige, birst, wenn schneeig stäubt das Gebein
 deines Vaters, unter den Hufen zerknirscht
 das Lied von der Zeder...
 Ein Tuch, ein Tüchlein nur schmal, daß ich wahre
 nun, da zu weinen du lernst, mir zur Seite
 die Enge der Welt, die nie grünt, mein Kind, deinem Kinde!»

Blutete, Mutter, der Herbst mir hinweg, brannte der Schnee mich:
 Sucht ich mein Herz, daß es weine, fand ich den Hauch, ach des Sommers,
 war er wie du.
 Kam mir die Träne. Webt ich das Tüchlein

(Celan 2018: 19)²⁶

Many years thereafter, the distant winter landscape of the Bukovina, where Celan spent his youth, and the inaccessible winter landscape of Transnistria, where the parents of the poet were murdered, imbricate now into that of a lacerated city, disseminated with ruins. There, the wounds left by National socialism are still open and not as extensively obliterated by the process of monumentalization as in the years following the fall of the Wall. It is the city in which Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were assassinated in the night between January 15 and 16, 1919; the city of the *Kristallnacht* that impressed his mark on Celan's *La Contrescarpe*; the city in which the Wannsee conference took place on January 20, 1942, and of the Plötzensee Prison, where the conspirators of July

26 I refer here to Felstiner's translation (1995: 18-19): «“[...] Oh for a cloth, child, / to wrap myself when it's flashing with helmets, / when the rosy floe bursts, when snowdrift sifts your father's / bones, hooves crushing / the Song of the Cedar . . . / A shawl, just a thin little shawl, so I keep / by my side, now you're learning to weep, this anguish, / this world that will never turn green, my child, for your child!” // Autumn bled all away, Mother, snow burned me through: / I sought out my heart so it might weep, I found—oh the summer's breath, / it was like you. / Then came my tears. I wove the shawl.»

1944 assassination attempt on Hitler were brutally executed. This complexity of elements at once temporal and spatial, semantic and affective explode inward, coalescing into a creative frame, at once polychronic and polytopic, heterochronic and heterotopic: there, the poetic is already in motion.

Being for Poetry. The Poem as Transnarcissistic Object

Such enmeshed frame will play a crucial role for what Celan would compose while staying in Berlin in 1967. Of the total of four lyrics that the poet wrote from December 16 until December 29, I will consider here particularly three texts. The first one, in chronological order, is *Ungewaschen, unbemalt*, a poem actually written on the flight from Frankfurt to Berlin, on December 16:

UNGEWASCHEN, UNBEMALT,
in der Jenseits-
Kae:

da,
wo wir uns finden,
Erdige, immer,

ein
verspätetes
Becherwerk geht
durch uns Zerwölkte hindurch
nach oben, nach unten,

auführerisch
flötets darin, mit Narren-
beinen,

der Flugschatten im
irisierenden Rund
heilt uns ein, in der Sieben-
höhe,

eiszeitlich nah
steuert das Filzschwanenpaar
durch die schwebende
Stein-Ikone

(Celan 2018: 485)²⁷

The second and third poems, *Du liegst* and *Lila Luft*, were written during the stay in the city, in the days immediately preceding Christmas' Eve—«Deux poèmes, dont un sur Karl Liebknecht et Rosa Luxemburg (assassinés ici le 16 janvier 1919)», so Celan to his wife Gisèle in a letter from December 23 (Celan et Celan-Lestrange, vol. 1: 595):

DU LIEGST im großen Gelausche,
umbuscht, umflockt.

Geh du zur Spree, geh zur Havel,
geh zu den Fleischerhaken,
zu den roten Äppelstaken
aus Schweden –

Es kommt der Tisch mit den Gaben,
er biegt um ein Eden –

Der Mann ward zum Sieb, die Frau
mußte schwimmen, die Sau,
für sich, für keinen, für jeden –

Der Landwehrkanal wird nicht rauschen.
Nichts
stockt.

(Celan 2018: 485-486)²⁸

27 «UNWASHED, UNPAINTED, / in Hereafter's / pithead: // there / where we find ourselves / Earthy, always, // a / belated / bucket conveyor pierces / us cloudborn / upward, downward, // // seditious / piping inside, on Fool's / legs, // the flightshadow in / the iridescing round / heals us in, into seven- / heighth, // ice-age-close / the feltswan pair steers / through the hovering / stone-icon» (Celan 2014: 321)

28 «YOU LIE in the great listening, / ambushed, snowed in. // Go to the Spree, go to the Havel, / go to the butcher hooks, / to the red apple stakes / from Sweden— // Here comes the table with the presents, / he turns around an Eden— // The man became a sieve, the woman / had to swim, the sow, / for herself, for none, for everyone— // The Landwehr canal will not roar / Nothing / stalls.» (Celan 2014: 323)

LILA LUFT mit gelben Fensterflecken,

der Jakobstab überm
Anhalter Trumm

Kokelstunde, noch nichts
Interkurrierendes,

vor der
Stehkneipe zur
Schneekneipe.

(Celan 2018: 486)²⁹

The fourth poem, *Brunnengräber*, dated December 25, shall not be examined in the next paragraph, in relationship with the question of temporality in Celan's late poetry:

BRUNNENGRÄBER IM WIND:

es wird einer die Bratsche spielen, tagabwärts, im Krug,
es wird einer kopfstehn im Wort Genug,
es wird einer kreuzbeinig hängen im Tor, bei der Winde.

Dies Jahr
rauscht nicht hinüber,
es stürzt den Dezember zurück, den November,
es gräbt seine Wunden um,
es öffnet sich dir, junger
Gräber-
brunnen,
Zwölfmund.

(Celan 2018: 486-487)³⁰

29 «LILAC AIR with yellow windowstains, // Orion's belt above the / Anhalter ruin, // flame-hour, nothing / intercurrent yet, // from / standing bar to / snow bar.» (Celan 2014: 323-325)

30 «WELLDIGGER in the wind: // someone will play the viola, day downward, in the jug, / someone will stand on his head in the word Enough, / someone will hang crosslegged in the gateway, next to the winch. // This year / does not roar across, / it throws back December, November, / it turns up its wounds, / it opens up to you, young / grave- / well, twelve-mouth.» (Celan 2014: 325, tr. mod.)

Let us notice how the reference to the winter landscape—and foremost: its representational kernel—persists, more or less explicitly, in all these texts («ei-szeitlich nah;» «umflockt;» «Schneekneipe;» «es stürzt den Dezember zurück, den November»). The title of the draft of *Du liegst* was originally *Winterreime* (*Winterrhyme*) before the author changed it in *Wintergedicht* (*Winterpoem*). Subsequently, the *Winter*-title were crossed off and corrected with date and place of composition. The final version of the text eventually presents only the incipit of the first verse in small capital letters, a common characteristic of Celan's publications. Notably, another crucial element was corrected, or rather subtracted, during the composition of this particular text. An intermediate draft illustrating the development of the poem shows how the «I» of the subject («*Ich lag* im großen Gelausche» m. e.) has been deleted. Instead of an «Ich,» a «Du» situates at the beginning of the poem, while the verb is conjugated in the present tense, rather than in the *Präteritum* (Celan 1994: 60-61).

The existing literature has extensively investigated the historical and genetical dimensions of these poems (particularly *Du liegst* and *Lila Luft*), and shed light on the «process of crystallization» from the lived, attested experience [*«bezeugtes Erlebnis»*] to the text (Szondi 1972: 115-116).³¹ My main concern here is to explore the representational processes which structure and link together *Ungewaschen*, *unbemalt*, *Du liegst*, and *Lila Luft*. These three poems form in my reading a cohesive, distinct unity, and for this reason I will focus on their intertextual relationships, on what do they *do* in representational terms.

The choice of focusing on just three of the four poems written in Berlin—especially in the case of a poet such as Celan, whose poetry is characterised by a prominent intertextuality—is motivated by different factors. While all four poems were composed one after the other in a brief period of time, and occupy a relevant, opening position in *Schneepart* (they actually open not only the book but in a way also the *Nachlass* of the poet), *Ungewaschen*, *unbemalt*, *Du liegst*, and *Lila Luft* belong to the few texts from the volume that were actually printed separately, as Celan was still alive, in a tribute to the German poet Peter Huchel.³²

31 Szondi's (1972: 113-125) and Janz's (2003: 335-345) works were instrumental in the reconstruction of Celan's itinerary, the places he visited, his meetings, his readings, most notably the newly published study on the Luxemburg-Liebknecht assassination by Elisabeth Hannover-Drück and Heinrich Hannover (1967). Kelletat's contribution on *Lila Luft* (1976: 18-25) sheds light on important linguistic references that determined Celan's lexical choices. And yet, as Szondi remarks, the question of the relationship between contextual and/or biographical knowledge and poem has to be considered carefully as well as critically, since Celan's work does not create a private/documentary-like account, and neither a "topography of terror".

32 The three poems were published in *Hommage für Peter Huchel* (Best 1968: 15-17) with indication of place and date of composition—elements which were not kept in the final version—respectively: *Frankfurt am Main/Berlin. 16.12.1967* (*Ungewaschen, unbemalt*); *Berlin 22/23.12.1967* (*Du liegst*); *Berlin 23.12.1967* (*Lila Luft*). Peter Huchel – who from 1949 to 1962 was also chief editor of the influential review *Sinn und Form* – met Celan in October 1957 in Wuppertal, in

But there is another element that motivates my interest in reading these three poems together as parts, traces and fragments of a wider structural organization extending, indeed, to *Schneepart* as a whole. The poems show a progressive movement of subtraction and erosion of the subject, organising around the vicissitudes of a blank space, a vacancy left for the sake of another subjectivity which remains unfathomable, *in absentia*. In this dynamic it is possible to detect the traces of a work of the Negative emerging in the transformation of the *narcissistic structure of the subject into the narcissistic structure of the work*—more specifically, in the passage from the «death narcissism» of the creating subject into the «life narcissism» of the poetic *corpus*.

Green's expansion of the metapsychological role of narcissism—which represents a relatively brief, although highly relevant conceptual parenthesis in Freud's thinking (Green 1983: 10 ff.; 2001: IX ff)—is here pivotal. Green re-thinks this concept in the light of the second “topography,” i.e., after Freud's discovery and introduction of the death drive. To be sure, as Green remarks, a subtle link between narcissism and destructivity was foreshadowed in Freud's work as the latter defined, for instance, melancholy as «an expression of a pure culture of the death drive» (Green 1983: 12; 2001: XI). The further development of the concepts of «death narcissism» or «negative narcissism» is, however, one of Green's most important achievements. The author summarises it as follows:

Je me suis attaché à défendre l'idée que l'on ne peut valablement accepter la deuxième topique en faisant l'économie de la dernière théorie des pulsions. [...] En outre, il me semble que la cohérence théorique comme l'expérience clinique nous permettent de postuler l'existence d'un *narcissisme négatif*, double sombre de l'Éros unitaire du narcissisme positif, tout investissement d'objet, comme du Moi, impliquant son double inversé qui vise à un retour régressif au point zéro. [...] le narcissisme négatif va vers l'inexistence, l'anesthésie, le vide, le *blanc* (de l'anglais *blank*, qui se traduit par la catégorie du neutre), que ce blanc investisse l'affect (l'indifférence), la représentation (l'hallucination négative), la pensée (psychose blanche). (Green 1983: 41-42)³³

occasion of a conference on the topic *Literary criticism – critically examined* [*Literaturkritik – kritisch betrachtet*] (see Celan et Celan-LeStrange, vol. 2: 507).

- 33 Green 2001: 10: «I have attempted to defend the idea that one cannot legitimately accept the second topography while leaving the final drive theory to one side. [...] Moreover, it seems to me that, on the grounds of theoretical coherence, as well as clinical experience, we are justified in postulating the existence of a *negative narcissism*, the dark double of the unitary Eros of positive narcissism; all object or ego-cathexis containing within it its inverted double which aims at slipping back regressively towards the point zero. [...] Negative narcissism tends towards non-existence, anaesthesia, emptiness, the *blanc* (from the English 'blank' which refers to the category neuter); whether this blank cathects affect (indifference), representation, (negative hallucination) or thought (blank psychosis).»

In my reading, death narcissism offers a tool to consider from a new perspective the phantom of a *déliasion subjectale* (*subjective unbinding*) unfolding through the creative process as a reverberation of what Green describes as the «atrophying effect on sexuality» (Green 1993: 328; 1999b: 238) of sublimation. In these terms, the ego of the writing subject falls prey to an unbinding process, a disinvestment, whose tendency is the point zero of subjectivity. What is peculiar in Celan's case is that this radical disinvestment (or disobjectalising process) of the subject, which we may consider as an attack on the cohesive forces of the ego, is at once outcome and counterpart of a powerful investment, of a form of *liaison objectale* directed towards the work. The objectalising function that writing embodies (Green 2005: 222)³⁴ intervenes here putting the object—indeed, the writing, the poem—in a relationship of antagonism with regards to the ego of the author. Against the death narcissism oriented towards the writing subject, the life narcissism of the work reacts with a new structural cohesion, which is a product of transference.

Conversely, the life narcissism that marks the work makes of the latter a new self-sufficient, autonomous unity (Green 2007b: 145): the price for the affirmation of such autonomy is the renunciation to the relation with its “original” object: the creator. This does not mean, however, that the work claims its absolutism detaching from the creative process, nor that a subject has entirely vanished. The survival of a subject by means the work is possible, although only at the condition that such subject persists as a vacancy around which the text organises. It is for this reason that, with Green, I call Celan's work a *transnarcissistic object*.

The notion of transnarcissistic object gives account of how writing becomes place of an investment through which the writing subject is exposed to its own erosion insofar as the latter prepares a new form of subjectivity from within the text: the unreachable, aleatory object of the work. An object that does not belong to the author anymore but rather offers a space of potential encounter with an otherness, elsewhere and elsewhen. We see here how sublimation proves itself to be a field of conflictual tensions between death drives and Eros, between objectalising and disobjectalising functions, whose intricacy is hosted in the work as poetic kernel.

In this regard, Celan's intervention on the draft of *Du liegst*, most notably the effacement of the «Ich» towards the «Du,» is all the more relevant if we consider that on December 15, 1967 (the day before beginning his trip to Berlin) Celan drafted a testamentary note. In it, he wished to settle the question of his literary remnants, including the poems preceding the 1948 collection *Der Sand aus der*

34 «The objectalizing function is not [...] limited to the transformations of the object, but elevates psychic functions to the status of object, on the condition that they are always the vehicle of a *meaningful investment*. It is thus the investment itself which can be objectalized.»

Urnen, as well as a huge body of translations.³⁵ The note was written, significantly, in French: the other “mother-tongue” of his all-day life, a linguistic alterity of the language of his poetry, and idiom of the present affects such as his wife Gisele, and his son Eric (Celan et Celan-Lestrangé, vol. 2: 8-12]). In these terms, the testamentary note is remarkable for it shows the expression of a transfer of existence (Green 1992: 314 ff) as it unfolds on the page. The note reads:

45 rue d'Ulm / 15. 12. 67 // S'il m'arrivait quelque chose: / tout ce j'ai fait [sic] – le manuscrit / de «Schwarzmaut» et les poèmes d'avant / «Der Sand aus den Urnen» inclus, est à mon / Fils Eric. / Je souhaite qu'une édition de mes poèmes / et de mes traductions de poésie anglaise, russe, / française paraisse aux Editions Suhrkamp et / je prie Beda Allemann d'y apporter son aide et / son savoir. // Paul Celan (Celan et Celan-Lestrangé, vol. 1: 574)³⁶

If I decided to repropose here an explicit reference to a concept that we already addressed with regards to Kafka's writing, it is not only because the *transfert d'existence* helps us to highlight a series of aspects of the narcissistic structure operating at the core of Celan's writing. The transfer of existence acquires in his poetry a unicity, an intensity which is absent in Kafka's work, due to the irreducibility of the respective circumstances that informed their works, and consequently of their respective stylistic peculiarities.

If we were willing to see in Kafka's work a sort of “sacrificial” dimension intimately intertwined with the question of writing,³⁷ in Celan's case this is not possible anymore. And yet, Celan's testamentary note is anything but the utterance of an «irremediably sick man»³⁸ affected by «persecution mania,» (Lyon 1990) or the alleged proof of the premeditation of a future suicide.³⁹ Quite on

35 Published in Vienna by A. Saxl Verlag, *Der Sand aus der Urnen* is Celan's first publication in German language. The book contained, however, so many misprints that the author decided to withdraw the remaining copy from the market. Until the publication of the critical edition, the collection as such was never reprinted in its original form. Poems from *Der Sand aus der Urnen*, including *Todesfuge*, were eventually republished in the homonymous section in *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (1952).

36 «If something happens to me: / everything that I have written—included the manuscript / of “Schwarzmaut” and the poems before / “Der Sand aus den Urnen”—belongs to / my son Eric. / I wish that an edition of my poems / and of my translations of poems from English, Russian, / and French appears with Suhrkamp publishing house / and I beg Beda Allemann to contribute to it with his help and knowledge. // Paul Celan».

37 A “sacrificial dimension” that, nonetheless, ought to be considered from the point of view of a christological sacrifice, but rather from the angle of the *Akedat Yitzchak* (the “Binding of Isaac”). It is precisely the “binding,” the relationship with literature and with the creative act which is here prominently involved.

38 So Heidegger on Celan in occasion of a public reading in Freiburg in March 1970 (Felstiner 1995: 282).

39 In these terms, I disagree with Hans-Michael Speier (1987: 65-79, here 65-66), who reads Celan's poetry as if attesting the «Umgekommen-Sein» of the author—as if Celan's last

the contrary, this brief text allows us to see Celan's last creative season from the point of view of an objectalising function which invests poetic writing as the only thing keeping Celan alive. Poetry is Celan's rigour and discipline, what enables him to endure in spite of harsh circumstances: a chance and an unbearable burden at the same time. It is not only a form of testimony and survival, but also a form of organisation of a subjectivity who has lost everything and whose origin has turned into ashes. If there is any sacrifice in Celan, that "sacrifice" already took place: his poetry comes after, but there is no *after* Auschwitz for the author of such poetry. The poem gives Celan a *forma mentis*, a form of structuring of the psyche. It is what enables the subject to stay in the world as a *limit* of the world, as a remnant which is all that remains of Auschwitz: a remnant which is intolerable for the West—a subject to exorcise, hospitalise, and label as "paranoid" and "sick."

It is in this sense that Celan's poetry has nonetheless a high ethical value, because it is an extreme form of exposition of the potential destruction of a subjectivity which, in spite of all, holds together, stands firm through poetry. The objectalising function that Celan's poetry expresses is a radical *being for* and *through poetry* which stems from destruction, but capable of creating life, poetry indeed: a being for poetry, which is projected in a transgenerational tension.⁴⁰

As we may recall, the transfer of existence is explored by Green in the wider context of a psychoanalytic meditation on the relationship between *body* and *being*. The concept of *being* is not present in Freud's conceptual repertory—just as the verb "I am" is syntactically absent in Hebrew. Only with the works of Lacan and especially Winnicott it is introduced in the psychoanalytic terminology (Green 1992: 314). In psychoanalysis, the concept of *being* is profoundly different from the one forged by Martin Heidegger. The former puts the accent on a process of development that cannot be foreshadowed nor exhausted, as signalled by the verbal form in the present continuous, and whose origin is lost, *untraceable*. Lyotard grasped this radical alterity between the Heidegger's *Sein* and Celan's *being for poetry* by reflecting on the question of the "oblivion of being," as he wrote: «"Celan" n'est ni le commencement ni la fin de Heidegger, c'est son manque: ce qui lui manque, ce qu'il manque, et dont le manque lui manque.» (Lyotard 1988: 153)⁴¹ The psychoanalytic *being* is not only an «être se faisant ou en train de se faire» (Green 1992: 314) but also the gift, and the property (in the sense of *feature*: «propriété») of another: the mother. Incorporating creativity as its crucial characteristic, *being* implies in psychoanalysis that the "being of a subject" cannot be conceived other than by reflecting on its inseparability with

poems were speaking in a voice from "the other side," or from afterlife.

40 On this point see Michael G. Levine (2014: 97-123), who has attempted a reading of the motive of sacrifice in Celan, most notably articulated in the relationship to poetry and his son Eric.

41 «"Celan" is neither the beginning nor the end of Heidegger; it is his lack: what is missing in him, what he misses, and whose lack he is lacking.» (Lyotard 1990: 94)

the object relation. We do not only create objects,⁴² nor simply are we in turn affected and modelled by the objects we find-create (Winnicott), and from the relationships we establish with them. The object survives the subject in that it “objectifies” (i.e., makes an object of) the creation of a structural matrix of subjectivity. As such, the object is not something that the subject simply “possesses,” nor is it reduceable to the horizon of expectations of subjective projections. The object must be conceived in the sense of a radical, opaque, irreducible alterity.

As we know, for Green, the work is the result of a transfer of existence in that «the question of the existence of the work of art—in which [the] most essential narcissism [of the creator] is invested—comes before everything, up to and including that which within the psychic apparatus is subject to the instinct of self-preservation.» (Green 1992: 314) In Celan's case, that does not only mean that the poetic work becomes, literally, more important than the very life of the writing subject. Celan's last will denote a shift in the psychic economy, in favour of a fundamental dedication to his own poetry, towards the demand of the work to be, to exist, and outlive its creator.

Such a demand, however, is not for poetry's sake only. Green reminds us that the *transfert d'existence*, while representing a shape [*figure*] of the work of the Negative, also incarnates a form of love whose intensity can be compared only to that of the mother for the child. Poetry, for Celan, is the space opened by the severing of the generational bond and the place of its (im)possible rebinding. In this sense, it is not accidental that Celan chooses to name his son Eric as heir and guardian of his poetic filiation (Green 1992: 316)— of what he has *done* through poetry, as we read in the testamentary note.⁴³ On the one hand, while throwing a retrospective, vigilant gaze upon his work (Green 1992: 314)⁴⁴ (a work which remains, as a whole, still invisible, because “yet to come”) the poet seems to evoke, with Eric Celan, a new possible generation of readers, towards whom poetry is «underway»—as the poet wrote in his *Meridian* speech: «Das Gedicht ist einsam. Es ist einsam und unterwegs. Wer es schreibt, bleibt ihm mitgegeben. // Aber steht das Gedicht nicht gerade dadurch, also schon hier, in der Begegnung—*im Geheimnis der Begegnung?*» (Celan 1999b: 9) Conversely, by handing and entrusting his work to his son (who, significantly, did not speak German) Celan wants in a way to ensure the survival of his work as an object

42 I use here the verb “to create” in a wider sense, of which literary creation is a more specific connotation. See Winnicott 2005: 87-114.

43 Cfr. also Celan's letter to his wife dated 14.1.1970 (Celan et Celan-Lestranger, vol. 1: 687) to which we shall return in the closing paragraph.

44 Green 1992: 314: «Le regard sur l'œuvre est le véritable père de celle-ci, en tant qu'il la légitime et reconnaît cet autre parent qui est son créateur immanent.» «The gaze upon the work of art is the real father of that, insofar as it legitimises it and recognises that other genitor who is its immanent creator.»

unbounded by the destiny of the writing subject, who has nonetheless dedicated any possible resource, every drop of life, to give form to it. The being of the subject has been transformed and transferred upon the body of the work, from which, however, the writing subject as such, has no access. This bitter, sometimes sardonic ambivalence is particularly prominent in Celan's late writings. As Ulisse Dogà (2007; 2021: 79 ff.) eloquently illustrated, his late poetry is characterised by a shift from the aleatory hope inscribed in the poem towards a threatening, corrosive sarcasm. Yet, in spite of all, Celan's poetry attempts to stand, to expose itself, to be underway, and to survive as a form of rigorous resistance within and through language.

Let us notice that the terminological constellation we just mentioned—the “gaze”, the “vigilant look upon the work”; the “solitariness of the poem”—leads us, again, to the core of the conceptual field of narcissism in its entanglement with the transfer of existence. Through the transfer of existence, the gaze of the ego of the subject is not reflected anymore in the mirror of the waters, like in the myth of Narcissus, but confronted with «the invisible shadow of the subject's image,» that very «empty structure» [«*appareil vide*»] (Green 1992: 62), which the work creates. In Celan's words: «Das Gedicht entsteht durch den Umgang mit einem uns {U} unsichtbar bleibenden: im Umgang mit der Sprache.» «The poem emerges through the dealing with something that to us remains invisible: in the dealing with the language.» (Celan 1999b: 105) We could say that the work occupies, in this case, the space of scopic perception—without which narcissism is unthinkable (Green 2001: 4-5)—, the written page taking the place of the mirroring image of the subject, whose monadic, unitary, indeed narcissistic tension is transferred on the work, with its unicity and stylistic peculiarities.

Also in this sense, the work represents a transnarcissistic object, for the structural features of the unity and cohesion of the subject are transferred and reorganised in a different form through the creative work. In this reorganization of narcissistic structures in the work of writing, through which the textual matrix takes the place of the reflecting surface, we can also detect a transformation of the narcissistic object into a new special category of object: a *transitional cultural object*. This in turn creates a new liminal space, at the border between presence and absence, internal and external, at once to be searched, created, and found.⁴⁵ In it, not the ego of the author becomes target of a powerful libidinal investment, but rather the representation of the absence of representation of another subjectivity emerging from the text: the subject of the work, «Etwas aus *meinem* / und *keinerlei* Stoff» (Celan 2018: 494, m. e.). Green summarises this point eloquently, as he writes:

45 Let us recall, with Green, that the concept of narcissism cannot «be thought about and interpreted in isolation while neglecting object relations and the general problem of the ego's relations with the erotic and destructive libido.» Green 2001: XIII; Green 1983: 14.

Tout écrivain est pris entre le double et l'absent: le double qu'il est en tant qu'écrivain, qui donne à voir une autre image de lui-même (auteur presque anagramme d'autre) est dans un autre monde; il est absent, celui qui émerge du silence et retourne au silence, aussi essentiel à la constitution de l'œuvre que le précédent. (Green 1992: 62)⁴⁶

The meta-representational traces of this intricately narcissistic conflict between transitivity (*liaison objectal* proper of the work) and intransitivity (*déliation subjectal* attacking the creating subject) emerge with peculiar intensity in Celan's Berlin poems. The erosion of the subject is, in this sense, instrumental to the preparation of a new corporeity of the poetic, which becomes fabric apt to the reception of a multiplicity of phantasmatic interferences and spectral traces.⁴⁷

Interferences – Intercurrences

It is in such terms that we can reconsider the two final verses of *Du liegst*: «Nichts / stockt.» Let us notice that the term «Nothing,» *Nichts*, can be understood not only as an adverb, but also as a substantive:⁴⁸ this *Nichts* stands for the name of an absence which “stagnates,” “thickens,” “arrests” on the page between veiling and unveiling. If we are willing to read *Du liegst* by paying particular attention to the vertical tension created between the first verse «Du liegst im großen Gelausche»—«You lie in the great listening»—and the last two «Nichts / stockt,» we may conceive the body of this lyric as a sort of spatial and temporal fabric capable of intercepting remnants and only remnants of memory—vestiges of an irreducible alterity. Thus, the word *Gelausche*—a deverbal noun deriving from *lauschen* and reinforced by the prefix *ge-* (and which means «to listen with great, tense attention, in such a way that no sound or word may be lost;» cfr. “lauschen”)—operates in the text. It represents a sort of sensorial organ of the body of the poetic. Such alertness, such readiness oriented towards the unexpected interception of traces is but one of the elements that structure the poem.

If we consider once more the drafts of the text, we can also see that the final verse read, in a first stage of development, «Du stockst,», before being replaced by «Was stockt;» and eventually corrected in «Nichts stockt» (the two words divided by and *enjambement*) (Celan 1994: 61). The composition of the poem carries the traces of the very process of sublimation that allowed it to be on the page: proceeding, subtraction after subtraction, from an open Alterity («Du») to an open question («Was»), towards absences that remain absences («Nichts

46 Green 1997: 326: «Any writer is caught between the double and the absent: the double that he is, as a writer who produces another image of himself (*author* being almost an anagram of *other*), exists in another world, and he is absent, he who emerges from silence and returns to silence. His absence is as essential to the constitution of the work as is his duality.» (tr. mod.)

47 See in this regard also Olsson's contribution in Fioretos 1994: 267-279.

48 Cfr. also Emmerich 2020: 261-263.

/ stockt»), literally *re-presenting* the absence of representation. The price to host such traces is precisely the erosion of the subject that we attempted to envisage with Green: the effacement of an *Ich* in order to make space for a thirdness, a *Du* which is «double» and «absent,» to use Green's words in *Le double et l'absent* (Green 1992: 43-67). A double and absent one listening, in alert, there where the silence of History leaves no witnesses.

Many scholars have identified in the final verses of this poem a fairly precise reference to one of the closing scenes of Georg Büchner's drama *Danton's Tod*. In the light of these remarks, the words «Alles stockt» pronounced by Lucille in this scene right after assisting to the public decapitation of Danton may acquire a new, unexpected value:

LUCILLE.

Es ist doch was wie Ernst darin.

Ich will einmal nachdenken. Ich fange an so was zu begreifen.

Sterben – Sterben –

Es darf ja Alles leben, Alles, die kleine Mücke da, – der Vogel.
Warum denn er nicht? Der Strom des Lebens müßte stocken, wenn nur der eine Tropfen verschüttet würde. Die Erde müßte eine Wunde bekommen von dem Streich.

Es regt sich Alles, die Uhren gehen, die Glocken schlagen, die Leute laufen, das Wasser rinnt uns so so Alles weiter bis da, dahin – nein! es darf nicht geschehen, nein – ich will mich auf den Boden setzten und schreien, daß erschrocken Alles stehn bleibt, Alles stockt, sich nichts mehr regt.

(Sie setzt sich nieder, verbüllt sich die Augen und stößt einen Schrei aus. Nach einer Pause erhebt sie sich.)

Das hilft nichts, da ist noch Alles wie sonst, die Häuser, die Gasse, der Wind geht, die Wolken ziehen. – Wir müssen's wohl leiden.

(Büchner 2012: 150-151) ⁴⁹

49 «There must be something serious in it though. I want to think about that. I'm beginning to understand such things. Dying—dying! —Everything has the right to live, everything, this little fly here—that bird. Why not he? The stream of life would have to stagnate if even a drop were spilt. The earth would suffer a wound from such a blow. —Everything moves on, clocks tick, bell peal, people go, water flows, and so on and on to—no, it mustn't happen, no, I want to sit on the ground and scream, that all things remain still in fear, that everything stops, that nothing moves anymore. (She sits on the ground, covers her eyes and screams. After a short break she rises.) It doesn't help, everything is as always, the houses, the streets, the wind blows, the cloud pass. —We must bear it.»

The possible reference to this extract from *Danton's Tod* has, in my reading, a powerful meta-textual, meta-poetic role, for it makes us feel the weight, the necessity of literary creation, and the intensity of its demand. By writing poetry, and by keeping writing it, Celan does not accept to succumb to the murderers and to the devastation of History. The poem has to survive, the poem has to be written, in spite of what erodes and consumes the body of the subject. The poem, foremost, has to carry within this remnant, this unbound element of representation as the glowing kernel of an *incréable* that has to be kept alive for it is what keeps alive the poet. Poetry thus is not simply life, destiny, but life's endeavour and creation of a destiny.

«Wir müssen's wohl leiden» reads Lucille's closing sentence: «Die Welt ist fort, ich muss dich tragen» (Celan 2018: 214) answers Celan's poem: «The world is gone, I have to carry you» (Celan 2014: 97). Celan encloses in just one verse the unfinishable process of transformation of the *Nichts* that the Shoah left in the subject to the *Nichts* that lie at the core of the poem, around which the poem organises itself, attempting a response to destruction and to remain “underway.”

What remains of the creature in all this? What remains of the dead? Can we still read Büchner's lines under the sign of Auschwitz and of the Shoah with the same lightness of the one who knows that, once the book is closed, these words will not come to haunt us?

Never in his lifetime, and most notably at this stage of his life, could Celan have afforded such lightness. Indelibly marked by the signs of the Shoah, his poetry had to carry an arrest, a hiatus within time, to which and from which time and humanity, in a way, nonetheless survived and kept flowing. «Das Gedicht als das sich buchstäblich zu-Tode-Sprechende»—so reads a note from the preparatory notes of *Der Meridian* (Celan 1999b: 113). This quote, «The poem as that which speaks itself literally to death,» poses the question whether the torments of Celan's last creative years may lay in the awareness of “speaking himself to death” through writing in order to give birth to poetry. To be sure, much was at stake in this writing: at his own's life risk, Celan's poetry represented more and more that dangerously lasting «Kokelstunde»—that «hour, in which one plays with fire»⁵⁰—that the subject enters, unable to do otherwise, in order to testify for life, to prepare by means of writing the possibility of a form of memory, even if it were just for the sake of a «noch nichts / Interkurrierendes»—a «nothing yet / intercurring.» This *Nichts* is perhaps the rest of a subject invested by the death narcissism and transformed into a vacant, white space of the work

50 See Kelletat's eloquent explanation of the verb “kokeln”, characteristic of Berlin's dialect (1976: 20-21 and ff.).

and at work to articulate a “bounding of the unbound.” A nothing, to be sure, but nonetheless «intercurring.»

In German, however, *Interkurrent* does not allude only to the “intercurring of something,” or to the “presence of an interference.” In medical sciences, *Interkurrent* is a technical term that translates the so called *morbus intercurrents*, referring to those illnesses which manifest themselves during the treatment of another condition. In this mesh of associations we can detect, I claim, that illness, that condition of the destructive drives that the human inevitably harbours despite all the attempts of liberation and the promises of beauty that sublimation seems to convey.

Green writes:

Le travail du négatif ne concernera pas désormais l'activité psychique telle qu'on peut l'imaginer hors des aspects positifs de la conscience, il choisira comme enjeu la relation à l'objet pris entre les feux croisés des pulsions de destruction d'une part, de vie et d'amour de l'autre. Le travail du négatif se résume alors à une question: comment, face à la destruction qui menace toute chose, trouver une issue au désir de vivre et d'aimer? Et réciproquement, comment interpréter tout résultat du travail du négatif qui habite ce conflit fondamental: le dilemme qui nous saisit entre l'enclume de la satisfaction absolue dont l'omnipotence et le masochisme sont les témoins, et le marteau du renoncement dont la sublimation serait une issue possible? (Green 1993: 255)⁵¹

It is thus here that the “endgame” of Celan’s last creative season takes place: in an unsolvable conflict that situates at the heart of the process of sublimation and radically puts it into question. Celan’s sublimation does not “poeticise” or “romanticise,” but inscribes on the page a conflict that does not cease to call us upon, today more than ever: far from reducing to a private dimension, Celan’s poems touch the depths, the reasons and the contradictions lying at the heart of that Western culture which made Auschwitz possible.

Celan resided in Paris from 1948 until his death and returned to visit Germany on many occasions for meetings and public readings. For the first time in almost thirty years on his way back to Berlin, towards the nerve centre of the annihilation machinery of the Third Reich, what could a poet such as Celan find, if

51 Green 1999b: 185: «The work of the negative will no longer involve psychical activity as it can be imagined independently of the positive aspects of consciousness; it will concern itself with the relation to the object caught in the cross-fire of the destructive drives on the one hand, and the life or love drives on the other. The work of the negative thus comes down to one question: how, faced with the destruction which threatens everything, can a way be found for desire to live and love? And reciprocally, how should we interpret the results of the work of the negative which inhabits this fundamental conflict, i.e., the dilemma which we are caught in between the anvil of absolute satisfaction, to which omnipotence and masochism bear witness, and the hammer of renunciation for which sublimation is a possible outcome?»

not the vertiginous absence of an entire people, of a vanished world? Again: absence of traces which become traces of an absence.

«Kein schöner Land in dieser Zeit / als hier das unsre weit und breit, / wo wir uns finden wohl untern Linden / zur Abendzeit» (m. e.). So reads the first stanza of a popular song belonging to the canon of German's *Volkslieder*—as collected and edited by Anton Wilhelm von Zuccalmaglio (1840: 494 ff.; see also Linder-Beroud und Widmaier). According to Barbara Wiedemann, this *Lied* is quoted, with bitter sarcasm, in the poem Celan composed on the flights from Paris to West Berlin, *Ungewaschen, unbemalt*. However, the parodic reference to this popular song does not stop there: «in dieser Zeit» in Zuccalmaglio's *Abendlied* is converted in a «Jenseits- / Kaue,» rendered by Joris as «pithead:» in German the term identifies also the structure in which miners change and wash themselves after finishing their shift (pithead baths). If we also consider that the German term *Kaue* derives from the Middle High German *kouwe*, in turn deriving from the Latin *cavea* (“hollow”; “cave”; “cage”; “dig”), we can see how the poem unfolds in front of us, as we read it, like a cavity, the mouth of an abyss in which something or someone is confined, “unwashed” and “unpainted” or “unembellished.”⁵² While we can recognise recurrent features of Celan's poetic landscape, a particular element seems not to appear anywhere else in the work of the author:

[...]

ein
verspätetes
Becherwerk geht
durch uns Zerwölkte hindurch
nach oben, nach unten,

[...]

Becherwerk: a bucket conveyor, used in the mines in order to transport extracted bulk material and debris from one place to the other. Such *Becherwerk* communicating upwards and downwards and piercing through «us cloudborn,» «we, those reduced, disintegrated to clouds,» represents the backbone along

52 The preparatory notes that Celan took before the composition of the text allowed the reconstruction of many relevant details concerning the frame of reference of the poem. Such is the case of the allusion to the open cast coal mines in Fulda and Eisenach, over which Celan's plane flew, and that the poet could see from the plane through the layers of clouds; or the hint at a white «Filzschwanenpaar» steering and navigating through a stone-icton, which seems to have been inspired by the visit of an exposition with the title *L'Art russe des scythes à nos jours* (Russian Art from the Scythians to our Days) at the end of November 1967. See Celan (2018: 1132-1133).

which Celan's poems (and his poetry) meta-poetically work. Embedded almost at the centre of the poem, this *Becherwerke* connects subterranean dimensions with higher ones, extracting and exchanging materials, interferences, (un)buried spectres. There, between the deepest depths of the poem, and the most sublime highs of the poietic, something, an empty structure, moves, operates, communicate. In spite of its belatedness [*«verspätet»*], or perhaps precisely because of that.

5 December 1967 – 23 January 1968. BRUNNENGRÄBER; DIE NACHZUSTOTTERNDE WELT

L'inconscient ignore le temps, mais le conscient ignore que l'inconscient ignore le temps; il ignore même que le temps à sa portée est misérablement pauvre.

André Green (2000b: 51)⁵³

[...] die Dinge im Gedicht haben etwas von solchen «letzten» Dingen [...] könnten, man weiß es nie, die «letzten» Dinge sein [...].

Paul Celan (1999b: 56)⁵⁴

«Another Time.» Temporality and the Work of the Negative

The conceptual prism of narcissism has enabled us to pinpoint a series of features of the Negative in Celan's *Nachlass*. Specifically, an analysis of the intricacies between negative narcissism and positive narcissism, objectalising and disobjectalising functions, death drive and sublimation has allowed us to shed new light on the relation that the creating subject develops with the work. Our analysis of the poems written by Celan in late December 1967 has shown how an investigation of the work of the Negative in his poetry would reveal itself incomplete if we fail to consider another capital element: *the question of temporality*. In the following section, we shall further explore this heterochronic and polychronic fabric of affective, semantic, and temporal layers overlapping in his poetry. Poetry and, more broadly speaking, what Balsamo calls the «area of the poetic,» opens and creates a new particular relationship with time, liberating it

53 «The unconscious ignores time, *but the conscious ignores that the unconscious ignores time*; it also ignores that the time within its reach is miserably poor.»

54 «The things in the poem have something of these “last” things [...] they could be, one never knows, the “last” things.»

from the hinges of a linear, vectorial homogeneity (Balsamo 2014). Poetry is, on its own, a venture through and within the depths of time(s), in constant tension with the linearity and verticality of written language. Entailing linguistic and extra-linguistic elements, known and unknown, representation and irrepresentability, subject and object, the relation between poetry and time does not only express a crucial feature of the creative dimension whereby the «area of the poetic» foreshadows «analytic and systematic thinking.» It also implies a «heterogeneity of signification» that is proper to poetic language: a «surplus of sense» which goes beyond the object and the subject of the creative act (Balsamo 2014: 267). This residual dimension of signification ought to be conceived in terms of a temporal virtuality of the poetic: a structural arborescence which is congenitally *polysemic as well as polychronic*. To be sure, that does not simply pertain interpretation but, most importantly, the power of the work to address an otherness in space and time: an otherness within—within the author, the work, the reader—and which the work gives shape to. We have discussed some features of such «temporal generative potentiality» (Green 2004b: 22) in our analysis of Kafka's last text *Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse* (1924), specifically by reading *a posteriori* what we have referred to as the negative event of Kafka's "failed" fantasy of emigrating to Palestine. Celan's case, however, compels us to take a step further by considering temporality in light of the specific challenges that his poetry poses not only to the reader, but to poetry itself: indeed, by putting the accent on that *other time—i.e., other forms of temporality*—which, as I maintain, Celan's poetry invites us to read.

The question of temporality is not simply one among others for Celan, but in its own right represents, we may say, a "meridian" of his work.⁵⁵ This association, although partially misleading at first, is by no means accidental. If Celan's poetics and poetry are notoriously characterised by a series of spatial references, as it is the case for the *Meridian*, it is also true that this spatial dimension—no matter how evanescent, untraced and untraceable on a geographic map (Celan 1999b: 12)—conceals a complex relation with temporality.⁵⁶ It is in fact in an intertwining of affective, linguistic, and temporal aspects that the *Meridian* acquires its elusive materiality: in the imponderable, abyssal distance it allows to measure as inscription of an absence, as trace which acquires body and range, poem after poem, throughout the work. As much as what we named Celan's

55 A considerable body of literature has already explored this topic, shedding light on its possible theological and philosophical sources (Meister Eckart, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger) and implications, and emphasizing explicit or implicit recurrences throughout the *corpus* of the author. Among others: Gellhaus 1996: 177-196; Zanetti 2006; Maldonado-Alemán 2016; Bartkuvienė 2009; Lipszyc 2012: 57-74; Levine 2014: 97-123; Olschner 2020: 642-658; Dogà 2021: 79-113; Miglio 2022.

56 Derrida already noticed that in *Schibboleth pour Paul Celan* (1986: 25). See also Olschner 2020: 642-658.

“being for poetry,” the *Meridian* escapes ontological categories, for it constitutes a virtual structure of the work and of the poetic, at once *in fieri* and *in statu nascendi*. In this sense, many preparatory notes for *Der Meridian* remind us that, even if camouflaged under the guise of “space,” the question of time haunts Celan’s poetry in manifold ways.⁵⁷

Temporality is far from being limited to a mere *thematic* thread either. In fact, it ought to be read according to that *semantic relevance* [*semantische Relevanz*] that Celan so perceptively grasped in resonance with the poetry of Osip Mandelstam. In his radio-essay *Die Dichtung Ossip Mandelstams* (a coeval text with *Der Meridian*) broadcasted on March 19, 1960, on Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR), Celan writes:

1. *Sprecher*. Diese Gedichte sind die Gedichte eines Wahrnehmenden und Aufmerksamen, dem Erscheinenden Zugewandten, das Erscheinende Befragenden und Ansprechenden; sie sind *Gespräch*. Im Raum dieses Gesprächs konstituiert sich das Angesprochene, vergegenwärtigt es sich, versammelt es sich um das es ansprechende und nennende Ich. Aber in diese Gegenwart bringt das Angesprochene und durch Nennung gleichsam zu Du Gewordene sein Anders- und Fremdsein mit. Noch im Hier und Jetzt des Gedichts, noch in dieser seiner Unmittelbarkeit und Nähe läßt sich es seine Ferne mitsprechen, bewahrt es das ihm Eigenste: seine Zeit.

2. *Sprecher*. Es ist dieses Spannungsverhältnis der Zeiten, der eigenen und der fremden, das dem mandelstamm’schen Gedicht jenes schmerzlich-stumme Vibrato verleiht, an dem wir es erkennen. (Dieses Vibrato ist überall: in den Intervallen zwischen den Worten und den Strophen, in den Höfen, in denen die Reime und die Assonanzen stehen, in der Interpunktion. All das hat semantische Relevanz. Die Dinge treten zueinander, aber noch in diesem Beisammen spricht die Frage nach ihrem Woher und Wohin mit – eine «offenbleibende,» «zu keinem Ende kommende,» ins Offene und Besetzbare, ins Leere und Freie weisende Frage.

1. *Sprecher*. Diese Frage realisiert sich nicht nur in der «Thematik» der Gedichte; sie nimmt auch – und ebendadurch wird sie zum «Thema» – in der Sprache Gestalt an: das Wort – der Name! – zeigt eine Neigung zum Substantivischen, das Beiwort schwindet, die «infiniten,» die *Nominalformen* des Zeitworts herrschen vor: das Gedicht bleibt *zeitoffen*, Zeit kann hinzutreten, Zeit *partizipiert*. (Celan 1999b: 216)⁵⁸

57 See for instance the section of materials with the title *Das Gedicht als Sprach-Güter* in *M*, 99-107.

58 «1. *Speaker*: These poems are the poems of someone who is perceptive and attentive, someone turned toward what becomes visible, someone addressing and questioning: these poems are a *conversation*. In the space of this conversation the addressed constitutes itself, becomes present, gathers itself around the I that addresses and names it. But the addressed, through naming, as it were, becomes a you, brings its otherness and strangeness into this present. Yet even in the here and now of the poem, even in this immediacy and nearness it lets its distance have its say too, it guards what is most its own: its time. // 2. *Speaker*: It is this tension

Precisely such «tension» between different times, such «openness» towards time leading towards the «empty» and the «free,» is the focus of this paragraph. My analysis will not be confined, however, to different tenses or linguistic time forms, nor simply to rhythmical or prosodic features of versification, but also considers the role of omissions, textual blank spaces, and erasures. In my reading, these elements are vestiges of the process of structuration of the poem, emerging as affective traces of that “wounded life” that Celan’s poetry did not cease to testify for and to construct, verse after verse.

My purpose is therefore to explore the representational modalities whereby temporality «participates» in Celan’s late poems in relationship with the work of the Negative, *both in its organising and disorganising functions*.⁵⁹

The question at this point is: what is disorganising and/or organising what, and what does such disorganisation allow in representational terms? After all,

of the times, between its own and the foreign, which lends that pained-mute vibrato to a Mandelstam poem by which we recognize it. (This vibrato is everywhere: in the interval between the words and the stanza, in the “courtyards” where rhymes and assonances stand, in the punctuation. All this has *semantic relevance*.) Things come together, yet even in this togetherness the question of their Wherefrom and Whereto resounds – a question that “remains open,” that “does not come to any conclusion,” and points to the open and cathectable, into the empty and the free. // 1. *Speaker*: This question is realized not only in the “thematics” of the poems; it also takes shape in the language – and that’s why it becomes a “theme” – : the word – the name! – shows a preference for noun-forms, the adjective becomes rare, the “infinitives,” the *nominal forms* of the verb dominate: the poem remains *open to time*, time can join in, time *participates*.) (Celan 2011: 216)

- 59 A “participation,” which, as it is the case, has many forms, shapes, sources, layers, among which the ‘historical’ one, for instance, plays here a crucial role. If Celan has always been a lucid observer of the world he lived in, the last years of his writing are notoriously characterised by a peculiar attention towards current events, international political transformations, and sociocultural developments. Especially in *Schneepart*, Celan’s poetry is feeling, like never before, the pulse of history in its unfolding. Or, to put it otherwise, a historical complexity felt and rhythmically shaped anew through the pulse of poetry. In August 1968, Celan writes to his wife: «The problems of poetry arise in me with great acuity, the events—you can imagine how affected am I from what is going on in Czechoslovakia—urge me amidst what I’m writing, what I am attempting to write.» (Celan et Celan-Lestrange, vol. 1: 631) We may mention a few examples: the socio-political turmoil in Czechoslovakia and the Prague Spring; the violent conflicts in the near east threatening the survival of the new-born State of Israel; the vicissitudes of space exploration; the war in Vietnam, and last but not least, the protests of 1968 student movement worldwide, and especially in Paris. All these historical events that Celan witnesses in first person—either in the Parisian streets or from his small apartment in Rue Tournefort—sediment in his poetry, showing us an author who never ceased to write under the «angle of inclination of his existence» (Celan 2011: 215): interrogating, day by day anew the world, the culture, the anthropological transformations, in all its contradictions. It is not accidental, in this sense, that *Schneepart* (in particular) and *Zeitgeböht* are the two only collections of the author in which the inner organisation of the lyrics reflects almost exactly the chronology of the composition of the texts. And yet, that aspect does not make of Celan’s late work a sort of poetic diary, nor a form of lyrical chronicle. See also Speier 1987: 66.

Celan was well aware of how the «no» could not be separated from the «yes:» «Sprich – / Doch scheide das Nein nicht vom Ja.» (Celan 2018: 89)

On January 8, 1968, Celan sent a small group of texts to his wife Gisèle (Celan et Celan-Lestrangle, vol. 1: 603-607, here 605). The poems there collected are *Treckschutzenzeit*,⁶⁰ *Lila Luft*, *Brunnengräber*—a text mentioned in the previous paragraph, and to which we will devote particular attention here—and two short lyrics dated respectively January 2 and January 5, 1968: *Das angebrochene Jahr*, and *Unlesbarkeit dieser Welt* (Celan 2018: 486-487). Attached to the lyrics Celan sent a letter with a brief message: «Je t’envoie cinq poèmes – excuse-moi de ne pas te les traduire, je le ferai une autre fois. J’espère qu’ils te parleront, d’eux-mêmes.» (Celan et Celan-Lestrangle, vol. 1: 603) In English the passage reads: «I send you five poems – please excuse me if I do not translate them, I will do it another time. I hope they will speak to you, of and for themselves.»

Celan’s intention of providing his wife with a French translation of the texts remained unfulfilled—or at least not documented. In his letter, the poet could only offer a few terminological elucidations—yet essential to illuminate aspects of the poems. However, the poet’s expression «J’espère qu’ils te parleront, d’eux-mêmes» (i.e., “of themselves,” “on their own initiative,” or “willingly,” but also “de même:” “nevertheless,” “equally”) reveals something remarkable, which goes beyond the communicative intent or the private circumstances.

In the last years of his creative journey, Celan seems to become increasingly incapable (or reluctant to the idea) of translating his work, demonstrating perhaps his awareness of the intrinsic untranslatability of his poetry.⁶¹ This presents not only an important signal of the linguistic threshold that his work was reinventing and transcending. It also expresses a necessity that his poetry is pursuing, namely, of leaving a trace, while preserving intact the weight of the imponderable rupture that made such trace possible.

60 Written on December 3, 1967, and later collected in the sixth and closing section of the book *Lichtzwang* (Celan 2018: 308). Particularly in light of the complex references to the work of Meister Eckhart this poem shall not be addressed in detail here. It is worth mentioning, however, that *Treckschutzenzeit* was the last text that Celan wrote while still living with Gisèle and Eric in their apartment in Rue de Longchamp (Celan 2018: 1022-1023), before moving, on November 20, 1967, in a small furnished apartment in Rue Tournefort. The poet will live there until October 1969. This solution was adopted on the request of Gisèle and after a long discussion between the two which started as early as April 1967. The year 1967 had been extremely difficult for the poet and his family: on January 30, 1967, the poet attempted suicide with a knife, barely missing the heart and injuring his left lung. He was saved *in extremis* by his wife. Shortly thereafter, he was hospitalised at the psychiatric clinic Sainte Anne, in Paris, from February 13, 1967, until October 17, 1967. From April, Celan was occasionally granted permissions to leave the clinic.

61 A few poems included in the first cycle of *Zeitgeböht* (Celan 2018: 557-567) represent a significant exception.

These poems must speak, address themselves, for themselves, nevertheless, no matter what: *d'eux-mêmes* and *de même*. Even if in a different way than his son Eric, Gisèle too was addressee and guardian of Celan's poetic peregrination, of his attempt to inscribe the traces of a destiny through poetry. A destiny that the poet did not choose, but which he was compelled to put into poetry. She did represent in this sense not only the interlocutor of a lifetime, both in a creative and affective way, but a witness of that sole form of «possible autobiography» left to the poet (Felstiner 1995: 254). What is at stake in such a form of “autobiography” is nothing less than the reasons, the possibilities, the limits, the task of poetry. For this reason, instead of using the term “autobiography,” I would rather speak in terms of *construction of a poetic diachrony of the subject*. With this concept, as I will try to show in the following, I intend to highlight how Celan's poetry, being both the ultimate form of defence and the perpetual opening of a wound, represents the only possible way to give *durable forms* to the vicissitudes and to the remnants of a subject for whom «das, was geschah» represents the absolute loss.

But let us return once more to Celan's letter. Let us notice how in «another time» [*«une autre fois»*]—one can also overhear the expression “another faith” [*une autre foi*]. Another *time* and another *faith* would be required to translate these particular poems in the mother tongue of the wife, but in fact in any other language. “Another time” that for the poet cannot have any place in his poetry since that would represent a time *beyond* the unsurmountable wound of annihilation, an “after;” and “another faith” that Celan could not conceive nor make his own as a form of salvation, since that would mean to abandon the struggle and the task of testifying, accepting defeat. Bounded, in his “being for poetry,” to the blank of the page that his verses outline, the “other time” of his poetry cannot avoid carrying the mark of Auschwitz, a frozen time; a time which is, itself, *part of snow*—*Schneepart* and yet *Zeitgeböft*, *Timestead*, place, container for time and of an “other time.”

In the light of these remarks, in the following I will not only argue that Celan's work of the Negative cannot be properly grasped without a closer investigation of the question of temporality which emerges from the specificity of his poetry, but also that the question of time in Celan's poetry cannot be properly grasped unless we consider it from the angle of the Negative.

Green has insistently addressed the question of temporality, devoting to the subject a significant number of contributions, *Le temps éclaté* (Green 2000b) and *La diachronie en psychanalyse* (Green 2000a) being among the most important one.⁶² Green argues that the question of time represents at once the veritable

62 The two works, respectively translated in English with the titles *Time in Psychoanalysis* (Green 2002a) and *Diachrony in Psychoanalysis* (Green 2003) are intertwined, and in many ways complementary: the latter is a collection of papers published in a time span of more than twenty

object of psychoanalysis, and situates, even if latently, at the core of Freud's work. In the arc of over forty years, Freud has indeed advanced many different hypotheses regarding the conception of time. He proposed for instance a theory of development (the libido theory) and reflected on the question the timelessness in the unconscious (which, at least to a certain extent, ought to be understood as an "invulnerability" of desire to the test of time, i.e. a "timelessness" of desire; see Green 2000a: 14 ff.). In addition to that, he formulated the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* (present since the very beginning of psychoanalysis) and, as a major theoretical asset of the second topic, the compulsion to repeat. Eventually, he also addressed the issue of historical truth in works such as *Der Mann Moses* (1939).

Criticizing the reductionist tendency of contemporary psychoanalysis, which has often flattened the issue of temporality to a developmental, linear conception, Green has expanded on the manifold hypotheses put forward by Freud. By so doing, he reclaims the richness of a diachronic heterogeneity that he calls *temps éclaté* [*fragmented, shattered or exploded time*]. The expression *temps éclaté*, which will lead my reading in the following, eloquently displays the question that time poses to our investigation, as it refers to a plethora of figures of a temporality which is irreducible to totality, homogeneity, and linearity. A temporality which not only is impossible to recompose or grasp in its entirety, but that is indeed characterised by

[...] l'accentuation de l'hétérogénéité diachronique de l'appareil psychique, du fait de la différence de structure entre les instances et de la façon dont les divers modes de temporalité y inscrivent leurs effets. Le temps n'est plus seulement en pièces, ses parties sont en tension les unes avec les autres. Entre les divers aspects qui le composent: temps de la biologie marqué par l'évolution, temps de la culture marqué par l'histoire des civilisations, de leur parcours incertain et hasardeux, il y a moins synergie que difficultés d'harmonisation entre les composés, et même antagonisme. (Green 2000b: 37)⁶³

These forms of temporality reflect the complex heterogeneity of the psyche as envisaged by Green: as such they constitute the field of tensions between two

years; the former, is a more organic work systematically exploring key issues of temporality in psychoanalysis moving from a detailed analysis of the different formulations that the topic acquires in Freud's *corpus*.

63 «[...] The accent [goes] on the diachronic heterogeneity of the psychic apparatus, as a result of the structural difference between the psychic agencies and their way in which the different modes of temporality express their effect on them. Time is not only in pieces, but its parts are also in tension one with the other. Between the different aspects that compose them, i.e., the time of biology marked by evolution, the time of culture marked by the history of civilizations, of their uncertain and hazardous paths, there is less synergy than difficulties of harmonisation between the components, and even antagonism.»

inseparable dimensions: a «diachrony» whose counterpart is not a «synchronic axis,» but a «structural» one. (See Green 2000a: 13 and ff.; Green 2000b: 37-38)

Many researchers have already investigated the role of loss and absence in relationship with the question of historical and existential time, specifically in connection with the task of memory and testimony in Celan's poetry.⁶⁴ In this paragraph I shall give account of a series of structural «anti-temporal» (Green 2000b: 139-145), or rather «negative temporal» elements which distinctively emerge in Celan's representations of time, in the creative process as well as in the text. In this case, it is important to underscore that such «negative temporal» elements are not to be understood as unrelated to the process of representation. On the contrary, they express once more the binding of an unbindable element within the chain of representation. They ought therefore to be envisaged as temporal expressions of that «representation of the absence of representation» constituting the kernel of the work of the Negative. These «anti-temporal» elements are in my reading vestiges of a «mortiferous stagnation» (Green 2000b: 142) i.e., structural traces of the death drive emerging in all its destructive force, threatening by means of the compulsion to repeat the survival and the integrity of the poem.

Green reminds us that psychoanalysis enables us to give account of representational dimensions of time which necessarily entail antagonistic, erosive, even “inorganic” tensions with regards to temporality itself. The concepts of *Nachträglichkeit* and repression [*Verdrängung*] may be considered, among others and for different reasons, illustrative examples of this tendency. In the former case, as we know, we are presented with a «temporal generative potentiality» congenital to the psyche, based on discontinuity and on a structural capability of semantic order that «splits the moment of the experience and that of signification.» (Green 2000a: 28) In the latter, we deal with psychic material that, precisely because repressed, is «hors temps, inusable, inaltérable, gardé intact, insensible aux outrages des jours qui se suivent; mais en revanche, il peut feindre les apparences du changement par nécessité des se travestir lorsqu'il parvient au voisinage de la conscience.» (Green 2000b: 51)⁶⁵

Temporality in psychoanalysis—and in this particular case in relationship with writing, creation, and the process of subjectivation—does acquire a specificity which radically differs from a phenomenological point of view. By postulating the unconscious as the most authentic component of the psyche,

64 See for instance the recent contribution of Olschner (2020: 648, 651).

65 «[That which is repressed is] outside time, unusable, inalterable, kept intact, insensible to the violence [outrages] of the days that follow one another; but, on the other hand—Green continues—it can feign the appearances of changing if confronted with the necessity of disguising itself as soon as it reaches the proximity of consciousness.» It is necessary to point out that Green refers to an «anti-temporal tendency of the compulsion to repeat» in the context of the border-line cases. I am therefore reading such «anti-temporal» tendency in wider and arguably less rigorous terms than Green's. Whether Green would agree with the position I am defending or recognise its validity remains an open question.

psychoanalysis offers a perspective on temporality which cannot be reduced to key philosophical concepts such as “phenomenon” and “event,” nor to perceptions and representations of time limited to consciousness.⁶⁶ It rather has to be conceived in terms of a constant, creative, germinative relationship with an absent otherness, with a “not knowing of not knowing”: «The unconscious ignores time—as we read in the exergue we chose for this paragraph—but *the conscious ignores that the unconscious ignores time*; it also ignores that the time within its reach is miserably poor.» (Green 2000b: 51)

Precisely these «anti-temporal» elements acquire for Celan a new, paramount role, in that they «participate» on a structural, representational level, to the construction of that *diachrony of the subject* we alluded to above. Unlike the idea of chronology, diachrony in psychoanalysis allows to highlight forms of temporalities taking part in the process of subjectivation which become intelligible only if we abandon the idea of a subject who is at the centre of the psychic organisation (Green 2000a: 11-39). Inhabited by a multiplicity of temporal and linguistic dimensions, the subject of such a diachrony continuously says his own decentration: subject of the unconscious insofar as *it is written* by the poetic there, where the subject is *not*. A diachrony, again, that does not only transcend, through the poetic, the individual, conscious perception and experience of time (becoming as such irreducible to a form of autobiography). Caught between the two poles of Eros and the death drive on the one hand (the intrapsychic) and the question of the object-relation on the other hand (the interpsychic), it also harbours a destructivity that tends towards the inorganic, the lost primeval traces of the creature. There, where even «eternity ages» (Celan 2018: 249), and the limits between the geological, the mineral, the inorganic, and the biological, start to tremble:

Der Stein, das Anorganische, Mineralische, ist das ältere, das aus der tiefsten Zeitschicht, aus der Vorwelt – die auch des Menschen Vorwelt ist, dem Menschen Entgegen- und Gegenüberstehende. Der Stein ist das Andere, Außermenschliche, [...] mit seinem Schweigen gibt er dem Sprechenden Richtung und Raum; [...] Der Stein. (Celan 1999b: 98)⁶⁷

66 On this point see also Green’s closing remarks in the paper *Théorie Générale de la représentation* [*General Theory of Representation*] (Green 2011: 58-60). There, Green discusses the theories of Anne Denis, who postulates the existence of an «archaic or primitive temporality» «which differs from the characteristics of the preconscious-conscious, and thus is closer to the unconscious» and to primary processes. In these terms, we could even interpret the «anti-temporal» elements that we claim detecting in Celan’s work as traces of a «protolinguistic temporality» (I would even dare to say: a temporality linked to the drive) surviving as interferences in the secondary processes—thus in language.

67 «The stone, the inorganic, the mineral is the oldest, coming from the deepest layer of time, from the prehistoric world – which is also the prehistoric world of mankind, standing against and in front of mankind. The stone is the other, extrahuman, [...] with its silence it gives to the one who speaks direction and space; [...] The stone.»

In Celan's poetry such inhospitable "wordscapes"⁶⁸ populated by stones, minerals, everlasting glaciers, and inorganic rests create a further dimension, a channel with that "other time" that his poetry harbours and which is essential to the (impossible) attempt of (re)construction, indeed of *poiesis* of the subject. In this sense, the poem embodies a new organization of residual elements which do not simply follow the patterns of signification, but rather circumscribe an unrecoverable, frozen object that *has* to be carried within, surviving in the text as useless, a-significant, disorganizing remnants of a temporal "representation of absence of representation." A time of the poetic that, we might say, is also "other" to poetry itself.

If until now I have focused on a *spatial blank*, moving forward I shall underscore also a *temporal blank*—although such temporal blank cannot ultimately be separated from a spatial dimension, and *vice versa*. It is from this *temporal blank* that a new temporal germination "begins" stemming from the poem, not unbeknownst to the author or to his intention, but significantly unbeknownst to a temporality of the "human." By so doing, I shall shed light on what the inorganic, the mineral, an *anti-time*, can tell us of a temporality of the "creatural," a temporal trace of a lost origin inscribed in the poetic.

Excavating into Shattered Time

Let us now to return to the poem *Brunnengräber*:

BRUNNENGRÄBER IM WIND:

es wird einer die Bratsche spielen, tagabwärts, im Krug,
es wird einer kopfstehn im Wort Genug,
es wird einer kreuzbeinig hängen im Tor, bei der Winde.

Dies Jahr
rauscht nicht hinüber,
es stürzt den Dezember zurück, den November,
es gräbt seine Wunden um,
es öffnet sich dir, junger
Gräber-
brunnen,
Zwölfmund.

(Celan 2018: 486-487)⁶⁹

68 «Gedichte als Wortlandschaften,» as we read in a fragment from *Der Meridian* (Celan 1999b: 102).

69 «WELLDIGGER in the wind: // someone will play the viola, day downward, in the jug, / someone will stand on his head in the word Enough, / someone will hang crosslegged in the gateway, next to the winch. // This year / does not roar across, / it throws back December,

An irreducible fabric of allusions, references, associations, and intertextual traces is interwoven in these twelve verses.⁷⁰ Scholars have already highlighted the ambivalence underlying the title-word *Brunnengräber*, which can be read not only as the plural of the term *Brunnengrab* (a burial practice typical of the Etruscan sepulchral custom until the 6th century B.C.E), but also as “well or fountain digger.”

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre has offered a further insight in this regard: not only has he remarked how *Brunnengrab* may represent the inversion of Celan’s well-known image of the «Grab in den Lüften» [*a grave in the air*] recurring in *Todesfuge* (Celan 2018: 46-47). Lefebvre has also pointed out how the process of excavation of a well or a tomb in the wind can be understood, meta-poetically, as excavation into the breath of the word, of the verse, and I would add, of the white of the page (Celan 2007: 172-173). If we further extend such a meta-poetic association, we might relate both “wind” and “breath” to the Hebrew term *ruah*, which leads us to the biblical scene of creation—*Beresbit*—and by extension, to the scene of literary *poiesis*. In this sense, the inaugural verse of the poem seems to encompass a temporal dimension which stretches from an inaccessible scene of creation towards a blank left in the air, in the wind, in the breath. In such mesh of references something is in motion, someone is “underway,” traveling through that air: the place and the time of an inexhaustible search.

The one who excavates into the wind, into the breath, in the attempt to reach out towards a form of lost origin—a source or a spring [*Brunnen*], and simultaneously a tomb excavated deep into the incorporeal and yet fertile “soil” of a wind, of a *ruah*—ventures towards the heart of an absence. And while the *incipit* of the lyric gives new form to the harsh work of excavating in the navel of Celan’s poetic, by evoking *Todesfuge*—that «virtual institution» (Felstiner 1995: 288) that the poet did not cease to deconstruct, tear into pieces, and rewrite over the years in a new, adamant style—the poem seems also to convey an excavation into the very work of the author. The associative matrix enclosed in this verse, therefore, articulates an attempt of excavation that has to be undertaken through poetry, both in a meta-representational sense, as well as a work of excavation into the *oeuvre*. Let us notice that a further element is enclosed in the term *Brunnen*. This term seems to allude, at once, to the incomparable loss of an

November, / it turns up its wounds, / it opens up to you, young / grave- / well, twelve-mouth.» (Celan 2014: 325, tr. mod.)

70 A thorough intertextual analysis of this poem, notably from the perspective of the Jewish numerical and linguistic mystical imagery is offered by Irene Fußl (2008: 108-114). Interestingly, none of the studies about this poem have considered Aleksander Blok’s *Двенадцать* (*Die Zwölf*) as a possible source for analysis. Originally composed by Blok in January 1918, Celan intensively worked on this poem in 1958 and published a translation of it via Fisher Verlag. Notwithstanding the considerable temporal gap between Celan’s translation and the composition of *Brunnengräber*, it seems to me that the two texts are linked by a striking recurrency of images that may not be accidental.

individual, as well as of a people: the loss of a place, of a time, of a world that for Celan bears the name of the birthplace: Bukovina. In a poem from *Mohn und Gedächtnis*, the poet evokes it as a «Brunnenland,» «Well-land»:

So bist du denn geworden
wie ich dich nie gekannt:
dein Herz schlägt allerorten
in einem Brunnenland,

wo kein Mund trinkt und keine
Gestalt die Schatten säumt,
wo Wasser quillt zum Scheine
und Schein wie Wasser schäumt.

Du steigst in alle Brunnen,
du schwebst durch jeden Schein.
Du hast ein Spiel ersonnen,
das will vergessen sein.

(Celan 2018: 52)⁷¹

We are once again able to feel the vertigo of a complex overdetermination, a heterogeneity of sources reread, ruminated, coalescing in poetry. Celan makes our head spin by inscribing in the space of just one verse his poetic journey, along with the destiny of a man and of a people. By so doing, he reinvents a trace which is, at once, of a life and of a work. It is here worth mentioning another element already pointed out by many biographers and commentators: the term «Brunnen» also recurs in one of the last readings that occupied Celan in the last days of his life. Felstiner (1995: 287) writes that, after Celan descended into the Seine from the Pont Mirabeau, «a biography of Hölderlin was found [...] on [his] desk, open to an underlined passage: “Sometimes this genius goes dark and sinks down into the bitter well [*Brunnen*] of his heart.” Celan did not» continues Felstiner «underline the rest of that sentence in the Hölderlin biography: “but mostly his apocalyptic star glitters wondrously.”»⁷²

71 In Felstiner's translation (1995: 61-62): «So you are turned—a Someone / As I had never known / Your heart a drum that summons / Through Land where Wells once flowed // Where no Mouth drink—and nothing / Will cleave where Shadows form— / Where Water wells to Seeming / And Seeming falls—to Foam // You rise in every Wellspring— / Through every Seeming—run / You've conjured up a Playing / That begs—Oblivion.»

72 The passage Celan read and underlined, quoted in Wilhelm Michel's biography (1963: 556), is from a letter regarding Hölderlin that Clemens Brentano wrote to Philipp Otto Runge on January 21, 1810. In the original German, the unabridged passage reads: «Niemand ist vielleicht hohe betrachtende Trauer so herrlich ausgesprochen worden. Manchmal wird dieser Genius

In spite of the apparent absence of any tense or verb constructions, the *incipit* of *Brunnengräber* can unearth the rich polysemy and polychrony in the poem. While creating a temporal tension which intertwines life and work, starting from and yet beyond the life and the work of the author—from the childhood in Bukovina until Celan's last reading before his death—the first verse of the poem also speaks about and for the poetic. It testifies, in meta-representational terms, for the task of poetry as descent into the depths of a *caesura*. But the poem, as Celan did not cease to remark in *Der Meridian*, also stretches towards an otherness, a reader who, in turn, will have been called upon to confront such absence and to be, in the volatile body of poetry, a *Brunnengräber im Wind*. This confrontation with the blank abyss inscribed in the page is what Celan's poetry prompt us to pursue.

Actual verb constructions explicitly appear in *Brunnengräber* only in the second and third stanzas. Here, the intertwining between time and poetic condensed in the first verse explodes, literally, on the page. The threefold repetition of the future tense «es wird...» creates a further temporal tension, a friction which is literally turned upside down in the third stanza, that seems to embody an interruption, even a regression in which time is turned over like soil. The year—*this* year—throws back «December, November,» turns up «its wounds,» and opens up to an otherness, a «young / grave- / well», «twelvemouth»—where «Mund» [«mouth»] phonetically recalls *Mond* [moon]: perhaps, a new sequence of twelve moons, or months.

In this multidirectional, multi-layered tension disrupting the linearity and the verticality of the text itself, between progression, arrest, regression, omen and traces, we can recognise a fragmentation, a shattering of temporality on the surface of the page: a *temps éclaté*. Precisely in this explosion, in this compulsion to repeat, time acquires new life, pulsating on the page as if from a hole in time and space. The poem constitutes that field of tension in which traces and fragments can reorganise themselves and leave the mark of their effect on the page.

November and December are two symbolically eventful months in Celan's life. In the cold, frozen months of late autumn 1942 the young Celan, born

dunkel und versinkt in den bitteren Brunnen seines Herzens; meistens aber glänzet sein apokalyptischer Stern Wermut wunderbar rührend über das weite Meer seiner Empfindung.» To say with uttermost certainty what Celan may have read in this quote is impossible. We may advance the hypothesis that he encountered here the glowing trace of the *incréable* of his work: a depth, a blank time *and* space too dangerously close to the mortiferous, frozen core that moves his poetry. There, where the absence of representation coincides with a *nothing* beyond any representation, of any form of thinkability or possibility of mental operations—see Green's reading of the difference between *no-thing* [non-chose] and *nothing* [rien] in Wilfred Bion (Green 2011: 102). Or perhaps, Celan had exhausted with his poetry the possibility of the poetic of granting for him a harbour, an anchor, which could allow him to hold on and firm without being subjugated to the yoke of a reality which still harboured Auschwitz in it—as the personalities surrounding the *Goll-Affaire* do not cease to remind us—and with which he did not accept any compromise whatsoever.

November 23, 1920, was informed of the death of the parents—of his father Leo Antschel, of the beloved mother Friederike “Fritzi” Schragger, born December 1, 1895 (Celan et Celan-Lestrange, vol. 2: 472). Between November and December 1951 we can situate the beginning of the romantic relationship with Celan’s future wife, Gisèle Lestrange. The two would eventually marry on December 23, 1952 (487, 491), and almost exactly fifteen years later, during his 1967 Berlin stay, Celan would write *Du liegst*, *Lila Luft*, and *Brunnengräber*. From Celan’s marriage, two children would be born: François, who died few hours after birth (493), and Eric, born June 6, 1955 (501), who at the time in which the poet penned *Brunnengräber* was *twelve years old*.

As Szondi stated in the context of the long debate concerning the relevance of biography in the understanding of Celan’s poetry (Pajevic 2000: 214-224), the identification of these mesh of elements, among many others, does not constitute on its own an interpretation of the text (see Szondi 1972: 113-125). We are dealing with a plethora of allusions which cannot be reduced to the references we are able to discern, nor to the specificity of our approach to the text. Also in this sense, the poem will always overcome the expectations of the interpretative act. As poetry cannot be reduced to a private matter, nor to a mere form of communication or chronicle—as the poet remarked in numerous occasions⁷³—the elements we can detect do not provide an understanding of the totality of the references: rather, they are useful to grasp the structural and representational processes underlying Celan’s poetry. The relevance of these details, thus, ought to be understood at once within and without the biographical data (i.e., beyond a “biography” or “autobiography”) as well as beyond a mere “chronology” of the subject.

We may recall how Green, in his paper *Le double et l’absent*, observed that «the function of the text, reduced to the linearity of written language, is to resuscitate all that it has absorbed by the work of writing.» (Green 1992: 54) Green’s remark may be seen as encompassing the core of the relationship between text and time, in that it allows to feel the weight of an absence that haunts the creative process as much as the text. But what does Celan’s text absorb in the work of writing? Is it just the “biographical data” itself? What can be «resuscitated» [«ressusciter»] here? And what does remain readable of such biographical data? It is perhaps a structural matrix, a temporal “transitional potentiality,” we may say, that develops from an absent core, and which remains at once present and absent in the mesh of linguistic, affective, representational elements, as if in reserve in the unique way in which the poem speaks of itself and for itself.

The question that arises here pertains the function of the poem as a protective container, a sort of linguistic “skin,” in which time may participate as a potentiality: an open, empty structure where temporality is indeed a creative element, an absence which puts in motion the matrix, inasmuch as the linguistic

73 On this topic see also Bevilacqua 2000: 225-235.

structure *simultaneously* offers a place of organization of such absence. No diachrony *per se* is ever given. Poetry has the task to prepare the conditions of a possible temporalization, allowing the creation of such a diachrony, and that precisely from a blank. The text transforms the fragmentation of time into a temporal tension between representatives of an absence. The fact that in Celan such a blank is as wide as a world, as *the world*, give us much to think regarding the magnitude of his attempt to shape a «suture» (Green 2000a: 18-19) which *is* and *must* remain *impossible*.

To Name the Absence of Any Name

That Celan's poetry can be understood in relation with temporality in terms of a protective and creative "container" emerge in explicit terms throughout his work. Let us think, for instance to the well-known image of the *Flaschenpost*, that Celan draws from Osip Mandelstam. In a crucial poem written on January 23, 1968, we read:

DIE NACHZUSTOTTERNDE WELT,
bei der ich zu Gast
gewesen sein werde, ein Name,
herabgeschwitzt von der Mauer,
an der eine Wunde hochleckt.

(Celan 2018: 490)

THE TO-BE-RESTUTTERED WORLD,
whose guest I
will have been, a Name,
sweated down from the wall,
on which a wound leaks upwards.

My choice in the translation of the final verse, most notably of the verb *hocklecken*, requires an explanation. *Hocklecken* is actually a neologism by Celan, formed by the prefix *hoch-* (which in verbal constructs indicates an ascending movement or gesture) and the verb *lecken*: the construction has been hitherto understood by critics and translators alike in the sense of *to lick up*, *to lick upwards*.⁷⁴ In my translation, I am considering for the first time the homograph

74 See for instance Pierre Joris' translation of the last two verses: «sweated down the wall / up which a wound licks.» (Celan 2014: 335). In Italian, Bevilacqua's translation similarly reads «su cui s'alza lambente / la lingua di una piaga.» (Celan 1998: 1127) See also Lefebvre's French version—«sué par le mur / qu'une blessure lèche vers le haut.» (Celan 2007: 37)—and Reina Palazón's—«rezumado hacia abajo por el muro, / en el que una herida lame hacia arriba.» (Celan 1999a: 361).

and homophone regular verb *lecken* i.e., «durch ein Leck Flüssigkeit herauflaufen lassen» as in the construct «leck sein» (“lecken”) or *to leak*. Interpreted in this way, the verb describes the opening of a «wound» [«Wunde»] elevating from a wall (a draft version of the text actually reads: «aus dem Nichts,» «from Nothingness» [Celan 1994: 90]), from which simultaneously a «Name» «sweats down» [«herab-schwitzem»].⁷⁵ The generic English verb «open,» that I have chosen in my translation, puts the accent on the image of an opening wound, as an orifice from which a poetic word flows or leaks out.

Structurally speaking, the future in the past (vv. 2-3) situates *de facto* as an umbilical centre of the lyric. The first verse, as well as the last two, converge towards the centre, as if they were folding and refolding in order to create a linguistic container for a poetic seed. To the world to «to-be-restuttered»—which is all that remains to articulate of a prophecy for a poet under the sign of Auschwitz (Celan 2018: 137)—corresponds a wound, the limbs of which open upwards, as if they were revealing the lips of a mouth.⁷⁶ In this double vectoriality, and from that core of absence, from that “Name of the absence of any name,» Celan reorganises the loss, creating a space in which an unknown temporality may, once again, «participate.» Such unknown temporality reactivates itself in the form of an otherness yet to come, yet to be named, there, where subject and verb are horizontally severed (see the *enjambement*, vv. 2-3) but vertically united. In this tension between times, which is also a tension through time, we find that “opening,» that vacancy of which we read in Celan’s *Die Dichtung Ossip Mandelstamms*, and which also characterises Green reflections on temporality. For a moment indefinitely echoing, Celan allows us here to grasp the “future in the past” of nomination—a «Name» that is always *pro-nominal*—in the impossible attempt to recompose and trace the errancy of the subject through time and space: from these fragments, from these traces.

But whose *I/Ich* can be harboured in the verses of these poems? The *I* of the poet, at once *creator* and *subject* of his own work (in the double sense of *subjective genitive* and *objective genitive*)? The *I* of a witness embodied by a reader-receiver of these harsh poems? Or are we here dealing with a potential alterity, an *alterity as potentiality* of the poem unfolding for a new reader, elsewhere, elsewhere? The answers to these questions remain unwritten and unwritable: still, the text does

75 Lefebvre points out how the verb «herabgeschwitzt» echoes the word “Auschwitz.” (Celan 2007: 181)

76 The same image recurs also in another poem from the same time (dated January 2, 1968), that the poet sent to his wife in the above quoted letter from January 8: «DAS ANGEBOCHENE JAHR / mit dem modernden Kanten / Wahnbrod. // Trink / aus meinem Mund.» (Celan 2018: 487). «THE BREACHED YEAR / with the moldering crust / delusion bread. // Drink / from my mouth.» Let us also notice here the recurrence of the semantic constellation that we can detect in *Bunnengräber* too: the year, the mouth, the breaking (the verb «anbrechen» meaning *to begin, to dawn*, but also to *break into pieces, without destroying completely*, and to *broach, to open a bottle or a container*), and foremost, the container.

not cease to call us upon to read, to give time to these verses to find their way through us. Reading after reading. For Celan each and every poem remains ineludibly ascribed to its «20 January,» to those dates of which the poem cannot but be «unforgetful of» (Celan 1999b: 8). What Celan shows us with poetry is the structural value of a *caesura* in the organisation of a diachrony of a subject. A subject that can resist and hold firm only through these poems of shattered time and disseminated, frozen, petrified vestiges. Harboursing this fragmentation as an explosive tension, the poem creates a unique form of temporality, an “other time” put into motion within and through the poetic: a new, potential attempt to *gain time*, to save it for and in the name of a world which has *yet* to be «restuttered,» again and again. It is a desperate effort to counterbalance the mortality of the writing subject, to escape or delay the death to which the poet is bound as a survivor, until the last verses will have been written.

Those last verses were arguably penned by Celan between April 1 and 13, 1970, just a few days before his death the Seine. In *Rebleute* (*Vinegrowers*), a poem which powerfully echoes *Brunnengräber*, we read:

REBLEUTE graben
die dunkelstündige Uhr um,
Tiefe um Tiefe,

du liest,

es fordert
der Unsichtbare den Wind
in die Schranken,

du liest,

die Offenen tragen
den Stein hinterm Aug,
der erkennt dich,
am Sabbath.

(Celan 2018: 577)⁷⁷

Once again, in just *twelve* verses [«*Zwölfmunde*»] Celan is able to put on the page the peregrination of creation and of the text, rewriting a beginning and an end, those «first and last things» that painfully animate his poetry: «The things in

77 «VINEGROWERS dig up dig / under the darhoured watch, / depth for depth, // you read, // the invisible / one commands the wind / to stay in bounds, // you read, // the Open Ones carry / the stone behind the eye, / it recognizes you, / on a Sabbath.» (Celan 2014: 454-457)

the poem have something of these “last” things [...] they could be, one never knows, the “last” things.» (Celan 1999b: 56). Celan's parents were arrested on June 27, 1942, during a Sabbath, with the young Paul escaping capture by miracle. Returning home the following Monday morning, he found his parents' house sealed from the outside and empty (Felstiner 1995: 14 ff.; 284 ff.; Maletta 2006: 229-234). April 13, 1970, was also a Monday: Celan might have penned his very last lyric concomitantly with a Sabbath. Once more, Celan composes an excavation towards the depths of the first and last reasons of his poetry, from the inception of the wound until the last breath that acquires new form in the verse. Writing and reading are inseparable terms, as both are instrumental to a renewal and a continuity of a bond between the generations. What intertwines them is not only the power of textual exegesis, through which new meanings and possibilities within the world may be opened. More importantly, writing and reading shape time, they are a form of participation to the creation of a rhythmic of transmission. In this poem the stone, the inorganic, the mineral, emerge one last time in Celan's oeuvre: a crucial word, *Stein*, inhabiting his poetic landscape since the beginning, appears carried behind the eye of «the Open Ones.» It is perhaps through this *Stein*, this lens of petrified temporality exudated in verses that Celan urges us to read his poems—and the time which can only be written and read as the «invisiblens of the page.»

3 April 1970. REBLEUTE

The word of the LORD came to me: What do you see, Jeremiah? I replied: I see a branch of an almond tree.

The LORD said to me: You have seen right, for I wake upon My word to realize it.

Jeremiah 1, 11-12

Death and life are in the hand of the tongue.

Proverbs 18, 21

*WIRF DAS SONNENJAHR, an dem du hängst,
über den Herzbord
und rudere zu, hungre dich fort,
kopulierend:
zwei Keimzellen, zwei Metazoen,*

das wart ihr,

*das Unbelebte, die Heimat,
fordert jetzt Rückkehr—:*

*später, wer weiß,
kommt eins von euch zwein
gewandelt wieder herauf,
ein Pantoffeltierchen,
bewimpert,
im Wappen.*

Paul Celan (2018: 258)⁷⁸

Der Unsichtbare. The Poem between *Psychose Blanche* and *Incréable*

What does it mean to write and to read the «invisibleness»—or the «*Invisible*» (Felstiner 1995: 284)—«of the page?» And what can we understand by the «invisible of the page?» The act of seeing, gazing, and sighting—in a word: the “visual”—obstinately recurs in several forms in Celan’s work. Pointing out the relevance of this aspect,⁷⁹ Felstiner (1995: 86) remarks that «throughout Celan’s writing, eyes gaze from or at the Jewish dead, and *Aug* is used twice as often as any other noun.» A new “scopic dimension” re-emerges, however, with unique intensity in the poems that Celan composed from February 1969 until the end of his life, and more specifically those collected in the first and third cycles of *Zeitgehöft*.⁸⁰ In this respect, along with terms referring to the semantic field of

78 «THROW THE SOLAR YEAR, to which you cling, / over the heart railings / and row to, starve yourself away, copulating: // two germ cells, two metazoons, / that’s what you were, // the inanimate, the homeland / now requests return—: // later, who knows, / one of you two, transformed, / may reemerge, / a slipper animalcule, / ciliated, / in the shield.» (Celan 2014: 200)

79 For more recent and quite diverging analyses of the visual dimension in Celan’s poetry, see Moskala (2013: 119–127), Buhanan (2016: 601–623), and McGuinn (2021: 1237–1260).

80 Celan began working on this of poems almost immediately after the end of his last stay at the clinic of Vaucluse in Epinay-sur-Orge, Essonne (Celan 2018: 1219), in which he was hospitalised from November 15, 1968, until February 3, 1969. The first cycle of the unfinished book, actually the only one bearing the title *Zeitgehöft*, includes texts written between February 25, 1969, and September 17, 1969; the third cycle was composed between February 6, 1970, and April 13, 1970, a few days before his death. Unlike the second cycle—also known as “Jerusalem Cycle” or “Ilana” [Shmueli]—the first and the third sections of the book have so far never been subject of a specific commentary. Furthermore, the tone, the atmosphere, the stylistic peculiarities and the imagery prevailing in the *Jerusalem Zyklus* make of it a *unicum* in Celan’s *Spätwerk*. For this reason, the following paragraph shall focus exclusively on poems from the first and third section of *Zeitgehöft*.

visual perception (Celan 2018: 558 ff.), or of a failure of it,⁸¹ and verbs such as *erkennen* [*to recognise; to identify; to discern*], and *sehen* [*to see*],⁸² a crucial term appears in *Rebleute*, the poem that closes and encloses Celan's oeuvre. The term I'm referring to is *der Unsichtbare*:

REBLEUTE graben
die dunkelstündige Uhr um,
Tiefe um Tiefe,

du liest,

es fordert
der Unsichtbare den Wind
in die Schranken,

du liest,

die Offenen tragen
den Stein hinterm Aug,
der erkennt dich,
am Sabbath.

(Celan 2018: 577)⁸³

81 As in the case of the term *Blendung*, *blinding* and *glare*, which we can associate with the German adjective *blank* (*shining, gleaming*, Celan 2018: 557; 2014: 610-611).

82 To which we might also add, for extension, the verb *berühren* [*to touch*]. See Green 1993: 329-330: «Nous serions prêts à avancer l'hypothèse qu'une particularité de la catégorie du visible (couplée à l'invisible) est de réaliser les conditions d'un "toucher-sans contact," à distance, toucher "métaphorisé" (transporté-transféré) de telle sorte que sa non-réalisation dans l'ordre du toucher aurait pour contrepartie la dynamique du détournement-attraction, mobilisatrice de son orientation sur des buts non sexuels avec conservation (transformée) de sa charge libidinale, sans que cette dernière s'accomplisse sur le mode de la satisfaction pulsionnelle et sans que cette transformation ne lui fasse perdre la qualité qui continue de la rattacher à la catégorie des phénomènes pulsionnels.» See Green 1999b: 239: «We wish to put forward the hypothesis that a distinctive feature of the category of the visible (coupled with the invisible) is to create the conditions of a "touching-without contact," at a distance, i.e., touching "metaphorised" (transported-transferred) in such a way that its non-realisation in the context of touching would be compensated by the dynamic of diversion-attraction, mobilising its orientation towards non-sexual aims with the preservation (transformed) of its libidinal investment, without the latter occurring along the lines of drive satisfaction and without this transformation making it lose the quality which continues to link it to the category of drive phenomena.» Let us also remember that, while bringing us back to the question of narcissism, the dimension of vision leads us to the crucial remarks on sublimation in Freud's *Eine Kindbeiserinnerung des Leonardo da Vinci* (1910) (Green 1993: 297 ff.; 1999b: 215 ff.) as well as to the distinction between *scopophilia* and *epistemophilia* (1992: 25).

83 «VINEGROWERS dig up dig / under the darkhoured watch, / depth for depth, // you read, // the invisible / one commands the wind / to stay in bounds, // you read, // the Open Ones carry / the stone behind the eye, / it recognizes you, / on a Sabbath.» (Celan 2014: 454-457)

How are we to conceive this scopic dimension in Celan's latest poems? I wish to show how the visual dimension of Celan's late poetry can be understood not so much in terms of "sight" or of sensorial, visual perception of an image, but rather in "representational" terms. It is a "visual sphere" that involves less the eye as organ of perception of a figurative image (or as a means of "testimony"), than a mental, psychic "envisaging." In these terms, I attempt to go beyond a nonetheless crucial difference between "sight" as sensorial perception and "vision" as intellectual, emotional, or affective imagination [*Vorstellung*]. What is indeed critical to underscore here is that such form of visualization is, in Celan's work, *made possible by the poem and through the poem*. It is therefore inseparable from the processes of writing and reading, of creating and receiving a text. Such dimension has to be consequently thought in its relationship with sublimation and with the transformative process that it entails between body and psyche (Green 1992: 24).⁸⁴

From this point of view, *Der Unsichtbare*—which is significantly: a substantive, a noun⁸⁵—does not simply circumscribe the Negative of visual, conscious perception [*sehen*]. It puts into play a form of latency that cannot be seen or sighted by the "naked eye," and which ought to be "envisaged" by means of a different sort of organ: the written word. As such, *Der Unsichtbare* is not a lyrical or rhetorical image: it names and impresses on the page the blank mental, representational space-time that we attempted to give account of in this chapter as framing structure for the representation of the absence of representation. Escaping sensorial perception and consciousness,⁸⁶ such blank makes us feel *otherwise* the lasting weight of an absence, of an empty space which cannot be filled nor occupied, and which is therefore continuously *unbesetzbar*. A negative which resists any positivation.

I will explore here the "visual sphere" in Celan's late poems along the axis of negative hallucination,⁸⁷ notably in a double connotation: on the one hand, that of the relationship between negative hallucination and sublimation in the

84 «Lire, écrire ne sont pas au regard de la psychanalyse des activités premières, mais des produits d'acquisition tardive, issu de l'apprentissage mais utilisant des pulsions partielles domestiquées par l'éducation, l'action "civilisatrice." Lire, écrire sont des sublimations, c'est-à-dire que les pulsions partielles sont inhibées quant au but, déplacées et déssexualisées.» Green 1997: 342: «Reading and writing, in psychoanalytic terms, are not primary processes, but complex activities acquired relatively late; they come as a result of training, making use of partial drives tamed by education and the "civilizing" process. Reading and writing are sublimations, which means that the underlying partial drives are inhibited from attaining their goals, displaced, and desexualized.»

85 In fact, the adjective *unsichtbar* recurs a few times throughout Celan's work, but only in one other occasion we can find it as a noun, namely in the poem *Hüttenfenster*, collected in *Die Niemandrose* (Celan 2018: 161).

86 Green stresses how «negative hallucination is not limited to nonperception but is completed by the unconsciousness of non-perception.» (1999b: 195).

87 Cfr. Maletta (2006: 207-234; 2008: 127-149).

creative process; on the other hand, in its the link between negative hallucination and what Green calls *blank psychosis*. Bringing together elements of Green's theory that have never been juxtaposed in such terms, I intend to show how the common matrix of negative hallucination can offer two different outcomes concurrently, helping us to further understand the work of the Negative in Celan's poetry. If on the one hand, negative hallucination may lead towards the process of sublimation, to the representation of absence of representation fruitfully emerging through the creative process, on the other hand, negative hallucination also constitute the matrix of what may develop into a «blankness» which is, indeed, psychotic (Green et Donnet 1973: 228) and a condition for a «paralysis of thought» (270)—or to use another pregnant expression in Celan's case: a psychotic «sidération de la pensée» [*sideration of thoughts*] (240). While in the former case we find the *possible germ of literary creativity*—in Green's words, the *incréable*—, in the latter we are confronted with the *germ of psychosis*. It is at the crossroad between these two blanks, or rather at the threshold separating two different vicissitudes of hallucinatory activity (literary creation and psychosis), which Celan's struggle for «those last things» (1999b: 56) takes place.

What is blank psychosis? In the words of Green and Donnet:

La psychose blanche est [...] cette psychose sans psychose où l'analyse nous fait accéder à l'ombilic de la psychose : structure matricielle comme condition de possibilité de l'élaboration psychotique sans que nécessairement une telle élaboration s'ensuive. [...] Blanche, la psychose l'est ici en tant que la banalité commune de ces «symptômes» est telle qu'on pourrait à bon droit leur contester cette qualification. Ces symptômes sont tout juste «symptomatiques», il faut les prendre à la lettre pour les analyser. Z⁸⁸ est déprimé comme peut l'être un sujet normal [...]. Mais cette «blancheur» est psychotique. (1973: 225, 228)⁸⁹

Green and Donnet describe blank psychosis as displaying a set of symptoms with «no readily identifiable clinical manifestation» (Demangeat). Such an apparent triviality betrays in fact what, significantly, alone an analysis in *après-coup* of the written text of the interview with the patient Z can unearth: a psychotic structure which is «latent, *invisible*, in negative» (Duparc 1996: 48). It is, in other words, a *structural* «psychotic potentiality» (Green et Donnet 1973: 226) i.e., «characterized by blocking of thought processes, the inhibition of the functions

88 With the letter “Z” Green and Donnet call the patient whose case and corresponding analysis would have led to the conceptualization of blank psychosis.

89 «The blank psychosis is [...] that psychosis without psychosis, the analysis of which allows us to access the navel of the psychosis: matrix structure as condition of the possibility of psychotic elaboration without that such an elaboration actually follows. [...] This psychosis is here blank in that the common triviality of these ‘symptoms’ is such that one could rightfully contest that a qualification. These symptoms are indeed simply “symptomatic,” they have to be taken literally in order to analyse them. Z is depressed like any other normal subject can be depressed [...] But that “blankness” is psychotic.»

of representation» (Green 1997: 40). But how can such a «psychotic potentiality» actually develop into a psychosis? Green and Donnet write:

Il n'y a pas de fatalité psychotique, parce que l'élaboration psychotique est facteur de paramètres qui ne sont pas uniquement «endogènes.» Il n'y a pas de destin psychotique, mais une potentialité psychotique qui s'actualise ou ne s'actualise pas selon les conjugaisons des séries complémentaires issues du psychotique potentiel et des rencontres qu'il fera ou ne fera pas avec les objets et les événements qui auront pour sens de dévoiler ou de voiler davantage cette potentialité. (1973: 226)⁹⁰

This quote is paramount, and we will see right away why. But before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify that the relevance of the notion of blank psychosis is not motivated by the fact that it may help us understand Celan's psychological state in the last year of his life and during the creative process.⁹¹ The *psychose blanche* rather proves to be insightful to grasp what Celan's poetry was capable of *touching* at the heart of the collective psyche of Europe in the aftermath of the Shoah. He discloses an *invisible* psychotic core, linked to the impossibility, indeed the denial to give thinkable form or structure to «das was geschah» (Celan 2000: 186). Celan's poetry is, in this regard, precisely that unexpected, surviving object—to say it with Green and Donnet—which can generate the development of blank psychosis in the reader: an «exogenous factor» which haunts the page as excrescence of the annihilation process made possible in the concentration camps.

With this hypothesis I push the theoretical implications of blank psychosis far beyond the primary frame of reference that Green and Donnet adopted. Nevertheless, blank psychosis acquires a significant explicative power, in that it offers a clinical-theoretical reference to tackle a crucial failure in the collective mental functioning of European culture in the aftermath of the Shoah. From this point of view, Celan's poetry touches the nerve of a foreclosure [*Verwerfung*] within Europe after Second World War: the rejection of giving thinkable, representable form to the annihilation of the Jewish people (Maletta 2006: 207-234).

90 «There is no psychotic inevitability, because the psychotic elaboration is a factor conditioned by parameters which are not exclusively “endogenous.” There is no psychotic destiny, but rather a psychotic potentiality which takes place or not depending on the conjugations of the complementary series derived from the potentially psychotic subject and the encounters that the latter will or will not make with those objects or events that may or may not result in an unveiling or in a veiling of such a potentiality.»

91 Much has already been written about the psychological conditions of Celan's last years of life. Many hypotheses have been put forward as to how such psychological sufferance might or not have affected his late poetry. Only a few scholars, however, seem to have been able to resist the temptation of labelling Celan's psychological pain as a mere form of psychosis—to mention the many attempts of romanticizing it. See on this matter the important remarks by Wiedemann (2000: 820-860).

An interesting parallel can be drawn here between Celan and Green as to the historical relevance of their respective works and legacies. If the former represents an unprecedented limit, a new frontier, a *unicum* in the history of literature in German language and beyond, Green's work is not only a breakthrough in the investigation of the borderline cases but, specifically with the study of the *psychose blanche*, a major development in the history of psychoanalytic movement in a crucial cultural conjuncture.

By establishing this parallel I do not simply imply that their works mark a turning point in their respective fields. Beyond that, while challenging in a new way the narcissistic integrity of Western European culture, they were able to give expression (almost concomitantly) to a mutation process in the representational manifestations of the unconscious. A mutation, indeed, not so much of the unconscious "itself"—for nothing can be known with regard to the unconscious unless we attempt to consider a specific psychoanalytic theory of representation (Green 2011: 31-60). With their works they rather unveil a new "symptomatology" of cultural representations, whereby such a transformation can become retrospectively graspable by analysing new forms of expression of the conflicts between unconscious and conscious, affecting thinking processes and informing the *Kulturarbeit*. I will resume these remarks in the conclusive section of my work, extending them also to Franz Kafka, to underline how, with their respective works, these authors were able to show through different forms of literary expressions the significance of the role of absence as an ineliminable element in the organization of a framing structure for representation.

This constellation of topics emerging from the study of the different vicissitudes of negative hallucination coexisting in Celan's poetry leads me to address an aspect that has been overlooked by the research: the ethical dimension of negative hallucination. Ultimately, negative hallucination in Celan's poetry poses a series of questions, in which «what is at stake [...] is the relationship to reality» (Green 1993: 235; 1999b: 170)—and by extension, to memory, culture, futurity. A relationship with that *Wirklichkeit* that, put to the proof of representation, creation, denial, delirious rejection, Celan had to conquer back through language, in order to impress it on the page in all its "invisibleness."

Whether it leads us to the question of the *incrédible* as the invisible, inaccessible affective trace of the relationship of the infant with the body of the mother, or to the linguistic and representational *Versagung* of thought processes, i.e., to the failure of the politics of memory in the collective mind of an allegedly "denazified" *Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, negative hallucination allows to read not quite the "unthought" of the West. Rather, it presents something the West "does not know of not thinking"—of not "envisaging." In both cases, the role of the death drive is crucial to grasp the relationship between creativity and ethics, and more generally speaking, between absence and the possibility of representation. It is precisely the capability of showing that remnant—that *waste*—of thinking

and representation invisible to Western culture that constitutes the specific feature of a form of Jewishness emerging through Celan's poetry—what the author called the «pneumatic concern» of his work in relationship with Judaism.⁹² What is at issue here is not only the work of the Negative in its different vicissitudes, but its relevance in highlighting irreconcilable approaches to the question of memory, transmission, loss, and the shaping cultural dynamics.

«du liest»

Let us return to Celan's very last poem to respectively reconstruct the last months of his writing through the spectrum of negative hallucination so far outlined. The double recurrence of the verb *to read* in this text is noteworthy. I propose to consider here *lesen* both as a transitive and intransitive verb. The transitive value of the present indicative «du liest»—«you read»—emerges first of all in that the act of reading necessarily requires an object, a form of textuality, in this case the poem. The poem becomes the object of a reading subject. To be more precise (and to speak with Winnicott and Green) the poem becomes a cultural transitional object, which is neither external nor internal, but rather creates a transitional area, a third, intermediate space between author and reader (Green 1993: 324 ff.; 1999b: 235 ff.). «Du liest» expresses in this sense a demand for a *vis à vis* with the text which stems from the text itself, the present and the absent one, the written and the unwritten, unwritable one. Celan's well-known letter to Hans Bender—dated May 18, 1960—evokes a meaningful image:

Handwerk – das ist Sache der Hände. Und diese Hände gehören wiederum nur *einem* Menschen, d.h. einem einmaligen, sterblichen Seelenwesen, das mit seiner Stimme und seiner Stummheit einen Weg sucht. Nur wahre Hände schreiben wahre Gedichte. Ich sehe keinen prinzipiellen Unterschied zwischen Händedruck und Gedicht. (Celan 2000: 177)⁹³

Poem and handshake, writing and reading imply a double vectoriality that connects not only writer and reader, but the process of reading and writing, as hands reciprocally reaching from the page outwards and inwards towards the page. «You read» embodies therefore an invitation to an encounter—one that may or may not take place—through which each and every text acquires new life: a re-actualization in the voice of a new reader, a new form of resonating in it over and over again.

While referring to the poem, to the process of reading, of interrogating these texts and these pages, «du liest,» implicitly poses another vital question: What are we reading through this writing? What may we read through these

92 See the letter written to Gershom Schocken on February 5, 1970, in Felstiner 1995: 280.

93 «Handwork—it is a matter of hands. And these hands belong to *one* person, i.e., a unique, mortal soul searching for its way with its voice and its dumbness. Only truthful hands write true poems. I cannot see any basic difference between a handshake and a poem.»

poems? From this vantage point, the verb *lesen* seems to operate in a very specific “intransitive” sense: reading is transformed into a gaze directed towards something that is apparently “not there” and yet alphabetically outlined, profiled on the page in all its “invisibleness.” Green’s remarks on the link between reading, writing, and voyeurism in *La déliaison* show how

l’écriture est une représentation arbitraire (graphique) de l’absence de représentation figurée (imaginaire). La perception de l’écriture comme telle ne renvoie qu’à elle-même, seul le déchiffrement de l’écriture donnera accès à une représentation. (Green 1992: 26)⁹⁴

Let us insist for a moment on this quote and on the substantive «déchiffrement» in the original French—«deciphering.» At first glance, the verb chosen by Green might sound inappropriate if applied to the work of Celan. And indeed it does, especially if we consider how Celan himself firmly rejected any criticism regarding his poetry as being “hermetic,” “encoded,” or “undecipherable” (Felstiner 1995: 253-264).⁹⁵

This, however, is perhaps not the only way to grasp Green’s quote: Celan’s poetry—and particularly the intransitive value of Celan’s «du liest» underscored here—enable us to illuminate another connotation *en souffrance* in the verb chosen by Green. Of course, *déchiffrement*, and the corresponding verb *déchiffrer*, refer to the action of *decoding*, *interpreting*, or *disclosing* the hidden meaning of a text, of a code, or of a message (for instance, by using a key). An etymological analysis, however, reminds us that the term *cipher* originally designates, according to Arabic algebra, the empty structure containing arithmetic representation. The Arabian term *şifr* refers to an arithmetical symbol or character of no value by itself «but which increases or decreases the value of other figures according to its position.»⁹⁶ Also, let us notice that the prefix *de-* in *déchiffrement* (cfr. “de-, prefix.”) does not indicate only an “undoing,” but also a descending movement (the senses of the Latin prefix include: *down*, *down from*, *down to*), like other compound verbs of Latin origin such as *de-ponere* [*to depone*] or *de-scendere* [*to descent*]. The verb *de-cipher*, along with the term «déchiffrement,» can be thus further understood as a sort of pathway alluding, literally, to a textual descend towards the “degree zero

94 Green 1997: 344: «[...] The written word is a (graphic) representation of absence of representation (i.e., the imaginary). The perception of the written word as such refers only to itself: the deciphering alone will open the way to representation.»

95 Cfr. also Celan’s letter to Siegfried Unseld, from April 7, 1970 (quoted in the first part of this chapter) in which, significantly, the term «Chiffre» is employed (Wiedemann 2000: 860).

96 I quote here from the Oxford English Dictionary: «cipher, n.: old French *cyfre*, *cyffre* (modern French *chiffre*) = Spanish *cifra*, Portuguese *cifra*, Italian *cifra*, medieval Latin *cifra*, *cifera*, *ciphra*, < Arabic *şifr* the arithmetical symbol “zero” or “nought” (written in Indian and Arabic numeration •), a substantive use of the adjective *şifr* “empty, void,” < *şafara* to be empty. The Arabic was simply a translation of the Sanskrit name *śūnya*, literally “empty”.»

of representation”—or to use Green’s words: to the framing structure for the representation of the absence of representation.

From these remarks we can deduce that Celan’s «du liest» urges us to go beyond a simple operation of deciphering. The verb *lesen* is loaded with an absence which leads us to envisage the framing structure of representation: a framing structure that does not allow us to see but to *read*, to *feel through reading* an unreplaceable void on the page. As such, the poem has the task to trace as accurately as possible not quite an object in its “decipherability” but a blank, empty space as heavy as the body of a people, as loud as a scream lost in a gasp. Celan’s «you read» conveys therefore a far more difficult, harsh mandate, for it confronts us with a darkness, an impenetrable, inaccessible silence that still finds its way in the poem. What to do with such unbearable, irreducible blank that this work outlines at the heart of poetry? Felstiner has in my opinion grasped in depth this question in Celan, as he wrote, regarding his very last text:

[...] *liest*, besides «read,» means «gather.» Years earlier, Celan had vintagers «press down on time like their eye.» Now *du liest*, coming hard upon the labor of «Vine-growers,» tells you to do more than read: it might work to first say «you read,» then flip the “d” and the next time say «you reap.» (Felstiner 1995: 285)

Building upon Felstiner’s remark, it is indeed this long, difficult, painstaking work of harvesting, reaping, and gathering that Celan’s poetry does, in spite of all, against all odds, and that at the same time is demanded of us: “to do more than read,” by means of reading. To harvest, to reap, to gather from the text a handful of fragments of such a blank, distillation of the work of the poetic, crafted through hundreds and hundreds of verses. On this point, Maletta observed that what is at stake at the very core of Celan’s poetry is the creation of a space in which absence may be thought *without falling into the trap of a tautological reference* to the empty space left by those who were annihilated (Maletta 2006: 212). Celan’s work creates a representational space which—under the sign of Auschwitz—reclaims and elaborates a new relationship with blankness and loss: a space-time at the margin of the *incréable*. The absence that Celan confronts us with is not tautological but inhabited, animated, put on the page through the work of the poetic.

The reiteration of «du liest» can therefore be considered in meta-representational terms as a repetition whose function is to pronounce at once an invitation to encounter, to read the poem, while giving a corporeal weigh to the abyssal void that the text has to carry. Reading and writing are, as such, exponential processes for Celan, they interrogate the very processes of reading and writing, and the dynamics of sublimation that underlie them. In this context, we can attempt to translate the transitive and intransitive aspects we recognise in Celan’s use of the verb *lesen* in the context of the *objectalising* and *disobjectalising functions*, thus

relating directly to the processes of binding and unbinding, and to the different outcomes of destructivity in the text.

On the side of the objectalising function, the act of reading is invested, becoming the very object of the work of sublimation, towards the creation of a place of vigilance and alert in which to feel, to “see” through the eyes of writing, the representation of the absence of representation. On the other hand, however, the disobjectalising function involves the disinvestment of any representational process through reading. The reader is here presented with the excruciating incapability of giving representational form to such absence of representation that Celan’s poetry inscribes on the page. Let us think, for example, of how Celan has been repeatedly labelled as paranoid, sometimes celebrated as a visionary surrealist experimentalist (emblematic is the case of the reception of *Todesfuge*), other times denigrated by critics and detractors, or of how his later work has been rejected—until recently mostly neglected or considered impenetrable. Seen from this vantage point, all these elements, judgements, and reactions suggest the extent of the foreclosure Celan was striking (and still does) in his struggle for putting into poetry the search for a testimonial *Wirklichkeit*—the liminal, mortiferous reality marked by the extermination process.

By reflecting upon the process of writing and reading through the objectalising and disobjectalising functions, and upon the effects of Celan’s work on the reader, we are able to grasp the vicissitudes of the death drive in his poetry, its diversions—we could say, its remodelling. In the case of the *incréable*, destructivity is fruitfully put into a representational frame as trace of an absence. Destructivity is thereby converted in the creation of a limit, a protecting boundary marking the inaccessible affective kernel of the relationship with the body of the mother—constituting, as we know, the core to which the creative process will not cease to return, unconsciously. We can detect here, again, the role of both parental figures through the work of sublimation. The *caesura* operated by the fatherly figure leaves its mark on the affective core of the *incréable*, generating the condition, the necessary space, for the return of the creating subject towards the periphery of that germ of loss. That *germinating loss* which took place before any language or speech, but which made language, speech, and creation, possible. In such poetic space enclosing the *incréable*—unreachable *space-time* which we could also call a *Zeitgeböht* or *Timestead*—Celan is able to reclaim and recreate a nourishing relationship with the paternal and maternal element of creation.

On the side of the blank psychosis, the destructive drives attack the binding processes necessary for representation and thinking, thus making way for a mental dimension in which emptiness prevails. It is worth emphasizing, again, that what Celan’s poetry does reaches significantly beyond a form of “incommunicability,” or “speechlessness.” The blank his poetry touches is on a far deeper layer. His poetry challenges the reader by exposing a «blank thought,»

in which the death drive literally besieges the thinking process in its link with language. What is lost, in this case, is the capability of perceiving language as tool for thinking—or as means for the perception of thinking. Such «blank thought» reveals the failure of «thoughts perception» as an impossibility of establishing relationships between words and their meaning «in accordance with the reference to the unconscious» (Green 1993: 271; Green 1999b: 197). That is the point that Green makes in the following passage of *Le Travail du négatif*:

J'ai de mon côté essayé de comprendre les mécanismes du blanc de la pensée. Il me semble qu'on pourrait les comprendre si on arrivait à imaginer une pensée, non seulement sans images – sans représentation –, mais aussi sans mots pour percevoir ce que l'on pense. C'est à ce titre que le langage est à la fois une représentation et une perception, il représente les relations entre les choses et les relations de relations de la pensée et il permet à celle-ci d'être perçue. Aussi l'hallucination négative de la pensée se manifeste-t-elle dans la situation analytique par une impossibilité de s'exprimer avec les mots qui n'est pas le silence de l'émission de parole mais celui de la formation des mots comme outils de pensée, ou celui de la relation entre la morphologie et la sémantique des mots. Les mots peuvent être alors à la rigueur sensoriellement perçue, mais ce qui est perdu c'est la relation des mots à leur sens selon la référence à l'inconscient. (Green 1993: 270-271)⁹⁷

Two vicissitudes of negative hallucination, then, corresponding to two vicissitudes of the death drive. For Celan, what is at stake in sublimation is the transformation of the impossibility, of the incapability, of the absence of representation into the representation of absence of representation. The *Unsichtbares*, the invisibility of the page, embodies the bet that the poetic must accept in order to face otherwise absence and the abyss of the page. Celan's poems prompt us to consider the problem of the object of writing—of the cultural, transitional, and transnarcissistic object—as something that is never given for granted but has to be thought from that irreducible, ambivalent blank linguistically and stylistically outlined on the page.

97 Green 1999b: 196-197: «For my part, I have tried to understand the mechanisms involved in blank thought. I think that we would be able to understand it if we could imagine thinking, not only without images – without representation – but also without words to perceive what one thinks. It is in this respect that language is both a representation and a perception; it represents the relation between things and the relations of thought relations making it possible for the latter to be perceived. The negative hallucination of thought also manifests itself in the analytic situation in the inability to express oneself with words. This is not the silence of an absence of speech but that of the formation of words as tools for thinking, or of the relation between the morphology and semantics of words. Words can in this case just about be perceived on a sensory level, but what is lost is the relation of the words to their meaning in accordance with the reference to the unconscious.» These remarks, formulated keeping in mind the analytical situation, can be extended, I claim, also to Celan's poetry.

«Something shall be, later,» reads the first verse of another poem from the third cycle of *Zeitgehöft* written on December 13, 1969:

ES WIRD etwas sein, später,
das füllt sich mit dir
und hebt sich
an einen Mund

Aus dem zerscherbten
Wahn
steh ich auf
und seh meiner Hand zu,
wie sie den einen
einzig
Kreis zieht.

(Celan 2018: 574)⁹⁸

Celan sent this poem both to Ilana Shmueli on December 15, 1969, and to his wife Gisèle, in the latter case as a birthday present, on March 19, 1970, just a few weeks before ending his life. «Something shall be, later»: this verse expresses the mandate of filiation through poetry, the creation of a new potential generation of sense that *may* come, later. The work of poetry as act of resistance, of permanence of a Jewish trace in the world, surviving the inmedicable wound Auschwitz left.

With growing awareness of his closeness to death, of the closure of the circle, an *I* watches, or rather “envisages” a hand drawing «the one / single / circle:» the lifelong passion of poetry. The third cycle of the unfinished work *Zeitgehöft*—which closes with *Reblente*—opens with a poem about writing as an attempt to protect, to enclose: to create a new skin, a new shell, a new container for something that «shall be» in a deferred dimension. The recreation of an “uncreatable” link, a fruitful relationship with the loss, is an endeavour that takes, for Celan, more than 30 years of relentless writings.

By allowing us to grasp the impenetrable borders of the *incrèable*, as a protective circle that Celan traces within the blank field of the «sideration of thought,» these poems show the ambivalence of negative hallucination, and of the representational processes through writing. It would be a tremendous simplification to oppose the work of creation (the *incrèable*) and psychosis in a sort of

98 «Something shall be, later, / that fills itself with you / and lifts itself / to a mouth // Out of shattered / madness / I raise myself / and watch my hand / as it draws the one / single / circle.» (Celan 2014: 443-443)

dialectic. The question is more intricated than that, for the two vicissitudes are not only inseparable, like the different threads of a common fabric: the death drive at work in negative hallucination is rather an element essential both to the *incréable*, as well as to blank psychosis. Celan's poem is capable of inhabiting this dual, ambivalent blank liminal space, outlining the *incréable* of his own work, while critically exposing the *psychose blanche* of the *Kulturarbeit*.

Celan, however, never fell prey of the psychotic tendency his poetry exposed. If anything, the potential psychotic kernel of Celan's poetry regards less the poet or the work of writing, than a reader, a culture, a world. Until the end, Celan could resist through poetry, as a way to arise from the «shattered madness,» «Aus dem zerscherbten / Wahn,» and to resist, firmly, until the death he voluntarily sought in the Seine.

I spoke above of a double vectoriality of the verb «you read,» alluding to the image, dear to Celan, of writing, scriptural hands, reaching outwards and inwards. «Du liest:» is that *du* also perhaps the poem itself? The poem as that which “reads the reader”? May this invitation to an encounter through the poem also hide a sardonic address to a readership? Celan was aware of the intrinsic difficulties that his work posed, of the resistance that his poetry created in the reader. Although Celan's poetry relentlessly searched for that other reader and listener, such “other” was never given for granted. These texts, as such, do not cease to be on alert, reading us, regarding us, compelling us to both feel and reflect upon them, and to search for ways of thinking the human and the responsibilities that the human carries to and for the other.

Celan's poetry makes “visible” a profound wound within European post-war culture. A wound, of which the *Kulturarbeit* seems to be still as of today narcissistically unaware: *the incapability of conceiving irrepresentability as an ineliminable element in the representational processes*. Celan's writing shows as such the limits of the dichotomy between “representation” and “absence of representation,” subverting the equation “irrepresentability = no representation.”

With his work, Celan confronts the Negative of Western history and culture as a work of suppression, foreclosure, and ultimately, of physical and cultural annihilation of the Jewish people as “otherness.” A work of the Negative that, in the West, reveals itself as the utopia of a continent without “other.” In *The Destruction of the European Jews* Raul Hilberg, considering the historical unicity of the Shoah, probes the heart of the “negativity of the West” towards the Jew. The Shoah represents the culmination—unique and unprecedented—of a process that started long before, and whose traces can be detected in the persecutions perpetrated by the Holy Inquisition, in expulsion of the Jews from the Iberic Peninsula (1492-1493), and in the assimilation process. With the concentration camps, the gas chamber, and the physical annihilation of the body of the culture and of the people, Nazi Germany reached an unprecedented stage:

The Nazi destruction process did not come out of a void; it was the culmination of a cyclical trend. We have observed the trend in the three successive goals of anti-Jewish administrators. The missionaries of Christianity had said in effect: You have no right to live among us as Jews. The secular rulers who followed had proclaimed: You have no right to live among us. The German Nazis at last decreed: You have no right to live. (Hilberg 1985 vol. I: 8-9)

Under the sign of such a tragedy, Celan has given form with his poetry to a work of the Negative that survives on the page as something that cannot and does not want to be assimilated: a Judaism that resists as unsolvable rest, both individual and collective, as a spectre haunting the West.

In a certain sense, a form of blank psychosis has long been deeply rooted in the West as an incapability of thinking and representing the other as “otherness” in its irreducibility. Celan was able to make us see and feel in a unique way the work of the Negative as persistence of an unsolvable alterity within the poetic: expression of a Negative that is radically irreconcilable with the West, and which persists within the poetic, finding expression *as the poetic*.

These poems do not cease to remind us how the creative process, as inseparable from the vicissitudes of the drive, entails a work which cannot be exhausted, a work whose ethical legacy cannot be satisfied by sublimation itself. «Das Gedicht – eine endlose Vigilie» (1999b: 91), writes Celan in his preparatory notes to *Der Meridian*, commenting on a passage by Kafka (Maletta 2008: 105). «The poem—an interminable vigil,» poetry as a form of constant attentiveness, of wake and wait: a relentless critical exercise which informs the ethical value of the creative process, of the work, of poetry itself. From such a form of vigilance, Celan invites us to read and to write, think and to construct, verse after verse, a legacy for the future.

Chapter 4

Poetics of the Psyche.

The *Incréable* in Green's Work: From Literature to Metapsychology

On peut dire qu'un psychanalyste n'écrit jamais que sur lui-même. Non qu'il s'agisse par ce jugement de frapper de caducité sa production par son caractère subjectif, mais parce que l'universalité – s'il y en a une – passe nécessairement par l'interrogation subjective.

André Green (1973: 28)¹

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

André Green (1992: 20)²

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

André Green (2004a: 27)³

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- 1 «One could say that a psychoanalyst never writes about anything but himself. This is not to discredit the work as merely subjective, but rather to emphasise that universality—if such a thing exists—must necessarily pass through subjective inquiry.»
 - 2 Green 1997: 338: «[...] the analyst reacts to the text as if it were a product of the unconscious. *The analyst then becomes the analysed of the text.* It is within himself that he must find an answer to this questioning, all the more in the case of a literary text, since he can only rely on his own associations. The interpretation of the text becomes the interpretation which the analyst must provide for the text but when all is said and done, it is the interpretation that he must give himself of the effects of the text in his own unconscious.» (tr. mod.)
 - 3 «Is it possible to mark the difference between mental life and writing? In the case of many works, the interweaving between the two is almost impossible to disentangle.»

In *La déliaison*—originally published in 1971, only a year after Celan's death—Green proposes a significant remark on the relationship between psychoanalysis and literature:

[...] il y a une mutation littéraire dont l'avenir dira si elle a été fatale à son patrimoine. Cette mutation est contemporaine de l'éclosion et du développement de la psychanalyse. En outre, il est important de remarquer que la très grande majorité des œuvres littéraires qui ont fait l'objet d'études psychanalytiques appartiennent à une époque antérieure à cette mutation. Il n'est donc pas sans intérêt de s'interroger [...] sur cet état curieux où la psychanalyse se porte moins vers les œuvres de son temps que vers celle du passé, comme si elle paraissait reculer devant elles, ou même déclarer forfait devant la littérature qui a le même âge qu'elle. (1992: 12)⁴

In spite of the common ground occupied by literature and psychoanalysis, Green observes how the latter generally reacts to coeval literature with a sort of *avoidance [évitement]*: as if psychoanalysis were in need for a temporal distance to come to terms with the uncanny element of a mutation emerging in new forms of literary representations. Significantly, if this literary mutation is contemporary to the birth of psychoanalysis, one could wonder whether literature *re-presents* something unbearable, in the immediacy of contemporaneity, to psychoanalysis itself. Something of an origin, remote like an infancy of language, stemming from the suppressed sources⁵ of the psyche: something that psychoanalysis may have later nominated in conceptual terms, without being entirely ready to face otherwise, without mediation. As such, the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis could be expressed in the light of an

4 Green 1997: 332: «[...] a literary mutation has taken place, leaving it for the future to decide whether or not it has been fatal to literature. This mutation is contemporaneous with the birth and development of psychoanalysis. Furthermore, it should be noted that the great majority of literary works which have been the object of psychoanalytic studies were written before this mutation took place. It is therefore legitimate to explore [...] the meaning of this curious phenomenon whereby psychoanalysis turns toward the works of the past rather than toward contemporary works, as if shying away from the latter, or even declaring its incompetence to deal with the literature of its own age.»

5 We may recall how Freud (1948, vol. 7: 33) notoriously expressed himself with regards to poets and artists, as he wrote: «Wertvolle Bundesgenossen sind aber die Dichter und ihr Zeugnis ist hoch anzuschlagen, denn sie pflegen eine Menge von Dingen zwischen Himmel und Erde zu wissen, von denen sich unsere Schulweisheit noch nichts träumen läßt. In der Seelenkunde gar sind sie uns Alltagsmenschen weit voraus, weil sie da *aus Quellen* schöpfen, welche wir noch nicht für die Wissenschaft erschlossen haben.» (m. e.) «But creative writers are valuable allies and their evidence is to be prized highly, for they are apt to know a whole host of things between heaven and earth of which our philosophy has not yet let us dream. In their knowledge of the mind they are far in advance of us everyday people, for they draw *upon sources* which we have not yet opened up for science.» (m. e.)

après-coup necessary for the structuration of a coherent conceptual reflection. A cut, an interruption is required to revisit traces of the creative work from a new perspective. But can we consider psychoanalysis simply as an *après-coup* of the literary? Is this enough to describe the complexity of the matter? Even if there are certainly reasons to believe so, the cases of Kafka and Celan show a liminal dimension of writing which is irreducible to the present conceptual horizon. In fact, Green's remarks, rather than limiting the question, draw our attention to an inexhaustible link, a rhythmic which marks the transmission of a poetic element circulating between literature and psychoanalysis. If the latter, as Green shows in *La déliaison*, allows to map traces of mutations and changes within the literary expressive landscape, literature has notoriously offered a territory of conceptual reflection towards a more complex understanding of the psyche, of the unconscious, of the human, and of life.⁶ A territory whose extension, whose depths are, nonetheless, constantly unknown, unexplorable, unfathomable—an “excess” escaping the range of psychoanalytic conceptual tools. This is precisely one of the elements that lead psychoanalysts to confront themselves with the creation of poets and writers—an element of richness that keeps the question constantly open. Indeed, as Green remarks:

De Freud à Lacan, il y a une marque du littéraire sur l'œuvre de pensée psychanalytique, un cadre formel du langage et de l'écriture, qui justifieraient à eux seul une étude. Nous nous en tiendrons cependant à l'examen, à sens unique, de l'effet de la psychanalyse sur la littérature, laissant à de plus lettrés l'autre tâche. (1992: 12)⁷

At this point, after putting Green's thinking at work with the writings of Kafka and Celan, his invitation to take over the «other task» of reflecting on the influence of literature on psychoanalysis creates an opportunity to return to the «imprint» of literature in his metapsychology—and more broadly to the relationship between creativity and theory.

6 In an unpublished paper, Balsamo has recently emphasised the crucial role that literature and, in general, artistic creativity, play not only as an area of verifiability of theoretical and clinical aspects of psychoanalysis. He also stressed the role of literature as a field of conceptual elaboration, i.e., as a fundamental source for deducible models and auxiliary constructions that may facilitate the thinkability of features of mental functioning, especially in those cases in which a theoretical systematization seems to be hardly possible or yet far from being satisfactorily cohesive and coherent. The same goes for particular clinical aspects, the complexity of which can be effectively illustrated by artistic or literary creations in the first place, as in a sort of an «avant-coup» paving the way for further developments (Balsamo 2022: 3-4 – quoted with the author's consent).

7 Green 1997: 332: «From Freud to Lacan, literature has left an imprint on works of psychoanalytical thinking, a formal framework encompassing both language and the phenomenon of writing [*écriture*] which would justify a study of its own. We shall confine ourselves, however, to the examination of the one-way effect of psychoanalysis on literature, leaving the other task to the more literarily inclined scholar.»

The *incréable* has shown how at the core of the creative process lies a wound, a loss, an absence which is constitutive of the psychic apparatus. But how that wound, that loss, that absence can be read with regards to a creative element at work in the process of theorization? While being a “figure” of the Negative, the *incréable*—as a signifier echoing an intense reflection on the question of loss and origin—situates at the border between representability and irrepresentability; the particular and the universal; the areas of the poetical and the theoretical; and last but not least, between conscious and unconscious. The liminal character of the *incréable* can help us, in other words, to shed light on what I consider an *epistemological* relationship between Green’s thinking and a passion for creativity, writing, and literature.

The psychoanalytic exploration of creative processes characterises Green’s work no less than the confrontation with clinical cases «at the border of analysability» (Urribarri 2013: 79). Papers such as *La déliaison* (1971), *Le double et l’absent* (1973), and *La réserve de l’incréable* (1982) are testimonies of how literature represents for him a sort of *Doppelgänger* which accompanies from the outset the development of his thought. Green has never ceased to assert that the «psyche encompasses literature, not the contrary»—«le psychisme englobe la littérature, pas le contraire» (Green 2004a: 16). If literature is a means of expression of «the creative power of the unconscious» (Balsamo 2019: 15) the relationship that Green establishes with textuality could offer in turn a way of reading the creative processes intervening in the transformations between the «space of literature» (Blanchot 1955) and a specific form of theoretical organisation.

Many scholars (i. a. Duparc 1996; Kohon 1999; Richard 2005; Reed and Levine 2018; Kohon and Perelberg 2017; Balsamo 2019) have already discussed the link between clinic and theory in the development of Green’s metapsychology—or to use Duparc’s expression, between a «clinic of the void» and a «theory of the Negative» (1996: 40). Here, I aim to reflect on Green’s work by highlighting the role of literature in the development of his theory of the Negative in metarepresentational terms. By so doing, I wish to trace the possible vicissitudes of what I call the *poetic* in Green’s process of theorization—from a *poetic of the void* to a *theory of the Negative*. I use here the word poetic primarily in its etymological value, i.e., in terms of *poiesis*, thereby referring to a form of *creativity*, of *making* which stems, indeed, from literature, but that is in fact not limited to it. Literature allows us to perceive in specific terms, as we will see, a creativity of the unconscious, a *poiesis* of the psyche at work. What is important to emphasise here is that such *poiesis* is not neutralised in Green’s process of theorization. On the contrary, it expresses itself in new forms and configurations, surviving otherwise and becoming recognisable in *après-coup* as a constitutive, yet irrepresentable element of the writing process and of the text.

Beyond any difference of genre or style, such a *poiesis* marks for Green a strong kinship between literature and psychoanalysis, actually opening a sort of

transitional area in which the two imbricate and communicate with each other in a common attempt to reconstruct a relationship with a loss, an absence. What I mean by that is not that psychoanalysis and literature are interchangeable or equivalent, but rather that the question of the transformation of this creative, poietic element common both to psychoanalysis and literature ought to be envisaged from the vantage point of the writing process. More precisely, from the specific angle of what the writing, the economy and the structuration of the text show of the psychic life.

For Green, the writing process, envisaged from a psychoanalytic vantage point, allows in a unique way the creation of a space of theoretical reflection—in Green's words: «l'espace théorique que seul l'écriture rend possible.» (Green 1977: 28) Therefore, before addressing in further detail Green's relationship with literature, I shall first insist on the question of writing—of how the *écriture* embodies a mode of meta-reflection and articulation of psychoanalytical thinking, while opening a new form of relationship with an analytic tradition, which the writing subject at once (re)invents and is *subjected* to.

The *Incréable* as Transgenerational Figure of the Negative in the Cultural History of Psychoanalysis

To properly grasp the question at hand—and the fundamental role of Green's work in a broader sense—it is important to consider the cultural context in which Green formed himself, as a psychiatry first, and then as a psychoanalyst.⁸

Green began his residency at the Sainte-Anne Hospital in Paris one year after Jean Delay and Philipp Deniker introduced chlorpromazine—the first antipsychotic medication⁹—in the clinical treatment of mental illness. This represented a revolution in a medical environment still dominated by the neuro-surgical praxis of lobotomy. Green enters the world of psychiatry in a moment of deep transformation, caught in a tension between new tendencies and ideas and the anchor of old views and practices. In fact, a double movement of secession characterised the cultural milieu at the clinic Sainte Anne, concerning not only psychiatry, but also psychoanalysis. While the revolution set into motion by the introduction of neuroleptic medications pushed psychiatry towards new frontiers and the progressive medicalisation of the field—still not with unproblematic outcomes—the years 1953/1954 also mark the split within the SPP, the Parisian Psychoanalytic Society (founded before the Second World War,

8 See in this regard also Green's own portrait of the cultural context of the time in the second chapter of *Un psychanalyste engagé* (1994: 39-67).

9 Synthetised in 1951 by Paul Charpentier in the laboratories of Rhône-Poulenc, and later commonly known as *Largactil*, chlorpromazine was initially developed as a possible potentiator of general anesthesia. For a brief historical perspective on chlorpromazine and on its role in the early stages of neuropsychopharmacology, see Ban (2007: 495-500).

in 1926, by Marie Bonaparte and others, with the endorsement of Sigmund Freud).

The split within the French psychoanalytic movement reveals the intensity of a lasting debate over the possible trajectories of psychoanalytic thinking between medial sciences, on the one hand, and an opening to new horizons and contributions from new disciplines, on the other. In a wider sense, it is possible to recognise here a time of deep crisis, characterised by dispersion, fragmentations, and unprecedented ferment in the history of psychoanalysis. In these decades, lines of research that Freud and the first circle of pioneers had prepared with their works find new heterodox expressions and developments.

If this cultural ferment signals that psychoanalysis is certainly not dead with Sigmund Freud, the death of the father of psychoanalysis constitutes a symbolic turning-point whose repercussions are all but mitigated in the intellectual context of Green's formative years. Freud's death represented the loss of a foundational figure: at once authoritative, normative, as well as protective, and legitimating (Meghnagi 2015: 60-94). Pondering on the question of the crisis of post-Freudian psychoanalysis, Green has underscored how such crisis is melancholic, for it is marked by the «interminable mourning for the death of Freud» (Urribarri in Cupa 2008: 53). This melancholic connotation is linked to a “diasporic” dimension: with Freud's escape from Vienna in the aftermath of the annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany in 1938, psychoanalysis itself takes the way of the exile. What Green calls «babelisme psychanalytique» (Urribarri 2013: 76) puts in this sense the accent on the linguistic and conceptual “dispersion” distinguishing psychoanalysis after Freud in the different cultural contexts it developed in. At the same time, however, it signals the imperative of reckoning with the irreducibility of the Freudian legacy, and precisely in the light of its babelic diversification.¹⁰

10 The expression «psychoanalytic babelism» echoes a theme of crucial importance also for the first generation of psychoanalysts, and that Green renews with his work. As Meghnagi writes: «The majority of the first didactic analyses took place in a situation in which one of the two components of the analytic couple spoke a different language from their mother tongue. This element did not receive the proper attention, but it is highly significant: not only because, for the first generation of analysts, multilingualism (that has to be distinguished from polyglottism as much as interculturality has to be distinguished from multiculturalism) was an existential condition. Furthermore, around this problem revolved the very question of their identity as Jews, and the validity of their challenge as pioneers of a new *forma mentis*. The crossing of languages and codes, the need to restore the significance of belonging, as an individual, to different cultural spheres [*multiappartenenza*]*—*at a time in which emerging nationalism considered all this a danger and academic psychology saw it as a symptom of a disorder or, worse, a disease— is at the origin of the Freudian project and fundamentally characterises the historical condition of psychoanalysis.» (Meghnagi 2015: 170. See also 160-179)

The question of the relationship with the fatherly figure thus takes on complex yet essential traits to reflect on the legacy of psychoanalytic thought after the death of its founder. On this point, Urribarri writes:

De manière symptomatique, chaque auteur post-freudien a voulu remplacer [Freud] comme figure principale, chaque mouvement militant a cru revivre la situation originaire des pionniers et du Père (re)fondateur. *L'Ego psychology*, le kleinisme et le lacanisme, les «trois grands dogmatismes post-freudiens» – come dit J. Laplanche (1986) – ont répété le même processus. Comme dans une formation réactive, le sentiment historique d'abandon a été substitué par une mythologie (c'est-à-dire une idéologie) paternaliste. (Urribarri in Cupa 2008: 53)

At this juncture of historical and cultural *Hilfflosigkeit*, the Freudian text defines the space of a work of mourning, of a *vis-à-vis* with the question of what remains of the relationship with the father through text and writing. A work of mourning that unavoidably implies also a form of betrayal, of parricide (Green 1977: 29), for every form of creation is recognition and transgression of a Law, of a *Torah*. Even if I do not intend to delve into an interpretation of the history of reception and transmission of the Freudian text in terms of a “family romance”—in spite of the high symbolical relevance of this association—one can no doubt recognise here a potential extension of the Oedipal structure,¹¹ in which the *incréable* acquires a new relational role in the representation of cultural experience. The relationship between subject and tradition, or more properly, the question of filiation through writing, emerges here in the context of a critical reacquisition of the Freudian text.

Extended to the level of cultural experience, the *incréable* embodies here both the maternal and the fatherly component of creation. A creation which is here less to be understood in literary terms than as a *poetics of a theory*. The *incréable* situates at the core of a confrontation with a text and with an authority: a confrontation connoted by a cut, a wound in the fabric of transgenerational communication. Only such interruption can create the condition to revisit the question of the origin of a mode of thinking, to give new shape to such origin of a loss towards the future of its possible expression. The core of the question, therefore, might be formulated with Winnicott's *The Location of Cultural Experience*: how is it possible to give form to a «separation that is not a separation but a form of union»? (2005: 132) How to give form through thinking to the continuity of life, to a new relationship with the world, in the light of this phantom of separation?

11 Which is certainly not new, since Freud himself provided a creative application of the Oedipus complex to religious and cultural problems. Yerushalmi's text in conclusion of his *Freud's Moses* (1991: 81-100) is a memorable meditation on this and other motives.

«Why do you write?» Playing and Textuality

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

One day, a former analysand asked me: «Why do you write?» The question took me by surprise: it was not one I had ever asked myself. Without thinking, I answered: «As a testimony.» To be sure, I was aware of the less avowable reasons that I had learned from my analysis: the need to be admired, exhibitionism, oedipal rivalry, and so on. But there were other reasons, too, on a more evolved level: the wish to organize experience into theory, and, last but not least, the expression of my search for truth in the filiation of Freud. However, all this would not have constituted the right reply. I should have said: «I write because I cannot do otherwise» – which does not contradict the interpretations I have just given, but rather includes them all. For, this persisting wish (which belongs to the unconscious) to satisfy, in a sublimated form, the instincts of one's infantile sexuality does not disappear with time, but endures, though transformed, ever endowed with the same imperiousness. And it is a necessity no less imperious which seizes the elements of a complex experience, often obscure and sometimes elusive, to organize it into a coherent vision which ensures that it does not completely escape our understanding. The aims of both the unconscious and the ego come together in the compulsion to write. They are founded on a third element, which takes into account the imperatives of the superego and the ego ideal. I feel hardly free to write or not to write: I must write to contribute to the increase of knowledge and to maintain a self-image which I can recognize. In each instance, the agencies which compose my psychical personality, as Freud says, converge towards the same goal, which is imposed upon me rather than freely chosen. (Green 1997: 3)¹²

Let us comment on this rich text by beginning with the fundamental reference to Sigmund Freud, which I propose considering, indeed, in a strict link with the question of writing. Green is not speaking here simply of a confrontation with the “content” of the Freudian legacy (concepts, theories, models, hypotheses, paradigms, and so on). By reflecting upon the reasons pushing him towards the work of writing in relationship with the «wish to organize experience into theory,» and the «expression of [a] search of truth in the filiation of Freud,» Green is here underscoring the role of the very process of writing as both a fundamental creative element of his reception of Freud's writing, and of his own psychoanalytic thinking. Writing emerges here, for Green, in the confrontation with the Freudian text, as instrumental *in thinking* his own role as a subject of a tradition, within a tradition. A tradition which the subject does

12 Significantly, this introduction does not appear in the original French edition. It is, however, the remodelling of the introductory pages of an essay previously published in “Transcription d'origine inconnue. L'écriture du psychanalyste: critique du témoignage” (Green 1977: 27-63). In the following I shall consider only the text of the English edition.

not only reinvent and rediscover by developing a critical relation with it through writing, but which, conversely, actively affects and informs a process of subjectivation. Beyond the content of Freud's work, therefore, what is essential to highlight in this passage is the role of writing as a mode of *inscription* of a trace, a form of, in Green's word, «testimony:» a way of developing and leaving on the page the creative fingerprint of a subject through language, as construction and representation of a way of thinking.

This text epitomises how for Green the revindication of Freud's legacy in its complexity needs to be envisaged *in relationship with that component of analytic thinking and practice that takes form as textuality, as writing process*, without being reducible to it.¹³ The work of André Green *inscribes* itself, from this point of view, in a filiation with Freud for it undertakes the task of carrying Freud's work through time by putting it into a fertile tension with the works that followed the father of psychoanalysis—towards a new «contemporary» paradigm. Green's work incorporates the *cesura* that every transmission entails, while putting a new accent on the complex diachronic and synchronic development of the psychoanalytic thinking:

J'ai toujours eu à cœur de reconnaître ce qu'il y a d'intéressant chez d'autres, sans pour autant me convertir. Je ne suis jamais entrée en religion. Ni dans le kleinisme, ni dans le winnicottisme, ni dans le lacanisme. Ce que j'appelle «le babélisme psychanalytique» des courants post-freudiens est sans doute un ferment supplémentaire dans la crise de la psychanalyse... Mais il ne s'agit pas de pratiquer l'éclectisme. Je cherche la complexité. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est de découvrir et de suivre historiquement les grandes lignes de l'évolution de la pensée psychanalytique chez Freud et après Freud. Nous sommes *après Freud*, bien sûr, et aussi *avec Freud*, pour penser les problèmes de notre temps. (Urribarri 2013: 76)¹⁴

13 Such a relationship with writing as a means of confrontation and transmission of the Freudian foundations is far from being given for granted if we consider the predominant *oral* dimension of Lacan's teachings in French psychoanalysis (which, not unlike De Saussure's *Cours de linguistique Générale*, crystallised as text in the *Seminars* only in a second moment through the work of Jacques-Alain Miller). The rediscovery of the Freudian textual sources of psychoanalysis could be read as such in parallel with Green's gradual distancing from the influence of the *maître absolu* Jacques Lacan—something that yet did not prevent Green from pursuing in his work a constant, rich critical dialogue with Lacan. An element of interests differentiating among others Lacan and Green pertains the relationship that their works develop with psychoanalytic tradition. Lacan seems to be driven by a sort of “adamic” drive, which expresses an attempt of (re)foundation: a break with Freud, to “return” to Freud. Does such “return” to Freud imply a “return *to be a new Freud?*” A return to Freud to read his work as it *should*, allegedly, be read and interpreted? That is what the work of Urribarri also seems to suggest (in Cupa 2008: 51-63).

14 «I have always been committed to recognise the elements of interests in the other authors, and that without necessarily convert myself. I have never joined a religion in this regard. Not

By playing with Freud's textual body Green reanimates—to say it with Winnicott—the interplay between subject and tradition, giving it a fundamental role in his own *œuvre*. The father figure becomes an ineliminable limit, an *incréable* which *is necessary in the process of filiation*, and which the subject is compelled to begin from and return to. The encounter with the figure of the father becomes possible in a new link, in an historical conceptualization of the evolution and mutations in psychoanalysis:

[...] in any cultural field it is not possible to be original except on a basis of tradition. Conversely, no one in the line of cultural contributors repeats except as a deliberate quotation, and the unforgivable sin in the cultural field is plagiarism. The interplay between originality and the acceptance of tradition as the basis for inventiveness seems to me to be just one more example, and a very exciting one, of the interplay between separateness and union. (Winnicott 2005: 134)

But that is not all. In Green's text we encounter another striking passage: «However, all this would not have constituted the right reply. I should have said: “I write because I cannot do otherwise” – which does not contradict the interpretations I have just given, but rather includes them all.» This answer, which may sound surprising in the text of a psychoanalyst, displays the level of awareness and sensitivity of Green's psychoanalytic thinking towards the capabilities and the limits of the written word. In addition, I am inclined to associate Green's expression with that «necessity» that compulsion to write that Rainer Maria Rilke (1929, 10) addresses in his *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter* (*Letters to a Young Poet*). But foremost, we may ask ourselves, pushing even further this web of associations: *to whom such a letter about the necessity to write may be directed?* The question whether this “letter” may be addressed to himself—or rather to a younger Green—, to a new generation of psychoanalysts, to the figures that constellated Green's intellectual life or to an unprecise subject elsewhere in time, elsewhere in space must remain for the moment open. We shall return to this point in a moment. «That cannot be decided,» would have nonetheless replied Green, as he indeed writes in *La réserve de l'incréable*, for the addressee of the work is «one for all and all for one.» (Green 1992: 314) Also in this case, an answer, or an approximation to an answer, must bear the weight of the undecidability, *bona pace* for the principle of non-contradiction.

the kleinism, nor the winnicottism, and neither the lacanism. What I call the “psychoanalytic babelism” of the different post-Freudian trends represents no doubt an additional ferment in the context of the crisis of psychoanalysis. But the question here is not to practice a form eclecticism. I am in search of the complexity. What interests me is to discover and to follow historically the great lines of evolution of psychoanalytic thinking with Freud and after Freud. We come *after Freud*, of course, but we are also *with Freud*, embracing the task of thinking the problems of our time.»

Beyond all these questions, this text shows how, for Green, writing represents much more than a simple attempt to convey knowledge and to communicate. «*I write because I cannot do otherwise:*» beyond any theory, the Negative is already at work as an active, creative force. This sentence is therefore pivotal to highlight in metatheoretical terms the relationship between writing and thinking, writing and theory, writing and knowledge, and especially the process of writing and the work in progress of subjectivation. The expression «I cannot do otherwise» (which in French would presumably translate to *je ne peux pas faire autrement*) suggests, how writing, for Green, articulates a form of organization of the subject which is bound to the objectalising function of writing: to that function of sublimation which allows an activity (such as writing) to acquire «object status» and to be considered as a «possession of the ego.»

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

Écrire implique une dissociation entre le sujet écrivain e le sujet de l'écriture. Il y a à la fois comme une possibilité de mise en chaîne, de saturation, de construction temporelle impliquant un véritable décollement qui permet de comprendre ou de croire que l'on comprend, après-coup, ce que l'on écrit, pourquoi on l'a écrit. L'écriture fait retour sur son auteur, comme la parole revient vers l'énonciateur. (Green 2004a: 98)¹⁵

Literature can no doubt show more clearly such a form of discrepancy, as we have seen in the analyses of Kafka's and Celan's works. As far as Green is concerned, however, the question that remains open is how such discrepancy may emerge in the process of theorization—in that «theoretical space that only writing enables.» (Green 1977: 28)

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

To the question whether Green is thinking here of himself as a writer or as a psychoanalyst, we know a possible answer, since he admittedly did not consider himself a writer. (Green 2004a: 98) We may or may not agree with him. Regardless of Green's opinion, however, the importance of his relationship with writing cannot be underestimated. Perhaps, it would be more correct to say that Green was conscious of being a *writing psychoanalyst*, i.e., a *psychoanalyst whose way of envisaging psychoanalysis cannot be conceived but in relationship with the act of writing too*. Yet, writing reveals something more, something beyond the intentionality or the consciousness of the author: it erodes the illusion of a simultaneity, creating the possibility of a new temporal construction and signification. It develops *a* and *in a* deferred rhythmic, in *après-coup*.

The Unconscious of the Text

At this point, let us return to the question of Green's relationship with literature and to the *incréable*. Indeed, the text we just read is even more important for it presents to a larger English-speaking audience two of Green's most relevant works on literature: *The Unbinding Process* (*La déliaison*) and *The Double and the Absent* (*Le double et l'absent*). Significantly, *La réserve de l'incréable* is absent from this collection: the text was not reprinted, not in the original French or in the English translation.¹⁶ Still, in this complex web of associations, in this fabric of affects this introduction intertwines, we can detect the *incréable* at work:

For, this persisting wish (which belongs to the unconscious) to satisfy, in a sublimated form, the instincts of one's infantile sexuality does not disappear with time, but endures, though transformed, ever endowed with the same imperiousness. And it is a necessity no less imperious which seizes the elements of a complex experience, often obscure and sometimes elusive, to organize it into a coherent vision which ensures that it does not completely escape our understanding. (Green 1997: 3, m. e.)

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

16 Interestingly, in spite of its importance, this text was not included in the recent *The Freudian Matrix of André Green* (Levine 2023). As of today, *La réserve de l'incréable* remains basically unknown to the international audience.

situates more on the side of the intellectual sphere.¹⁷ In spite of that, the two are linked by two crucial aspects: first, both scopophilia and epistemophilia find their sources in the drive motions [*pulsionnel*] and are therefore intimately related with sublimation. Second, both scopophilia and epistemophilia are necessarily bound to an element of irrepresentability which cannot be removed, but that is actively operating, instead, on a structural level. As he writes «to organize [...] into a coherent vision which ensures that it does not completely escape our understanding.» Green is indeed aware that there is far more than a mere resistance at work in the process of theorization. And is not the *incréable* itself a word, a signifier *created* to give form to something which was already there, and which awaited to be found through the act of creation? A word, a remnant of language which may «ensure» that the «often obscure and sometimes elusive» complexity of life «does not completely escape our understanding»?

We are walking here on the borderline between psychoanalysis and literature, or rather, in the words of Winnicott, in *a transitional area* between the two. Now, Green's relationship with literature is paramount to grasp the relationship with Freud's textual legacy as we are envisaging it through the process of writing. I am of course not suggesting that Green is reading Freud as an author of literature. Rather, Green's relationship with literature, his interest for *what remains unwritten and yet incapsulated in the written text* constitutes a mark of *originality* which draws directly from the *origins* of psychoanalysis.¹⁸

17 (Green 1992 : 25): «[...] lire est lié au plaisir de voir, ce qui implique qu'une certaine curiosité anime le lecteur. Mais cette curiosité, si la lecture peut permettre de penser qu'elle comporte quelque abstraction, reste quand même loin de ce qu'on appelle la curiosité intellectuelle, car elle est beaucoup plus 'sensuelle' que cette dernière. C'est tout l'écart qui sépare la scopophilie de l'épistémophilie. L'épistémophilie est recherche d'une 'théorie' explicative, ainsi qu'en témoignent les théories sexuelles que les enfants bâtissent pour s'expliquer comment les bébés viennent au monde. La scopophilie est une quête pour un plaisir moins inhibé, moins déplacé, moins désésexualisé. Plus affectif qu'intellectuel. Une œuvre littéraire est appréciée selon l'effet émotionnel qu'elle provoque chez le lecteur plus que par l'intelligence qui en émane, même s'il faut beaucoup d'intelligence de la part de l'écrivain pour produire cet effet.» See Green 1997: 343: «Reading is related to the pleasure of seeing, which implies that the reader is moved by a certain curiosity. But this type of curiosity, even though it would seem that the act of reading entails some form of abstraction, remains quite far from what we call 'intellectual curiosity,' because it is much more sensuous than the latter. The discrepancy between the two is precisely that between scopophilia and epistemophilia. Epistemophilia is more akin to the search for an explanatory "theory," as exemplified by the sexual theories put together by children to explain how babies come into this world. Scopophilia is a drive toward a much less inhibited, displaced, or desexualised pleasure. It involves the affect more than the intellect. A literary work is appreciated according to the emotional effect it induces in the reader, much more than through the understanding that emanates from it, even if it takes a great deal of intelligence on the part of the writer to produce this effect.»

18 The essential works of Jean Starobinski, particularly *La Relation critique* (2001), first published in 1970, have long shown how psychoanalysis sinks its roots both in the clinic and in literature.

Notoriously, the question of the so called “application” of psychoanalysis still raises as of today a certain scepticism not only without, but also within the field of psychoanalysis, fuelling debates regarding the domain of specificity and the tasks of psychoanalysis itself. Many discoveries of psychoanalysis can nonetheless hardly be conceived without keeping in mind the fertile exchange with literature. Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, just to name one example, remains an unreplaceable creative source for the formulation of Freud’s oedipal theory (Green 2004a: 16).

Discussing in this regard the cultural relevance of Sophocles’ work, Green has remarked how «[b]eaucoup plus que d’une tragédie antique, si importante soit-elle, il s’agit là d’un véritable vecteur culturel de messages inconscients.» (ibid.) In my translation: «Far more than an ancient tragedy, no matter how important, [Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*] is a veritable cultural vector of unconscious messages.» From a psychoanalytic vantage point, nothing forbids us from extending this definition also to other works of literature, insofar as every piece of great literature is characterised by an unconscious textual dimension:

[...] Même si cela peut paraître étrange, un texte *a* un inconscient qui le travaille. Comment le prouver? Les critiques littéraires d’inspiration structuraliste, même les plus réservés à l’égard de la psychanalyse, admettent l’existence des structures formelles inconscientes d’un texte [...]. Mais lorsqu’il s’agit de l’inconscient freudien, la réticence est manifeste. Or cet inconscient peut se montrer – je n’ose pas dire se démontrer. Et ceci sans nécessairement faire appel à l’auteur. L’existence de cet inconscient textuel est présent (sic) dans les articulations thématiques, les césures du texte, les silences brutaux, les ruptures de ton et surtout les taches, les scories, les détails négligés qui n’intéressent que les psychanalystes. Les critiques traditionnels épiluchent un texte avec un soin vertigineux, la philologie n’à pas de secret pour eux, leur érudition est accablante. Il reste qu’à un moment ou à un autre se pose toujours la question, ne serait-ce que pour eux, si ce n’est pour autres : «Qu’est-ce que ça veut dire? Qu’est-ce que ça me fait? Comment, pourquoi cela me fait-il quelque chose?» (Green 1992: 58)¹⁹

19 Green 1997: 323: «[...] Even though that may seem strange, the text *has* an unconscious which works it and through it. But how to prove it? Structuralist literary critics, even those who have the most reservations concerning psychoanalysis, admit that a text possesses formal unconscious structures [...] But where the Freudian unconscious is involved, there is a manifest reticence. This unconscious can be detected — I dare not say that it can be proven. And this, without necessarily referring to the author. This textual unconscious is present in the text’s thematic articulations, its brutal silences, its shifts of tone, and especially in the blemishes, incongruities, and neglected details which only interest the psychoanalyst. Traditionalist critics dissect a text with incredible care, philology holds no secrets for them, their erudition is overwhelming. There comes, nevertheless, a time, a moment of truth, when one has to ask: “But, what does this mean to me? How, why does this do something for me?” (tr. mod.)

Green speaks here of an *unconscious of the text* which touches and resonates within and with the unconscious of a reader (Green 1992: 19, ff.). The communication of these unconscious dimensions—of the author through the text, of the text itself, of the reader—constitutes what Green calls «the discourse of the work.» What is at stake here is not the text *per se*, but the work as a cultural object *underway*: the work in its capability of creating complex resonances on individual as well as collective levels, in different ways and modalities, in different places and times (Green 1997: 20). «The discourse of the work» is for Green, we may say, that living dimension of exchange, which the text can provoke and carry beyond its time and space of creation in communication with that otherness, that reader whose reading act makes the work alive—living in a new breath, source of new *inspiration*.

If we conceive literary and artistic works as cultural vectors of unconscious messages, as Green suggests, then the history of literature, the history of the readings of literary works, may be envisaged in terms of the multifaced forms in which the unconscious dimension of a culture emerges, affects and *represents itself* in different times and spaces, in an interplay of folding and unfolding, veiling and unveiling. The history of the reception of a work can be considered as the possible, yet unforeseeable peregrination of the effects of the work on its readers: of that which the work can show, in each time and space, as the unconscious of the culture.

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

Il reste qu'on ne peut s'en tirer sans interroger l'œuvre, le texte de l'écriture, par rapport au texte de la vie. Non seulement de la vie de l'auteur, mais de la vie comme espace commun partagé par les hommes et dans lequel l'œuvre prend racine ou se transmet, ne serait-ce que pour arriver à son destinataire. Ce tourbillon de vie, ce bruit de la vie dont Freud dit qu'il est entièrement le fait d'Eros, comprend aussi ce noyau de silence, cet ombilic neutre autour duquel il se tisse jusqu'à le faire complètement oublier. (Green 1992: 59)²⁰

If this is true, the «unconscious messages» conveyed by works and writings, can emerge, beyond the domain of literature, in theoretical works, essays of literary criticism, and metapsychological studies. In its close connection with

20 Green 1997: 324: «Still, we cannot proceed without questioning the work, the text of writing, in terms of the text of life—not only in terms of an author's life, but also of life as a common space shared by human beings, in which the work takes root or circulates, if only in order to reach its audience. This whirlwind or commotion of life which Freud ascribed entirely to Eros, also includes a core of silence, a neutral navel which life makes us forget as it winds itself around it.»

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

In its particular features, the *incréable* constitutes a trace of an unconscious dimension of the writing process and of the text susceptible of emerging as constitutive part of theoretical thinking—and of the ways whereby we may or not organise psychoanalytic knowledge. From this point of view, the *incréable* enables us to detect not only an “unachieved,” but indeed an “uncreatable,” a blank that breaks the circularity of consciousness in the process of theorization. An element which cannot be created and which in spite of that becomes the secret object of the creation process. Such gap, which is in its own right a characteristic of the work of the Negative, leads us to consider the *incréable* as an embodiment of a conceptual “reserve” of unconscious order within Green's theoretical structuring.

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

But that is only one element of a more complex picture. Indeed, the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis cannot be limited to a question of knowing or unknowing. If we accept the hypothesis according to which the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis cannot be reduced to a mere question of ‘inspiration’ or ‘anticipation’ of knowledge of the psyche, the unconscious dimension I am trying to address here is essential to explain how a theory—the *writing of a theory*—conveys the seeds of possible signification *a posteriori* of a subjectivity in its relationship with that twofold object *which is the work and ingrained in the work*. In an interview with Dominique Eddé, Green speaks of the importance of the *insight* in the context of the clinic and of the analytic *séance*, differentiating it from the sphere of the intellectual knowledge. He says:

[...] l'insight n'est pas une prise de conscience intellectuelle, c'est une idée qui prend corps et s'enracine comme une conviction, c'est un moment où, pour employer une comparaison banale, le puzzle laisse apparaître l'image. Là où on ne voyait pas clair, là où les choses étaient vagues et confuses, un paysage se devine. (Green 2004a: 96)²¹

Literature offers a sort of gaze, of sight towards our innermost cell which we are unable to recognise but through the eyes of another. Writing makes perceivable that sight *that transcends sight*, re-vealing an image which we cannot perceive but as if an otherness looking back at us and within us through the text, in response. If that is the case, for Green literature does not only represent a field of conceptual investigation or a theoretical substratum. The transitional area between literature and psychoanalysis—between scopophilia and epistemophilia—invites to consider as constitutive component of Green's work of theorization an affective matrix that writing only can inscribe and illuminate in the subject. It is such multiplicity of perspectives, this way of inhabiting the threshold between different worlds—made possible by literature—which Green incorporates as a further poetic element of his theory:

L'analyste devient alors l'analysé du texte. *Cette question, c'est en lui qu'il faut lui trouver une réponse et d'autant plus, dans le cas du texte littéraire, qu'il ne peut compter que sur ses propres associations. L'interprétation du texte devient l'interprétation que l'analyste doit fournir sur le texte, mais en fin de compte c'est l'interprétation qu'il doit se donner à lui-même des effets du texte sur son propre inconscient.* (Green 1992: 20)²²

We do not only read literature: literature reads us. As we direct our eyes towards the page, that page, that text *regards us in turn*—as the title of Didi-Huberman's book *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* suggests (1992). The unconscious of the text *reads* our unconscious, it *reveals* its being presents and absent at the same time in the effects and in the affects that the act of reading puts in motion. The image that appears in front of us, within us, in such an *insight*, is all but the reflection of a mirror. It is rather the negative hallucination of the subject, that representation of absence of representation in which Green detects the structure that frames and allows representation.

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

22 Green 1997: 338: «[...] the analyst reacts to the text as if it were a product of the unconscious. *The analyst then becomes the analysed of the text.* It is within himself that he must find an answer to this questioning, all the more in the case of a literary text, since he can only rely on his own associations. The interpretation of the text becomes the interpretation which the analyst must provide for the text but when all is said and done, it is the interpretation that he must give himself of the effects of the text in his own unconscious.» (tr. mod.)

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

In *Le double et l'absent*, Green writes:

L'acte d'écrire est un acte étrange, aussi peu nécessaire qu'imprévisible, mais aussi tyrannique qu'inévitable pour l'écrivain. Les tentatives d'explication psychanalytique sont peut-être trop restées au niveau des significations préconscientes en soulignant le rôle du fantasme de création, ou même d'autocréation dans l'écriture. Freud a ouvert une voie sans l'explorer jusqu'au bout. Mélanie Klein, après lui, y a vu un désir de réparation après le travail des pulsions de destruction. Ne serait-ce que par la négation du monde réel qui existe au départ de tout désir d'écrire. Winnicott, enfin, a situé l'œuvre dans cet espace potentiel où l'œuvre prend le statut d'objet transitionnel, espace de jeu et d'illusion entre le moi et l'objet. Ce que nous aimerions ajouter ici à leur suite est que le travail de l'écriture présuppose une plaie et une perte, une blessure et un deuil, dont l'œuvre sera la transformation visant à les recouvrir par la positivité fictive de l'œuvre. Aucune création ne va sans peine, sans un douloureux travail dont elle est la pseudo-victoire. Pseudo parce que cette victoire ne dure qu'un temps limité, qu'elle est toujours contestée par l'auteur lui-même qui éprouve l'inlassable désir de recommencer, donc de nier ce qu'il a déjà fait, de nier en tout cas que le résultat, si satisfaisant qu'il ait pu paraître, soit entendu comme son dernier mot. (Green 1992: 57)²³

With this passage, which seems to reconstruct a psychoanalytic “history of literature”—a (hi)story of the vicissitudes of sublimation through

23 Green 1997: 322: «The act of writing is a strange act, as unnecessary as it is unpredictable, but for the writer it is also as tyrannical as it is inevitable. It may be that attempts at psychoanalytical interpretations have remained for too long on the level of preconscious meanings, by emphasizing the role of creation and even self-creation fantasies. Freud blazed a trail but did not follow it to the end. Melanie Klein, after him, saw in the act of writing a desire for repairs in the wake of the destructive instincts – if only because of the negation of the real world, which coexists with the desire to write. Winnicott, finally, placed the work in that potential space where it has the status of a transitional object, that arena of play and illusion between ego and object. To this, we would like to add the notion that the work of writing presupposes a wound and a loss, a work of mourning, of which the text is the transformation into a fictitious positivity. No creation can occur without exertion, without a painful effort over which it is the pseudo-victory. Pseudo, because this victory can only last for a limited time, because it is always contested by the author himself, who constantly wishes to start over, and thus to deny what he has already done, to deny in any case that the result, satisfying as it might seem, should be taken as the final product.»

literature—Green puts on the page the work of transmission, the work of filiation. He makes it visible, *readable*, by reinventing a heritage, a legacy in the work of other authors that preceded him and by seeding the works of others to follow. Maurice Corcos, rightfully pointed out how Green's work can be understood, in its complexity, as a «*éloge de la transmission*» (Green 2006a: 15) But what is transmitted more specifically, what is the object of such a transmission?

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

In another interview between André Green and Dominique Eddé, we read:

Je ne me considère pas comme un écrivain mais j'ai quand même beaucoup écrit et il m'arrive en rouvrant l'un de mes livres, parfois à vingt ans de distance, de me dire, étonné: «Ah tiens, c'est moi qui ai écrit cela... c'était déjà là!» Ce qui revient à dire que la chose s'est totalement détachée de soi. Il y a constamment ce mouvement d'excentration, de non-coïncidence avec soi et de quelque chose qui est propre au mouvement même de la communication orale ou écrite; le produit de cette communication devenant en lui-même un objet qu'on peut considérer soi. Comme une objectivation de la subjectivité par l'écriture. (Green 2004a: 98-99)²⁴

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

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

reflection of the *logic of the heterogeneity* (in Urribarri 2013: 43) of the psychic functioning at work. Writing allows to show what Freud called the «endopsychic perception of the process.» (Green 1977: 38) This means that writing puts us in front of the opacity of our own psychic life emerging through the structuring of the text from the double vantage point of double and absent, of writing subject and written subject, of “agent” and “acted one.” Writing re-presents us, in front of ourselves, in the guise of an alterity. And it is in this way that writing does not demonstrate but rather *shows* the complexity (not the totality) of the work of the psyche.

The Unbinding Process : A Letter to an Unknown Recipient

We have observed how *La déliaison* expresses the need to reflect, through literature, on the expansion of the clinical, epistemological, theoretical, and cultural horizons of psychoanalysis in response to the new challenges of the contemporary. Green’s meditations suggest how a *Fortschritt in der Geistigkeit* (Freud 1948, vol. 16: 219 ff.), a possible step forward in the evolution of psychoanalytical thinking can be achieved if the latter will be able to *unbind* itself from the constraints of dogmatism, intellectual stagnation, and paternalism, jerking «the text out of its groove.» (Green 1997: 339). As such, the “listening” of that *alter ego*, that *Doppeltgänger* that literature embodies for psychoanalysis plays a paramount function in freeing the power of imagination and opening new paths of investigation.

The question, far from being whimsical, truly concerned the very life and death of psychoanalytic practice and theory. A few years after the first publication of *La déliaison*, Green wrote a paper called *L’analyste, la symbolisation et l’absence dans le cadre analytique*, first published in French in 1974 in *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*. Now commonly known as the “London Report,” the paper is significantly dedicated to the memory of D. W. Winnicott, and was presented in London in 1975, during the 29th Congress of the International Psychoanalytic Association.²⁵ In the conclusive remarks, Green wrote:

La solution de la crise qui traverse la psychanalyse ne dépend pas que d’elle, mais son avenir dépendra de la façon dont elle saura conserver l’héritage freudien et intégrer ses acquis postérieurs. Pour Freud, il n’y avait pas de savoir antérieur. Sans doute faillait-il son génie créateur pour inventer la psychanalyse. L’œuvre de Freud est devenue notre savoir. Or, un analyste ne peut pratiquer la psychanalyse et la maintenir en vie seulement en appliquant un savoir. Il lui faut aussi faire preuve de créativité, dans la mesure de ses moyens. C’est peut-être ce qui a poussé certains d’entre nous à reculer les limites de l’analysable. Il est remarquable que la tentative de l’analyse de ces états ait eu pour résultat un vivant essor de théories imaginatives. Trop, pour certains; c’est-à-dire trop de théories, trop imaginatives.

25 The title of the Congress was “Changes in Psychoanalytic Practice and Experience: Theoretical, Technical and Social Implications.”

Toutes ces théories ont en commun de s'efforcer de construire une préhistoire là où aucun témoignage d'histoire ne peut être recueilli. Cela indique surtout que nous ne pouvons nous passer d'un mythe des origines, tout comme le petit enfant est réduit à construire des théories, voire un roman, sur sa naissance et son enfance. *Sans doute notre rôle n'est-il pas d'imaginer, mais d'expliquer et de transformer. Freud, pourtant, a eu le courage d'écrire : «Sans spéculation métapsychologique et sans théorisation — j'allais presque dire sans "fantasmatisation" —, nous ne ferons pas un pas de plus en avant» (1937). Nous ne pouvons accepter que nos théories soient des fantasmes. Le mieux est probablement d'accepter qu'elles soient non pas l'expression de la vérité scientifique, mais une approximation — un analogon de celle-ci. Alors, il n'y a pas de mal à construire un mythe des origines si nous savons que ce ne peut être qu'un mythe.* (1990: 101, m. e.)²⁶

If psychoanalysis does not intend to give in in front of the new challenges posed by the mutations within the clinical, analytical, and theoretical horizons, it is necessary to welcome and rethink, from a new perspective, other forms of expression of the creative power of the psyche. As such, literature and poetry, can be considered as «fictional alterities» (Balsamo 2022: 3-4) to think the virtuality of the human: a form of *possibility* of a truth, or an approximation to the truth. Could literature be, in this respect, a «good-enough mother,» to use Winnicott's famous phrase—or, perhaps, a source of “sentimental education,” to recognise anew the importance of opening to the counterfactual and contradictions?

26 Green 1997: 57-58: «The solution to the crisis in which psychoanalysis finds itself does not lie within analysis alone. But analysis holds some cards with which its destiny will be played. Its future will depend on the way it finds in which to preserve its Freudian heritage while integrating its later acquisitions. For Freud there was no previous knowledge. Undoubtedly it needed his creative genius to invent psychoanalysis. Freud's work has become the basis of our knowledge. But an analyst cannot practise psychoanalysis and keep it alive by applying knowledge. He must attempt to be creative to the limits of his ability. This is perhaps what has made some among us extend the limits of the analysable. It is remarkable that the attempt to analyse these states has resulted in such a flowering of imaginative theories - too many for some, i.e. too many theories and too much imagination. All these theories strive to construct pre-histories where there is not even any evidence of a history. Above all, this shows us that we cannot do without a mythical origin, just as a small child must construct theories, even romances, about his birth and infancy. *Undoubtedly our role is not to imagine, but to explain and to transform. However, Freud had the courage to write, «Without metapsychological speculation and theorizing — I had almost said “phantasying” — we shall not get another step forward” [...] We cannot accept that our theories are fantasies. The best solution would be to accept that they are not the expression of scientific truth but an approximation to it, its analogue. Then there is no harm in constructing a myth of origins, provided we know that it can only be a myth.»* (m. e.)

Finally, there is one more aspect of this paper that does not cease to be at once haunting and illuminating. The final pages of *La déliaison* reveal a passage of remarkable expressive force, in which a particular aspect of the unconscious of the text emerges:

Peut-être la littérature mourra-t-elle, mais peut-être aussi qu'une mutation que notre imagination n'est pas capable de concevoir lui donnera un autre visage. Notre horizon actuel est borné par nos modes de pensée. Après tout, nous ne sommes guère pas plus capables d'imaginer ce qui succèdera à la psychanalyse qu'on était, en 1880, en mesure de concevoir ce que Freud nous permettrait de voir, et qui était là sous nos yeux, depuis toujours. *Il suffit d'un seul.* (Green 1992: 42, m. e.)²⁷

«One adventurer is enough to change the face of everything.» Little did Green know, as he wrote these lines, what extraordinary intellectual itinerary expected him. Here again, we can detect another reference to the Freudian foundations, to scopophilia, epistemophilia, and to that passion for discovery which *is* the adventure of writing. Also, we can surely interpret Green's last words as a form of identification with the figure of the father, with the figure of an intellectual conqueror—an identification which was not alien to Freud himself. However, an alternative perspective might be advanced. Here, I think we can recognise the seeds of a subject of the unconscious who speaks through a subject in time. At the threshold between literature and psychoanalysis, in that liminal field of tensions which allows us, at once, to read together literature and psychoanalysis and to recognise their own specific values, Green is able to express *the future in the past of his own intellectual adventure*.

Green is therefore not so much identifying here with the figure of the father or of the discoverer. Perhaps, he is rather leaving an empty space in the fabric of the text and of his work, for someone yet to come. Is this a sort of “fictional alterity” in form of a “letter” from a younger psychoanalyst, addressed to an absent guest, an absent self? Celebrating and uncovering this empty place, it is as if Green were taking the first step in a chain of transmission as a future heir of his own work, of his own thinking, in the filiation of Sigmund Freud.

Nothing, of course, can confirm the validity of such a reading. What remains certain is that a place has to be left vacant, an origin yet to be found, an absence present for the power of the imagination and thinking to come to life—«in a solitude peopled by play» (Green 1997: 57). «For what is reading-writing if not “the capacity to be alone in someone's presence”?» (327)

27 Green 1997: 359: «Perhaps literature will die, or perhaps a mutation, which imagination cannot now conceive, will occur and give it another face. Our present horizon is confined by our modes of thought. After all, why should we be more capable of imagining what will come after psychoanalysis than people were in 1880 of imagining what Freud was about to reveal, which had been there, under their noses, since time immemorial? *One adventurer is enough to change the face of everything.*» (m. e.)

Conclusions.

Filiations of the Negative

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

Paul Celan (2018: 506)¹

Tam ve-lo nishlam
Finished but not concluded

«Conclure ne signifie pas ici clore le travail, mais ouvrir la discussion en laissant la parole à d'autres.» (Green 1990: 101) «To conclude does not mean to close the work, but to open the discussion and to leave the floor to others.» (1997: 57). These words by André Green are a talisman to see in the conclusion of this book something far more important than an accomplishment of some sort. For, as necessary as it is, the conclusion of a work pushes its author to take stock of the ground so far covered and, virtually, to consider what is left to be done. In this regard, the act of concluding inevitably confronts oneself with a symbolical, spectral entanglement of life and death: with limits and inadequacies, unsolved questions, and unexplored possibilities. The ghost of a potentially entirely different work lurks at the threshold. Green inspires me to see in this form of conclusion a gesture of openness towards the new possible life of a debate, leaving the floor for the presence of an absence that *may* and *can* take the word as an other—in all its alterity. This *memento* of an otherness (subjective genitive *and* objective genitive) that “I am” is indeed a reminder of the fact that the work of the Negative, and any “cultural experience,” (Winnicott) is not exhausted by the enterprise of a single—quite the opposite. And yet «universality—if such a thing exists—must necessarily pass through subjective inquiry» (Green 1973: 28). The “termination” of the work is the necessary price for the interminability of a chain of communication that engages individuals and communities through time and space. Also in this transformation of death into absence, the Negative is profoundly at work and—between *Endlichkeit* and *Unendlichkeit*—*on the way*.

1 «the wilding conviction / that this is to be said differently than / so.» (Celan 2014: 381)

It is with these thoughts in mind that I have chosen as one of the exergues for this conclusion the phrase *Tam ve-lo nishlam*, a Hebrew expression which can be translated as “finished (or perfected) but not completed,” and that I first encountered in Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi’s *Freud’s Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (1991: 96) This book, notably the last chapter, *Monologue with Freud*, left an enduring impression on me, setting an unparalleled standard in style, erudition, and richness of content. The last chapter of Yerushalmi’s work allowed me to *read* as never before the epistemophilic tension of the drive in all its transgenerational value. A form of transmission is here at work, on a profoundly subjective as well as cultural level. By literally giving tangible shape to an absence, revolving around a blank core, this conclusive part of *Freud’s Moses* embodies in turn Freud’s famous passage in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1948, vol. 14: 450): «Die Schrift ist ursprünglich die Sprache des Abwesenden.» «Writing is originally the language of the absent.» As such, *Tam ve-lo nishlam* echoes for me the inexhaustible nature of the exploration of the work of the Negative.

A conclusion is therefore at once possible and impossible, necessary and inevitable for the work to continue, for the reading to begin over and over again. A cut, a *cesura* is required, imposed in order for the subject to become such: one has to say “no” to the object—at once limit (or container) and stimulus awakening the drive—in order to say “yes” to the possibility of subjectivation. Is this not also what the space of literature shows us?

More than one hundred years have passed since Kafka’s death in 1924; more than one hundred years since Celan’s birth (and more than fifty years since his death in 1970); last but not least, ten years separate us from Green’s death in January 2012. We come *after* these authors; and with such untimeliness comes the crucial task of asking what remains of them—of their writings—at the beginning of a new millennium.

With this book, I attempted to offer a specific reading of the work of the Negative in which sublimation is at once a protagonist, a vicissitude, and a form of expression of the unconscious through the creative process. By following Kafka’s, Celan’s, and Green’s “negative adventures,” I tried to create an original itinerary through their pages, and to show how in sublimation converge some of the most cogent questions of the *Kulturarbeit* in the West and of our contemporaneity. This journey, however, should be understood neither as a linear development, nor as a conscious form of achievement—be it in the guise of “Absolute Knowledge,” or as the consciousness of a subterranean “history of the Negative.” The writing subject is in turn written by the work of an unconscious which defies at every given step the categories of consciousness, its “positivity.” Sublimation, as vicissitude or destiny of the drive, is never given for granted, nor in any definitive sense “satisfactory:” it «guarantees nothing, protects against nothing» (Green 1993: 330; Green 1999b: 239). Because of its

ineliminable link with the drive and with the compulsion to repeat, sublimation, and more generally the work of the Negative, can never be considered as a final stage of achievement (1993: 58-60; 1999b: 36-37). Kafka, Celan, and Green were well aware of how sublimation was *per se* not enough. Asking whether sublimation should be considered «an enrichment in the accomplishments of psychical life, a new pleasure which the psychical apparatus is capable of, or does it simply pave the way for the progression of the death drive?» (Green 1999b: 238) Green knew that such question had no easy answer after the Shoah. He was aware that the debate on the role of the death drive, of destruction and destructivity, needed to be kept alive, and not to be occulted by easy forms of reconciliations. Green put in new words the same dilemma that, in very different forms, lies also at the core of Kafka's and Celan's writings. The writings of these authors are of enormous political and social relevance, for they never cease to pose fundamental questions as for the role of culture and creativity in the way people, individual, communities exist and coexist.

If the *incr able* describes the irrecoverable trace of an original link with the body of the mother, therefore alluding to a homeostatic state in which *infans* is not a subject yet, what does the *incr able* correspond to on a social and collective level? Is it a form of universal, utopian peace, a messianic world in which the extinction of all inequalities and injustices prevails, or rather death, the extinction of the humankind, non-life? True, the *incr able* is not discussed in a cultural or social dimension by Green; but the oedipal structure in which the *incr able* situates suggests that a possible answer to this question cannot be seen neither in the first option nor, fortunately, in the second one. It is no accident that the *incr able* has to remain “uncreatable:” the *incr able* echoes on a social and political level a form of responsibility intimately linked with the fact that the Negative cannot be separated from a form of “work”—of transformation, of rebounding, of reinvention.

The *incr able*, as a figure of such creative work of the Negative, reminds us that a possible response to the issues posed by coexistence is more complex than what political and social discourses may lead us to believe. The work of the Negative shows us how destructivity is constitutively ineliminable to the human condition and entertains a complex relationship with Eros itself. I wonder if Hannah Arendt had something similar in mind, as she wrote:

The life span of man running toward death would inevitably carry everything human to ruin and destruction if it were not for the faculty of interrupting it and beginning something new, a faculty which is inherent in action like an ever-present reminder that men, though they must die, are not born in order to die but in order to begin. (1998: 246)

* * *

On the seashores of endless worlds children meet
Rabindranath Tagore (1950: 51)

While attempting to create a bridge, a meeting place between different “textual shores”, with this work I tried also to offer a new way of envisaging the specificity of Kafka, Celan, and Green both as articulators and representatives of the work of the Negative in different and yet deeply intertwined cultural-historical contexts. Kafka, Celan, and Green reveal indeed different elements and features of this complex constellation.

Kafka’s last collection of texts, *Ein Hungerkünstler*, can be read as an attempt to narrate the vicissitudes of an irrepresentable element through the process of sublimation, from the suffering body to the page, and beyond. As I have shown, this “metarepresentational storytelling” does not exhaust in itself. It is rather linked with a complexity of historical, cultural, and literary issues finding new shape and force in his writing. The *incréable*, being the magnetic core of Kafka’s work and at the same time the limit creation cannot cross, offers far more than an aesthetical category. It is the kernel of the creative process in its corporeal link with the trace of an absence which is deeply, intimately close, imponderably remote, and inaccessible. With his last writings, Kafka gave new dignity to a dying body by reinventing it and recovering it in another form through the process of sublimation. But that corporeal remnant animating his writing was, furthermore, no less linked with that limit, that cultural remnant of a Judaism which the author, as well as an entire generation of Jews, could not perceive as their own. Freud’s *Unheimliches*, as Meghnagi pointed out, can be read in these terms and in strict correlation with Kafka’s writings. Kafka’s work represents also a search for new means to cope with the cultural crisis of European Judaism, with the loss of means of transgenerational communication. Confronted with an unrecognisable, uncanny representation of the *body* of tradition—like in the *Verwandlung*—Kafka had to invent, through literature, a new way to write his place in the generational chain of transmission. As such his writings are an attempt to give new form to an irrepresentable element within tradition itself.

Only four years separate Celan’s birth in 1920 (significantly, the same year of publication of Freud’s *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*) from Kafka’s death in 1924. And yet, the context in which the two authors worked were dramatically different. The threshold from Kafka to Celan leads us through what Daniel Sibony

(2008) called «Le meurtre du Nom,» «the slaughter of the Name.» With the Shoah and with Celan's work, the question of the Negative undergoes a deep mutation which also reflects a change in the representational modes of the unconscious. A mutation which keeps defying as of today the representational limits of Western civilisation.

Celan's poetry confronts us with unprecedented challenges, it compels us to think the specificity of the work of the Negative in his *oeuvre* through other conceptual tools. His poetry flows out from the wound of an unprecedented catastrophe in human history, which took place at the core of the *Kulturarbeit*. It confronts the reader with something unbearable on a social, political, collective level no less than on an individual one: the death drive at the core of the work of culture and civilization. Celan's verses are in our time more significant than ever to rethink the question of an ethics from the point of view of literature. With his poetry, Celan revealed how the question of the Shoah was all but solved in Germany, and more broadly in Europe. The phrase «*La poésie ne s'impose plus, elle s'expose,*» (Celan 2005: 58) showcases as such the core of Celan's late work. Poetry *exposes itself* to the abyss of the human, as much as *poetry exposes*, under the sign of Auschwitz, the destructivity at the core of the cultural processes.

Celan's poetry embodies a different stage of the work of the Negative, in which the question of sublimation appears in all its complex ambivalence: his poetry must keep alive the *incréable* of a vanished world. While this very endeavour to put into poetry an immedicable loss keeps the poet alive, it also pushes the subject towards a mortal exposure to the death drive. As we observed, this endeavour must not be confused with a sacrificial dimension but pertains to the intricacies between objectalising and disobjectalising functions, between life narcissism and death narcissism, between the passion of poetry and its harsh mandate.

Green's work of theoretical investigation of the Negative allowed us to shed new light on Kafka and Celan's writings, emphasizing a dimension of the Negative still at best unexplored by the research—and at worst denied and disavowed by Western civilization. But in addition to a theoretical and conceptual dimension, his own work is also pervaded by the Negative in metarepresentational terms. The work of the Negative does not represent for Green simply an object of investigation, but also the structural matrix of his thought, his clinical approach, his theory, his writing. By saying “no” to the dogmatism of post-Freudian schools, Green was able to create a new intellectual path, whose importance and legacy do not cease to unfold, today more than ever. It is however on a deeper level that the originality of Green's ideas reveals its connection with the work of the Negative. Again, the *incréable* is here at stake, and open to a temporal dimension. With this concept, Green allows us to see at once the

statute of psychoanalytic epistemology in relationship with literature and with the creative power of the psyche. But thereby, Green also gives a new role to remnants of a dimension of infancy in which the subject, indeed, as *in-fans*, has no access to language. The *incréable* measures in this sense a distance which language cannot cover; a distance around which, nonetheless, the writing process does not cease to revolve.

The English verses of a poet Green loved, Jorge Luis Borges, seem to me quite appropriate to enclose what I am trying to say:

I offer you that kernel of myself that I have saved, somehow –
the central heart that deals not in words, traffics not with
dreams, and is untouched by time, by joy, by adversities.
(Borges 1974: 862)

Whose *I* is here saving what of whom? Whose Self is implied, here? Who is being written and who is actually writing in the works we just read? The *incréable* was already inscribed here, *offered* to us by an unknown subject, unbeknownst to the writing subject itself, in these verses that Green did surely know at some point in his life. Pages and pages had to be written in order to give theoretical status and form to that significant kernel which marks the limit of inaccessibility of the subject to its remotest cell. The subject has always been, potentially, there, yet elsewhere, there where it did not know to be.

As far as psychoanalytic epistemology is concerned, these verses enclosing the *incréable* show to what extent the work of the Negative is operative in the process of theoretical creation—what we have called “poetics of the theory.” From this standpoint, the *incréable* reveals a dimension of delay, of retrospectivity, which defies the perception of a linear, homogeneous time. Psychoanalysis, also in its metapsychological dimension, allows us to see the *temps éclaté*—the time fragmented, exploded, exposed to its own, irreducible multiplicity—that literature allows us to live anew and otherwise: the temporalities of the subject, of the object, of the dream, of the work of creation, in tension with the time of history. Also for that reason, the “adventures of the Negative” that I researched in this work, are not reducible to a chronology; they constitutively entail the possibility of a continuous restructuration of an irrepresentable temporal element that does not cease to shape us as human, creatures, parts of relationships.

We have remarked how the concept of filiation, in relationship to the work of the Negative, takes the form of a working through around an absence, a kernel of irrepresentability, which extends beyond the limits of the individual, of the subject in a given space and time. But what is the object of such work of transmission?

Something has to be lost, a link has to be missing, in order for the creation to be such. The limit has to be transformed, reconfigured, recreated, otherwise, elsewhere. But that is not new, of course. To that we must add a further element, namely the loss, *the transformation of the loss*. This becomes the unconscious object of the process of transmission at the heart of the works of these authors. The work of the Negative has to be understood here not quite as a content, but rather as a matrix, an empty structure organising that emptiness which structures the object of transmission. The work of writing, in this sense, is not only a means to attempt the recreation of a link with a loss object. It is the delay and the limit, the very barrier that forbids the access to that trace, to that lost core of a link that precedes us as part of a relationship of which we were not aware, a story that wrote us.

What is transmitted in this interminable work is ultimately that very absent core, that matrix of irrepresentability which every generation has the task to receive and to rediscover as the object of the creative endeavour. *The object of transmission remains inescapably the object of another subject, of an alterity and for an alterity that has to rediscover, to reinvent and to devise it, again and again, in new ways.*

The sublimated object embodies an ineliminable dimension of thirdness, a limit which, as we have highlighted, composes the transitional area between generations, between two others. Psychoanalysis has addressed in a unique way the problematics of the object relation, especially with regards to the question of the object “founded-created.” This question is paramount, particularly in the case of cultural objects such as works of literature and of art. In *Le Travail du négatif*, in a passage that clearly bears witness of Green’s intellectual debt towards Winnicott’s theory of transitional phenomena, we read:

S’efforçant de localiser l’expérience culturelle dans la topique psychique, Winnicott donne asile aux objets culturels dans l’espace intermédiaire entre réalité extérieure et intérieure, espace qu’il avait déjà défini comme celui abritant les objets et les phénomènes transitionnels. [...] La problématique de trouver-crée est avancée ici. Winnicott désigne par le dilemme qui se rapporte à ce qui, existant dans la réalité, est simplement trouvé, par opposition à ce qui est créé par le sujet. Autre manière de parler de l’objet objectivement perçu (trouvé) et de l’objet subjectif (créé). On le voit l’accent se déplace du côté de la création. L’intérêt de la démarche de Winnicott est multiple. Il donne un statut psychique singulier aux productions culturelles du côté du transitionnel, aire intermédiaire (entre dedans et dehors), champ de la symbolisation (lieu de la réunion potentielle à l’endroit même où la séparation a eu lieu), du paradoxe (l’objet transitionnel est et n’est pas... le sein), etc. (Green 1993: 325)²

2 Green 1999b: 235: «Attempting to locate cultural experience in psychical topography, Winnicott provides a sanctuary for cultural objects in the intermediate area between external and internal reality, an area which he had already defined as accommodating objects and transitional phenomena. [...] The problematics of finding-creating are developed here. By

The cultural transitional objects that Kafka, Celan, and even Green could create, each with his specific form and stylistic peculiarity, may accompany us in the new millennium, and help us reflect upon an ethics that, alike the work of the Negative, stems from the loss, from an absence, from an interruption that inhabits us constitutively. Showing us the inevitability of the link between life and death, they do not cease to remind us of the necessity of creatively facing the limit, the absence, the death, that «logique de l'ombre», that «logic of the shadow» (Green 1993: 60; 1999b: 37) that inhabits each and every one of us—and of giving it a transformative role in the structuring of our psyche, in our cultural dynamics, in our representational horizons.

The destiny of their works is therefore far from being independent from our individual and collective responsibility. It shall also depend on the place that we will be able to find and to create for them, on our capability of finding them anew, recreating a new relationship with them—in the liminal, transitional space that, through these works, we share with an otherness that calls us from afar, underway in time.

this Winnicott is referring to the dilemma relating to that which, because it exists in reality, is simply found in contrast to that which is created by the subject. This is another way of speaking of the object objectively perceived (found) and of the subjective object (created). It can be seen that there is a shift in emphasis towards creation. Winnicott's approach is of interest on several accounts. He gives a specific psychical status to cultural productions in the transitional, intermediate area (between inside and outside), the symbolic field (a place of potential union at the very point where the separation occurred), of paradox (the transitional object both is and is not ... the breast), etc.»

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Filiations of the Negative

Reading Franz Kafka and Paul Celan with André Green

Francesco Adriano Clerici

Expanding the theoretical framework developed by André Green over more than four decades of research, this book offers a new inquiry into the *work of the Negative* in the late writings of Franz Kafka (1883–1924) and Paul Celan (1920–1970). The study follows the thread of the Greenian concept of the *incréable*, a figure of the Negative expressing a tension toward a lost and severed origin, one that can never be reconstituted or created, but only *represented otherwise* through writing. In doing so, the book explores the function of absence and of the limit in the creative process. In this light, Kafka's and Celan's writings emerge not only as works on, and at the limits of representation. Through the creative process, the authors persistently interrogate the loss of origins, the question of writing, and the death drive at the heart of culture and civilization.

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