TO REVERSAL: AESTHETICS AND POETICS FROM KANT TO ADORNO, BLANCHOT, AND CELAN

JACOB MCGUINN

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Statement of originality

I, Jacob McGuinn, confirm that the research included within this thesis is my own work or that where it has been carried out in collaboration with, or supported by others, that this is duly acknowledged below and my contribution indicated. Previously published material is also acknowledged below.

I attest that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge break any UK law, infringe any third part's copyright or other Intellectual Property Right, or contain any confidential material.

I accept that the college has the right to use plagiarism detection software to check the electronic version of the thesis.

I confirm that this thesis has not been previously submitted for the award of a degree by this or any other university.

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author and no quotation from it or information derived from it may be published without the prior written consent of the author.

Signed: Jacob McGuinn Date: 7th August, 2017

Details of collaboration and publications: N/A

Abstract

This thesis reads radical indeterminacy into the reflective judgements of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement* through points of connection between Kant's aesthetics and the philosophies and writing of Theodor Adorno and Maurice Blanchot. These re-situate the 'ends' of Kantian aesthetics in the historical situation of the 1960s and 1970s. In turn, this historicising of Kantian aesthetics reinterprets its original content. Such double reading – from Kant forwards, and back to Kant – is configured through what I call 'reversal': the indeterminacy of aesthetic reflection calls for a reverse 'reading' of itself which is not self-defeatingly determined by the aesthetic. Kant thus gives us the vocabulary for re-reading his aesthetics of reflection, and from this other indeterminacies of reflection, despite his attempt to organise and explain reflective relations through consistently with philosophical form through judgement. To read Kant outside his or any philosophy's economy, the task demanded by Adorno's theory and Blanchot's writing, asks for poetic readers and writers such as their near-contemporary, Paul Celan. They understand Celan's poetry as making legible how Kant's aesthetic might be thought reflectively, thus showing that the indeterminacy Kant attributes to reflection can be aesthetically *experienced* without being effaced by the philosophical *judgement* implying that indeterminacy. This turn back, the turn of verse, forms the hinge between Adorno's and Blanchot's dialectical and political thinking, allowing the common sense, the un-institutionalised 'we' Kant thinks ratifies aesthetic judgement, to remain negative or 'unavowable'. Aesthetics still structures the reading of poetry, but such poetry makes the indeterminate implications of Kantian aesthetics legible. 'Disconnection' becomes the organising principle for reflection and politics, implied by but now freed from aesthetic judgement, made visible by a poetry of 'reversal'. We conclude by finding the development of these ideas in two major elegists of Celan, Geoffrey Hill and Jeremy Prynne.

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 1

INTRODUCTION

Indeterminate Aesthetics, aesthetic indeterminacy 2

1. Aesthetics of indeterminacy 2
2. Aesthetics from Kant to Adorno and Blanchot 10
3. From aesthetics to poetics 15

CHAPTER ONE

On Reversal: Kant, Hegel, and reflection in aesthetics 25

1. Not Hegel: Hegel, Kant, and negativity 26
2. On reversal: Kant's aesthetic and teleology of reflection and reflecting judgement 38
3. Reversal again: indeterminacy, figurability, and poetry 52
4. On method 57

CHAPTER TWO

Saying We: community from aesthetics to exile 62

1. Framing community: May '68, politics, and history 66
2. No-man's land: judgement from Kant to Adorno 68
3. The 'unavowable' common sense: community from Blanchot to Kant 81
4. Celan, exile, disorientation 96

CHAPTER THREE

Towards a non-transcendent aesthetic: dialogue, presence, dialectic 115

1. Dialogue to dialectics 116
2. Blanchot – the fragmented present of writing between *le pas au-delà* and *désastre* 131
3. Adorno – 'progressive impossibility': meaning and the future from *Negative Dialectics* to *Aesthetic Theory* 152

CHAPTER FOUR

The figure of snow: Celan, elegy, aesthetics 174

1. Celan and figuration 175
2. Over and over: the elegiac aesthetic 199

CONCLUSION

The necessity of indeterminacy: from aesthetics to politics 221

APPENDIX: Poems 232

APPENDIX: Abbreviations 240

BIBLIOGRAPHY 241

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I want to thank my supervisor, Paul Hamilton, without whom this thesis would not have been conceived, let alone completed. His generous reading, and his generous support, have been invaluable, as has his advice throughout. I could not have done without either his understanding or his consideration – or his humour. Mark Currie's timely interventions have been likewise invaluable, prompting me into directions I had not envisaged. Anything of value here is due, no doubt, to them.

I am wholly grateful for the support of friends and colleagues in the English department at Queen Mary – and beyond: Joel Grossman, Hetta Howes, Ivan Juritz, Rosie Langridge, Martha McGuinn, Lily Parrott, Anna Robin, Sophie Seita, Laura Staab, Calum Watt, David Wylot – for conversation.

This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

And lastly, I am always grateful to my family, for love, and to my father, my first teacher, for our ongoing conversation.

INTRODUCTION

Aesthetic indeterminacy, indeterminate aesthetics

But no commentaries! Poetry first (then France, Germany etc. later!)

Paul Celan to Gisèle Celan-Lestrange

In this introduction, I firstly give an account of my reading of Kant's aesthetic, and the turn to Adorno and Blanchot required to undertake this reading. I establish the concepts and terms I will address in the thesis: indeterminacy and reflection. I secondly frame in greater detail the critical intervention of reading, firstly, Adorno and Blanchot in the context of Kantian aesthetics, and secondly, Adorno and Blanchot together in their historical situation. Finally, I give an account of the relation between these questions and poetry, and show that their 'reversal' of Kant needs poetry for its full articulation, as demonstrated with especial historical aptness by Celan.

1 – Aesthetics of indeterminacy

Determining the aesthetic: reflection and reflective experience

'Aesthetics' is the part of philosophy that thinks about experiences of beauty (and a range of other 'aesthetic' experiences and features), in nature and art. But the scope of this definition is inherently expansive. Does aesthetics concern the *experience* of beauty, or the *features* of an object that let us judge it to be beautiful? And why should aesthetics only measure 'beauty' – surely aesthetic experience leads to a host of possible judgements other than just 'beauty'? And what, indeed, would an aesthetic judgement signify? Would it refer to the judger's experience, or to the features of an object, and would such reference 'mean' something in the same way that other philosophically delineated judgements do? Does saying that something is 'beautiful' make the same conceptual impression on an experience/object as scientific judgements? To say, 'this is a tree' is more determinate than to say, 'this tree is beautiful

(to me)'. What, indeed, does 'beautiful' mean, and is its validity conceptually, and therefore universally, grounded?

I think that we can resolve this expansiveness of aesthetics not by finding a correct determination of what aesthetics is, or of how it functions, but by characterising its 'expansiveness' itself, its resistance to determination. The difficulty in defining aesthetics derives from the 'reflective' experience it thinks. Difficulty in definition, and in determination, is precisely what, for Kant at least, provokes aesthetic *reflection*. And my questions here are likewise reflective, in the sense that they do not refer to concepts but instead require singular, and reflexive, consideration. Each of these questions is 'bent back' upon itself (to invoke the etymology of reflection), and thereby turns back upon the conditions of asking, and thinking, them. To say that something is beautiful requires us to think about what saying that means, and not merely to decide whether that judgement is correct or not. And whether we are concerned with the features of the experience of beauty, or with the features of a beautiful object, we are pressed to measure the relation between subject and object: the features of an object are only beautiful when experienced, and the features of experience are shaped and constituted by the features of the object being experienced. The formal relationship, then, is structurally reflexive: the form of experience of an object is conditioned by the form of the object being experienced, which is in turn only an object of experience to the extent that it is experienced as such by a subject. Because I cannot predicate 'beauty' of an object in the way I predicate other determinate features, 'beauty' refers, for Kant, to the experience of that object. And it is in Kant that we find the outline of this 'reflexive' account of 'reflective' aesthetic experience. Aesthetics is, for Kant, a way to account for reflective experience, such as the reflective experience provoked by judging something to be beautiful. The 'end' of aesthetics is reflection itself, and not in determination of what art should be, or of what should count as beautiful. Aesthetics makes sense of the way the subject can experience reflection, and can employ reflection in its own judgements.

For Kant, aesthetics discloses the way judgement functions for the subject who uses judgement to think, and the ways judgement's reflections resemble the reflective way nature is organised (that organisms are not produced according to a 'purpose' or 'concept', as tools are, but are self-generating forms). Kant therefore uses the aesthetic to outline the mandate of reflection, and to give 'purposiveness' to reflection which lacks conceptual 'purpose'. But this also limits aesthetic experience, and limits reflection. Art is produced reflectively; and not only its production but also its work is coordinated through reflection. A poem, for example, works by being read, and by provoking a certain reflective reading in which words are uncoupled from their habitually determinate use. In a painting, visual form is itself the subject of reflection, and not merely the vehicle for the appearance of objects. In music, sound is patterned such that its different elements respond, reflectively, to one another to provoke an experience of sound itself. In each of these, then, reflection is not limited to the *experience* of art, but part of the way art *functions*. Reflection, again, is *collaborative*: not just a feature of aesthetic

judgement, but part of art's *work*. In Kant's usage, reflection is thinking without conceptual determination. Aesthetics describes the conditions of such thinking, and thereby also describes the conditions for the kind of reading engaged in by criticism. Criticism is reflective to the extent that it reads its literary object indeterminately. Literature is not the 'terminus' for criticism, to the extent that criticism does not 'determine' a text's meaning but instead 'reflects' it; but criticism is nonetheless constituted by literature. How far can we extend this aesthetic legibility of indeterminacy gained from reflection? What are its limits, when its ends are not, by definition, determined?

A determination of what aesthetics is, or of what it deals with, is not useful for our concerns here. I am concerned rather with the way aesthetics is shaped by the reflection it thinks, and is constituted by the indeterminacy it reflectively traces. If the aesthetic thinks not just about, but *through* reflection, then it assumes the form of reflection in order to think it. And, through aesthetics, this gives a reflective form to indeterminacy itself. An account of the way aesthetics deals with indeterminacy – including its own necessarily indeterminate response to indeterminacy – gives form to the reflective conditions of the aesthetic.

A contemporary aesthetics

In writing *The Critique of the Power of Judgement*, his third *Critique*, Kant is motivated by a need to find a ground for 'judgement' itself, and not just for the scientific or moral uses of judgement. Judgements outlined in the rest of his critical project are not reconciled with one another as judgments. He finds this ground of this reconciliation in reflection. All judgements, for Kant, employ reflection; in his first *Critique*, for example, reflection is merely a moment in conceptual determination. But if Kant is to account for judgement as an independent 'power', it must have ground outside the concepts by which it is used. *Nonconceptual* experience is reflective, but it does not claim a priori validity. Uniquely, however, the experience of 'beauty' is both reflective *and* makes claims to truth. Reflection cannot have any determinate ground, precisely because that would be the end of reflection. So Kant grounds reflection *in its indeterminacy*. But this allows us to use the aesthetic to account for other indeterminacies: here, I look at political indeterminacy (in chapter two), and dialectical indeterminacy (in chapter three), before turning finally to the indeterminate way poetry reads aesthetic philosophy back. The significance of such aesthetics for the *contemporary* is in the way aesthetics gives form to reflective experience, as well as giving form to the conditions of reflective experience.

I will now turn to contemporary accounts of the aesthetic in order to frame my reading of Kant. One problem for contemporary aesthetics is the way that the reflection registered in aesthetic judgement can be coerced by other discourses. Because it claims an autonomous ground merely on its own operations, aesthetics is open to indeterminacy. For Terry Eagleton, this means that the aesthetic merely

'recasts historical contradictions into ideologically resolvable form'.[1] In this characterisation, the artwork merely reproduces its social material in aesthetic experience, which is suitably reflective for coercion: it makes things seem 'beautiful', and reflective, in a way that occludes the historically determinate ways those things are produced. One difference, here, is a turn from the conditions of experience of beauty to the form of art works. In Eagleton's characterisation, aesthetic experience is *determined* by the artwork's form. But this does not take into account the way such experience is reflectively constructed both internally (as part of the subjective logic of judgement) and externally (in the artwork's mediation of social and historical form). Indeed, such experience is already a historical contradiction: a non-conceptual and yet valid judgement based merely on reflection. My contention is that such reflexivity renders the aesthetic open to the contradiction Eagleton claims it stifles. But developing such an openness requires accounting for the reflective relation between art and aesthetic experience. And in developing such a relation, we posit a possible 'experience' of the aesthetic itself.

I will now turn to contemporary attempts to explain how the aesthetic can be reflected upon, and the way that negotiating between 'aesthetic experience' and 'art's work' is itself a reflective procedure. This is foundational for the reading of Adorno and Blanchot on which my own reading of Kant is based. In developing a Kantian reading of aesthetics as structured by an indeterminate, reflecting judgement, we can in turn develop a sense of the reflective relation between aesthetics and art, in which art is not merely determined by aesthetics. And from this, we can develop a form in which aesthetics harnesses reflection to make relations visible *in their indeterminacy*. A contemporary aesthetics would render indeterminate relations, and nonconceptual experience, visible. But it would still require the formal conditions of legibility of aesthetics itself. An 'aesthetics' of aesthetics would hinge upon the same reflective work that characterises Kantian aesthetics.

We can pick up the narrative of an 'indeterminate aesthetics' with the post-Kantian context of Romanticism. For Susan Wolfson, Eagleton's position depends upon a Romantic concept of form as 'organic'. But Romanticism itself works through contradiction as form, rather than formally concealing it. This is the 'dialogic' fragment form of the Jena Romantics. Romantic 'poems reflect on rather than conceal their constructedness (not only aesthetic, but social and ideological); […] sometimes the textual forms of reconciliation are visibly factitious (not magical)'.[2] If there is form, it is reflectively constructed; if there is reconciliation, it is legibly fragmented. This means that aesthetics has to re-think form. For Isobel Armstrong, this 'remade aesthetic' would amount to 'a cognitive account of the emotions as mutually inclusive'.[3] Aesthetics thinks through its separation from its object, and to this extent becomes the fragmentation in which that object's separation from cognition can be thought. This

[1] Eagleton, Terry, *Criticism and Ideology* (London: NLB, 1976), 114

[2] Wolfson, Susan J., *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 14

[3] Armstrong, Isobel, *The Radical Aesthetic* (Blackwell: London, 2000), 18

is specifically because, as Kant said, aesthetics proceeds from pleasure, feeling, and is therefore already in dialogue with its lack of objectivity. This leads us to consider Angela Leighton's characterisation of form as elegy. 'Form, in the sense of body-form as well as in the sense of formal outline or effigy, is a word which contains the complex dynamic of elegy itself. For elegy is a literary form defined by the body-form which lies somewhere within the container or reliquary of the text; but it is also a form left empty, feeling the hollow shell of its literary objectlessness.'[4] In the conclusion to this thesis, I will consider this elegy of aesthetic experience, that loses its object and thinks that loss. This form of aesthetic fragmentation of reflection becomes legible in a reading of poetic form in dialogue with critical attempts to read them. And politics might reflectively be registered in its indeterminacy by thinking through this form.

We can find a first turn from subjective aesthetics to objective art in post-Kantian philosophy in the development of 'fragmentary' form by the Jena Romantics. The fragment marks the displacement of subjective self-positing reflection into the art object, such that 'the infinite self-reflection of the work of art is an infinite reflection on the relation of the *self-limiting finitude* of form to the absolute infinite task of reflection itself'.[5] By such displacement, the private experience of reflection becomes sociable. The infinite reflexivity of self-identity is not so much interrupted as externalised in this sociability.

> A real aesthetic theory of poetry would begin with the absolute antithesis of the eternally unbridgeable gulf between art and raw beauty. It would describe their struggle and conclude with the perfect harmony of artistic and natural beauty. But a philosophy of poetry as such would begin with the independence of beauty, with the proposition that beauty is and should be distinct from truth and morality, and that it has the same rights as these: something that — for those who are able to understand it at all — follows from the proposition I=I.[6]

We move here from a theory of art to a philosophy of poetry. What happens inside aesthetic experience should happen 'outside' the subject. Aesthetic claims to autonomy come out of self-reflective subjective identity. But the fragment proposes its own identity. So if fragmentation articulates identity, this is also to say that identity proceeds by fragmentation: by moments of disconnection and objectification. Art is true to identity's fragmentation, not to subjective self-identity.[7] In the artwork, reflection happens externally to the subject. As Benjamin writes, this 'infinity of reflection, for Schlegel and Novalis, is

---

[4] Leighton, Angela, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 222

[5] Ibid., 65

[6] Schlegel, Friedrich, 'Athenaeum fragments', in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed., trans. by J.M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 246-60, 25. Schlegel is directly critiquing Kant – the 'unbridgeable gulf' between subject and object as such – by invoking Fichte and the absolute self-identity of the I.

[7] See Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe, *Poetry as Experience*, trans. by Andrea Tarnowski (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), for whom this marks art beginning at the point of 'real' separation from Kantian aesthetics, a 'disconnection [*déliaison*]' (30).

not an infinity of advance but an infinity of connectedness'.[8] Reflection connects, rather than negates, its objects. Benjamin suggests that to affirm this infinity is to deny 'the torso character of works'. 'The work of art cannot be a torso; it must be a mobile transitory moment in the living transcendental form. By limiting itself in its own form, it makes itself transitory in a contingent figure, but in that fleeting figure it makes itself eternal through criticism.'[9] Connection, then, happens in critical reflection, formed according to a mobile and reflective, fragmentary work. The fragment is this reflection between criticism and the artwork. The work's finite form opens to an infinite critical legibility, a conversation, dialogue. The fragment is dialogical.[10] But if we read it as a form of communication between object and subject, rather than within its own proposed horizontality, we misread its systematic, objective 'reality'. Connections are *outside* the subject. So, in *Ideas*, the history of reflection becomes the dialogue of fragmentation.

> *To Novalis*: You don't stay at the threshold of things. On the contrary, your spirit is deeply suffused with poetry and philosophy. It was closest to me in these images of uncomprehended truth. What you've thought I think; what I've thought you will think or have already thought. There are misunderstandings that serve only to confirm the greatest shared understanding. Every doctrine of the eternal Orient belongs to all artists. I name you instead of all the others.[11]

The fragment is addressed 'to Novalis'. This address is already a dialogue, or writes the way it will be critically disconnected from itself. 'You' and 'I' become confused in this fragmentation/reflection. I name you, Novalis, in the singular, in order to name the fragmented plurality of that singularity, name you in fragmentation (I think what you think or have already thought) by which the singularity of that name is already plural, speaks otherwise. Autonomy preserves the possibility of dialogue. 'I' am only identically 'I' in dialogue. 'You' (Novalis) are possible because dialogue is possible. Dialogue is possible because of the way the artwork interrupts subjective self-reflection. The artwork interrupts self-reflection by embodying it. 'You don't stay on the threshold of things'. You depend on the sociability marked by poetry. This turn to poetry, then, parallels the philosophical turn to the fragment. Poetry's forms of address do not merely instantiate possible forms of sociability. 'You', especially for

[8] Benjamin, Walter, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 1 — 1913-1926*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), 126

[9] Ibid., 183

[10] As we shall see, Blanchot works through exactly these parameters, most explicitly in *The Infinite Conversation*: from 'interruption' as the ground of communication, to the reflexivity of critical dialogue as a 'conversation', to the fragmentary form that grounds (as it unworks) all writing. I will deal with this throughout the thesis, but especially in chapter three.

[11] Schlegel, Friedrich, 'Ideas', in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed., trans. by J.M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 261-68, 268

Celan, is a point of *disorientation* to which the poem is nonetheless bound: 'you' are necessarily indeterminate, and this indeterminacy fragments rather than instantiates sociability.[12]

To return to contemporary aesthetics, this idea of the fragment not merely becoming autonomous *from* aesthetics, but *reflecting* an aesthetic autonomy for itself, informs Peter Osborne's own post-Kantian distinction between subjective aesthetics of experience and what he calls a 'historical ontology'[13] of art. The separation of subjective experience from the object of experience means that, if it is to remain viable in the contemporary era, aesthetics must return to the object: 'it is not the extension of sensibility to include the subject's relation to itself – auto-affection—that is the problem, so much as its consequent principled *indifference to the character of objects* that occasion judgement; in particular, its principled indifference to the cognitive, relational, historical and world-disclosing dimensions of works of *art*'.[14] In Kant's own account, '[t]here is neither a science of the beautiful, only a critique, nor beautiful science, only beautiful art.'[15] Aesthetics is not legislative, and is therefore restricted from making valid claims about what its objects are. Beauty can only refer to a subjective experience. So because we cannot legislate a priori for what the beautiful *is*, we are limited to describing the aesthetic experience of the beautiful. 'Aesthetics' describes the subject's response to the appearance of something beautiful, it does not describe the artwork that prompts such experience. For Osborne, subjective aesthetics cannot respond to the way art produces its own meanings. In order to think a 'contemporary' art after Kant, one must think art's 'historical ontology'. Aesthetics adequate to the ways art radically takes on the reflective work Kant reserves for subjective experience is yet to be thought. A Kantian critique of art, not aesthetics, would have to find some way to describe the artwork itself.

> The aesthetic concept of art mistakes one of art's many conditions for the whole. It mistakes art's necessary aesthetic appearance for the *ground* of its apparently autonomous, and hence infinite, production of meaning, which is in fact historically relational […].[16]

'Aesthetics' can only incompletely account for the autonomous, plural operations of art. From aesthetic 'auto-affection', then, we turn to artistic 'auto-poiesis'.[17] From an account of aesthetic 'feeling', we turn to an account of what art 'makes'. This would be an account of the way art operates objectively in ways that do not simply reproduce the terms of subjective aesthetic experience. In a way redeploying

[12] We shall look at Celan's 'exilic' poetics in detail throughout the thesis, but here it is worth emphasising the way lyric questions about address trace philosophical questions about the conditions of communication in ways that do not just substantiate those philosophical claims. This move is not restricted to the Romantic, and its ends – in Blanchot's philosophy or Celan's poetics – are not restricted to the harmonious hopes of Jena Romanticism. I will trace the unworking of these hopes in this thesis.

[13] Osborne, Peter, *Anywhere Or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 49

[14] Ibid., 42

[15] CJ, 184/5:305

[16] Osborne, *Anywhere Or Not At All*, 49

[17] Ibid., 44

Hegel's critique of Kant,[18] such an account of 'fine art' and not just of 'aesthetic experience' would be hinged on the historical manifestation of art in art works. The difference I would emphasise is that such manifestation is not simply objective, and that such manifestation exposes the subject to an objectivity it loses from itself in judgement. In isolating itself through the 'aesthetic' from the ways it 'shares' reflection with its object in experience, the subject isolates itself from its own affective objectivity: the way that pleasure is manifest for a body, or in a body, even reflectively. The experience of art might not be merely 'agreeable', but its pleasures are as manifest and historically specific as the artworks which provoke them.

There are consequences of this fragmentation of aesthetics from art for our understanding of the politics of aesthetic indeterminacy we looked at earlier. If we are to consider aesthetic 'visibility' of politics, we have to take into account the way art, and not just aesthetic judgement, functions to produce visibility. For Hal Foster, this distinction can be made through the 'avant-garde'. Foster, writing in Lacanian terms, in thinking about art, aesthetics mediates between the subject and a hostile but constitutive 'real'. Aesthetics pacifies the real in order to make it available to the subject, constituting an 'image screen', where the real is pictured according to subjectively available forms. But it is simultaneously constituted by the 'gaze' of the real that exceeds those subjective forms.[19] Where aesthetics mediates, art is anti-aesthetic. Yet art – specifically the 'avant-garde' – does not tear this image screen. Rather, 'the goal of the avant-garde is not to break with the symbolic order absolutely […] but to reveal it in crisis – to register its points not only of breakdown but also of breakthrough, that is, to register the points at which new possibilities are opened up by this very crisis.'[20] Art thus provokes new aesthetic experiences by coordinating its forms *objectively*, according to the real, not just by reproducing *subjective* forms. Art proposes a form of *negative* mediation, in which its difference to the actual (contra Arendt) marks a break between the 'actual' and the 'real'. There is an implicit politics to this, when read in the context of the preceding discussion. By registering the ways the symbolic order is not identical with itself, art registers an indeterminacy in the symbolic. Such indeterminacy, and not any actual communicability of judgement, provokes a reflective experience.

In this thesis, my situating of Kant's aesthetics assumes a context of late twentieth-century accounts of both aesthetics and the political. The Kantian model of reflection serves to illuminate the ways accounts of aesthetic experience develop political implications. But more than this, the model of reflection also serves as a *model for its own reflexivity*. Thinking about the relation between aesthetics and politics is itself structured by reflection. And thinking through the consequences of aesthetic reflexivity – the way its indeterminate ends emerge in non-aesthetic discourse – requires us to account

[18] I shall cover this in detail in chapter one.

[19] Foster, Hal, *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency* (London and New York: Verso, 2015), 7-14

[20] Ibid., 17

for aesthetic reflexivity itself. Kant's relation to the writers I focus on here – Adorno, Blanchot, and Celan – is itself reflective. Re-reading Kantian aesthetics is a reflective procedure. There is therefore an *aesthetic* at work in this reading. In this thesis, I will try to account for both the ways aesthetics is operative in theory, and the ways that such operativity is legibly an aesthetic procedure itself. My contention is that re-reading Kantian aesthetics, the kind of re-reading undertaken by Adorno and Blanchot, forms a reflective procedure in which the reflexivity of the aesthetic becomes apparent in ways fundamental to recent re-readings of the aesthetic.

2 – Aesthetics from Kant to Adorno and Blanchot: the scope of the thesis and the question of the critical reading

I turn to Adorno, Blanchot, and Celan as readers. Each develops a mode of critical writing responsive to the legibility of disconnection. My aim is to think *about* disconnection *through* disconnection. My claim is that the aesthetic as characterised by Kant, with its grounding in reflection, gives form to this reading, and makes visible the conditions and ends of this reading, even as it alters or turns against Kant's own claims. By reading Kant, we can focus these conditions and ends, and show what form a contemporary aesthetic, for Adorno and Blanchot, would take.

Why Adorno? – nonconceptual dialectics and nontranscendent aesthetics

Adorno's work, in *Negative Dialectics*, towards a dialectics motivated by the non-conceptual 'negativity' which conceptual thinking obscures can be linked to his sense of aesthetic experience of 'dialectics' in *Aesthetic Theory*. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno broadly exposes conceptual 'identity' to the non-conceptual, non-identical aspects of experience which it both occludes and is constituted by. A 'negative' dialectics would incorporate (reflectively) experience which is 'non-identical' to conceptual determination. This would require, however, not merely circumventing conceptuality, but exposing the conceptual system to the experience it elides or excludes. These exclusions and elisions are in complex ways constituted by and experienced in social forms and structures; and yet registered subjectively. Making such 'occlusion' and 'elision' apparent is the task of a negative dialectic. But this measurement between society and individual, between subject and object, between conceptual work and the object of work, is the task of an aesthetic: an aesthetic gives form to these non-conceptual measurements. In such a context, aesthetic experience is pitched negatively. This negativity is highlighted when considering Kant, as opposed to Hegel. Aesthetic experience for Kant is inherently reflective and therefore indeterminate, because although it involves concepts, it does not employ them

determinately. Adorno suggests that this is *doubled* in the work of art, which not only reproduces but *produces* the reflection Kant registered in the subject. Art is constructed both from social material and from the history of artworks – but both 'material' and 'history' are pitched indeterminately, because experienced reflectively, and therefore negatively. The aesthetic, for Adorno, is a form of *non-transcendent* experience: its object is not determined by experience, but remains negative. Aesthetic experience must therefore be understood from within a negative dialectic, in which its lingering negativity is the spur to more and more indeterminate conceptual work.

But we must also recognise the ways in which such a dialectic is, like aesthetic experience, reflectively constructed. This second task will inform much of my reading of Adorno. If we are either to produce a viable contemporary aesthetic theory, or a negative dialectic, we have to reckon with the ways each does not merely illustrate the other, but is collaborative and mutually constitutive. There must be a relation between dialectical philosophy and the negativity of both the experience and production of artworks; yet this relation cannot merely be constitutive without invalidating the claims on both of negativity. The relation between dialectics and art is itself negative. To make this negativity visible, there would have to be a model for a collaborative, negative relation between these discrete discourses. We can find such a model in the collaborative way Adorno constructs the *negativity* of aesthetic experience from within a context of the *negative* dialectic, without thereby positing 'the negative' itself.

Why Blanchot? – writing, politics, and nontranscendent aesthetics

Blanchot's development of 'fragmentary writing' in the 1960s and 1970s is motivated by a turn both to non-transcendent dialectics, and by way of response to the non-conceptual organisation of politics in the 1960s (after Algeria, May '68). As with Adorno, Blanchot's sense of dialectics is inseparable from its expression. Where for Adorno conceptual dialectics happens in judgement and in society, such that aesthetics are part of dialectics, for Blanchot dialectics happens in writing. In *The Step Not Beyond*, this is pitched negatively. Writing there is fragmentary, developed throughout the 1960s (in essays collected mostly in *The Infinite Conversation*), this idea of fragmentary writing is that writing does not negate what it writes. It therefore models the kind of non-transcendent 'work' of '*désœuvrement*', 'unworking', which is the dialectical 'step' which does not 'negate' (the equivocation of 'pas'), and indicates without moving into a 'beyond'. Such a writing is, in the terms of this thesis, strictly indeterminate: its terminus is reflectively 'unworked' from negating any negativity and returned to the quasi-activity of writing itself. And as with Adorno, such philosophical developments are entwined with political response. Blanchot's later *Unavowable Community* responds to May '68, but comes from a protracted engagement with politics after the events of the Algerian war in 1958. Fragmentary writing must

therefore be read collaboratively with developing a politics of fragmentation, a politics responsive to its fragmentary conditions: community.

Blanchot's writing is therefore aligned with both Adorno's and Kant's sense of aesthetics: with a reflective form that can accommodate its own indeterminacy and the unexpected ways it might develop, just as writing, without proposing any 'beyond', still negatively indicates the form of a political engagement that, like writing, does not master its political object. The organisation of writing, like such politics, is not just fragmented but fragmenting. Blanchot does not just use writing to posit or make sense of the indeterminate, but is concerned with the ways writing inscribes its own indeterminacy, and therefore becomes the only mark or form by which it might be read. There is nothing 'beyond' writing that could validate it, just as there is nothing but the reflective activities of the aesthetic itself that could validate it. Therefore, as with Adorno, Blanchot develops a non-transcendent (anti-Hegelian) version of the dialectic, and employs writing to structure the experience of such a dialectic. Again, this becomes visible by reading Blanchot through Kant's reflective aesthetics; in which reading Kant, again, is turned reflectively against himself.

Why this moment? – '68 and the indeterminate organisation of community/politics through writing/art

Kant develops his aesthetics in order to validate non-conceptually organised, reflective experience. The reflecting aesthetic judgement responds to reflective experience and validates it *through reflection*, i.e., without the usual cognitive move of determining it through a concept. The aesthetic therefore gives form to non-conceptual, indeterminate, and reflective experience. And this is the kind of experience that organises May '68 politically. Thinking the indeterminacy of such a politics means responding to the reflective way they are organised. My three chosen writers, in response to my reading of Kant, give form to such a political organisation. Celan's poetic writing bears witness to the ways the *politics* of May '68 are organised *aesthetically*, and his poetry works through this elision in a way that exposes it as negative. The unwitting 'aestheticisation' of politics is thought through *poetically*. Blanchot's development of fragmentary writing in response to the fragmentary political organisation of May '68 also measures this discrepancy between actual politics and political conditions. And for Blanchot, too, such a measurement is the exilic measure of a non-manifest futurity. Such non-manifestation of the future is given form in the reflective way politics and writing are organised. And we can finally see the collaboration between aesthetics and politics in Adorno's sense of the aesthetic as a socially constructed organisation of reflective experience, where art is the construction of social forms without any determination by or of those forms; whose autonomy is irrevocable, but registered negatively in a political context of identification and determination. '68 marks a point of historical contact. But it also marks a point where history is reflectively, rather than determinately, organised. It is open to the future

and to futurity, and therefore to both retrospective comprehension (in dialectic) and to a present indeterminacy.

Critical fragmentation: Adorno and Blanchot

In reflective, aesthetic experience, experience is fragmented. It is dispersed by its indeterminate coordinates, such that its ends are not necessarily indicated by the features of its object. The form of a work of art does not fully determine the form of its experience, just as aesthetics cannot adequately prescribe the reflective form new art works take. Such experience is therefore reflective in the sense that it is collaborative. As indeterminate, the aesthetic judgement must reflectively construct the coordinates of its operations, just as a work of art must reflectively construct form without the logical precedent of that form in what Kant calls 'purpose'. My contention in this thesis is that this indeterminate relation is reproduced on a critical level. Fragmentation does not rest with the artwork, but returns, *reverses* upon aesthetic experience. The disconnections addressed by Adorno and Blanchot give form to a disconnected aesthetic experience of art. The fragmentation of experience, as much as the disconnection to which they respond, is legible in the disconnection between these two writers. Responding to 'disconnection' *in* these writers means responding to the critical 'disconnection' *of* them.

Recent attempts to bring these two projects together focus on their asymmetry as collaborative. Emmanuel Ravel compares Blanchot's anti-aesthetic theories of writing with Adorno's negative-dialectic-inflected aesthetic theory. 'The negative dialectic establishes the necessity of appearance by the fact that the *différance* [*différance*] of meaning [*sens*] which it engenders alone signals the possibility of a coherence to come.' This appearance of the promise of meaning, of presence *as* the debt of presence connects to the 'unworking [*désœuvrement*], by which art's total destruction of itself is generative of new forms'.[21] If Blanchot's writing fragments its own formal coherence, this resonates with Adorno's 'negative' dialectic of aesthetic experience, where the fragmentation of coherence promises new formal possibilities. This dialectics of promise doubles back into this fragmentation. Focusing mostly on Blanchot's earlier writing and his fiction, William Allen remarks that, for Blanchot, art is 'foreign' to culture, 'arising after culture […] for it is too late and only offers a future without reconciliation, a utopia, if any, that only responds to the infinite space of the work in its contestation.'[22] Art contests any attempt to accommodate it. It remains negative. This negative is the condition for critical contestation. For Allen, Adorno's 'historicity', as 'an endless process of critique', helps

[21] Ravel, Emmanuelle, *Maurice Blanchot et l'art au XXème siècle: Une esthétique du désœuvrement* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), 148 [my trans.]

[22] Allen, William S., *Aesthetics of Negativity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 73. This idea of 'contestation' is also developed in Liska, Vivian, 'Two Sirens Singing: Literature as Contestation in Maurice Blanchot and Theodor W. Adorno', in *The Power of Contestation*, ed. by Kevin Hart and Geoffrey H. Hartman (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), pp. 80-100

articulate this critical 'contestation' in Blanchot's writing.[23] Blanchot's writing is also subject to the ways its errancy is interrupted by its critical and discursive deployment. But Adorno's 'aesthetics' are also thereby reflectively subject to writing that can only mark its own discontinuity. Aesthetics are subject to repeated displacements by writing.

Leslie Hill, however, focuses on a disconnection between Adorno and Blanchot. In Hill's reading of Blanchot, writing, as fragmentary form, proposes 'a radical futural trace irreducible to presence'.[24] But Adorno's sense of fragmentation, according to Hill, attests to the incoherence of a *past* totality, recuperating as fragmented this negative totality.[25] Blanchot's writing, however, asks whether the fragment 'affirmed itself instead as the futural promise of a radical multiplication of writing as a proliferating series of singular events?'[26] I, however, trace exactly this 'proliferation' of serial but singular events internally to aesthetic experience. Writing, indeed, is only fragmentary when it passes through the fragmentation of aesthetics. So I will challenge the idea that Adorno's aesthetic is recuperative. I will instead suggest that it resists either critically recuperating art as a symbol of subjective aesthetic capacity, or repeating art's incoherence on a critical level. Instead, I will argue, Adorno's thinking constitutes a non-dialectical, non-transcendent aesthetics – to the extent to which dialectics are transcendent, which is exactly where aesthetics intervenes. The futural illegibility of new art forms is only illegible through their subjective experience. Only subjectivity is subject to this illegibility. That means that the *future* possibilities of fragmentation are registered aesthetically (within a history of aesthetic fragmentation) or else obscured. In this way, Blanchot's written *désœuvrement* is also exposed to the fragmentation of aesthetic experience in reading. This 'désœuvrement' of aesthetics is installed by the aesthetic itself. It is the debt of thinking to the nonidentical of which aesthetics is the history. To think Blanchot's 'fragmentation' of the aesthetic, we must think back through the aesthetic. The aesthetic forms the conditions of its reversal in reading.

This would be to expose Blanchot to history, as well as to expose history to what Blanchot designates with writing. Considering the critical field after Blanchot's death, Michael Holland argues that 'Blanchot's work is currently cut off from history—its own first of all, but also that of twentieth-century Europe, in which it is so deeply embedded'.[27] Returning Blanchot's work to history does not mean, however, that we can find its meaning there. This particular challenge is set by the work itself. His writing, like Adorno's, responds to disconnection, and it is this response to disconnection that must be taken for history. I read Blanchot's fragmentary writing in the specific context of May '68. But that

[23] Ibid., 252-3

[24] Hill, Leslie, *Maurice Blanchot and Fragmentary Writing: A Change of Epoch* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 9

[25] Ibid., 2-5

[26] Ibid., 6

[27] Holland, Michael, '*État Présent*. "Maurice Blanchot"', in *French Studies*, 58:4 (2004), pp. 533–538, 537

does not mean that we can find the meaning of the event formalised in writing, and neither can we find a meaningful content reflected back into writing by the event. Rather, as Blanchot insists, they are related in (and through) their mutual dispersal. So I also read Blanchot through his disconnection with Adorno, and vice versa. Reading this disconnection means being attentive to the history of this dispersal. But this makes legible another form of history. If history is thought through such fragmentary aesthetics, then it is read through its discontinuity. Historical discontinuity becomes legible in the aesthetics' fragmentation, as much as writing becomes fragmentary in this legibility. My claim, here, is that this forms a critical demand: a demand that we read in a way that is historically specific, without determining that relation to history. These writers' relation to one another, as well as to history, is exilic. A reflectively indeterminate aesthetic forms the condition of legibility of such exilic relation.

3 – From aesthetics to poetics: Paul Celan, reversal, indeterminate ends

My thesis will finally justify the role of poetry and poetics in this intervention into aesthetics, in order, firstly, to suggest that aesthetic reflection parallels the poetic reflection of figuration; secondly, to suggest that Kant's aesthetics are organised *figuratively*; and thirdly to suggest that the 'ends' of Kant's aesthetics are also open to their unanticipated figuration. I will outline a version of reading, prompted by reading poetry, that gives form to this figurability of the aesthetic. Finally, I will outline the way such figuration can be considered a 'reversal'.

Figuration and 'reversal'

My focus on 'legibility' as a measure of the conditions and capacities of reading is orientated by Celan. I am asking about the conditions of reading Celan's poetry. One must situate his poetry in its historical context; but this means developing a way to read that relation between poem and history that develops reflectively from the poetry, and specifically from the poetry's reserved encounter with history itself. 'History' is not simply, determinately represented in this poetry, precisely to the extent that such poetry's work is indeterminately reflective. Events become, in Celan's alchemical, figurative poetics, marks which poetry awaits, just as poetry awaits interpretation, and just as such awaiting reserves from interpretation the capacity to determine the poem's meaning. History is a hermeneutical procedure which, in its reflective use of language, the poem both encodes and withdraws from. Even more

specifically, I am asking how do we read *one* poem by Celan, 'Die Pole', 'The Poles'.[28] Not just what attitude the poem asks us to assume, but in what version of reading would the coordinates of this poem's figurative work become legible? What are the conditions of legibility for this pem? I do not mean to suggest that this *reflective* sense of reading is restricted to this poem. I merely mean to suggest that this poem prompts and exercises such a reading for this thesis, deploying the polar stakes upon which my sense of 'reversal' in and of aesthetics turns. The poles of that poem are the coordinates of my reading of Adorno, Blanchot, and Kant. And this is precisely because of the way the poem proposes a figure – polarity – which is at once rooted in a specific historical moment, and opened (at its other end) to a futurity which is not merely uncertain, but divested of determination. The poem is configured by indeterminate ends, which it encodes into the poem in the figure of polarity. There is no end to such reading, no point of negation or (polar) attraction to which the poem's figurative work tends, let alone resolves. It traces over the conditions for speaking in common without giving a common ground for speech. This, indeed, is the reversal of Kant, from within Kantian reflection, which I undertake to read in this thesis. On what ground, Kant asks, might we say that something is true when there is no ground for such judgement other than the reflective procedures of that judgement? On what ground, Celan asks, might we say 'we' when that 'we' identifies no 'us', no object, no people? *As if we could be we without us*. How does a poem speak (write) towards that 'you', that object which is not only not there, but the absence of which the poem *inscribes*? What form of judgement would hold these coordinates together – saying we without us, speaking *as if* there were an object to speak to or about, holding that shared way objectivity is lost to such a judgement as the common ground of judgement? The aesthetic conceived by Kant gives us resources to make these questions *visible*, and the poem (and much of Celan's poetry) gives is a reading *of that visibility* which reflectively reverses the Kantian ends of that aesthetic judgement.

And so, although I have switched between the 'visibility' of form afforded by the aesthetic, and what the aesthetic makes 'legible' or readable, I do not want to leave this difference ambiguous. My focus on poetry, and on writing, is a focus on *aesthetic legibility*. By this I do not mean the 'aesthetic' way that art makes things perceptible, but the way in which that process is itself readable. I turn to poetics to develop this form of reading. If the activity of politics is framed by the political, then the activity of poetry is framed by the poetic. Poetics is the study of the conditions of the work of poetry, as aesthetics is the study of the conditions of the work of art. The definition of poetics is as ambivalent as aesthetics. It can refer to the technical *features* of poetry, or to a broader *theory* of poetry. Like aesthetics, poetics is internally organised around this reflection between the technical specifics of a poem, and the theoretical significance of poetry. In both senses, poetics accounts for the way language becomes *legibly* poetic. Poetics is often opposed to hermeneutics (explaining how language functions,

[28] See the appendix for the poem. But also see my reserve in not reading the poem here as an introduction to it, and to my reading, which I am attempting merely to frame here.

rather than what it means). But by tracing aesthetic reflection as a *function* of poetics, we could develop a poetics of interpretation, and a poetics of aesthetics: a kind of reading in which reflective indeterminacy becomes legible. Poetry, at least in my reading of Celan, prompts us to read according to indeterminacy, and therefore to read indeterminately. This poetic procedure of indeterminate reflection generates a hermeneutic where that reflection is shared, in reading. Celan's poetics, we shall see, encode a future indeterminacy of reading, in which meaning is 'not beyond' the poem.

In turning to poetics, I want to suggest that we can make sense of this poetic use of reflection through the concept of 'figuration'. My emphasis on figuration has two motivations. Firstly, figuration is the transformation of ideas into images. It therefore involves reflection, through the reflective production of imagery in language. But, secondly, the end of such figuration requires interpretation. The work of figuration might be transformative, but it is also indeterminate. It encodes the necessity of the interpretation of its meanin. Figuration therefore mimics conceptuality. Where a concept determines the characteristics of an object by establishing its identity with the concept, the figure is reflectively exposed to an indeterminate identity. The end of figurative transformation remains undecided. The work of figuration is therefore 'aesthetic' in the sense that it employs reflection without identifying it. Poetry's use of figuration reflects the work of aesthetics. The dynamic interpretative relationship between a poem's text and its context is, in this sense, organised by the figure: interpretation itself requires a reflective construction of the possible ends which a poem proposes without at the same time determining them. The activity of interpretation is figurative to the extent that reading means responding to the indeterminate ways that what one reads is dynamically constructed in the activity of reading. And this kind of reading is encoded in the poetry I read here. And so, finally, reading such poetry gives form to the way aesthetics functions *as indeterminate*: the way that the reflection which constitutes aesthetic judgement and experience is *figurable*, not limited to the constraints of aesthetic judgement itself; and the way that such figuration is part of the articulation of aesthetics. This way of reading aesthetics gives form to the way aesthetic reflection indeterminately emerges in inaesthetic contexts: in politics (through community), philosophy (through the dialectics of presence), and, indeed, in the language of poetry. This constitutes the structure of this thesis. The figurability of the aesthetic is made legible through poetics, which gives formal legibility to the poetic, indeterminate, figurative activity of reading and interpretation. Reading poetry gives us the formal resources to re-read the aesthetic.

Kant proposes the idea that aesthetic judgements are autonomous, neither moral nor information based judgements about the world, however much a role reflection plays in constituting and conditioning those determining judgements. The reflection set into play in aesthetic experience is the same reflection employed in determining judgements. The aesthetic, reflecting judgement is therefore both collaborative with and autonomous from conceptual judgements. By turning to poetry, we can develop a form for reading the unanticipated, indeterminate, and reflective work of concepts. The ends of such reflection are not determined by the aesthetic, but it is possible to read these ends in

their indeterminacy. Poetry offers a form of such legibility. By reading poetry, we can read back these 'ends' of aesthetics.[29]

In *The Poetics of Indeterminacy*, Marjorie Perloff argues that, although poetry might open language to its 'indeterminate', uncontrolled reference, the range of that reference is always structurally contained by the 'poetics' employed: by the system of poetry itself from which an individual poem derives meaning.[30] Meaning is developed systematically, structurally. This suggests that a poem is always generically measured against this system of meaning.[31] My contention here is that such an activity of measurement has conditions of legibility, and therefore an aesthetic. This measurement can therefore be developed into a *poetics* of those aesthetics, in which the terms of such reflective measurement are made legible in reading poetry. A poetics of aesthetics could make visible the way such an aesthetics could operate. The formal conditions of reading poetry are indeterminate, in that poetry constructs its own conditions; reading poetry thus offers *forms for aesthetic experience*, and not just forms where the aesthetic is operative. As my title suggests, the thesis moves from 'aesthetics' to 'poetics', in order to move from the 'visibility' of form to the 'legibility' of the aesthetic conditions of form itself. This turn, this 'reversal', is performed, firstly, by establishing the reflective form of Kantian aesthetics; then, secondly, by establishing the susceptibility of those aesthetics to 'reading' and 're-reading'; and then, thirdly, by developing such a 'reading' as a way both to 'read' poetry, and to demonstrate poetry's effective 're-reading' of the aesthetic conditions of reading. These three methodological coordinates set the terms of the thesis. They are, necessarily, developed rather in tandem. This is because my contention is that Kant's version of the aesthetic contains the formal seed of its own re-reading. We are already, in reading Kant, performing the kind of 'unworking' of aesthetics Blanchot will develop for writing, and the 'negative' of conceptual determination Adorno will develop for dialectics, and the 'indeterminacy' of figuration that will shape Celan's poetics. The point, then, is to develop the terms and conditions of such legibility. My claim is that, firstly, we can develop such a legibility by thinking about the aesthetic as 'figurable'. Secondly, this 'figurability' can be considered a 'reversal' of the ends of Kantian aesthetics, by the means of Kantian aesthetic reflection. 'Reversal'

[29] As Gary Banham recognises, in *Kant and the Ends of Aesthetics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), this recruitment of *aesthetic* reflection for *teleological* purposiveness is implicit in Kant's account of the reflecting power of judgement. The aesthetic has its own 'ends', but they are *indeterminate*, and therefore not conceptually proper ends at all. Thinking such 'ending' involves thinking teleologically and reflectively. But I want also to suggest, here, that such thinking invokes an aesthetic legibility itself. For such negative, indeterminate 'end' to be visible, it must be reflectively legible. Poetry offers a formal account of such legibility.

[30] Perloff, Marjorie, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981)

[31] See Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1975), for an account of this 'structural' reading of genre that my study of Adorno and Blanchot, in a way, precedes or sets the scene for. Part of my task here is to reintroduce apparently inaesthetic criticism to its aesthetic assumptions.

acts as the figure for this reflection, and as a figure works reflectively: its ends must be read in their indeterminacy, and through the close legibility of poetry.

Buffaloes: indeterminacy and figurability

My contention is that the kind of reflective forms of judgement theorised in Kant's aesthetic can give form to a politics of spontaneity and indeterminacy, or at least the questions about it. This contemporary pre-occupation is anticipated and strikingly brought into play by Rosa Luxemburg. Luxemburg's response to the Russian revolution in a way anticipates the kind of 'indeterminate aesthetics' developed in response to the political crisis marked by May '68, to which Adorno, Blanchot, and Celan respond. And Luxemburg becomes an important point of orientation for Celan. Politics is not just a question of visibility, but also of measurement. Its change depends upon a capacity to measure present *impossibility* against a future *possibility*. Its determination is reserved in the future. In this it resembles my sense of the figure. Any present measurement of politics depends upon its present indeterminacy. If we are, as, in reading Rosa Luxemburg, Jacqueline Rose suggests, to develop a 'poetics of revolution',[32] then we must consider this figurative form of measurement in which a revolutionary future might emerge for politics. In this reading, it is not a matter of determining the uncertain ways politics can manifest, but of making legible the indeterminate form of manifestation of the political. We can make my sense of the figure clearer through Paul Celan's development in his poem 'Coagula', written between 1962-1965, of a poetics that responds directly to Luxemburg's indeterminate 'spontaneity', and which shows that such a politics traces the outline of indeterminate aesthetics.

Coagula
Your wound
too, Rosa.

And the hornslight of your
Romanian buffaloes

in star's stead above the
sandbed, in the
talking, red-
ember-mighty
alembic.[33]

In a letter from 1917, Luxemburg, looking through the grill of her prison bars in Breslau, describes the mistreatment of buffaloes in the yard outside. They are, she guesses, from Romania. Imagining their journey from that past to this present means elegising them, measuring the distance between this present and their lost past through the loss which that present embodies. 'How far away,

[32] Rose, Jacqueline, *Women in Dark Times* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 40
[33] BIT 76-77|78-79

how irretrievably lost were the beautiful, free, tender-green fields of Romania.'[34] Here is exile, not Romania. Here is Romania in exile. Such measurement involves not only the imaginative displacement of the *objective* scene, but also a subjective displacement through imagination, a *self-displacement*. Identifying with the buffaloes means, in an imaginative sense, dis-identifying from the self. 'I stood before it, and the beast looked at me; tears were running down my face—they were **his** tears.'[35] She does not cry as herself, but as the buffalo; 'I' is displaced into the third person, 'him'. There is a displacement of affect, here, that does not just prompt 'my' feelings, but insists on the displacement of that 'I' with the affect of the other. Not only is 'here' exile, but 'I' am exiled by this here. Engaging reflectively with this other means disengaging with myself, in which this 'otherness' takes my place. 'My face'; '**his** tears'. Luxemburg herself becomes the figurative space in which the buffaloes' exile becomes legible, literally, in writing this letter, and in which figurative identification their exile is opened, indeterminately, to other identifications: first of all, Luxemburg's own. Figurative displacement becomes the condition for identification.

In 'Coagula,' Celan draws upon this letter (or at least we can read this letter into the poem). Celan no doubt draws upon his own self-displacement in rendering Luxemburg's response to these buffalos into his own poem. In this alchemical poem, Luxemburg, in her displacement, becomes a figure of identification. The poem's subject is not 'Rosa', but her 'wound': 'Auch deine | Wunde, Rosa' – 'You wound | too, Rosa'.[36] The poem draws in this wound, opens with this fissure, this wound, adding it to the 'buffaloes' hornslight'. And Celan's history is drawn in, too, with the buffaloes and Romania, from which (writing now in the 1960s, in Paris) Celan was exiled. But Romania is already a site of displacement for Celan.[37] His own home country, Bukowina, was not only, like the buffaloes' Romania, lost for him, but lost entirely, subsumed after the war into Ukraine and Romania. Rosa, imprisoned in Breslau and eventually murdered in Berlin,[38] was, like Celan, from the East (Poland), and so like Celan (as he writes in 'Coagula's' alchemical companion poem 'Solve') 'De-easterned';[39] and as Jewish, in a more profound sense 'de-easterned' in exile from Jerusalem.[40] But in 'Coagula' we do not get such easy identifications. The poem does not make simple affective identifications. The poem is open to the displacement of 'you', to the exile of 'you', the displacement of orientation itself, of the east, of an object to mourn. This is the paradox of identification: that any identification proceeds from a

[34] Luxemburg, Rosa, *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, ed. by Georg Adler, Peter Hudis, and Annelies Laschitza, trans. by George Shriver (London and New York: Verso, 2011), 1069

[35] Ibid.

[36] BIT 76|77

[37] Celan lived and studied briefly in Bucharest.

[38] Peter Szondi suggests that Luxemburg's death is the subject of another poem, 'Eden': Szondi, Peter, *Celan Studies*, trans. by Susan Bernofsky and Harvey Mendelsohn (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 83-96

[39] We shall return to the vexed translation of this important word later in the thesis.

[40] A missing heritage drawn upon repeatedly, in Celan's poetry, by the image of the 'horn'.

displacement. How would we recognise that displacement, without replacing it, without the poem standing aesthetically (symbolically, figuratively, or emphatically) in for what is lost? The poem does not just mourn a lost object, or a lost homeland, or a lost friend, but a loss of *loss*, a loss of that capacity to identify effectively what is lost

Luxemburg identifies with the animal, writing, '[p]oor wretch, I am as powerless, as dumb, as yourself; I am at one with you in my pain, my weakness, and my longing.'[41] The animal is a figure of her own suffering. But Celan laments a 'you' to lament. There is no you, no point of imaginative figuration; not just a lost object, but a loss of objectivity: 'your wound', not 'you'. I contend, in this thesis, that Kant's aesthetic also traces this loss of objectivity. The reflecting aesthetic judgement responds to a cognitive incapacity to determine its object. It responds by turning inwards, and identifying that reflective work with the subject itself. As such, the object is present in aesthetic judgement, but indeterminately present. And the subject is made aware of the 'objectivity' of the subjective faculties, imagination and understanding. This judgement recuperates reflection for subjective experience. In this way, it releases a usual suspension of the subject's own bodily and cognitive 'objectivity', the subject's self-presence for consciousness. But it does so by suspending the object's objectivity. This disparity opens Kant's aesthetic up to its own possible figurative displacement. In order to make moral judgements effective in the world, they have to an extent to be emptied of effect: there must be a ground *beyond* either the world or the subject, that is nonetheless shared by both, that validates reason in constructing moral judgements. Finding this ground is the task of Kant's third *Critique*, and Kant finds his answer in reflection itself. As Celan's poem shows us in reading Luxemburg, such a capacity to make moral judgements effective depends upon a suspension of the self in the place of the other. A poetic capacity for 'I' to speak to 'you', to configure 'you' into a poem, depends upon a figurative capacity to identify not just *with* the other (I feel sorry for these buffaloes), but *as* the other (I cry their tears), which threatens to displace the other's affect through symbolising it. In grounding an objective capacity to identify moral effectiveness in the subjective capacity to judge, Kant similarly threatens to suspend that object. The poem discloses this act of figuration for what it is, and thereby exposes it to the multiple suspensions of identity which figures outline. The poem does not more effectively make moral identifications. It *reflects* the way those identifications operate.

In this sense, the poem shows in microcosm the reading this thesis will undertake as a whole. Kant's sense of reflection usefully discloses the reflective forms of identification that hold in political structures, and the reflective relations that structure them. But to make this disclosure legible, this reflection must itself be susceptible to the reflections of reading. There must be a legibility of reflection. The poem affords this legibility to the identifications made by reflection.

[41] Luxemburg, *Letters*, 1070

Critical dialogue: Celan not encountering Heidegger

We can see the disconnection that puts dialogue at stake by reading Celan through Heidegger's poetic philosophy – a common starting point for the critical narrative of the entanglement of poetry with twentieth-century literary theory. In this thesis, I want to offer a counter-narrative to this Celan-Heidegger nexus. Reading Celan through Heidegger elides Celan's engagement with politics. The concern of this thesis with aesthetic indeterminacy is motivated by the indeterminacy of the politics. Celan reads Hölderlin in parallel with Heidegger, and, despite their difficult encounters and the difficulty that attends Heidegger's politics for Celan,[42] together the two sketch out one post-war future for poetry: as the site where being might speak.[43] Certainly, Celan's close readings of Heidegger bleed into his vocabulary. But we can read Celan with Heidegger, and thus endorse Heidegger's valorisation of language in philosophy, only at the expense of the political in Celan's poetics.[44] This is more than just a matter of Heidegger's veiled and unveiled National Socialist affinities. The kind of 'fusional' relation which this narrative affords between Celan and Heidegger, between poetry and philosophy, elides over exactly the possibility of political discontinuity. The anxious theoretical inheritance of Heidegger slips into a paralleled blindness in reading Celan. If Heidegger's historical situation closes off the political (we can read everything in Heidegger *but* politics), then, it follows, Celan's poetry writes up to the limit of politics. While it is certainly viable to read Heideggerian poetics through Celan's poetry (and beyond), this comes at the expense of a poetics of the political, a poetics which could engage with precisely the 'realities' of history and political relation which Celan, throughout but

[42] It is correct to emphasise Celan's Jewishness here, which coloured much of his thinking and life, not least his exilic relation to history and to his own German language. See Felstiner, John, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), who emphasises the significance of Celan's personal experience of the Holocaust, '*was Geschah*': '[i]f language had any point after "that which happened," it was to name the eclipse without profaning it' (153). This tension over the functional 'ends' of poetry shapes my thinking about the 'ends' of Kantian aesthetics.

[43] This maximal position is advanced by Dennis J. Schmidt in 'Black Milk and Blue: Celan and Heidegger on Pain and Language', in *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, ed. by Aris Fioretos (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 110-129, for whom Celan was 'drawn' to Heidegger's 'kindred sensibility' (123). See also Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, trans. by Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988): 'I think one can assert that it is, in its entirety, a dialogue with Heidegger's thought.' (33). Mark M. Anderson, in 'The "Impossibility of Poetry": Celan and Heidegger in France', in *New German Critique*, 53 (1991), pp. 3-18, suggests that we would be mistaken in asserting that Celan articulates 'Being's' history as the 'exit from the human'', in which the Holocaust marks a sublime unrepresentable point of history (see especially 14-17); see also Pöggeler, Otto, *Spur des Worts. Zur Lyrik Paul Celans* (Freiburg and Munich: Karl Abler, 1986), 249. A more detailed exposition of the dialogue with Heidegger comes in Lyon, James K., *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger: An Unresolved Conversation, 1951-1970* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

[44] For this dialogue with Heidegger through the poetic figuration of reality, and especially the reconstitution of poetry's 'ontic' character from an 'ontologisation' of reality, see Nowell-Smith, David, *Sounding/Silence: Martin Heidegger at the Limits of Poetics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); see also Bambach, Charles, *Thinking the Poetic Measure of Justice* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013), 213-8.

particularly in his late work, not just endorses but insists upon. I think that this accounts for some of the accusations of late hermeticism in Celan's work, emphatically resisted on his part.[45] Celan seems hermetic when decontextualized, when dehistoricised, even as his poetry apparently resists the presence of history.

We might, indeed, be more faithful to Celan's difficult relation to Heidegger precisely by countering it. My hope is that my reading of Celan in this thesis through Adorno and Blanchot will unfold something of a suppressed relation between these two thinkers, might present an opportunity to think of these uncommon writers 'in common'. And this is my political point. The divergence of method or narrative between these writers itself constitutes one 'aesthetic' fate of the political. This introduces, inevitably, though in reverse – which is to say, read from the perspective of its future displacement – upon Kant's concept of aesthetic theory. I want to trace the ways in which Kant both establishes and displaces the space for the political in his aesthetic theory by reading that double movement – placement, displacement – from the perspective of Adorno's and Blanchot's re-writing of political, communal aesthetics. But I also want to trace this movement as a relation between these writers. This is Celan's point of entry.[46] Celan's poetics offer the figurative space where this relation can be read. Before his death, Adorno hoped to write about Celan, sketches of which hope survive in the fragmented and posthumous *Aesthetic Theory*. Blanchot only wrote about Celan in elegy, after his death. Historically, then, the relation is already displaced: exilic, fragmented, posthumous, hopeful. But the relation is also historically concentrated. Much of the writing where this 'displaced' aesthetic-political relation is worked out spirals towards or away from May '68. The date marks Adorno's sad humiliation and decline, and, in Germany at least, a kind of reversal of the hopes for critical theory, for the desperately grasped autonomy of aesthetic thinking, in the student occupation of the Frankfurt School buildings: a political movement which, in hoping to embody the nonidentical political, instead erases the conditions of its possible legibility. In Paris, both Blanchot and Celan lived ambiguously in the throes of the student-worker insurrection, and their responses generate a tautly ambiguous sense of 'community' which both reads back into Kantian aesthetic theory and against the apparently liberal politics by which *les évènements* were subsequently narrated. Adorno, Blanchot, and Celan all therefore

[45] In a dedication of his copy of *Niemandsrose* to Michael Hamburger, Celan inscribed 'Absolutely not hermetic', after mistakenly attributing an accusation of hermeticism in a TLS review to Hamburger. See *Poems of Paul Celan*, 4th edition, trans. by Michael Hamburger (New York: Persea Books, 2002), xxix, and 351-4.

[46] For Blanchot, Celan mediates his own vexed recuperation of Heidegger. In a letter to Catherine David from 1988, Blanchot writes of Heidegger's 'refusal, faced with Paul Celan, to ask for forgiveness, a refusal that threw Celan into despair and made him sick, for Celan knew, that in the face of the West, the Shoah was the revelation of its essence. And that it was necessary to preserve its memory in common, even if it meant losing all peace, but in order to preserve the possibility of a relation to others.' *Maurice Blanchot: Political Writings, 1953-1993*, ed., trans. by Zakir Paul (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 123. 'Faced with Paul Celan', Blanchot evokes the political stakes of commonality, relation to others, in relation to this caesural event. Celan, for his part, was 'struck, dismayed' upon hearing of Adorno's death in 1969, a year before his own. Quoted in Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, 263

resisted politics for the sake of the political, a sense of 'the political' which is decisively aesthetic. My argument is that we can read in this resistance a kind of pre-history to the theoretical manipulations of the aesthetic in the theoretical afterlife of '68. And this pre-history *disturbs* the historical by unfolding its aesthetic roots, *disturbs* the communal by expressing its plural, indeterminate, aesthetic roots. Celan's poetry, and the elegiac re-inscription of his already elegiac poetics in English language poetry of the 70s – I look at Geoffrey Hill and JH Prynne – marks a point of departure, an exilic movement, which describes one fate of aesthetic theory. My hope is that we can expose, in this counter-Heideggerian narrative, some of the aesthetic pre-history of contemporary literary theory and philosophy, but also hold on to some of that ambiguously held sense of political autonomy which so strangely marks Blanchot's, Adorno's, and, perhaps even less hopefully but more hoped for, Celan's writing, 'a hope, ~~today~~, | for a thinking man's | (coming) | word | in the heart'.[47]

[47] Celan's poem 'Todtnauberg', chronicling a visit to Heidegger's hut, added, to his original inscription in Heidegger's guest book, the words 'today' and 'thinker's', meaning the erasure I have superadded is in reverse: a hope which is added after it has been disappointed. The word might be coming, might still be coming, and the word marks that hope after its possibility (the thinking man's, Heidegger's) has been disappointed. This poem marks today the expectation of future fulfilment which minimally marks hope.

CHAPTER ONE

On Reversal: Kant, Hegel, and reflection in aesthetics

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the way Kant accounts for reflection in his aesthetic. Kant uses the aesthetic to mandate philosophically for reflection in judgement. But here, I want to suggest that the indeterminate ways Kant establishes this mandate gives room to turn Kant's account of reflection against itself. There is a negativity to Kant's presentation of reflection. My contention in this chapter is that Kant's aesthetic gives form both to reflection and to a reflexive reading, to which it is at the same time susceptible. Kant is read according to a 'reflection' he describes in his aesthetic. I describe this reflexive reading as 'reversal'. 'Reversal' is a structuring principle of Kant's account of aesthetic judgement, but it is also a figure through which Kant's aesthetic can be read. It shows how Kant's account of the aesthetic speaks of a wider figurability of the aesthetic itself. This figure, 'reversal', structures the way that Kant is the subject of both exposition and critique, and the way that his aesthetic provides a structure of reflection which can give form to such a reading by 'reversal'. I will develop here what I mean by 'figure', and by 'reversal', in reading Kant's aesthetic.

Why this indeterminacy of reflection, and this reversal of determination in aesthetics? For Kant, aesthetic judgement is both grounded in and coordinated by reflection, in such a way that the procedures of cognition are turned against themselves. In determining judgement, the subject uses a concept to determine something particular. The reflecting judgement works in 'reverse' of determining judgement. It proceeds from the particular, and from subjective experience. Its ends are indeterminate. It accounts for the way experience is itself experienced, whether 'aesthetically' (in judgements of taste) or 'teleologically' (in judgements about the reflective organisation of nature). Kant uses reflecting judgement to account for the indeterminate ways beauty and organisms are experienced. Such judgement does not finally determine these experiences, but it does still claim a universal validity. In this insistence on the validity of indeterminacy, Kant gives form to non-conceptual experience, and to a non-conceptual employment of judgement. In this chapter, I trace the way Kant gives form to indeterminacy through reflection. But I also argue that this form is not contained by the aesthetic, instead exposing the subject to a reflection which is *indeterminate*. My contention is that Kant's

judgement works figuratively, and that although it gives form to reflective experience, it is also subject to reflection itself. This will have consequences for the way the aesthetic works after Kant.

I begin after Kant, with Hegel, in order to show, firstly, how Hegel attempts to recover reflection from this Kantian indeterminacy, and therefore, secondly, why Kant's aesthetic remains useful for an account of the kinds of reflective indeterminacy that we will encounter in Adorno, Blanchot, and Celan. Precisely because reflection, as Kant suggests, is indeterminate – as a non-conceptual experience with non-conceptual ends – the ways it can be used or configured are indeterminate in ways he does not acknowledge. But Kant's focus on the necessary *negativity* of aesthetic experience and judgement means that his aesthetic can offer a form for thinking through the presentation of negativity. This distinguishes Kant from Hegel in aesthetics, but also offers a way, through Kantian aesthetics, to read against Hegel's recruitment of negativity for the positive telos of conceptual dialectics. Kant's account of such 'negative presentation' gives form to a negativity which Hegel's dialectics threaten to elide. This becomes clear through reading Adorno's and Blanchot's use of aesthetics (in Kant's negative sense) to develop a counter-reading of Hegel. In examining Kant's aesthetic, and what a 'reversal' in – and of – that aesthetic would be, we can develop a 'negative' version of aesthetics which might intervene in Hegel's version of dialectical negation; and therefore, through Kant, we can find a way to the late twentieth-century interventions into dialectics through 'aesthetics' by Adorno and Blanchot.

I will firstly give an account of this Hegelian turn. Hegel turns from Kant. But Adorno's and Blanchot's differently motivated turns from Hegel can be coordinated through a turn back to Kant. Secondly, I detail Kantian aesthetics and teleology, with reference to his wider critical project, in order to flesh out the idea of the 'reversal' of reflection and its 'figurability', mapped out in Kant's aesthetics. Finally, I develop this figure of 'reversal' more explicitly, by looking at poetry as a turning point (re-verse) for aesthetic judgement, and concluding with a discussion of the methodological and critical implications of developing this 'figurative' reading of Kant's aesthetics.

1 – Not Hegel: Hegel, Kant, and negativity

i. Hegel and the ends of aesthetics

In this section, we trace Hegel's critique of Kantian aesthetics at the point of reflection. The different uses each assign to reflection in the aesthetic marks a difference in their conception of negativity. By tracing Hegel's sense of reflection, we can see how Kant organises reflection indeterminately in his

own aesthetic, and therefore how Kant gives access to Adorno's and Blanchot's critiques of Hegel at this point of the indeterminacy of reflection.

Hegel 'turns' from Kant in the sense that he turns the procedures of Kant's aesthetic against their Kantian ends. For Kant, reflecting, aesthetic judgement does not claim any *objective* validity, but merely the *subjective* validity of its own reflective work. And the ends of such aesthetic judgement are not in determinate concepts, but remain indeterminate: the 'common sense' of intersubjectivity (from aesthetic judgements of taste); and the 'connections' that organise nature (from teleological judgement). For Hegel, however, reflection is not merely a subjective experience, but a structuring principle manifest in objective artworks. For Hegel, reflection does not merely configure experience, but, in its manifestation in art, gives it sensuous form. Art is only indeterminate in the sense that it precedes philosophy, which finally determines it. Art thinks in sensuous form what cannot yet be thought conceptually. Its indeterminacy is therefore recoverable for philosophy, once conceptual thinking becomes adequate to the Idea art thinks sensuously. The reflections of aesthetic judgement form part of a more systematic dialectic by showing how the Idea can be manifested sensuously. But in Adorno's and Blanchot's critiques of Hegel, it is exactly this manifestation through negation that is under question. Hegel recruits the indeterminacy of reflection, felt in aesthetic experience, to give structure to the reflective, speculative ways dialectical thinking negates what is indeterminate for it. Hegel's critique of Kant therefore makes visible the parameters of a critique of Hegelian negation. By showing how, for Hegel, the manifestation of reflection in art deals with reflection's indeterminacy, we can develop an aesthetics of non-manifestation which could turn against this Hegelian model of reflection.

Hegel famously announces that art, considered 'in its highest vocation [*ihre höchsten Bestimmung*]', 'is and remains for us a thing of the past [*ein Vergangenes*]'.[1] What limits art? Art's 'highest vocation' would be the manifestation of truth. This is not, as Schiller had it, merely the 'appearance' of truth; nor, as Kant had it, a true (but subjective) pleasure. For Hegel, the Ideal of art is the sensuous manifestation of truth. In art, the Concept is reconciled with external appearance. Art is 'true' to the extent that it manifests, objectively, the Idea, which would otherwise be subjective. Historically, this means that, to use one of Hegel's examples, a Greek sculptor makes manifest the idea of human perfection which could not yet be articulated *as* an idea. Art *shows* that human perfection is true. But this manifestation is also art's limit. Although Hegel characterises art as one of the three modes in which the absolute might appear, alongside religion and philosophy, it is the least of these modes precisely because it is limited to appearance. 'The beautiful [*Schöne*] has its being in pure appearance [*Schein*]'.[2] Art, as beautiful, makes the Idea appear. To the extent that it is beautiful, art is Ideal: it is the actual reconciliation, in sensuous form, of the internal force of subjectivity (Spirit, the Concept)

[1] HA, 11

[2] HA, 4

with external appearance and sensuous form. In art, the spiritual Concept is reconciled with sensuous appearance. Art is thinking in 'sensuous form', and 'when art is present in its supreme perfection, then precisely in its figurative mode it contains the kind of exposition most essential to and most in correspondence with the content of truth'.[3] Art's claims to truth are the claims of manifestation: as beautiful, art 'truly' makes the Concept appear.[4] As Ideal, art is the appearance of reconciliation. So art is the sensuous embodiment of the Concept; but it is also the 'ensouling' of mere sensuous matter. As beautiful, lifeless matter 'shines' with spiritual content. What is beautiful is 'ensouled': 'the Concept ensouls the real existence which embodies it, and therefore is free and at home with itself in this objectivity'.[5] Beauty thereby articulates the adequacy of natural, and artificial, form for spirit – but also the limits of this adequacy. The necessity of art's appearance constrains the spiritual Concept which is, for Hegel, really absolute and universal. There is therefore a complex and collaborative compromise in art between organic and manifest 'life', and the Spirit that 'ensouls' it – a dialectic.

> Thereby the sensuous aspect of a work of art, in comparison with the immediate existence of things in nature, is elevated to a pure appearance, and the work of art stands in the *middle* between immediate sensuousness and ideal thought. It is *not yet* pure thought, but, despite its sensuousness, is *no longer* a purely material existent either, like stones, plants, and organic life; on the contrary, the sensuous in the work of art is itself something ideal, but which, not being ideal as thought is ideal, is still at the same time there externally as a thing.[6]

Art mediates the Idea. Art is limited by the necessity of appearance, and so is aesthetic experience. Although art can refine the beauty that appears in nature, such that art can become Ideal, 'whereby the inner soul and spirit is seen at every point',[7] to be adequate to the Absolute it must relinquish sensuous particularity. Ideal art might be wholly 'ensouled', but Spirit itself requires the self-transparency of philosophy, and the philosophical articulation of the Concept which unfolds from its own form. Art passes firstly to the specific appearance of Spirit in religious images, and then to this self-transparency without appearance in philosophy. As a vehicle of Spirit, art is finite, precisely because its material, like nature's, is finitude itself; whereas Spirit, if it is free, is infinite.[8]

---

[3] HA, 102

[4] See Pippin, Robert B., 'What Was Abstract Art? (From the Point of View of Hegel)', *Critical Inquiry*, 29:1 (Autumn 2002), pp. 1-24, for a discussion of Hegel's relevance, again, to art 'after' the end of art, specifically when its 'figurative' work is overtaken – after its figurative work of correspondence. 'Figuration' as I use it, however, is not necessarily representation in the Hegelian sense.

[5] HA, 112

[6] HA, 38

[7] HA, 153-4

[8] HA, 97-100; see also 'Absolute Knowing' in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and *The Science of Logic*, trans. by George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), where Hegel distinguishes between 'immediate' being (which in the aesthetic is associated with aesthetic experience) and the 'essence' which

For Hegel, art articulates spiritual truth by embodying it. But in order to think the spiritual 'in itself', one must turn away from art. Art is a transitory moment in the history of Spirit. This transition away from art, however, is effected by the very reflection art presents. Art operates reflectively. It is constituted by the reflective way Spirit is manifested in sensuous appearance. The external appearance is not identical with Spirit, but art's 'outside' is not just mere matter either.[9] Its strange, medial quality is conferred by aesthetic experience. A person recognises the way an artwork mediates subjective form through an object, and this recognition registers the subjective way that objective artworks function. The artwork is an object constituted by subjective reflection.

> What is thus displayed is the depth of a suprasensuous world which thought pierces and sets up at first as a *beyond* in contrast with immediate consciousness and present feeling; it is the freedom of intellectual reflection which rescues itself from the *here* and now, called sensuous reality and finitude. But this breach, to which the spirit proceeds, it is also able to heal. It generates out of itself works of fine art as the first reconciling middle term between pure thought and what is merely external, sensuous, and transient, between nature and finite reality and the infinite freedom of conceptual thinking.[10]

The artwork is torn between presentation and representation.[11] The spiritual 'beyond' that it reflects is 'suprasensuous', but its material is markedly sensuous. Art constitutes, to pre-empt Blanchot, a kind of 'not beyond'. Its reflective work therefore *presents* the form of spirit, but is insufficient to *represent* it. Art instantiates reflection, but this reflection is taken on by thinking itself: the experience of art supersedes what art presents.[12] Once art has disclosed to us the *form* of this reflection, then that reflection exceeds the particular presentation of the artwork. It is for this reason that, historically, art is a 'thing of the past': it 'has rather been transferred into our *ideas* instead of maintaining its earlier necessity in reality and occupying its higher place.'[13] We stand in need not of art, but of a *philosophy of art*. Without such a universalisation of reflection in philosophy, art would be limited to local historical presentation, and its ahistorical significance would be missed. This means going beyond art. In aesthetic experience, we must consider the way that art's objectivity is not sufficient either to the production or

---

is not beyond being, but *mediated* being (337). Nature's immediacies are only true, 'essential', when mediated by spirit; a process which art leaves incomplete because tied to the appearance of the 'immediate'.

[9] HA, 20: 'the inner shines in the outer and makes itself known through the outer, since the outer points away from itself to the inner'; and in beautiful organisms, too, there is this structural relation between inside and outside: human skin, for example, discloses 'this swelling life', even though merely functional: 'skin itself, which permits the inner life to shine through it, is an external covering for self-preservation, merely a purposeful means in the service of nature ends.' (146)

[10] HA, 8

[11] See Taylor, Charles, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p.468, on art's '*Darstellung*' compared with religion's '*Vorstellung*'. Art is indefinite presentation. 'The work of art renders something, is faithful to something. But what it is faithful to it does not describe.' (472)

[12] HA, 103: 'the '*after*' of art consists in the fact that there dwells in the spirit the need to satisfy itself solely in its own inner self as the true form for truth to take'.

[13] HA, 10

the experience of precisely the reflection it presents. Art is lacking, and it presents what it lacks. 'Art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is.'[14] The beauty of art may well be '*born of the spirit and born again*',[15] but what it births is reflection, not art.

This is the situation that explicitly confronts Adorno in his *Aesthetic Theory*. Once art, as he writes there, has become 'autonomous', has liberated itself from its 'cultic functions',[16] then what does it do?[17] This autonomy is 'irrevocable'.[18] And this is the situation that less explicitly confronts Blanchot in his account of writing. There is, to use Blanchot's word, a *désœuvrement* – an 'unworking' – of art by art, after Hegel: if its function is actively to reconcile truth and appearance, then its 'untrue' appearance 'unworks' that function. What do we make of art's *appearance* when it no longer manifests truth? Hegel's 'retrospective' sense of art's history (henceforth we are 'after' art as mediator of the Concept) reflects his 'retrospective' sense of the dialectic's synthetic operations. Absolute knowledge contains the now reconciled history of its articulation; it comes *after* history. And the reflective 'truth' of aesthetic experience negates the history of art's truthful appearance in artworks. The aesthetic therefore parallels the dialectic, and offers a possible way into it. Art, too, has a history of its articulation. And art for Hegel implies a teleology. Art asks the question of its futurity. The 'end' of art is a question about the form of its displacement, as well as the ambiguous form of its telos. The question of this chapter, and this thesis, is not therefore about the 'end' of art, but about the various 'ends' of aesthetic thinking, and the 'figurability' of those ends (their translatability) into unexpected futures. And Kant, not Hegel, provides a form for thinking these ends.

What can we gain for an understanding of the 'end' or 'ends' of art or aesthetics from relating Kantian aesthetics to Hegel's? We can register how the shift from the subjective experience of 'beauty' to the objective reconciliations of 'art' reinvests Kantian aesthetics with the question of 'history' and manifestation. Hegel drew upon Kant's account of the aesthetic pleasure taken from the sensed reconciliation between inner subjective experience and external objective form. Hegel agrees with Kant that judgements of taste are not merely sensuous, and therefore contingent: they refer to a subjective

[14] HA, 11

[15] HA, 2

[16] AT, 1

[17] Arthur C. Danto, in *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), argues that art as a 'history' has come to an end, because its representational practices are now liberated; see also Houlgate, Stephen, 'Hegel and the 'End' of Art', in *The Owl of Minerva*, 29:1 (1997), pp.1-21 for an alternative, more 'Hegelian' reading. See also Pippin, Robert B., *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), who argues that Hegel's historicisation of beauty gives us a way to read modern painting's own negotiations with history: the 'problem' of beauty's significance, worked out in painting, makes legible problems of social intelligibility.

[18] AT, 1

capacity to judge, and to a form of judgement, as well as to the form of the object.[19] He also agrees with Kant that, in aesthetic experience, the subject is positioned towards the world differently from the way it is in other conceptual experience: the subject does not desire to appropriate the object, nor, as in science, does the subject desire to abstract knowledge from the object.[20] But for Hegel, the subject *qua* spiritual is also alienated by nature. Nature limits the spiritual freedom of subjective thought.[21] Rather than nature, art mediates subjective experience in objective form through beauty, precisely because art is constructed out of both sensuous material and subjective experience. Its beauty is '*born of the spirit and born again*'.[22] But as Julia Peters points out, we cannot divorce Hegel's claims about the end of art from his sense that beauty, too, develops historically. If art cannot easily be emancipated from beauty, then not only art, but *beauty* too is contentious 'after art'.[23] And we can resituate this question of 'beauty' as a question of the *experience* of art. In other words, we are returned to Kant: the question of the 'end' of art is a question of the subjective forms, including 'beauty', that are the ground of the experience of art, and not just of the objective forms of the particular arts. The *contentiousness* of this subjective form is the ground of Kant's aesthetics. Hegel's project and claims are troubled when 'beauty' is examined in Kantian terms: as a judgement, and as an experience. And the question also turns against itself: what happens to art, and not just to art, but also to aesthetic experience and judgement, 'after' beauty?

ii. Adorno, Blanchot, and the Kantian critique of Hegel

'After' beauty, art's mediating role, mandated to beauty, is revoked. Once art no longer manifests the reflective work of the Idea, beauty is no longer significant. If art lingers, it is indeterminately. We must look elsewhere than Hegel, to Kant, to think this aesthetic indeterminacy. Adorno uses the aesthetic experience of art (which is henceforth, in its indeterminacy, negative) to mount an intervention into Hegelian dialectics, which are not, for Adorno, adequately responsive to their own negativity. Blanchot develops the ways writing is coordinated by indeterminacy in ways that, likewise, intervene in dialectics of negation. We can call both of these interventions 'Kantian' in the sense that they are configured by

[19] HA, 60

[20] HA, 36-7: 'He leaves it free as an object to exist on its own account; he relates himself to it without desire, as to an object which is for the contemplative side of spirit alone.'

[21] See Gardiner, Patrick, 'Kant and Hegel on Aesthetics', in *Hegel's Critique of Kant*, ed. Stephen Priest (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 161-171, and Guyer, Paul, 'Hegel on Kant's Aesthetics: Necessity and Contingency in Beauty and Art', in *Hegel und die "Kritik der Urteilskraft"*, eds. H.-F. Fulda and R.-P. Horstmann (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990), pp. 81-99, for an account of this shift from nature to art, and of Hegel's development of the transient 'necessity' of art.

[22] HA, 2

[23] Peters, Julia, *Hegel on Beauty* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014)

indeterminacy. But they are post-Hegelian in that this indeterminacy is historically motivated. We can see what this means, firstly, in Adorno.

Hegel describes the necessity of philosophy overturning art. Adorno reverses this situation through aesthetics. Aesthetic experience conserves reflection where philosophy abandons it. It is not only that art stands in need of philosophy, *philosophy* stands in need of philosophy. Like art, philosophy stands in need of reflection. For Hegel, art's transience, its provisionality, means its reflective work necessarily passes into the determinate form of philosophy. But for Adorno, it is precisely this persistent provisionality that registers the ways philosophy has failed to become reflective. Aesthetics would respond to this provisionality and, as for Kant, become reflective itself. Aesthetics 'demands of philosophy precisely what philosophy has neglected to do: that it extract phenomena from their existence and bring them to self-reflection'.[24] Adorno suggests that for Hegel, 'it was art and not its prototypical forms that was transient'.[25] The historical manifestations of art are provisional, and so, Hegel infers, must be art as a concept. But Adorno reverses art's transience into a philosophical necessity. Philosophy has failed to do exactly what art is supposed to do: to make the identity of the Concept actually manifest. 'That according to Hegel art was once the adequate stage of spirit and now no longer is, demonstrates a trust in the real progress of consciousness of freedom that has been bitterly disappointed.'[26] Apparently negated, art lingers as *negative* experience in a context where philosophy has failed to manifest the experience of freedom. Art's history is 'inhomogenous'.[27] Its truths are contradictory. But when philosophy requires reflection, this negativity is significant. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno writes that '[p]hilosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realise it was missed'.[28] Philosophy is shown to be necessary in the *formal* way that art was to be shown, by Hegel, to be unnecessary. *Philosophy* lingers in its need for philosophy, just as art lingers in its need for philosophy. Critical aesthetics begins, then, with a need in philosophy. The way that philosophy deals with art – aesthetics – shows us how philosophy has not dealt with itself. Art gives form to a critical need in philosophy.

Adorno's reversal of Hegelian dialectics in *Negative Dialectics* is an attempt not to overturn Hegel's dialectics, but to re-deploy and re-emphasise them. Hegel's dialectics are not negative enough. The significance of thinking of the 'negative' without negating it is that the negative is the motor of thinking.[29] However, if one is to account for the negative, one must account for its *non-manifestation*.

---

[24] AT 341/391

[25] AT 272/309

[26] AT 272/309

[27] AT 273/310

[28] ND 3/15

[29] Molly MacDonald argues that the 'gaps' of negativity 'are the gaps on which the entire movement of consciousness depends. Without the space created in the movement of negation, there would be no state of transformation, no moment in which a retrospective understanding of the preceding shapes of consciousness

If the negative could be 'posited' or 'grasped', then it would not offer the indeterminate, 'negative' space in which thinking might move or change. Such space must, however, itself be provisional, changing, and unexpected, or else it would merely present opportunities for further self-identification. A 'negative' dialectics would therefore have to develop a model of reflection that could reflect provisionality, without the synthesis of that reflection in a final moment of reconciliation. So where Hegel sees the strength, and limit, of art in 'presentation', in positing as actual what would otherwise be spiritual, Adorno sees, in the situation 'after' Hegel, art's provisional character as 'presenting', in semblance, the kind of reflective experience philosophy lacks. Art does not, for Adorno, posit 'truth' as reconciliation. It posits contradiction. Adorno is concerned with thinking contradiction as contradictory, and with an experience of negativity not negated through experience. What would a dialectics that registered the way it 'negates' contradictory experience be like? For Adorno, contemporary experience is itself contradictory. We live in a 'false world',[30] an 'administered' world,[31] where the contradictions of reason (the myths of enlightenment) are not just manifest but triumphant. We live in a world, that is, which constructs an incapacity for the experience of negativity. Thinking is governed by the principle of identification, which derives from the speculative reconciliations of reflection registered in art. Dialectics must be re-orientated, and re-coordinated, by this negativity which would otherwise be negated. And the motivation for this is the motivation of dialectics itself: experience requires negativity, and the subjective freedom to experience depends upon it.

This attempt to register the experience of negativity also motivated Blanchot, who was involved in the French post-Kojèvian, post Jean Hyppolite readings of Hegelian dialectics.[32] The impetus of Blanchot's fragmentary writing in the 1960s and 1970s, which is the concern of this thesis, is less explicitly anti-Hegelian than in the 1940s and 1950s. There, in 'Literature and the Right to Death' for example, Blanchot argues that the negativity that drives dialectical thinking and activity in the world (the negation of stone and fire in the idea of the stove, for example) is not accounted for by dialectics. There are experiences of negativity not susceptible to negation. The crucial experience is death: there is death as the negation of experience, but also the 'other death', death as the impossibility of negation,

---

could be gained.' *Hegel and Psychoanalysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), p. 107. If dialectics is constructed 'backwards', through the retrospective *Aufhebung* that speculatively recognises the real identity of apparent contradiction, then it has to be able to position itself in this 'negative' way. MacDonald indexes this through Freud, but it can equally be read through Levinas, Derrida, and Blanchot, and their different senses of the dialectical 'trace'. See Bruce Baugh, *French Hegel* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 19-25, who tracks this development in French thinking from Hyppolite through to Derrida. I shall return to this in more detail in chapter three.

[30] AT 15/26; 393/461

[31] AT 268/303

[32] Again, see Baugh, *French Hegel*, who does not place Blanchot on this trajectory, but does establish it in the context Blanchot worked in.

the experience of which is impossible.[33] This kind of negativity without negation is registered in literature. Here the concerns of the anti-Hegelian dialectic develop into Blanchot's later concerns with fragmentary writing. The crucial experience of literature is of fiction – the 'he/it' [*il*] gestured to in *The Step Not Beyond*,[34] the 'third person who is not a third person'[35] in *The Infinite Conversation*, the experience of writing that is positioned 'negatively' in relation to the world, rather than operatively 'negating' the world. Fiction can register the ways experience itself is disastrously fragmented by the negativity by which it is apparently driven. Hegel proposes the negation of contradiction in the way the otherwise subjective Spirit can be reconciled with objective appearance in art. But for Blanchot, the kind of negativity experienced in literature is the displacement and dismantling of experience as possible. In fiction, one is exposed not to 'an other', whose identity is finally reconciled with the reader's speculative identifications; one is rather exposed to the 'other' of experience, to the 'third person who is not a [dialectical] third', to the contradictions of non-identity. To write 'he' is to expose the subject to an incoherence which would otherwise be elided. Such literature is alienating experience because it alienates the subject from real capacities of negation that are the condition of experience. In such fiction, there is a negativity with which the subject cannot identify. There is nothing, for Blanchot, no coherence, to be expected from literature.[36] In literature, then, Blanchot finds a non-negated negativity which returns us to the experiences of non-dialectical negativity that elude Hegelian dialectics. Literature is not the experience of displacement so much as the displacement of experience – and this reversal is crucial: literature does not, for Blanchot, offer new and unexpected forms for the dialectic of experience so much as expose the subject to an indeterminacy that drives *and* displaces experience. Literature is at once a 'step' beyond itself and 'not' beyond itself. This constitutes a non-transcendent aesthetic.

The measure of Adorno's and Blanchot's response to Hegel is, therefore, the dialectic. Both are concerned with describing a kind of thinking that can account for the negativity dialectical thinking replaces. But both turn to aesthetic experience to make this description. And both describe a non-

[33] In 'Literature and the Right to Death', 'in the presence of something other, I become other', and in the work of literature, the production of writing, 'the book […] is precisely myself become other' (314). 'Literature learns that it cannot go beyond itself toward its own end', that 'what asserts itself now is the very possibility of signifying, the empty power of bestowing meaning – a strange impersonal light' (329). In the place of negation, then, literature 'asserts' a negative indeterminacy that cannot posit an 'end' [*The Work of Fire*, trans. by Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995)]. I want to trace this 'not beyond' of literature in the later fragmentary writing as it responds to Kant's 'indeterminate' aesthetic, but see also *The Space of Literature*, trans. by Ann Smock (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), and the reflections on the way that writing marks death as both the possibility of negation (and therefore experience), and the impossibility of experiencing such negation – is writing, dying, Blanchot asks, the experience of 'radical reversal, where he dies but cannot die, where death delivers him to the impossibility of dying?' (100).

[34] SNB 1/8

[35] IC 384/563 [trans. amended]

[36] SNB 2/8

transcendent aesthetic: an experience which does not go beyond itself or its object, which does not negate the negativity of experience. Both are guided, however, not by an 'inversion' of negation – not by positing the negative as if nonconceptual experience could be positively 'held' or determined – but by the reversal conceptual cognition and judgement undergo when exposed to this nonconceptual negativity. And both find the model for such reversal in Kant because it is exactly this 'reversal' of experience which, covertly, characterises Kantian aesthetics.

iii. From Hegel to Kant

In what sense is this discomfort with Hegelian dialectics channelled through the aesthetic, and why does Kant make this channelling visible? Kant's divergence from the aesthetics of Hegel outlines the role reflection plays in Hegel's dialectics.

Hegel's speculative philosophy mobilises Kant's dialectical antinomies. The contradictory 'antinomies', for Kant, establish a dialectic which has a regulative function in Kant's philosophy. The Kantian dialectic establishes the parameters of possible experience, by demonstrating the points at which antinomy can be reconciled by turning back to what is critically possible.[37] Where for Kant experience finds its limits at the negative (the critical block where beyond subjectively possible experience there is no possible identification of the 'thing in itself'), for Hegel, upon encountering the negative, the form of experience is reconfigured until it is reconciled with what was deemed to be negative to that experience. The Hegelian subject is mutable, then, but absolute in its mutability. The subject can speculatively move beyond objective contradiction by positing itself as the site for the reconciliation of contradiction. The negative is the spur for the subject's reformation.[38] The subject's freedom is its capacity ultimately to reconcile this contradiction through negation.

This theme runs through Hegel's philosophy. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is an account of the activity of spirit, and of the way subjective consciousness extends beyond, and reconciles, objective contradictions. The *Science of Logic* is the account of the result of this reconciliation, which serves as the ground for absolute knowledge: knowledge which operates in the self-transparency of the concept

[37] See Friedlander, Eli, *Expressions of Judgment: An Essay on Kant's Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), however, for an account of the way in the third *Critique* this regulative function – due to judgement's unique lack of a field of legislative operativity – opens onto a more speculative horizon of judgement's function.

[38] In *The Restlessness of the Negative*, trans. by Jason Smith and Steven Miller (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), Jean-Luc Nancy describes these contradictions of negativity and their grounding role in Hegel's account of the subject's dialectical relation to the world in a way counter to Hegel: the subject 'remains its contradiction, just as my pain, my death, and my other, or my joy, remain outside of me: outside of me — what, being *mine*, makes me go out of myself. It is what, in me, negates me as me; what negates my determination, and what precisely relates it to the other — which is to say, what also relates this determination to itself, opening it in itself for itself.' (42). Nancy's account recalls Adorno's, where the subject subsists in the contradictions of negativity, and not reconciliation: a prolonged 'restlessness'.

in philosophy, where the means of knowing correspond with what is known, such that knowing is no longer agonistic or contradictory experience, but is the subjective unfolding of the concept from itself, and from its reconciliation. But this means that any absolute knowing includes, as reconciled, contradictory experience. *The Science of Logic* is the passive repetition that completes the active circularity of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. But the aesthetic, as the point of negotiation or transition, where reflection famously passes from 'the poetry of imagination to the prose of thought',[39] marks the point of transition of reflection. Hegel argues that 'art has the function of grasping and displaying existence in its appearance, as *true*, i.e. in its suitability to the content which is adequate to itself',[40] and that 'the outer must harmonize with an inner which is harmonious in itself'.[41] But with Kant, any harmony is won through its indeterminacy. In Kant's aesthetics, this harmony is non-manifest, in the sense that, although universally valid, aesthetic judgement remains subjective. There is no final 'end' of aesthetic judgement, no manifestation of its effects, except in the free play of judgement itself, and in the non-manifest 'common sense' shared between subjects. The provisionality of aesthetic experience is both a means and an end. Adorno's and Blanchot's different concerns with the non-manifestation of the Hegelian negative, their concern with finding a form in which the negative is legible in its non-manifestation, finds a possible articulation in Kant's version of the aesthetic.

In the introduction, I suggested that aesthetics can offer a form in which indeterminacies, discontinuities, and disconnections are legible as such. Kant's critical concern with accounting for the conditions of possible experience would seem to exclude such disconnections. Indeed, Kant's aesthetic is explicitly concerned with connection: with finding a common ground between the distinct realms of nature and reason by which judgement can operate to connect them. If, Kant asks, reason is operative in nature (which it must be, otherwise neither scientific knowledge would be possible, nor moral demands effective), then there must be a shared principle that connects subjective judgement with the objective world it judges. But the problem is that such a principle could only be freedom itself. Only the subject's 'freedom' to judge, and nature's 'freedom' to generate new forms autonomously, could be the ground adequate to these twin freedoms. If the principle that grounded each were *determined*, then neither would be freely autonomous. The principle must therefore be *indeterminate*: it must neither be manifest nor legislative, and yet still be universally valid. If there is a shared principle that connects subjective judgement with the objective world, it is, paradoxically, this free *disconnection*. Each freely, collaboratively, shares in the other's freedom.

In order to think such a connection by way of disconnection, Kant had to find experiences in which both the subject and object are operative, but free; and experiences in which their operativity was

[39] HA, 89
[40] HA, 155
[41] Ibid.

collaborative, but autonomous. The third *Critique* describes two of these experiences: the aesthetic judgement of taste, and the teleological judgement of natural, organic forms. In the former, the subject registers its own capacity merely to think, without conceptual reference to an object, and the pleasure of this attests to the way that beautiful forms can provoke such free, non-cognitive experience. In the latter, the subject's capacity to judge the 'teleological' organisation of natural forms (the way organisms appear at once to be a means and an end) registers a correspondence between the organising principle of judgement and the organic forms of nature. In both experiences, Kant uses judgement as a measure of these twin freedoms. Judgement's capacity merely to reflect, to operate reflectively – which is to say, judgement's capacity *not to determine* nature objectively – marks its principle of freedom shared with nature.

Hegel agrees that human experience is internally divided, even contradictory. But such contradiction can, for Hegel, be reconciled by the speculative activity of thinking itself.[42] For This reconciliation is mediated by concepts, with the subject as the vehicle of mediation. For Kant, subjective judgement acts as a bridge between 'different worlds'.[43] But for Hegel, art presents this 'bridging' work objectively.[44] It is the task of philosophy to resolve the contradiction between internal and external; art gives form to such reconciliation.

> Philosophy affords a reflective insight into the essence of the opposition only in so far as it shows how truth is just the dissolving of opposition and, at that, not in the sense, as may be supposed, that the opposition and its two sides *do not exist at all*, but that they exist reconciled.[45]

Philosophy takes on the reconciliation which the reflective form of art indicates. As we saw earlier, it is precisely at this point, where philosophy assumes the reflective work that art presents as a reflective form, that Adorno turns Hegel against himself. Philosophy, indeed, depends upon a presentation – it 'shows' how truth reconciles – and therefore upon an aesthetic. If truth is to be 'shown', then it must be shown in a form. But, as Adorno suggests, this means that philosophy itself stands in contradiction. It must dissolve its own reflective capacity to 'show' truth and become reflection itself. But in order to do this, philosophy stands in need of reflection which cannot be posited, or positive, but must be negative. And so here we return to Kant's conception of the aesthetic, in order to expose Hegel's to its

---

[42] HA, 54: 'Spiritual culture, the modern intellect, produces this opposition in man which makes him an amphibious animal, because he now has to live in two worlds which contradict one another. The result is that now consciousness wanders about in this contradiction, and, driven from one side to the other, cannot find satisfaction for itself in either the one or the other'.

[43] CPJ 63/5: 175-6

[44] HA, 60: Hegel characterises Kant's aesthetic as proposing the way that a particular can articulate the Concept, '[b]ut this apparently perfect reconciliation is still supposed by Kant at the last to be only subjective in respect of the judgement and the production [of art], and not itself to be absolutely true and actual.' Only art can make this reconciliation 'actual', by making reconciliation its objective work; and only philosophy of art can make it 'true', by reassuming it into the subjective.

[45] HA, 54-5

contradictions. As Kant recognised, the aesthetic experience is negative, in that it does not make claims on any object. And the aesthetic judgement is likewise negative, in that it does not claim any objective determination. Aesthetic judgement, like aesthetic experience, is reflective *and yet universal*. Kant's aesthetic, we shall see, is open to reflection, including its own reflection. Kant's aesthetic is exposed to the indeterminacy of both the object of beauty, and the subjective judgement of beauty. This is a shared indeterminacy, and therefore a reflective indeterminacy, that parallels the shared conceptual determinacy of knowledge judgements. The ground of Kant's aesthetic is not, therefore, the final 'truth' of reconciliation in a philosophy of art, but the neutral, provisional, and repeated experience of aesthetic indeterminacy itself, in which the subject is repeatedly exposed to unexpected aesthetic forms. There are, then, two different histories at work here (and we can recall Adorno's characterisation of art's history as 'inhomogenous'): in Hegel's history, art is an amplification of natural beauty in the Ideal which is eventually subsumed into the truth of philosophy; in Kant's history, art is the unexpected harmony of objective form with a subjective capacity to experience such form. Kant, then, leaves room for the provisionality of experience, and for the continuing reflection of which, as Hegel recognised, philosophy stands in need.

2 – On reversal: Kant's aesthetic and teleology of reflection and reflecting judgement

In suggesting that 'reversal' is a figure both for the exposition and critique of Kant's aesthetic, my contention is that Kant's third *Critique* is governed, throughout, by reflection. Kant's concern with accounting for reflection is motivated by a problem of grounding the critical faculties he describes in his wider critical project. The third *Critique* gives form to reflection itself. In the first *Critique*, reflection is merely employed in cognition, constituting 'the state of mind in which we first prepare ourselves to find out the subjective conditions under which we can arrive at concepts. It is the consciousness of cognition'.[46] In the third *Critique*, however, the capacity to judge reflectively is a 'power' with its own a priori operations and ground. Yet Kant's aims remain transcendental. He is concerned with reflection only to the extent that it falls within the limits of possible subjective experience. The problem which motivates the third *Critique* is that reflection is employed in cognition, but does not have any objective content, nor any 'realm' where its powers are legislative. [47] And so he aims to account for the ways this reflective power of judgement makes sense of an otherwise critically obscure point: that judgement, scientific or moral, is at once autonomous and effective in a likewise

[46] CPR 366, A260/B316

[47] CPJ 61/5:174

autonomous world of objects, without claiming any legislative ground for this effective 'power'. In the first *Critique*, Kant describes how 'all judgments, indeed all comparisons, require a **reflection,** i.e., a distinction of the cognitive power to which the given concepts belong.'[48] But here, with beauty and telos, Kant is interested in the way reflection remains operative when there is no cognitive judgement, and in the way reflection can operate autonomously, without advancing any conceptual determination.

The question therefore becomes *reflective itself*. In what form, and on what ground, can one reflectively examine reflection? In asking how reason and nature, how understanding and imagination, can be thought in common, Kant is asking what principle connects them. This inscribes a reflexivity into reflection itself. My contention is that Kant's version of reflection works according to a 'reversibility': reflecting judgement operates indeterminately when conceptual determination is not possible, and its operations 'reverse' those of determination. I will further argue that this reversibility exposes Kant's critical account of reflection to its own 'reversal': that the 'ends' of reflecting judgement, as Kant conceived them – in configuring, if not constructing, an intersubjective 'common sense'; and in configuring, if not constructing, the connection between the form of judgement and organic form – are indeterminate in ways that exceed or go beyond the transcendental mandate Kant set out for reflection. This will lead us to a 'figure' of the aesthetic as 'reversal': a form of thinking that operates without conceptual determination, and which encodes the ground of its own operations, in indeterminate ways. Finally, this will lead us to a potential reading of Kant through Adorno and Blanchot who, as we saw in the last section, are both concerned with the ways 'indeterminate' experience and judgement can be coordinated through forms of 'negativity' without negation. The reflection described in Kant's aesthetic helps to organise negativity as indeterminate. My argument here is that Kant provides a form for thinking such negativity without negation, but making this form legible requires us to reverse his own transcendental logic.

i. Reversal

What are the terms of this reading? I want to examine Kant's aesthetic through the figure of 'reversal'. This can be related to the ideas that organise Kant's aesthetic and his account of reflection: the 'indeterminacy' of aesthetic experience and judgement, and the 'figurability' of experience in judgement itself. I will read these as aspects of the 'reversal' I explore in and through Kant. And finally, I will develop these terms with reference to the 'disconnection' that such a reversal describes. Here I will preliminarily develop the terms of this critique.

The experience that grounds Kant's aesthetic is not conceptual. The judgement that arises with such experience is likewise not conceptual. If we are to conceive of this experience and this judgement,

[48] CPR 366-7, A261/B317

we cannot do so conceptually. Such aesthetic experience tests the limits of conceptual possibility, by invoking judgement without conceptual determination, but with a conceptual judgement. Concepts are not, for Kant, always absent from aesthetic judgement; but their presence is not determinate. And this logical structure affects interpretation of Kant's aesthetic. I turn to 'reversal', then, both to explain this logical structure, and to describe its consequences; not as a concept, but as a figurative manoeuvre or configuration of reflection outside conceptual limits.

This figure of reversal organises the indeterminate ways reflection operates in aesthetic experience and judgement. I draw upon two correlated but distinct meanings of indeterminacy, here, and this ambiguity (and this distinction) are important for characterising what I mean by reversal in this context. The first is spatial. What is 'indeterminate' in this sense does not 'terminate' in that it does not have a 'terminus', an 'end' or 'boundary'. There is no fixed spatial location or end where such 'indeterminacy' can be identified. When I say that a judgement is 'indeterminate' in this sense, I mean that its *object* is not fixed, or that there is no fixed point or boundary towards which it is orientated.[49] Kant's aesthetic judgement of taste is 'indeterminate' in the sense that it does not refer to an object, but to a subjective capacity to judge reflectively. The second sense of the word is temporal. What is 'indeterminate' in this sense does not finish. This is distinct from the spatial sense in that there is no definable close of such 'indeterminate' reflection. There is no definable 'course' that such judgement should take, because it is constituted by the 'free play' of subjective faculties. In Kant's sense, again, this means that aesthetic, reflecting judgements are neither *spatially* limited by any object, nor *temporally* limited by the subject. This reflects Kant's division of the two pure forms of intuition, space and time, into an outer and an inner sense.[50] The indeterminacies involved in judgement are twin, in the sense that they are simultaneously 'outer' (spatial) and 'inner' (temporal). There is a further consequence to this, which is not logical but critical. If such judgements are logically indeterminate, then they are also interpretatively indeterminate, in the sense that their freedom from both an 'object' and 'course' means that their *meaning* is also unfixed, indefinable. Aesthetic judgements of taste, in Kant's sense, are not the same as critical judgements, but they do form the condition by which criticism can take place. Critical indeterminacy therefore rests in the logical indeterminacy of aesthetic judgement.

In Kant's account, the aesthetic does not just respond to indeterminacy, but produces it. The procedure of cognitive judgement is, for Kant, 'reversed' in aesthetic experience. In determining judgement, cognition matches a concept to the representation of an object, thus identifying the object and determining it. Reflecting judgement occurs when the subject is unable to provide a concept for an experience. Unable to proceed from a concept to determine a particular, judgement instead works

[49] So 'the mere form of purposiveness in the representation through which an object is **given** to us' constitutes the 'ground of the judgement of taste', and not any object. [CPJ 106/5: 221]

[50] CPR 180 A33/B49-50

backwards from the particular. The process of determination is reversed: cognition moves from the object determined to the faculties which have cooperated to determine it. This reflecting judgement is refocused to consider its own powers. It reflects upon the free play of the faculties, unconstrained by the requirement to determine objects. The resulting indeterminacy of aesthetic judgement provokes a feeling of pleasure in the subject, a pleasure felt in the way the faculties can work harmoniously, a kind of experience different from that produced in the determining of objects.[51] In this way, the aesthetic both responds to reflection and produces it, in indeterminate ways. There is, again, neither spatial nor temporal end to such reflection, other than the transcendental limits of the subject to which Kant mandates it.

This is why, in order to unfasten reflection from these transcendental limits, I turn to figuration to describe the movement of reflection in aesthetic experience and judgement. By figuration, I mean a 'negative presentation' of relations. A figure, in this sense, is the mark of the identity of two non-identical things. But this mark is negative. The figure, then, is the reverse of the concept, in the sense that it is exposed to the incompatibility of what it connects. Judgement connects otherwise separate (but collaborative) 'worlds': reason and nature. From Kant's dialectic, we know that we are obliged to think that reason is effective in nature (or should be), because we have communicable knowledge about nature, and we can have moral judgements that are effective in nature. But neither are identifiable, one with the other. Their connection, then, must also mark their necessary separation, or distinction. Judgement does not collapse this distinction, it moves between each point, like a bridge that simultaneously touches each shore. Judgement, like a bridge, marks an indeterminate space in between two distinct worlds. It is itself a kind of boundary, in the sense that, for Kant, judgement is operative in both 'realms' without having a 'territory' of its own. It is an experience of Reason but necessarily indeterminate; its indeterminacy is what gets it on terms with reason and so denies it conceptual definition. Judgement is not legislative itself; it is merely reflective, in the sense of reflectively moving between these two realms. So we can see that, as a distinct power, judgement has to be thought of as *figurative*, rather than *conceptual*: it is not a distinct 'thing', but rather an activity; but unlike a concept, it does not determine anything. And the contours of its activity are thought through the image of its figure. Figuration, then, here describes a connection or relation that remains indeterminate, and therefore cannot itself be thought determinately. The relation established by figuration – and here I am myself drawing on poetics as a distinct but connected discourse – is one that, like a bridge, only exists as the act of crossing, the experience of being connected to two incompatible realms, and has to be passed over repeatedly. The figure, then, is *reflective* in the sense Kant uses the term. But the figure is also exposed to the indeterminate ends Kant avoids in mooring reflection to the subject. If we think of reflection as functioning figuratively, then its terminus remains reflectively open, because it is moored

[51] The 'pleasure' of the beautiful is a pleasure in cognition, in judgement itself, and is therefore distinct from the 'agreeableness' of pleasure in sensation. [CPJ 184/5: 305]

to the *negativity* of reflection, and not to the positive experience of subjective freedom mandated to reflection by Kant.

ii. Reflection: from aesthetic judgement to common sense

The terms of this 'reversal' as reading both respond to and develop out of Kant's own aesthetic. Kant's specific exposition of the role of reflection in aesthetic experience and judgement can reflectively configure a reading of Kant's aesthetics. This means there are two levels to 'reversal': that firstly, it describes the structure of Kant's own aesthetics; and that secondly, it offers a possible stance or position from which Kant's aesthetics can be read in relation to other critical ideas. This depends upon there being a possible 'experience' of aesthetic experience, a meta-aesthetic experience whereby the reflective work Kant constrains to the aesthetic is deployable outside its transcendentally mandated place. Kant's sense of reflection's indeterminate work encodes this kind of meta-aesthetic possibility into his aesthetics. The second level, then, is read out of the first. Kant's own structure establishes the form by which it can be read. I will now turn to Kant's account of this reflective work in aesthetic judgement (before turning to teleology), and examine the specific way that, for Kant, beauty's role in organising *subjective* reflection is reproduced in the aesthetic judgement's organisation of an *intersubjective* common sense. Kant thinks that such 'common sense' underwrites community, by inscribing a form of communicability. The mere communication without objective content of aesthetic judgement outlines the shape of intersubjective communication, and the principle by which it is possible. But what kind of ground for community can the 'communicability' of aesthetic judgements constitute? If aesthetic judgement proceeds *indeterminately*, then is such indeterminacy likewise operative, like reflection, in any community constituted by 'common sense'?

For Kant, the reflective experience and judgement of beauty refers to a reflective capacity merely to communicate, and does not communicate any conceptual information.[52] The judgement refers to a 'feeling', not to a concept (and is thus aesthetic).[53] But this 'feeling' is, in fact, the subjective capacity to 'judge' itself. This reflecting judgement therefore communicates a faculty of communicability, rather than any determinate knowledge. This is, as suggested earlier, the first stage of Kant's 'reversal' of cognition in reflecting judgement. There is no 'objective' basis for saying

[52] Taste is 'the faculty for judging [*Beurtheilsvermögen*] that which makes our feeling in a given representation **universally communicable** without the mediation of a concept' [175/5: 295]; and 'the faculty for judging *a priori* the communicability of the feelings that are combined with a given representation (without the mediation of a concept)' [176/5: 296].

[53] Alison Ross compares this 'structural dislocation' of aesthetic experience from practical ends in Kant to Adorno's sense of 'art's dislocation from functional contexts', in *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 15

something is beautiful. And yet, for Kant, judgements of taste – saying something is beautiful – make a priori claims to validity, as if they were objective. Such judgements claim universal validity on a subjective basis. Considered logically, this means that Kant's account of aesthetic experience has 'reversal' at its centre. Kant differentiates between determining and reflecting modes of judgement. The former, the determining mode, is involved in cognition. The subject encounters an object and refers it to a concept. But it still does this by employing reflection. Reflection functions to refer intuition to the correct faculties. But in this way, reflection is not felt independently of this determination, and although its operations are effective a priori in judgement, it does not have its own normative ground. As Henry Allison points out, Kant's task in the third *Critique* is to identify this ground of reflection.[54] The latter, then, the reflecting mode, is the site of this possible experience, and is involved in aesthetic judgement. The subject encounters something that, aside from whatever conceptual determinations are employed (this is a tree, or a painting), leads her to judge that it is beautiful. The connection between the faculties of imagination and understanding is registered subjectively, and 'constitutes the subjective, merely sensitive condition of the objective use of the power of judgment in general'.[55] In reflecting judgement, the faculties are connected by judgement itself, not by any representation of objective agreement.[56] So the aesthetic judgement employs reflection, but rather than reflectively referring the object to a concept, the reflecting judgement proceeds from the particular itself. The determining judgement, on the other hand, proceeds from a concept to the particular.[57] The reflecting judgement, finding no concept, proceeds from the particular towards a concept.[58] In the reflecting aesthetic judgement of taste, the structure of determining conceptual judgement is reversed.

The merely reflective operation of judgement in the aesthetic judgement of taste shows how the faculties are connected subjectively, and therefore a priori. This is felt as pleasure. But it also shows (or reflects) an intersubjective connection.[59] If everyone, 'every human being' judges 'by means of understanding and sense in combination', then the pleasurable experience of the faculties' subjective agreement also registers a *shared* capacity to judge.[60] If I can communicate with other humans, then I can only do so on the basis of the shared forms of cognition in the faculties. The pleasure I feel in the

---

[54] Allison, Henry E., *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the* Critique of Aesthetic Judgment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 13-18

[55] CPJ 26/20: 223-4

[56] CPJ 27/20: 225; see also 102-3/5: 216-7

[57] CPJ 26/20: 223-4

[58] Paul Guyer identifies here a regulative 'possible concept' in the aesthetic, which itself 'connotes […] the general condition for the application of concepts, the harmony between the imagination and understanding.' *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 2nd ed. [orig. ed.: 1979] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 35-6

[59] Indeed, such pleasure 'promotes the cultivation [*Cultur*] of the mental powers for sociable communication' [CPJ 185/5: 305]; a form of communicability which is still distinct from actual communication.

[60] CPJ 104/5: 219. See Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, for an account of this connection between reflecting judgement and the 'universal voice': p. 106

aesthetic experience of beauty is not due to any representation of an object, but to the harmony of the faculties themselves. The experience of beauty demonstrates my own faculties, but also their communicability: it validates as communicable a subjective capacity that must otherwise, in determining judgement, merely be assumed as the basis of communication. Significantly, then, the reflective structure of aesthetic experience conditions the reflective structure of the intersubjective validity of that experience. Both the 'experience' of beauty and the 'universal voice' that communicates it are not determined in judgement, and the relation between the two is also indeterminately reflective. The validity of aesthetic judgement is constructed reflectively. Aesthetic judgement therefore marks a double indeterminacy: the 'subjective' indeterminacy of judgement itself, which has no end other than its own reflective activity; and the 'objective' indeterminacy of the aesthetic object or situation that provokes such judgement, without itself being the target of any conceptual determination. And further to this, aesthetic judgement also proposes an 'intersubjective' relation between subjects which is, likewise, constructed reflectively: 'common sense'. There are three levels of indeterminacy invoked here: the indeterminate experience that provokes judgement, the indeterminate procedures of judgement itself, and the indeterminate end, common sense, which this judgement validates.

The reflecting aesthetic judgement has its 'end' – *Zweck*: purpose, function, terminus – not in any objective determination, but in describing and validating a shared 'common sense'. This is the communicability of aesthetic experience (without its objective communication) that marks the connection between subjects. Such reflective connection, though, must by definition not be something determined, otherwise it would deliver the experience of an object rather than of the conditions for objectivity, the free play of the faculties. The subjective free play of the faculties discloses a capacity merely to reflect. This shared, subjective, 'common sense' is a logically necessary consequence of Kant's account of aesthetic experience. Because aesthetic judgement reflectively refers to the subject itself, it is a strictly subjective experience that cannot legislate any conceptually determinable objective quality to the object that provokes it. When I say 'this rose is red' I make an objective claim about the rose that must be true. And for this determination to be true it must be communicable. Any other person with the concept 'rose' and the concept 'red' would agree. And this agreement would result from a cognitive employment of reflection. This 'someone else' would see the rose and match it determinately with the concept red. But in order to do this, this 'someone else' would have to have the same cognitive forms as me (even if not the same concepts). So my *aesthetic* experience, in which I feel my faculties themselves in play, rather than using them to determine something else, confirms to me that I do indeed have such faculties. And if I have these faculties, then so should every 'someone else', otherwise nothing would be communicable. I cannot objectively say what 'beauty' is in a rose, only that my experience of it requires me to say that it is a rose 'and it is beautiful (to me)'. But because that judgement also refers to a 'supersensible' alignment of the forms of nature and the forms of cognition,

because it refers to my reflective capacity to think at all, it must, for Kant, be universal.[61] The a priori ground for reflecting judgements is the subject's capacity to reflect.[62]

This means that, for Kant, the indeterminacy of aesthetic experience is recruited by aesthetic judgement to validate the subject. And this also constitutes the ground for common sense. But it does so negatively, and any 'determination' of subjective power Kant finds here must refer to intersubjective connections for validation. For Kant, then, such aesthetic judgements do not remain subjective, but in fact '**demand**'[63] universal assent on a subjective basis. The forms of the faculties of cognition must be communicable. Their communicability is registered by aesthetic experience. Judgements about such experience must therefore also be communicable *and* subjective. Aesthetic judgements refer at once to a subjective capacity to judge, and to a universal subjective capacity to judge that should be shared by all others. An aesthetic judgement is therefore both singular and plural. It is strictly singular – *this* is beautiful *to me* – and just as strictly plural – any 'you' *should* experience in this way too. Such judgement remains singular while inviting a community, a 'shared sense' of judgement.

This reflective construction of a community of 'common sense' out of reflecting judgement itself marks another point of possible reversal of Kant's thinking, and this can be signalled through Blanchot. The hinge of the reversal of Kant, here, is that any 'community' that shares this sense cannot be objectively determined. It is formed, and coloured, by the singularity of subjective experience. 'Common sense' lets Kant distinguish between transcendentally valid aesthetic judgements and mere enthusiastic ravings (*Schwärmerei*), which in turn measures the difference between a free (and indeterminate) political arrangement in '*sensus communis*' and more anarchic liberties. The indeterminacy of the non-conceptual is shepherded into the mandate of the aesthetic, and validated as common sense. But language's indeterminate 'babbling', to use Novalis's term of post-Kantian poetics, threatens the coherent way it is recruited.[64] If the aesthetic reflectively grasps the indeterminacies of

---

[61] For a general account of the relation between the 'subjective universality' of reflecting, aesthetic judgement and the objective validity of determining, cognitive judgement, see Wilson, Ross, *Subjective Universality in Kant's Aesthetics* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007).

[62] Registered in 'pleasure': 'the subjective aspect in a representation **which cannot become an element of cognition at all** is the **pleasure** or **displeasure** connected with it; for through this I cognize nothing in the object of the representation' [CPJ 75/5:189]. Pleasure, and not the object, is thought in this judgement.

[63] The judger 'does not count on the agreement of others with his judgment of satisfaction because he has frequently found them to be agreeable with his own, but rather **demands** it from them' [CPJ 98/5: 212].

[64] Novalis, 'Monologue', in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed., trans. by J.M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 214-15. In the essay 'Athenæum', Blanchot describes such babbling in a poetic: 'that to write is made up (of) speech (a) work, but that this work is an unworking [*désœuvrement*]; that to speak poetically is to make possible a non-transitive speech whose task is not to say things (not to disappear in what it signifies), but to say (itself) in letting (itself) say'. But making this distinction constitutes 'a major difficulty through which one comes to discern the strange lacuna at the interior of literary language that is its own difference, in a sense its night; a night somehow terrifying, and analogous to what Hegel believed he saw in gazing into men's eyes' [IC 357]. Poetry measures this difference between aesthetic indeterminacy and poetic babbling, which offers a measure between the political indeterminacy of 'common sense' and anarchy.

non-conceptual experience, then it concedes its structure to such indeterminacy. What is shared in aesthetic judgement, and what is *demanded*, is negative – a shared disconnection. Indeed, such disconnection is mandated by the structure of aesthetic experience outlined above. 'You' cannot experience this, because it does not refer to any objective quality but only to a subjective form; but 'you' *must* experience *like* this, even if it means experiencing your strict disconnection from me consequent upon us both being undetermined. What I feel, in such universal subjective judgement, is the weird way such determinations of community are not just paralleled with but part of the contours of singular, subjective experience. Any 'connection' Kant establishes here is structured by this *disconnection*. The question of such 'connectivity' through disconnection will, we shall see, occupy both Blanchot's political thinking about the 'unavowability' that is the only, indeterminate mark of being together in community, and his sense that writing disastrously undoes its own coherence, and writes disconnection through the way it leaves 'marks'. For Kant, the 'immediacy' of the step from the taste of judgement to the 'demand' that everyone judge this way is transcendental. But this 'immediacy' also elides the full consequences of the disconnective experience now grounding our common sense of being undetermined. Blanchot makes us ask, then, after both the consequences of *writing* as a practice that 'disconnects' for our sense of the 'community' of that experience; *and*, reciprocally, after the consequences of a 'disconnected' *community* on writing as a practice. Again, this is a further 'reversal' of Kant's account. The immediacy with which community is demanded by the aesthetic judgement is exposed to the indeterminacy of an art practice – writing – that resists, for Blanchot, all immediacy. What kind of community could be 'demanded' on the basis of art, like Blanchot's writing, responding to the exigent *fragmentation* of the coherence of experience? If Kant's account of 'common sense' has disconnection as its ground, then Blanchot makes this disconnection aesthetically legible as the (in)operative work of writing.

For Kant, the reflective experience of beauty has a dual function. It firstly organises the subject's own sense of the coherence of reflection. By giving form to the free way the subjective faculties can operate autonomously, it provides a reflective experience of the subject's own capacities. But this recruitment of reflection also exposes the transcendental role of judgement to less secure operations. What role, indeed, does the object's 'giving form' play in this experience? Secondly, this experience organises intersubjectivity by giving form to a 'common sense'. The subject can reflectively have a sense of its connection to other subjects without any objective basis for that connection. People are thus connected subjectively, on the a priori ground, the 'demand', of reflection itself. But again, this turns against Kant's transcendental account of the ground of such connection: if mere reflection forms a shared ground for community, then that community is also exposed to a shared disconnection. There is a shared lack of objective ground, here, just as there is a lack of objective form in the reflecting

aesthetic judgement of taste. Such reflective experience is pitched negatively: it is reflective precisely because it lacks determination, and this lack of determination configures both the subjective reflecting judgement and the common sense it endorses. It therefore falls to us to examine what, precisely, this connection through reflection is. What kind of connection could reflection establish, organise, or merely describe? How can the aesthetic police the negativity (the lack of determination) which not only provokes this reflective experience, but also governs it?

iii. Reflection: teleology, nature, and art

We are in a way following the structure of Kant's own third *Critique*, here, in moving from the experience of reflection, to the reflecting judgement, to the organisation of common sense. We follow reflection as it moves from the beautiful object, to the subject's experience of beauty, to a proposed 'common sense' of that experience. This is the subjectivisation of reflection through aesthetic judgement, and the dispersal of that subjective reflection intersubjectively. Such a 'common sense', however, is already figurative. Like the aesthetic judgement itself, there is no objective basis for it other than the reflective work of judgement. We might 'demand' assent, but that assent cannot be actualised or formalised in any concept. But Kant does also turn to the *objective* experience of reflection (though we should be conscious that we remain with experience and judgement, and not with objective actualisation) in the reflecting teleological judgement.

Is it possible to track the indeterminacy reflection into such organisation, just as we did in the politics of community in common sense? Teleological judgement refers to the way natural forms can be conceived as self-organising. Such organisms are judged both as causes and ends, and as self-generating and -organising forms. We might call this 'backwards causation' in Kant's teleology, the idea that the cause is determined by its end.[65] This is a reversal of causation. A limb, for example, is at once a discrete 'member' of the body, and has its functional life only in that body: a hand has its own independent function and 'end' (distinct from, say, a foot), but this end and function is not distinguishable from the body as a whole organism; and its 'cause' is not distinguishable from its 'end' in the body. A hand's life is in the body. A dismembered limb is not only inoperative, it is dead. The subject's capacity to think about such a reflective organisation of form endorses, again, its capacity to register mere reflection. But here that capacity explicitly recruits objective form itself for that judgement, validating a connection between the subjective form of judgement and the judged objective forms of nature. We might ask, however, with the sense of 'disconnection' organising common sense outlined above, what effect 'dismemberment' would have on such an organisation of reflection. [66]

[65] CPJ 244/5: 372: 'a thing that is to be cognized as a natural product but yet at the same time as possible only as a natural end must be related to itself reciprocally as both cause and effect'

[66] The hinted pun here of 'membership' of a community is associative but significant.

Teleological judgement is a form of measure between singular and plural, between what is singular and what is common, through the objective form of the organism. So the dismemberment of the organism is the limit of the teleological judgement. The disconnection between the singular and the common would make teleological judgement impossible. We might ask, then, to what extent such dismemberment is also politically effective in the reflections that organise common sense – the 'dismemberment' from an organically (which is to say *reflectively*) conceived society. If Kant constructs such connections through figuration, then they are exposed to the unpredictability and the provisionality of figures. And they are also exposed, as we shall see in the final section of this chapter, to the poetics of figuration. In turning to teleological judgement, I therefore want both to trace the way Kant uses such judgements to reinforce and validate the aesthetic experience of 'connection' through beauty, and to mark some of the ways such validation might not contain the reflection it seeks to organise. If the teleological judgement marks the shared organising principle of judgement and nature, of the subjective and the objective, then it does so through reflection. It is therefore also, despite appearances, susceptible to the indeterminacies of reflection uncovered in aesthetic judgement.

Firstly, what kind of connective work does reflecting *aesthetic* judgement undertake? Aesthetic judgements are structurally supposed, by Kant, to form a 'bridge' between the different aspects, phenomenal and nominal, cognitively determined or morally free, under which we can think ourselves.[67] There are proliferating, unanticipated natural forms, which I am capable of experiencing. And in parallel, there are theoretical, moral ideas which are not manifest in the world but which must, according to the second *Critique*, be possibly effective in the world. There is a doubling of freedom here that mirrors the ambiguity of the word in German, '*Freiheit*'. The subject is free to reason not only *about* the world, but free *from* the world in unanticipated ways.[68] And nature is free both as freely available *to* the subject, and free to be *any other way*.[69] These freedoms, indeed, are collaborative: not only do subjects continually 'know' things about the world, they also continually construct new ways of being in the world, and hence newly effective moral stances in the world. If nature were not 'free', then reason could not 'freely' reason either. There must, then, be a connection between these twin freedoms. But freedom must itself constitute this connection. Just as 'community' must be constructed

[67] CPJ 81/5: 195

[68] We might recall Hegel's version of Kant, here (as outlined above), where the subject's attitude to the object as beautiful is free from desire. This freedom, for Kant, endorses the subject's moral capacity for freedom: through reason, the subject can think in ways not dictated by the finite forms of nature; and yet, this freedom from finitude parallels nature's own freely generated forms. For Hegel, this corroborates the absolute freedom of the infinite to reform what it reconceives. But Kant's connection is more negative: subject and object freely interact as free *from* each other. And such negativity, again, exceeds Kant's control: it also endorses the subject's moral freedom to assume new moral and social attitudes and forms in the world indeterminately, and in ways not necessarily cooperative with reason. On this collaboration see *CPJ* [192/5: 314], on 'aesthetic ideas' as a 'counterpart (pendant) to **ideas of reason**'.

[69] For an account of this conceptual ambiguity, see Krieger, Leonard, *The German Idea of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 86-124

through the strict singularity and strict universality of aesthetic experience, so must this 'bridge' between reason and nature be constructed in the teeth of their manifest disconnection. That is to say, reason is only free to the extent that our idea of nature is free from its ministrations, mediations (concepts) tailored to our capabilities for experience. This freedom also upholds Kant's axiomatic assumption that there is no way to 'think' the noumenal 'in itself'. This is a crucial 'vice versa' (reversal), in that nature is only free to the extent that reason can conceive of it as free from reason. The collaborative relation between the two is therefore *negative*. There cannot be a positive 'bridge' built between these two 'worlds',[70] because that would violate the freedom of which it must be constituted. Aesthetic experience, then, that does not *determine* anything of any object, and yet in which the faculties of reason and understanding are nonetheless *animated*, is structurally apt to form such a bridge. In such experience, both the subjective forms of reason and the objective forms of nature are felt freely. To say a rose is beautiful might not tell me anything determinate about roses, but it does tell me that I am capable of experiencing roses *in their freedom from determination*, and simultaneously *free from having to determine them*. Aesthetic experience thus provides a form for registering 'connection' without determination. The 'connection' it forms with nature, the 'bridge', takes a negative form.

How is this 'negative' experience of connection mediated by aesthetic experience, and how does that experience mediate, in turn, a connection with natural forms? Nature functions 'as **art**' in that there is a '**technique** of nature',[71] a productive principle; but fine art functions like nature in that, through genius, it 'imitates' this technique.[72] How do we conceive this relation? We can return here to the idea of backwards causation, and look more closely at the link between aesthetic and teleological judgement. In the teleological judgement of them, the parts of an organism are at once cause and effect of an organism. An organism's parts 'reciprocally produce each other', such that the 'concept of [the whole], conversely, is in turn the cause.'[73] Here we have the reflective reversal of reflecting judgement as the principle for natural organisation. Again, reflecting judgement is not positive, but provoked by the lack of a determinate concept. And like an organism, an artwork is an effect that has no cause except

[70] CPJ 63/5:175-6: 'as if they were so many different worlds, the first of which can have no influence on the second: yet the latter **should** have an influence on the former, namely the concept of freedom should make the end that is imposed by its laws real in the sensible world; and nature consequently also be able to be conceived in such a way that the lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the ends that are realized in it in accordance with the laws of freedom.'

[71] CPJ 10, 20: 204, not as 'fine art' but in a technical way.

[72] On genius, see CPJ 184-9/5: 304-9. Kant also distinguished art-beauty from natural-beauty by introducing the 'ideal'. The ideal, unlike for Hegel, is for Kant merely regulative: art's beauty is admixed with concepts because it is a 'representation of a thing', not merely a 'thing' in itself, and thus the idea of 'perfection' is introduced into the aesthetic judgement. But here, again, the aesthetic parallels the moral: the ideal is not obtainable (*pace* Hegel), and spurs more and more reflection, both in judgement and production [CPJ 189-90/5: 311]. Art's *production* of form therefore provokes this reflective thought of the ideal. Where for Kant the 'ideal' is the non-actual, regulative concept of beauty, for Hegel it is the manifestation and actualisation of the inner subject with external appearance [Hegel, 153-60].

[73] CPJ 244-5/5: 373

itself. That is to say that, unlike other objects, like tools, fine art answers no purpose except the intention of its own production.[74] A hammer answers a definable need. But a painting, to the extent that it is beautiful, serves no other purpose. Art is therefore experienced as an 'effect' that is its own 'cause'. The 'rule must be abstracted from the deed'.[75] Now, we might accuse Kant of naivety here and say that art is produced for all sorts of reasons, more or less cynical. But the point Kant is making is that art is *experienced* as if it was its own cause. We might say that a poem, for example, has all sorts of historically identifiable causes and effects, but to the extent that we experience it *aesthetically* it is its own cause. To the extent that it is an object of aesthetic experience, it serves no purpose except to furnish that experience. Nature serves all sorts of purposes, *and* it is beautiful. Art serves all sorts of functions, *and* it is beautiful. And this experience also helps to show us the ways such causation is operative in natural objects. We might say that a leaf, for example, is produced in order to nourish the tree; but to the extent that it also nourishes itself *qua* tree, it is hard to distinguish this cause from the effect. The experience of beauty as backwards causation thus gives form to the teleological experience of purposiveness without purpose. And this reinforces Kant's broader teleological idea that freedom is its own cause and effect, without which causation freedom would not be possible. It is only as such, free from determination, that aesthetic experience can invoke the kind of cognitive free play of which it is constituted. And it is only as such, free from prior determination, that natural forms can proliferate in unexpected but transcendentally lawful ways.

Beauty's purposiveness is teleological, not constitutive or determinate. Its judgement does not constitute or determine its object, because it remains subjective. But it is manifested teleologically. Thus 'beauty in nature, i.e., its agreement with the free play of our cognitive faculties in the apprehension and judging of its appearance, can be considered in this way as an objective purposiveness of nature in its entirety, as a system of which the human being is a member'.[76] Beauty thus marks the systematic agreement of subjective experience with objective, natural form, but only when that agreement is registered as teleological. The reflective non-manifestation of beauty as a determinate concept draws us to the teleological experience of the world. We are arranged teleologically towards beauty: the 'end' of aesthetic judgement is nothing other than the 'cause' of that judgement, the mere reflective experience of beauty itself. Aesthetic experience discloses a teleology of subjective form. The connection between aesthetic and teleological experience is thus, again, negative: a connection that is not posited or objectively manifest, but which is operative in its negative presentation.

Aesthetic experience, and its realisation in aesthetic judgement, reflects the productivity of natural growth. Judgement is productive, but its productivity is negative. It does not posit any

[74] CPJ 244-5/5: 373

[75] CPJ 188/5: 309

[76] CPJ 251/5: 380

objectively valid fact about any object. Instead, reflecting aesthetic judgement refers to a subjective fact: the subjective, indeterminate productivity of judgement itself in its reflective capacity. Its indeterminacy is therefore its strength. Precisely because the reflecting judgement, felt in aesthetic experience but translatable to teleological judgements, does not define any object, the undetermined, unexpected forms of nature can be met without anticipation of that form. The flexibility of the mind felt in aesthetic experience corresponds with the flexibility of the forms the mind encounters in teleological judgements about nature. The connection Kant establishes between the mind and nature in the reflecting power of judgement is therefore *itself reflective*. The mind's capacity to reflect autonomously – without any determinate content – *reflects* nature's proliferation in new forms. Both teleological and aesthetic judgement are therefore not just the declutching of judgment from its role in determining object of knowledge, and a relish for how aptly the faculties work in common to do this. The freedom raised to consciousness exceeds that purpose and is adequate to still unrealised or un-thought of purposes which nature or art may come up with. Such reflection, then, despite Kant, does not merely function subjectively to receive unexpected new forms. It also produces the conditions and forms by which new experience can be disclosed. The indeterminacy, and the freedom, that necessarily conditions reflecting judgement also conditions the production of new reflective forms in art. Kant recognises this in his account of the way that in poetry, as we saw earlier, concepts themselves are uncoupled from their determinate ends. The ends of judgement about poetry, then, are reflective, proliferating, just as natural forms proliferate, as Rodolphe Gasché puts it, 'wildly',[77] indeterminately – indeed, reflectively.

This figure of reversal therefore encodes the two 'ends' of Kantian aesthetics identified earlier: 'community' and 'connection'. Community, as the 'common sense' demanded by subjective universal judgement, can only be presented negatively in that judgement. And connection, as the teleological collaboration of aesthetic experience and nature's forms, can only be presented negatively in that judgement. Kant's aesthetics therefore provide a figure for *negative presentation*. And crucially, this figure is governed by indeterminacy: both the indeterminate 'object' of judgement (which is not, in fact, an object but the subject as a kind of negative object), and the indeterminate way such judgement proceeds without end. The 'reversal' of cognitive, determining judgement identified earlier therefore elaborates these two figurative 'ends' of judgement, neither of which, by necessity, can be positively or

[77] Gasché, Rodolphe, *The Idea of Form* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). Only 'wild', not yet determined nature can offer reflective experience [2]. Only in such indeterminacy can the imagination reflectively construct new conceptual harmonies for the understanding, and new 'aesthetic' meanings [32, 49]. Gasché also links this with Adorno's sense of the 'myths' of enlightenment and nature, in 'The Theory of Natural Beauty and its Evil Star', in *Research in Phenomenology*, 32 (2002), pp. 103-122, but we can press this claim more strongly, here, by linking the indeterminacy of aesthetic experience more directly with determinate conceptual judgement through Adorno – the precise move Kant dismisses by constraining 'mere' reflection to the subjective aesthetic.

objectively identified, but both of which ground, for Kant, our capacity to judge at all. Without this negative presentation of the supersensible – the common ground of freedom shared between subjects, and between the subject and object – there could be no communication of truths.

3 – Reversal again: indeterminacy, figurability, and poetry

i. Indeterminate aesthetics

In his third *Critique*, Kant develops a model of reflecting judgement. Reflection is operative in all judgement, but in certain experiences – aesthetic or teleological – the work of reflection is interrupted. Its mandate, as we saw in the introduction to the last section, is to assign representations to the correct faculties. This work depends upon there being a concept to determine that representation. When it is absent – as in the aesthetic experience of beauty – reflection does not stop, but carries on as *mere* reflection. But this reflecting judgement serves, in fact, another purpose: it registers and endorses a subjective capacity to think. The encounter with reflection is negative, in the sense that it lacks determination. But Kant salvages this negativity to validate an *a priori* subjective capacity to judge that does not need to refer to the world of natural objects, and is thus subjectively free. In order to salvage negativity in this way, Kant must also salvage the indeterminacy of experience and judgement. The 'purposiveness without purpose' of aesthetic judgement is thus used to confirm the innate capacity of the subject to judge. And the restriction of reflective indeterminacy to the subject serves to confirm an intersubjective and shared capacity for 'communicability', even without any actual objective communication. The aesthetic judgement turns a reflective encounter with an indeterminate negativity into an opportunity to endorse an indeterminate freedom of the subjective power to judge. Indeterminacy is recruited for the transcendental subject. However, in order to make this move, Kant has recourse to figuration. Because the ends of aesthetic judgement are indeterminate – 'without purpose' –, they have at once to be demanded and merely supposed. In the connections forged between the 'different worlds' of nature (as the sensible) and freedom (as the supersensible), 'the latter **should** have an influence on the former'.[78] And assent to the judgement of taste is 'to be expected of everyone [*jedermann zugemuthet*] […] just as if it were a predicate associated with the cognition of the object.'[79] This reflecting judgement is not merely 'not-conceptual', it is a parody, or reflection, or imitation of conceptuality. It performs a semblance of conceptuality. So the 'universal voice' of the judgement of

[78] CPJ 63/5:175-6

[79] CPJ 77/5: 191; and in 103/5: 218 the judgement of taste is 'necessary, just as if it were to be regarded as a property of the object that is determined in it in accordance with concepts; but beauty is nothing by itself, without relation to the feeling of the subject'.

taste 'only **ascribes** this agreement to everyone, as a case of the rule with regard to which it expects confirmation not from concepts but only from the consent of others'.[80] Again, we 'expect' assent. But what this assent would actually be remains indeterminate; expected (looked out for), but unanticipated (not formed in advance).

In order to recognise the independent power of judgement, Kant must establish not just its response to indeterminacy, but its own indeterminacy. The structure of aesthetic judgement encodes indeterminacy into its claims to universal validity. It is already torn. And its ends, therefore, cannot be manifest, because that would overwrite the indeterminacy which is, paradoxically, judgement's source of validity. The ends of aesthetic judgement therefore must be figured, but not posited; they must be presented negatively, non-manifest, non-actual.[81] Figurability is already written into the third *Critique*, and into reflecting judgement. The consequences of this figurability extend into his broader critical project, the effectiveness of which the third *Critique* was supposed to validate (if not complete). But such judgement is also susceptible to the reflection it thinks. It does not draw on conceptuality, nor on any objective validity. Its ends are to be supposed, and its activity is figurative, 'as if' it were a concept. The aesthetic proposes a reversal of experience, an experience coordinated by reflection and not determination. But that reversal is not contained by the aesthetic. Indeed, the aesthetic itself is constructed through reflection. Just as figurative ends are not determinate – the end of a metaphor must be interpreted, reflectively – so the aesthetic requires reflection. Kant's aesthetic judgement remains reflective in the way that Hegel's foreclosed. The ends of aesthetic experience are subject to reflection, and thus remain indeterminate. In this final section I will examine the implications of this figurability of reflection *in* the aesthetic, and of the reflective figurability *of* the aesthetic itself. In considering the consequences of conceiving negativity in Kant's philosophy of experience, we can turn to an account of the poetics of figuration that might be invoked to structure these consequences.

ii. Indeterminacy, figuration, and poetry

The reflecting aesthetic judgement must remain, for Kant, regulative. In a late essay, 'On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy', Kant attacks the idea that one can simply 'think' intuitively, that any 'intellectual intuition' might be possible. One must think, always, conceptually.[82] Pleasure cannot be a 'surrogate of cognition'.[83] This means that any 'connection' that might reflectively be established

[80] CPJ 101/5: 216

[81] To re-emphasise, here, this is precisely the move Hegel resists in Kant: for Hegel, beauty, and art, is the manifestation and actualisation of the Concept in sensuous form, and therefore its precise determination.

[82] Kant, Immanuel, 'On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy', in *Raising the Tone of Philosophy: Late Essays by Immanuel Kant, Transformative Critique by Jacques Derrida*, ed., trans. by Peter Fenves (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 51-81; n. 395

[83] Ibid., p. 62

in aesthetic or teleological judgement remains *negative*. The connections communicated in aesthetic judgement cannot become objective, because such objectification would violate not only the transcendental conditions of possible experience, but also the *reflection* of which such judgements are constituted. The task, then, is not one of making reflection 'objective',[84] but of conceiving a form in which the negativity of reflection itself (its indeterminacy, its provisionality) could be *negatively* presented. Such negative presentation is the concern and task of Adorno's aesthetics and *Negative Dialectics*, but also of Blanchot's 'fragmentary writing', the 'step/not beyond' conceptual determination. We can find such a form for 'negative presentation' in Kant's sense of reflecting judgement: in the 'reversal' such judgement responds to and undertakes.

Such negative presentation is encoded in Kant's aesthetic in the way he treats poetry. That treatment is put into relief when considered, again, against Hegel's sense of poetry within the wider sphere of the aesthetic. My final claim in this chapter is that Kant's aesthetic is readable through a figure, 'reversal', precisely because the aesthetic is already structured through figuration. The 'ends' of reflecting judgement are not determined by that judgement, because the aesthetic for Kant does not communicate any content, instead communicating the form of communicability. The ends, like figures, remain to be determined; the aesthetic judgement merely outlines the conditions of their visibility.

There is, then, a *poetic* procedure at work in the aesthetic. Just as, for Kant, poetry is the reflective, playful deployment of concepts without determining their purpose or end, so the aesthetic itself is coordinated through its own reflectively indeterminate procedure, and the reflective way it configures its ends.[85] For Hegel, poetry is the final stage of art, in the sense that poetry discloses the way that, finally, the Concept exhausts the possibilities of its embodiment and turns subjective again; and in the way that poetic form is not contained in the content of its words, but in the 'poetic imagination'.

> Poetry is the universal art of the spirit which has become free in itself and which is not tied down for its realization to external sensuous material; instead, it launches out exclusively in the inner space and the inner time of ideas and feelings. Yet precisely, at this highest stage, art transcends itself, in that it forsakes the element of a reconciled embodiment of the spirit in sensuous form and passes over from the poetry of the imagination to the prose of thought.[86]

---

[84] We might think here of the turn by the German *Frühromantiker* towards such objectification, such that poetry 'embodies' truth; but we might also think of Hegel, for whom art was (admittedly limited) thinking in sensuous form. Both threaten to *posit* the reflection Kant thought could only be *negatively* presented.

[85] This would provide the basis for the *Frühromantiker* reading of poetry as assuming the role of aesthetic critique itself. I do not want so hastily to make that same move, for reasons that I hope will become clear. The figurative work of the aesthetic is not extracted from the condition of reflective experience, but rather part of its own immanent work. Art does not 'do' philosophy, or make it happen, but rather offers critique of it; or rather philosophy has its own subterranean artistic procedures.

[86] HA, 89

With poetry, Hegel returns us to Kant. For Hegel art is the sensuous embodiment of thinking, and the manifest articulation of the way external matter can be reconciled with subjective spirit. But for Kant, art offers a negative presentation of the way reflection can be reconciled with the reflective work of the faculties. Kant's art is thoroughly indeterminate, in the sense that it is only 'art' to the extent that it provokes the reflection of aesthetic experience. And so 'beauty', to reiterate the point, 'is nothing by itself, without relation to the feeling of the subject'.[87] For Kant, poetry also 'claims the highest rank of all'[88] the arts. Its work, however, is the 'merely entertaining play with the imagination'.[89] Poetry presents concepts without purpose, such that the imagination can play with them reflectively without needing to invoke any end of their determination. In this way, Kant's characterisation of poetry most closely follows his characterisation of the faculties themselves in aesthetic judgement, and therefore claims the 'highest place' in the arts as the one most resembling the subject's aesthetic attitude, and thus the one most conducive to pure cognitive play.

But there is a fine line here between poetry provoking aesthetic experience and articulating it. If poetry 'embodies' the cognitive free play it also induces, then it is, in Hegel's sense, the sensuous embodiment of the reconciliation that for Kant remains a subjective procedure. Hegel's sense of poetry's embodiments is therefore significant for us, here. What, precisely, does poetry, as art, embody? For Hegel, this is 'sound' itself:

> the last external material which poetry keeps, is in poetry no longer the feeling of sonority itself, but a *sign*, by itself void of significance, a sign of the idea which has become concrete in itself, and not merely of indefinite feeling and its nuances and gradations. Sound in this way becomes a *word* as a voice inherently articulated, the meaning of which is to indicate ideas and thoughts. The inherently negative point to which music had moved forward now comes forth as the completely concrete point, as the point of the spirit, as the self-conscious individual who out of his own resources unites the infinite *space* of his ideas with the *time* of sound.[90]

There is a Kantian reconciliation of transcendental faculties (here encapsulated in the *a priori* forms of space and time) made objective, here, in poetry. By making 'sound' itself, in its sensuousness (a *voice*) *meaningful*, poetry makes the mere form of signification itself significant: a sign, a symbol. The mere work of articulation becomes significant. The mere work of reflection Kant outlined in the aesthetic becomes significant, voiced, a sign, and not just 'mere' reflection.

[87] CPJ 103/5: 218

[88] CPJ 203/5: 326

[89] CPJ 205/5: 327

[90] HA, 88-9

But as a final reversal – and I do want to invoke the poetic implications of *verse*, here, the turn that defines verse, the turn at the end of a line[91] – does not the articulation of reflection as 'sound' in poetry, the way poetry makes sound itself articulate, expose a further reflective mutability in signification?[92] I mean that poetry's inclusion of sonic form into its patterns of signification makes legible a *mere reflection* at work in ordinary semantic signification. Sound is significant in poetry, and meaningful. And certainly, as Hegel points out, this is poetry's alchemical work of reflectively making sensuous form meaningful. But it is also, in reverse, an exposure of semantic meaning to a more negative sense of reflection. We should recall the threat of 'babbling' indeterminacy that for Novalis, and Blanchot, poetry measures. If mere sound is possibly meaningful, then meaning is possibly just 'mere sound'. As Kant's aesthetics emphasise, reflection is finally indeterminate. And the reflective way poetry invokes sound as 'voice' (we might ask, whose voice? Surely, to quote Blanchot again, the voice of the 'third person who is not a third person', the non-dialectical imposition of voice from outside, the exilic, fictional voice of poetry which is the concern of this thesis's reading of Celan) exposes voice to its reflective indeterminacy. The way that even sound is 'voiced' in poetry exposes the subject to a negative indeterminacy. If sound is meaningful, its meaning is threatened by the indeterminate way signification is susceptible to unexpected reflection. Voiced sound discloses a negative, reflective work of presentation by which the subject establishes identity: in language which is intimately non-identical with itself, even in its voicing.

There are poetic implications to Kant's aesthetics, just as there are aesthetic implications for poetics. What is the aesthetics' reflective 'work'? If cognitive work is the determination of what was indeterminate by thinking, or, for Hegel, by 'negation', then the reflecting judgement does not undertake any 'work' in this sense. And yet it is operative, or functional, in that something does happen. The ends of aesthetic, reflecting judgement are not 'work', then, but the mere reflective operativity of a persistent indeterminacy. In poetry, for Kant, the reading mind is presented with concepts of the understanding in such a form – intentionality without purpose – that the imagination plays with those concepts in unexpected, unanticipated ways. The 'free play' and 'disinterest' that characterise pure judgements are not dispensed with but re-deployed. Reading a poem, the imagination 'freely', reflectively plays with concepts. Concepts are reflectively *indeterminate*. The concept becomes the object of reflective free play. They are not determinately referred to an object. Instead, they are exposed to the free play of

[91] See Agamben, Giorgio, *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 109

[92] We are anticipating, certainly, the structuralist and post-structuralist constructions and deconstructions of sound and speech, voice and signification, but I want to remain in the discourse of aesthetics here for a reason: there are aesthetic assumptions and implications that remain subterranean in structuralism, which are precisely concerned with the *form* and *formation* of meaning, and with the formal conditions of critical reading. Kant's aesthetic concern with the conditions of meaning make these aesthetic structures legible where they might otherwise be occluded or passed over.

reflection that any more cognitively determinate, purposive or intentional use of words[93] would suppress. Just as poetry inspires only more conceptual free play (without the determinate end of rhetorical meaning), so the aesthetic judgement provokes more reflection in its ends: 'common sense' marks a shared reflection, and not a determination, of community; and the 'connections' established between nature and reason are likewise reflective, not determinate. Aesthetic judgement takes on the characteristics of art. But these characteristics are indeterminate and reflective. Art does not determine the characteristics, constitution or structure of aesthetic experience and judgement. Nor does it become 'working' (doing cognitive work, 'intellectual intuition') where the reflections of aesthetic judgement leave off. Art instead is a collaborative unworking, a Blanchotian '*désœuvrement*', an Adornian 'negative' presentation. Describing these readings of aesthetic ends will occupy the rest of this thesis. The point to emphasise here is that the form of these readings is established in Kant's aesthetic itself. The form of the reversal of that aesthetic is a form of reading. Just as poetry, for Kant, both induces conceptual play and undertakes that play, while remaining persistently negative in its indeterminate presentation of the conceptuality, so the aesthetic itself is figurable into the context of art on this reflective, indeterminate ground. The kind of figurative work poetry undertakes – exactly this para-conceptual play – makes legible the para-conceptual way aesthetic, reflecting judgement proceeds; and the way the identifiable ends of aesthetic judgement – the reflective connections of community and cognition – are structured through this indeterminacy. The aesthetic is not immunised from indeterminacy by the reflection it adopts and inscribes.

4 – On Method

There is an inevitably *reflexive* quality about an argument doing justice to the reversal of Kant and the problem it leaves his reader of getting on terms with indeterminacy and disconnection resistant by definition to conventional conceptual treatment. And the reversal seized on by Adorno and Blanchot not only has consequences for the way they think, but also for the way we are obliged to think about them. This is what I mean by an 'aesthetic' in their criticism: a form of the conditions of their reading, and a form of reading by which those conditions are legible. The model for this kind of aesthetic

[93] Kant's counter-form is 'rhetoric', in which 'purpose' does determine the apparent free play of the imagination. We might think about the contemporary importance of this for our understanding of aesthetics: art cannot simply be rhetoric, where the intention for meaning determines its formal work; it has instead, for Kant, only to have the strict intention of art itself [CPJ 204/5: 327]. Rhetoric, indeed, with its mobilisation of play for determinate purposes, precedes 'ruin' [CPJ 205/5: 328], in a way such that Kant closely resembles Adorno's concern with the appropriation of aesthetic 'purposeless' form for determinate purpose in the culture industry, replacing aesthetic semblance with the determinations of exchange in the commodity.

thinking can be won from Kant's aesthetic, but it is won reflexively through reading itself. The legibility such an aesthetic affords to the ends of reflective aesthetic experience and judgement is won through reflection – just as Kant suggests that any aesthetic judgement remains reflective.

These 'ends' are organised by disconnection: a 'community' which is reflectively organised by a principle of shared indeterminacy; and a philosophy which is organised by a principle of collaborative indeterminacy. And these ends are likewise organised through their mutual disconnection: reflection does not instantiate either an objective basis for community, nor an objective (conceptual) procedure for philosophical thinking. The task of a post-Kantian aesthetic, then, would be to make this *disconnection* itself legible, and to explore the conditions of such legibility. This legibility is further afforded by poetry. That is to say, it has to be read. Reading Celan's poetry offers a formal way such an aesthetic could be read. Poetry does not therefore legislate for a mode of writing, but offers formal opportunities by which reading can be configured and shaped. The three principle voices I discuss to develop this aesthetic of legibility – Adorno, Blanchot, and Celan – are therefore read through this 'reversal' of engagement with Kantian aesthetics. And my method is in a sense to welcome disconnection. This has implications for the macro and micro level of my writing. On the macro level, I firstly want to attend to the ways that these writers are disconnected from one another. They do not, for the most part, write about one another. And the instances when they do – particularly about the crystalline, elegiac figure of Celan – are explicitly framed by their disconnection: Blanchot writes about Celan as an 'anonymous friend'; Adorno writes about Celan as a fragmentary, undeveloped afterthought to his *Aesthetic Theory*; and Celan is a figure of elegy for the English language poets I look at in the final chapter.

My point, structurally, is not, then, to impose a critical connection where one does not exist, but to think through exactly this disconnection This is firstly a task of understanding the significance of disconnection in their work, and in an aesthetics orientated by disconnection. Secondly, it is treating disconnection – according to the preceding reading of Kant – as a method of reading in itself, and as a method in which the kinds of reflection and indeterminacy that occupy Kantian aesthetics are legible. Disconnection is thematically integral to each of these projects. Celan's poetry, in my reading, is more than anything a poetry of exile. But, if we are to take that exile at its word, then we cannot provide a critical 'home' for it meaningfully to reside in. We cannot 'explain' poetry that so forcefully resists explanation. Indeed, Celan's poetry offers just this kind of resistance for the writers whose responses to Celan I explore. Such poetics compels a reading which is likewise exilic: which is orientated towards a future reading which it does not make manifest. There is no final reading, surely, of any poem; but this resistance to finality is exposed, in Celan's poems, to the future as exilic itself: his work exacts a reading which is not one possible home among many in a series of other possible, future critical readings, but is rather exposed to its own futural *indeterminacy*. Reading is not just provisional, it is itself *indeterminate*. Celan's poetry requires us to read *indeterminately*: not just without end (terminus),

but without determining, foreclosing any meaning. Kantian aesthetics, attuned to their own reflective indeterminacy, channel this poetic reading, just as they channel a philosophical reading counter-Hegel.

Such a reading of poetry gives form by which we read other disconnections: poetic, philosophical, and political. If we are to recognise, register, and respond to the disconnections that are attendant upon each of these discourses – which they surely are – then we need to have a form to make this disconnection legible. This legibility is won from the difficult task of reading Celan's poetry as exilic, but at the cost of 'making connections' in criticism. Reading Celan lets us read *disconnectively*, makes legible the disconnections between Adorno and Blanchot, between both of them and Kant, and crucially between poetic reading and poetic writing. And this turns, again, on the distinction poetry measures between language that is 'voiced' and language that 'babble's, and between a politics of 'common sense' and the ravings of *Schwärmerei*. Thematically, then, and structurally, such reading lets us re-imagine the terms of Kantian aesthetics from the inside out: no longer orientated towards making connections, Kant's aesthetic becomes the reversed site where disconnections are made legible. And the hope, the futurity which Celan's poetry so fiercely reserves for itself, is the hope that in such disconnection there might be space where difference might be thought as lost *without that loss being lost*; where, in Adorno's project, the negative might be dialectically registered *without being negated*, the nonidentity of thought registered *without being identified*; where, in Blanchot's project, writing might compose a system of exchange marked by loss, an antisystematic writing open to what it loses *without recompense* in any figured 'beyond'. These projects are open to disconnection, and disconnection must be welcomed into the system of reading itself if we are to hope to register it. No systematic account of each thinker could be (will be) given. Instead, each functions as a lens through which a disconnective reading can be glimpsed.

And, to repeat myself, this has methodological implications on a micro level, too, of my writing. The rhetorical figure guiding my work here is, in one sense, zeugma: I am yoking together, across this gulf of disconnection, intrinsically different conceptual registers, vocabularies, and, indeed, languages. When Kant writes '*sensus communis*' he does not do so with the same historical weight as Adorno's *Gemein*, Blanchot's *communauté*, or English 'community'. Each refers, indeed, to radically different political and historical situations: the rational community Kant invokes from Königsberg is not the radical collapse of community into sociability in Paris in May 1968; or the disintegrated *Kultur* of the culture industry that emerges with Adorno's account of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. This seems obvious, but I want to reclaim its significance for reading. I track, trace, words deployed in very different contexts, not to advocate their consistency, but to expose the word, like a crystal, to exactly this radical difference over time and space. I want these words – words I repeat, words that intrude into my writing, words that I do not define – to remain, despite this, *singular*. I want these words, in their singularity, to trace their radical exposure to different signification, not just to 'yoke together' by association very different contexts (Adorno's trepidations over student protest in post-war Germany;

Blanchot's vexed 'unavowal' of community in '68; Celan's fearful mistrust of the aestheticisation of politics in the same context), but to expose those singular words and concepts to the way history pluralises them.

Again, this is thematic. I am concerned with this conceptual exile: with the way Kantian aesthetics are not adequate to the context of late twentieth-century protest and artistic practice, and the way that such inadequacy still makes legible otherwise negative structures of thinking and conceptualising in that new context. Most importantly, perhaps, when Kant writes 'aesthetics', it refers to a field of experience to which Adorno's 'aesthetics' are alien and yet, crucially, involved. Adorno's thinking radicalises aesthetics by retaining the original sense and transporting it, as exile, into a new territory. And this attends a whole host of concepts: Kant's 'nature' is both inherent to and radically inadequate to Adorno's 'nature'; Kant's 'subject' and 'present' are both inherent to and radically antagonised by Blanchot's 'subject' and 'present'. But this inadequacy is only legible through the word's singularity. We do not invent new words for new experiences. We should not, to quote Celan, 'split off No from Yes.[94] Any account of the crucial but difficult role of negation in Adorno's and Blanchot's projects would have to respond to the way negation *does not negate its object*.

The guiding concepts of the thesis are therefore not conceptually determinable, but rather describe the ways conceptuality can be exposed to an indeterminacy. Disorientation, negation that does not negate, exile, reversal: each of these describes a *method* or an *approach* to systematic conceptual thinking that encounters its own *reversal*: stepping not beyond what it thinks, not negating its object, exilically orientated by the no-man's land of its own exile. Each models a *non-transcendent negation* that I trace through the aesthetic. And in order to think such disconnection, we must attend to the ways conceptuality *resists* determination, and in such resistance remains legibly *indeterminate*: without terminus, end, or meaning. We do not, finally, 'make sense' of disconnected relations, we do not, critically, find a way to 'connect' what is otherwise disconnected. The poem that is exiled from meaning does not find its home in criticism. Criticism does not resolve the hermeneutic problems that such poetry presents. But in order to think this, we must have forms for *disconnection* itself. The question this thesis finally addresses, then, is what form could such disconnection take? The tentative, always provisional answer is *reversal*: a descriptor for local, specific situations that do not resolve into conceptual clarity or determinacy. How else do we respond to these singular situations – political, poetic, or philosophical – that reverse our capacity to conceptualise them, that demand of us (as Kant's aesthetic judgement does) that we register this reversal as the only ground and expression of our capacities to experience them?

In the rest of this thesis, I will trace some of these situations: the political situation of May '68, the poetic situation of Paul Celan as exilic and elegiac figure of criticism, and the philosophical situation

[94] Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose*, Felstiner, 76|77

of a re-reading of Kant's aesthetics in a context to which they are inadequate. In doing so I trace in parallel what Adorno describes as a 'negative dialectic' and Blanchot as writing the 'disaster'. My claim is that these situations are not 'connected', but offer 'forms' for reading each other's disconnection. Each situation describes a nonencounter. Such nonencounters stand as what Blanchot calls, repeatedly, a 'relation without relation'.[95] They describe a negation without negation, a step not beyond, a yes not separated from its no. These nonencounters structure my thesis: in chapter two I look at politics through each writers' 'nonencounter' with the political, focused in May '68; in chapter three I look at philosophy through the structures of dialectical 'nonencounter' Blanchot and Adorno develop in response to such politics, placed in dialogue with Celan's exilic poetic; in chapter four I look at poetics through Celan as both elegist and figure of elegy, poetic and critical, in which 'nonencounter' both organises and interrupts – disorganises – poetic figuration. It is in Kant's aesthetics, with its model for singular, subjective, non-objective legitimation of judgements of taste as *universal*, that we find the site for playing out each of these themes of reversal. The ends of Kantian judgement are reversed: it no longer secures 'community', in chapter two; nor does it secure self-presence, in chapter three; nor does it secure a bridge with nature, in chapter four. But the terms and form of this reversal are enacted *through* the form of Kant's aesthetic judgement of taste. By insisting on the objectivity that Kant has to jettison from such judgement, and by insisting on historicising those judgements in artworks, Kant's aesthetic is set into 'reverse'. But, I insist, the *form* of this reversal of Kant is found *inside* Kant's account of the aesthetic itself.

[95] Not just the asymmetrical relation to otherness, found in Levinas, but a doubled asymmetry where the self is exposed to its own otherness.

CHAPTER TWO

Saying We: Community from aesthetics to exile

as if without us we could be we

Paul Celan

Introduction

This chapter pursues the first of the 'ends' of reflecting judgement in Kant's third *Critique*: 'common sense' and community. 'Community' is a reflective site in which the reflection Kant identified with aesthetic judgement is played out. In chapter one, we saw how the aesthetic judgement is reflective. Its validity does not, for Kant, derive from any objective fact or determinate concept, but from its own reflecting work. In order to establish its validity as reflective, Kant has recourse to what he calls 'common sense': because an aesthetic judgement refers to the subjective faculties of cognition, rather than predicating anything of an object, its validity rests on the supposition that every other person must, if they have the same cognitive faculties, judge in the same way. 'Common sense' thus legitimises a judgement that merely reflects on a subject's own cognitive powers. But it also means that aesthetic judgements outline the conditions for intersubjective agreement, and therefore for sociability itself. In the aesthetic, then, Kant finds a non-objective basis for sociability.

The question I now want to examine is to what extent such sociability shapes political community. What is the difference between a reflective 'common sense' and a political 'community'? Further to this, if the experience of politics is, like that of beauty, a *reflective* experience, then is political judgement also a *reflecting* judgement? The consequences of this would play out the 'reversal' I identified in chapter one. Aesthetic judgement affords the conditions for a subjective comportment to sociability. But sociability is itself a reflective experience. The 'common sense' which for Kant endorses a capacity for reflecting judgement is itself susceptible to reflective experience. The 'indeterminate' procedures of aesthetic judgement, explored in chapter one, are also operative in political judgement. But what would a reflective, indeterminate political organisation be like? What happens to the aesthetic judgement when its validation in 'common sense' is reflectively referred to historical and political events, when it is a 'community' and not just posed as a regulative transcendental mark of 'communicability'?

We can turn to a specific event, the student-worker uprising of May '68, to pose these questions. This has a double effect. Firstly, May '68 is the subject of this kind of indeterminate political thinking. In such thinking, 'Community' marks a provisional organisation of sociability and politics. And this *political* indeterminacy is historically discontinuous. '68 marks a historical rupture. The indeterminate political organisation *in* the event is mirrored by an indeterminate historical organisation *of* the event. That is to say, secondly, that '68 is reflective: it is *experienced* reflectively, in politics, and *judged* reflectively, in history; and in this it mirrors Kant's version of the aesthetic, which responds to a reflective experience of beauty with a reflecting judgement of taste. The task of thinking about a *discontinuous* event *historically* is a *reflective* task, which invokes the terms of the aesthetic. Finally, '68 is a 'common' point itself, around which three writers – Adorno, Blanchot, and Celan – meet. But their relationship to the event is not continuous. Blanchot and Celan lived through it, but their relation to it is explicitly *written*, in a way that resists a simple or continuous identification of them with the event. And Adorno's position is less continuous still: the German student uprising was famously, tragically given his death the next year, focused on his own Frankfurt school at the Institute of Social Research. None of these writers endorse the idea that the reflective work of art can be simply translated into the reflective organisation of politics. But for each the idea of 'community' marks the difficult transaction and exchange between the indeterminate experience of the aesthetic and the indeterminate production (or not) of politics. My contention in this chapter is that this relation can be marked through an engagement with Kant. Just as Kant insisted on the merely formal relation between aesthetics and politics, so each of these writers describes a politics invested with aesthetic procedures that resists, perhaps paradoxically, political investment. By tracing Kant's own move from the reflecting aesthetic judgement to 'common sense', we can see how those procedures are transformed or translated in response to politics.

And as a final move, the historical specificity of this event is important. Kant's aesthetics exclude historical change by channelling reflection into the transcendental scope of the subject. But if politics and history are also experienced reflectively, then the historical and social material Kant excludes from aesthetic experience might also, in an aesthetic attentive to them, be reflectively visible. In reading Adorno, Blanchot, and Celan here, I attempt to develop such an aesthetic. There are four parts to the chapter. Firstly, I outline the historical and political questions arising from May '68. Then I trace Adorno's intervention into Kant's aesthetics through the idea of 'common sense', followed by plotting this version of 'community' against Blanchot's idea of 'unavowable' community. Finally, I explore these aesthetics and politics through the idea of 'exile' in Celan, in order to develop the idea that these aesthetics are, themselves, organised by 'exile'.

1 – Framing community: May '68, politics, and history

The events of the student-worker uprising frame the question of community for Blanchot, and frame Celan's poetics in his late poetry. Thinking about community in '68 means thinking about the indeterminate organisation of politics. That means responding reflectively to politics. We can therefore use '68 to frame questions about Kantian aesthetics, because, as we saw in chapter one, Kant develops the aesthetic in response to an experience of reflective organisation. By looking at May as an exemplary event, we can frame the way Adorno's, Blanchot's, and Celan's sense of the relation between politics and aesthetics can be channelled through my reading of Kantian aesthetic indeterminacy.

The questions raised by the events of May '68 are historical, as well as political. The question of what 'political' conditions (*le politique*) constitute the activity of 'politics' (*la politique*) is a primary question of the republic. What are the political conditions that frame the practice of politics? Exactly this question is exercised in historical thinking about May, and the fifth Republic instituted in 1958.[1] Kristin Ross argues that retrospective, historical, accounts of the events have elided the question of equality with a valorisation of individuality. There are consequences of this elision on the form of history itself. May 'contributed to creating a timeless and eternal era where even the *idea* of discontinuity and historical change has been evacuated […]. Completely deterritorialized, May becomes one with a stage of capitalism that denies any succeeding historical stages.'[2] In such histories of the event, the discontinuities that mark it are elided. May marks both a political rupture and a rupture in historicisation. If we are to make sense of the discontinuities of experience in May's politics, then we need a historical form of the visibility *of discontinuity itself*. But this poses the problem of paradox. In what form can discontinuity be thought, if discontinuity marks a rupture of exactly the kind of communication and continuity that is the condition for thinking historically? The question, here, is how to think of a *historical* equality, and not just a political manifestation of equality. This is an aesthetic problem. In what form can the indeterminacy of such reflection (the reflective way an event is 'discontinuous' with thinking about it) be thinkable? We might think, here, of Christoph Menke's account of politics and aesthetics. For Menke, '[p]olitical equality is an aesthetic thought'.[3] Equality has to be made to appear. But it also has to be experienced. This means that equality is something we spectate. 'Equality [*Gleichheit*] is an aesthetic effect, an effect of aestheticisation in spectatorship [*Zuschauen*]. And if aesthetic spectatorship is an activity, then we *make* ourselves aesthetically equal.

[1] See Reynolds, Chris, *Memories of May '68* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011) for the contemporary response to unres. For a history of the event's interpretation, see Reader, Keith, *The May 1968 Events in France* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993); and Bourg, Julian, *From Revolution to Ethics* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), who, through a reading of Deleuze that parallels this history, argues that '68 grounded an orientation to 'ethics' in the social sciences and philosophy of the 1970s.

[2] Ross, Kristin, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 183

[3] Menke, Christoph, *Die Kraft der Kunst* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013), 175 (my trans.)

Or: in the aesthetic activity of spectatorship we make ourselves *equal*.'[4] We are spectators to the equality we make in spectating. Political equality is spectated. Any history, then, would 'spectate' the event it would make itself equal to, or continuous with. The equality which, as Ross argues, is at stake in the events of May, would only be visible to a historical form equal to its presentation. Presentation itself raises political questions of equality.

Thinking about '68 involves two concepts we can examine here: equality and history. If writing examines this question of political equality, then it reproduces the form of that political question. What history, and what writing, would be adequate to thinking equality? What are the aesthetic conditions of equality? The writing of '68 shows that the usual authorities where decisions are made no longer explain what is happening. Writing offers an alternative explanation of what happens when authority is suspended. But this is manifested as a displacement, and not an inversion, of authority. Politics that depends upon a sovereign capacity to *suspend* politics leaves the *political* terms of that decision unconceptualised. The juristic conception of sovereignty as a capacity to decide on suspension is developed by Carl Schmitt as a 'borderline concept'.[5] This decision might refer to present politics, but it is discontinuous from that present: 'to produce law it need not be based on law.'[6] Sovereignty thus opens politics to other discourses, precisely through sovereign claims to supremacy, absoluteness, indivisibility, perpetuity.[7] Conceptions of literature at this time focus on the way writing divests exactly these kinds of authority. A dissolution of political authority parallels a dissolution of literary authority. [8] Sovereignty here shifts from a juristic into a literary question. But when sovereignty is not conceptualised legally, or when legal conceptualisation becomes inadequate, writing does not become a more adequate way to conceptualise sovereignty.[9] Writing inhabits this *dissolution* of sovereignty.

---

[4] Ibid., 172

[5] Schmitt, Carl, *Political Theology*, trans. by George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 5

[6] Ibid., 14

[7] These are what Jean Bodin identifies as the characteristics of sovereignty in *The Six Books of the Commonwealth* (1576), and they inform the subsequent tradition of political thought that can be charted through Hobbes, Rousseau, Benjamin, Schmitt, and Agamben. Agamben provides a useful account of the more recent history in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), especially on the 'paradox' of sovereignty (15-27), and on force (63-7).

[8] We can think here as much of Adorno's concern to distinguish the truth content dialectically operative through the complex of form and material in the artwork against meaningful subjective intention, whereby intentions are objectively as well as subjectively situated, [AT, 196-9/223-7] as of the broader strokes of Roland Barthes's 1967 'The Death of the Author', and of Blanchot's concerted separation of the writer from the written in *The Space of Literature*, and 'Literature and the Right to Death' in the 1950s.

[9] See Leslie Hill, ''Not In Our Name': Blanchot, Politics, the Neuter', in *Paragraph*, 30:3 (2007), pp. 141-159, for an account of Blanchot's counter-reading of sovereignty in the '30s and '40s. Hill argues that Blanchot reads sovereignty and the law as akin to writing in its radically neutral groundlessness. I want to focus on this connection in Blanchot's later works. See also Opelz, Hannes, 'The Political Share of Literature: Maurice Blanchot, 1931-1937', in *Paragraph*, 33:1 (2010), pp. 70-89, for an account of how in

Writing *can* inhabit this kind of dissolution. Writing dissolves the kinds of authority associated with sovereignty in such a way that it is exposed to this dissolution, rather than crediting it. By looking at this suspension through writing, not politics, we can register the way the political is worked out reflectively outside politics.

To make sense of suspension of authority, we must recognise the context of '68 from the Algerian war through the 1960s. The war in Algeria precipitated the end of the Fourth Republic in 1958. In a quasi-coup, the military established de Gaulle in power to constitute the Fifth Republic, in which he remodelled the parliamentary system by introducing a presidential executive branch. De Gaulle employed these executive powers in response to successive crises. The prolonged 'state of emergency' which he declared in the wake of an attempted military coup in 1961 amounted to a 'state of exception', temporarily assigning extraordinary powers to the president, which was repeated in '68. So the events of the Algerian war were a preliminary rupture reproduced in '68, at the end of which de Gaulle fled the country, dissolved the national assembly, and threatened military intervention to restore order. The period is thus framed by moments of political crisis threatening rupture of politics. The conceptual re-configuration of republicanism was carried out in the context of political suspension and renegotiation. The triumph of de Gaulle meant that, in 1958, this leftist contestation was submerged. Mark Lazar frames this as a conflict between two polar, but parallel, conceptions of historical time.[10]

> A man [de Gaulle] against a party; some essential, cast-iron ideas of nationalism and Catholicism set against a rigid Marxist doctrine; two conceptions of history, one which emphasises the continuity of a country and a people, another which wants to break [*césure*] fundamentally with these; two languages, one written and spoken in a classical prose which sometimes lapses into lyricism, another wooden with cumbersome formulations […].[11]

Different politics are here articulated, for Lazar, in different forms of historical time. The events play out in possibly contradictory forms. For Todd Sheppard, the most immediate context of this paralleling of histories is played out in 1958, in Algeria. There, he argues, the 'primary clash' was not between the 'left' and the 'right', but 'between those who relied on historical determinism and others who looked on republican legalism'.[12] The present 'consensus' was 'late-blooming', but 'has ever since served as fact: Algeria was not France but a colony, and thus it deserved and would obtain independence'.[13] Those

---

the 1930s Blanchot moved towards situating the political as negation of empirical experience, which sets the ground for the later turn I am concerned with towards the non-negated negative as a political relation.

[10] Lazar, Marc, *Le Communisme, une passion française* (Paris: Éditions Perrin, 2002). Lazar points out (79-80) that this subterranean paralleling of history emerges from the paralleled communist and Gaullist resistance movements in the war.

[11] Ibid., 77-8 (my trans.)

[12] Sheppard, Todd, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 83

[13] Ibid., 89

who resisted Algerian independence (chiefly the paramilitary OAS) did so on the grounds that Algeria was, in fact, already part of the constitutively indivisible French republic. If Algeria was allowed to secede, the Republic would not be legally coherent as a republic. Algerian independence threatened French sovereignty.

In the context of the war for Algerian independence, the concept of the 'republic' and its law thus becomes the conceptual territory in which sovereignty is argued out, however much it was ignored by contemporary politicians. The question of legality figured in this 'republicanism' could, Sheppard implies, re-write the grounds of history on which the Algerian appeal is mounted: the silence with which historical determinism was accepted came at the expense of legal conceptualisation.[14] Contemporary politics did not work out the terms by which it established historical determinism, and so this conceptualisation was left to other discourses to work out. Because this fragmentation or suspension of law was not conceptualised politically, it emerges in writing. The prolonged crisis of Algeria resulted not in a triumphal left-wing revolution of the political status quo, but to the manifestation of an occluded, internalised legal suspension. May '68 was not, therefore, the spontaneous affirmation of individual liberty, but the vexed return of an un-conceptualised legal suspension. In retroactively ascribing necessity to these events, the contingency that constitutes them is obscured. And so is the future which that contingency made possible. In saying that Algerian independence was historically necessary, we might avoid the problem of a legally enforced unity, but we also avoid responding to the discontinuity of that event as indeterminate – on which indeterminacy a future autonomy depends. This requires us to think of the discontinuity of these events. But thinking such discontinuity means developing a form of writing adequate to discontinuity. This implies an aesthetic, even if that aesthetic remains subterranean. What are the conditions of visibility of political indeterminacy, and of historical discontinuity?

The discontinuous arrangement of people in politics might mirror an indeterminate play of ideas in aesthetics. But if it does so, then such political judgements would function like Kant's aesthetic judgement. For Kristin Ross, the displacement of political conceptualisation emerges in new forms of historicism.[15] But I want to argue that it is also felt in writing, in the way writing (and art) is theorised by Adorno, Blanchot and Celan as developing procedures responsive to its own fragmentary, discontinuous operations. That is to say, the questions raised by politics in '68 are *continuous* with questions raised by writing itself, as becomes clear when we consider them through Kant's aesthetic. Ross suggests that this displacement is registered in historical writing, and that this leads to the 'real question': 'the question of equality' 'as something that emerges in the course of the struggle and is verified subjectively, declared and experienced in the here and now as what is, and what should not

[14] Ibid., 95-7

[15] Ibid., 85-90, 113-124

be.'[16] These are exactly the terms of Kant's reflecting aesthetic judgement. These political questions are worked out *like* aesthetic questions. In the history of '68, writing is exposed, like politics, to the indeterminacy of experience that is marked by aesthetic judgement. But this 'coincidence' of political indeterminacy with aesthetic indeterminacy exposes *aesthetic* experience, too, to the radical displacements at work both in the 'present' of attempted equality of relations, and in the retroactive 'history' that tries to account for that equality. Because the fragmentation of law was not conceptualised by politics, other discourses were left to conceptualise it, like writing. Aesthetics can make clear why politics cannot work out its own political, the conditions of politics: because the relation between them is indeterminate and reflective. When the political conditions do not determine what happens in politics, then they are related indeterminately. Could such an 'aesthetic' judgement account for the 'rupture' that marks equality? This would allow us to read the temporal re-orientation of the aesthetic in the 1960s as a historically, materially inflected response to a crisis in the kind of thinking-in-common that Kant thought aesthetics could initiate. This would be to resituate Kant's 'common sense' according to the politics of 'community'. In this discontinuity, a political crisis focuses an aesthetic crisis. We can now turn to the way this crisis transforms aesthetic experience.

2 – No-man's land: judgement from Kant to Adorno

Given the version of Kant's aesthetic established in chapter one, in which aesthetic judgement is coordinated by a reflection that remains indeterminate, what happens to the 'end' of aesthetic judgement, the validation of judgement in 'common sense,' when read through these indeterminate politics and history? If this political crisis focuses an aesthetic crisis, then it does so through the radically discontinuous form of the thought of equality: equality as a reflective experience of otherness, of an otherness not continuous or identical with the self, which provokes a reflecting judgement. Adorno's reconfiguration of the parameters of Kantian aesthetics follows these lines. The reflection that Kant mandates to transcendental subjective experience in the aesthetic is, for Adorno, threaded through material and historical coordinates. We can track the way Kant threads reflection into the form of 'communicability' in common sense, and then track this against Adorno's reading of this Kantian move, in order to develop the terms of this Adornian reconfiguration of reflective common sense. In this section I will look at the ways Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* develops the reflective relation between art and society out of Kant's version of aesthetic reflection.

[16] Ibid., 73-4

Kant and reflection

As we saw in chapter one, for Kant, aesthetic judgement is a reflecting judgement because in aesthetic experience there is no conceptualisation of an object. Rather, the subjective form of judgement becomes the quasi-'object' of judgement itself. And rather than predicating anything of an object, aesthetic judgement refers to a subjective feeling – pleasure. Aesthetic judgements claim validity on a non-conceptual basis. Aesthetic judgement refers to a 'representation which, though singular and without comparison to others, nevertheless is in agreement with the conditions of universality, an agreement that constitutes the business of the understanding in general'.[17] Because a concept has objective content, it can be repeated, but also communicated to any subject who also has the same concept. Lacking such a ground, the aesthetic judgement is nonetheless experienced as true. Its pleasure is not derived from anything merely 'agreeable' about the object, but from the reflection of cognitive powers that – finding no concept – are working reflectively. The pleasure is taken in these subjective powers. But this apparently subjective experience also '**demands**'[18] others' assent. It speaks in a 'universal voice'.[19] This is 'common sense', a '**communal** sense [*gemeinschaftlichen Sinnes*]', a sense shared by all:

> a faculty for judging that in its reflection takes account (*a priori*) of everyone else's way of representing in thought, in order **as it were** to hold [*zu halten*] its judgment up to human reason as a whole […].[20]

The 'commonality' adequate to this 'common sense' has to be reflective, and therefore indeterminate itself. So we can define 'taste as the faculty for judging that which makes our feeling in a given representation **universally communicable** without the mediation of a concept.'[21] The claims of taste mirror those of conceptuality, but are grounded in subjective feeling rather than in an objectively verifiable concept. Aesthetic judgement communicates 'the necessary condition of the universal communicability of our cognition'.[22] This judgement communicates 'communicability', rather than any objective information. And 'it is the universal capacity for the communication [*Mittheilungsfähigkeit*] of the state of mind in the given representation which, as the subjective condition of the judgment of taste, must serve as its ground'.[23] The aesthetic judgement is therefore grounded in the very 'common sense' it produces. One can only judge according to the common sense that verifies that capacity to judge, which emerges with the very pleasure it registers. The common sense that validates the reflecting capacity to judge is itself organised by reflection.

[17] CJ 104, 5: 219
[18] CJ 98, 5: 212
[19] CJ 101, 5: 216
[20] CJ 173, 5: 293
[21] CJ 175, 5: 295
[22] CJ 123, 5: 239
[23] CJ 102, 5: 217

This common sense works through figuration, because it is reflective. It supposes assent, as well as demanding it, expecting it without anticipating the details of its content. Assent is not communicated; the form of assent is supposed: 'this happens by one holding his judgment up not so much to the actual as to the merely possible judgment of others, and putting himself in the position of everyone else'.[24] 'Common sense', like the aesthetic judgement and experience it verifies, is organised reflectively. In the reflecting, aesthetic judgement of an aesthetic experience, there is a non-conceptual claim to universality. This claim is grounded in a feeling, 'pleasure'. But the possibility of 'pleasure' forming the ground for such non-conceptual judgement makes possible the indeterminate proliferation of such grounding. If pleasure grounds judgement, it does so without determining its coordinates. Indeed, this freedom is what constitutes such pleasure. This inscribes a certain 'incommunicability' into the aesthetic judgement: the taxonomy of judgement might be communicable, but the form of its representation cannot be determined. 'Any relation of representations, however, even that of sensations, can be objective […]; but not the relation to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure'.[25] Kant at once restricts the communication of pleasure (judgement 'merely connects its constitution together with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure')[26] and claims that, as judgers, we 'have grounds for expecting a similar pleasure in everyone'.[27] The judgement therefore establishes communicability at the expense of communication. We can only expect such pleasure if the pleasure expected is reflective. 'Common sense' is not only supposed from aesthetic judgement, its constitution is necessarily reflective. The pleasure it expects depends upon that pleasure not being determinately tied to a certain representation.

A 'critique' of judgement is necessary, for Kant, because judgement claims its own a priori ground. But this 'ground' is reflectively held in the 'appearance' it experiences. And the appearance of assent in 'common sense' is only supposed, and figured, in the singular judgement itself. Judgement must provide its own 'principle', and must presuppose systematicity, or possible systematic harmony, in the teeth of indeterminately contingent empirical forms (forms which, indeed, proliferate). Judgement has a double function. Judgement 'requires a principle that [judgement] cannot borrow from experience […] [it] can only give itself such a transcendental principle as a law'.[28] It acts according to the understanding, which provides conceptual laws for organising nature, and it also acts, according to the understanding, to reflectively link sensible intuition to those conceptual rules. But judgement also operates reflectively when there is no concept, and, following Béatrice Longeunesse, as 'mere reflective judgement', does not then produce any concept that could verify the judgement independently from that

[24] CJ 174, 5: 294
[25] CJ 89, 5:203
[26] CJ 95, 5: 209
[27] CJ 97, 5: 211
[28] CJ 67, 5: 180

judgement.[29] The 'mere' operations of reflection are verified in the reflective way they are coordinated through 'common sense', and therefore remain indeterminate. This claim, then, can only be grounded in the feeling of pleasure itself; and this means that its universality has to be presupposed in other subjects, rather than abstracted into a communicable concept. So the aesthetic judgement generates its own grounds by proposing 'common sense', but in doing so also generates the possibility of 'community' or possible 'communicability' without recourse to conceptuality.

Adorno, art, society and history

'Common sense' is the externalisation of reflection, without its objectification in a verifiable concept. 'Common sense' is external to the subject, but it is grounded in the merely supposed repeatability of a subjective feeling, pleasure. That pleasure is not abstracted from or objectified. But what are the consequences of this externalisation for Kant's attempts to channel reflection through the transcendental experience of the subject in the aesthetic? In reflecting, judgement works autonomously (without determining anything else). It is possible here to carve an objectively orientated aesthetics from Kant's subjectivism. As a reflecting judgement, the aesthetic judgement is concerned not with determining any particular object, but with uncovering in reflection an *indeterminate*, which is to say non-conceptual, relation to an object: the object and the relation remain particular. Likewise, on encountering a work of art, one does not reflectively develop a concept which can exhaust its indeterminacy. So if we think of aesthetic experience as responding not just to the discrete, subjective feeling of pleasure or displeasure, but to *art*, to *artwork*'s objectivity, then the reflecting work of responding to indeterminacy can be registered externally to the subject, in the art object itself. This is the effect of internally displacing Kant's judgement of subjective 'feeling' (in response to nature) with the objectification of that same indeterminacy in the work of art. So while Kant is concerned with the connecting objective but proliferating, 'wild'[30] nature with subjectivity through the subject's indeterminate feeling of pleasure, in thinking about art we are concerned with how this 'connection' might be made objectively, in the proliferating but produced instances of art. And with this question we are still within Kantian pleasure. As Paul Guyer puts it, pleasure is not merely felt in response to the subject's autonomy, but is autonomous itself, such that aesthetics asks, 'how we can be pleased with an object independently of

[29] Longuenesse, Béatrice, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, trans. by Charles T. Wolfe (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 163-4

[30] Gasché, *The Idea of Form*, 2: 'Given that nature is defined by Kant as the domain of objectivity, and hence of what can possibly be known, nature in the wild stands as cognitively undomesticated nature. Vice versa, things — including artifacts — for which no determinate concepts are available, and whose purpose cannot be made out, are similar to things found in uncharted nature.' This 'domestication' is an important metaphor: what mental or representative '*domus*' could 'house' nature's wildness?

its subsumption under a concept'.[31] In the artwork, the reflective work (and the pleasure) associated with subjective pleasure is, by reflection, externalised. For Adorno, this amounts to the historicisation of aesthetic judgement by the externalisation of reflection in the artwork. If, for Kant, reflection is both the 'work' and 'end' of judgement, if it is both to secure a transcendental capacity of the subject to reflect and to describe 'mere' reflection, then there is a 'gulf' internal to reflection itself. The artwork radicalises this gulf, which for Kant is felt subjectively, by externalising it. Externalising it, in the artwork, means making that 'gulf' into a history: it traces the different ways it is manifest in individual artworks. But what is traced, in this history, is the *indeterminate* way such reflection is externalised in aesthetic experience.

Art is itself a discontinuous concept, in that it traces a non-continuous, 'inhomogenous'[32] history. Aesthetic experience does not proceed determinately. As a reflective concept, art is organised discontinuously.[33] For Adorno, art 'cannot fulfill its concept'.[34] It does not propose conceptual universality, but rather the reflectively supposed universality of Kantian 'common sense'. For Adorno, this constitutes a 'history' of art, and not just its transcendental experience. No singular artwork is identical with any concept of art, but that means also that each artwork exceeds any aesthetically derived concept of what art is. The history of art, like the history of aesthetic experience, is not deterministic. 'The artwork's autonomy is, indeed, not a priori but the sedimentation of a historical process that constitutes its concept':[35] it is the sedimentation of the history of forms that have been called art. Art is a concept that integrates its own history *as* reflective.

There is a contradiction in 'common sense' as history, then, that is reproduced, for Adorno, in art's relation to its material. Art is positioned not only towards the Kantian 'genius' subject who mediates nature's law, but also towards the society that constitutes the material of its production and experience. As Kant suggests of the 'genius', 'the rule must be abstracted from the deed',[36] in that the 'cause' of art is not distinguishable from its 'end'. But for Adorno, this means that any artwork stands

---

[31] Guyer, Paul, 'Kant's ambitions in the third *Critique*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. by Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 538-587, 562

[32] AT 273/310

[33] Here we might note J.M. Bernstein's description, in *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), of the history of art, for Adorno (through Kant), as a 'record' of 'the collective labour of mourning through which the claims of common sense have been kept alive' (63). Bernstein suggests that aesthetic judgements are made from the historical 'now' in which determinate judgements predominate, and that therefore they 'remember' a lost 'common sense'. 'Common sense' describes a reflecting judgement grounded in the sensible indeterminacy of the judgement itself, in which 'we operate as sensible beings who have the capacity to discover within our sensible determination the possibility of aligning it simultaneously with both objects and others' (54). A 'world' premised on this kind of judgement, rather than determinate judgement, would be one in which there is 'lawfulness without law' (59).

[34] AT 71/87

[35] AT 23/33

[36] CJ 188, 5: 309

in contradiction with its material, which is thoroughly determined. However, we can reintroduce Kant's transcendental judgement to its material history. This requires us to rethink the reflective relation between art and aesthetic experience. Adorno is suggesting that the transcendental critique of aesthetic judgement *includes* the history of the forms of art that Kant excludes as merely 'the formation and culture of taste', undertaking only to criticise judgement 'from a transcendental point of view'.[37] For Adorno, art is an externalisation of the '*sensus communis*' into the sedimented historical forms of society. And yet this externalisation is encountered aesthetically or not at all. 'Art does not exist as the putative lived experience of the subject who encounters it as a tabula rasa but only within an already developed language of art'.[38] The reintroduction of 'common sense' to the historical 'community' it models must take place through the reflective aesthetic experience itself. Art is neither outside conceptuality and history, nor society. It marks the ways concepts are reflectively contradicted by their social material. Art only contradicts society and conceptuality as autonomous. And this autonomy is derived from aesthetic experience.

So art's relation to society is *indeterminate* and *oppositional*. It is contradictory. Art's reflection of its material is also a contradiction of that material.

> […] art becomes social by its opposition [*Gegenposition*] to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art. By crystallizing in itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with existing social norms and qualifying as "socially useful," it criticizes society by merely existing […]. Art's asociality is the determinate negation of a determinate society […].[39]

If we are to think of aesthetic experience generating, and not just confirming, autonomous, free social relations, we have to do so through the way art opposes and contradicts society. The community indicated by aesthetic experience is therefore not the resolved or reconciled community of 'common sense' projected from a harmonious feeling of internal free play, but neither does art merely reproduce its social material. Society instead marks the externalisation of this free play in contradiction, not reconciliation. In art, we experience the autonomy of art, and not necessarily the reflective autonomy and harmony of our own subjectivity. Under art's autonomy, *judgement* is experienced indeterminately. We ask whether this is art, and not whether I feel if this is beautiful. The felt indeterminacy of our own capacity to judge, felt in the same reflective form of aesthetic experience, puts our relationship to judgement under reflection. The relationship between aesthetic experience and other cognitive experience is therefore reversible, but not identical. Aesthetic judgement is not like the judgements of understanding. It is autonomous. But its autonomy is won in relation to cognitive, conceptual judgement. It therefore contradicts the determining procedures of cognition, just as it stands in

[37] CJ 58, 5: 170

[38] AT 447/523

[39] AT 296/335

contradiction to the determinate social material it mediates *reflectively*. The transcendental relation between reflection's work in determining judgement and its autonomous work in aesthetic judgement can be reproduced in art as a relation between the 'aesthetic' and the 'deterministic' use of social material. The community vouched for or indicated (supposed) by aesthetic judgement is indeterminately organised, just as art is.

Aesthetic jurisdiction

The 'autonomy' which Adorno identifies with art is a social autonomy. But it mirrors and draws upon the transcendental autonomy of reflecting judgement indicated by Kant. Adorno agrees with Kant that in aesthetic judgement, the subject is orientated toward its object without desire, it is 'disinterested': this is 'Kant's insight […] that aesthetic comportment is free from immediate desire'.[40] But this autonomy from desire relations is also socially mediated.

> The separation of the aesthetic sphere from the empirical constitutes art. Yet Kant transcendentally arrested this constitution, which is a historical process, and simplistically equated it with the essence of the artistic, unconcerned that the subjective, instinctual components of art return metamorphosed even in art's matured form, which negates them […].[41]

The apparently 'subjective' autonomy of art is actually 'social'. But equally, that 'social' autonomy is mediated by 'subjective' experience. The 'metamorphosed' 'return' of the subject in art is the return to aesthetic comportment of exactly the 'objective' features that Kant excludes from it. For Kant, reflection is provoked when the subject does not find a concept that can determine the 'beauty' it experiences. Adorno suggests that this judgement is itself subject to *reflection*: to the historical and mutable features that structure it. The autonomy aesthetic judgement describes becomes 'negated' in art that contradicts it. There is a complex amplification of reflection, here. If the subject is reflectively related to the object in aesthetic experience, then that aesthetic experience is itself reflectively related to the historical features of society. Art can *contradict* these features, and negate them, just as it assumes social and historical material into the artwork. Simon Jarvis suggests that Kant's detachment of aesthetics from morality is a diminishment, or narrowing, of aesthetic judgments, a claim that 'they are not cognitive but are *analogous* to cognition; that they are not moral but *analogous* to morality'.[42] For Jarvis, this leads to an inversion of Kant's own claim that in the judgement of taste, 'pleasure', a feeling, claims universal validity. 'The problem lies […] in the decision that has already been taken here — […] by means of a *legal* "deduction" of categories — about the radical separateness of thinking and feeling

[40] AT 12/22

[41] AT 12/22

[42] Jarvis, Simon, 'An Undeleter for Criticism', in *Diacritics*, 32:1 (2002), pp. 3-10+12-18, 9

and, accordingly, about the expulsion of all affectivity into an object for a thinking which is presumed, insofar as it is thinking, to treat affectivity as what it thinks *about*'.[43] Pleasure is separated from its manifestation, and channelled into the transcendental through the aesthetic. But pleasure is mediated, first, be social, historical, and bodily experience. Criticism must reclaim the pleasure of judgement, which amounts to a reversal of the idea of subjectivity, in which 'the subject is no longer to be understood as *defined* by being what affectivity and substance are *given to*'.[44] Such an aesthetic theory could think art's historical displacement from cognition, through the *feeling* of displacement in art. And such a re-conception of 'displacement' would also concern how subjective cognition internally displaces the subject from 'feeling' what it 'feels'. By thinking through these displacements, we might arrive at the broader displacements of the subject from intersubjective relations, precisely in the way Kant proposes them in a deferred, subjectively felt, 'common sense'. The distribution of reflection in common sense is not *determined* by that distribution. Aesthetics can register this 'reflective' common sense when it recognises its own displacing activity. If aesthetic experience is coordinated through displacement, then so is any 'common sense' it endorses and is validated by.

But what do I mean here by 'displacement'? I want to develop this into the idea of exile with Paul Celan (in section four). My contention here is that Adorno develops a 'no-man's land' out of the territory of aesthetic judgement and experience, which developed out of Kant's own account of the place of judgement, but which exposes a neutrality within it. Kant describes the 'legality', the proper terrain, of the different modes of cognition in spatial terms. If nature is understood as a field of experience, then the different modes by which it is experienced by a subject have different, but overlapping, legal jurisdictions (*juris+dictio*, where the law is 'spoken'). Judgement's terrain overlaps with the realms of understanding and reason, which are operatively distinct, legislating in different ways, but on 'one and the same territory of experience'.[45] This territory is externally coherent but internally, legally divided.

> Concepts, insofar as they are related to objects, regardless of whether a cognition of the latter is possible or not, have their field, which is determined merely in accordance with the relation which their object has to our faculty of cognition in general. – The part of this field within which cognition is possible for us is a territory [*Boden*] (*territorium*) for these concepts and the requisite faculty of cognition. The part of the territory in which these are legislative is the domain [*Gebiet*] (*ditio*) of these concepts and of the corresponding faculty of cognition.[46]

The distinction here between 'territory' and 'field' is instructive. '*Boden*' refers to an area, to soil or ground, but '*Gebiet*' refers to a domain. The difference here is between a neutral territory and a land

[43] Ibid., 8

[44] Ibid., 12

[45] CJ 62, 5: 175

[46] CJ 61-2, 5: 174

under legislative control. Where concepts are legislative, the field of experience is a 'domain'; where they are not, it is merely a 'territory'. Concepts are still active in this field, even when cognition is not possible. We can think of things we cannot cognise, and this distinction holds to separate the 'field' of experience according to the faculties of understanding and reason. Outside this field there is the 'unlimited but also inaccessible field […] namely the field of the supersensible'.[47] But there is a peculiar intrusion of this neutral inaccessibility into the 'field' of experience which it limits. The 'supersensible' is autonomous from the field of experience, but it '**should** have an influence' on it, 'namely the concept of freedom should make the end that is imposed by its laws real [*wirklich*] in the sensible world'.[48] If commerce must be possible between these two worlds, across this 'incalculable gulf [*unübersehbare Kluft*]',[49] it is because judgement functions in both realms without legislating in either. Judgement is strangely neutral with regard to cognition. In order to operate in both 'fields' of experience, and to reconcile them, it cannot be identical with either but must be coincident with both. The operations of judgement are therefore neutral. It works upon the world neutrally.

In Adorno's reading, Kant establishes a neutral field and not a workable territory for aesthetic judgement. And this inoperativity has consequences for the ends Kant seeks to develop through aesthetics. What is 'incalculable' is too numerous for measure, or exceeds the conditions of measurement. Aesthetic judgement operates within this incalculability, and this indeterminacy. And this means that it operates neutrally on the field of experience, without any conceptual legislation, a 'no-man's land'. Rather than bridging, such neutrality breaches the two separate fields. For Adorno, this breaching constitutes a 'no-man's land' internal to reason. The 'transcendental' conditions for experience are already outside themselves, conditioned by experience. As Adorno says in his lectures on *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 'these conditions can only be held to be valid if they do in fact relate to experience'.[50] The transcendental conditions for experience are not abstracted from experience, they have an objective basis. Adorno continues, 'the sphere of the transcendental is neither one of logic — because it is concerned with the possible knowledge of objects — nor is it a sphere concerned with the contents of knowledge — because it does not presuppose such contents, but only the possibility of possessing such contents. It is, then, a curious *no man's land* of knowledge positioned somewhere between psychology and logic'.[51] In this neutral way, thinking threatens to transcend itself. In aesthetic experience, pleasure is felt at the suspension, and then supposed reconciliation, of this neutral gulf, when, in aesthetic experience, judgement is operative reflectively, without determining any content. But this means that pleasure is felt neutrally, is felt as the threat to 'transcend' its 'transcendental'

[47] CJ 63, 5: 175

[48] CJ 63, 5: 176

[49] CJ 63, 5: 175

[50] Adorno, Theodor, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason (1959)*, Rolf Tiedemann ed., Rodney Livingstone trans., Cambridge: Polity (2001), 21

[51] Ibid., 22

function. It threatens, in Adorno's words, to become a 'no-man's land'. We can relate this *Kluft* to Adorno's vision of utopia from his childhood, where 'The land […] that I occupied when playing on my own was a no man's land.'[52] The subject, here, 'occupies' a 'no man's land', subjectivity inhabiting the land as neutral. So when Adorno uses the same expression to describe the 'gulf' in reason as to describe the 'gulf' between borders, I think he is parodying the Kantian narrative of aesthetic judgement. The subjective 'autonomy' of aesthetic judgement becomes *social* and *political* autonomy. As a child, he is literally between political borders, and he is socially isolated, playing 'alone'. Like the aesthetic judgement itself, he 'plays' between two spheres of experience. Adorno is describing the aesthetic actualising the community that, for Kant, aesthetics can only suppose. But what he experiences is not the 'transcendental' connection of these two spheres. It is rather the 'no man's land' of their separation, the 'gulf' between the two. But here, in this 'no man's land', Adorno the child experiences *pleasure*, freedom, play. Pleasure is not in reconciliation; it is in the feeling of being between borders. The aesthetic experience, this pleasure, is an experience of exile. Adorno collapses the distinction that Kant tries to make in order to secure the validity of aesthetic judgement, between its 'present' in experience and its 'future' in community. Play is internal to reason, and so, therefore, is borderlessness. Community is articulated in this collapse of borders: the collapse of the territorial distinctions which Kant establishes in reason. 'Community' does not secure the relation between the subject and the world of objects. Rather, it exposes this relation as already exilic, already displacing its object, even if that object is subjective feeling, pleasure.

Contradiction

There is, for Kant, a discrepancy between judgement's epistemological and moral functions. Judgement is supposed to secure, as a bridge, the connection between autonomous understanding and reason. But in order to do this, it must be able to function autonomously from both. Judgement is located in and locates the '*Kluft*' that distinguishes the realms of understanding and reason. Judgement operates internally to this distinction, hoping to bridge the gulf of the faculties' necessary separation. Judgement's *displacement* from an operative territory allows it to *place* those cognitively functional uses of judgement by understanding and reason. For Kant, the 'power' of judgement is in reconciling these distinct territories by showing how they both operate on a common field. Judgement is necessarily cognitively neutral. But this means that the 'common' judgement measures is not just neutral, but negative. Because judgements make non-conceptual claims for universality, they are able to mediate between understanding and reason without violating their respective legal claims for validity. But this capacity to mediate requires that judgement have its own autonomy, its own a priori ground. So the ground on which judgements operate is the 'field' [*Gebiet*] of experience as such, not a 'territory' nor,

[52] Adorno, Theodor, *Kulturkritic und Gesellschaft* [GS 10.1] (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003), 305.

certainly, a 'domain'. And this para-legal 'space' constitutes the 'space' where aesthetic judgement's validity is claimed; in other words, the space of the 'common sense' where those judgements find their ground and validity. 'Common sense', then, is a mere 'field', a 'no man's land'.

This neutral functionality structures the aesthetic. We can relate this to what Bernstein calls the 'antinomy of aesthetic autonomy', where 'what constitutes the autonomy of taste necessarily makes the value of beauty contingent, external, and instrumental'.[53] However, this internal division is also the source of judgement's autonomy. It might not operatively provide a 'bridge', but it can work inoperatively in the *space* of the 'bridge'. For Peter Dews, indeed, Kant's structure discloses how 'human *freedom* [is] divided against itself': 'the realization that the human self is freedom, rather than merely possessing 'free-will' as a capacity, was precisely what opened up the possibility of this inner diremption'.[54] Again, for Adorno, this is a reversal of Kant's aesthetics staged within the structure of the aesthetics itself.

> The relation of subjectivity to art is not, as Kant has it, that of a form of reaction to artworks; rather, that relation is in the first place the element of art's own objectivity, through which art objects are distinguished from other things. The subject inheres in their form and content [*Gehalt*] and only secondarily, and in a radically contingent fashion, insofar as people respond to them.[55]

In this reversal, subjectivity is registered in its objective form in the artwork. Subjective pleasure is not, as Kant suggests, felt by the subject in response to its own free play, but felt 'primarily' in the way that freedom can be objectified externally in art. If there is 'subjectivity', as this freedom to play, then it is located in the object. It is displaced from subjective experience. Such experience is henceforth negative. The 'bridge' of judgement does not hold internally, does not reconcile anything, but it does open up the distance, the gulf, which constitutes freedom, and therefore subjectivity, only in the object itself. Aesthetic experience distances the subjective freedom of experience from its social manifestation. But this 'distancing' is an experience of autonomy that, in not reconciling experience, allows for experience.

Pleasure is here displaced from the internal work of subjective faculties to the reflective work of art itself. This reflects the fate of aesthetic experience in historically changing social contexts. Aesthetic experience, orientated by the contingent historical forms of society, is displaced from its transcendental role. But because the artwork's material is social, the aesthetic experience of the artwork offers a way to read this social material according to aesthetic reversal. Rather than securing the subject's relation with nature, aesthetic experience radicalises the subject's social distance from the natural. But in doing so, in opening up rather than reconciling the 'gulf' it works through, the aesthetic potentially becomes the condition for a relation to that *sundered* subjectivity. Pleasure is preserved as

---

[53] Ibid.

[54] Dews, Peter, *The Idea of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 22

[55] AT 450/527

the feeling of a harmonic indeterminacy lost in exchange society, lost by the freedom to think conceptually that the subject historically won from indeterminacy. Pleasure is a lost indeterminacy in a context of manifest determination. The indeterminate 'principle' that guides Kant's transcendental aesthetic experience becomes the social and historical principle of exchange.

> If in monopoly capitalism it is primarily exchange value, not use value, that is consumed, in the modern artwork it is abstractness, that irritating indeterminateness of what it is and to what purpose it is, that becomes a cipher of what the work is. This abstractness has nothing in common with the formal character of older aesthetic norms such as Kant's. On the contrary, it is a provocation, it challenges the illusion that life goes on, and at the same time it is a means for that aesthetic distancing that traditional fantasy no longer achieves. From the outset, aesthetic abstraction […] was foremost a prohibition on graven images [*Bildverboten*]. This prohibition falls on what provincials ultimately hoped to salvage under the name "message": appearance as meaningful; after the catastrophe of meaning, appearance becomes abstract.[56]

The subjective autonomy of aesthetic experience lives on in the artwork that contradicts it. The experience of this contradiction in artworks is a 'catastrophe' for aesthetics as the locus of art's meaning. The 'ban on images' is upheld aesthetically. In Adorno's reading, the aesthetic experience of art, which objectifies the reflection that in Kant's description is strictly subjective, externalises the work of judgement. Aesthetic judgement can be turned against its transcendental terms to expose the subject to the history Kant excludes from such judgement. But it does this through the work of judgement itself. The power of abstraction by which reflection is externalised as art is the power of judgement. The externalisation of judgement happens by its own reflective work. This exposes a neutrality in judgement. The cognitively neutral aesthetic experience is matched with its own reflective work. As externalised, as art, judgement is no longer the immanent terrain of the subject, but sedimented social material. So art can 'think' that material, reflectively. And the neutral relations by which art undoes the relation between aesthetic experience and aesthetic judgement are exposed in precisely this contradictory social material. As negative, art can make manifest the contradictions that form social relations. But art's autonomy from society, its opposition to it, is for Adorno already social. The ends of Kantian aesthetic thinking, marked as 'common sense', are therefore exposed in art to a neutrality. Society does not become the inverse location of aesthetic meaning. Rather, the 'subjective' ends of aesthetic judgement are reversed in their objective distance from society. Autonomy is distant from a society that has no forms for autonomy's articulation. Art articulates this distance. Any community, then, would be in this contradiction, and not in Kantian reconciliation.

It is useful here to think of Kant's differentiation between images and schemata. The image works symbolically, invoking the imagination reflectively. The schema also invokes the imagination,

[56] AT 28/40

but determinately. So the 'reflecting power of judgment' works 'not schematically, but **technically**, not as it were merely mechanically, like an instrument, but **artistically**, in accordance with the general but at the same time indeterminate principle of a purposive arrangement of nature in a system'. And without this 'presupposition' of the principle of systematicity, 'we could not hope to find our way in a labyrinth of the multiplicity of possible empirical particular laws.'[57] Schemata function according to 'a hidden art in the depths of the human soul'.[58] And in the 'technique of nature'[59] in the third *Critique*, Kant finds the analogue of this principle of connection. But he can only establish its validity reflectively, in a similarly reflective externalisation of reflection in the 'common sense'. It is this reflective use of the image that inscribes indeterminacy into its uses and, despite Kant, into its ends, including the common sense. If common sense is governed by the image, that means its procedures are reflective. But it also means that any attempts critically to think it are governed by the indeterminacy of those reflective procedures. Common sense cannot substantiate any positive version of community. But this means it can outline a less substantial, reflective, negative organisation of community. This plays upon the question of whether 'difference' or 'negativity' can simply be harnessed for a positive political community. And it draws upon the Kantian question of common sense: if the foundation of common sense is the merely reflective supposition that demands assent, then how can such a reflective structure be distinguished from *Schwärmerei*, babbling, enthusiasm? How could reflection *in its indeterminacy* be recruited for politics, without either that politics missing the negative by grasping it, or that negativity slipping politics altogether? The aesthetic question of how to mediate reflection plays directly upon this question of political constitution. But its relation to such constitution is insistently negative. It becomes the task of aesthetics not only to identify reflection, but to articulate the reflective ways such reflection is connected to politics. In demonstrating the way social and historical material is reflected negatively in art works and aesthetic experience (in contradiction), Adorno gives form to this task. And we shall now see how Blanchot establishes this negativity as a relation, not only between otherwise disconnected subjects in a revived reflective common sense, but in the 'aesthetic' work of writing which measures its own form of articulation in the politics of community.

[57] CJ 17, 20: 213-4

[58] CPR 273-4, A141-2/B180-1

[59] CJ 10, 20: 204

3 – The 'unavowable' common sense: community from Kant to Blanchot

Nous parlons, nous parlons

Proceeding from Kant's 'indeterminate' version of aesthetic judgement, Adorno develops a structure of art and aesthetic experience that also bears an 'indeterminate' relation to its social and historical material. The reflective structure of Kantian aesthetic judgement shapes the reflective relation art and aesthetic experience bear, for Adorno, to social and historical material. This has consequences for the kind of 'common sense' to which such art and aesthetic experience can attest. Not a transcendental 'common sense', but the social experience of 'community' itself colours and shapes the forms of art and aesthetic experience. But the *negativity* of this relation means that art does not simply, in its mimetic activity, reproduce or replicate social forms. The question I will address now, with Blanchot, is what such a 'negative' relation between art (writing) and society (community) would be like? If politics and political structures are not simply reproduced in art (whether in their coherence or incoherence), and yet art is, as Adorno insists, reflectively developed out of history and social material, then what would those 'politics' in art be like? If art simply reproduced politics, then it would not be reflective, nor provoke reflective experience. For Adorno, its reflection is therefore contradictory. What can art tell us about an 'indeterminate' politics, if its own procedures are themselves necessarily – if they are, that is, in Kant's sense, to provoke the minimal kind of reflection that distinguishes art – negative? To say 'we speak' is to invoke a common ground for speaking which, in its negativity, recalls the reflective parameters of Kantian 'common sense'.

The 'fragmentary writing' Blanchot develops in the 1960s is correlated to his response to an indeterminate arrangement of community in political writing. But the relation between the two is also worked out in writing, and is therefore negative. Blanchot's specific response to '68 makes apparent this negative relation between aesthetic experience and community. There is contradiction, not verification, between art and politics; but this contradiction is coordinated through the discontinuities of those politics. How does one *write* the indeterminate relation shared in an unavowable community? For Blanchot, the neutrality of writing structures a neutral relation, with writing as a point in common; but this doubled neutrality compels us to reconfigure exactly that relation between writing and politics, much as the neutrality of reflection compels Adorno to re-think the relation between aesthetic experience and society. Thinking about the *neutrality* of this relation means thinking about how writing and politics are disconnected *as* something they have in common, share. Thinking about this neutrality means reconfiguring the stakes of Kantian 'common sense'. In this section, I will examine Blanchot's development of 'fragmentary writing' with 'political' writing in the 1960s, culminating in *The Unavowable Community* in 1983.

Political impediment

In a letter to Roger Laporte in 1984, a year after publishing *The Unavowable Community*, Blanchot describes facing a 'real dichotomy' in the 1930s: writing journalism in the day, and at night writing without any 'exigency but [writing] itself'. The division between the reality of political commitment and withdrawal from politics is registered as a division in writing, between committed and autonomous writing. 'If there is fault on my part', he continues, 'it is in that division [*partage*].'[60] But what does writing divide from, share with – *partager* ambiguously means both – politics? At this time, in *The Unavowable Community*, Blanchot turned back to May '68. Michel Surya argues that this conceals a 'metamorphosis'[61] in Blanchot's first turn to literature in the 1930s. For Surya, this second turn back to politics obscures Blanchot's political commitments of the 1930s. The initial 'passion' for literature merely conceals a 'political passion'. The claim is that Blanchot uses literature to aestheticise politics. David Amar likewise argues that Blanchot's post-war politics, even if they do not exactly reproduce the pre-war politics, 'act as a kind of *impediment* [empêchement]' to understanding the political present. Any illumination of the political in writing 'obscures at the same time a certain part of that engagement (of the 30s and beyond) and, by so doing, the political in general.'[62] In these claims, writing corresponds with politics. Its negativity merely conceals an uncomfortable political commitment. The question here is whether such a 'negative' writing could bear this determinate relation with politics (even inversely).

Political engagement is pitched for Blanchot through writing. *The Unavowable Community* responds to May '68; but Blanchot's response to those events is coordinated by writing's anonymity. If there is a correspondence, it is between the anonymity of writing and the anonymity of political relation. That is to say, Blanchot's political thinking, in common with his literary thinking, responds to the anonymity of its object, and takes on that anonymity as the groundless basis for relation 'without relation'.[63] This negativity structures relation. The anonymity of writing reflects a political anonymity. Nancy suggests that Blanchot's turn to politics in writing marks a failure of what was called '"real

[60] Reproduced in Jean-Luc Nancy, *Maurice Blanchot. Passion politique* (Paris: Galilée, 2011), 61 (my trans.). See also Nancy, *The Disavowed Community*, trans. by Philip Armstrong (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), and Ullern, Isabelle and Gisel, Pierre, eds., *Penser en commun? Un « rapport sans rapport »*, (Paris: Beauchesne, 2015), which responds to the difference of relation mediated by 'community' for Blanchot between Nancy and Sarah Kofman.

[61] Surya, Michel, 'L'Autre Blanchot', in *Lignes*, 43 (2014), pp. 7-62, 44 (my trans.)

[62] Amar, David, 'D'une politique impossible', in *Lignes*, 43 (2014), pp. 140-152, 141 (my trans.). Surya and Amar argue from Blanchot's nationalism as a tacit fascism, much like Jeffrey Mehlman, in *Legacies of Anti-Semitism in France*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1983), argues that Blanchot's work in the 1930s amounts to antisemitism. Leslie Hill, in *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary*, Oxford: Routledge (1997), however, argues convincingly that accusations of fascism, in turn, risk 'entirely misrepresenting the politics of radical dissidence Blanchot attempts to put forward' (40-1). See Holland, Michael, 'N'en déplaise. (Pour une pensée conséquente.)', in *Cahiers Maurice Blanchot* 3 (2014), pp. 149-162, for another critique of Surya's arguments.

[63] IC 45. Here this 'relation without relation' is inscribed by poetry; but its terms are translated into politics.

communism"'.[64] It is only from such failure, however, Nancy argues, that the real question of community, of what is common, can be maintained. Community emerges at the point of failure of politics. Are we to equate this with the discussions of sovereignty, then, that I rehearsed at the start of this chapter? Do the phenomenological failures attending the experience of literature – the dispersal of authority, the doubling of that dispersal in the reader – 'metamorphose' into a formal, sovereign way to make sense of political failure? I think, rather, that the failures double upon one another. If real political failure is legible according to literature, it is only through the fragmenting dispersal to which literature is subject. If the unconceptualised political history of the 1960s (and perhaps even the 1930s) re-emerges in literary discourse, then it does so as an interruption of that discourse, even as it does so through the interruptions literature might be able to make 'legible'. As Martin Crowley argues, Blanchot is avoiding two kinds of messianism here: the presence of 'Romantic messianism' and the 'gap, a messianic interruption or turning point which would, happily, have always already receded.'[65] Instead, 'he finds a way to configure the revolutionary moment as a welcome void, exorbitant and ungraspable, which is *also* a possible site of collective, oppositional activity'.[66] This rupture '*also*' constitutes a relation. And this rehearses the *indeterminate* relation between art and aesthetic judgement's 'common sense' in Kant.

Literature is interrupted by history; but its interruption gives us a minimal opportunity to think of the ways history is interrupted in turn. That is a 'real dichotomy'. The two are *disconnected*, and yet we think through this relation to a possible politics *of* disconnection. If Blanchot's passions metamorphose with his politics, then, they do so according to the exigency of the present, which is to say the exigent pressure on that present of a non-manifest future that we call politics. Passion, too, is subject to the neutral relations of writing: passion that declines, for Blanchot, to patience, to passivity, and not to power. We can think of present anonymity not, as Amar argues, as constituting an 'impediment' to the present of politics if we think of the specific relation writing bears to anonymity. Community is the point of negotiation of this anonymity. And the anonymity of this community is legible when thought in the place of Kantian 'common sense'. That means thinking about it *through* the indeterminate experience of writing and reading. The dispersal of the present of experience might obscure the present of politics, but it does so according to a reconfigured 'common sense': a sense that shares dispersal.

[64] Nancy, *The Disavowed Community*, 2

[65] Crowley, Martin, 'Even now, now, very now', in *Blanchot romantique*, ed. by John McKeane and Hannes Opelz (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 247-262, 247

[66] Ibid., 248

'Explosive communication'

Blanchot's sense of 'community' response can be framed by the Kantian communication of 'common sense'. For Kant, aesthetic experience can be referred only to the subject. Its validity is worked out in 'sociability'. 'All *presentation* of one's own person or one's art [*Kunst*] with *taste* presupposes a *social condition* (talking with others)'.[67] He continues:

> in aesthetic power of judgment, it is not the *sensation* directly (the material of the representation of the object), but rather how the free (productive) power of the imagination joins it together through invention [*Dichtung*], that is, the *form*, which produces satisfaction in the object. For only form is capable of laying claim to a universal rule for the feeling of pleasure.[68]

Sociability precedes any judgement, because the judgement has to be 'shared'. But the 'sensation' of the judgement cannot be shared, only its form, its mere communicability. 'Common sense', then, is a shared negative experience. In it is shared the form of judgement without any communication of objective content.

As we saw with Adorno, aesthetic experience places us in a neutral relation with society in which social relations are supposed but not determined by the experience of community. And this indeterminacy returns to condition the form of the subject's aesthetic experience. Where concepts are connected internally by schemata, aesthetic judgements are connected externally (if the external is understood as a projection of the inside, that is) in society. Blanchot emphasises this transformation of experience in its externalisation. Whereas in Kantian '*Dichtung*' the subject imaginatively arranges and connects with the form that provokes pleasure, for Blanchot, in writing, the subject is provoked by disconnection. There is no end to such sociability other than its formal reflection in 'talk', conversation; and there is no attached objectivity into which it could settle. For Blanchot, this is reproduced in the experience of community. But there the possibilities of communication are formally excessive, displaced into the sociability-without-end of 'common sense'. So for Blanchot, '68 demonstrated that:

> explosive communication could affirm itself (affirm itself beyond the usual forms of affirmation) as the opening that gave permission to everyone, without distinction of class, age, sex, culture, to mix with the first comer as with an already loved being, precisely because he was the unknown familiar.[69]

'Explosive communication' is communication that exceeds what it communicates. This reproduces the Kantian communicability without communication of aesthetic judgement. But where Kant's 'common

---

[67] Kant, Immanuel, 'Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view' [1798], in *Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. by Günter Zöller and Robert B. Louden, trans. by Robert B. Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 343, 7: 240

[68] Ibid., 344, 7: 240-241

[69] Blanchot, Maurice, *The Unavowable Community*, trans. by Pierre Joris (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1988), 29-30

sense' demands assent from the subjects it presupposes, Blanchot's 'community' that generates 'explosive communication' is wholly nonidentical: the 'unknown familiar' that remains 'unknown' in its 'familiarity'; that is 'familiar' to what the subject does not know. Rather than judgement referring a present experience to a future community, Blanchot's community is the already present 'future' unknown that provokes judgement.

This affirmation of the present negativity of communication re-doubles into the equality by which such a community would be composed.

> Everybody had something to say, and, at times, to write (on the walls); what, exactly, mattered little. Saying it was more important than what was said. Poetry was an everyday affair.[70]

'What' is communicated matters less than its communication. We are engaged in Kant's aesthetic: the aesthetic judgement has no objective content, it is 'merely' subjective. But against Kant, that communication is not the confirmation of a harmonic response to the given world, but a radicalisation of communication as the displacement of aesthetic judgement in writing's own reflections. Any such community would be 'unavowable' precisely because of its reflexivity. The externalisation of indeterminacy in 'common sense' comes back against the subject. Just so, art's reflective work intrudes upon the everyday. And this reflective work, for Blanchot, welcomes an otherness that disarranges subjective unity.

Such writing '(on the walls)' displaces the transcendental suspension of aesthetic experience. It introduces the non-objective 'common sense' into a political present of society. Society does not here reflectively ratify judgement, but is the site and object of judgement's reflection itself. The kind of connection through reflection that constitutes Kant's 'common sense' is, for Blanchot, already an 'unavowable' community in the sense that what it shares is disconnection. Blanchot thereby reverses the telos of Kantian aesthetics. Judgement is no longer orientated by the reconciliation of 'common sense'. In the historical experience of non-relation *as* relation, aesthetic experience is transformed from an experience of reconciliation to an experience of displacement. But this is an experience, however, that for Blanchot marks the possibility of friendship: of a relation that does not identify *as* its other, but *with* the nonidentity of the other. But this returns also to Kant's aesthetic 'common sense', that has interminably to be reconstituted in being 'talked' about through sociablility. Any 'community' is thus inscribed with provisionality: it is never, in the present, constituted.

Sense

[70] Ibid., 30

Speaking in 'common sense', with a 'universal voice', means speaking in common, saying 'we'. Such a capacity depends upon a capacity to identify the plural in the singular. It depends, then, upon a capacity to 'sense' what is 'common'. As Jean-Luc Nancy puts it, '*Sense* [sens] is already the least shared thing in the world. But the question of sense is already what we share, without any possibility of its being held in reserve or avoided.'[71] How do I communicate my singularity when singularity is precisely what is incommunicable? How do I think of sense in 'common', when my experience of sense is singular? Kant's aesthetic 'common sense' is in this reading both a community of sense and the question of sense's commonality. The reflective navigation of judgement's singularity towards communication in common disturbs that singularity. Kant argues that there can be no determinate concept of beauty, only its manifestation in reflecting judgement. Aesthetic judgements find their a priori ground, instead, in 'the feeling of the subject'.[72] Yet, Kant maintains, this judgement finds communicability in a 'common ground, deeply buried in all human beings'.[73] This common ground is located *inside*, deeply buried, but also shared, *outside*, in an indeterminately plural 'all human beings'. Faced with the '**exemplary**' 'products of taste', every human would judge in common; yet 'taste must be a faculty of one's own'. So taste cannot be derived conceptually, but neither can it be derived socially. The exemplary status of the product of taste is, instead, as 'a mere idea, which everyone must produce in himself, and in accordance with which he must judge everything that is an object of taste'.[74] So, 'it would better be called the ideal of the beautiful, something that we strive to produce in ourselves even if we are not in possession of it'.[75] Because it has no objective basis, its objectivity must be a merely regulative 'ideal', and so always futural, awaited. This experience of the loss of objective validity returns to the subject as an experience of its own finitude, its limits.

> Only that which has the end of existence in itself, the **human being**, who determines his ends himself through reason, or, where he must derive them from external perception can nevertheless compare them to essential and universal ends and in that case also aesthetically judge their agreement with them: this **human being** alone is capable of an ideal of **beauty**, just as the humanity in this person, as intelligence, is alone among all the objects in the world capable of the ideal of **perfection**.[76]

Because human experience is conditioned by its end, human 'purpose' is limited by 'purposeless' experience. It is human finitude, as the experience of self-conscious limitation in time, that allows the

[71] Nancy, Jean-Luc, 'A Finite Thinking', trans. by Edward Bullard, Jonathan Derbyshire, and Simon Sparks, in *A Finite Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 3-30, 3

[72] CJ 116, 5: 231

[73] CJ 116, 5: 232

[74] CJ 116-7, 5: 232

[75] CJ 117, 5: 232

[76] CJ 117, 5: 233

particular human to determine ends, or purposiveness. So, as Peter de Bolla puts it, we should 'speak of *aesthetic* experience as something to be *lived through*'.[77] In aesthetic experience, 'finitude' is tied to 'purposiveness'. The 'purposiveness' of beauty is bound to the provisional way it merely appears, aesthetically. And for Kant this twinning is confirmed by the capacity to judge these ends aesthetically – which is to say *reflectively*. Attempts to universalise such experience would have to proceed reflectively.

Like Kant, Blanchot takes this reflection as the ground for communication. But he insists upon its provisionality. In *The Unavowable Community*, this is articulated by the provisional relation of love. There, writing's ephemerality is tied to its 'explosiveness'. Writing is provisional, ordinary, even as it displaces the ordinary, is 'beyond utilitarian gain'.[78] This written relation is, again, like 'love'. This love 'is not the moral fusion of hearts dear to romantic myth, but rather the strange relation that attracts lovers into an intimacy that makes them even more foreign to each other'.[79] Equality can be thought through this 'love' of the 'unknown familiar', but it is thereby organised by a dissymmetry of power.

> Love, stronger than death. Love which does not suppress death but which oversteps the limit death represents and thus renders it powerless in regard to helping someone else (that infinite movement that carries towards him and, in that tension, leaves no time to come back and worry about "oneself"). Not so as to glorify death by glorifying love, but, perhaps on the contrary, to give to life a transcendency without glory that puts it endlessly at the service of the other.[80]

A 'transcendency without glory' is a relation to the other that does not know anything of its other (unknown familiar), and yet still attests to it, bears that relation. Love 'oversteps the limit death represents' (think of *Le Pas au-delà* of ten years earlier, the 'step/not beyond') precisely by not overstepping it, by finding only its own weakness there. Thinking equality in writing means thinking of writing's weakness, its provisionality, but at the same time thinking through the form of that weakness as a relation that can bear weakness, provisionality, in its indeterminacy. Thinking equality means re-orientating the 'sense' in 'common sense', and not just changing the parameters of what is 'common'. This redefinition of sense returns us to Adorno's attempt to re-orientate the aesthetic towards the social and bodily material it excludes. The political is an excess of communication, an 'explosive' communication, whereby relations exceed the content of what is communicated. Writing,

---

[77] de Bolla, Peter, *Art Matters* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 15

[78] Blanchot is referring specifically to Margeurite Duras's *La Maladie de la mort* (Paris: Minuit, 1983), where love is a dissymmetrical (*l'amour* the hidden rhyme to '*la mort*'), and therefore disarranging, relation: 'You look at this form, you discover there at the same time an infernal power, abominable fragility, weakness, the invincible force of weakness without equal.' (30; my trans.) In reading that *récit*, Blanchot establishes a critical relationship with the book that doubles the 'weakness' of the lovers' relationship in the book.

[79] Madou, Jean-Pol, 'The Law, the Heart: Blanchot and the Question of Community', trans. by Thomas Pepper, in *Yale French Studies*, 93 (1998), pp. 60-65, 61-2

[80] Blanchot, *Unavowable Community*, 45

uncoupled from the unity of presence in speech, is always located outside itself, outside its present, in the various possible presents where it might be read – 'on the walls' of its scattering generic forms. And the 'sense' of 'common sense' exceeds the unitary 'common' it supposes: the aesthetic judgement is, from its inception, located outside itself. Kant's focus on the 'common' neglects the formal work of what is 'sensed' in this common. 'Community' is located outside a unitary commonality. It is marked by excess.

Friendship and fragmentary writing

If writing marks in such excess of communication a possible communicability beyond determinate identity, then it does so in the constrained form of its articulation in writing itself. In writing community, writing is exposed to its own indeterminate organisation. *Writing* and *critical reading* constitute a point of community, whose point in common is the book or literature itself. But the book is always absent, in the sense that it is only present in the displaced experience of reading. So while literature indicates an 'other', at the same time it displaces it. Writing and community here meet through 'friendship'. As Patrick ffrench argues, in relating Blanchot to Bataille, 'the work *may* serve an end ('telle fin') exterior to itself, in which case it may be exchanged. But if the work serves no end it constitutes a scandal in the context of exchange and of human relations founded on commensurate exchange.'[81] This, of course, is also the scandal of aesthetic indeterminacy. Here the indeterminacy of what is not exchanged, friendship, is a relation to the other that is 'purposeless'. Friendship is traced as an anonymous relation, as a non-relation, as an anonymity to which we nonetheless bear relation, an anonymity which constitutes, in fact, any 'we' who speak as what Blanchot calls the 'last to speak'.[82] The 'other' is an 'end' of literature, to use Kant's vocabulary, but that 'end' remains indeterminate. And it also marks a 'purposeless' relation. The 'friend' is the purposeless other whose relation interrupts thinking's systematicity by drawing it towards this indeterminate end. Writing of Bataille, in turn, Blanchot describes friendship as 'this relation without dependence, without episode, yet into which all of the simplicity of life enters, passes by way of the recognition of the common strangeness that does not allow us to speak of our friends but only speak to them'.[83] The relation is coordinated by strangeness, but also by the provisionality of a conversation as the only provisional mark of there being a 'friend' to speak to. So this a mutual repetition of anonymity. 'Friendship: friendship for the unknown without friends.'[84] Lars Iyer suggests that 'Blanchot underlines the fact that words were not so much *exchanged*

[81] ffrench, Patrick, *After Bataille: Sacrifice, Exposure, Community* (London: Legenda, 2007), 129

[82] SNB 91-2/127

[83] Blanchot, Maurice, *Friendship*, trans. by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 291

[84] SNB 133/182

by the friends, but *repeated*, as if it were the sheer fact of the address that is important, not its content.'[85] For Iyer, this community emerges from a failed communicability: the failure of surrealism to constitute an immediate 'politics'. But this failure makes another communicability legible. Friendship is the witness to this failure of legibility – the failure to make anonymity legible in the real world. For Blanchot, this negativity constitutes the basis of community, and this anonymity constitutes Blanchot's response to the political events of France in the 1960s, which can therefore be read as attempts to 'trace' the 'anonymity' of friendship as community.

Responding to '68 means responding to the form of that response, and that means responding to the anonymity of writing. The difficulty of identifying a community in its anonymity reproduces the strain of anonymity in friendship. As I suggested in the opening section, this interruption of legal universality is not answered in subsequent political history, and so resurfaces in other discourses in May '68. And for Kant, the interruption of such universality is what prompts reflective experience. For Blanchot, the strain of identifying with what is not just politically nonidentical (the oppressed other), but nonidentical with politics itself (outside the territory of law), is a strain felt by the writing I. Writing registers the tension of reflection in politics. A failure of politics to organise its reflective relations is reproduced as a written incapacity to identify its singularity with the plural 'community' it writes towards in friendship. We can see this tension in the series of political events to which Blanchot responded in the 1960s. As a signatory of the 'Manifesto of the 121', the 'Declaration of the Right to Insubordination in the Algerian War in 1960', Blanchot attests that '[t]his is a war of national independence. But what is it for the French? It is not a foreign war. French territory has never been threatened. Moreover, it is being waged against a people whom the State ostensibly considers French, but who are fighting precisely to stop being considered so.'[86] 'Community' here describes an extra-legal formulation. The state might consider the Algerians French (as did the OAS), and therefore subject to Republican law, but for Blanchot Algeria is outside French territory, and therefore outside Republican law. Blanchot is attesting to a non-relation, or to a relation without relation, a relation to the Algerians as *outside* the 'jurisdiction', the territory of law. The formulation of community as 'impossible' (outside possible experience) has to be understood in its historical iterations. Fragmentary writing develops as a practice coordinated according to this relation without relation. Thinking, in such writing, this 'impossible' history invokes indeterminacy in a way that is recognisably aesthetic when considered alongside Kant, but it also compels us to adjust the terms of that aesthetic according to the way this reflection manifests in a specific history. Making this declaration, Blanchot later attested that 'each one of the signatories needs to be considered *equally* its unique author; I assume this responsibility

[85] Iyer, Lars, 'The Workless Community: Blanchot, Communism, Surrealism', in *Paragraph*, 26.3 (2003), pp. 51-69, 59

[86] Blanchot, *Maurice Blanchot: Political Writings, 1953-1993*, 15

globally, in its entirety'.[87] This is what Blanchot calls 'speaking as if anonymously'[88] (note that we are in the figurative here: speaking 'as if' we could speak anonymously). The form of refusal of universal Republican community also forms a kind of community, one orientated by 'equality'. This equality is negotiated in writing between the singularity and the multiplicity of 'I'. Speaking together, equally, 'I assume this responsibility globally': 'I' assume, in this form, the equal anonymity of each of its singular authors. 'I' is overwritten with a displacing equality of the numerousness with which it identifies, attempts to incorporate. And this becomes 'global', a *spatial* figuration, a mapping of equality. In identifying with the nonidentity of Algeria, 'I' am distended, fragmented; in identifying with the friend, 'I' am refused the coherence of a symmetrical relation. Writing community means responding to the ways community fragments writing, just as writing is organised by its possible interruption and fragmentation. In the collectively authored *Comité* issue, to which Blanchot largely, anonymously contributed during May '68, writing becomes 'a power of refusal that we believe is capable of opening up a future'.[89] 'We' believe in, attest to, the incapacitation of singularity by anonymity, in which separation (*nous parlons, nous parlons*), in which nonidentity marked by 'we', a 'future' opens up. The 'future' here is the potential change opened up in the suspension of the self-identity of the I, the self-identity of the law. Just as Algeria is not French territory, so 'Here (in the French world), where we can say everything, almost everything, we can only speak in enemy territory'.[90] This 'we' marks an identification with the extra-territorial: as in the USA, 'we must feel (behave) like blacks in a white society'.[91] 'The texts will be anonymous. […] to constitute collective or plural speech: a communism of writing'.

> Thus the texts will be fragmentary: precisely to make plurality possible (a nonunitary plurality) […] in order to find their meaning not in themselves but in their conjunction-disjunction, their being placed together and in common [*mise en commun*][92]

Writing 'places in common' a 'conjunction-disjunction' of fragmentation. Speaking in a 'universal voice' *displaces* the unity of the I. This is felt historically in the displacements of identity involved in political identification with otherness. Community is thought through this fragmentation of unity. In writing, I give up my identity as anonymous. And the disjunction of this anonymity constitutes a commonality to which politics negatively attests. Any community is organised by a dispersal of singularity, just as writing displaces the singularity of its voice into the third person, the fragmentary.

---

[87] Ibid., 29

[88] Ibid., 18

[89] Ibid., 79

[90] Ibid., 86

[91] Ibid., 87

[92] Ibid., 85

This anonymisation of identity passes through writing. Writing disarranges the conditions for thinking in common. Writing 'passes through the advent [*l'avènement*] of communism […] communism being still always beyond communism'.[93] Writing passes through the failure of communism to be present, in which failure of presence there still remains the possibility of communism. Like communism, writing displaces itself as present. If writing is not simply to take the place of a suspended legality, but rather to write into and place in common its displacement, then it has to affirm its 'necessary insufficiency',[94] 'the political incarnated in the detour'[95] of writing. There is a reversal implied in this detour (and a reversibility in the 'communism of writing'), where political framing of writing becomes a literary framing of the political. The reversibility of the two is collaborative. But this reversibility also undoes any reference to framing, becomes a 'detour' and not just a '*retour*', return. In an essay on Sade written in 1965,[96] collected in *The Infinite Conversation*, Blanchot describes 'the way in which writing, the freedom to write, can coincide with the movement of true freedom [*la liberté réelle*], when the latter enters into crisis and gives rise to [*provoque*] a vacancy in history. A coincidence that is not an identification.'[97] Indeed, it is the coincidence of these two freedoms, the freedom of writing and political liberty, that provokes the rupture between them. We cannot expect writing to reconcile the breach it provokes. Instead, writing and politics constitute a 'coincidence' but not an 'identification'. This dissymmetrical relation suspends politics' continuity. Like revolution, like conversation, writing 'is the time of the between-times [*l'entre-temps*] where, between the old laws and the new, there reigns the silence of the absence of laws, an interval that corresponds precisely to the suspension of speech [*l'entre-dire*]'.[98] Writing is 'between times' in the sense of coinciding with two parallel times which reverse into one another: the present and the future, the future felt as the dissipation of presence; the possible and the impossible, writing as 'naming the possible, responding to the impossible'.[99] The 'communism of writing' is the present impossibility of community, then, experienced in the present: it is a response to the possible that responds to the impossibility of that present possible being the future, being any future.

---

[93] IC xii/VII-VIII

[94] Bident, Christopher, *Maurice Blanchot: partenaire invisible* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1998), 473

[95] Ibid., 474

[96] In this year France prepared for the first time to elect its head of state by universal suffrage; see Hill, ''Not In Our Name'', 147-8, who describes the ruptural mood of equivocation then between legal progress and illegitimate *coup d'état*. Hill suggests Blanchot's politics in this essay are 'not simply a matter of replacing a political discourse with a literary one […]. It was to testify to a radically different relationship to the law. […] what spoke now […] was something other; it was the loquacious, neutral silence of the absence of all laws […] law as the neutral suspension of all laws' (148). As I have been arguing, writing is here characterised as a discursive displacement, and not a discursive replacement, of a suspension of law.

[97] IC 222/330

[98] IC 226/336

[99] IC 48/68-9

Unavowability

When Blanchot names community 'unavowable', he is saying that it cannot be attested to. The experience of community interrupts the unity of the subject who could attest to it. And yet, like aesthetic experience, community is experienced in the singular, by the subject: it does not resolve into a conceptually determinacy. It has to be shared in its singularity, even if it exceeds or disturbs that singularity. 'Unavowing', we are still 'saying we', but that 'we' does not mark any distinct 'us'. Saying 'art', we are saying the *Kluft* that aesthetic experience was supposed to bridge. For Blanchot, community names the uncoupling of the determination of relations by identity. Community names the collapse of these relations, not some positively located 'other' dimension of experience. So,

> if the relation of man with man ceases to be that of the Same with the Same, but rather introduces the Other as irreducible and — given the equality between them — always in a situation of dissymmetry in relation to the one looking at the Other, then a completely different relationship imposes itself and imposes another form of society which one would hardly dare call a "community." Or else one accepts the idea of naming it thus, while asking oneself what is at stake in the concept of a community and whether the community, no matter if it has existed or not, does not in the end always posit the *absence* of community.[100]

'Given the equality between them', we have to think in this way: we have to name this community, knowing that community does not name anything present, but rather the loss of presence that would be the condition for such relations. However, in this way community 'responds to the impossible' in the present, responds to a future hope (love) that would (impossibly; would not) be able to think in this communal way. The present, indeed, 'demands' this kind of community. 'The existence of every being thus summons the other or a plurality of others. […] It therefore summons a community: a finite community, for it in turn has its principle in the *finitude* of the beings which form it'.[101] The 'finitude' that conditions aesthetic experience for Kant, the provisional way it is provoked by a reflection that cannot be determined, is here displaced into the 'finitude' of human beings in their singularity. Singularity finds its objectivity in others, even as those 'others' displace the experience of singularity. Community names this displacement.

As aesthetic experience marks the incompletion of the concept of art, community marks an incompletion of the presence of singularity. And this makes possible a response to 'impossibility' – to the future that a politically motivated sense of community would depend upon.

> If, as a principle of community, we had the unfinishedness or incompleteness of existence, now as the mark of that which raises it up so high it risks disappearance in "ecstasy," we have the

[100] Blanchot, *Unavowable Community*, 3

[101] Ibid., 6

> accomplishment of community in that which, precisely, limits it, we have sovereignty in that which makes it absent and null, its prolongation in the only communication which henceforth suits it and which passes through literary unsuitability, when the latter inscribes itself in works only to affirm the unworking that haunts them, even if they cannot not reach it. The absence of community puts an end to the hopes of the groups; the absence of a work which, on the contrary, needs and presupposes works so as to let them write themselves under the charm of unworking, is the turning point which, corresponding to the devastation of the war, will close an era.[102]

Blanchot employs the form of sovereignty, of a neutral excess of law that suspends the law,[103] as the formulation of what is lost. From this perspective, Blanchot's interventions into Algeria and '68 do not refer to any determinable, though marginal, community. Rather, Blanchot refers to community as ineluctably present, but also ineluctably displacing presence. It is the experience of 'closing an era' – an intervention into precisely those arguments about historical necessity that we saw conditioned the response to Algeria, Vietnam, and May '68. Community resists exactly this historical continuity. The 'communism of writing' is the response of writing to a demand for equality, which responds to the temporal experience of self-displacement in community. As Jean-Pol Madou describes it, Blanchot's is a community 'that does not allow itself to be circumscribed by any form of sociality and is not taken up in any dialectical process […] emptied of all transcendence, [community] is abandoned to an immanence just as impossible'.[104] And yet, it is precisely in its exposure to the 'outside' of experience that the experience of community invokes and parallels the philosophy of aesthetic experience. The community that writing ends with is not, however, founded by any aesthetic experience. Rather, the experience of community exposes in aesthetics a neutrality that Kant's aesthetic tries to resolve. If in community the subject feels its dispersal and not its reconciliation with a dispersed world, then that dispersal is felt throughout aesthetic experience. Perhaps we might not call this aesthetic anymore; and yet it traces over and marks with this dispersal the territory and map that we could, with Adorno, call aesthetic, a no-man's land of experience. In this way, the aesthetic is restored – by its reversal – to the temporality of hope: it preserves in its dispersal of presence a possible future for the indeterminacy it would otherwise coopt for its own collaborative, grounding work. We shall return to this in chapter three, but the question remains: how do we think this dispersal of writing that disperses thinking, in what 'form' is this dispersal registered in its neutrality?

---

[102] Ibid., 20

[103] See Balibar, Étienne, 'Blanchot l'insoumis', in *Blanchot dans son siècle*, ed. by Monique Antelme et al. (Lyon: Parangon, 2009), pp. 288-314 — who describes the Schmittian right to call the legal system to account in the name of a more demanding counter-law in a way that for use slips into other discursive transgressions, and in slipping makes possible a response to this other 'demand'; even, perhaps, Kant's 'demand' for intersubjective assent to aesthetic judgement.

[104] Madou, 'The Law, the Heart', 60

Anonymous writing

Writing is reflective to the extent that it is coordinated through its own indeterminate procedures. Such writing is the 'exile' of experience – coming from outside experience – in Kant's sense of the transcendental, positing experience constantly outside its own conditions. Writing is coordinated by exile, and in '68 this exile is the objective suspension of politics in the city, in Paris. For Blanchot, finally, this amounts to 'fear', and not pleasure.

> This fear is something we witnessed, fear— that cannot be shared — was given to us that we might share it, and that we might master it in the very rejection of all mastery. ‖ But it implies the discretion that culminates in silence, even as it turns us aside from it.[105]

'Fear' coordinates peoples' disconnection, just as pleasure registered their connection. 'We' 'witness' what was supposed to be shared, human relations of finitude, 'that cannot be shared'. An incapacity to share is inscribed into experience, as in the city in *The Madness of the Day* (another retrospective publication in 1973, this time from 1949), in which 'sight was a wound'.[106] This is the neutrality of experience. And it is replicated in the neutrality of relations between people, the 'fear' in the city. '*Don't think you can use others to free yourself from yourself: you are condemned to yourself in order for there still to be someone to welcome others.*'[107] 'I' am disengaged from myself; subjectivity exilicly placed outside experience. '*Think about others in such a way that it is no longer you who comes back from this thought and that it is not in a thought that you dispose yourself towards them.*'[108] Disposing yourself towards 'them' means disposing yourself towards a multiplicity, a numerousness, in which singularity becomes anonymous. Just as the 'I' is displaced by the 'we', not 'you' but 'them'. And finally, 'you' are displaced by 'him': the third person. 'You' are '*il*', he/it, the 'third person who is not a third person [*troisième personne qui n'est pas une troisième personne*]'.[109] Because in community you are indeterminate, this neutral third person, the person outside witness, who is not a (dialectical or witnessing) third, displaces the second-person you.

> *If it were enough for him to be fragile, patient, passive, if the fear (the fear provoked by nothing), the ancient fear that reigns over the city pushing the figures in front of it, that passes in him like the past of his fear, the fear he does not feel, were enough to make him even more fragile, well beyond the consciousness of fragility in which he always holds himself back, but, even though the sentence, in interrupting itself, gives him only the interruption of a sentence that does not end, even so, fragile patience, in the horizon of fear that besieges it, testifies only*

[105] Blanchot, Maurice, ''Two letters to J.-B. Pontalis', trans. by Leslie Hill, in *Paragraph*, 30:3 (2007), pp. 23-25, 24

[106] Blanchot, Maurice, 'The Madness of the Day', trans. by Lydia Davis, in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*, ed. by George Quasha (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1999), pp. 191-199, 198

[107] SNB 130/169

[108] SNB 129/176

[109] IC 384/563 [trans. amended]

> *to a resort to fragility, even there where it makes thought mad in making it fragile, thoughtless* [inconsiderée].[110]

We are exiled in the city: it is the place of displacement that we nonetheless share. We are exiled there in the sense that, fearfully, we lose identity in order to credit a community. But for Blanchot, there is another, more obscure identity here, the 'silhouette' behind the determinate, fusional community. This is the community of losing identity, the 'we' who lose our identity in becoming us. And we feel this community, it takes its form, in writing where 'fear is never overcome'.[111]

When Sarah Kofman refers to 'the foreignness of that which can never be held in common',[112] she is referring to the foreignness of 'thinking in common' itself, but also of thinking in common with Blanchot. If Blanchot writes towards foreignness, then that writing is itself exilicly displaced from our reading. We are engaged with neutrality. But Blanchot calls this relation friendship. As well as his letter to Laporte, and *The Unavowable Community* in 1983, in 1984 Blanchot published *The Last To Speak*, another retrospective work: an elegiac essay written for Celan in 1972. If we are to think about Blanchot's retrospective politics, we have at the same time to address how those politics are framed and mediated by his thinking about literature. Thinking the political means responding to the anonymous form by which it is thought. Celan, as much as '68, is a point of orientation here, of community. Engaging with the history of '68, like engaging with Celan, means engaging with anonymity. Writing is linked to politics by its anonymity, the displacement of identity that makes space for what is other to identity. Such an indeterminate 'end' of aesthetics makes legible the contradictions of reflection that inflect Kant's aesthetic. But it also makes legible a possible politics coordinated by such indeterminacy. Thinking between writing and politics means thinking the anonymity of their relation. In *The Step Not Beyond* (1973), '*"We speak, we speak, two immobile men whom immobility maintains facing one another, the only ones to speak, the last to speak* [les derniers à parler]*."*'[113] 'We' speak, but only anonymously; 'we' converse, speak together, only to interrupt one another's presence, to speak as 'the last to speak', expecting no answer, no 'we' to hold us together in common. The interruption that constitutes conversation is here conversation itself. The 'last to speak', for Blanchot, is both 'anonymous' and, as Christophe Bident points out, the 'anonymous' friend Celan.[114] By using the phrase as a title for his essay on Celan, 'the last to speak' is named, Celan (it becomes singular, 'le

---

[110] SNB 119/163

[111] Fynsk, Chrisopher, *Last Steps: Maurice Blanchot's Exilic Writing* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 213: 'Fear is never overcome, but this does not prohibit the concluding naming of an impossible peace and even an apparently peaceful acquiescence.'

[112] Kofman, Sarah, *Smothered Words*, trans. by Madeleine Dobie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 30; a book 'in homage to Maurice Blanchot', but responding, also, to Adorno's 'new categorical imperative' (7), and to Adorno's reversal on the impossibility of poetry, on the 'right of suffering' to expression (76).

[113] SNB 91-2/127

[114] Bident, *Maurice Blanchot*, 502-4

dernier') but Celan is also named anonymous, plural ('les derniers'). Celan is un-named. 'Friendship attests only to the absence of testimony for death (or madness), and it is this absence which does not accompany it, which dictates the law of its separation, of its gap.'[115] If there is a relation founded by reflection in writing, then it is to the extent that writing is interrupted by that relation. A writing that could allow for such interruption would have, reflectively, to interrupt its own determining procedures. Kant outlines the possibility of such an aesthetic use of reflection in judgement, and outlines the moves Blanchot makes in relating fragmentary writing to a fragmentation of politics in community. But for Blanchot, this relation itself is thoroughly negative. And crucially, the form of such writing is negative. It is, as we shall see with Celan himself, a writing of exile.[116]

4 – Celan, exile, disorientation

(Betrinkt dich | und nenn sie | Paris)[117]

Kant offers a model of reflecting judgement coordinated by indeterminacy, but uses this indeterminacy as a 'common sense' to ratify the transcendental validity of reflecting judgement. Common sense is validated by the sociability aesthetic judgement both provokes and is validated by. But this indeterminacy of reflection in community can be exposed, for Adorno, to the kinds of 'history' of art such judgement excludes (including society and the body); and by Blanchot to the kind inscription of reflection that writing negatively 'shares' with politics. This gives form to 'art' as a history of reflectively organised objects; and to politics as a reflexively shared indeterminacy. So we can track the way reflection moves from an aesthetic experience to a political experience back into Kant through Adorno and Blanchot. This depends, however, upon there being a formal visibility and reflexivity of this relation itself. that these are all *exilic connections*. Celan's poetic relation to '68 shows the kinds of indeterminate relations explored aesthetically (in Adorno) and politically (in Blanchot) to be part of how writing functions itself, and thus shows how the indeterminacy Kant reserves for aesthetic *experience* is part of how *art works*. This intervention into aesthetics by the reflection aesthetics thinks can inform a reading of Celan's poetics. Poetry bears the responsibility to witness for a presence that it

[115] Ibid., 503

[116] For Christopher Fynsk, in *Last Steps*, Blanchot's sense of writing's dialectical negotiations is 'exilic', a movement from outside that remains outside, just as the otherness experienced in literature remains other. This is characteristed throughout IC, but see especially, '[t]he outside, the absence of the work […] writing outside language that every discourse, including philosophy, covers over, rejects, and obscures through a truly capital necessity' (33).

[117] BIT 336|337, 'Betrinkt dich' meaning 'get drunk', but also, more ominously, 'drown'.

cannot present. It is in this way reflective. For community, as for Kant's aesthetic judgement, a 'witness' is necessary for validation. But, as Blanchot suggests, this witness is necessarily 'unavowing'. For Celan, poetic witness, and any poetic response to the present of politics, is coordinated through the way writing is displaced from the present of witnessing. If poetry affords any kind of community, it does so either by its own displacement (aesthetics becoming politics), or by exposing a displacement already at work in politics. In this final section, I will develop these poetics through some key figures in Celan's work: 'displacement', 'disorientation', 'exile', and 'polarity'. Each can be read as a figure for the kind of reflective, but indeterminate, relation aesthetics bears to politics.

Displacement

We can think of Celan's presence in Paris in '68 – living on *Rue Tournefort*, near the *Place de la Contrescarpe*, working in the *École normale supérieur*: all central spaces for *les évènements* of '68 – through the various 'displacements' that organise Celan's poetics in this period. These are visible through the indeterminate aesthetics developed in chapter one which, we can now see in reading Celan, are *exilic* aesthetics to the extent that they inscribe their own disorientation. The historical coordinates of Celan's poems at this time – Dutschke and the student uprisings in Germany, the Prague Spring, and the ambiguous socialism of the student-worker uprising – are reconfigured through these poetics. Just as Kant coordinates aesthetic indeterminacy through the 'image' (not a conceptual schema), in Celan's poetry, history is figured. But this procedure of figuration is itself reflectively unstable, and reflexively concerned with the terms of its own coordination of what it reflects.

We can see this through a specific example: the 'moor'. The 'moor' that marks the 'moorsoldier from Masada' in the poem 'Imagine' (June 1967) returns in one of Celan's '68 poems from *Schneepart*, 'The Runic one' (May 3-4 1968). These images reflect historical indeterminacies, and play through the way history is articulated in figures. In the first poem, the mass suicide of Jews in resistance to Rome in Masada returns as a non-encounter, an 'imaginary' encounter:

> Imagine:
> that came toward me,
> awake to name, awake to the hand,
> forever,
> from what cannot be buried.[118]

This soldier 'cannot be buried', ambiguously both because he returns to the imagination now (in the aftermath of the Six-Day War),[119] but also because there is an essential absence of the past in the poem's present. The poem can only perform its own imaginative activity. The soldier, indeed, is again un-buried

[118] BIT 220|221

[119] See BIT n.541-2

by the way resistance can be figured and reproduced in different contexts. The ambiguity of this is focused in the way the image returns, again, 'changing paths [*Fahrbahn*]', in '68.

> The Runic one too changes lanes:
> amidst
> the arrest-squad
> he scrapes him-
> self, arresting-arrested, red,
>
> carrot, sister,
> with your peels
> plant me, the moory one, free
> from his
> Tomorrow,
>
> Auch der Runige[120] wechselt die Fahrbahn:
> mitten
> im Greiftrupp
> schabt er
> sich Greifend-Gegriffenen rot
>
> Mohrrübe, Schwester,
> mit deinen Schalen
> pflanz mich Moorigen los
> aus seinem
> Morgen, [121]

The image, indeed, 'changes lanes' with apparent ease. The image of the protestor discloses an ambiguous violence: he is 'arresting-arrested', his 'arrest' hard to distinguish in the crude 'CRS=SS' slogan that would collapse two histories into one image. Singularity is at stake here. The protestor transforms into the image of the 'runic' SS he would apparently resist precisely because of the way that protest collapses historical distinctions into one image. The poem interrupts this imaginative suspension by imagining its interruptions. Celan notes how protestors "ironically" simulate nazi salutes 'behind [*hinter*] the ~~red and~~ black flag'.[122] The socialist 'red' is in the grip, here, of a more sinister Nazi 'black'. The 'moor soldier' interrupts this elision: the 'red' turns into the 'carrot [*Mohrrübe*], rhyming into '*Moorigen*' and '*Morgen*'. The 'forever' 'un-buried' moor soldier is un-buried again by this collapse of imagery, this time into the 'morning' of the future. The poem, in this way, discloses through images

[120] 'Auch deine | Wunde, Rosa' in 'Solve': Rosa Luxemburg's wound, result of right-wing murder, haunt the simulation of left-wing protest here; see also the 'sister'.

[121] BIT 352-4|353-5

[122] BIT n.590, BW n.842

the history that images otherwise might conceal. But this leaves the poem open, too, to the problem of 'changing lanes': how can the poem address what is historically singular *without* 'un-burying' it again?

The image reappears again, in *Schneepart's* fourth cycle.

> From the moorfloor to
> climb into the sans-image,
> a hemo
> in the gun barrel hope,
> the aim, like impatience, of age,
> in it.
>
> Village air, rue Tournefort.
>
> Aus dem Moorboden ins
> Ohnebild steigen,
> ein Häm
> im Flintenlauf Hoffnung,
> das Ziel, wie Ungeduld mündig,
> darin.
>
> Dorfluft, rue Tournefort.[123]

The poem climbs out of its own 'image' bed, in the 'moor floor'. The poem is this climbing (*Steigen*) from imagery, the imaginary, in which we see the distance from imagery, the 'no-image' that grounds it, in the climbing. Finally, then, we are back in Paris, in the *rue Tournefort*, the real without image where, paradoxically, images are turned – on the streets and in the street-name, the 'strong turn'. But in the poem, these places are ambiguous subject to displacement.

The image is ambiguous. Its ambiguity performs the reversal that Kant's aesthetics encode without making manifest: it shows how reflection cannot be determined by the aesthetic, and how its indeterminacy disperses its judgements. It proliferates without determinate end, because there is no object identical with the image. The 'image' of the object is the object to the extent that it is figurable, displaceable. Aesthetics is exposed to this crisis when the image no longer merely recouples the object with the subject, but proliferates its reflections. The provisionality of the image means that it cannot endorse any determinate politics. The image plays out the indeterminate way the aesthetic bears a *figurative* relation to politics: it signals its shape but doesn't control its outcomes. Celan risks this ambiguity by serialising the image. A serial, dialogic image could chart the history an apparently object-less, doubled image elides. But it also risks the disorientation of ambiguity, and ambivalence. There is no eventual security here, even in the '*Ohnebild*' and its imagined 'hopes'. The simulate-protest can only be simulated, presented in its simulation. The aesthetic contradiction that characterised our account

[123] BIT 372|373

of Adorno's reflection is reproduced, poetically, in the image. This is articulated in Celan's major speech on poetics, *The Meridian*.

> And then, what would the images be? | What is perceived and is to be perceived once and always again once, and only here and now. Hence the poem would be the place [*der Ort*] where all tropes and metaphors want to be carried ad absurdum.[124]

Any presence in the poem is always this simulate-presence of 'images'. As an image, this presence is exposed to repetition: its singularity becomes repetitive singularity because there is not, in the image, a final determinate under which that singularity could be sublated. In the image, one encounters, over and over, the place of a singularity that does not resolve into any commonality.

Disorientation

The image disturbs, rather than resolves, the relation between 'I' and 'you'. For Werner Hamacher, dialogue in Celan's poetry is coordinated by the mutual suspension of each of its poles:

> the absence of the You suspends the I and the absence of the I suspends the You and, accordingly, suspends discourse itself – this unsublatable ambiguity realizes on the level of composition what the apostrophe says about the You when it links up with the terminology of dialogistics[125]

Hamacher reads Celan's lyric dialogue through critical dialogistics. This becomes another kind of dialogue. And this dialogue is 'unsublatable': neither pole is identical with the other. As Yves Bonnefoy recalls Celan saying, '*you* (meaning French or Western poets) *are at home, inside your reference points and language. But I'm outside*'.[126] 'You' are at home, but I am 'outside'. Bonnefoy continues: 'doubtless, the most harshly felt form of his exile was that as a Jew, i.e. inhabited by a founding word from the *other*, moving outward from I to thou, he had to live in the essential impersonality of the Western languages'. Celan, in other words, felt his exile in language; not just in living his daily life in Parisian French but writing in his mother's High German, but immanently in language, in language always thought of as an exile of the 'I' from the 'you'.[127] The poem's incapacity to present the 'you' it addresses means that it bears that 'you' as a promise of presence. For Christopher Fynsk, the poem is

---

[124] Celan, Paul, *The Meridian: Final Version – Drafts – Materials* [*Der Meridian. Endfassung – Entwürfe – Materialien*, 1999], ed. by Bernhard Böschenstein and Heino Schmull, trans. by Pierre Joris (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 10/10

[125] Hamacher, Werner, 'The Second of Inversion: Movements of a Figure through Celan's Poetry', trans. by Peter Fenves, in *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, ed. by Aris Fioretos (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 219-263, 241

[126] Bonnefoy, Yves, 'Paul Celan', trans. by Joel Golb, in *Translating Tradition: Paul Celan in France*, ed. by Benjamin Hollander, *Acts* 8/9 (1988), pp. 9-14, 11

[127] Ibid., 12

in this way orientated by death. The poem is 'reaching through time', 'enriched' by time. [128] 'You' give the poem time by interrupting it. 'Language now offers itself in its historicity and as the ground of a relation that is radically finite.'[129] The poem is open to a futurity which it does not manifest, just as 'you' orientates the poem without being manifest there. This suspension of orientation, that is to say, takes the place of orientation. It coordinates and shapes the poem, which is, in this way, constructed through a reflection not of 'I' to 'you', but of 'I' to the non-manifestation of 'you'.

In *The Meridian*, Celan describes poetry as, in this way, 'like art'.

> Perhaps – I am only asking – perhaps poetry [*Dichtung*], like art [*Kunst*], moves with a self-forgotten I toward the uncanny and the strange [*jeden Unheimlichen und Fremden*], and sets itself free again – but where? but in what place? but with what? but as what? || Then art would be the route [*Weg*] poetry has to cover – nothing less, nothing more. I know, there are other, shorter routes. But poetry too does hurry ahead of us at times. La poésie, elle aussi, brûle nos étapes.[130]

The '*étapes*', the 'steps' or 'stations', are burnt, stepped out before us, in poetry; but to where? 'Who knows, perhaps poetry follows its path — also the path of art — for the sake of such a breathturn [*Atemwende*]'. To '*brûler les étapes*' means, idiomatically, to 'jump the gun', to 'cut corners'. Here poetry is outside the present, not just a present yet to come. Poetry is not time reconstituting in the future a present to which we can turn, not 'going home', but going towards the '*Unheimlichen und Fremden*', the un-homely and foreign.

In this formulation, poetry 'covers' art, passes through it, but does not offer a final reconciliation. This is its 'meridian'. In the OED, a meridian is 'the 'circle of the celestial sphere which passes through the poles', as well as the line crossed by the sun at noon, both a circle (which returns to itself) and a limit. It is also midday, noon; as well as a separate place, a place of separation. It is derived (in German and English) from the middle-French *meridien*, meaning the south. So: a line, a border to be crossed, that turns out to be a circle; and a highpoint, noon, that is also a point of division, and a polar reversal of orientation – the south, not the north.[131] This is a reversal of orientation, not its inversion. The poem does not 'lack' orientation, chaotically or meaninglessly signifying nothing. The poem is instead orientated precisely by the *disorientation* it registers. Celan figures this disorientation into his poetry as exile: '(the place you come from, | it talks itself dark, southward)', '(der Ort, wo du herkommst, | er redet sich finster, südwärts)'.[132] Homeland is talked into darkness, the noon meridian

[128] Fynsk, 'The Realities at Stake in a Poem', 162

[129] Ibid., 163

[130] Celan, *The Meridian*, 6/6

[131] We should bear in mind the political 'reorientation' developed in the 1960s through identification with the global 'south' and the colonised other: in Vietnam or in Algeria.

[132] BIT 294|395

signalling its reversal into a southern, dark 'place' (recall the '*Ort*' of the image). 'You' come from this reversal. So, in an earlier poem, 'Speak You Too':

> Speak you too,
> speak as the last,
> say out your say.
>
> Speak-
> But don't split off No from Yes.
> Give your say this meaning too:
> Give it the shadow.
>
> Give it shadow enough,
> Give it as much
> As you know is spread round you from
> Midnight to midday and midnight.[133]

'You' speak from this reversed meridian, the circle from darkness to darkness. This is a 'reversed' meridian, a reversed orientation, which is not just an inversion of orientation (looking the other way), but a reversal of the idea of orientation: we speak towards the other who is not there, the anonymous friend. We speak indeterminately. This circular, reversed, shadow speech does not, however, affirm 'your' presence. It is instead neutral, the 'No' not split off (*schiede nicht*) from the 'yes', neither one nor the other. Meaning, that would positively determine language, is neutralised. This remains the language of the image: repetitive, objectless, indeterminate. For Roger Laporte, with the meridian Celan is thinking, alongside Blanchot, of 'non-presence': 'or better, as Blanchot says, the experience of non-experience, is capable of speaking the poetic "experience" without sublimating it into a MEANING, of speaking it, then, in its enigma which gives us to infinite thinking.'[134] The *Meridian* speech itself marks this 'meridian' point of transgression: 'for in this work, by means of this work, the border – the distance – separating prose and poetry was destroyed for good',[135] and writing passes over 'into a frightening territory'.[136] We do not pass from poetry, as we saw Hegel claimed, nor return to poetry, but trace a poetics of the meridian, the border, the non-place, the 'no-man's land' of reflection, 'explosive communication'. We do not pass beyond art; art shows how we do not pass beyond it. Celan's poetry marks a point of generic transgression. Critical witness to this poetry, as it resists meaning, forms a way to think through the 'non-presence' that this transgression announces. The aesthetic is not to be salvaged from this repetitive, indeterminate work of the image. But the image does offer an interruption of reflection as the work of identity, by which interruption reflection *remains reflective*. The exilic image might transgress borders, might work out its own 'space' as a no-man's land, but this disorientation

---

[133] Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose*, Felstiner, 76|77; recall Blanchot's *The Last To Speak*.

[134] Laporte, Roger, 'Readings of Paul Celan', trans. by Norma Cole, in *Translating Tradition: Paul Celan in France*, ed. by Benjamin Hollander, *Acts*, 8/9 (1988), pp. 222-227, 225

[135] Ibid., 226

[136] Ibid., 227

becomes the point of orientation for poetry that would remain open to its future interruption of meaning, and to the image's future 'un-burying' by the poem. This openness to futurity coordinates a response to the image of the political, a 'non-presence'.

'From | the east' – Hölderlin and Celan

Turning to the east becomes an *indeterminate turn*: the poem is open to the 'other' as *negative*, and this becomes a *figure* in Celan, just as the figures of '68 are unmoored. The east, the 'orient' of orientation, is present as a negative and reflective coordinate for the poetry's figurative work, 'unmoored' from a stable polarity. It also becomes a figure of reading: reading, in this case, the exilic *into* Hölderlin, who is 'unmoored'. This disorientation – this exilic turn to the east, the orient, this non-present orient – can be thought through Celan's re-configurative reading of Hölderlin. Celan's own turn to the east plays out the contradictory temporality, as well as spatiality, of disorientation. The east marks, for him, the lost homeland of Czernowitz in the now defunct Bukowina. But as a Jew, the east is also Jerusalem, the city always anterior to its messianic promise. The 'east' is ambiguously both a lost past and a non-manifest future.

We can read this ambiguity through *Atemwende's* 'Ashglory' by reading it, in turn, through Hölderlin. What is present, in 'Ashglory', what is 'cast-in-front-of-you [*Hin- | gewürfelte*]', like a die, comes 'from | the East'.[137] The east, specifically, is the Romanian coast of the black sea, from which Hölderlin's Danube returns to Germany in 'Der Ister'.

> Yet almost this river seems
> To travel backwards and
> I think it must come from
> The East. [138]

The river 'appears' (*scheinet*) to travel 'backwards' (*Rükwärts zu gehen*). The river might go east, but its appearance comes back, to Germany, and to German. The east is a point of reversal, of appearance. In 'Die Wanderung', Hölderlin declares, 'But I am bound for the Caucasus!': for this east.

> That time out of mind our parents,
> The German people, had quietly
> Departed from the waves of the Danube
> One summer day, and when those
> Were looking for shade, had met
> With children of the Sun
> Not far from the Black Sea's beaches;
> And not for nothing that sea

[137] BIT 64|65

[138] Hölderlin, Friedrich, *Selected Poems and Fragments*, trans. by Michael Hamburger (London: Penguin, 1998), 256|257

Was called the hospitable[139]

The east is not just a site of reversal, but of exchange, where Germans '*Vertauschten das Word'*, exchanged words. This is its hospitality (*gastfreundliche*). The river's backwards movement is an exchange. It is a figurative movement of words, appearance. It is in the hospitable 'east' that German is conceived, not against another language but in translation with it. The east, then, is Germany's *nomadic* home. The 'black' sea is the sea of 'shade' (*Schatten*), of rest but also of differentiation (shade being marked by the sun), a meridian point in which hospitable difference exchange can take place. Hölderlin translates the Greek πόντος εύξεινοσ (*póntos euxeinos*) as 'gastfreundliche'. This translation 'names' the Greek meaning in German. In 'Ashglory', Celan mirrors this naming, but also cuts it in half: naming the sea merely 'Pontisches', 'pontic', and cutting off the 'hospitable'. This eastern sea was hospitable, once.[140] This hospitality was a hospitality to difference, which was capable of framing that difference as a productive exchange.[141]

This hospitality is the 'reversal' of transaction that corresponds with the 'reversals' of reflection in the aesthetically mandated common sense, where reflection does not substantiate the community it outlines. The poetry stages the *figurative* nature of such transaction. The first poem from the first cycle ('Aschenglorie' is from the third) opens thus: 'Du darfst mich getrost | mist Schnee bewirten', which Joris renders as, 'You may comfortably | serve me snow'.[142] 'You', here, are being welcomed, but welcomed as a 'host', welcomed to 'host' 'me'. 'Bewirten' means to host, as well as to serve, as a landlord hosts guests; or, as Felstiner renders it, 'You may safely | regale me with snow'.[143] This is to say, 'you' are not a guest. The poem demands hospitality from you, the strange hospitality of an image, 'snow'. The poem does not host you; it demands that 'you' host it. So while Hölderlin's river is both the site of exchange and the inscription of meaning through exchange – 'But the rock needs incisions | And the earth needs furrows, | Would be desolate else, unabiding'[144] – writing for Celan needs to be

[139] Ibid., 184|185

[140] Tomis, now Constantja in Romania, where Celan holidayed, was the Black Sea site of Ovid's exile, from which he wrote his elegiac poem *Tristia* and his *Letters from the Black Sea* (*Epistulae ex Ponto*); here again the locus of poetic exile. In *Tristia*, III. II: 'Pontus, seared by perpetual frost, holds me' (l.8).

[141] This, at least, is his argument in the short essay 'Being Judgement Possibility', in *Friedrich Hölderlin: Essays and Letters*, trans. and ed. by Jeremy Adler and Charlie Louth (London: Penguin, 2009), where 'judgement' ('*Ur-teil*') describes an 'original division', 'that separation, by which object and subject first become possible' (231). This is the hope, at least, of 'intellectual intuition' which underwrites much post-Kantian aesthetic thinking: that aesthetic judgement might be 'cognitive' precisely by its separation from cognition because of its immediate intellectual intuition of phenomena. The startling thesis proposed here by Hölderlin, however, is that this kind of unity can be intuited only because of separation, division, or, in 'Der Ister', 'incision', 'furrowing', an initial separation which makes any subjectivity possible: 'the I is only possible by virtue of this separation [*Theilung*] of the I from the I' (231). There is no hoped for reconciliation of the subject with the object, then, because it is only by separation that there is any subjectivity at all. One proceeds, then, from and by this separation, this division.

[142] Ibid., 2|3

[143] Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose*, 222-3

[144] Ibid., 256|257

hosted itself. For Jeremy Tambling, Hölderlin's inscriptive poetry conceals in that inscription a violence, 'Hölderlin's violent inversion of inscription', in which '[a]rt forces a way, creating a 'Bahn', a track. […] consciousness, producing art, like Achilles playing the lyre, comes from a violent inscription creating memory, which precedes it'.[145] Hölderlin's poetry produces the conditions for its own inscription retroactively. The capacity to 'host' is internalised by poetic reflection that takes reflection for its own ground. But this identification of capacity and ground is disturbed, by Celan, in precisely the poetic image that should accommodate it. The 'east', in 'Ashglory', is also where 'while | the glossy [*blanke*] | Tartarmoon climbed up to us, | I dug myself into you and into you'. Again, 'you' are created as a host by the demands of the 'I'. And again, the 'east' is something that comes to you – the moon rising above us – but comes violently, the Tartars intruding from the east, like Georg Trakl's wolves in 'Im Osten' who 'break through the doors'.[146] The demands for hosting are violent, in that they ask for spacing, a place, in you where I can be. The poem navigates these demands by registering the violence in what might be called love, and exposing it, like Blanchot, to the less certain relation through fear. The moon rises to 'us' – you and I together. And the 'fearful', 'terrible' (*furchtbar*, not Hölderlin's *Furchen*, furrows) east is cast in front of you, plural (*euch*). The poem is orientated towards this displacement of singularity by a numerousness which demands, at the same time, that we recognise its singularity.

Witness

For Celan, poetry 'climbs out' from such retroactive grounding by the work of exchange of figuration itself. Reading Hölderlin, writing Hölderlin, Hölderlin becomes an exemplary figure in that being re-written into Celan's poetry. His figures become the terms of his exile. His poetics of 'originary-separation' are radicalised into a separation *of* origin. Poetry works to disorientate, working with the 'appearance' of the river coming 'from the east' and not with the 'furrowing', grounding work of the river. This distinction is worked out through witnessing. 'Ashglory' ends by disturbing the terms of witness through its reflective distribution.

> No one
> bears witness for the
> witness.[147]
>
> Niemand
> zeugt für den

[145] Tambling, Jeremy, *Hölderlin and the Poetry of Tragedy: Readings in Sophocles, Shakespeare, Nietzsche and Benjamin* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2014), 8

[146] Trakl, Georg, *Georg Trakl: The Last Gold of Expired Stars*, trans. by Jim Doss and Werner Schmitt (Skyesville: Loch Raven Press, 2010), 179

[147] BIT 64|65

Zeugen.

Celan's 'witness' to Hölderlin's east is framed lyrically by the suspension of the possibility of witnessing. If for Hölderlin subjectivity proceeds according to an original separation, according to exchange and figuration, then its guarantee is always outside itself. And this means that the *process* or *work* of 'witnessing' is always, impossibly, outside witnessability, unattestable, and, as we saw with Blanchot, unavowable. In order to testify, I must place myself outside that to which I testify. If I testify for myself, I must place myself outside myself. The structure of witness is internally divided because in order to be a 'witness' I have to separate myself from what I 'witness'. Derrida proposes in 'Poetics and Politics of Witnessing'[148] that this is the 'triangulation' of witness, where the witness attests to having been present, and bears that presence in memory to another who witnesses that attestation: 'presence, as presently *re-presented* in memory'.[149] But we can also refer this to Kant. If, for Kant, aesthetic judgement *testifies* to the validity of non-conceptual experience (including the non-conceptual, reflective organisation of community), then here poetry testifies for the way such testimony undoes itself through the 'impossibility' of reflection. Rather than securing the self-presence of the subject (through the play of cognitive faculties), this reflection testifies to the ways the subject is displaced from itself. Reflection is not secured to the subject, it is – as Kant himself saw – indeterminate. Writing cannot make up for a lack in experience itself, it can only testify (avow to) to the disconnections it reflectively exposes there.

Poetic figuration, the image, becomes a kind of deferred witness, a serial witness. The only thing that is irrevocable about witness is this impossibility. The first cycle from *Atemwende*, 'Atemkristall', ends with three variations of witness. In poem 19, 'der herz- | förmige Krater | nackt für die Anfänge zeugt, | die Königs- | geburten', 'the heart- | shaped crater | testifies naked for the beginnings, | the kings- | births'.[150] In poem 20, in parentheses, 'Wo flammt ein Wort, das für uns beide zeugte?' | Du – ganz, ganz wirklich. Ich – ganz Wahn', 'Where flames a word, would testify for us both? | You – all, all real. I – all delusion'.[151] And in poem 21, which closes the cycle,

> Deep
> in the timecrevasse,
> in the
> honeycomb-ice
> waits, a breathcrystal,

[148] See also his essay on witnessing in Blanchot, 'Demeure', in Blanchot, Maurice, and Derrida, Jacques, *The Instant of My Death/Demeure*, trans. by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). See also Pierre Joris, 'Paul Celan's Counterword: Who Witnesses for the Witness?' in *Justifying the Margins*, (Cambridge: Salt, 2009), pp. 79-86

[149] Derrida, Jacques, 'Poetics and Politics of Witnessing' [2000/2004], trans. by Outi Pasanen, in *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. by Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 65-96, 77

[150] BIT 16|17

[151] BIT 18|19

your unalterable
testimony.

Tief
in der Zeitenschrunde,
beim
Wabeneis
wartet, ein Atemkristall,
dein unumstößliches
Zeugnis. [152]

We have a modulation here from 'zeugt', to 'zeugte', to 'Zeugnis'.[153] In 19, there is a 'crater', heart shaped but not a heart, which testifies that something had begun. This is messianic, again: a king's birth. In 20, there is a similar absent testimony: the poem asks for a word which could testify for a relation. Rather than an event, then, here there is a missing relation, in the plural. In 21, the testimony is to come, or itself to be arrived at; a noun, not a verb. By this modulation, the process of witnessing is separated from the witness. We await witness, not a witness. We await testimony for a relation which could tell us in the retroactive way a crater tells of something that happened, that is done with. We await, then, in the future, the arrival of something that could attest to the possibility to attest to something that happened, in the past. We await a past, the confirmation of its absence. The stakes of Kantian inter-subjectivity are thus here bound to the stakes of temporality in witness. The word that would 'witness' our relation would have to testify to 'my' incapacity to witness (my 'Wahn'), but my capacity to witness is precisely what is missing, what must be attested to. If poetry is to attest to some future, then, it must first of all attest to its own capacity to attest. Its 'orientation', its path, is opened up onto this impossibility. So, at the close of 'Ashglory', the 'witness' (*Zeugen*) is separated both from 'witnessing' (*Zeugnis*) and from his or her own name: he or she is named, as witness, 'Niemand', no one. We are opened here to the 'no-man's land', the neutral terrain of experience where reflection is played out.

Witness cannot testify to its own conditions. Poems are orientated by a displaced east. So in the poem 'Solve' from the fourth cycle of *Atemwende*, witness, numbering or naming names and people, is bound to this dis-orientation, 'Entoster', 'De-easterned'.[154] The 'tomb- | tree' which is 'de-easterned' in

[152] BIT 18|19

[153] There is a further modulation at work in 'unumstößliches', which picks up on 'Stoß' in poem 14, meaning 'shock'. Thus, 'Dein vom Wachen stößiger Traum', 'Your dream, butting from the watch' (12-3), turns into a 'horn' which 'Der letzte Stoß, den er führt', 'The last butt it delivers'. So, in 21, your 'witness' does not fail to impact, like a ram's horn, to deliver, to arrive. Witnessing's serial quality, its self-deferral and interruption of presence, is structured by Celan's serial poetics here: witnessing occurs through poetic borders, singularly but in the poems' seriality. We will return to the significance of this ram in chapter three.

[154] BIT 76|77. Hamburger has it 'De-Eastered', in *Poems of Paul Celan*, Michael Hamburger trans., 4th edition, trans. by Michael Hamburger (New York: Persea Books, 2002), 240|1. Felstiner, as Joris, 'De-easterned' (268|9). The word oscillates between 'east' as a compass point and 'Easter' as a temporal, messianic – as well as geographic and historical – orientation.

the poem, is set ‘stromaufwärts, strom | abwärts’, ‘upsteam, down- | stream’. Again, we can recall Hölderlin’s ‘Der Ister’ here, with Celan invoking, behind these streams, the ‘no one’ of witness: ‘Yet what that one does, the river, | Nobody knows [*Weis neimand*].[155] In ‘Solve’, this tree ‘splits’, in this movement,

> by the tiny flaring, by the
> free
> punctuation mark of the
> script salvaged and dis-
> solved into the count-
> less to-be-
> named un-
> pronouncable
> names.
>
> vom winzig-lodernden, vom
> freien
> Satzzeichen der
> zu den unzähligen zu
> nennenden un-
> aussprechlichen
> Namen aus-
> einandergeflohenen, ge-
> borgenen
> Schrift.

The names are not countable in their numerousness, are only said as a ‘punctuation mark’[156] that connects as it separates. The ‘scripts’ are ‘salvaged’ (*Geborgenen*), but salvage is itself split in the German to uncover ‘borgenen’ inside it, which means to lend, to loan. What would be salvaged, then, is this ‘loan’, and here I want explicitly to recall the system of exchange Hölderlin establishes in translation as/of origin and its reconfiguration by Celan in ‘Aschenglorie’. So the ‘names’ which are ‘de-easterned’ are *both* ‘to-be-named’ *and* ‘unpronounceable’, unsayable. Naming is both a loan (a finite gift) and irreversible. The impossible structure of witness here witnesses its own impossibility, the ‘Nieman’ behind the stream of witness. In doing so, it testifies to a community of people ‘to be named’ that does not, with false hope, hope also to ‘name’ or say those names. So the names are ‘fugitive’ (*geflohenen*) from one another, not witness in words to ‘us’.

The Poles: ‘we’ and ‘us’

[155] Hölderlin, *Selected Poems and Fragments*, 256|257

[156] We might think of the *trait* (trace or mark) that haunts Blanchot’s connection-disconnection in *le pas au-delà*: the hyphen that marks the (not) beyond.

This resolves, in Celan's poetic, in the question, again, of 'saying we'. the conditions of saying we are the conditions for attesting to a community. But as Kant saw, they are reflective conditions that cannot be determined. So 'common sense' is always threatened by enthusiasm, mere raving, because its ground is necessarily indeterminate. This indeterminacy infects writing's capacity to 'say we', to write 'in common', which is, as Celan shows, henceforth figurative. It also infects the capacity for which such a writing should testify: a capacity to be, politically, in common through sociability. This undoing of testimony is therefore an exposure to the reflective indeterminacy that is the condition of such sociability. To mark such a community would be to say 'us'. To attest to any 'us' would be to stand outside that 'us'. And that 'us', outside, would in turn be lost to witness. So the question of naming the community, of naming the relations between people, modulates, according to the detailed modulations of 'witness', into a question of saying 'we'.

Orientation, as witness, as witness both *as* a relation and *to* a relation which therefore cannot name who it witnesses or who witnesses, is dis-located from the east of 'us' to become dis-orientation. This is not, however, simply a chaotic dislocation of poetic orientation. Rather, this 'without direction' of a negated East – a lost, already separated direction – becomes a kind of orientation, a meridian: the pull of the 'other' he describes in the *Meridian* speech as a 'figure': '[t]he poem wants to head toward some other, it needs this other, it needs an opposite. It seeks it out, it bespeaks itself to it. || Each thing, each human is, for the poem heading toward this other, a figure [*Gestalt*] of this.'[157] This is all to say that 'orientation' becomes *polar*. This 'polarity' is in play in the poetry's working over of the problem of saying 'we'. All the threads of the discussion thus far become entangled in the later poem 'Die Pole', written in Paris in 1969, but composed as part of the Jerusalem cycle, responding to a trip to Jerusalem.[158] Already the poem is exilic, writing towards Jerusalem from Paris; but also writing back into Paris. Jerusalem is historically divided: between the messianic Christianity as the site of the 'King's birth', and the nomadic Jewish terminus of Exodus, the to-be-reached place. The specifics of history are therefore significant in locating the poem's present, dating it, but also slip between these two contradictory temporal dimensions, and these two cities.[159] The circumstantial fact of Celan's writing in German in Paris is historically far from circumstantial, and poetically it is significant. So Celan's work is fastidiously dated because it is re-figuring the landscape of history itself, which is to say, the

---

[157] Celan, *Meridian*, 9/9

[158] In a letter to Ilana Shmueli, Celan says 'That Jerusalem would be a turning point [*Wende*], a caesura in my life', quoted in Lyon, *Heidegger and Celan*, 174

[159] On the significance of 'dating' a poem see Celan, *Meridian*, 8/8, where he asks whether 'each poem has its own "20th January" inscribed', the date that Büchner's Lenz departed for the mountains. See also Derrida's essay on 'dating' as 'numbering' in Celan's poetics, 'Shibboleth: For Paul Celan' [1986], trans. by Joshua Weider (revised by Thomas Dutoit), in *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. by Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 2-64 in which what 'takes place only once' (1), what is singular, of a date, is set into repetition by poetry, such that the poem is 'this "not" passage [*ce pas de "ne pas"*]' (31), the passage of 'pas' to what cannot be attested to because it only happened 'one time'.

conceptual space by which we are inducted into historical time: the 'east'. History is a way to conceptualise time, but it works *figuratively*, which is to say indeterminately and reflectively. Celan's poetry thinks through the conceptual and theoretical transactions and coordinates that made up the philosophical response to political crisis in 1960s. This amounts to saying that *theoretical* and *philosophical* work in this period, by Blanchot and Adorno, works across these coordinates. The stakes of this coordination are laid out by these thinkers as a kind of reversed Kantian aesthetic field. The aesthetics of thinking an objectivity that is incompatible with subjective experience, and therefore of thinking through the incompletion of aesthetic judgement, is here framed as a poetic question; specifically, it is framed as 'polarity' that doubles, as an image, into other 'polar' images.

The poles
are in us,
insurmountable
while awake,
we sleep across, to the Gate
of Mercy,

I lose you to you, that
is my snowcomfort,

say that Jerusalem *is*,
say it, as if I was this
your Whiteness
as if you were
mine,

as if without us we could be we,

I leaf you open, forever,

you pray, you lay
us free.

Die Pole
sind in uns,
unübersteigbar
im Wachen,
wir schlafen hinüber, vors Tor
des Erbarmens,

ich veliere dich an dich, das
ist mein Schneetrost,

sag, daß Jerusalem i s t,

sags, als wäre ich dieses
dein Weiß,
als wärst du
meins,

als könnten wir ohne uns wir sein,

ich blättre dich auf, für immer,

du betest, du bettest
uns frei.[160]

The figurative stakes I have been tracing are here laid out: this orientation to the East, specifically to Jerusalem and to the Gate of Mercy in the temple; the conditions for speaking 'together', for saying the relation between 'I' and an addressed, hosting 'you'; finally, the coordinates of figuration by which this relation is put into the poem – polarity itself. The poem advances in a series of polar stakes. Firstly, 'us' is orientated towards the messianic 'Gate | of Mercy' which it cannot cross, which interruption occurs in the line break dividing it. Then, that 'us' is unfolded into a series of possible constellated relations: where 'you' are lost to 'you', as if 'Jerusalem *is*', 'as if I was this | your Whiteness | as if you were | mine'. Each of these stations unfolds into the *loss* of bond in 'us': that 'you' remain separate, that Jerusalem could be but is not necessarily 'named' as present, that 'I' could be 'Whiteness', an abstract space that we shared but that was not identical with either of us. This culminates in the decisive distinction (although still speculative, in the subjunctive) between naming 'we' and naming 'us': 'als könnten wir ohne uns wir sein'. This line marks its own temporality: 'as if could we without us we be', 'as if we could without us be we'.[161] The 'we' is doubly framed. Firstly, it is set into the subjunctive, into a possible future: 'als könnten wir'. Then, it is negated, or has 'us' negated from it: 'ohne uns' (recall the *Ohnebild*). Only then is it positively posed: 'wir sein'. The second 'wir' contains the history of both subjunctive and negation within it, as well as being a repetition of that first, framed 'wir' in the clause's subject position. What is explicitly at stake here is a *history* of saying 'we'. Celan is tracing the conditions by which this kind of communal naming is possible. The rest of the poem stages these conditions. We can read the poem deploying a 'polar' relation or constellation of concepts, which is itself conditioned on reading Celan's de-easterning of orientation in *Atemwende*. Saying 'we' is thus configured by this reflective, polar history that interrupts it with an 'us'.

This polarity is staged in the first stanza. We (us) only go as far as the 'Gate | of Mercy', itself polar, an empty, framed space. 'Our' passage is 'unübersteigbar' (again, recall the 'moor floor' '*ins | Ohnebild steigen*'). What is '*unübersteigbar*' is, as Joris suggests, 'insurmountable'. But we can dissect

[160] BIT 438-40|439-41

[161] Hamburger has it: 'as though without us we could be we' (333); Felstiner, like Joris, has: 'as if without us we could be we' (363).

Celan's word further. We can read *steigen* out of it. '*Steigen*' means to climb, but also to increase; what is '*steigbar*' is therefore both climbable, but also increasable; and what is '*übersteigbar*' is both surmountable and excessive, increasing beyond itself. There is an excess of numerousness here under negation. This excess 'figures' the excess of reflection I have been naming in this chapter. We cannot increase beyond these poles, just as we cannot climb over them, or the gate. There is a limit here, invoked through a negated increase. Celan is imposing a frame of finitude to 'us'. 'We' increase, we are numerous, 'us', but that numerousness is contained, limited. 'Us' marks the limit of what we can name. The concern for naming, which we identified with the modulations of witnessing, becomes a concern for naming the possible. Naming a community in 'us' imposes two kinds of polarity: polarity as what contains opposition within itself, and polarity as a terrestrial or spatial polarity, marking the extreme limits by which space is delimited and oriented. This figurative delimitation of 'us' is a spatial delimitation ('in us', 'across, to'), but it is also temporal: the 'Gate of Mercy', the Sha'ar HaRachamim, is the gate through which the messiah will enter Jerusalem. The gate remains a threshold. As a threshold, it marks the border of the city, the political border of the community.[162] The Gate of Mercy thus stands for an entrance to the city, to the community, and an end to nomadism (the end, literally, of the Jewish Exodus, and therefore of history). Here this is marked by the possibility of naming 'Jerusalem': 'say, that Jerusalem *is*'. If Jerusalem 'is', then we 'are', are a community, in a place, a city. But if 'we' are, then it is *without us*: 'As if without us we could be we'. The self-identity of 'we', the matching of the first 'we' with the second 'we', would be the identification of this city. The 'us' is still nomadic, in nomadic space, outside. The definition of 'we' is opposed to the delimitation of 'us'. We can pose a 'we' as a future community, as an active first person plural, but that means losing 'us', losing 'you to you', losing the opposition that characterises the polar space of 'us' which the poem delimits. So where does poetry intervene in this polar nomadism? For Celan poetic language:

> does not transfigure or render, it names, it posits, it tries to measure the area of the given and the possible. True, this is never the working of language itself, language as such, but always of an 'I' who speaks for the particular angle of reflection which is his existence and who is concerned with the outlines and orientation. Reality is not simply there, it must be searched and won.[163]

As Blanchot puts it, poetry, like community, means 'naming the possible, responding to the impossible', 'each time it is poetry'. Here, Celan is disclosing how the formation of political 'community' is framed through figuration, through a concealed work of imagination, just as the protestors of '68 elided the contradictory history of images they invoke.

[162] Think of the modulation between the Aristotelian '*zoon politikon*' and Heraclitean language 'outside' the city: between language as an articulation of identity and of exile.

[163] Celan, *Collected Prose*, 16

These poles are ‘in us’. They measure between an interior ‘common’ and an exterior ‘community’, between a subjective capacity to share experience and an objective experience of sharing in the political, reproducing the Kantian move from the subjective reflection of aesthetic judgement to its external validation in common sense. And this is measured figuratively in the image of the ‘poles’: at once ‘in us’ and what we ‘approach’. Just so, the pole is a point of turning (either astral or terrestrial, on an axle). And as turning, it measures its own poetic capacity. And so ‘I lose you to you’: I turn to you turning to you. ‘We’ turns figuratively to ‘us’. The pole is no longer a single north, a point of astral orientation, but a numerous ‘us’, a plural ‘you’. The specifically *figurative* model of polarity elaborated with Celan’s poem, here, is polarity as a relation which is realised ‘in us’. Polarity is realised as a social, intersubjective relation, objectified in ‘us’. But this realisation attests to an impossibility of objective social relations. If we think of this within the Parisian context delineated above, we can re-think equality through this figural/polar relation. Equality, as what is shared between us, is in Celan’s poem polar; and in addition, it is ‘insurmountable’. ‘I lose you to you’, and that is the minimum of equality as singularity. The polarity which characterises ‘us’, which is ‘in us’, cannot be overcome because it is the minimal distance required to distinguish ‘us’ as a collection of differentiated individuals. In the poem, the concept of polarity as a distinct relation of suspended opposition contagiously bleeds in to its figural partner, the relation between us. These two conceptually discreet relations are related, become poles themselves, so that, in the local economy of the poem, what is ‘insurmountable’ is the polar relation between ‘the poles’ and the polar relation between ‘us’.

Conclusion

The reflection that distinguishes the aesthetic, reflecting judgement refers, for Kant, at once to the transcendental interior of subjective judgement, and to the exterior of intersubjective validation in common sense. But measuring between these two reflective ends means, we now see with Celan, that we are measuring their nonidentity. For Adorno, aesthetic judgement is displaced through the way it employs reflection without registering the objective material which that reflection substantiates. Such judgement is therefore, for Adorno, not restricted to the subject, but something that is *negatively*, reflectively played out in art works. And for Blanchot, this ‘measurement’ of nonidentity mirrors a political measurement. The fragmentation of writing mirrors, without identifying, a fragmentation of community. Reflection, again, is *indeterminately* operative in the community it should substantiate. So while for Kant aesthetic experience offers opportunities for thinking about non-conceptual experience as connective, the disconnection from determinate judgement on which this is grounded returns to aesthetic experience. There cannot, for Celan, be any ‘we’ without ‘us’; and yet poetry proceeds ‘as if’ this could happen, as if there could be subjective experience without any object, as if I did not ‘lose you

to you'. Such art is conditioned by its present impossibility. Kant's connecting aesthetics are here exposed to the objectivity – the indeterminate, the futural objectivity – that they think but also conceal. The aesthetic is turned towards thinking disconnection, and so is poetic form. As Blanchot puts it, this is neutrality. 'The Neuter, the gentle prohibition against dying, there where, from threshold to threshold, eye without gaze, silence carries us into the proximity of the distant. Word still to be spoken beyond the living and the dead, *testifying to the absence of testimony*.'[164] Such testimony testifies to poetry's neutral continuity through its suspended poles, the suspended 'I' and 'you', their turning meridian.

> On both poles
> of the cleftrose, legible:
> your outlawed word.
> Northtrue. Southbright.[165]

The gulf, the cleft (*Kluftrose*), of aesthetic experience becomes legible (*lesbar*) in this meridian, outside legal jurisdiction. There are 'still songs to be sung beyond | mankind', 'es sind | noch Lieder zu singen jenseits | der Menschen'.[166] But this is also, I will now argue, a neutral, not-beyond mankind, a present neutrality which aesthetic experience has to think, a no-man's land, experience (ex-perience, *ex+perius*, 'from out of peril, risk') of exile.

[164] SNB 76/107

[165] BIT 16|17

[166] BIT 14|15

CHAPTER THREE

Towards a non-transcendent aesthetic: dialogue, presence, dialectic

Your reversals, incessantly

Paul Celan

Introduction

In chapter two, I explored the way that the reflective verification of aesthetic judgement in 'common sense' could be related to thinking about political 'community'. I suggested that this engagement with political 'community' frames Blanchot's explorations of 'fragmentary writing'. The political context of Blanchot's fragmentary writing forms a reflective relationship with that writing. This relation could itself be thought of as 'fragmentary'. And this exposes a 'fragmentation' at work in Kant's reflective aesthetics. I also suggested that Adorno's intervention into Kantian aesthetics is motivated by a turn to the 'sense' in 'common sense': by the social and historical features of aesthetic experience. Kant's version of reflective aesthetics is thus, in Adorno's and Blanchot's reading, one of *negative presentation.* It presents the negativity of reflection, and not its final determination.

I will now turn to this idea of presentation, and to the idea of presence and the present. This develops from a reading of Celan's poetry. Celan characterises poetry as constituted by a dialogic response to a 'you' which the poem cannot present. My argument is that this also characterises critical reading of poetry as 'dialogic'. And it therefore carries over into the reflection that characterises aesthetic experience. What kind of 'presence' could reflection afford, given its indeterminacy? And in what kind of 'present' would such a reflecting judgement occur? The answer turns upon dialectical questions. What kind of dialectics could be orientated by the negative without negating it? What 'presence' could be afforded, by what dialectical 'present', for the negative? Finally, this leads us to the idea of a 'non-transcendent aesthetic': a version of reflective experience that is organised by its own indeterminacy, and therefore resists a dialectical movement of negation into a transcendent 'beyond'. In the way it exposes dialectics to a reflective indeterminacy registered in aesthetic experience, this is also a 'reversal' of dialectics, which 'reverses' the procedures of negation that characterise dialectics by insisting on the negativity of reflection in place of the 'negations' of determination.

Having looked at the fragmentary writing of *Infinite Conversation* and the political writing up to *The Unavowable Community*, I now focus on the developed fragmentary texts themselves:

Awaiting/Forgetting, *The Step Not Beyond* and *The Writing of the Disaster*, as interventions into dialectics, and not just aesthetics (though coordinated by reflection mandated to aesthetic experience); and having looked at *Aesthetic Theory* and Adorno's version of Kant, I now look at how *Aesthetic Theory* is linked to the philosophical dialectics of *Negative Dialectics*. In both readings, I am looking at how aesthetic questions intervene in dialectics, by exposing dialectics to the kinds of 'negative presentation' by reflection found in Kantian aesthetic experience. The task here is to read a kind of writing, and a kind of aesthetic, which is not merely 'about' disorientation, but which is thoroughly responsive to, and structured by, disorientation. That means we do not reach a conceptual terminus. Rather, these texts are read according to the disorientation which coordinates them. My contention is that this contradiction is the motor for thinking aesthetics in Adorno, and writing in Blanchot, but that it also lets us think formally how these two projects might make each other legible.

This chapter has three sections. In the first, I look at Celan's poetic dialogues as configuring dialectical suspension. In section two, I follow this suspension through Blanchot's thinking about the present of writing. Finally, I look at how Adorno traces this movement from dialectics to aesthetics. In this way, I want to explore how 'futurity' is coordinated by an experience of the dispersal of presence, and to demonstrate the connection – by disconnection – with the political and aesthetic suspensions explored in chapter two, and the reading of Kantian aesthetics as proposing a 'negative presentation' of reflection in chapter one.

1 – Dialogue to dialectics

Lingering 'with you'

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht characterises aesthetics an 'oscillation' between 'presence effects' and 'meaning effects'.[1] In poetry, these two effects are simultaneous: meaning inheres in its presentation.[2] For Gumbrecht, interpretation historically seeks to transcend the artwork's 'presence' in order to reach its 'meaning'. But I want to suggest that such 'oscillation' is subject to dialectical, and not just 'metaphysical', pressures.[3] 'Presence', as well as interpretative 'meaning', is 'produced' for Gumbrecht. But presence is subject to interpretation as much as meaning is. The 'visibility' of an object as an object of interpretation depends upon its presence. So the conditions of presentation – aesthetics

[1] Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich, *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 2

[2] Ibid., 17

[3] Ibid., 28-47

– also mark the conditions of interpretation. The question here is of accounting for the way poetry *produces* such presence as an aesthetic; dialogically, reflectively, establishing the conditions of its reading.

What form of dialogue is possible when the terms of dialogue suspend 'you', when, as in 'Die Pole', 'I lose you to you'? We are asked to think of a dialogue that loses you. Such dialogue is neutral, because there is no presence of 'you' to drive it. For Blanchot, neutrality, when heard in the singular, sounds strange. '*The neutral, the neutral, how strangely this sounds* [cela sonne étrangement] *to* me.'[4] Responding to neutrality means responding to the way neutrality displaces the 'singularity' of 'me'. As Hugo Monteiro argues, this 'estrangement' is only legible if it is 'sounded', and heard. Criticism is dialogic in that it listens. But listening, criticism can no longer 'talk' to its object. It is neutralised, suspended. Monteiro reads this Blanchotian interruption through Celan's 'counter-word': '*intromission*', meaning both an introduction and a bodily intrusion. Blanchot, like Celan, is 'submitting the tradition of seeing [*regard*] to its untimely tear'. Poetry 'collides' with philosophy, and this 'constitutes a space of "intromission" in opposition to the course of discourse'.[5] But this interruption is part of discourse, dialogue, dialectic. 'As neutral, therefore, appears (or sounds) the limit of reception itself.'[6] Dialectic, like dialogue, is constituted by such interruption. In *The Writing of the Disaster*, 'Something rings false in the dialectic [*Quelque chose cloche dans la dialectique*], but only the dialectical process, in its inexhaustible demand, in its ever-maintained completion, allows us to think what is excluded from it'.[7] 'Something' 'sounds' contradictory, but it is only 'sounded' in dialectics. If poetry sounds an interruption with philosophy, then the two constitute another dialogue. But this dialogue neutral, not productive. Blanchot's condition of dialogue is the demand that you, '[a]ct in such a way that I could speak to you'.[8] 'You' must be addressable. But if you are to be 'sounded', then you must be interrupted.

This interruption of dialogue that drives dialogue recalls the role reflection plays for Kant. The neuter (*ne-uter*, neither one nor the other, not-either) has to be thought in its suspension. It is an 'operation that is inoperative', 'effect of non-effect'.[9] Thinking this dialogue requires a different form of reflection, however. In what form does one 'reflect' on a neutral presence? As neutral, presence is not negated. But neither is it affirmed. For Daiana Manoury, it is figured, imagined, an image. Neutral

[4] IC xxi/xxii

[5] Monteiro, Hugo, 'Le Neutre dans les limites de la philosophie', in *Maurice Blanchot et la philosophie*, ed. by Éric Hoppenot and Alain Milon (Paris: Presses Universitaire de Paris Ouest, 2010), pp. 229-242, 232 (my trans.)

[6] Ibid., 235

[7] WD 72/118

[8] Blanchot, *Awaiting Oblivion*, 5/14

[9] IC 303/447

writing is 'a transitive space within which language and the subject metamorphose unrelentingly'.[10] To think presence in this neutral 'common', to make a 'common sense' of it, means thinking in images, 'from which the neutral emerges'.[11] This neutrality emerges 'by our indiscreet reading' which 'tears' the image into visibility.[12] 'You' are legible only in this neutral tearing. With this neutral reflection emerges, for Blanchot, a torn poetry. 'Poetry: dispersion that, as such, finds its form. […] It is as though language were torn from itself'.[13] Poetry is a form of dispersion. This dispersal is the condition of reading poetry as poetry. And if any 'you' is to be constituted in these interruptions – sounding, imagining – it is in this tearing dispersal.

For Celan, dialogue is sounded through 'you'. Celan's poem 'Vaporband-, Banderole-uprising' from *Atemwende* opens its last three stanzas by repeating 'Mit dir', 'With you'.[14] The poem speaks 'with you', not 'to you'. Such dialogue is tentative. If you are present 'with' the poem, then how can you remain 'you', separate, addressable? Political responsibility for singularity is reproduced figuratively, on the level of the image. In a letter Celan wrote to his wife, Celan describes this tension between the political and the figurative in this poem as 'insurrectional'. It occurs in the 'redder than red' banners of revolution, but in the '[i]nsurrection of other things too, geological, scriptural ones, matters of the heart.'[15] The poem imagines, hosts insurrection. The poem is a figurative site where other discourse intrude, precisely because of the way it 'hosts' them reflectively, in figures, without determining their ends. In the aesthetic work of the poem these discourses are reflective, not determinate. In another letter, Celan links poetry with Eisenstein's *October*, suggesting that in the film he saw, 'the brother of poetry'. 'Then, at the moment when the insurgents occupy the Winter Palace, it began to desert poetry and to become Cinema, motion-picture shots, tendentious and overdone, the intertexts became propaganda'.[16] The 'moving image' posits continuity. But this is the sequential continuity of filmic montage. The 'poetic' image shifting to the 'cinematic' is a shift in temporality. Eisenstein's film uses that shift, or modulation, to 'enact' the political as politics, as propaganda. If images are the basis for montage, construction, then continuity is being imposed on them. Does the 'poetic' image, then, endorse interruption as mere interruption, in which the 'insurrection of other things' can appear?

This 'poetic image' interrupts its own 'imaginary' work.

---

[10] Manoury, Daiana, 'Le Neutre blanchotien, reflets et réflexions à partir de *L'Amitié*', in *Maurice Blanchot et la philosophie*, ed. by Éric Hoppenot and Alain Milon (Paris: Presses Universitaire de Paris Ouest, 2010), pp. 243-257, 247-248 (my trans.)

[11] IC 325/477

[12] IC 324/476

[13] IC 360/528

[14] BIT 102|103

[15] BIT n.498

[16] BIT n.499

with the
outward- and away-
burrowing black-constellation swarm:

into the silicified forehead of a ram
I burn this image

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

der verkieselten Stirn eines Widders
brenn ich dies Bild ein[17]

The '*Schwarzgestirn-Schwarm*', might also be translated the 'blackstar-swarm'. It is significant that these stars, *Gestirn*, transform into the 'pebble' brow of the ram, its '*Stirn*' The adjective 'verkieselten' might be literally translated as 'turned to a pebble (*Kiesel*)'. The 'burrowing' motion of the stars is both out of the stars and into the pebbled brow. The image of the 'Great, glowing vault' which 'I' burn into the ram's forehead is 'burnt in' through this constellation of inverted stars. The stars' blackness is their presence in absence of light, an impossibly swarming, numerous presence. The ram's brow is also produced in a reverse history: bone mineralised into stone, rather than minerals organically becoming bone. Both of these figures go backwards: stars to darkness, bone to stone. The ram's skull is 'burnt into', with the swarming black stars. The image is burned in to you, but also exposed to the history of its imagination, much like the political image we looked at in chapter two.

This 'with' brings us back to ''Vaporband-, Banderole-uprising', and to 'you'.

The beam hammered all
the way through you,
that writes here,
redder than red.

Der durch dich hindurch-
gehämmerte Strahl,
der hier schreibt,
röter als rot. [18]

This beam, a beam of light, 'writes' here through you, with you, but also transcending you: writes here through you. It passes through you. It also, for the Celan whose daily language was French, visually 'yesterday' (*hier*). The space 'here' is displaced into 'yesterday'. This 'with you/through you writing'

[17] BIT 96|97
[18] BIT 102|103

then leads each of the next stanzas: ‘With its words’; ‘With you to coin gold, now,’; ‘With you to assist the banderoles’; ‘With you to moor the glasshard leaflet | to the blood-bollard [*Blutpoller*]’. This is nailing a leaflet to a bollard, perhaps, political dissemination, writing, but the nailing is accompanied each time ‘with you’. The leaflets are nailed to the bollards with you. Any image, any light, any politics must also pass through you. But this means that you are also weighed down with all this figurative freighting. The poem is demanding, even as it nails ‘you’ down, your presence. The space of the political is excessive, redder than red, because of this excessive ‘you’.

> With you to moor the glasshard leaflet
> to the blood-bollard, that
> the earth pushed out
> through this step-pole.
>
> Mit dir das glasharte Flugblatt vertäuen
> am lesenden Bluttpoller, den
> die Erde durch diesen
> Stiefpol hinausstieß.

The ‘blood-pole’ turns into a ‘step-pole’, the ‘*Poller*’ proliferations of this detached ‘*Pol*’. The polar relation between ‘you’ and the ‘leaflets’ (both are hammered in) is picked up in the poetic ‘polarity’ between the ‘*Bluttpoller*’ and the ‘*Stiefpol*’. But the poem also interrupts this polarity. A polar relation is of opposites, but here there is one pole, detached. A ‘step-pole’ is a slant polarity, like slant familiarity with a step-brother. It is an assumed pole, taken on. Just so, the literal space of the political, the bollard, must be ‘hammered through’. And just so, ‘you’ must be hammered through; indeed, you are ‘moored’ here, grafted to this detachable pole.

The poem addresses you by freighting you with this figurative weight. Writing you means writing you into an image. Elsewhere in cycle V, ‘you’ is ‘threaded’, but this threading also undoes the images it threads. ‘You’ passes through a needle’s eye.

> You, the hair taken from
> the lip with the bright-
> seeing highsleep:
> threaded through the goldeye
> of the sung-aright ash-
> needle.
>
> You, the knot torn out
> of the throat with
> the One Light:
> run through by needle and hair,
> under way, under way.
>
> Your reversals, incessantly, round

the seven-
fingered kisshand behind
happiness.

Du, das mit dem hell-
sehenden Hochschlaf von
der Lippe genommene Haar:
zurechtgesungenen Aschen-
nadel gefädelt.

Du, der mit dem Einen
Licht aus dem Hals
gerissene Knoten:
durchstoßen von Nadel und Haar,
unterwegs, unterwegs.

Eure Unschwünge, immerzu, um
die sieben-
fingrige Kußhand hinterm
Glück. [19]

The 'hair' which 'you' takes from the lip (a mouth's edge open like a needle's eye, another figurative modulation) is threaded in the first stanza, and then 'run through by needle and hair' in the second. 'You' are both the threaded hair and the 'knotted' thread. These are 'Your reversals, incessantly', where 'you' makes up both the threading and the tearing/knotting of that thread. Figures reverse, repeatedly, *immerzu*. The throat is the medium of breath, and itself a place of transformations. Breath comes silently inside and outside through the throat (reversals or turns of breath), but it might also be transformed into speech through the opening lips, speech 'threaded' through the breath in the throat. 'You' are both the silently threading breath and the speech 'torn out' from the throat. The pole (neck) you are moored to is this site of transformation.

To-
be-deciphered you.

With you,
on the vocalcords' bridge, in the
great Inbetween,
nightover.

Zu
Entziffernde du.

[19] BIT 100|101

Mit dir,
auf der Stimmbänderbrücke, im
Großen Dazwischen,
nachtüber. [20]

The 'Bänder' of poem six, the leaflets or flags of political movement, are here the 'Stimmbänder', the vocal-cords. Political writing is transfigured into speech – not yet speech, rather, but the cord, bridge, that joins breath with voice. And again, this is 'with you', you are threaded in. And both leaflet and vocal cord are 'Inbetween' spaces, spaces of figuration and bridging. The poem therefore stages the 'threading' of two different kinds of 'threading' work: the internal bridging between inanimate breath and speech, the breathturn to speech which identifies 'you', and the external bridging possibilities of the political, in which a space is made, again, for 'you' to be recognised, moored. Internal identification is posed against external identification.

Celan's poems hold these two kinds of work in a sort of 'step' polarity, a polarity which does not reconcile the relation between the two poles but holds them discontinuously together. In the cycle's final poem, this 'political' external space is set in 'quasistellar' constellation with the internal needle-threading, self-threading, you.

Ohne Licht rollts, ohne
Farbe – du
stich die Elfenbeinnadel hindurch
– wer weiß nicht,
daß der getigerte Stein, der dich ansprang,
an ihr zerklang? –
und so – wohin fiel die Erde? –
laß es sich drehen zeitauf,
mit zehn Nagelmonden im Schlepptau,
in Schlangennähe, bei Gelbflut,
quasistellar.

Without light it rolls, without
color – you,
stick the ivory needle through it
– who doesn't know
that the tigered stone, that jumped you,
rang out on it? –,
and so – whither fell earth? –
let it turn time-up,
with ten nailmoons on the towrope,
in serpent-nearness, at yellow-flood,

[20] BIT 98|99

quasistellar.[21]

Without colour, the blackstars; the bone-needle running through; the pebble or stone that turns against you; the earth falling without direction, non-polar; the mooring place: in this final stanza the figurative work of the whole cycle collapses together. The figures constellate, or quasi-constellate. They 'rotate' or 'spin', 'es sich drehen', 'time-up', into time. The complex falling together of the figurative work of these poems turns around this rotation, and it does so 'with you'. In this way we are returned to the cycle's first poem, which ends: 'The world is gone, I have to carry you.', 'Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich tragen.'[22] All the 'mooring' work the poems do for 'you', tying 'you' onto directional poles, threading you figuratively into the world as if with a needle, is only, finally, poetic work. 'The world is gone, I have to carry you.' This could mean two things. The world is gone and so I must stand in and bear you in its place. Or else there is no world, and in its place I must carry you, wear you, to bear me. You are either borne in the poem, despite everything, or else you become the real orientation of the poem after the world is gone; in which case this figurative weight is loaded onto 'you', the 'you' the poem creates itself, spins out of itself.

What does the poem do 'with you'? Does the poem 'thread' you back together, provide the figurative transformations necessary to describe sundered relations? The poem does not carry out the work of politics, but rather provides the figurative space where the political can take form. The poetic ambiguity about that spatiality, about whether it bridges or threads anything together, opens up the question of whether the politic space, the 'community' we discussed in chapter two, is finally, possibly, moored to any 'real' articulation. Celan's poetry is painfully orientated *by* the 'you' it addresses.

Any presence of you, and meaning for you, cannot be 'produced' as poetic effects. The suspension of 'you' in Celan's poems opens that space, marked by 'you', to other 'insurrections'. This poetic dialogue 'with you' can be read through philosophical dialectics. Poetry's *negative* presentation of dialogue, and of presence, gives form to a philosophical problem with presenting *negativity*. Hegel's dialectic proceeds by negation. The subject negates what it experiences as negative by disclosing a self-consciousness of identity with it. But in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel famously characterises this negation as life 'enduring' the negative and 'tarrying', 'lingering with it [*bei ihm verweilt*]'.[23] In common with Celan's poetry, Blanchot's and Adorno's writing tries to account for how 'negation' might be returned to this 'negative'. And in this way, Blanchot and Adorno work towards thinking non-transcendently, thinking in such a way that does not transcend its object by negating it. For Blanchot, this is writing in the time of 'waiting'. For Adorno, this is dialectics responding to the 'suffering' of

[21] BIT 104|105

[22] BIT 96|97

[23] Hegel, G.W.F, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 21 (I consulted Terry Pinkard's forthcoming translation for Cambridge University Press.)

objectivity in order to 'linger' with its object. By reading them with Celan, we can see how both accounts work towards 'community' as dialogue that can respond to the way it loses its object, loses objectivity in a way that returns us to the initial Kantian question of aesthetics: how can one think reflectively, when reflection is provoked by an incapacity to think conceptually?

Waiting

For Adorno, a 'negative' dialectic would respond to the way dialects suspends its negative. But this response would be dialectical, a dialectical reversal of the priority of the object. 'If thought really yielded to the object, if its attention were on the object, not on its category, the very objects would start talking under thinking's lingering glance [*verweilenden Blick*].'[24] Such dialogue would be structured by the negative, not by its negation. This dialogue would be orientated by reflecting on particularity. 'It compels our thinking to linger with minutiae [*vorm Kleinsten zu verweilen*]. We are not to philosophize about concrete things; we are to philosophize, rather, out of those these things.'[25] Only as part of a dialectical system are objects legible in their objectivity. The point is to reverse the force of this systematicity. This reversal, however, can only be effected through the subject thinking particularity.

> The conception of the system recalls, in reverse form [*in verkehrter Gestalt*], the coherence of the nonidentical, that which is breached/wounded [*verletzt*] by deductive systems. Criticism of the system and asystematic thinking is superficial so long as it is not able to release the force of coherence which the idealist system signs over to the transcendental subject.[26]

In this 'reversed form', the system would disclose its objectivity rather than reproducing 'transcendental subjectivity' in the place where it forgets that objectivity. The system should unlock the coherence granted by systematic thinking for the priority of the object, rather than repeating subjective coherence in the form of the object. This is a reversal of he role Kant mandates to reflection. Here, reflection substantiates the way it loses its object as negative, rather than relocating that reflection in the transcendental subject.

For Blanchot, writing 'awaits' presence. This waiting is configured through the thought of community: one awaits the other so that one can speak. Rather than marking the presence of something else, reflection becomes waiting. This waiting is dialogic. The interlocutors of *Awaiting Oblivion* decide that they are not alone, but not quite together, because 'We're only together if we could be separated',

[24] ND 27-8/38

[25] ND 33/43

[26] ND 26/36

so that they are "'United: separated [Réunis : séparés].'"[27] The condition for being together is separation – *partager* meaning both to divide and to share.

> "Everything would change if we waited together." – "If the waiting were common to us [*était commune*]? If we belonged to it in common? But isn't that what we are waiting for, to be together [*d'être ensemble*]?" – "Yes, together." – "But in waiting." – "Together, waiting and without waiting."[28]

Between being 'common' and being 'together', there is an interval: waiting. 'Waiting' is what is in common, awaiting commonality. Waiting is a passivity, an incapacity actually to be in common, together; and it is this passivity, this inoperativity, which is shared. The two speakers are awaiting together the capacity to speak in common because conversation structurally always takes turns, waits to speak while the other speaks. Speaking becomes waiting, because speaking is structured by its intervals of interruption. I must interrupt you in order to speak. 'Interruption is necessary to any succession of words; intermittence makes their becoming possible, discontinuity ensures the continuity of understanding.'[29] Speaking is discontinuous, and the continuity of being 'together' is this common discontinuity. In this interval, awaiting 'waiting', the interlocutors are differentiated, singular.

This singularity is felt as discontinuity. This spacing, where waiting is exterior, is registered socially, in a 'crowd a crowd [*une foule*] that was not a true crowd of people but something uncountable and indefinite, a kind of abstract weakness, incapable of presenting itself in any other way than in the empty form of a very large number.'[30] This crowd, however, 'made her more present'.[31] The 'crowd' waits in the anonymous space of her singular presence, because her singularity depends on being interrupted by this numerousness: counting depends on an uncountable numerousness. Her singular presence, then, is registered as the non-presence of the crowd which interrupts her. Beyond her, there is a non-manifest crowd. This 'beyond' is the non-countable that determines singularity.

> He who lives in a state of waiting sees life come to him as the emptiness of waiting and waiting as the emptiness of the beyond of life [*de l'au-delà de la vie*]. The unstable indeterminateness of these two movements is henceforth the space of waiting. At every step [*pas*], one is here, and yet beyond. But as this beyond is reached without being reached through death, it is awaited and not reached [*on l'attend et on ne l'atteint pas*]; without knowing that its essential characteristic is to be able to be reached only in waiting.[32]

Waiting is neutral time. 'He' waits – another, not I. In this indeterminate waiting (awaiting itself has no end, no termination, because it would terminate if what it awaited arrived) what is awaited is waiting.

---

[27] Blanchot, *Awaiting Oblivion*, 20/42

[28] Ibid., 20/43

[29] IC 76/107

[30] Blanchot, *Awaiting Oblivion*, 18-9/39-40

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 27/55-6

He awaits something to wait for. This is the *pas au-delà*, the step/not beyond. Nothing is negated, and so there is nothing beyond waiting; and yet waiting is structured by the neutrality of this 'not beyond' that is not reached. In not reaching, in not 'going beyond' the present, the present is only waiting, neutral. Being in common means being together in this waiting, which is waiting for each other. Community is thought through this neutrality. What is 'sensed' in 'common' here is only the neutrality of this waiting that places me outside myself.

In *Awaiting Oblivion*, writing is always awaiting the other it addresses. But it also has to forget this other in order to speak, because the other is an unbearable pressure on speech's unity. Waiting undoes the identity of dialogue. '"This is indeed proof that I am addressing you." – "I am not asking you to speak: to hear, only to hear."'[33] The 'sounding' insurrection of dialogue has to be awaited. Dialogue does not mark presence, but the lack of presence. 'It was as if he had introduced inside his thought a form of suffering that, as soon as it was awakened, forced him not to think about it.'[34] 'As if pain's proper dimension [*espace*] were thought.'[35] 'Waiting' intrudes as suffering into thought. In this intrusion, it is as if 'pain' was a part of 'thought', as if it was possible to think pain. But that would mean thinking the separation that pain marks. Dialogue is sharing pain, shared dissimilarity, shared alienation from sharing or communication itself. But pain is what resists thinking. What dialogue could be organised by pain? How could it be 'sensed'?

Suffering

In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry describes the experience of pain as a kind of maximum or excess of sense that also dismantles our capacity to make sense of it. Only I can experience my pain, but the isolation of that experience is also felt, or matched by, my alienation from it. Pain is unavailable to experience precisely because it is so experientially singular. It is the experience of the conditions of experience being dismantled. So pain is both a most singular experience – indeed, the experience of mere singularity – and an experience that exceeds my singular capacity to respond to it. For Scarry, this provokes a linguistic crisis and reversal.

> To witness the moment when pain causes a reversion to the pre-language of cries and groans is to witness the destruction of language; but conversely, to be present when a person moves up out of that pre-language and projects the facts of sentience into speech is almost to have been permitted to be present at the birth of language.[36]

[33] Ibid., 5/14

[34] Ibid., 15/32-3

[35] Ibid., 10/23

[36] Scarry, Elaine, *The Body in Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 6

This pain cannot be experienced. In pain, sense intuition exceeds the conceptual categories by which it might be thought. Pain invokes the imagination only to have it fail. In 'some peculiar way […] it is appropriate to think of pain as the imagination's intentional state, and to identify the imagination as pain's intentional object.'[37] Pain is sublime here. And as for Kant's sublime, Scarry invokes symbolism to make sense of it. The subject is exposed to the experience of the 'presence' of pain as deeply, affectively felt, and yet not available to experience, and it makes from that affect a symbol. But this pain is a feeling of the faculties' exteriority to the body. In this way, the aesthetic experience it provokes doubles against the resolution marked by the sublime. The imagination fails to present this most singular feeling of self-presence because, as pain, that self-presence is made external.

In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno suggests that, rather than recovering the body for the subject, suffering marks freedom – but this freedom is felt at once by a subject and against subjectivity, inside and outside. The freedom of thinking painfully exceeds itself, and exceeds the body from which (with which) it thinks.

> Where thinking goes beyond the bonds it tied in resistance — there is its freedom. Freedom follows the subject's urge to express [*Ausdrucksdrang*] itself. The need to let suffering speak is the condition of all truth. Suffering is objectivity that weighs upon the subject; its most subjective experience, its expression [*Ausdruck*], is objectively mediated.[38]

It is painful that to think means to dis-identify oneself from one's own body. The most private, subjective experience, precisely because of its subjective privacy, must be communicated even to the subject itself before it can be experienced. The subject is deprived of the suffering that weighs upon it. Subjective experience, the most subjective experience, is an objectivity which interrupts the self-presence of subjectivity – but that objectivity is precisely subjectivity itself. The 'expressive' movement from inside to outside ('*Ausdruck*' – 'pressing out') marks a transition from subjectivity to objectivity. The expression of suffering is the failure of expression, but it is also the expression of this failure, the objectification of suffering as a failure to communicate. Adorno continues:

> This may help explain why the presentation of philosophy is not a matter of indifference to it but immanent to its idea. Its integral moment of expression, nonconceptual-mimetic, is only objectified through presentation — language. The freedom of philosophy is nothing but the capacity to sound its unfreedom.[39]

The expression of suffering, the 'pressure' (*Druck*) which suffering applies from within (*aus*) subjectivity, is the subjective expression of 'something' objective: the subject. It parallels Kant's aesthetic experience, but also reverses it by orientating it to its suppressed objectivity. In expression,

[37] Ibid., 164

[38] ND, 17-8/27

[39] Ibid., 18/27

the subject itself becomes, mimetically, objective: outside itself, unavailable to itself. The concept is not adequate to express its own undoing. But for Adorno this is thought's 'freedom'. It is *pain* which is to be expressed, not *pleasure*. The free, nonconceptual communication with which Kant establishes the possibility of 'common sense' is for Adorno the freedom experienced in pain: the freedom from thinking that suppresses its own objectivity as outside experience. The pain of the 'most subjective experience' is its objectivity, and this objectivity salvages experience for communication, expression. Pain is at once most internal and the condition for externality.

Something

This expression of suffering is the expression of an objectivity of the subject that subjectivity is not adequate to think. For Adorno, this 'suffering' is immanent to conceptual form. To think is to think something. But, conversely, neither is this 'something' available without thought. 'The nonidentical is not to be obtained immediately, as positive on its part, and neither by a negation of the negative. This is not itself, as for Hegel, affirmation.'[40] Materiality is only material, only 'something', dialectically. Dialectics both negates this something and, in this abstraction, *makes* it something.

> To think means to think something [*etwas*]. By itself, the logically abstract form of "something," something that is meant or judged, does not claim to posit a being; and yet, surviving in it — indelible for a thinking that would delete it — is that which is not identical with thinking, which is not thinking at all. The *ratio* becomes irrational where it forgets this, where it runs counter to the meaning of thought by hypostasizing its products [*Erzeugnisse*], the abstractions.[41]
>
> 'Something', as a substrate necessary to thinking of concepts, including the concept of Being, is the utmost abstraction – not to be abolished by any further thinking process – of subject matter not identical with thinking; without that 'something' formal logic cannot be thought.[42]

Concepts cannot be divested of the specific materiality they think. This is the 'something' they think. Negation is always the negation of something, but that does mean that such negation posits anything. Concepts cannot move beyond this material, cannot 'abolish' it with any 'further thought process'. The concept seems to be dialectically beyond the 'something' it abstracts. The concept of materiality is already an abstraction; but abstraction is also the site of vestigial materiality, where the nonidentity of the matter with conceptuality is exposed. We encounter such matter 'in the interior of supposedly pure

[40] ND 158/161

[41] ND 34/44

[42] ND 135/139

concepts and of their truth content'.[43] We cannot think without identifying, even if that identification misses something of its object. 'To think is to identify [*Denken heißt identifizieren*].[44] […] The semblance and the truth of thought entwine. This entanglement cannot be overcome by decree, as for instance by an assertion of being-in-itself outside the totality of thinking's determinations.'[45] Without abstraction nonidentity would not only not be apparent, it would not be *material*, objective. We can think of the way capital is divested of any appearance of the residual labour for which it was exchanged. Thinking that labour back means thinking back through the process by which capital obscured it, otherwise it would not be visible as labour. So abstraction potentially turns against itself, here, by registering the 'weight of objectivity' it abstracts. 'Something' is suffered, not divestable. Consistent consciousness of such a nonidentity, as Adorno says in his lectures, is the speculative truth of identity. 'A truly achieved identity would have to be the consciousness of *non-identity*, or, more accurately perhaps, it would have to be the creation of a reconciled non-identity'.[46] The reconciliations of identity have to be 'achieved', 'created', manifest, presented. A 'reconciled non-identity' is therefore not just inverted identity, but the 'consciousness of *non-identity*'. Such 'consciousness' is suffered. In suffering, consciousness is exposed to its outside. This is abstraction. But it is also the reversal of abstraction. In suffering, the place of abstraction is occupied by the 'something' abstracted, the 'something' that remains nonidentical with abstraction. It is experienced as something consciousness lacks. The experience of this gap not only speaks truly about the nonidentity of the 'something' with thinking but establishes in this utopian space (no man's land) the possibility of such nonidentity becoming a relation in itself. Consciousness of nonidentity becomes utopian when it becomes a way of thinking *external* as well as internal relations.

For Kant, felt pleasurably, such indeterminacy becomes the spur to cognitive 'free play'. Rather than disabling thinking, as Scarry argues, the pleasurable experience of indeterminacy provokes reflection. By thinking aesthetically, then, we might utilise the negativity of 'something' pleasurably. If aesthetics were adequate to the indeterminacy experienced, the nonconceptual would be a pleasure. Negative dialectics is therefore necessary because other epistemological models do not adequately reflect their complicity with concealing this 'something'. A negative dialectic would stage this reflection. Thinking beyond conceptual domination, thinking what 'suffers', must come from within. Matter and materiality are not objectively available except through the concept that negates them. Materialism would require a changed conceptual procedure. The obligation to go beyond conceptual

[43] ND 138/142

[44] An ironic response, perhaps, to Heidegger's '*Was heißt denken?*'

[45] ND 5/17

[46] Adorno, Theodor, *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-1965*, ed. and trans. by Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 55

determination comes from within, dialectically. So if, for Kant, matter is not conceptually available to thinking, that is because concepts are not sufficiently provisional to think of matter's provisionality.

> Sensations, the Kantian matter, without which the forms would not even be imaginable, which therefore are also for their part conditions of the possibility of knowledge, have the character of the transitory. The nonconceptual, indispensable from the concept, disavows the concept's being-for-itself and changes it. The concept of the nonconceptual cannot linger [*verweilen*] with itself, with epistemology; it obliges philosophy to material-substantiality [*Sachhaltigkeit*].[47]

Philosophy is obliged to think the indeterminacy of its object, obliged to think 'something', because abstraction always comes from 'something'. This is impossible, however, because nonconceptual. Suffering is the failure of thinking to think the nonconceptual. Aesthetic experience does not remedy this lack, but it does offer a way to think of it as more than just a sublimely empty space.[48] Experienced aesthetically, precisely this 'something' cannot be divested from experience. Nonconceptuality is thus reflectively transfigured, reconfigured, as the negative – mobile, dialectical, not negated.

If we are to salvage Kant's sense of aesthetic universal, but subjective, validity, tied to the analytic of the beautiful, we need to be attentive to the suffering, the weight of objectivity, attendant upon that subject in the first place. It is the weight of objectivity, the 'something' which concepts think, that resists conceptualisation, not some sublime but ineffective failure of the imagination to dislocate itself conceptually or reflectively from matter. We can link suffering, as the objectification of subjective experience, to common sense, which externalises subjective experience. M. J. Bowles suggests that this disjointed experience is, for Kant, how synthetic understanding proceeds,[49] as Hegel's dialectic demonstrates. This excess of sense is what Bowles calls 'matter', Adorno the suffering of objectivity – 'something'. Bowles argues that matter marks the point of resistance of what cannot be synthesised by understanding. But understanding proceeds by negating this resistance. Synthesis proceeds discontinuously towards to the negative it fails to synthesise. Matter marks the excess of experience that is also the condition of experience, its indeterminate 'future': understanding has to synthesise something, some matter, or else it would be 'empty'.[50] In this reading, matter is what is *painful*. It

---

[47] ND 137/141

[48] We might begin in this way to think beyond Lyotard's focus on Kant's sublime as configuring the 'empty' signification of the ethical in post-modernity, coordinated not least by the Holocaust.

[49] Bowles, M. J., 'Kant and the Provocation of Matter', in *The Matter of Critique: Readings in Kant's Philosophy*, ed. by Andrea Rehberg and Rachel Jones, (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2000), pp. 1-18

[50] Ibid., 6-9; on the mutuality of concepts and intuition, and the conceptual oscillation between 'emptiness' and 'blindness', recall Kant's famous dictum from CPR: 'Thoughts without concepts are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.' (193-4, A51/B75) But also recall Celan's repeated imagery of 'blindness', especially in 'Tübingen, Jänner', which opens with 'Eyes talked in- | to blindness.' [*Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, 158-9]. Celan is here inverting the eyes' faculty and purpose, and doing so *socially*, they are 'talked into' it, over time, historically. The chiasmus which Celan performs is just another (excessive) turn on Kant's own scheme; power falls into passivity by its own power.

provokes the failure of experience even as it conditions experience. So the question of sense becomes a question about the conditions of experience, and this question is felt, painfully, as an excess of sense's singularity. Thinking 'common sense' means attending to the way 'you' might be sensed – sounded, imagined.

Poetic dialogue 'interrupts' dialectical progress with this 'you'. But thinking this interruption means interrupting dialectical presence. If there is a reversal of priority towards this 'something', then that reversal is already dialectical. The '*danger*', as Blanchot puts it, is '*that the disaster acquire a meaning instead of a body*.'[51] The danger is that the negative, the indeterminate, the something that orientates thinking would, indeed, orientate it: give it direction, meaning, and thereby be forgotten in negation. Giving this indeterminacy a body does not mean, however, making it present. As Kant knew, the indeterminacy of reflection cannot be sublated into a concept without ceasing to be reflective. It would rather be '*a subjectivity without any subject*: the wounded space, the hurt of the dying, the already dead body which no one could ever own, or ever say of it, *I, my body*'.[52] If we are to think of this 'body', it is in this neutral non-presence, and the displacement this non-presence subjects us to, bodily, enjoins us to, dialogically – enjoins us to our incapacity to host it.

2 – Blanchot: the fragmented present of writing between *le pas au-delà* and *désastre*

write in the thrall of the impossible real, that share of disaster wherein every reality, safe and sound, sinks[53]

In this section, I want to look at how Blanchot's concept of non-transcendent writing – the 'step/not beyond' – helps us think of the neutralisation of experience as 'disaster'. I want to explore the ways this non-transcendence and this neutrality can make legible the displacement of experience in aesthetics. This lets us think Blanchot's reversal of Kant. Kant establishes the way that an experience of reflection structures, as reflecting judgement, the form of experience. But for Blanchot, this second reflection displaces judgement's transcendental security. Writing reflectively shows that such reflection is actually neutral, in a way that displaces subjective experience. It is not 'possible', in Kant's sense of the transcendental, to 'experience' writing. Instead, we have an 'experience' of the impossibility of securing reflection.

[51] WD 41/71
[52] WD 30/53
[53] WD 38/65

In *The Infinite Conversation*, Blanchot characterises poetry as 'naming the possible, responding to the impossible'.[54] What dialogue is there, here, between possibility and impossibility? Poetry responds, 'each time it is poetry', to impossibility by not naming it. The name poetry henceforth names this refusal of poetry to name the possible. Poetry is possible writing that responds to an impossibility of writing. Kant wants to name the *possibility* of reflective experience, but Blanchot suggests any such 'naming' inscribes the *impossibility* of that experience. The motto is, itself, dispersed through Blanchot's text: firstly in the subtitle; then as '*naming* the possible, *responding* to the impossible'; and a third time without any emphasis. How could a poem make 'impossibility' a 'possible' experience? How does poetry navigate this paradox? This poetic problem of repetition reflects a problem with presence. As we saw in the last section, 'you' are only awaited, not present in writing. We can connect this with disaster.

> The disaster: break with the star, break with every form of totality, never denying, however, the dialectical necessity of a fulfilment; the disaster: prophecy which announces nothing but the refusal of the prophetic as simply an event to come, but which nonetheless discovers the patience of vigilant language. The disaster, touch of the powerless infinite: it does not come to pass under a sidereal sky, but here – here in the excess of all presence. Here: where, then? *"Voice of no one, once more."*[55]

Such a dialectic is not subject to totality, but still operates as if towards some future presence. Its operations are figurative, because the fulfilment of this future is impossible. Any futurity is not prophetic, in the sense that it is never 'present', never merely a future proceeding from the present. And neither does this futurity 'take place here': its space, its presence, exceeds space. And so it is not spoken by anyone. It is the repetition of this 'no one, once more'. This occurs *within* dialectics, just as, for Adorno, the 'something' that concepts think is only thinkable through the dialectical thinking that negates it. Thinking 'something', presently, is impossible. Dialectics proceeds in the consciousness of this impossibility. This disables dialectical history from within. It presents a history of dispersal. '"Already" or "always already" marks the disaster [*la marque du désastre*], which is outside history, but historically so: before undergoing it, we (who is not included in this we?) will undergo it. […] a remainder which is neither a result (as in subtraction), nor a quantity left over (as in division). Patience again – the passive. The *Aufhebung* turns [*devenue*] inoperable, ceases.'[56] And, again, this history includes a dialogic history of saying 'we'. This is 'friendship', a connection by radical incompatibility that articulates a radical incompletion of dialogue: 'to die in common through separation'.[57] Three kinds of dialogue are constellated here in disaster: poetry, dialectics, and community. This constellation is

[54] IC 48/68-9
[55] WD 75/121
[56] WD 40/68-9
[57] WD 29/50

articulated, however, through the 'step/not beyond' of writing which disconnects. And this disconnection is legible through a reversal of the orientation of reflection in Kant's aesthetic.

i. Time, disaster, identity

The time of judgement: Kant, figuration, and time

The reflection that characterises aesthetic experience for Kant is translated by Blanchot into the repetition of writing. For Adorno, the subject feels its own objectivity as a 'weight'; and the subject awaits, for Blanchot, a form by which it could account for the painful separation from the other that constitutes being 'together' but not 'in common'. Writing is thus stretched between two separate kinds of autonomy: the subject's felt singularity, and the nonidentical singularity of the other. In attempting to account for this doubling, writing is fragmented. Rather than providing a space where the 'presence' of the object can be 'presented', writing is interrupted by this coincidence. This doubles back into aesthetics. Art becomes autonomous at the same time as aesthetics, in the sense that both condition one another. But both also resist one another. The autonomy of art is also autonomy *from* theoretically framed meaning. If an aesthetic theory thoroughly conditioned the internal meaning of the artwork, then the artwork would no longer be autonomous. But at the same time, if the artwork resisted all conditioning from any exteriority, any theory, then it would dissipate and no longer be recognisably art. The relation between aesthetics and art is therefore not only reflective, it is negative. If we are to find an 'aesthetic' theory in Blanchot's sense of writing, it would be in the fragmentation such a theory undergoes in being written, the dissipation and neutralisation of a theoretical relation that could be 'outside' its object. The futurity that coordinates the present of aesthetic judgement is not merely yet-to-be determined. It is felt as the loss of the present. Any futurity that writing makes legible is subject to this reversal. Any figuration of the future as something 'beyond' the present betrays the indeterminacy by which the future is legible as such. But any thought of the future necessarily transcends the present. The two coordinates reverse into one another. So the future is located in this *reversal*, a reversal between being transcendental and transcendent, outside and inside, 'presence' and 'present'. In interrupting these dualities, writing exposes them to the impossibility that constitutes futurity. It is precisely by not writing about 'aesthetics', then, that Blanchot marks out a possible future for aesthetic experience, which is to say a possible future for an experience of the present not determined by presence. For Leslie Hill, this is anti-aesthetic, and an anti-aesthetic that becomes visible in Blanchot's reading of Celan's poetry. Each share in writing as a 'turning point, a caesura, a disjunction,

an interruption': a 'breathturn' or 'reversal'.[58] But I want to retain this nonconceptual reflection for the aesthetic, as a reflective, indeterminate account of the conditions of reading – this shared 'impossibility' of disaster. This aesthetic would, however, have to account for the non-manifestation of its object. Poetry would then signal this reversal of objectivity as a secure or determining point of orientation for thinking. But that would then be pitched through the non-manifest futurity of presence in the present.

As I have repeatedly described it, Kant's aesthetic judgement reflectively recuperates objective indeterminacy for subjective experience by withdrawing itself from objectivity. Aesthetic experience might refer to an objective reality, but aesthetic judgement refers to the subjective feeling prompted by that reality. The subject reflects on its own indeterminate response to an object. Judgement remains in this way provisional. It is not coordinated by any object, but rather coordinates its own pseudo-objectivity in a future sociability of judgement's 'common sense'. This experience is therefore coordinated by futurity. So while it refers to an object and a subject, an outside and an inside, and therefore to space and time, presence and a present, in aesthetic 'free play' these coordinates are not securely separate. Pitched through this futurity, they are exposed to one another in indeterminate ways. This refers us back to Kant's account of the transcendental: the formal conditions for experience. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant describes the distinction between space and time. 'Time can no more be intuited externally than space can be intuited as something in us'.[59] Just as I cannot 'intuit' time externally, I cannot 'intuit' space internally. Time and space are separated by comparison. Space works in the way time does not, and vice versa. They are defined negatively against one another. Time is not, here, 'inner sense', but also 'not externally' intuited; space is, likewise, 'not internally' intuited. Time is *not outside*. 'Space is a necessary representation, *a priori*, that is the ground of all other intuitions';[60] 'Time is a necessary representation that grounds all intuitions'.[61] Space is a 'ground' for intuition; time 'grounds' intuition. Space is a representation of the outside *from the inside*: space is defined negatively as 'not internally' intuited because it is a representation *from* the inside into appearance. Space, as a form, is therefore the 'not inside' of intuition: it is a projection turned outwards. Time is more complex.

> Time is nothing other than the form of inner sense, i.e., of the intuition of our self and our inner state. For time cannot be a determination of outer appearances; it belongs neither to a shape or a position, etc., but on the contrary determines the relation of representation in our inner state. And just because this inner intuition yields no shape we also attempt to remedy this lack through analogies, and represent the temporal sequence through a line progressing to infinity, in which the manifold constitutes a series that is of only one dimension, and infer from the properties of this line to all the properties of time, with the

[58] Hill, Leslie, *Radical Indecision* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 203-4

[59] CPR 175 A24/B37

[60] CPR 175 A24/B38

[61] CPR 178 A31/B46

> sole difference that the parts of the former are simultaneous but those of the latter always exist successively.[62]

Because it is an 'inner sense', time 'lacks' objectivity. It therefore has to be figured. But it has to be figured negatively. We imagine an infinite line that has no space, and is therefore simultaneous; and in translating this line into objective space it becomes serial. Time might be a 'grounding' of inner representation, but we make 'analogies' for time: we find its equivalence *outside*, in appearance. Time, in the way it is a 'turning' inwards of appearance, provokes determinations outside itself: we are tempted to think of it *as* something else, figuratively. Kant's initial description of time as 'not external' and space as 'not internal' turns out to be a characterisation of the way space and time function. That is to say, time's function *provokes* analogy, provokes its own spacing in appearance, precisely by the way it is 'not externally' determined.

In a way, this is an error of reflection in judgement. Reflection should refer intuitions to their corresponding categories. But already, in the transcendentally pure intuition of time, we have to make recourse to space. In his description of such error, Kant again makes recourse to the image of a line, a figure, a diagram of lines:

> error is effected only through the unnoticed influence of sensibility on understanding, through which it happens that the subjective grounds of the judgment join with the objective ones, and make the latter deviate from their destination, just as a moved body would of itself always stay in a straight line in the same direction, but starts off on a curved line if at the same time another force influences it in another direction. In order to distinguish the proper action of the understanding from the force that meddles in, it will thus be necessary to regard the erroneous judgement of the understanding as a diagonal between two forces that determine the judgement in two different directions, enclosing an angle, so to speak[63]

The subjective influence on objectivity is the origin of error. Judgement would be a continuous, truthful straight line between intuition and understanding, except that 'another force' influences it, the 'unnoticed influence of sensibility'. The sensible is a force of error. This intrusive influence ('influence' being the force of the stars, fate flowing down) comes, again, as a doubling: the erroneous judgement is determined 'in two different directions', an 'angle' between two forces. The judgement in error is a diagonal step aside. The force that causes this mis-step is 'transcendental illusion': the misuse of categories of experience outside of their territory, 'a mere mistake of the faculty of judgement when it is not properly checked by criticism, and thus does not attend enough to the boundaries of the territory in which alone the pure understanding is allowed to play'.[64] We can here explicitly recall Adorno's account of the 'territorialisation' of reflection in aesthetics as a neutral 'no man's land'. This erroneous

[62] CPR 180 A33/B49-50

[63] CPR 385 A294-295/B350-351

[64] CPR 385 A295-296/B352

judgement can be properly checked by referring understanding back to its own territory. But we have seen how, like a line in diagonal, time itself — the pure intuition which 'grounds' understanding — from the moment it is in play turns its own 'inside' out in analogy. Time works in analogy, crossing its own boundary as the 'inner sense' into the world of appearance by a doubling in analogy. Time is 'transcendental', a condition for experience, but it seems also to function in a way *similar* to Kant's following description of the 'transcendent': 'I mean here principles that actually incite us to tear down all those boundary posts and to lay claim to a wholly new territory that recognizes no demarcations anywhere'.[65] Time also, as we have seen, 'incites' to analogy, to unlawful 'appearance'. Time, as a category of sensibility, is itself under the influence of time, is historical — which is to say that it *doubles* itself in crossing over itself, that it becomes 'temporal' in the sense of appearing *as* itself, despite itself. So the transcendental aesthetic of the pure intuition of time, while remaining structurally transcendental (i.e., the condition for the possibility of 'spacing' appearance), is itself 'aesthetically' spaced and acts *as if* transcendent: it doubles back on its own boundaries even in its 'grounding' work. As if it was under the influence of the outside that it marks, time is subject to time.

Identification

The 'outside' that characterises writing for Blanchot redoubles on these transcendental conditions. '♦ There would be a separation of time, like a separation of place, belonging neither to time nor to place. In this separation, we would come to the point of writing.'[66] Writing traces how time becomes historical in being separated from itself. Historical experience is in this way conditioned by what is outside experience. Thinking historically means being outside history. But temporally, history is already 'outside' itself. This is important for thinking about community as a site of identification. If time becomes an 'event' when it identifies a present with spatial presence, an exterior location with an interior experience, then the experience of community interrupts this correspondence. The question of the political identification of a community turns around the question of the identity of time. And like the identity of time, political identification is worked out figuratively. As Fynsk puts it,

> identification […] remains identification with no *identity*, and we are given to think its movement only *with* that of others, by figure or simile ("*ainsi que le 'pas au-delà'*"; "*comme si mourir*"), the basis of comparison being the manner in which it *gives itself* as its own transgression and thus a *becoming other* that is held in its self-loss. What carries this disappropriating movement is perhaps still thought, but it is indeed a disaster for thought.[67]

[65] CPR 385-6 A296/B352

[66] SNB 71/100

[67] Fynsk, *Last Steps*, 170

Identification is 'a disaster for thought' because of the way it is internally divided. Part of the 'double' work of writing is the way it responds to identity both as something internal to language and thought, and as something social and intersubjective. Identification, of course, is not merely something one 'does', let alone possesses, but something that happens *to* 'you'. It is an experience of objectification. Social relations are always in this way double: both opportunities for self-identification and the passive reception of identity from outside. Just as apparently internal self-identity is interrupted, and thereby produced, by acts of identification from outside to which 'you' are passive, so writing works through a double relation: it both figures and is figured by what it writes.

The displacements of self-identity experienced in community are also the displacements of a capacity to identify. As *The Step Not Beyond* has it, 'we', an identifiable community, are always coming, to come, *a-venir*, never present. So 'we' is separated from 'them', as being 'together' is from being in 'common'.

> ♦ *Coming towards us* [venant vers nous], *as they* [ils] *came towards one another through this plurality that unifies them* [les] *without showing unity: their young return.*
>
> *He thought: saving the we* [sauvant le nous], *like he believed he saved thought in identifying it with the fragile fall, that their young return would allow him, even in their no longer being together* [tout en cessant être ensemble] *(for a long time he had no longer heard anything, not even an echo, that could have passed for an approbation, a confirmation of the daily meeting), to fall in community* [de tomber en communauté]. *Fragile fall – common fall* [Chute fragil – chute commun]*; words always skirting one another.*
>
> *And he knew, thanks to the too ancient knowledge, effaced by the ages, that the young names, naming twice, an infinity of times, one in the past, the other in the future, that which is found only on this side, that which is found only beyond, named hope, deception. Hand in hand, from threshold to threshold* [de seuil en seuil], *like immortals, one of whom was dying, the other saying:* "would I be with whom I die?"[68]

The distance between the past and the future, between this side and beyond, is felt as 'common', the common of writing where words 'skirt' one another. This 'coming' is both 'on this side' and 'beyond', 'hope' and 'deception': Celan's 'from threshold to threshold'.[69] Thinking of 'we' to whom 'they', the anonymous crowd, come, is paralleled with 'saving thought in identifying'. The 'thresholds' between which thought thinks are these two 'wes': thought's self-identity and the individual's identification with a crowd. Both fail: 'we' does not become identical with 'they'; 'thinking' identifies with the 'fall' of thinking. Between these two nondientities, however, there is a 'common fall', a falling together, 'as one' (*comme-un*). And like dying, which combines the power of negation (death) with the non-power

[68] SNB 136-7/186-7

[69] Blanchot used this phrase of Celan's, *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle*, in another essay collected in *Friendship*, n.302: 'We also can retain the term *Threshold* and strive, as Paul Celan engages us to do, to think from *threshold to threshold*.'

of displacement (dying), the experience of this 'common fall' is always displaced, never present. It is torn between the past and future. But in this way identity is saved from itself by its exposure to the 'not beyond' of suspended negation. And in this way too writing sketches out the parameters of a double movement, a torn movement, of a non-transcendent writing.

Negation, disaster

Writing's future is incoherent, not reconciled with the present. Without any principle but this incoherence, writing only marks its own dispersal in fragmentation. But this echoes Kantian aesthetics. Aesthetics deals with an indeterminacy it cannot negate. Unable to negate the object, it negates (judges) the subjective experience of that object. The negative is merely displaced. For Blanchot, writing registers this displacement as 'disaster', as in the final fragment from *The Writing of the Disaster*. '♦ *Shining solitude, the void of the sky, a deferred death: disaster.* [Solitude qui rayonne, vide du ciel, mort différée : désastre.]'.[70] The sentence is in reverse: '*désastre*', which should predicate the clauses it follows, instead turns into a pseudo-subject. It fails to resolve in meaning the clauses it describes. Disaster here acts as 'the key word that opens and does not open [*le mot clé qui ouvre et n'ouvre pas*]';[71] by wordplay neither 'opening' (*ouvrir*) nor 'working' (*œuvrer*). Playfulness becomes literal here. Opening and working also do not work, in that the word opens itself up to an internal deferral of meaning, not to any resolved 'work'. The 'key word' both opens and does not open, works and does not work. The sentence is organised syntactically around this negative. The colon opens it up to '*désastre*', only for that key word not to make sense of the clauses it follows. There is solitude which 'brightens' in rays of light; solitude which opens up, turning against the clotted sky, *'vide*', 'empty', which should otherwise be opened up at the same time as it is filled with rays of light. This solitary space is therefore one which is not *timed* by light. The death which conditions the present as possible is not distinguishable from the nonperson who dies. In this collapse of distinction, the possible futurity (open sky) opened by death is not distinguishable from an *im*possible futurity (clotted sky). The collapse of this distinction is a suspension of the negation by which time proceeds, by which the present is secured by an open future. Disastrously, in the present we await death as indeterminate, a negative into which a future might be opened; but this future is always the *displacement* of the present, just as in dying I am displaced by the other I who dies, who exceeds my experience, who is nonetheless me. The future displaces the present, repeatedly. Negation is set aside. Light is set aside. Instead, solitude radiates. This is the radiation of fragmentation: of singular, discrete, solitary things which do not connect, which do not work together, but which are related by this disconnection, this unworking. Singularity is characterised by this displacement, not by a reciprocal reflexivity.

[70] WD 220/146

[71] WD 206/136

Disaster cannot be incorporated into any singular experience even as it conditions that singularity of experience. That, indeed, is the insight hidden in Kant's aesthetic: that the indeterminate is at once the motor and block to coherent subjective experience, and that experience of the indeterminate at once founds the subject's capacity to reflect and to judge (to think subjectively), and resists precisely that subjective experience. Any attempt to harness this 'indeterminacy' for the subjective system would incapacitate that system.

> ♦ *If the break with the star* [la rupture avec l'astre] *could be accomplished in the manner of an event, if we could, if only through the violence that operates in our bruised space, depart from the cosmic order (the world), where whatever the visible disorder, order still dominates* [l'arrangement l'emporte toujours], *the thought of the disaster, in its adjourned imminence, would still lend itself to an experience of discovery whereby we could only be recuperated* [qu'à nous laisser ressaisir], *not exposed to that which slips away in motionless flight, in the separation of living and dying; outside experience, outside the phenomenal* [à l'écart du vivant et du mourant; hors expérience, hors phénomène].[72]

The point, then, is that we cannot escape from the 'disaster' (the 'break with the star) of disarrangement because the very mechanism of our subjective experience of the world is already conditioned by this disarrangement. Disaster does not signal some external event, some exit. Yet at the same time it is the intimate ground of experience that resists all experience. In writing, negation does not proceed. It is neutral: the experience of the 'step' (*pas*) which 'negates' (*pas*), but which does not affirm that negation, which is not transcendent. Rather than the Kantian arrangement of indeterminacy into an aesthetic experience, for Blanchot we have the disarrangement of experience by its own reflective indeterminacy. Where Kant defers that reflective work by supposing a 'third' objectivity, the 'common sense', to secure subjective experience which is otherwise cut off from the object it responds to, Blanchot insists on the continued reflection of that indeterminacy. There is no third, here, and no dialectical step beyond the indeterminacy of the negative. There is no event of this experience.

ii. The present and the return

Experience, responsibility

The sociality that might secure aesthetic experience for the subject is reserved by Blanchot as a limit to subjective experience. The disaster does not mark an affirmative rupture from the world. It is immanent in the world – and that includes the actualised 'social' reality it apparently interrupts. In *Last Steps*, Fynsk argues that writing doubles in response to contradictory demands: to respond to the injustices of

[72] WD 55/92; trans. modified

social power, and at the same time to respond to the ethical grounds outside power that make written response possible. To respond to present injustice, writing must appeal beyond it. Yet those appeals transcend the present. By this contradiction, writing undergoes an 'exilic movement' that 'carries beyond the order of representation, beyond the figural'.[73] The task of writing is therefore to respond equally to each demand. But that means that writing must proceed by contradiction.

The responsibility that presses on writing is to the world writing excludes. As Bertrand Renaud argues, writing does not make experience possible so much as enjoin language to a responsibility for the world. But this responsibility is to the world in its exclusion from responsibility.[74] This is framed by Blanchot as an experience that refuses communication, without refusing the obligation to communicate. 'The disaster – experience none can undergo [*inéprouvée*] – obliterates (while leaving perfectly intact) our relation to the world as presence or as absence; it does not thereby free us, however, from this obsession which burdens us: others.'[75] Writing bears a responsibility to the neutrality it cannot experience. The experience of fragmentation fragments the form by which it is experienced. Fragmentary writing doubles the loss of transcendent presence rather than reconciling itself with that loss. Such writing does not make anything available to experience except the present of fragmentation.

> The disaster, unexperienced. It is the very possibility of experience — it is the limit of writing. It is necessary to repeat: the disaster de-scribes [*de-crit*]. Which does not mean that the disaster, as the force of the writing, is excluded from it, is outside writing, an outside-text [*s'en exclue, soit hors écriture, un hors-texte*].'[76]

The disaster, non-experience, makes experience possible by marking its outside. But in writing, that 'force' is radically included. If the concept proceeds by negating its object, writing is more precariously exposed to the negative which it does not negate, cannot exclude, and bears a responsibility to what it cannot exclude. Blanchot includes writing's incapacity as a condition for writing. This is also framed as the force of 'others', of 'you'. 'The one who waits precisely does not wait for *you*. It is thus that you are however awaited, but not in the vocative mode: not called.'[77] Writing calls you into presence, but also suspends dialogue. The only presence offered is the presence of exclusion. We are exposed in writing to a responsibility to this exclusion of presence *as* what makes present experience possible. And yet we are enjoined by writing to attend to the possibility, in this depleted present, of a future not yet present. Writing displaces the aesthetic as the site for experiencing indeterminacy (and thereby for

[73] Fynsk, *Last Steps*, 3

[74] Renaud, Bertrand, 'Le passif de mort ou l'éthique à l'impossible: sur *L'Écriture du désastre*', in *Maurice Blanchot et la philosophie*, ed. by Éric Hoppenot and Alain Milon (Paris: Presses Universitaire de Paris Ouest, 2010), pp. 259-277

[75] WD 120/184

[76] WD 7/17

[77] WD 139/211

reconciling subjective judgements with their objective truths), but it also inhabits the loss of the aesthetic as a site for presenting the conditions of reconciliation.

> ♦ The present, when heightened as successive instants [*si s'exalte en instants*] (appearing, disappearing), forgets that it cannot be contemporaneous with itself. This noncontemporaneity is a passage already passed over; it is the passive which, outside time, disarranges time as pure and empty form wherein all would order and distribute itself either equally or unequally. Time that is deranged and off its hinges still lets itself be drawn — if only through the experience of the crack — into a coherence which unifies and universalizes itself. But the experience of the disaster — the experience none can have, the retreat of the cosmic which it is too easy to unmask as utter collapse [*effondrement*] (the lack of foundation [*fondement*] where once and for all, without ambiguity or questions, everything we can conceive of and think would be immobilized) — obliges us to disengage ourselves from time as irreversible, without the Return's assuring its reversibilty.[78]

Fragmentary writing intervenes into the narrative temporality of writing. The seriality of fragmentation presents time as not exchangeable, or dialectical, where each moment proceeds into the next. The 'experience none can have' fragments this dialectical procession, 'immobilizes' it. This disarrangement of time, as we have seen in Kant, is inherent to time's form. Presence disarranges the present by which it is arranged, because it needs a present to be thought but is not compatible with the present. We are 'obliged' to, responsible for this experience, because responsible for this presence. And we are obliged, therefore, to stop thinking of time as irreversible, continuous, and instead think of the discontinuities to which it is subject. Bearing this responsibility also means bearing the way it collapses experience. Writing thus works through, and not despite, the contradiction by which experience is conditioned.

The problem is in affirming the contradictory movement immanent to conceptuality. It is not a matter of affirmatively producing some new dialectical concept that could ground other conceptual contradictions. The threshold concept, *le pas au-delà*, responds to the dispersal of time that should condition experience, and in doing so bears its responsibility to what is *other* to experience. Writing, *le pas au-delà*, is a concept of non-transcendence, but also a non-transcendent concept. As such it traces the contours of this disastrous non-experience: it is a concept that does not mediate an experiential outside into a conceptually determinate, systematically secure 'inside'. Instead, it is exposed to neutrality. Concepts are already contradictory, acting at once transcendentally (conditioning experience) and transcendently (appealing beyond the objects they think). The *concept* of *le pas au-delà* marks the failure of negation, this suspended negativity. And so *conceptually*, *le pas au-delà* fails itself, weakens itself. It is a threshold-concept for a limit experience. And that limit experience is the experience of the neutrality of conceptual contradiction. Looking at its various iterations in the eponymous book, Leslie Hill shows that the concept always plays at the border of conceptuality,

[78] WD 78/125

weakening its authority rather than imposing it.[79] And Fynsk describes *le pas au-delà* as writing moving on this threshold between transcendence (as marking a reality outside it) and its own 'outside' (its autonomy, its non-power, neutrality). 'Its role would not be that of a key or master signifier. […] the motif is really little more than a conduit.'[80] Writing does not bridge in reconciliation or otherwise guarantee thought's unity. In the place of this bridge it exposes thinking to its discontinuity. If we think of writing as the displacement, rather than the conduit, of presence, then we are thinking in this 'non-transcendent' way. The aesthetic, as a way to organise the experience of the nonconceptual by its indeterminacy, is subject to the neutral displacements of writing, where that experience is configured by an exposure to displacement, and not by reconciliation.

I think Kevin Hart is right, therefore, to characterise *The Writing of the Disaster* as 'a book of experience, of what 'experience' of the disaster might be'.[81] This usefully opens up Blanchot's work to a Kantian reading, and to a post-Kantian history it radicalises as fragmentary. If experience is to be transcendentally justified, then disaster at once demands and refutes all justification. But this means, for Hart, disaster is,

> first of all, experience *par excellence*, exposure to peril, yet also, since it is not a lived event, non-experience, an attunement to the Outside that is suffered in a state of radical passivity in which one loses the power to say 'I'.[82]

Yet Hart identifies this 'outside' not with the Kantian transcendental, with the conditions of possibility of experience, but with the kind of historical event that we have just seen Blanchot dismiss: the Holocaust. Indeed, 'we better understand what 'disaster' means, what the approach of the neutral Outside 'means', when we reflect on the Shoah'.[83] Hart is certainly registering the irony of such a 'meaningful' interpretation of the Shoah. And yet, however caesural, even in such an ironic reading, to locate meaning as 'caesural' is to figure and to orientate as meaningful, even negatively, what Blanchot insists is neutrally 'outside' meaning. Is it possible to read historically, attendant to the history of writing's formation, but without locating 'meaning' where, historically, writing does not offer it? After all, the 'relation without relation' is both historically manifest and *critically* manifest; it is a relation both articulated by writing and borne to writing, witnessed in writing. The interruptions to thinking posed by 'disaster' are internal to thinking, cannot be associated with any historical event, even as they manifest, as writing does, historically. So I want to read the conditions of possibility that disaster

[79] Hill, *Maurice Blanchot and Fragmentary Writing*, 186-90

[80] Fynsk, *Last Steps*, 128

[81] Hart, Kevin, 'From the Star to the Disaster', in *Paragraph*, 30:3 (2007), pp. 84-103, 92

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., 95-6

displaces.[84] The disaster's immanence is so thorough (it 'ruins everything'),[85] yet its depletions and reversals so provisional, that we are obliged (as if under transcendental law) to think of the disaster internal to thinking, if we are ever to think justly. 'To think the disaster (if this is possible, and it is not possible inasmuch as we suspect that the disaster is thought) is to have no longer any future in which to think it.'[86] Writing continues through its own dispersal; its future is this futureless procession. If we are to make sense of the disaster, of fragmentation, of 'relation without relation' transcendentally, which is to say in the place of disastrous displacement of transcendental security, then we have to read the experience it presents as an internalised repetition of the outside that *displaces* any history even as it installs it. It is a matter therefore of thinking time as 'repetition' rather than 'procession'. My wider claim, here, is that the reflection Kant identifies as a free 'ground' for experience itself *displaces* experience. An aesthetics orientated by this negativity could register such displacement.

The return of the present

If 'disaster' bears a force upon experience, it is as a demand to take responsibility for the future. And yet, this demand and this responsibility are borne as an injunction against thinking the future. For the future, in the present, we have not to think the future, or the present as a conduit to the future. What would be the condition for such experience? For Leslie Hill, Blanchot was 'endeavouring to think the challenge of a future that was radically irreducible to presence'. But for Hill, this does not constitute a 'transcendental enquiry with the aim of legislating for all possible experience or experiences, but an exploration of the impossibility that announces itself in thought […] as the limit and condition of thinking itself.[87] The fragmentary displaces transcendental enquiry because such enquiry is limited to experience as *presentation*. But the future resists all presentation, and so constitutes what Blanchot calls a 'limit experience'.

> Presence without anything present [*Présence sans rien de present*]. In this affirmation which has been released from all negation (and consequently from all meaning), which has relegated and deposed the world of values, which does not consist in affirming – i.e., bearing and

[84] Here, as with my reading of Adorno, I do not want to dismiss or diminish the importance of that event for shaping all the texts I am reading, which it certainly did decisively; indeed, any reading of Celan that did not take the Holocaust – *was Geschehen* – into account would be shamelessly violent, careless of history. However, I think that that makes it all the more important to take Blanchot at his word here, as we do Adorno on the 'impossibility' of lyric poetry after Auschwitz. The decisive, singular importance of the Holocaust requires us not to treat it as singular in a sublime sense, as some evental interruption which we can single out and deal with without recognising the complicity of all thought with disaster, the disastrous inside of thought. My desire to treat the disaster, here, as 'transcendental' rather than exceptional is, I think, in line with these writers' projects, and part of my focus on Kant's aesthetic of the beautiful rather than the sublime.

[85] WD 1/7

[86] WD 1/7

[87] Hill, *Maurice Blanchot and Fragmentary Writing*, 64-5

> sustaining – that which is, but rather stands beyond it, outside of being, and no more belongs to ontology than it does to dialectics, man sees himself assigned, between being and nothingness, and starting from the infinity of this in-between [*cet entre-deux*], accepted as relation, the status of his new sovereignty: the sovereignty of a being without being in the becoming without end of a death impossible to die.[88]

This experience requires us to think of a 'present without any presence', and yet also of a 'present' that is 'beyond' presence. This requires another form of reflexivity, which could reflect absence and still act as an 'in-between'. This is the affirmation of the interval. It does not belong to dialectics because this affirmation is not positive but neutral, but it is still dialogic. So 'it called thought outside (not beyond) [*au dehors (non pas au-delà)*], designating to thought by its fissure that thought has already left itself, that it is already outside itself: in relation — without relation — with an outside from which it is excluded to the degree that thought believes itself able to include this outside'.[89] The transactions between inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion, that characterise relation are here 'without relation'. The 'new condition of man' is to affirm this non-relation.

Fragmentary writing bears the injunction that it introduces: to think the futurity outside all presentation. For Blanchot, this doubling constitutes the history of the fragmentation of historical procession in the dialectic. This can be thought through Nietzsche's 'eternal return'. Nietzsche, for Blanchot, comes after Hegel, but also *before* him; the fragmentation Nietzsche symbolises is the effect of Hegelian dialectical history, but also the condition for it. History demands fragmentation. 'And writing alone can respond to this demand […] mad writing.'[90] Nietzsche's thought of the 'eternal recurrence of the same to the same' is already excessive. It exceeds the rapturous disclosure on the Surlej Boulder, and its repetitions disarrange even Nietzsche's affirmation of it in *The Gay Science*. Thinking the displacement of metaphysical presence by the recurrence of presence (in which circular infinity there is never any singular 'present' to which to return), the 'eternal recurrence' displaces identity *internally*. The 'return' of identity displaces the present where identity might return, because the present is nothing but 'return'. Life', which is what comes in time as experience, what arrives, 'you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and every sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence'.[91] Time is no longer an 'inner sense'. Time happens to 'you', it is objective. Time has already happened. Its return is identical, and this dis-identifies time as progressive unity. Succession and sequence become irreversibly reversible. So, as Manola Antonioli puts it, Blanchot does not read Nietzsche for content but for a 'style'.

---

[88] IC 209/310

[89] IC 158/237

[90] SNB 22/34-5

[91] Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Nietzsche Reader*, Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large eds., Oxford: Blackwell (2006), 236

Nietzsche's 'philosophical fragments do not oppose themselves, do not contradict themselves, they *juxtapose* themselves in a non-dialectical experience of speech and writing that inaugurates a new experience of thinking.' In this way Nietzsche marks 'discontinuity, white space [*l'espace blanc*], caesura.'[92] *Reading* Nietzsche enjoins Blanchot to fragmentary writing. *Reading* is fragmentary, and repeats in fragmentary writing – writing which repeats the inadequacy of reading, repeats the way reading displaces what it reads.

Blanchot develops this reading in part from Pierre Klossowski, according to whom we 'identify' with the eternal return, which requires us to identify our singular experience with multiple subject positions. In such identification, '*I am no longer in the moment when the abrupt revelation of the Eternal Return reached me*'.[93] The circular form of time is 'a transfiguration of existence which — because it has always been the Circle — wills its own reversibility, to the point where it relieves the individual from the weight of its own acts *once and for all*'.[94] The subject enters into a reversible relation with its own individuality: willing individuality, singularity, it wills the circle of its multiplication. We encounter the social in the subject. Identity is identical over time by its relation to what is outside it — its other, which is its repetition in society. And this suspends negation. Negation, in the thought of the eternal recurrence, turns into the 'step not beyond', the *pas au-delà*, step/not beyond, that, passing, does not pass anywhere beyond that passing. The step by which time should proceed, negation, turns into recurrence, repetition. Identity requires discontinuity, however, in order to mark it as singular. In this repetition there is no internal discontinuity, only the exchangeability of the same for the same. So this *identity* becomes the discontinuity that disarranges time. *Identity* is felt to be outside itself. The 'return' of the same to the same displaces presence. If the same returns to itself, then it always exceeds itself. And if the present is constituted as singular, self-identical, then it is interrupted by precisely this 'identical' return. It is therefore a nonidentical repetition precisely by the way it proposes self-identity.

> The "re" of the return inscribes like the "ex", opening of every exteriority: as if the return, far from putting an end to it, marked the exile, the beginning in its rebeginning of the exodus. To come again would be to come to ex-center oneself anew, to wander [*à errer*]. Only the *nomadic* affirmation *remains*.[95]

All that 'lingers', 'remains', in writing is the affirmation of 'error' as a wandering, nomadic exile. The fragmentary becomes an outside-not-beyond identity.

---

[92] Antonioli, Manola, 'Nietzsche et Blanchot: parole de fragment', in *Maurice Blanchot et la philosophie*, ed. by Éric Hoppenot and Alain Milon (Paris: Presses Universitaire de Paris Ouest, 2010), pp. 103-110, 103

[93] Klossowski, Pierre, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith (London: Athlone, 1997), 58

[94] Ibid., 69

[95] SNB 33/49

This can be figured, again, through aesthetics. Fragmentary writing interrupts art's self-identity. As Levinas puts it,

> For Blanchot, the vocation of art is without equal [*hors pair*]. But most importantly, writing does not lead to the truth of being. It might even be said it leads to the error of being – to being as a place of errancy [*lieu d'errance*] and that which cannot be inhabited. So it might equally be argued that literature fails to lead anywhere at all, because any such place is impossible to reach. The error of being: *further outside than truth*.[96]

Writing returns to art *as exile*. We should recall Celan's *Meridian*, here, from chapter two. Writing is a return of an identity that is not identical with itself. Just so, any judgement about art depends on an exilic departure from any history of art. Art proceeds by discontinuity. And that means it proceeds by fragmenting continuity. The continuity experienced in art, where each time the artwork is singular but recognisably art, becomes the experience of the *fragmentation* of judgement. Judgement is subject to the discontinuity of the presence of law.

> (Even in the law of the Eternal Return, the past could not repeat the future *as* the future would repeat the past. The repetition of the past as future frees for a completely different modality – which one could call prophetic. In the past, what is given as repetition of the future does not give the future as repetition of the past. Dissymmetry is at work in repetition itself.[97]

Repetition of the 'past' in the future is prophetic, but there is another 'modality' of repetition: the impossible repetition in the eternal return of the future in the past. The break from continuity does not propose another possible continuity (an 'avant-garde'). It breaks from the experience of continuity. In writing, we experience this fragmentation of experience as the condition for any experience of writing. We can only recognise writing, like art, aesthetically, by its discontinuity from the transcendental conditions for experience: it is not present, it bears no presence, it withdraws from meaning coordinated by identity.

iii. The trace, the future, reversibility

Disastrously, the experience of presence is withdrawn from the present. How can writing refer to any future, when it marks this withdrawal? Writing's work of marking and tracing what is other to it is, in this fragmentation of reflection, neutral. Writing at once bears a responsibility to what is 'beyond' it, and, orientated by this outside, cannot write anything other than 'outside'. 'Outside' the present, it cannot ever 'present' presence. This is a temporal injunction. Writing is never self-present, and yet it

[96] Levinas, Emmanuel, *Proper Names*, trans. by Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 134

[97] SNB 42/61

bears a responsibility for dialogue. This becomes legible when writing is tasked with responding to exactly this impossibility. It is legible, then, in its 'tearing': in Celan's poetic image that 'tears' the imaginary, in writing the 'unavowability' of community. These do not trace further spaces into which writing passes. They mark a fragmentation internal to writing that enjoins it merely to repeat, and not to reflect, presence.

This marking is also a condition for legibility. This fragmented legibility can be followed through the temporality of the 'trace' in reading. But Blanchot's fragmentation intervenes into this trace-work. The roots of neutrality in the Romantic fragment and 'ironic' reading, therefore, are, as Christophe Bident argues, 'ironically' apparent in the way they do not surface in Blanchot's fragment writing. If 'irony disjoints speech', then this interruption also 'emanates' from fragmentation into reading.[98] Reading repeats the dispersing work of writing. Reading Levinas for the 'trace', Blanchot's writing is 'grown aware of itself as response'.[99] Writing internalises *distance*, grows distant from its powers of presentation, assumes in fragmentation the reflecting role of reading. Writing therefore repeats the distinction Kant draws between aesthetic experience and aesthetic judgement. The relation between reading and writing is fragmented as a temporal relation itself. There is no present in writing, and therefore no presence in reading. The trace for Derrida, according to Martin Hägglund's reading of him through Kant, is 'an ultratranscendental condition': it thinks 'a constitutive finitude that is absolutely without exception'.[100] This time is not a transcendental law governing experience, but the necessary 'undecideability' of the future. 'If law is essentially deconstructible, the undecidable coming of time is thus the undeconstructible condition of justice.'[101] The 'traced' undecideability of time assumes the place of a transcendental condition that could legislate for such undecideability. This is a condition for reading. The trace retroactively installs its object's presence. Synthesis marks what 'will have happened'. This is what, in *Writing and Difference*, Derrida calls 'original repetition'.[102] Derrida is describing, as Bruce Baugh usefully demonstrates,[103] how Hegel's 'synthetic' dialectic presupposes the form of synthesis in the objects being synthesised. The logic of the trace, then, reverses this. Synthesis produces the presence of what it synthesises. This is not representation, but nevertheless appears as if from the past. Derrida extends this into a reading of Blanchot's negation, a 'double *pas*

[98] Bident, Christophe, 'Le Neutre est-il une notion romantique?', in *Blanchot romantique*, ed. by John McKeane and Hannes Opelz (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 75-91, 90

[99] Davies, Paul, 'A Fine Risk: Reading Blanchot Reading Levinas', in *Re-Reading Levinas*, ed. by Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (London: Athlone, 1991), pp. 201-227, 210

[100] Hägglund, Martin, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 19

[101] Ibid., 42

[102] Derrida, Jacques, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London and New York: Routledge, 1978), 338

[103] Baugh, *French Hegel*, pp. 19-21; this narrative is counter to the apparent dominance of Kojèvian Hegel in France.

(pace, not)', in which 'the other dislocates the opposition of near and far, without however confusing them'.[104] The other's 'distance' from the text saves it from the negations of 'presentation'. Reading, we are displaced. But how can we connect this sense of retroactive, read negativity with the responsibility writing bears for what is beyond presence, beyond negation?

Reading according to this 'trace' effects the kind of 'irreversible reversibility' experienced in Nietzsche's eternal return. But for Blanchot, writing is not just a 'trace' but a 'mark'. Writing marks, and the mark *effaces* itself.

> ♦ Effaced before being written. If the word trace can be admitted, it is as the mark that would indicate as erased what was, however, never traced. All our writing — for everything and if it were ever writing of everyone — would be this: the anxious search for what was never written in the present, but in a past to come.[105]

Writing marks the loss of presence of which it is a 'non-effect'. Referring to no *future* presence, we well as no original presence, fragmentary writing effaces its own presence, rather than producing itself retroactively in the gap of the present it exposes. This is implicitly a 'reversal' of the Kantian aesthetic procedure: rather than validating the subject's reflective activity in judgement, Blanchot's fragment effaces its own possibility.

> ♦ Writing is not destined to leave traces, but to erase, by traces, all traces, to disappear in the fragmentary space of writing, more definitively than one disappears in the tomb, or again, to destroy, to destroy invisibly, without the uproar of destruction […]. To write at the level of the incessant murmur is to expose oneself to the decision of a lack that marks itself only by a surplus without place, impossible to put in place, to distribute in the space of thoughts, words and books. To respond to this demand of writing is not only to oppose a lack to a lack or to play with the void to procure some privative effect, nor is it only to maintain or indicate a blank between two or several affirmative enunciations; what then? perhaps first to carry a space of language to the limit from which the irregularity of another speaking, nonspeaking, space comes back, which effaces it or interrupts it and which one approaches only through its alterity, marked by the effect of effacement.[106]

Any 'undecideability' is here subject to erasure. Any future would be 'erased before being written'. There is no symbolic recuperation of the negative in a writing that inhabits its loss. Writing instead enjoins us, over and over, to this limit of language which returns to disperse writing. If we recall the play of inside and outside that characterised Kantian judgement, the play of 'presence' as spacing and 'present' as timing, where judgement reflectively provided a space for an experience that had no objective presence, here, for Blanchot, writing *effaces* this placement. Responding to a lack of

[104] Derrida, Jacques, *Parages*, ed. by John P. Leavey, trans. by Tom Conley, James Hulbert, John P. Leavey, and Avital Ronell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 26

[105] SNB 17/28

[106] SNB 59/73

possibility, writing becomes a 'surplus without place', an effect without ground or presence. Exceeding all presence, however, it does not constitute in itself another (dialectical) presence 'beyond' that lack into which presence might proceed. It marks, rather, the alterity of *effacement* itself, the alterity of *nonspeaking*, which is not an absence of communication but the neutral dissipation of communication. Assuming critical reflection into its own work does not, therefore, mean providing a further dialectical step to mediate literature or writing. It is the suspension of writing for the sake of the 'nonspeaking'. In this suspension, however, we are exposed to a different 'modality' of time: 'there is no future [*avenir*] for disaster, just as there is no time or space in which it might fulfil itself'.[107] The future does not 'come', there is no present adequate to it. It might only be preserved, then, by writing that responds to its alterity, its nonexperience.

However, the suggestion in *The Step Not Beyond* that writing is carried to the 'limit' of experience and exposed there to the 'other' of speaking is cautiously reconfigured in *The Writing of the Disaster*.

> But to travel to the end of thinking [*aller au bout de la pensée*] (in the form of thinking of the end, or the edge) – is this not possible only by exchanging one thought for another? Whence the injunction: do not change your thinking, repeat it, but only if you can.[108]

The injunction here is against 'exchange' as a cipher for change, against which writing must be exposed to its own repetition. In order to think of the future in its indeterminacy – its refusal to end – writing must think beyond time as a form of succession, in which each moment is exchanged for the next. And so it must think in the serialism of fragmentation, in which fragmented interchangeability each fragment is reversible, and so therefore *irreversible*, not something we can read beyond. Fragments repeat, rather than exchange. There is no 'limit' or 'edge' to fragmentary writing. The 'irreversibility' of this law of 'reversal' interrupts legal coherence. Writing legislates (thinks future coherence, in that laws legislate for the future) the continuing incoherence, the self-dispersal of the present. Writing is 'the movement of irreversibility that, as such, is always reversible (the labyrinth)'.[109] Again, this temporal dispersal is figured as a spatial displacement: time's dispersal is a labyrinth. Again, time breaches its own secure boundaries. In being figured, time is displaced, space is dispersed. This 'reversal' – this turning back, this re-verse – reverses writing's legislative claims, interrupts its futurity.

In suspending presence and the present, and in figuring this suspension as a future dispersal that returns nonidentically to the present, Blanchot is displacing 'hope'. Hope is installed into the dispersed future as a possible future dispersal. Hope, that future coordinate of presence, is there, like a star, a point of orientation, but its hope is that the present is dispersible. Writing is committed to,

[107] WD 1-2/7

[108] WD 4/12-3

[109] SNB 15/26

attentive to the present precisely by being attentive to the way the present is not orientated by any future that might meaningfully secure it. So, *Le Pas au-delà* opens with this reversal of law:

> Do not hope, if there lies your hope — and one must suspect it — to unify your existence, to introduce into it, in the past, some coherence, by way of the writing that disunifies.[110]

Writing is exposed to indeterminacy. But that does not mean that it fills that fissure with its own presence. Writing, like time, is already coordinated by this fissure. One cannot retroactively find meaning through writing that is orientated by the future as the dispersal of presence. This movement of reversibility that traverses the present, in the progressive exchange of present for present, in the continuing loss of presence that is felt as the present, is felt as suffering. '*Listening, not to the words, but to the suffering that, from word to word, without end, traverses the words.*'[111] As Leslie Hill says, this is writing as disaster:

> In disaster […] language is not all. Something else, without ever appearing as such, unknown, unnamed, and unforeseen, traverses each word, effacing it and reinscribing it. It does so, however, not as the transcendent or transcendental, but 'as' (as without as) the neuter, the infinitely repetitive (re-)marking of difference prior to ontology.[112]

This 'something else' opened our discussion in this chapter: the 'something' that rings false in the dialectic, the 'something' that concepts negate in order to think. But in this reading of Blanchot, this 'something else' is nothing other than writing itself: writing which comes, as a mark, from the future of its own dispersal, writing which reverses from an 'effect of non-effect', the impossibility of experiencing the future as indeterminate. The possible loss of each fragment, which is precisely because of this possibility necessary, marks what a legally framed present would cover up in a falsely pitched future: that the present is already lost to itself. If Blanchot thinks dialectically, then, it is in this way: in exposing within the dialectic the loss that it calls progress. And the exposure of such loss, the exposure to such loss, we might call an aesthetic experience. The reflective aesthetic experience is prompted by the 'negative presentation' of an object in reflection: when it is not conceptually available to experience, experience 'merely' reflects. The crucial difference, however, is that in such an experience, *experience* is lost.

The difficulty of conceiving such a task for writing is that it is double. It responds to the impossibility of the system by writing from within its impossibility. Fragmentary writing responds, as I have been claiming, to a double demand with a double voice:

> there must always be at least two languages, or two requirements: one dialectical, the other not; one where negativity is the task, the other where the neutral remains apart, cut off both from being and from not-

[110] SNB 2/8

[111] SNB 86/120

[112] Hill, *Maurice Blanchot and Fragmentary Writing*, 300

> being. In the same way each of us ought both to be a free and speaking subject, and to disappear as passive, patient[113]

If writing is to found any political subjectivity, it is in the way it gives voice to this double and paradoxical exigency: to think of present suffering without transcending that suffering, and to think hopefully of a future without that future constituting a transcendent 'third' into which that suffering present would be negated. Writing inhabits the injunctions it responds to, and repeats them.

> The correct criticism of the System does not consist […] in finding fault with it, or in interpreting it insufficiently […] but rather in rendering it invincible, invulnerable to criticism or, as they say, inevitable. Then, since nothing escapes it because of its omnipresent unity and the perfect cohesion of everything, there remains no place for fragmentary writing unless it comes into focus as the impossible necessary: as that which is written in the time outside time, in the sheer suspense which without restraint breaks the seal of unity by, precisely, not breaking it, but by leaving it aside without this abandon's ever being able to be known.[114]

In this way any system of writing is provisional. And that means that it is coordinated by an experience of the indeterminacy of experience. The futurity that coordinates the present of aesthetic judgement is here not merely indeterminate, not merely yet-to-be determined. It is felt as the loss of the present. This is disaster. The indeterminacy, the future, that should make aesthetic, reflecting judgement possible is subject to a reversal. Just as the community that the aesthetic judgement supposed became, in chapter two, the present failure of community as the only possible communal end of aesthetic work, so the present failure of judgement – an incapacity to judge that this present moment is *aesthetic* – becomes the only possible aesthetic experience. If judgement is withdrawn from its future coordinate, then that is for the sake of the future indeterminacy that the aesthetic would think. The aesthetic is only possible, then, according to this disaster: that its present is impossible, that its future is promised, that its experience is not of any reconciliation of the present with the future (I judge as if any other subject would have to judge in this way) but of the dispersal of the present of experience.

The disaster, the 'break with the star', is the break with a certain kind of fateful futurity. And yet, if it is the break with a determinate future, with prophecy, it is also not possible to accomplish this break. The disaster is precisely that we are stuck in this temporality. Writing does not break with it. Rather, it accomplishes *le pas au-delà*, the step/not beyond by which it does not break with anything, by which it lingers, conceptually, on the threshold of conceptuality. By *not* breaking with time, by not exceeding it, writing breaks with time as reversible, reverses it as irreversible.

[113] WD 20/38

[114] WD 61/100

3 – Adorno: 'progressive impossibility' – meaning and the future from *Negative Dialectics* to *Aesthetic Theory*

The task mandated to writing by Blanchot is impossible: to think the future in a present that can only disperse the future. This is to think from a finite standpoint not the 'infinite', but the indeterminate and repeating finitude of presence that is always erased by the present. For Adorno, too, this impossibility attends thinking. And as with Blanchot, with Adorno the task is focused through a responsibility thinking reflectively bears to what it thinks. Experienced finitely by finite subjects, community, like art, is never conceptually complete. Like art, it proceeds by particular experiences. And like art, it must be reflectively constructed from experience. To what extent can the aesthetic experience of art shape or make legible the kind of reflective indeterminacy that characterises writing, for Blanchot, and not just the experience of it? We can now turn to Adorno's intervention into dialectics through aesthetics by mapping these coordinates onto his own writing.

How do we move from the question of 'community' to the question of dialectics? In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant describes the 'ambiguity' of the word 'community' (*Gemeinschaft*) that describes how objects perceived sequentially – in different spaces – can be thought of as simultaneous. There must be 'something through which *A* determines the position of *B* in time'. They must be 'represented as **existing simultaneously**'. 'Thus it is necessary for all substances in appearance, insofar as they are simultaneous, to stand in thoroughgoing community of interaction with each other.'[115] The interaction of these objects is a *'commercium*' and not a '*communio*'. They are empirically related, and so interact with one another. A *communio*, however, as Kevin McGlaughlin puts it, would think 'of a nonempirical simultaneity or of a community that exists "where perceptions do not reach".'[116] This is 'common sense': thinking of a relation between subjects that is not empirically mediated. For McLaughlin, this task is delegated by post-Kantian reason to poets, who communicate language outside empirical relations. But this is not sequestered to aesthetic experience. These relations reflectively proliferate. Specifically, as I argued in chapter two, 'common sense' does not ratify transcendental continuity between subjective reason and objects, but interrupts it by 'objectifying' it in political relations. 'Community' interrupts 'common sense'. So the reflection of aesthetic experience interrupts the terms of transcendental experience. If we are to say something like 'community' holds as a 'nonempirical simultaneity' between subjects, then, as McLaughlin argues, we have to recognise the ways this simultaneity is founded on an incommunicability, a 'poetic force' that exceeds language's empirical functions in poetry. My contention is that this interruption of 'empirical simultaneity' is not

[115] CPR 318 A212-213/B259-260

[116] McLaughlin, Kevin, *Poetic Force: Poetry after Kant* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 6

discrete. The apparently subjective aesthetic judgement refers to an objective history of artworks. And the apparently subjective terms of political judgement about community also communicate a sedimented history of *objective* judgements, which structure the terms of political 'society'. Aesthetic judgement is therefore subject to an objectivity which it does not determine. And in this failure, aesthetic experience returns us to the objectivity – the objective 'simultaneity' of perceptions – that Kant's aesthetics seem to skirt. Thinking about art, in other words, means thinking about the ways objectivity is suppressed from judgement, precisely because of the way art thinks towards a 'community' – a present, a presence – of subjective experience. This means, for our purposes here, moving between the suspensions of conceptual progress thought in Adorno's *Negative Dialectic*, to the coordination of experience as a promise – as a futurity felt in the present – by Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*. My argument is that this suspended negation works towards a non-transcendent aesthetic, in which critical reading cannot legislate its objects' meaning, but in which failure a non-transcendent presence might be registered. I will now examine how 'meaning' coordinates 'futurity' in Adorno's aesthetic.

In *Reality and its Dreams*, Raymond Geuss gives a useful account of how thinking about the future is entangled in political utopianism. For Geuss, utopia responds both to present reality (and not just to normative moral value) and to demands impossible in the present of that reality.[117] Blanchot's concern for the future in writing is in this sense utopian. Thinking about the future as at once impossible in the present and yet pressing in the present means, for Blanchot, thinking through writing. Utopia is also the crucial question for Adorno's aesthetics. For Adorno, art is faced with a present crisis that threatens its future possibility.

> The crisis of art, which has today reached the point of endangering its very possibility, affects both of its poles equally [*ihre beiden Pole gleichermaßen*]: On the one hand its meaning [*Sinn*] and thereby essentially its spiritual content [*Gehalt*]; and on the other its expression and thereby its mimetic element. One depends on the other. There is no expression without meaning, without the medium of spiritualization; no meaning without the mimetic element: without art's eloquence [S*prachcharakter*], which is now in the process of perishing.[118]

We have seen how for Blanchot writing depletes presence in a non-transcendent configuration of writing as repetition. Here, for Adorno, this is a depletion of meaning. Blanchot's 'double voice' of writing is doubled, by Adorno, into the aesthetic experience of art. Art's capacity to mean is depleted by its incapacity to express; but expression also depends on that expression being meaningful. I will look at this problem from *Negative Dialectics* to *Aesthetic Theory*, by tracing how 'polar' dialectics work according to contradiction, then how that contradiction is not manifested but registered by art, and finally how this contradiction – contradictorily – makes a future legible. This occurs outside the principle of identity. But that means it also refuses the reconciliations mandated to aesthetics by Kant.

[117] Geuss, Raymond, *Reality and its Dreams* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016)
[118] AT 358/413

The question thus turns around what kind of aesthetics would be possible without this principle of reconciliation. And this opens onto other questions: can we retain, in aesthetics, reflecting judgement as a mode of identification? Can we think of identification, like identity, as provisional? Can we, finally, think of a 'community' outside reconciliation, outside identity, through the provisionality of reflection?

This 'crisis' in art's conditions is registered as a 'disaster' for critical aesthetics. 'The more art is compelled to oppose the standardized life stamped out by the structure of domination, the more it evokes chaos. Chaos forgotten becomes disaster [*Unheil*].'[119] If aesthetics is to say that the artwork is meaningful, then it has to 'forget' the incoherence, the indeterminacy, that it registers. But were it to give up on coherence, then it would merely reproduce incoherence. The problem is in thinking without either recuperating the object for determinate thought, nor merely reproducing the incoherence of objective indeterminacy. For Adorno, as for Blanchot, this problem is navigated by fragmentation. 'Only philosophy in fragment form would bring the monads, designed in illusion by Idealism, to their proper place. They would be representations in particular of the totality unrepresentable as such.'[120] Art's fragmentation presents a negativity that characterises totality, which is unrepresentable in that totality. And in this way, criticism registers the ways truth 'turns against' objectivity in art.

> The truth content of art, whose organon was integration, turns against art and in this turn art has its emphatic moments. Artists discover the compulsion towards disintegration in their own works, in the surplus of organization and regimen […]. However, the truth of such disintegration is achieved by way of nothing less than the triumph and guilt of integration. The category of the fragmentary [*Fragmentarischen*] – which has its locus here – is not to be confused with the category of contingent particularity: The fragment [*Bruchstück*] is the part of the totality of the work that contradicts totality [*welcher ihr widersteht*].[121]

Aesthetics has to register the ways the artwork objectively contradicts, '*widersteht'*, the kind of reconciliation, the 'integration', that is nonetheless its work. This contradiction reproduces an aesthetic crisis on a critical level. And this reproduces a contradiction that fuels philosophy: not between the particular object and conceptual universality, but between objective particularity and subjective particularity. This is worked out, for Adorno, between *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*. In tracing the two projects together, we can find a critical relation between the need for a dialectics which prioritises objectivity, and an aesthetics which marks the form this kind of experience can historically take. The point is not, therefore, to suggest that *Negative Dialectics* morphs into *Aesthetic Theory*, philosophical lack supplemented by aesthetically felt plenitude, but rather that the two establish a mutual debt to experience: a philosophical debt to the object obscured by a subjectively orientated

[119] AT 352/404-5

[120] ND 28/39

[121] AT 57/74, trans. amended

theory of knowledge is calibrated by an aesthetic debt to the artwork.[122] My concern is with this relation of debt, not with establishing any continuity between the two kinds of thinking. What subjective dialectics lose is not credited by an aesthetic experience which significantly loses its own object, art; art's 'irresolvable antithesis that is never brought to rest in the state of being' which is paradoxically only 'visible' 'at a standstill'.[123] Rather, there is a collaboration between these losses. The 'progressive impossibility'[124] of negative dialectics lets us read a political significance into Adorno's aesthetics that goes beyond art's critique of the 'wrong state of things [*falschen Zustandes*]'.[125]

i. Polarity: the polar relation between subject and object in Negative Dialectics

The 'right state of things' would 'be neither a system nor a contradiction'.[126] As J.M. Bernstein describes it, the negative dialectic is historically conditioned by exactly this 'wrong state of things', in which system the world appears contradictory. 'Contradiction, when it occurs, points to the claim of the particular, the nonidentical, against its social identifications.' Such contradiction is 'bound to unreconciled experience'. [127] If dialectics proceeds by negating its object, then it proceeds by the way the object contradicts present concepts. The point of a 'negative' dialectics is to relocate truth from 'negation' to 'contradiction'. In a false world, reconciliation of contradiction is false. But that does not mean that contradiction is simply true – that the 'real' is an inversion of the 'actual'. Rather, in contradiction, as Simon Jarvis suggests, this 'real difference' is speculatively treated *as real*.

> Speculative thinking […] does not treat contradiction as an accidental error, but as something real. […] negative dialectic seeks to make *visible*, as contradiction, the real antagonisms which are masked by philosophy's striving for logical identity.[128]

---

[122] As Andrew Bowie puts the problem, suggesting however that Adorno does not resolve it: 'If what is aimed for in both art and philosophy is a wholesale critical response to the totalizing nature of the commodified world, the danger is that they will mirror what they oppose. This can lead to a demand for radical responses which leave too little space for the fact that critical reactions to commodification can take many forms in differing contexts.' *Adorno and the Ends of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 168. My claim is rather that it is the decisive *disconnection* between art and philosophy that indexes the kinds of unreconciled, non-transcendent utopian experience which Adorno opens for us, and which, read alongside Blanchot, allows for art's immanent conceptual fragmentation to collaborate with political discontinuities.

[123] AT 233/263-4

[124] AT 265/301

[125] ND 11/22

[126] ND 11/22

[127] Bernstein, J.M., 'Negative Dialectic as Fate', in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. by Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 19-50, 38

[128] Jarvis, Simon, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 170

We do not get past contradiction if contradiction is real, rather than just an unreconciled negative. For Josh Cohen, such suspension by contradiction opens thinking to the political. Contradiction has to be 'voiced', sounded.

> Far from fulfilling its vocation of fidelity to non-contradiction, which would leave real – social – contradiction unacknowledged and unexamined, philosophy's eminently political task is to refuse this vocation.[129]

Contradiction does not mark an opportunity for negation, which would simply invert the 'false' as 'true'. Just so, the epistemological reproduction of the exchange society in the polar subject-object relation cannot be reversed by inverting that polarity. Just because 'what we do in such reflections, without confessing to it, is to presuppose as mediating what we want to deduce as mediated, the subject, thinking',[130] and thereby hypostasize the subject, indeed 'objectify' the subject, does not mean that criticism can do away with such a polarity by inverting it, by replacing the subject with the object. Rather, 'critical thinking' should 'eliminate this hierarchy'.[131] The point, then, is that the *reversal* of *polarity* is not the same as a *polar inversion*. Adorno's negative dialectics would think *against* polarity by posing critical thinking in contradiction to polar-identity. It is not enough simply to replace the hypostasized subject with a re-valorised object. That would be merely to reinforce the polar separation by which the subject is hypostasised. Such replacement, indeed, is precisely what the subject does: it places itself, as 'mediator', in the place of what it 'mediates'.

> The objectifying subject contracts into a point of abstract reason, and finally into logical noncontradictoriness [*Widerspruchlosigkeit*], which in turn means nothing except to a determinate object[132]

Without contradicting determinate experience, the subject cannot experience indeterminacy. Any 'contradictory' polar relation between subject and object is impossible, even as this contradiction – the separation of subject and object – is what grounds and drives dialectical thinking. The point, then, is to expose this polarity to its contradictions.

The polar relation between subject and object cannot be done away with, because to do away with it would be to reproduce the ideological step that would do away with such difference between thinking and what is thought for the sake of, and in the form of, identity. In identity, the object's objectivity becomes the site for the subject to posit its own identity with that objectivity. A dialectics which could linger with its moment of negation, rather than proceeding by that negation beyond what is negated, a dialectics which would *reverse* through what is negated rather than taking that negation as

[129] Cohen, Josh, *Interrupting Auschwitz: art, religion, philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2005), 37

[130] ND 180/182

[131] ND 181/182

[132] ND 139/143

an opportunity to establish its own self-identity, would turn upon the priority of the object. This is a reversal of the polarity of dialectical relations, but it is not the inversion.

> The polarity of subject and object may appear to be an undialectical structure in which all dialectics should take place. But the two concepts are originating categories of reflection, formulas for an irreconcilability [*nicht zu Vereinendes*]; not positive, no primary states of fact, but negative throughout, expressing only nonidentity. Even so, the difference between subject and object is not easy to negate. […] They constitute one another just as, by virtue of such constitution, they diverge from each other [*auseinandertreten*].[133]

This polarity is negative, not positive. The poles '*auseinandertreten*', diverge, step away from one another. Polarity is itself subject to a dialectic. Each pole is the negative moment of its opposite. The subject is not-subject, the object not-object. And because of this, dialectically, the subject is also not-object, the object not-subject. A polar dialectic proceeds by this reversal, not by the negation of difference.

> Nothing is possible but the determinate negation of the individual moments whereby subject and object are turned into absolute opposites and are precisely thus identified with each other. In truth, the subject is never wholly the subject, the object never wholly the object; and yet the two are not pieced out of [*herausgestückt*] any third that transcends them.[134]

Each pole is negatively related to the other. There is no final third that secures their polar opposition other than this contradiction. And this movement is historical, capable of changing. The subject is only provisionally a subject, according to its negative relationship with its object, a relationship that might change. Adorno is presenting, in this 'negative' polarity, the possibility of a *non-transcendent* dialectical thinking, one that does not propose to solidify or secure as positive either the subject or the object, but rather to work *through* their divergence, their separation. The subject is the product of the objectivity it negates. A negative dialectic would recall this objectivity, not negate it.

The subject is a negated objectivity. But objectivity is also a negated subjectivity. Thus, the subject constructs the object it negates.

> As through the crenels [*Scharten*] of a tower, the subject gazes upon a black sky in which the star of the idea, or of Being, rises. And yet it is the very wall around the subject that casts [*wirft*] its shadow on whatever the subject conjures: the shadow of reification, with which a subjective philosophy will then again impotently feud.[135]

So the subject is trapped in the subjectivity by which it thinks. And yet, that does not mean there is any 'third' beyond subjectivity that could release the subject from this trap. 'What would lie in the beyond

[133] ND 174/176

[134] ND 175/177

[135] ND 140/143

[*jenseits*] makes its appearance only in the materials and categories within.'[136] Polarity might well falsely collapse the distinctions between inside and outside in identification, but the outside is only conceivable in this collapse and this identification. The real is at once obscured by the subject and only minimally available through such subjective obscuration. Concepts make thinking possible. Yet they are not sufficient to think of the way thought can be orientated by the experience of indeterminacy. Adorno proposes that with dialectics, 'we can think against our thought without abandoning it'.[137] We cannot think outside thought, but we can think of the ways thought is outside itself. But if thinking is complicit with any injustice it might register, in what form could it think 'beyond' suffering? Can thinking move beyond its complicity with domination?

This would require not just a polar reconfiguration – replacing the subject with the object, the concept with, for example, 'the body' – but a reconfiguration of polarity. Polarity would no longer mark opposition, but contradiction: the way it speaks against itself (*contra+dictio*), speaks out of this resistance. 'Instead, the rigidly dichotomous structure disintegrates [*zerfällt*] by virtue of the determination of each of the poles as a moment of its own opposite.'[138] Polarity no longer marks the continuous relation between subject and object, a relation which is abstracted into Kantian transcendental philosophy. This abstraction is the abstraction of both the subject and the object. The negative dialectic is the amplification of the nonidentical relation between each pole of this duality. Thus the play of contradiction, of opposition, of polarity, exposes the nonidentity of the polar relation. The discontinuity opened by such exposure, such play, the reflection identified by Kant with the aesthetic, in turn opens up polarity to a more speculative continuity, to a possible relation through such discontinuity. The free play of identification, in which each pole identifies as a 'moment of its own opposite', allows for this discontinuous relation. The 'free play' felt in Kantian aesthetics is translated into apparently secure epistemological relations. This is a radicalisation of Kant's proposal that the subjective identity experienced in such aesthetic judgements should secure a priori validity for judgement as such, including determinate judgements. Here, *determinate*, and not just *reflective*, judgements are discontinuous, made of moments. And as Claudia Brodsky points out, the art object, 'an "object" made of "moments" may well be the only proper object of a subject that alternately perceives and fails to perceive it'.[139] Art, the object of *aesthetic* experience, models the moment of a kind of subjectivity that can accommodate its alternations between subject and object. The subject in

[136] ND 140/143

[137] ND 141/144

[138] ND 139/143

[139] Brodsky, Claudia, 'Framing the Sensuous: Objecthood and "Objectivity", in Art After Adorno', in *Art and Aesthetics After Adorno*, ed. by J.M. Bernstein et al. (Berkeley: The Townsend Center for the Humanities, 2010), pp. 69-115, 81

aesthetic experience, experiencing an object as a moment of non-relation to it, itself becomes a moment of this polar *non*-relation.

ii. Contradiction of reality in Aesthetic Theory

The subject's relation to the object it thinks is polar. But that polarity is the construction of subjectivity. Dialectically, that 'polar' subjectivity is submitted to a negative polarity, in which each pole – subject and object – is the provisional negative of its other. Accordingly, each moment of thinking in this dialectic is provisional, rather than determinate. Rather than proceeding from a determinate opposition between subject and object, thinking in this way would construct its polarity reflectively. But this means thinking *through* contradiction, rather than negating it. I want now to suggest that, with Adorno, we can think of this as an aesthetic experience, formed by the reflective way artworks construct polarity outside subjectivity.

When aesthetic experience is thought of dialectically, the autonomy it secured for Kant is disturbed. Aesthetic experience refers to a subjective capacity to experience. One's capacity to judge the object as it is without purpose, autonomous from any 'interest', reflects one's subjective capacity to be autonomous. That I can think about this object as being without any purpose reflects the autonomy of my thinking. But this autonomy also alienates me from the object. If I can think autonomously, apart any object, then the object is unnecessary. Aesthetic judgement marks the subject's autonomy – that it can autonomously think without needing any purpose to that thought – but it also marks the subject's alienation from objectivity; and this marks the subject's capacity to dominate that object. Only a subjective experience of autonomy directed by the priority of the object, and by its specific formal work, could resist this domination. But this means reversing aesthetic experience into the artwork itself. If, instead, the artwork is autonomous from aesthetic experience then, rather than ratifying subjective autonomy, it would be experienced negatively, promising in an object the kind of autonomy and happiness that we do not yet have or feel subjectively. Only if the artwork's objectivity resisted the subject's attempts to recuperate it for experience would, paradoxically, the autonomy which aesthetic experience promises be possible.

This moves us away from a characterisation of Adorno's dialectical aesthetics as inverting polarity in favour of the object, as Tom Huhn suggests. For Huhn, whereas we can associate Kant with subjectivism, 'Adorno's negative dialectic instead favors the object at the expense of the subject'.[140] But if the negative dialectic employs a negative polarity, then this prioritisation of the object does not negate the subject as its opposite. Instead, thinking is coordinated through experience, exposing the apparently secure opposition between subject and object to the reflective ways each pole is constructed.

[140] Huhn, Tom, 'Kant, Adorno, and the Social Opacity of the Aesthetic', in *The Semblance of Subjectivity*, ed. by Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaart (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 237-257, 239

As Brian O'Connor stresses, the priority of the object is established within this relationship of reciprocal determination in experience.[141] This reciprocity is visible 'only when the priority of the object is a feature of the account.'[142] In this negative dialectic, thinking is constituted by 'the interdetermination of subject and object'.[143] It is only through subjective experience that the object is constituted as an object. The point is to prioritise objectivity *within subjectivism*, such that it is thinkable. The aesthetic offers opportunities to do this precisely because its claims to truth are framed within mere subjective experience that, for Kant, makes no claim to objective validity. Lacking such objective validity, aesthetic judgement must construct its own grounds for truth *as if* they were objective. As Ross Wilson argues, 'Kant's attempt in the third *Critique* was already an attempt to elaborate an objective aesthetics, albeit one that would be subjectively mediated'.[144] The difference of aesthetic from epistemological experience is that the object's form, rather than the subject's transcendental forms, coordinates that experience. And so the 'separation of subjective universality from conceptual support is not a clean break'.[145] There remains a recourse to conceptual objectivity, even if it remains incomplete. Aesthetic judgements are thus in an 'unavoidably precarious position'[146] between determination by the object and subjective self-legitimation. This precariousness is vital for our reading of Adorno. If, in Wilson's characterisation of Kant, '[t]he subjective is in aesthetic judgement already held to be universal',[147] for Adorno, this objectively-derived subjective feeling characterises aesthetic claims to subjective truth. 'Kant envisioned a subjectively mediated but objective aesthetics.'[148] In aesthetics, we experience subjectivity without reference to an object. But this lack is coordinated objectively by the artwork, once the pleasure aesthetics refers to is historicised in 'art'. 'The subjective detour [*Abweg*] may totally miss the mark, but without the detour no objectivity becomes evident.'[149] In aesthetic experience, precisely because it refers to subjective experience for validation, we experience the way subjectivity is opposed to objectivity. There is no object to negate. Consequently, there is no end to aesthetic thinking, or reading. And so in aesthetics we experience the way subjectivity is negatively coordinated by objectivity; and crucially, we experience the way subjectivity is constructed from a *lack* of objectivity.

This 'reversed polarity' becomes visible in aesthetically experienced contradiction. Just as contradiction makes possible the positive dialectic that works by negating that contradiction, so the

---

[141] O'Connor, Brian, *Adorno's Negative Dialectic* (Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 2004), 49-52

[142] Ibid., 55

[143] Ibid., 167

[144] Wilson, Ross, 'Dialectical Aesthetics and the Kantian *Rettung*: On Adorno's "Aesthetic Theory"', *New German Critique*, 104 (2008), pp. 55-69, 67

[145] Wilson, Ross, *Subjective Universality in Kant's Aesthetics*, 47

[146] Ibid., 82-3

[147] Ibid., 83

[148] AT 216/245

[149] AT 229/261

negative dialectic by which art is experienced works by lingering with that contradiction as negative. There is no a priori ground for calling an object 'art' other than the history of provisional artworks with which it enters into constellation. The artwork bears a doubled, paradoxical relation to reality: it constitutes its own autonomous reality out of the provisional material of society and history, not from the finite but ontologically necessary reality of nature.

> Every artwork is in fact an oxymoron. Its own reality is for it unreal […]. An artwork is real only to the extent that, as an artwork, it is unreal, self-sufficient, and differentiated from the empirical world, of which it nevertheless remains a part. But its unreality – its determination as spirit – only exists to the extent that it has become real.[150]

The artwork is 'really' there, but 'really' semblance. 'In aesthetic semblance the artwork takes up a stance toward reality, which it negates by becoming a reality sui generis. Art protests against reality by its own objectivation.'[151] The artwork presents an objectification of reality that contradicts the positive constructions of reality in dialectics by reversing that process of negation. The artwork 'negates' the idea that reality is constructed by its own autonomous presentation.

> There is nothing in art, not even in the most sublime, that does not derive from the world; nothing that remains untransformed. All aesthetic categories must be defined both in terms of their relation to the world and in terms of art's repudiation of that world. [152]

The categories of aesthetic experience, and its reflective work, are relocated from the subject to the object. And so art, as a way of reflecting the world, works autonomously from the subjective reflection that it nonetheless reproduces.

> The experiencing subject, from which aesthetic experience distances itself, returns in aesthetic experience as a transaesthetic subject. The aesthetic shudder once again cancels the distance held by the subject. […] The moment of this transition is art's highest. It rescues subjectivity, even subjective aesthetics, by the negation of subjectivity. The subject, convulsed by art, has real experiences […].[153]

Art does not therefore simply reproduce reality; but neither does it repudiate it. Rather, it becomes the site of an experience of subjectivity *made objective*. Subjectivity becomes the object of this experience. But it is reflected negatively, as if the subject were an object. This contradiction allows for a subjective experience of reality as *outside* subjectively mandated polarity. This is a radicalisation, and not a renunciation, of Kantian aesthetics. The artwork provokes and claims validity *outside* its own objectivity, *inside* the subject's experience, in what the subject feels. However, '[t]he feelings provoked

[150] AT 358-9/414

[151] AT 359/414

[152] AT 183/209

[153] AT 349/401

by artworks are real and to this extent extra-aesthetic [*außerästhetisch*].'[154] Pleasure is registered *outside* the subject's aesthetic experience. 'The relation of the objectivity of the artwork to the primacy of the object is fractured [*gebrochen*].' [155] The artwork's claims to objectivity are themselves mediated by subjectivity: not only by the apprehending subject of aesthetic experience, but by the subjectivity dominated context of society which constitutes art's material.

If the real exceeds experience, if it remains negative, then it has to be imagined, figured. The artwork reflectively provokes this figuration by its lack of objectivity.

> Both [art and philosophy] keep faith with their own substance through their opposites [*Gegensatz*]: art by making itself resistant to meaning; philosophy, by refusing to clutch at any immediate thing. What the philosophical concept will not abandon is the yearning that animates the nonconceptual side of art, and whose fulfilment shuns the immediate side of art as mere appearance. The concept — the organon of thinking, and yet the wall between thinking and the thought — negates that yearning. Philosophy can neither circumvent such negation nor submit to it. It must strive, by way of the concept, to transcend the concept.[156]

Art refuses exterior meaning; philosophy refuses the immediacy of its object. Both, then, are configured by their opposites. Both are works of figuration. Art: towards the objectivity lacking in subjectively orientated dialectics; philosophy: towards the nonconceptual which it cannot conceptualise. Both, in other words, work critically, negatively, not positively generating any 'meaning'. Only this self-criticism can stop the subject from 'building a wall [*Wand*] between itself and the object'.[157] And yet, just as the subject builds the 'tower' of the real into which it is locked, the 'real' is only available *as* this wall. We must figure the way thinking is blocked from what it thinks, and that means figuring the way thought is blocked. The real must be figured in order to be critiqued. Criticism, like thinking, is always criticism of *something*, it is a negative procedure. This figure – the wall – constitutes the reality it critiques. It is contradictory. But this contradictory process models the way art exposes the apparently subjective work of aesthetic judgement to the objectivity it lacks. If art is to imagine itself into this gap, it does so only in contradiction. 'The power of what exists erects the façades into which consciousness impacts/from which consciousness is repelled [*auf welche das Bewußtsein aufprällt*]. It must try to penetrate them.'[158] Thinking is nothing other than this attempt to penetrate the limitation by which it is established. There is no 'outside' which the wall demarcates, because thinking is the wall *and* its penetration. Adorno figures this contradiction in the wall.

---

[154] AT 349/400

[155] AT 222-3/253

[156] ND 15/26-7

[157] ND 31/41

[158] ND 17/29

Just like the 'you' 'intruded' as an image into Celan's poetic dialogue, this process is internalised into Celan's poetry. But we should firstly recall how, for Blanchot, the condition for 'explosive communication' was that writing could, in fragmenting them, exceed its generic borders in its new medium: writing '(on the walls)'. Writing on 'walls' here means writing that is both provisional and excessive: temporally, it is written in a public present; spatially, it is written on any possible surface. In both modes it is both unnecessary and provisional: it should not be there and it might be erased. The 'wall' here signals the condition for this provisional and excessive communicability. But such writing at once opens up a fragmented futurity in the wall and impossibly blocks the indeterminacy such a future might be constituted by. Such writing is 'like' a 'wall': it establishes a limit and blocks it. Once politics is established, the political which made such establishment possible dissipates. Writing 'on the wall' equivocates on exactly this limit.

> FROM FISTS, white
> from the truth hammered
> free of the wordwall,
> a new brain blooms for you.
>
> AUS FÄUSTEN, weiß
> von der aus der Wortwand
> freigehämmerten Wahrheit,
> erblüht dir ein neues Gehirn. [159]

This 'new brain' blooms organically from the 'wordwall'. Words are here conceived as a wall themselves from which truth is worked. The new possibilities opened by such a truth are newly material possibilities: a new brain, a new configuration of thinking, newly material thoughts translate from the monolithic wall into the organic, blooming, brain. The 'wordwall' is violently worked out, hammered, into some newly 'beautiful' image. Such figurative violence is irrevocable. It traces the figurative heart of aesthetic experience: that the aesthetic judgement is as irrevocable as any determinate judgement, that the organicism of Kant's 'beauty' infects its subsequent production in artworks, and that the production of such artworks – and, crucially, such *aesthetics* that could frame the experience of those artworks – is organised by a kind of block. When Adorno says that suffering needs expression, but that expression occludes suffering, and then doubles the problem by tying the capacity for expression to its polar twin, meaning, he is similarly tracing this violent path the mute object takes towards meaning.

The 'ram', *Widder*, into the forehead of which, we recall from the first section, an image was burned, becomes contradiction, *Widerspruch*. Contradictorily, the 'ram' literalises the *Widder* figuratively concealed in *Widerspruch*. Its work is framed negatively: 'What | doesn't he | butt against?'; and this 'butting' is framed by the negation of world in the you: 'The world is gone, I have to carry

[159] BIT 58|9

you'.[160] Negation is a thing, a ram.[161] In turning this negation into an object, Celan contradicts it, speaks against it; the ram speaks against (*widerspruch*) itself (*Widder*). Contradiction, speaking against, resisting, is paradoxically both forceful and powerless: it can only contradict its object by not negating it. Contradiction summons figuration. For Adorno, art works through such reversals of conceptual progress, reversals of negation. This is 'form':

> the nonviolent [*gewaltlose*, also 'forceless'] synthesis of the diffuse that nevertheless preserves it as what it is in its divergences and contradictions, and for this reason form is actually an unfolding. A posited unity, it constantly suspends itself as such; essential to it is that it interrupts itself through its other just as the essence of its coherence is that it does not cohere.[162]

In art, negation repeatedly contradicts itself; it inhabits the contradiction of a provisional polarity. And that synthesis-fragmentation paradox extends into the way that art, the history of art, forms its own material: artworks work on other artworks. The 'history' of these relations, art to art, forms a *contradictory history*, 'inhomogenous': a temporal synthesis constituted by points which contradict one another, rather than harmonising. 'A noncontradictory [*widerspruchslose*] theory of the history art is not to be conceived: The essence of its history is contradictory in itself.'[163] Adorno frames this 'contradiction' negatively: we are asked, impossibly, to conceive of a noncontradictory theory that could frame the discontinuities of art. Aesthetics is essentially in this position of impossibility: it bears a relation to a history of discontinuity that, contradictorily, both presents and asks for synthesis. In a negative dialectic, art does not become some privileged discourse that can substitute for an otherwise compromised form of subjective identification. It does not propose meanings where other epistemologies cannot. It becomes, instead, the thoroughly negative site where the subject is repeatedly – over and over – exposed to its nonidentity with objectivity. Art remains a contradiction. But in this way, subjective experience is exposed to the contradiction of the future as promissory, to which we will now turn.

iii. Utopia: thinking, hoping, promising the future between art and aesthetics

For Kant, thinking is mediated by the subjective forms of the faculties. For Adorno, those forms are the sedimentation of objective, social, and historical forms. They are generated from a history of cognition, and the objective history of social conditions. They appear to be subjective precisely because that history is the history of negating objectivity. But in the aesthetic experience of art, one has to think reflectively from the objective forms art gives to experience. If art expresses anything, it is in form.

---

[160] BIT 96|7

[161] Specifically a ram's horn, image of Celan's negated Jewish history.

[162] AT 189/216

[163] AT 275/313

Aesthetics has therefore to be an aesthetics of form if it is to respond to art. And yet, aesthetics cannot merely repeat art's form – there has to be some critical difference. But neither can aesthetics think of anything beyond what art gives in form. The contradiction that generates artistic form is reproduced differently, here, as an aesthetic contradiction.

> Because form is the central concept of aesthetics and is always presupposed by it in the givenness of art, aesthetics must gather all its forces to think the concept through. If aesthetics is not to be trapped in tautologies it must gain access to what is not simply immanent in the concept of form, yet the concept of form refuses to grant a voice to anything aesthetic that claims independence from it. An aesthetics of form is possible only if it breaks through [*Durchbruch*] aesthetics as the aesthetics of the totality of what stands under the spell [*Bann*] of form. Whether art is in any way still possible depends precisely on this. The concept of form marks out art's sharp antithesis to an empirical world in which art's right to exist is uncertain. Art has precisely the same chance of survival as form does, no better.[164]

Aesthetics cannot recuperate anything distinct from that given in art's form; and yet aesthetics cannot either merely repeat art formally. Yet in a curious reversal, Adorno says that the future possibility of art – and not just aesthetics – depends on the capacity of aesthetics to 'break through' its own dependence and conditionedness on 'the totality of what stands under the spell of form'. Aesthetics has to go beyond what art presents, but at the same time cannot think outside art. If there is any 'future' to art, as well as to aesthetics, it has to be thought through this contradiction, and this double demand: to think of the future (not) beyond the artwork. Could we call this a negative dialectic of art, aesthetics 'in reverse form'?

This deferral of meaning is implicit to Kantian aesthetics. Finding no concept adequate to the experience of beauty, the subject must reflectively construct newly adequate cognitive forms to think this indeterminacy. To validate these unanticipated reflections, the subject supposes some future subject's assent in 'common sense'. Just as no present concept is adequate to think 'beauty', so no present subjectivity is adequate to experience that beauty. There always has to be more possible future experience, otherwise the indeterminacy that characterises it would terminate. The legibility of the aesthetic experience is in the future. But that future legibility has to be present, now, in art's form. The 'communication between objects', is preserved by aesthetics in 'communication as the affinity of elements that remain unidentified',[165] an indeterminate affinity communicated by an objective indeterminacy. Thinking through the concept of form means thinking through the present illegibility of form. The present of form is a promise. For Kant, the reconciliation felt within judgement promises future intersubjective reconciliation. But for Adorno, the failure of this to materialise means that the

[164] AT 187/213

[165] AT 183/208

promise persists negatively. The future imagined by art is not reconciled with the present of its imagination.

This is the 'promise of happiness' that is scattered through Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*. As Christoph Menke observes, '[b]eauty is the illusory appearance [*scheinhafte Erscheinung*] of happiness […], happiness that can only be made as appearance [*Schein*]: which remains a mere promise, of which one does not ever know whether it can be redeemed or is a lie.'[166] In art, the subject is presented with an experience that cannot be reconciled with the present. Reconciliation is not deferred, it is 'broken'. That is art's promise. Thierry De Duve argues that the 'reconciliation' 'as '"promise" is ceaselessly betrayed and yet still waiting to be fulfilled'.[167] In art, we experience promise as a negativity which is not negated. According to de Duve, Adorno sacrifices art to such future reconciliation, while de Duve himself does 'not entertain, even remotely, the hope that some future day the world might be peaceful enough – harmonious, beautiful, *reconciled* enough – to allow for the vanishing of art into uselessness'.[168] Art, here, promises a reconciliation in which it would disappear; de Duve holds on to the hope that it will not. But does the future function in this way for Adorno? I think Adorno's characterisation of form as contradictory speaks against this. James Gordon Finlayson argues that the experience of the artwork does not prefigure any determinate future.[169] Art anticipates happiness, 'like a hope raised by the work itself',[170] in which anticipation the future is not manifest, but is made possible as different to the present. This hope is only possible if the artwork does not manifest it. For Adorno, this means that while art synthesises it does not identify its material. Art thinks *against* its own promised happiness.

> Stendhal's dictum of art as the *promesse du bonheur* implies that art does its part for existence by accentuating what in it prefigures [*vordeutet*] utopia. But this utopic element is constantly decreasing, while existence increasingly becomes merely self-equivalent [*gleicht immer mehr bloß sich selber*]. For this reason art is ever less able to make itself like existence. Because all happiness found in the status quo is ersatz and false, art must break its promise in order to stay true to it.[171]

Art wants to promise a reconciled form of the future, but that means it cannot merely make its material like itself, equal to itself, *gleichen*. As what is actual becomes historically more self-identical, art must refrain from its own synthetic work if it is to stay true to its 'utopic' syntheses. 'Art is the ever broken

[166] Menke, *Die Kraft der Kunst*, 53

[167] De Duve, Thierry, 'Resisting Adorno, Revamping Kant', in *Art and Aesthetics After Adorno*, ed. by J.M. Bernstein et al. (Berkeley: The Townsend Center for the Humanities, 2010), pp. 249-299, 255-6

[168] Ibid., 259

[169] Finlayson, James Gordon, 'The Artwork and the *Promesse du Bonheur* in Adorno', in *European Journal of Philosophy*, 23:3 (2015), pp. 392-419, 406-10

[170] Ibid., 395

[171] AT 393/461

promise of happiness [*Kunst ist das Versprechen des Glücks, das gebrochen wird*].'[172] We should note Adorno's translation of Stendhal's French. *Versprechen* is not equivalent to *la promesse*, *promettre*. *Promettre*, like *to promise*, derives from the Latin 'to send forth', *pro* (before) +*mittere* (to send). A promise prefigures some future occurrence. But while the German prefix '*ver*' can refer to 'before', it can also more ambiguously describe the error of its verb's action (*verlesen* – to misread), an error which is also errancy, to misguide, such that *versprechen* means to promise but *sich versprechen* means to mispronounce. What French and English 'promise', what they 'send forth', is in German open to the risk of error, of mistake, misleading: speaking-before but also mis-speaking; an errancy which is performed or risked in Adorno's translation. Breaking the promise of happiness is also keeping to it as a promise. For Josh Cohen, this form of broken promise is pitched through Adorno's 'new categorical imperative': to think after Auschwitz such that Auschwitz 'will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen'.[173] We have to think against similarity, against repetition – but what can aesthetics do but repeat or represent its figurative object? For Cohen, this imperative 'demands above all a vigilant resistance to alterity's assimilation to knowledge', and so 'the judgement of its fulfilment belongs of necessity to an unachieved and unachievable future'.[174] Not just unachieved: unachievable. The future is not prefigured but, for Cohen, interrupted. This 'conjunction of necessity and impossibility'[175] constitutes art's promise. 'Art is not the fulfilment but the maintenance of its promise'.[176] Art cannot present happiness, only promise it. We do not experience any presence in art, only its promise; indeed, the broken promise that does not ever manifest. And this is the promise of aesthetics, the promise that something like reflective experience, and therefore something like art, could be possible. The futurity of art's present is non-transcendent: as futural, it does not go beyond what the artwork presents, even as it promises something else than what it presents. The future is promised as a non-manifest happiness.

An aesthetics responsive to this form of futurity as promise in art would have to think through exactly this form. We can relate this to Alexander García Düttmann's characterisation of criticism that 'would be the critique of what exists in the name of what does not yet exist.'[177] Aesthetics orientated by art's promise would critique what is present 'in the name' of what is not yet present. What is presently possible is referred through a presently impossible futurity. By reflection, the future becomes a coordinate by which the present might be read. For Düttmann, this orientation is effected by language. Because 'meanings' are specific to 'a particular use of language, a language game', [178] they are

[172] AT 178/205

[173] ND 465/358

[174] Cohen, *Interrupting Auschwitz*, 4

[175] Ibid., 25

[176] Ibid., 53

[177] García Düttmann, Alexander, 'Without Soil: A Figure in Adorno's Thought', Robert Savage trans., in *Language Without Soil*, Gerhard Richter ed., New York: Fordham University Press (2010), pp. 10-16, 10

[178] Ibid., 15

disclosed by a legibility that is not identical with their present. We read according to a 'utopian trace' at once present and futural; a depletion of what exists by what does not yet exist which does not, however, transcend what exists. Like language, in language, meaning in art is immanent to its form, and yet is necessarily read, and therefore re-read. This means, however, that any 'utopian' meaning cannot positively be located in language. Aesthetic experience does not amount to 'non-identity thinking'.[179] Rather, it is attendant to the temporal displacement of meaning, of reading, immanent to the way language functions. And this means being attendant to the way language does not positively mean, means being attendant to its indeterminacy. For Robert Kaufman, Adorno's aesthetic is thus coordinated through Kant's, which 'weirdly projects the possibility of uncoerced social construction from the very absence of an object, general rule, norm, or standard of taste that would determine the process called the judgment of beauty.'[180] In aesthetic experience, the subject is the exposed to 'new' possible social forms that 'aesthetic experiment constructs'.[181] Through Kaufman, we could say that aesthetic experience thus 'projects' new forms through the indeterminate forms presented by artworks. In responding to the experiential lack presented by artworks, the subject has to coordinate aesthetic experience through an indeterminate future. And for Anthony Cascardi, 'while artworks are indeed objects, the truth-content of art is *of* the world while also offering critical reflections upon it'.[182] Just as the concept of art is inadequate to the sensuous presence of the artwork, artworks are objects, but not just objects. They also make truth claims that exceed their 'object' status without transcending it. In other words, artworks can only function *as art* through this non-relation to aesthetic theory, a relation of non-transcendence. 'If it is essential to artworks that they be things, it is no less essential that they negate their own status as things, and thus art turns against art.'[183] And aesthetic theory must therefore assume, in this relation, a position of displacement. It is never adequate to the sensuous 'embodied meaning' of the artwork; and yet, its inadequacy exposes the 'truth' of this meaning by becoming the negative refusal to impose meaning or to transcend the artwork.

---

[179] Yvonne Sherratt argues this in *Adorno's Positive Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). She suggests that we can configure Adorno's utopianism through identity thinking's 'opposite', some positively grasped 'non-identity thinking' (126-135). But this would be to locate utopianism externally to thinking, and externally to the negativity that characterises thinking. I want to suggest instead that utopianism is in complex ways located internally to identity thinking, to which there is no alternative 'way' to think – one cannot positively think 'nonidentically'. This is the crux of the turn to aesthetics I am now tracing. In this economy of hope, governed by that Celanian leitmotif, 'the minimal sheaves of hope', the hope for utopianism, like the minimum of pleasure, is articulated by the smallest resistance to the positive, and resistance is always complicit with – even as it is active in – the economy it resists.

[180] Kaufman, Robert, 'Red Kant, or The Persistence of the Third *Critique* in Adorno and Jameson', in *Critical Inquiry*, 26:4 (2000), pp. 682-724, 713

[181] Ibid., 711

[182] Cascardi, Anthony J., 'Prolegomena to Any Future Aesthetics', in *Art and Aesthetics After Adorno*, ed. by J.M. Bernstein et al. (Berkeley: The Townsend Center for the Humanities, 2010), pp. 7-40, 11-2

[183] AT 230/262

This does not mean that theory is just the aporetic repetition of its own conceptual inadequacy. Rather, theory's decisive displacement by the artwork models a different condition for truth: the truth of promise, not correspondence; but only insofar as that promise is always displaced. Theory's displacement lets us think of truth as displaced, exilic. But that means thinking through the form that truth critically takes: language, writing. In *Negative Dialectics*, 'hope' is in the form of the constellation: 'it is not to transfigure the existence of these elements, but to bring them to a configuration, in which the elements enter into a writing.'[184] Just so, in *Aesthetic Theory*, the artwork's written character is reproduced on a critical level by aesthetic experience. 'Art transcends [*tranzendiert*] the nonexisting only by way of the existing; otherwise it becomes the helpless projection of what in any case already exists [*was ohnehin ist*].'[185] 'Through its own figuration [*Komplexion*], art brings the essence into appearance in opposition to its own semblance.'[186] Art transcends its object status only in aesthetic experience, which it nonetheless contradicts. That does not just mean, as Kaufman suggests, that it projects a new, future subjective form in which it could be experienced. It means, rather, that the artwork undertakes what Gerhard Richter calls 'a mimesis of what does not yet exist, the negative traces of futurity that can be neither predicted nor programmed in advance but that nevertheless inscribes itself into the artwork, and into the philosophy that enters a relation with that artwork, as a non-identical and negatively charged otherness.'[187] Only in aesthetic experience is the present of the artwork unfolded into these 'negative traces of futurity', not new meanings but newly legible negativity, indeterminacy, futurity.

> In art, universals are strongest where art most closely approaches language: that is, when something speaks, that, by speaking, goes beyond [*übersteigt*] the here and now. Art succeeds at such transcendence, however, only by virtue of its tendency toward radical particularization; that is, only in that it says nothing but what it says by virtue of its own elaboration, through its immanent process. The element in art that resembles language [*sprachähnliche*] is its mimetic element; it only becomes universally eloquent in the specific impulse, by its opposition to the universal. The paradox that art says it and at the same time does not say it, is because the mimetic element by which it says it, the opaque and particular, at the same time resists [*opponiert*] speaking.[188]

Art's eloquence, like philosophy's, is the eloquence of what art lacks. Aesthetics does not recompense for this lack. Aesthetics does not thereby transcend the artwork. 'What speaks out of important artworks is opposed to subjective reason's claim to totality. Its untruth becomes manifest in the objectivity of

---

[184] ND 407/399 (I consulted Simon Jarvis's draft translation of this section of *Negative Dialectics*.)

[185] AT 227/259

[186] AT 335/384

[187] Richter, Gerhard, 'Aesthetic Theory and Nonpropositional Truth Content in Adorno', in *Language Without Soil*, ed. by Gerhard Richter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), pp. 131-146, 140

[188] AT 269/305

artworks.'[189] As Simon Jarvis puts it, 'The 'language' invoked in Adorno's account of 'constellation' is a language which still retains its double character, a language which has not yet wholly surrendered itself to sign or image, concept or intuition.'[190] Art's eloquence is therefore negative, just as the future into which it is read is negative.

Just as the artwork is not determinate, is not ever complete – its promise never either redeemed nor falsified – so is aesthetics orientated by incompletion, 'grasping theoretically its continually transforming object of reflection.'[191] Aesthetics is provisional, yet it must, in a sense, think beyond the artwork. Here Adorno runs into the same problem as Blanchot. Aesthetic thinking about art must simultaneously respond to two polarising demands: that it not be identical with its object, and therefore in some sense exceed it; and yet that it not over-write it, or negate it. Adorno argues that meaning is not merely to be located with subjective intention. It is objectively mediated. But neither is that object meaningful in itself. The artwork has to enter into relation with a judging subject through aesthetic expeirence, because it is not sheer objectivity: it is the objectification, the sedimentation, of a subjective history of art. This reflects the 'polar' non-identity of subject and object, their mutual construction. And in the experience of art, the subject is also exposed to the way it is organised objectively. The critical disconnection registered with art by aesthetics reflects a disconnection between subjectivity and the subject's objective moment.

> The supposed fundamental facts of consciousness are something other than merely that. In the dimension of pleasure and displeasure [*Lust und Unlust*] the bodily intrudes upon them. All pain and all negativity, motors of dialectical thinking, are the often mediated, sometimes unrecognisable forms of the physical, just as all happiness aims at sensuous fulfilment and obtains there its objectivity.[192]

Happiness is felt in the body or it is not at all. Happiness needs to be articulated. But it is articulated, by art, according to the temporality of the promise. This means that happiness, in art, is a felt distance from objectivity, the suffering, the 'weight' of objectivity on the subject that needs 'expression'. We cannot talk about meaning in art without recognising the way meaning depends on this negative expression. Suffering is not just negated happiness. Suffering is the weight, from the future, of an objectivity that has to be negated in order to be thought. Happiness is manifest or it is not at all. And yet, '[a]ny happiness is a fragment of the whole happiness',[193] just as the fragment in philosophy is 'representations in particular of the totality unrepresentable as such', and in art is 'the part of the totality

[189] AT 343/394

[190] Jarvis, *Adorno*, 177

[191] Erjavec, Aleš, 'Aesthetics and the Aesthetic Today: After Adorno', in *Art and Aesthetics After Adorno*, ed. by J.M. Bernstein et al. (Berkeley: The Townsend Center for the Humanities, 2010), pp. 182-209, 191

[192] ND 202/202

[193] ND 404/396

of the work that opposes totality'. Happiness is the contradiction of a futurity that opposes happiness now. Its singularity registers the multiple legibility which its non-manifestation makes possible.

> If art is supposed whole and unfragmented [*bruchlos*], it is bound from the outset to fail; if it is jettisoned in order to be won, there is no guarantee that it will return; it is lost insofar as the individuated does not on its own, without any deus ex machina, go over into the universal. The sole path of success that remains open to artworks is also that of their progressive impossibility [*fortschreitender Unmöglichkeit*].[194]

The 'steps' of progress (*fortschreitender*) are impossible, reversed, because they promise an impossible, non-manifest futurity. Criticism, then, has to respond to this impossibility, and not to engage with art as so much figural ore to be mined.

> The more the emancipation of the subject demolished every idea of a preestablished order conferring meaning, the more dubious the concept of meaning became as the refuge of a fading theology. Even prior to Auschwitz it was an affirmative lie, given historical experience, to ascribe any positive meaning to existence. This has consequences that reach deep into aesthetic form. When artworks have nothing external to themselves to which they can cling without ideology, what they have lost cannot be restored by any subjective act.[195]

No subjective act could positively pose the nonidentical. And subjective judgement cannot answer the debt to the negative by which it proceeds. The 'body', far from being the refuge of happiness, is already the site of multiple nonidentities which the subject occludes, even as it makes them available to experience. Kantian aesthetic ends are thereby reversed. Rather than obtaining for a transcendental system the nonconceptual truth of aesthetically felt pleasure, aesthetics responds to the suffering of that loss, which is not the loss of pleasure but the loss of pleasure's identity with happiness. This loss vouches for the futurity of happiness, not for its present meaningfulness, as the feeling of present pleasure. Aesthetics suffers to lose its object because losing it is the only way to rescue it from meaning, a meaning that would occlude the indeterminate, futural happiness the artwork prefigures, figures into, steps (not) towards.

Conclusion

The task of bringing Adorno and Blanchot together is not just complex, it means responding to incommensurable demands. On the one hand, Blanchot insists that writing affirms only its own dispersal. On the other, Adorno insists that any liberation from experience must be mediated through experience. Subjectivity is the only measure of autonomy by which the dominating practices of

[194] AT 265/300-1

[195] AT 200/229

subjectivity might be resisted. Both writers therefore themselves respond to incommensurability. Writing writes through the impossibility it both exposes and installs. Aesthetic experience persists in its interruption of transcendentally secure, possible, experience. To bring these two writers together, then, means responding to an incommensurability that *connects* them, means responding to their mutual *disconnections*. These are not just historical or circumstantial. Both insist on disconnection as part of the reflective procedure of 'aesthetics', however conceived. If we are to think of them together, it cannot just be through their connections. Rather, their disconnection provokes us to re-think the way reflection characterises a critical relation in itself. Both resist presence and meaning, and any criticism of both must respond in turn by not utilising their resistance to connection to impose or establish a 'third' critical presence. If the relation between these two writers is played out critically, then, it is through their mutual or collaborative resistance to any critical determination of their relation. Through relating them, through bringing them together, we are exposed to the kind of critical thinking they advocate. If the two work towards a 'non-transcendent' aesthetic, then this 'non-transcendence' holds also for critical interpretation. Indeed, this is articulated by a critical connection outside presence, outside meaning, that holds these two writers exilicly 'outside' each other. Blanchot's fragmentation amplifies a fragmentation at the heart of this system, which in turn amplifies the fragmentations the aesthetic undergoes in Adorno's reading of it. Aesthetic experience is not merely negative. It is the dispersal of experience, the expropriation of transcendental conditions, which exposes the transcendental unity of the subject implicated in that experience to the futural possibilities of dispersal. The aesthetic does not merely 'undertake' the work of a 'negative' dialectic; it is the site where a necessary futurity is felt at the *limits* of subjective unity, at the multiple, serial, dispersal of the unity of the present which nonetheless constitutes 'another way' of history.

Hill's characterisation of Blanchot's sense of writing withdrawing presence, precisely the presence 'gathered' in Heidegerrian *alétheia* where an originary forgetting is un-forgotten,[196] reflects the characterisation of Adorno's negative dialectic I have been drawing.

> For Blanchot, to forget forgetting was not to accede, by dint of the positivity born of a double negative, to the foundational durability of memory. It was much rather to be exposed twice over to an erasure. But this erasure of an erasure did not culminate in anything present, but in the radicality of a redoubled deletion which, if it forcibly left a trace, was irreducible either to being or to non-being and might be addressed only under the auspices of what, Blanchot […] had begun calling: the neuter.[197]

The kind of 'truth' afforded here is that of the self-dispersal of writing as a mere function of the present. Writing does not mimetically draw or gather any truth, however pitched through non-correspondence, which Heidegger attributed to poetic truth. Neither is there any Hegelian positive dialectically produced

[196] See Hill, *Maurice Blanchot and Fragmentary Writing*, 144-147
[197] Hill, *Maurice Blanchot and Fragmentary Writing*, 148

from the process of negation. Rather, writing is *exposed* to that negation, such that it 'radically' 'redoubles' the deletions effected by negation. As we have seen, Adorno's negative dialectic also interrupts the procedures of dialectical progress; read through Adorno, Blanchot's 'fragmentary writing' is the exposure of dialectics to its own process; read through Blanchot, Adorno's 'negative dialectic' is the exposure of thinking to its non-originary relation to dispersal. Not only does the 'erasure of erasure' 'not culminate in anything present', it asks for a way to 'address' that non-culmination. Here we are brought back to poetry, and to Celan, and specifically to the figure. What kind of poetics could reflectively address its own neutralised capacity to address? What kind of figuration would govern this capacity, or not? What kind of figurative relation would afford to these radically incapacitated, but also radically demanding, relations to otherness, the otherness articulated by dialectical thinking itself?

CHAPTER FOUR

The figure of snow: Celan, elegy, aesthetics

the poet with the name in reverse

Hélène Cixous

Introduction

Cixous, in my epigraph, is referring to Celan, specifically to the paronomasia (the punning, the 'naming-beside') by which he got to that name from Ancel (An-cel, Cel-an). Celan 'called himself contrarily'. And Cixous reads him from this point of contradiction. 'Only thus are we able to advance, by beginning at the end'.[1] I want to read this paranomasic reversal into Celan's poetry itself. This kind of 'contrary naming', naming that does not present what it names, is felt in the elegy. We saw in chapter three how the kinds of reflective connection Kant sought to establish in his third *Critique* – the connections between subjective faculties registered in aesthetic experience, and the connections that organise nature in teleological judgements – are turned into relations by *disconnection*. Each of these writers reflect on disconnection; and that disconnection itself can be pitched, through Kant's aesthetic, into an aesthetic of disconnection, an aesthetic coordinated by the reflective orientations of disconnection. We saw, in chapter two, how this disconnection reflectively organises 'community', and we saw in chapter three how this disconnection reflectively shapes 'dialectics' of presence and presentation. Now, we can turn explicitly to the poetics that have framed these accounts of disconnection. And we can see more specifically how these accounts are shaped by the figure 'reversal' which is also at once, I will now argue, a 'reversal' of thinking through figuration itself, and a figure for such figuration. This is an attempt to think of the future *without* presence, without the present: a promise, discontinuous with any present. Chapter three explores how the future does not just exceed the present, but disperses it. And if elegy looks back from the future to an absent subject, then it marks, in Celan's elegists, the incompatibility of that absence with any poetic present.

[1] Cixous, Hélène, *FirstDays of the Year*, trans. Catherine A. F. MacGillivray (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 9

Their subject does not arrive. They have to proceed, then, into this non-arrival, and then have to address something non-present. There is therefore a poetics of this non-manifestation.

Now, in this concluding chapter, I want to look at how Celan's poetics think through this reversal towards the kinds of futurity that are reserved for aesthetic experience. And I want to suggest that this reversal is legible in reading those poetics as 'elegiac', repeated in Celan's elegists, critical and poetic. My claim is that figuration fragments into legibility through reading, and therefore into aesthetic experience.

This chapter has two parts. In the first, I look at Celan's poetics of figuration and the way they enjoin and resist reading the future. This reading is staged by Adorno and Blanchot, in their critical work on Celan. In the second, I look at this figuration through two of Celan's English elegists: Geoffrey Hill and J.H. Prynne. Both sections trace the figure of 'snow' in its fragmentary passage from Celan to Adorno, Blanchot, Hill, and Prynne.

1 – Celan and figuration

i. 'detours from you to you': Celan, figuration, snow

'Oversnowed | beauty'

In his translation of Shakespeare's sonnet V, Celan finds a rhyme between 'snow' and 'beauty':

> Beauty o'er-snow'd, and bareness everywhere:
> Then were not summer's distillation left
> A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass
>
> Überschneit
> die Schönheit. Und Entblösstes allerwegen.
>
> Dann, blieb der Sommer nicht als Sommers Geist
> im Glas zurück, verflüssigt und gefangen[2]
>
> [*Oversnowed*
> *beauty. And everywhere bareness.*

[2] Celan, Paul, *Gesammelte Schriften Band V: Übertragungen II. Zweisprachig*, ed. by Beda Allemann (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003), 324-5 (my trans.)

So does not summer remain as summer's spirit
behind glass, liquefied and trapped]

'Überschneit | die Schönheit'. '*Überschneit*', of course, is not quite snow but the verb form 'schneien' turned into an adjective: 'over-snowed'. And '*Schönheit*' is not any beautiful thing, but abstract 'beauty'. The verbal action of snowing is crystallised, suspended, into an adjective describing this abstract 'beauty'. Not a literal landscape, then, but a concept that is snowed over. And no snowing, none of what W.S. Graham calls 'The real unabstract snow'.[3] So what is this snow, layered over this abstraction? The clue is perhaps given in its parallel image, the likewise crystal glass, glass which invisibly traps what it contains. Does snow contain beauty as glass contains summer's spirit? And does Celan's translation also contain what it translates? This is pitched through two different metaphors for containment, for communication, for visibility – for metaphor itself. Snow buries what it covers, whereas glass transparently displays what it imprisons. But snow that covers beauty covers up something already invisible, not real, abstract. After all, what would beauty be that we could not experience? What kind of judgement could be made (and both Shakespeare's and Celan's poems propose this) that there is beauty covered up, not apparent? This is a negative aesthetic judgement. I attest to what I do not experience.

If 'presence' is something the poem 'translates', then it is 'negative' in the sense developed in chapter three. What is the effect of this 'negative' presence for the poem's capacity to figure presence? The question here is to what extent, in such translation, is 'presence' governed by 'forgetting'? In this section, I want to trace figuration across this metaphor of a 'landscape' that is exiled, displaced, in being translated. We should recall Kant's reflective 'field' of judgement, and Adorno's 'no-man's land', as well as the 'neutrality' of reflection for Blanchot. We can explore 'snow' and 'glass' as figurative points of contact within Celan's poetics, and with critical readings of his poetry. This kind of dialogic figuration amounts to a translation itself. But the stakes of that translation are not clear. For Anne Carson, such dialogues form an 'economy of the unlost', a relation of exchange where what is exchanged is lost, but in being exchanged visible. 'Celan is a poet who uses language *as if he*

[3] Of course, Graham's image, taken from 1970's *Malcolm Mooney's Land* and its eponymous poem, read in the full, contains exactly this dialogic, dialectical, reversible relation between image and language, and its radicalisation between 'language' and 'the real': 'Words drifting on words. | The real unabstract snow.' The words 'drift' above the snow, in the line above, 'overwording' the snow on the page, but also *preceding* snow. Words might be abstract, but only ever as abstract as the 'real' snow they contain, figure, move above. The two lines reverse into one another. Graham, W.S., *New Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), 157

were always translating'.[4] We can characterise this exchange of loss as elegiac. Carson reads Celan through the Greek poet Simonides, finding in his Greek elegiac metre 'the acoustic shape of perfect exchange':[5] where rhythmically, each half is perfectly reversible with the other. This reversibility of exchange lingers in Celan's elegiac work, which 'poems do not pretend to partake of happier process or positive change',[6] but rather reserve as this reversibility the possibility of a non-exchangeable loss. What is lost is never, to use Carson's term, 'unlost', and the elegy does not pretend otherwise. Rather, it interrupts the exchangeability of mourning that would replace displaced loss with the material reversibility of language. This elegiac movement traces the reflective coordinates of community explored in chapter two, and of dialectics explored in chapter three. In this chapter, I want to demonstrate how this elegiac work translates into critical reading, and therefore makes legible the 'loss' of experience in aesthetic thinking, the objectivity – and the futurity – that aesthetic experience loses.

Translating the future

Such translations constitute a poetic dialogue. But dialogue, I have been arguing, is subject to suspensions. Joel Golb argues that temporally, Celan's translations translate a destroyed past into an incompatible present.[7] They always in this way trace loss. The poem presents this loss of a past. But translation is spatial: the transfer from one space to another. For Leonard Olschner, such translation witnesses the loss it enacts. Loss returns in the poetic present, 'visible markers left by the poetic visitations of other poets in his home territory'.[8] This territorialisation of loss is a question of presence. For Ana Glazova, Celan's translations are dialogic. Poetry translates the 'presence' of another. 'The poet's speech establishes a relation to the past – in other words, to the poetic tradition – and, in transforming it, makes the distance to the past perceptible.'[9] Translation is thus characterised as an encounter with the past which configures the poetic present. But my contention is that such translation also responds to the present's incompletion. In dialogue, a poem's present is repeatedly displaced from the future

[4] Carson, Anne, *Economy of the Unlost* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 28

[5] Ibid., 89

[6] Ibid., 99

[7] Golb, Joel, 'Translating Tradition: A Reading of Paul Celan's "Huhediblu"', in *Translating Tradition: Paul Celan in France*, ed. by Benjamin Hollander, *Acts* 8/9 (1988), pp. 168-180

[8] Olschner, Leonard, 'Anamnesis: Paul Celan's Translations of Poetry', in *Translating Tradition: Paul Celan in France*, ed. by Benjamin Hollander, *Acts* 8/9 (1988), pp. 56-89, 61

[9] Glazova, Anna, 'Poetry of Bringing about Presence: Paul Celan Translates Osip Mandelstam', in *MLN*, 123:5 (2008), pp. 1108-1126, 1109

because it always supposes the possibility of another translation. If poems are translatable, then they are orientated by the future. Poetic dialogue with 'you' includes such translations. You are encountered in 'detours [*Umwege*] from you to you',[10] detours that take place outside the poem's present. The complex presentation of 'you' in the poem, as I have been arguing, interrupts any 'presence' in the poem. Yet this interruption also opens the poem towards a future coordinated by this 'you', this exteriorisation of poetic focus from its own singular utterance into a 'you'.

For Celan, the space of dialogic presence interrupts the poem's present, and its capacity to present. 'You' are constituted in this dialogue, and 'you' interrupt the poem.

> Only in the space [*Raum*] of this conversation does the addressed constitute itself, as it gathers around the I addressing and naming it. But the addressed which through naming, as it were, become a you, brings its otherness into this present [*Gegenwart*]. Even in this here and now of the poem – for the poem itself, we know, has always only this one, unique, momentary present – even in this immediacy and nearness it lets the most essential aspect of the other speak: its time.[11]

Time speaks, not 'you'. Interruption speaks where you should. The poem presents this interruption. This is an interruption of 'space' (*Raum*) by 'place' (*Ort*). As we saw in chapter three, this is the 'place' of the repetition of the image.

> And then, what would the images be? | What is perceived and is to be perceived once and always again once, and only here and now. Hence the poem would be the place [*Ort*] where all tropes and metaphors want to be carried ad absurdum.[12]

The other's singularity is incompatible with the poem's singularity. It is a time of repetition that interrupts the poem's 'here and now'. 'You' are always, therefore, figured into the poem, your presence is figurative.

> The poem wants to head toward some other, it needs this other, it needs an opposite. It seeks it out, it bespeaks itself to it. | Each thing, each human is, for the poem heading toward this other, a figure [*Gestalt*] of this.[13]

This is a collaborative identification. The poem's 'present' identity is constituted in distinction from the 'other', the 'figure' towards which the poem reaches. Such 'reality', we recall from

[10] Celan, *Meridian*, 11/11

[11] Ibid., 9/9-10

[12] Ibid., 10/10

[13] Ibid., 9/9

chapter one, 'must be searched for and won', is not 'present' in the poem. 'You' are a future coordinate which orientates the poem as present. The poem, then, can only repeat its non-encounter with the other it figures, reaches towards. If the other were present, it would not be present as other; it can only be figured. The poem presents an absurd, repeating discontinuity, orientated by what it cannot reach.

The figure charts across this repetition 'ad absurdum' – or at least wants to, intends to, hopes to. Decisively, the figure is *hoped* for, a *hope* for the singularity of presence repeated over and over and therefore never reconciled with any reality. The 'next time' of the present is constituted by this hope. In a draft of the *Meridian*, Celan notes: '[t]he poem is, also in terms of its semantic meaning, the place of the singular [*der Ort des Einmaligen*], the irreversible'.[14] So while 'the present in the poem is the presence of a person',[15] '[t]he poet as person is given to the poem as its share [*Dem Gedicht ist der Dichter als Person mitgegeben*]'.[16] The poem 'shares' the presence of a poet. It 'shares' in its singularity a repetition of the singular in dialogue with 'you', the 'future'. This is repetition of singularity. It does not pass over into something else. Absurdly, the poem must share this incompatibility because any singularity is 'irreversible'. Absurdly, we enter the image-time of repetition, reversal, precisely because the poem is irreversibly singular. So the poem's identity is shared. And yet neither pole of this sharing can be fully present in the poem, because the poem remains irreversibly singular. The poem shares the loss of presence in identity. What the poem means is 'irreversible', singular, necessary to the poem; but what it means is the relation it bears presently, of loss, to the 'presence of a person'. Meaning does not exceed the poem. Meaning takes place in the poem. That meaning is non-transcendent: it is bound to the poem's space, and therefore bound to be lost to the poem because it has no appeal for articulation outside it, even as it is outside it. 'The poem is lonely. It is lonely and *en route*. Its author remains added to it.'[17] Presence is the future the poem moves towards, but that movement is restricted to the poem's present.

[14] Ibid., 118/118
[15] Ibid., 113/113
[16] Ibid., 116/116
[17] Ibid., 9

Figurative present

Reading Osip Mandelstam (whose poetry he extensively translated while working on *The Meridian*), Celan characterises language in the poem as 'actualisation'. We can link this with the figuration of presence. He discusses this in a radio essay on Mandelstam. In poetry, language is 'neither "analogy" nor plain language, but language "actualized," voiceful and voiceless simultaneously, set free under the sign of an indeed radical individuation which however also remains mindful of the limits imposed on it by language and of the possibilities language has opened up'.[18] This characterisation is echoed in *The Meridian*, where this 'radical individuation' sets language free, but at the same time, 'remains mindful of the borders language draws and of the possibilities language opens up for it'.[19] This individuation occurs within the poem, even as it opens up 'possibilities' of thinking outside it. In an image translated by Celan from Mandelstam, a poem is a 'message in a bottle',[20] a message whose referent is not yet determined, remains in the future. It is not, therefore, a figure *without* referent; it is a figure *without-yet* a referent. Presence is indeterminate. It is both the presence of writing, of language, and the presence of a referent-to-come. In this way it is utopian, spanning the distances between a political reality and a utopian demand impossible in the present of that reality. The figure does not draw between two different presences, metaphorically blending them into one image, but reverses between these two temporally distinct (and mutually conditioning) points of possible signification.

Arching between these incommensurable temporalities, the poem measures out a figurative economy. The figure measures its own figuration. The bow, an image repeated throughout Celan's poetry, acts as such a figure for figuration, spanning the distances between the poem's 'present' and the 'presence' of another in the poem. The ambiguity of this measurement is apparent in the poem 'Lyons, Les Archers', collected in *Fadensonnen*. The image of the 'archer' draws on both Celan's own birth sign as a Sagittarius (as Barbara Wiedemann notes) and, more specifically, on Pindar's second Olympic ode.[21] Mark Payne suggests that, through Pindar, this image becomes a meta-critical image for communication in Celan's 'dialogic' address, in which the 'strangeness' of the poem, its distance from reference,

[18] Ibid., 215

[19] Ibid., 9

[20] Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose*, Felstiner (2001), 396

[21] See Wiedemann's commentary on 'Lyons, Les Archers' in reference to a letter Celan sent to René Char on 22.3.1962: Celan, Paul, *Die Gedichte*, ed. by Barbara Wiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), n.758.

communicates the reader's estrangement from the poem, allowing for an 'encounter' in its interruption of ordinary referential discourse as 'the very thing that allows responsive contact with the other to occur'.[22] The poem has to be interrupted to be read. In 'Lyon, Les Archers' the 'bow' also recalls Heraclitus's punning fragment: 'The name of the bow is life; its work is death', 'βιός τῷ τόξῳ ὄνομα βίος ἔργον δὲ θάνατος'[23] 'Biós' puns between 'bow' and 'life', such that life is stretched like a bow into death, its work, and such that the bow's work is both life and death. This figurative coincidence is repeated in the 'coincidence' of the girl reading Camus's *L'Étranger* (*Der Fremde*), who recalls the poet's absent wife, to whom the poem is addressed. To confuse the matter, Celan wrote this poem in Paris, 29-30.10.1965, two days after having returned from a quite nomadic trip around France, ending in Lyon. So the poem stages in recollection a presence that recalls the absence of (in the time of the writing-recollection) the now present wife. 'You' are drawn, a bow, between the singular and the plural, doubled from 'du' to 'euch'.

you too, with all
the instrangedness in you,
instrange yourself,
deeper,

the One
string
tenses its pain between you,

the missing target
radiates, bow.

auch du
mit allem
Eingefremdeten in dir,
fremdest dich ein,
tiefer,

die Eine
Sehne

[22] Payne, Mark, 'Lyric Communication: Pindar and Paul Celan', in *Modern Philology*, 105:1 (2007), pp. 5-20, 13

[23] Heraclitus, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, ed., trans. by Charles H. Kahn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 64-5

spannt ihren Schmerz unter euch

das verschollene Ziel
strahlt, Bogen.[24]

The 'bowstring' spans between the singular and plural 'you'. The image of the 'one' string imagines this doubling presence. The 'life' of the image, the desired but distant wife, is also its work towards 'death', its undoing, in that it can only be 'alive' in distance, in its presented absence. Without this distance, the figure collapses into the presence of the object which it would imagine. But in this poem, the coherence of the image of the 'One string' is already disturbed by its distribution, as if by arrow flight, towards the other. And this addressed other remains equivocally both *and* neither the girl and the wife. We can connect this with Aris Fioretos's sense of poetic legibility. Fioretos suggests, reading the 'Pfeilschrift' | 'arrowscript' in 'Beim Hagelkorn' from *Atemwende*, that 'Celan's writing remains on the way toward a readability which can only coincide with a time coming. Its illocutionary mode is that of the promise'.[25] Readability, figured, is always promised. And so are 'you', your presence in the poem. The poem's figuration proposes the material condition by which, in the future, we can read it. History's material inception is figured in the poem's now of reading. The stakes invested in reading a poem also lay out its not-yet historical readability, a future 'now' where it might emerge into the discourse of critical interpretation; a possible readability afforded precisely by its resistance to readability now. The legibility of this encounter can only be figured through its present unreadability, its present distance from meaning, which preserves such legibility as a future possibility, reflective and not yet determined.

Figurative presence

The poem's present appeals to a presence incompatible with that present, by which it is nonetheless grounded. There are complex transactions here between the poetic inside and outside, staged through the figure. Celan insists that the poem could host a particular human presence,[26] and yet that presence is futural, not present, figured. For Peter Szondi, Celan's

[24] BIT 130 | 131

[25] Fioretos, Aris, 'Nothing: History and Materiality in Celan', in *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, ed. by Aris Fioretos (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 295-341, 300

[26] This marks one point of differentiation from Heidegger, for whom 'language' and not any poet speaks in the poem. See Lyon, *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger*, 118-121.

poetry 'is ceasing to become mimesis, representation; it is becoming reality. To be sure, this is a poetic reality: The text no longer stands in the service of a predetermined reality, but rather it is projecting itself, constituting itself as a reality.'[27] This 'poetic reality', for Szondi, eschews representation. We are presented with language 'constituting a reality', not mediating it in representation. Amir Eshel goes as far as to argue that 'Celan's poem does not wish to speak through comparisons and metaphors. His other is not figured, but rather is present in pauses, intervals, and muted breath coronas'.[28] The other is the poem's negative, and only negatively present in poetic silence. If the poem makes anything legible, it is through its immateriality, through what it does not write. But this runs against the internalisation of figuration that I have been tracing in Celan's poetry. Celan's describes a 'doubling' of the world's unreadability in poetry. 'Unreadability of this | world. Everything doubles'. 'Unlesbarkeit dieser | Welt. Alles doppelt.'[29] Poetry does not in this way disappear. It rather insists upon the objectivity of what it loses, doubles it, presents it, in the kind of 'negative' presentation I have been developing from Kant. And from this, 'You [*Du*], wedged in your deepest, | climb out of yourself [*entsteigst dir*] | for ever.' 'You' emerge in this doubling, not in vanishing. The problem of representation of absence is here more complex than a sublime symbolic non-representation. It is a matter of a poetic 'us', poetry's capacity to stage dialogue. In another example of doubling from *Schneepart*, in 'Largo':

> the pair of blackbirds hangs
> out near us, under our
> together up there
> drifting along white
>
> meta-
> stases.
>
> das Amselpaar hängt
> neben uns, unter
> unsern gemeinsam droben mit-
> ziehenden weißen
>
> Meta-

[27] Szondi, *Celan Studies*, 31

[28] Eshel, Amir, 'Paul Celan's Other: History, Poetics, and Ethics', *New German Critique* 91 (2004), pp. 57-77, 74

[29] BIT 326|327

stasen.[30]

A metastasis is a rapid change, but etymologically a rapid change of place, a translation. This transference, however, is figural: 'our' being together (*gemeinsam*, common) is doubled into the 'Amselpaar',[31] paired into one word. Not the world, the world 'doubled'; but neither a negatively symbolic recuperation of loss. The transactions of such figuration are vital. And so the poems sing their own incapacity to represent, which means that they mark out the possibility of figuration, its outline or shape.

If the poem merely presented the 'unrepresentable' as a negative space outside the poem's figurative limit, then the poem would vanish, and so too would the possibly legibility of that negative. Instead, I want to suggest, we read in Celan's poetry a vexed intrusion of this 'outside' space into figuration itself through the reflections of 'doubling'. Celan's poems, as Rochelle Tobias argues, figure 'spacing' itself.[32] 'The absence of an original leads to the proliferation of figures in the text'.[33] And, I would suggest, also leads to the proliferation of readings of the text. This is not the 'presence' of the other in the torn out gaps of figuration, not, then, the sublime ontologisation of this caesura, but a lingering with this gap as describing the limits of presence and presentation itself. This opens up poetics to the 'political' as I have been outlining it, the political which is not a 'transfigured' or 'exchangeable' absence or otherness, but a presentation of indeterminacy that is not exchanged, as presence *and* the present itself. This is not distant from Adorno's description of aesthetic 'stylization' in 'Commitment', where a certain 'artfulness', to use Celan's word from *The Meridian*, 'transfigures' an occurrence in order to invest it with meaning.[34] Celan's 'simulation' contradicts such 'artifice'. In 'Commitment', Adorno repeatedly argues that artworks present non-exchange, not the unrepresentable. As outlined in chapter three, this is utopic, '[t]he minimal promise of happiness which [artworks] contain, which refuses to be traded for any

[30] BIT 342|343

[31] Recalling the 'Simili- | dohle', the 'simulate' Jackdaw from 'Frankfurt, September', the 'simulate' brother Kafka, the jackdaw (*kavka*); the title of which reflects Tübingen, Jänner', where Hölderlin doubles into Celan, looking with the gulls into the pool beneath his tower. This is a question of tradition, of trade: the poem present's Celan's own doubling of Kafka, one of his brothers-elect, the Kavka (jackdaw) '*Ansel*', Anschel, Celan – Cixous's 'name in reverse'.

[32] Tobias, Rochelle, *The Discourse of Nature in the Poetry of Paul Celan* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 1-3

[33] Ibid., 9. Figuration does not mark language's grasp of any reality; rather it constructs the space by which this incapacity to grasp might be marked by time. The poem voices this incapacity.

[34] Adorno, *Notes to Literature Vol. II* [*Noten zur Literatur*, GS 11, 1974], ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Shierry Weber-Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 88

consolation'.[35] The artwork is the 'determinate negation of empirical reality'[36] which can be distinguished from 'the mere positivity of a meaninglessness'.[37] Making this distinction is crucial for how we understand the operations of 'doubling' figuration. But it is also crucial for any aesthetics, and reading, of such figuration. Celan's figures double the world's 'illegibility', rather than disappearing into illegibility themselves. Tobias continues: '[t]he poems push the figures they construct to the point of their collapse, so that they may be revealed as conceits that expose in space the poem's vulnerability and exposure to time.'[38] The exposure of figures to their 'doubled' spacing in the poem exposes that spacing to an internal vulnerability. This exposure is repeated critically in the legibility afforded by those figures.

Snow and glass

This 'unreadable world' modulates into the first poem of cycle II in *Schneepart*.

> The to-be-restuttered world,
> whose guest I
> will have been, a name,
> sweated down the wall,
> up which a wound licks.
>
> Die nachzustotternde Welt,
> bei der ich zu Gast
> gewesen sein werde, ein Name,
> herabgeschwitzt von der Mauer,
> an der eine Wunde hochleckt.[39]

The illegibility of the world where 'everything doubles', whose doubling the poem inhabits, is here a 'stuttering' world after which we (the poem?) stutters. Far from constituting a reality, the poem lags behind it, repeats it in its own stuttering intervals. We should notice, too, the way the poem collapses other Celanian figures together. The 'wound' (*Auch deine | Wunde, Rosa*) that reaches up a 'wall' (the wall into which the ram impacts), and also the guest, the hosting snow, the *Schneetrost* where 'I lose you to you' in 'Die Pole'. The poem stages the

[35] Ibid., 90
[36] Ibid., 89
[37] Ibid., 91
[38] Tobias, *Discourse of Nature*, 12
[39] BIT 334|335

dissolution of its singularity. 'I' will have been a 'name' in this world, insubstantial, repeatable. As Hans-Michael Speier writes, this 'is a lacerated and injured speech that marks/indicates [*kennzeichnet*] a damaged world, in which an "I" must be a guest.'[40] 'I' am not compatible with this world, which incompatibility 'I' witness. The poem's 'I' contradicts the world. The constraints placed on the 'I' are witness to a straitened communicability of the world. This displacement is futural. The world is marked in the future, as where 'I will have been' a guest. The poem is configured by this future displacement.

The 'I', as a name, dissipates into other possible identities to come, other indeterminate names, you. This displacement is hosted by the poem. For Speier, by this displacement of self-identity the poem reaches 'outside' the human. This is the world in its displacement. We read this displacement in the preceding, eponymous poem of the collection: 'Schneepart'. 'Snowpart, arched [*gebäumt*], to the last, | in the updraft, before | the forever dewindowed | huts'.[41] Here, '[o]ne can no longer see out of the dewindowed huts, the door- and windowless reality imparts the image of something not-human. The lyric I of this poem works in isolation, its activity must remain without testimony.'[42] Isolated 'behind glass', the 'I' can only repeat the not-human outside, cannot construct it. In this reversal of subjective autonomy, the 'I', despite its incapacities, must host a stuttering it can only follow. In this it traces a decoupling of aesthetics from 'nature' by 'art'. This 'snowy' outside is marked by the *missing* glass of the windows. There is no transparency, no medium, that could present this world. And yet, we can trace a figurative relation through this disconnection. Glass is a threshold metaphor, here, between the inside and outside. The snow outside, arched like a tree (*gebäumt*), is a crystal form that should be repeated by glass, which is also crystalline. Glass, however, is artful, made. Precisely that construction has been removed here, is lost, 'dewindowed' – precisely that visibility has been removed. And this acts as a meta-figure for figuration. Transparent communication is not adequate, here, to the 'stuttering' relation between 'I' and the 'world'. So there is a negative relation, a repetition of crystallisation: from snow to glass. This repeats the modulation from the 'outside' to the 'inside'. But it is incomplete, here. Glass does not give views on the outside. It does not, then, communicate anything but its own incapacity to communicate. But through this incapacity, there is a gap of legibility into which the poem

[40] Hans-Michael Speier, 'Paul Celan, Dichter einer neuen Wirklichkeit. Studien zu 'Schneepart' (I)', in *Celan-Jahrbuch 1*, ed. by Hans-Michael Speier (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1987), pp. 65-79, 67 (my trans.)

[41] BIT 334|335

[42] Speier, 'Paul Celan', 72

might be read, and into which, therefore, a 'future' and 'you' might enter. It is precisely the nonidentity of each pole of figuration, here, that allows for this entrance. Between 'snow' and 'glass', then, there is a disconnection, a repetition, and yet a figuration. The poem opens up to critical legibility not by symbolically presenting what language otherwise negates (through silences, through gaps), but by proliferating figuration. In this way, the poem acts as a figure for the aesthetic legibility it affords.

ii. 'The passage into the inorganic' – Adorno, Celan, nature

White and green

This figurative 'non-encounter' makes 'un-encountered' world legible to critical reading. This 'non-encounter' organises Adorno's reading of Celan. For Adorno, poetry – Celan's poetry – marks the displacement of the natural world, not its symbolic embodiment or reconciliation with language. Writing is structured by the way it does not encounter the world. This failure is the subject of Celan's 'Conversation in the Mountains'. [43] In the poems I just looked at, this figuration was through snow and glass. Here, those figures are abstracted: white and green.

> Up here the earth has folded over, it's folded once and twice and three times, and opened up in the middle, and in the middle there's some water, and the water is green, and the green is white, and the white comes from further, comes from the glaciers, now you could say but you shouldn't, that that's the kind of speech that counts here, the green with the white in it, a language not for you and not for me — because I'm asking, who is it meant for then, the earth, it's not meant for you, I'm saying, and not for me —, well then, a language with no I and no Thou, pure He, pure It, d'you see, pure They, and nothing but that.[44]

The earth's 'folding over' of time becomes a folding over of pronouns at the end. This is finally no singular dialogue, but 'pure they'. This folding is marked by colours. In water, green and white are confused. The white is from elsewhere, from some glacier, some glacial distance. This a missed conversation in the sense that it depends on a language that traces the past of

[43] See Felstiner, John, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 139 for an account of Celan and Adorno's relationship.

[44] Ibid., 142

something, water. In conversation with something, language is not present to itself. Water takes on colour provisionally. It is green, but also white: not only is it the illusion of light prismatically splitting from white into colour that we call, in language, green, but the water was once, in these mountains, glacially white, ice and snow, suspended in crystals, and will become the organic green of the plants it feeds. Celan's language articulates this history. To be able to call water at once green and white would be to name its history: the white glacier which is its origin and the green grass which is its terminus. This language does not refer to a subjective experience, but to the 'earth'. Language unfolds, neutrally, in a history incompatible with subjective experience. Missed conversation makes possible language operating outside the temporal parameters of conversation.

In 'What sews', from *Schneepart*, there is again this modulation from green to white, and again mediation through snow.

> 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[45]

As in chapter three, voice is here 'sewn' 'beyond', in 'chasms' or 'fissures' (*Abgründe*). This sewing is traced back from 'chasms' to 'White' to 'the snowneedle'. A snowneedle, of course, would melt after sewing, disappear, erase its origin. You are asked to swallow this, to become the passage of this snow and this erasure. This snow has 'sworn', testified for, 'white' in the 'chasms'. 'You' are asked by the poem to internalise, swallow, this witness to displacement, to let it thread/erase through you. This singular modulates into 'euch', 'gewährt euch den Durchzug' | 'grants you passage through', 'you' *plural* are granted passage, threaded by this neutral ground, just as the two 'yous' split in 'Lyons, Les Archers'. Finally,

> a word with all its green

[45] BIT 328|329

enters itself, transplants itself,

follow it

ein wort, mit all seinem Grün,
geht in sich, verpflanzt sich,

folg ihm

The word returns to green from white. Snow is threaded 'through you' when you 'swallow it'; you are instructed to 'follow' the green in its transplantation. This needle-passage has become a 'word', but the 'white' has also translated into 'green'. Just as the glacial white passes into green in the water, the snowneedle passes into a tree in a word. But there is no product from this transplantation. This is a self-transplantation which 'you' are asked merely to follow. In other words, you are displaced by this activity; but by this displacement you have become a kind of witness to it. So the work of testimony (swearing on white) at the start of the poem is 'sewn' by the poem into you as the displacement of you. And this is figured as the displacement of '*du*' into '*euch*', of the singular into the plural. In becoming witness, you become plural. Figuration is here a passage into this displacement of the world.

Adorno – 'inorganic'

As we saw in 'Commitment', Adorno is suspicious of the way aesthetic experience can be appropriated for the domination of nature, when the indeterminacy felt in aesthetic experience becomes an absence where 'meaning' can be determinately imposed. For Adorno, art both articulates and contradicts this aesthetic appropriation.

> The Kantian conception of a teleology of art modeled on that of organisms was rooted in the unity of reason, ultimately in the unity of divine reason as it is manifest in things-in-themselves. This idea had to go. […] The aesthetic concept of teleology has its objectivity in the language of art.[46]

We can no longer connect the teleological experience of nature with the reflective experience of art, because nature is the site of the multiple displacements of the 'natural' by, firstly,

[46] AT 185/210-11

expropriating capitalism and, secondly, mythic conceptions of 'the natural'. Art's indeterminate reflection contradicts these displacements, but in contradiction, such reflection is also complicit with those myths – of reason or of nature. It is only through the 'negative dialectic' of art that such myths can be contradicted. 'By the force of their dialectic, artworks escape myth, the blind and abstractly dominating nexus of nature.'[47] The radical expropriation of aesthetic experience from the subject to the artwork opens the possibility of reversing the subject's domination of nature. And yet, this reversal remains a negative possibility. Art is inextricably bound with reason; its objectification is not just impossible, it is a myth, just as a nature without subjectivity is a myth. 'The further real domination of nature progresses, the more painful it becomes for art to admit the necessity of that progress within itself.'[48]

> Art's affirmative element and the affirmative element of the domination of nature are one in asserting that what was inflicted on nature was all for the good; by re-enacting it in the realm of the imagination, art makes it its own and becomes a song of triumph. […] In doing so, art finds itself in inextricable conflict with the idea of the redemption of suppressed nature.[49]

Art is objectification, and as such is complicit with the procedures of objectification by which nature is dominated. But in art, this pain is legible as pain (the expression of suffering), and the semblance of objectivity is visible.

Art's figurative role in representing nature must be abandoned when nature is exposed as a myth. Its figurative work, for Adorno, must become *negative*. Art thus relinquishes immediacy as a myth, and passes into 'the world of imagery'.

> Art is mimesis of the world of imagery [*Bilderwelt*] and at the same time its enlightenment through forms of control. The world of imagery, itself thoroughly historical, is done an injustice by the fiction of a world of images that effaces the relations in which people live. […] any solution demands the authenticity of a form of experience that does not lay claim to an immediacy it has lost.[50]

Rather than claim immediacy, this 'form' would lay claim to the 'loss' of immediacy. For Adorno, this is the non-presenting work of poetry; Celan's 'anorganic aspect':

> It yearns neither for nature nor for industry, it is precisely the integration of the latter that leads to poeticization, which was already a dimension of impressionism, and contributes its part to

[47] AT 185/211

[48] AT 207/237

[49] AT 210/240

[50] AT 285/324-5

> making peace with an unpeaceful world . Art, as an anticipatory form of reaction, is no longer able – if it ever was – to embody pristine nature or the industry that has scorched it; the impossibility of both is probably the hidden law of aesthetic nonrepresentationalism [*Gegenstandlosigkeit*]. The images of the postindustrial world are those of a corpse[51]

Such art imagines the futurity of nature, a postindustrial nature. Imagery cannot mythically restore any forgotten nature (or the myths of unity that come with that), but neither can they imagine the postindustrial world that has negated that myth. Imagery, in the present, is *impossible,* because unity is impossible. The world is unfigurable. Images persist in imagining this 'corpse': not an impossible image, but a response to the impossibility of imagery. We can reconcile this, I think, with Adorno's utopianism if we read it through Celan's 'presence of the nonpresent' temporality of the poem. The present that must be imagined is the present that defies all imagining. Imagination cannot exceed its present impossibility. But the postindustrial situation must be imagined. The utopia, the future of possible imagination, like the poem's present, is conditioned by impossibility. The image is only possible on this condition: the condition of the corpse, the already negated (and no longer negatable) world.

Discussing Celan's apparently 'hermetic' poetry and its relation to social reality, Adorno describes this mimetic, imaginative work of representing an 'inorganic' topos. By Celan,

> the experiential content of the hermetic was inverted. His poetry is permeated by the shame of art in the face of suffering that escapes both experience and sublimation. Celan's poems want to speak of the most extreme horror through silence. Their truth content itself becomes negative. They imitate a language beneath the helpless language of human beings, indeed beneath all organic language: It is that of the dead speaking of stones and stars. The last rudiments of the organic are liquidated[52]

Here the 'corpse' that Adorno says art imagined 'speaks', speaks of an 'inorganic' landscape. Stars, points of orientation, are spoken to, but have been spoken apart (*dés-astre*). The landscape between this nonspeaking noise and the spoken-out stars is *inorganic* because it cannot be *spoken* to. This is a non-dialogue, with a corpse. But, by reversal, the dead address what does not speak. Adorno continues:

> The language of the lifeless becomes the last possible comfort [*Trost*] for a death that is deprived of all meaning. The passage

[51] AT 285-6/325

[52] AT 405/477

> into the inorganic is to be followed not only in thematic motifs; rather, the trajectory from horror to silence is to be reconstructed in the hermetic works. […] Celan transposes into linguistic processes the increasing abstraction of the landscape, progressively approximating it to the inorganic.[53]

We can recall, at the end of this passage, Adorno's sense of art's 'progressive impossibility' discussed in chapter three. The 'passage', the 'steps', language takes in Celan's work are not towards some reconstructed nature, but towards a reconstructed abstraction of nature. Art here affirms its domination of nature rather than mythically obscuring it. The only exit is not towards an apparently meaningful (but actually exterior, mythical) construction of nature, but towards a reconstruction of the painful process by which nature has become imagined as a corpse, the corpse of unity, of meaning, in which depletion, however, the possibility of futurity, of hope, is minimally reserved. Adherence to the displacement of meaning, to its depletion, makes imagery impossible, but reserves in that impossibility the possibility of 'another way of writing'. Just as snow 'oversnows' abstract beauty, not any landscape, so the figure 'overwords' its own abstraction, not giving any presence except its own figurative abstraction.[54]

iii. Blanchot – 'unfigurable universe'

Figures behind glass

In Blanchot's *The Step Not Beyond*, like Celan's *Schneepart*, 'glass' configures a relation to the outside which reverses a subjective capacity to positively think about what is outside subjectivity. And for Blanchot, too, this configuration exposes the 'I' to an objective plurality with which it is incompatible.

> *On the threshold, coming from the outside perhaps, the two young names like two figures behind the glass about whom we could not say for sure whether they are inside or outside, since no one, except the two figures, who expect everything from us, could say where we are.*[55]

[53] AT 405-6/477

[54] 'Words drifting on words. | The real unabstract snow'. 'Überschneit | die Schönheit.'

[55] SNB 100/138

Any location of 'us' is displaced from us, 'coming from the outside', from 'two figures' in dialogue. But like Celan's 'dewindowed | huts', glass is a threshold space here, already in dialogue with itself. Figuration becomes a condition of reading, a threshold space which both enjoins and prohibits an 'image' and a 'reading'. Images proliferate, indeterminately. By such proliferation of imagery, in 1966 Michel Foucault described Blanchot's writing in similar terms: 'one is outside the outside, which is never figured, only incessantly hinted at by the whiteness of its absence, the pallor of an abstract memory, or at most by the glint of snow through a window'.[56] Yet, we have to be careful of such felicity. If we are to think of this proliferation, it has to be through the straitening conditions of interruption by which that proliferation is possible. This means responding to figuration as reflection. 'To die: the reflection in the mirror perhaps, the mirroring of an absence of figure'.[57] If there is responsiveness, reflection, it is coordinated by this exteriority: the exteriority of nature as a 'corpse' that marked Adorno's reading of nature.

This exteriority marks an injunction against 'hopeful' reading, which can be connected with Adorno's prohibition on the 'image' of nature and Celan's figural outside.

> Do not count on death – on your own or universal death – to found anything whatsoever, even the reality of this death. For it is so uncertain and so unreal that it always fades away ahead of time, and with it whatever declares it.[58]

This fragment on Celan first appeared in 1977, later published in *The Writing of the Disaster*. As we saw in chapter two, Blanchot's thinking here revolves around the suicide of this 'anonymous friend', Celan, from 'The Last to Speak' (1972/1983) to *The Step Not Beyond* (1973) and *The Writing of the Disaster* (1980).[59] Blanchot was also responding, 'after 1971',[60] as Leslie Hill writes, to the 'impossibility' and 'necessity' of remembering Auschwitz, a double relation made thinkable in the unavowable political relation without relation encountered in May '68. But this is also a singular response to Celan's singular death. And yet, Blanchot's writing on Celan seems to enjoin us, like this fragment, not to make a meaning of 'death', not to elegise Celan. Responding to Celan means responding to death as 'impossible', as not present, depleted. As Christophe Bident puts it, this invokes translation, a 'friendship

[56] Foucault, Michel, 'Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside', trans. by Brian Massumi, in *Foucault Blanchot* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 1987), pp. 7-60, 29

[57] SNB 94/130

[58] WD 90-2/143

[59] See Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary*, n.295 for this bibliographic information.

[60] Ibid., 209-221; linked explicitly, by Hill, also to Adorno's double injunction, 220

alternately convergent and divergent of two languages'[61] – French, German and, here, a third, English. Celan's death demands response, while precluding it; asks for response to the poetry, not the man, asks for an elegiac reading of the poetry, withdraws death from the experience. How might we respond to death 'that fades away ahead of time', that is 'unreal'?

This fragment from *The Writing of the Disaster* follows a quote from Celan's *Meridian* speech: '"*Poetry, ladies and gentlemen: an expression of infinitude, an expression of vain death and mere Nothing* [La poésie, mesdames, messieurs: une parole d'infinie, parole de la mort vaine et du seul Rien]."'[62] Celan: 'Die Dichtung, meine Damen und Herren –: diese Unendlichsprechung von lauter Sterblichkeit und Umsonst!', 'Poetry, ladies and gentlemen: this infinity-speaking full of mortality and to no purpose!'.[63] Interpreting Celan, elegising Celan, means translating Celan. And that means responding to the difficulties of 'translating' presence. Indeed, these difficulties are amplified in this critical elegy as translation. Blanchot responds to two demands: not to transcend what he reads, and yet still to interpret it in this suspension of transcendence. His injunction is against critical transcendence, against finding in the 'image of the corpse' any opportunity to transform that death for meaning. Death recedes, repeatedly displaces the future from which it approaches, and criticism – subject to this work of death itself, proceeding by negating what it reads – must adhere to and imagine this form of recession.

The snowbed

This 'expression of infinitude, expression of nothing', Blanchot continues, go together, 'but without agreement'.[64] This is coincidence without identity, contradiction. Blanchot maintains the two poles together, but distinct, against their transcendence. So Celan relates 'the final nothingness which nevertheless occupies the same plane (without either preceding or succeeding it), as the expression which comes from the infinite, wherein the infinite gives itself and resounds infinitely.'[65] Death interrupts the present, interrupting negation. And the figure

[61] Ibid., 503

[62] As Leslie Hill points out, Blanchot's own translation of Celan's line departs significantly from previous attempts (including Ann Smock's translation of Blanchot's translation): Hill, Leslie, '"Distrust of Poetry": Levinas, Blanchot, Celan, in *MLN*, 120:5 (2005), pp. 986-1008, 996-1000

[63] Celan, *Meridian*, 11/11

[64] WD 91/144

[65] WD 91/144

interrupts presence, interrupting presentation. In his more substantial elegiac essay, 'The Last to Speak', Blanchot again reads this through snow in the earlier poem 'Schneebett', from *Sprachgitter* (1959). The poem's words scatter through Blanchot's essay, which offers facing pages of his own translations. The 'we' with which the poem ends – 'We were. We are.', 'In the passages, passages'[66] – is marked out as a critical measure by which the poem is read 'together' with criticism. The fragmentation of imagery marks out this 'we' by which, displaced, the poem is read. This is the poem's 'snowy' work of figuration, reflecting snow: 'crystal on crystal', crystallisation repeated, reflecting itself, proliferating. Snow offers a form, internalises a form, for thinking its repetition in critical reading. It is not just snow but 'we' who fall, 'crystal on crystal', 'time-deep', 'we fall' and then fall again even as we stay, the 'snow-bed' which is 'under us' but which is also us, falling through time's deepening 'mesh'. 'We' are not only figured by snow, the figuration is the process by which we make a 'bed', a foundation, for ourselves; and this dual role of figuration means it also disrupts itself, so that 'we fall and lie there and fall' at the same time. Or not precisely at the same time, but in the repetition of crystal on crystal, falling on falling. 'And fall'. This is a relation between 'us both'. And the poem finds its poetic repetition, too, in 'Die Pole'. The 'bed' where, in that poem, we 'lay' together 'free' is like this 'snow-bed', 'crystal on crystal', the 'we' who fall on that foundation, in this poem, are the 'we' said 'without us', when 'I lose you to you, that | is my snowcomfort'.

The question remains of how this loss might configure futurity outside presence. If we adhere to Blanchot's enjoinment in *The Step Not Beyond* 'not to hope' that we might find coherence in 'writing that disunifies', then we must understand his attention to poetry as itself a paradoxical intervention against 'hope' and thinking of the future by thought which is itself oriented by futurity. So Blanchot asks:

> Can one say then that poetic assertion, in Paul Celan (always perhaps distanced from hope as it is distanced from truth — but always in motion toward both) still leaves something, if not to hope for, then to think about, through brief phrases that suddenly illumine, even after everything has sunk into darkness […].[67]

The reading circles around this response to assertion of what remains un-illuminated, non-present. For Celan, this is a movement, something that happens over time: the poem

[66] Celan, *Poems of Paul Celan*, 96|97

[67] Blanchot, Maurice, *A Voice From Elsewhere*, trans. by Charlotte Mandell (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 77

immediately moves us 'towards' blindness. Transcendence is turned outside into transgression. 'The outside: there where eyes are focused — eyes detached from the person, eyes one could think are solitary and impersonal'.[68] This bodily transgression (eyes without any person to see) is a transgression of conceptual function. Eyes turned outside are turned towards this dispersal of function. Turning to the outside has to be imagined from behind this dispersal of imagination:

> would speaking be staying behind the bars — the bars of a prison — through which the freedom on the outside is promised (or refused) […] or might speaking instead be thinking oneself provided with these bars, which makes one hope there might be something to decipher and, thence, to enclose oneself again in the illusion that meaning or truth might be free, over there, in the landscape where *the trace does not deceive*? But, just as writing is read in the form of a thing, of the outside of a thing condensing into such or such a thing, not to designate it, but to be written there […] isn't the outside also read as a writing, writing without a link, always already outside itself?[69]

The disconnections of writing reflect back into reading. Reading is reversed: no longer responding to the 'landscape where *the trace does not deceive*', reading can, in reading *writing*, only respond to the disconnections to which it is subjected in this relation. Reading here does not secure the operations by which it can simultaneously construct the truth it finds 'outside' itself (recall here Adorno's 'tower' of subjectivity, the wall of the real). Writing always displaces presence, its own first of all. Hope has to be drawn across this gap. In writing, the trace always deceives, always erases itself. But it is also always written in this outside, which for Blanchot is curiously material: writing is 'in the form of a thing, of the outside of a thing'. Writing is material, therefore, outside the deception of presence, because radically inside its presentation: it inhabits the hope that language might not deceive by deceiving.

> The relationship with the outside, never already given, attempt at movement or progress, relationship without attachments and without roots — this is not just indicated by the empty transcendence of empty eyes, but asserted explicitly by Paul Celan in his prose fragments as his possibility: to speak with things[70]

[68] Ibid., 63

[69] Ibid., 59

[70] Ibid., 67-8

The ‘possibility’ of speaking with things depends on this outside, this impossible space of identity. We cannot speak with things, only figure speaking with them. Illumination here fascinates, suspends, what it illumines.

> Come, even if it’s nowhere, only there where — in the fissures-crevasses of dying — the incessant light (which does not illumine) fascinates.[71]

An incessant, repetitive light; a negative landscape which is not just nowhere but the place of ‘fascination’, of suspension of place. An ‘inorganic’ landscape, perhaps, not organised by unity but by ‘fissures’ of repetition, outside the transcendental surety of unity, but radically inside writing, not transcending it.

> Not one single rift or fissure, but an indefinite succession — series — of crevasses, something that opens up, always already closed again, and not the gaping of the abyss where one would only have to slide into the immense, unfathomable void, but rather those clefts or fissures whose narrow constraint, the narrowness of failing, seizes us, by an impossible breaking through, without allowing us to plummet in a freefall, even if it is eternal: that perhaps is dying, the hard growth in the heart of dying[72]

Reading is exposed to this seriality of fissure, a seriality of loss. Reading responds not to death but to dying, to the disconnection from death as an experience. What is ‘experienced’ in writing is this indeterminate relation to dying, a repeated induction into what escapes and yet demands experience.

Unfigurable universe

As Anne-Lise Nordholt Schulste points out, Blanchot’s ‘outside’ of language is literature in so far as literature is the real, the world, under *figuration*. The ‘world’ is the ‘real in so far as it has become objectified, mediated, transformed in the dialectic of work, knowledge and discourse’.[73] Literature ‘mediates’ the real into a world. ‘The world’ is not the same as ‘the real’ because the world is already mediated by language. Literature, then, presents another space: it presents mediation itself, the world in ‘figuration’. Literature is the movement of what is outside language. It is figurative because its ends are ‘outside’ the world and therefore

[71] Ibid., 85

[72] Ibid., 85

[73] Schulte Nordholt, Anne-Lise, *Maurice Blanchot: L’écriture comme expérience du dehors* (Droz: Geneva, 1995), 113 (my trans.)

'outside' determination. They do not refer to the 'real', but to its mediation. But there is no world without mediation. And, in literature, there is therefore no world without figuration: without the uncertain, indeterminate mediation of a real which is necessarily 'outside' that mediation. Such figurative leaps are necessary for experience. Without mediation experience would be impossible. So literature establishes both the possibility of our 'experience' of the world and the impossibility of our 'encountering' it in language.

We are compelled then to respond to the world in its impossibility. Blanchot calls such a world the 'unfigurable Universe (a term henceforth deceptive; a Universe escaping every optical exigency and also escaping consideration of the whole – essentially non-finite, disunited, discontinuous.'[74] Will humanity, Blanchot asks,

> ever be ready to receive such a thought, a thought that, freeing him from the fascination with unity, for the first time risks summoning him to take the measure of an exteriority that is not divine, of a space entirely in question, and even excluding the possibility of an answer, since every response would necessarily fall anew under the jurisdiction of the figure of figures? […] That is, finally, is he capable of literature, if literature turns aside and toward [se detourne vers] this absence of a book?

The world outside transcendent security, outside illumination, the world 'fascinated', suspended in its own non-transcendence: the world which resists address (resists questioning) as much as figuration. The question of the possibility of literature turns into a question of the possibility of the world as figurable; and so the question of the *impossibility* of literature turns into a question about the world as 'unfigurable'. If, for Kant, 'beauty' marks the world's final figurability, even as indeterminate, even as it escapes our understanding, then for Blanchot, writing marks the world's unfigurability, and this marks its escape from legality, its reserve of futurity. Responding to the world as indeterminate, Blanchot suggests, means transfiguring the subject, changing what we call human, displacing our sense of subjectivity, not reinforcing it. The fate of aesthetic experience, here, is to be reversed, to mark unfigurability, but to preserve in that reversal the hopes that conditioned aesthetic judgement: the hopes for relation, for the political, for the future.

Reaching through Celan's poems, serially, we find a serial relation of images that do not meet, or connect, but nonetheless repeat one another. Such writing hosts an experience of displacement. In 'Die Pole', in the compound '*Schneetrost*', 'snow' does not meaningfully add

[74] IC 350/514

to ‘comfort’. They are thought together, in their polarity. Each word reaches for the other, just as ‘I lose you to you’. ‘Safety’, ‘confidence’, ‘comfort’ – *trost* – is brought together with snow. Snow is to host me, snow is to be my comfort. I am to reflectively put myself into snow, make myself into a snowfigure, a ‘Schneepart’, ‘Snowpart’,[75] ‘Lösspuppen’, ‘Loessdolls’,[76] naturally formed stone-figures that resemble people. Snow, stone, natural forms, form places to be, but places of displacement: apparently natural forms that crystallise independently of us, but which draw ‘us’ together, form places for hosting. In the ‘world to be stuttered after’, the ‘to-be-restuttered world’, the world whose stuttering the poem imitates, follows, the ‘hosting’ which words can effect is like the ‘hosting’ of things by snow. It is crystalline, singular, but provisional. ‘Snow’ does not meet or disappear into ‘comfort’, then, but depletes it in matching it; no snow, no comfort, just a figure for how ‘I lose you to you’. The words remain outside one another, lost to one another. They are related like a guest to a host in their unfamiliarity and provisionality. Snow is a provisional form. Figures, like snow, hold that provisionality of meaning as their form. The figure, like snow, can hold to the seriality of this repetition in difference because it is formed by provisionality. Related not to the natural world, but to the world ‘oversnowed’, to the non-organic proliferation of the world in its snowy, crystalline form, repeated and serialised in the poem that mimics that snow, that serialisation, and not the world. A figure, then, which covers, like ‘oversnowed | beauty’, something uncertain, impossible to judge or to name, but nonetheless felt. This is the aesthetic that does not ‘aestheticise’ nature, that does not take from nature a form of natural figuration, meaningful formation, but nonetheless relates to what is present as a form of displacement – and thereby a form of hope: a place where, in my displacement, ‘you’ might come, a place where the displacements of determinate meaning, of presence, become minimally hopeful sites of ‘my’ reversal for you.

2 – Over and over: the elegiac aesthetic

[75] BIT 334|335

[76] BIT 376|377

Discussing Geoffrey Hill, Angela Leighton characterises elegy as a genre open to its fictiveness. Elegy

> may simply be a 'fiction', playing up, as all literature does, the disparities of form and content […]. Rather than a work of mourning […] elegy might be defined as a work of losing, in which language replicates the loss that gives rise to it.[77]

For Hill himself, the question of 'truth' in elegy is pitched through faith, faithfulness. Because its object is missing, the elegy works at a threshold. It cannot affirm its object, yet it persists in affirming itself. Just as the elegy is open to the way it loses its object, 'it is not faithless | to stand without faith'.[78] Language replicates loss, and elegy affirms this replication. As Hill's fictional poet Arrurruz writes, 'I piece fragments together, past conjecture | establishing true sequences of pain'.[79] These 'true sequences' are masks which offer a form in which pain can be felt. Faced with non-presence, elegy addresses a mask. The elegy is a form of repetition, then, and hopeful that it can sufficiently repeat what it loses – but it is exposed to losing repetition, too, to a repetition of loss in fragmentation. In this section, I do not want only to look at the ways elegy gives form to 'loss', but also at the ways elegy thinks through the loss experienced in aesthetics. And the specific elegies of Celan are also translations. As we saw in the last section, Celan's 'figures' are configured by a future presence that is lost to a poetic present, but which nonetheless remains the displaced, futural condition for that poetic present. My claim is that we can read the reflective loss that characterises aesthetic experience through the way Celan's figurative work is itself translated. Again, this is focused around the image of snow. The displacement to which such figuration is subject, in Celan, is translated (displaced) in his elegists. The elegy, however, thereby reserves the legibility of a non-manifest future that works through Celan's figures. And the work of Blanchot's and Adorno's criticism becomes legibly elegiac, here, too, as a reflection not on loss, but on reflection's losses.

i. 'And again I am too late. Too late': Geoffrey Hill and elegy

'Tristia: 1891-1938, *A Velediction to Osip Mandelstam*', in *King Log* (1968), from which I take my subtitle, is an elegy by Geoffrey Hill for the poet Celan elegised repeatedly in translations himself. The elegist is always 'again too late'. But that does not mean that the elegy recuperates

[77] Leighton, *On Form*, 222
[78] Hill, Geoffrey, *Broken Hierarchies: Poems 1952-2012*, ed. by Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 179
[79] Ibid., 69

the loss it follows. Speaking from the 'future' beyond the elegised subject, the poem speaks backwards, addresses what it loses. But it also thereby loses the present from which it speaks. Hill's elegies reproduce this question of 'elegising elegy', this exilic question that expropriates the mournful work of elegy from itself, makes it workless. In 'Tristia', 'Images rear from desolation | like ruins upon a plain.' Images 'rear' out of a desolate landscape, coming back out of it, in reverse: like ruins appearing, rather than degrading. Images appear, in this topos, 'again' 'too late'. After addressing the subject, 'Difficult friend', the poem addresses itself. The poem is 'too late' for Mandelstam, so what kind of friendship could it offer other than the image of friendship, and what would these images be but ready-made ruins? How can the poem elegise (never mind the elegist) its own form?

> Tragedy takes all under regard.
> It will not touch us but it is there –
> Flawless, insatiate – hard summer sky
> Feasting on this, reaching its own end.[80]

'Tragedy' is, formally, 'catastrophe': the dramatic moment when narrative is vertiginously played back under the 'regard' of catastrophe, etymologically a 'turning back', a 'down turn', a reversal. And this reversal, felt 'too late', disrupts the poet's address to the (poet) he elegises: it will not touch '*us*', both elegist and dead; we are together under this 'hard' sky that gives us nothing, that goes on without us to 'its own end'. This is to dramatise the way such transcendence can leave us behind: the way an elegy, which reaches so fitfully back to the past, can turn out to propose a future of its own transcendent capacity to 'reach'. Hill resists this, but this resistance leaves the poem rather disabled. Under the tragic regard of the poem's elegiac work, 'I' and the 'friend' are left behind.

If elegy can only ever repeat a loss, and so only present a kind of absence, then this elegy elegises elegy itself, elegises that repetition of loss, that repetition from loss. In Hill's elegy to Celan, 'Two Chorale-Preludes: On Melodies by Paul Celan', collected in *Tenebrae* (1978), this results in distancing, as well as a certain mimesis – which is to say, an elegiac mimetic activity, a repetition or reproduction of distancing. So, initially, the poem claims to modulate 'melody' rather than any material content, 'Es ist ein Land verloren'[81] in the first poem, 'Wir gehen dir, Heimat, ins Garn' in the second. But this melodic, formal repetition bleeds into the determinate content of the poems. '1 Ave Regina Coelorum' opens thus:

[80] Ibid., 58
[81] The first from 'Eis, Eden', the second 'Kermorvan', Celan, *Poems of Paul Celan,* 150|151; 180|181

There is a land called Lost
at peace inside our heads.
The moon, full on the frost,
vivifies these stone heads.

Hill's translation of 'Es ist ein Land Verloren' differs from Hamburger's 'There is a country Lost'. Who 'calls' to this land, for Hill, and why interpolate this 'calling' into the translation? It departs, even, from Celan's feminine ending by stressing the monosyllabic '*Lost*' against Celan's 'Ver*lor*en'. And Hill interpolates, too, 'these stone heads' into Celan's frost, his 'Mond im Ried', moon in the reeds. And more startlingly, Hill brings this landscape 'inside our heads'. Celan's poem continues by repeatedly claiming that this 'Land' 'sees': 'It sees, it sees, we see, | I see you, you see me'. In all this reflective work, 'we' is both formed by 'it' seeing, and undone again into 'I' and 'you'. This is finally 'ice' rising from the dead, a crystalline frost emerging from a dead landscape into the shapes of these pronouns. In Celan's poem, the landscape withdraws from us, setting its own reflective work in our stead. In Hill's elegiac translation, this work has been internalised, brought 'inside our heads', but also addressed, 'called' to, objectified, made into 'stone heads' like graves. Celan's anonymous elegy, where anonymity is elegised in the landscape, is repeated in Hill's attempt to mark that landscape, to bring it inside, to 'vivify' 'these stone heads' with the crystal forms of Celan's words. Elegy becomes an opportunity to take on Celan's poetic work, not just to memorialise it, or to repeat it faithfully: it is repeated but different, newly generative of a different relation, yet still elegiac. This is repeated, again, in the poem's double: '2 Te Lucis Ante Terminum', which opens:

Centaury with your staunch bloom
you there alder beech you fern,
midsummer closeness my far home,
fresh traces of lost origin.

In both cases, the poem is resisting what it writes about, compacting it into condensed oppositions. But rather than staging progress, figurative transition from the sign of the metaphor to its referent, the poem stalls at precisely these points of movement. The moon 'vivifies' stone, bringing stone to nocturnal life; and specifically vivifies 'stone heads', rhyming too fully with the 'heads' which this land 'Lost' is inside (and implying, in repetition, the absent rhyme: dead). The heads' stony exterior, disclosed by an external landscape (moon on frost), discloses an empty landscape inside. The 'loss' is internal to the landscape, and this is what the 'external' moon shines upon: empty stone heads, loss brought to life. In the second

poem, the 'Heimat' to which we (you) thread (*ins Garn*) or go is biologically strange, strangely vivified: the 'Centaury' the centaur like flower, weirdly humanised, or the 'you' and 'you' of beech alder and fern. All this vivification discloses is an uncanny closeness of distance: 'midsummer closeness my far home, | fresh traces of lost origin.' The poem, that is to say, brings loss to life, brings distance home, brings a 'far home' close (stickily, humidly, biologically close: too close, inside) only to disclose traces of that loss. We cannot trace back anywhere because home is already too close; and yet traces are disclosed, paths opened up only to the 'land called Lost' we are already in, which is already 'inside our heads'.

My contention here is that Celan does not here merely become the conveniently emptied (melodic) elegiac site for yet more peaceful elegiac work, but rather that Celan's poetics infect Hill's elegiac capabilities. If Celan's poetics repeat repetition, moving only from outside to outside, here Hill's elegy, with all of its classical elegiac markers (the decking flowers, the elegiac stanzas in long metre), is itself elegiacally reversed. Celan does not just provide one more empty prompt for monuments. Rather, repetition of that 'loss' interrupts the elegiac work, sending it off in tangents against itself, disorientating it. Flowers and plants do not deck the corpse; they bloom autonomously and must be addressed in place of any person. The homeland is not lost and to be returned to; it is lost but already here, and not just here but inside us, inside our heads. Stony monuments do not speak grave epitaphs of remembrance, bringing another's memory to life; they are brought to life themselves, the stone heads full with no land, with loss. As John E. Jackson points out, Celan is himself engaged in this elegiac over-determination of imagery. In 'Huhebildu', Jackson argues, Celan's interpolation of Verlaine's 'Ah, quand refleuriront les roses de septembre!', as 'O quant refleuriront, o roses, vos septembre', radicalises the history of the quote. While Verlaine asks (ironically enough) when roses will have their time to bloom again,

> Celan's permutation of september and of the roses inverts that natural order, or rather breaks it, and creates thereby a diachronical relation not only between the two quotations, but also between the two orders implied by these citations: we are thus invited to understand, I believe, that the historical order in which Celan is writing bears an inverted relationship to the order in which Verlaine wrote.[82]

[82] Jackson, John E., 'Paul Celan's Poetics of Quotation', in *Argumentum e Silentio: International Paul Celan Symposium*, ed. by Amy D. Colin (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), pp. 214-222, 215

Verlaine is memorialising Rimbaud, poet remembering poet. But we can also see Celan's repetition with difference as elegiac: the 'ah' becoming an elegiac (and apostrophic) 'o',[83] and no longer do we ask when the 'roses of september' will 're-flower', but when will the roses' 'September' re-flower, when will their repeatability return, come back again? (*Auch deine Wunde, Rosa*). This is not an 'inversion' of natural order. The very repeatability of quotation disturbs its natural order, its temporal present. And this disturbance amplifies and exposes the disturbance of figuration, which connects one thing with another. Derrida attributes to this the 'madness' of dates. 'One awaits less the return of the flowers, their blossoming to come, than the re-flowering of returns. […] What counts, what is born, flowers, opens, is not the flower, it is the date. It counts, and *September*, moreover, includes a cipher, a number, rather, in its name.'[84] Recall the simulation of 'Frankfurt, September'. Flowers simulate their September. Flowers 'mean' September, which 'means' the return of flowers, the numerousness of flowers. The organic, ciphered in 'September', addressed in Verlaine's 'septembre', is numbered but excessively repeats, returns in its organic loss. As Helmut Müller-Sievers argues, this time about the interpolation of Büchner's 'Es lebe der König!', 'Long live the King!', from *Danton's Tod*, as the 'counter-word' of Celan's *Meridian*, quotation is, 'at the same time, metaphor and metonymy, figurative and literal expression, and it thus disorients permanently the desire to identify meaning and intention'.[85] Such disorientation, as Derrida might say, 'madly', resists interpretation. 'The slogan is the opposite of a shibboleth: nothing in its utterance shows whether it "belongs" to the speaker, and no philology can tie it to a speaker's intention.'[86] And for Fynsk: '[t]he "step back" in and from Büchner's text liberates the possibility of self-citation and the poetic naming of this movement of self-situation which the speech has described.'[87] Quotation exposes figuration to its disorientating work; and this disorientating work is, here, the work of elegy: a repetition of elegiac topes that interrupt the mournful work of elegy by disengaging them from the apparently determinate but actually indeterminate 'you' to whom they hope to refer. Figuration, like translation, like elegy, *displaces* its object, such that it becomes autonomously detached from the discourse it apparently secures.

---

[83] The 'O', for example, of Shelley's *Adonais*, which replaces the 'I' who weeps: 'I weep for Adonais – he is dead! | O, weep for Adonais!' ll. 1-2 – Adonais being the simulate-Keats remembered in the poem. Shelley, Percy Bysshe, *The Major Works*, ed. by Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 529-545

[84] Derrida, 'Shibboleth', 37

[85] Müller-Sievers, Helmut, 'On the Way to Quotation: Paul Celan's "Meridian" Speech', in *New German Critique*, 91 (2004), pp. 131-149, 138

[86] Ibid., 140

[87] Fynsk, 'The Realities at Stake in a Poem', 165-6

We can see this literalised, again, by Hill in his elegy 'September Song'. Again, this is mediated generically, through tradition. But again, it interpolates itself, interrupts, into the tradition it invokes. As he will later affirm in *The Orchards of Syon*, referring to Milton's elegy 'Lycidas', 'Now there is no due season, do not | mourn unduly'.[88] In 'Lycidas', 'Yet once more' Milton 'plucks' the berries before they are due to 'disturb' their 'due season',[89] excessively returning, coming both too early and too late, coming again. Again, he returns to a pastoral idyll in which space he might figure Lycidas who is dead. Lycidas's due season is interrupted by his death, and so the poet must interrupt the pastoral before it (and he) is ready; but by the poem's close we are returned to the 'due season'. The interruption is unseasonal, but due. The debt established by Lycidas's death can be credited by returning it to that seasonal progress. Just so, even though: 'Now thou art gone, and never must return!', the dead friend King can be credited in the figure of Lycidas. The poem is the work of reconciling an absent future with the plenitude of a suddenly remembered past, in order to be able to imagine a Lycidas who 'is not dead'. But for Hill, this ambivalence of 'undueness' is elegiac itself. We are enjoined, across the line break, both not to and to 'mourn unduly' because there is no proper time for mourning except all the time. And if there is no proper time for mourning, no 'due season', then, as in the elegies for Celan, there is no proper 'Land', no proper place. The dislocations of space in the 'Chorale-Preludes' are responsive to this dislocation of elegiac time, of the incapacity of elegy now to provide its own time for mourning as Milton once did. We are enjoined, by Hill, both to mourn and not to mourn this loss of 'due season': 'do not | mourn'. Elegy must work this ambivalence, both mourning and refusing to mourn, and both mourning and refusing to mourn the blows to its memorial capacities that this ambivalence marks. This is the elegiac distinction between organic, cyclical, repetitive time and monumental, eternal time. But in Hill's poem this distinction blurs: the monumental becomes repetitive, the organic weirdly eternal, revivified, fateful. We can read the 'September' (Celan's and Verlaine's, too) of the elegy 'September Song', from *King Log*, through this interruption of temporality, of 'due season'. In the sonnet's parenthetical centre, Hill interrupts his stringent refusal to name any victim by naming himself, the poet:

> (I have made
> an elegy for myself it

[88] Hill, *Broken Hierarchies*, 351
[89] Milton, John, *John Milton: The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Orgell and Jonathan Goldgern (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 39

is true.) [90]

'I' am also 'made' here, tentatively, from this elegy. But Hill breaks the copula 'is' from 'it', a hesitation even to affirm the truth of this construction. It is true, I have made an elegy only for myself, but the truth of this interrupts even my capacity to affirm it. It is an elegiac truth, self-interrupting, self-displacing. Elegiac faithfulness is truth to the dead, lingering with loss. But this poem balks at lingering, even as it hesitates. The time of the elegy is manifestly separate from the time of the death it elegises, so why does that death keep coming back, why, if the elegy works truly to mourn, would 'September fattens on vines. Roses | flake from the walls'? Here, as with Celan, the poem figures 'September', rather than the roses: September, not roses, 'fattens on vines'. This is 'plenty' indeed, 'more than enough', an excessive return, the grossly repetitive consolation of ordinary continuity. The monumental elegy finally gives way to the organic flowers peeling away from life, and the elegy for 'myself' is in turn displaced. 'I' give way to 'you' in my hesitation to distance myself from you, to say that this elegy is for me.

Here we might return to 'Tristia', the 'valediction' for a (signed but not named) Osip Mandelstam.

> Difficult friend, I would have preferred
> You to them. The dead keep their sealed lives
> And again I am too late. Too late
> The salutes, dust-clouds and brazen cries.[91]

Like Milton, 'I am too late', but here this lateness is not succeeded by the poetic work of restoring due seasons, restoring time. Rather, lateness gives way to more lateness, 'I am too late. Too late'. The problem is that 'you' do not poetically disappear enough. I am too late for you, but that means you exceed me, do not return, are not remembered (re-membered). 'And again', I am left in the repetition of elegy. In the 'Chorale-Preludes', elegy is a "kind | of otherness', 'self understood', my self, my internal space, giving way not specifically to you, but to an outside in which the 'truth' of that internal spacing is under question even as it is externalised. I make an elegy, and surely it can only comfort me, but then where am I if I am elegised if not subsumed somehow into my own monument? Here we might recall the image of Shelley, the elegist, decked in flowers in 'Adonais'[92] as instructive for this internalisation of

[90] Ibid., 44
[91] Ibid., 58
[92] These are 'like flowers that mock the corse beneath', l.17; the 'Rose' repeated six times, hiding the flower in the verb of the 'rising' immortal poets – all this becoming an uncanny elegy for Shelley himself, who at

dislocation: in place of any body to mourn, the elegist mourns himself; but this displacement replaces the re-membering work of elegiac identification with an internalisation of non-identity. If I can only elegise myself, then I am suddenly, in the elegy, dismembered, not identical with myself, outside.

This bleeding of dislocation also affects the 'Chorale' prayer form of the songs. Both are sung at Compline, in the last hours of the day. So the 'Te Lucis Ante Terminum', is the prayer 'To you before the end of day'. 'Terminum' is at the same time any abstract limit, terminus, border. To you before the boundary, you, the light (*Te lucis*) before the boundary. This is a meridian. In Hill's poem, as the title, it marks the limit between Celan's melodic introduction and Hill's poetic response. There is an equivocation here. On the one hand, with Celan, the poem hesitates after the work's completion, hesitates to carry on working/writing after the day has happened; but on the other, after Celan, the poem hesitates at the boundary of Celan's own poetry, the too-close 'far home' of his untranslatable (untranslated) verse. Hill hesitates either to affirm or to deny his elegiac capacities and responsibilities, but also hesitates even to affirm Celan's presence in the poem. The poem, then, is at a kind of limit, of a kind of limit, and this threshold status carries into the poem itself: a homeland which is present/distant, the second stanza's half-rhyme of 'cleft' with 'graft', working through a cleft, a separation, 'working' as a repetition of 'clefting'. This is perhaps the poem's 'immortal transience', the repetition of transience, its immortal, eternal limit which repeats endlessly. Transience, in this anti-pastoral elegy, is immortal, vegetable life blooming and stifling at once. The hymn asks for protection in the night, after that boundary of the day is crossed, asks for protection in the unknown, and Hill's poem closes with such rousing faithfulness, 'BE FAITHFUL grows upon the mind | as lichen glimmers on the wood'. The poem seems to close with a resolution: the equivocations over how to be 'faithful' to the elegiac subject (Celan) resolve. The mind that was 'peaceful' but 'lost' inside now peacefully blooms with the vegetable life that seemed so threateningly 'outside' yet pressing. But this faithfulness, abstract-organic, is doubly distanced, doubly 'other' to the mind: both as something that exceeds the mind, grows upon it not in it, and in its figural relation to 'lichen', one organism growing infectiously upon another. Intellection becomes organic, the mind figuratively like wood. Faith is parasitic, grafted on.

The poem challenges the organic connections it presents, much like Celan challenged the apparent organicism of nature and natural landscape by imagining a future, 'postindustrial'

---

the end of the poem assumes the place of Adonais, whose soul is henceforth 'like a star' l.494: eternal, transcended away but weirdly present in the mortal poet.

nature, Adorno's 'inorganic'. For Celan and Hill both, this is a process of crystallisation. Both can be read through, against, Kant's account of crystallisation in nature as a point of connection between organic nature and organically orientated judgement, between the reflections of beauty and teleology:

> nature displays everywhere in its free formations so much mechanical tendency to the generation of forms that seem as if they have been made for the aesthetic use of our power of judgment without giving us the slightest ground to suspect that it requires for this anything more than its mechanism, merely as nature, by means of which it can be purposive for our judging even as without being based on any idea. By a **free formation** of nature, however, I understand that by which, from a **fluid at rest**, as a result of the evaporation or separation of a part of it (sometimes merely of the caloric), the rest assumes upon solidification a determinate shape or fabric (figure or texture) which, where there is a specific difference in the matter, is different, but if the matter is the same is exactly the same.[93]

Kant finds a form of judgement in nature. But this crystallisation is the figurative proliferation of natural forms. This is natural transformation, where matter seems to form figures (ice crystals, for example) by a 'leap'. This 'leap' is a separation. 'Caloric' is not, for eighteenth century science, simply 'energy' but a substance itself. Transformation marks a substantial loss. Crystallisation is here elegiac: it is a transformative separation. This is what happens to produce snow crystals.

> The formation in such a case takes place through **precipitation**, i.e., through a sudden solidification, not through a gradual transition from the fluid to the solid state, but as it were through a leap, which transition is also called **crystallization**. The most common example of this sort of formation is freezing water, in which straight raylets of ice form first, which then join together at angles of 60 degrees, to which others attach themselves at every point in exactly the same way, until everything has turned to ice […].[94]

Ice, like elegy, is a crystalline autonomous production by separation. There is no objective cause but loss. There is no end 'until everything has turned to ice'. The organic growths of Hill's metaphors are crystalline. Where 'BE FAITHFUL grows upon the mind | as lichen

[93] CJ, 222, 5: 348
[94] CJ, 222-3, 5: 348

glimmers on the wood', we are in precisely this kind of crystallisation (notice the modulation from 'growing' to crystalline 'glimmering'). If the elegy is a spontaneous crystallisation, an organic and productive leap, then it is a leap from loss, from separation. Elegy does not merely resolve this separation, it provokes it. Just as ice is provoked by the serial separation of water from (substantial) caloric, in Hill's poem the organic elegy is provoked not from an original separation or loss of some person, but of the elegy's own internal identity. The elegy is faithful to the loss of elegiac capacity which Celan's poetics mark. We are in the time of repetition, mere repetition, even when we are in the organic: vegetable life does not figure the blooming afterlife of the elegy, but rather the crystalline repetition of separation. For Kant there is a leap where water crystallises, becoming solid, but this happens in a series 'until everything has turned to ice'. The process is proliferating. It is not gradual but serial. It is not a continuous transformation but a series of discontinuous leaps. Rachel Jones links the possibilities of crystallisation, by analogy, to the possibilities of imagination in judgement. If by crystallisation nature is able autonomously, by a 'leap', to produce original forms, then 'the 'leap' of crystallisation can be read as analogous to the leap of imagination in genius, where matter is restructured without following pre-given rules'.[95] In this way, analogous to the productive, aesthetic imagination, 'crystallisation continually generates 'another nature' out of nature's sensible manifold, producing original objects which can be thought of as the discontinuous unfolding of a genealogy of active matter',[96] and is 'a *non organic* mode of production, generating its figures and fabrics without reference to limits set by pre-conceived ideas of organic wholes'.[97] And so 'an imagination which functioned non-organically would generate a richness of thought surpassing limits and transforming the internal organisation of ideas, reworking the very fabric of our thought, and so allowing unforeseen ideas to emerge'.[98] Crystallisation, in this reading, is the 'non-organic' proliferation of natural forms, which might be read back into the aesthetically judging mind as possible aesthetic production. Hill's elegiac poem, we can now see, unfolds an elegiac facet to this crystallisation process. The elegy is the symbolic proliferation of the world under the aspect of its loss. The elegy, mourning, marks the world's loss. (*Die Welt ist fort.*) Crystallisation is the serial proliferation of precisely this loss: an un-growing, non-organic growth by separation. Hill's poetic response to Celan's

[95] Jones, Rachel, 'Crystallisation: Artful Matter and the Productive Imagination in Kant's Account of Genius', in *The Matter of Critique: Readings in Kant's Philosophy*, ed. by Andrea Rehberg and Rachel Jones (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2000), pp. 19-36, 29-30
[96] Ibid., 30
[97] Ibid., 31
[98] Ibid., 32

already present lost world is not the aesthetic reproduction of that lost world, but the repetition of its loss. It is a separation from an aesthetic capacity. The 'crystalline' form is already an art form, and this means that aesthetics unfolds in its own non-organic dimension, staged by the poem's marks of external vegetable life and internal 'stoniness'. The irresolution of the closing figure ('BE FAITHFUL' growing 'as lichen') marks this separation internally to figuration. Figuration is a separation, not a reconciliation. Figuration is non-organic, mourning organic wholeness, mourning which dislocates figured identity into elegiac nonidentity.

This is a possible point of fracture in Kant's aesthetics, a moment of possible reversal. If nature can autonomously generate its own crystalline, leaping forms, and if, by analogy, judgement can produce new forms of connection by its own leaps, then there emerges within aesthetic analogy the possibility of a crystalline relation. In the 'Chorale-Preludes', Hill, however, suggests that this process of crystallisation is at the same time an externalisation. Ice is not just what happens outside, ice is the point of contact between the inside and the outside. Crystallisation does not merely describe an analogically possible relation between judgement's subjective inside and nature's objective outside. That relation is already crystalline in language's objective expression.

> Moods of the verb 'to stare',
> split selfhoods, conjugate
> ice-facets from the air,
> the light glazing the light.[99]

'To stare' is to observe something fixedly, with fascination. Why would such observation 'split selfhoods'? This is speculation: it poses a future connection of what is presently split. The links to speculation are etymological, with 'speculate' deriving from 'speculatus', to observe, as if from a watchtower (not from 'speculum', a mirror). Speculation, isolated here as language, linguistically abstracted from an uttering 'self', 'splits' selfhood into the plurality of 'selfhoods'. Speculation, in the poem's stare, is suspended, reversed, a speculative loss of future connection. To stare is to be removed from oneself. But it also has a peculiar effect on what is stared through, air. The word breathes like ice into the air. Staring, words become material, 'facets', crystalline, surfaced and with aspects: objective. The word, in being 'conjugated', in being declined through its tenses, becomes materially different from the selfhood. But the word is also the selfhood. It is breathed out, a *breathturn*. The self is externalised as it is crystallised. The word turning to ice in the air is the 'shadow' of the self

[99] Hill, *Broken Hierarchies*, 132

which breathes it. The self is split like a verb, declining in its action through time, and its action is utterance itself. In speaking, both I am and the word is, the same and the same as other. So we are left with 'light glazing the light', light surfacing light like ice surfacing ice. Light has become crystalline, glazing the 'light' of the word, passing through its new medium, which is not just air but air that has been spoken, become material with the icy word spoken into it. Light is transformed even as it transforms the air it passes through. Language is prismatic, snowy. Light glazes that prism of 'light'. The word, as prism, separates, splits the light, and the light comes out of it. Speculation is spoken. It happens linguistically before it happens in the world, in the air outside. The self breathes air in, and then speaks it out again, a 'breathturn'. The 'spoken out word' would dissipate except for literature. Literature, then, is the word materialised outside the self, which might not be worked upon but which still works for itself, proliferating like ice, proliferating the elegiac work of self-separation: splitting itself off in order to witness for the one mourned, and then mourning in turn that separation from the self, witnessing that witness, the no-one who witnesses for the witness.

ii. J.H. Prynne 'out in the snow-fields'

We live under dark skies and – there are few human beings.[100]

Hill's prayer 'Ave Regina Caelorum' (Hail Queen in heaven) recalls how, in 'Funeral Music':

> The sky gathers up darkness. When we chant
> 'Ora, ora pro nobis' it is not
> Seraphs who descend to pity but ourselves.[101]

'We' chanting does not call the divine seraphs to pity but 'ourselves'. We might pray, but praying is its own effect, here. When 'we' chant we end, finally, not with any sky, but with 'ourselves'. The sky reverses, gathering darkness not light. In these dark skies (recall Blanchot's '*void of sky, deferred death*', that closes *The Writing of the Disaster*[102]), there is no place to present death. They are also imagined by J.H. Prynne in his elegy for Celan, 'Es Lebe Der König', from *Brass* (1971), where finally 'Forbearance comes into the | stormy sky and the water is not quiet'.[103] Forbearance is restraint, but also legally not calling in a debt. Coming into the sky, arriving there, at the end of the poem is this restraint, and this acknowledged but sustained debt. The poem's future is this suspension of debt. This reversed sky is also operative

[100] Celan, Paul, *Collected Prose*, ed. and trans. by Rosmarie Waldrop (Manchester: Carcanet, 1986), 26
[101] Hill, *Broken Hierarchies*, 51
[102] WD 146/220
[103] Prynne, J.H., *Poems* (Tarset: Bloodaxe, 2005), 170

in Celan's *The Meridian*. Celan refers to Büchner's Lenz, walking errantly in the mountains, who 'has the sky beneath him as an abyss [*hat den Himmel als Abgrund unter sich*]'.[104] This reversal of sky is also a reversal of the terminus of prayer, heaven. It marks a reversal of transcendence. Prynne takes his title, too, from a quotation: as we have already noted, Lucile in Büchner's *Dantons Tod* utters what Celan calls a 'counter-word': ''Lenz – or rather Büchner – has here gone a step further [*einen Schritt weiter gegangen*] than Lucile. His "Long live the king" is no longer a word, it is a terrifying falling silent, it takes away his – and our – breath and words.'[105] This counter-word reverses, empties itself, is no longer a word with any meaning or presence (why would the widowed wife so absurdly enrage her husband's killers, commit herself to death?), and this reversal infects us, too, reading, empties 'us' and 'our' 'breath and words'. This, for Celan, is the 'breathturn'. Charting between the Medusa and the abyss of art – between art which suspends its object and art which vertiginously dissipates – there is poetry.

> Poetry: that can mean an *Atemwende*, a breathturn. Who knows, perhaps poetry travels this route – also the route of art – for the sake of such a breathturn? Perhaps it will succeed, as the strange, I mean the abyss *and* the Medusa's head, the abyss and the automatons, seem to lie in one direction – perhaps it will succeed here to differentiate between strange and strange, perhaps it is exactly here that the Medusa's head shrinks, perhaps it is exactly here that the autonomatons break down – for this single short moment? Perhaps here, with the I – with the estranged I set free *here* and *in this manner* – perhaps here a further Other is set free?[106]

Poetry interrupts aesthetic experience by 'traveling the route' of art. Neither suspending its object nor vanishing, poetry distinguishes (*unterschieden*) 'strange from strange', like the figure of the bow in 'Lyons, Les Archers'. 'Perhaps the poem is itself because of this […] and now can, in this art-less, art-free manner, walk its other routes, thus also the routes of art – time and again [*wieder und wieder gehen*]?' Again and again, in repetition, art's fate is stepped out by poetry which interrupts it. By poetry, then, art is not secured but set on a detour: the detour of this counter-word, the detour of this interruption, the interruption of the artless. So when Celan says that art 'is the subject of a conversation that takes place in a room […] a conversation that, we sense, could be continued indefinitely, if nothing interfered', he immediately then answers himself: '[s]omething does interfere [*Es kommt etwas dazwischen*].

[104] Celan, *Meridian*, 7/7
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.

// Art returns.'[107] In poetry, art returns to itself. Celan interrupts his speech, art interrupts itself, continues discontinuously, by returning. When Prynne quotes this already quoted counterword, then, he offers it as a counterword to his own artful work.[108] I want to suggest that this can be read more than thematically about Celan's exilic life, that instead it can be read, like Hill's poem, as an elegy for the aesthetic. I have been arguing that the aesthetic is both spatialised, by Kant, and radically de-spatialised, dislocated by the subsequent reworkings of the aesthetic I have been exploring, radically dislocated, that is, by the aesthetic itself, by its own reflective work. Celan's radical displacement from Germany, his exilic life, is repeated elegiacally as an incapacity properly to 'locate' elegiac work. Where, precisely, can this mourning find its place? Why does Celan 'live on', exiled, without any place to live? Prynne's elegy for Celan (scrupulously dated and signed: '*for Paul Celan, 1920-1970*'), like Hill's (indeed, can be read in dialogue with Hill's 'September Song'), works out this elegy for elegy, this incapacity properly to mourn, in a way which I am arguing also interrupts and elegises, makes elegiac, the aesthetic and aesthetic work.

This 'diachronic' temporality is figured through colour – diachronic becomes 'dichroic', split colour – just as it is for Celan in 'Conversation in the Mountains', and through 'snow'. *Wound Response* (1974) closes with 'Again in the Black Cloud',[109] in which light fractures into colour, is 'dichroic': each light wave containing at once potentially all colours but only presenting one colour. This fracturing traverses the inside and outside of Celan's snow and glass. In this poem, 'the hour | is crazed by fracture' too. Light's 'dichroism' is worked out temporally. Just as light sustains in its fragmentation the potential for completeness within fragmentation, the particular ambiguity of language in the poem has the potential for plural communication into community. We can decide to speak together, to say 'we', only because of a separability, rather than a fungibility, of members. We can say 'we' only on the ground that there is no similarity. This is staged 'out in the | snow-fields', outside, in snow.

- out in the
snow-fields the aimless beasts
mean what they do, so completely the shout
is dichroic in gratitude,
half-silvered, the

[107] Ibid., 2/2; and notice the interruption of 'wieder', like the '*Wider*' that rams through his poems; and of the 'something', the '*Etwas*' or '*quelque chose*' that interrupts dialectics (see chapter three).
[108] To amplify the matter, 'Es lebe der König' is a German translation of a French phrase, '*vivre le roi*': the irony of Büchner's interpolation of it into his play about the French revolution is compounded, again, by Celan's and Prynne's repeated ironisations.
[109] Prynne, *Poems*, 230-1

gain control set for “rescue” at
negative echo line.

The stakes of ‘communicability’ are here staged between poetic expression and inexpressive ‘beasts’, purely somatic creatures. These ‘aimless beasts | mean what they do’ in their dichroic utterance. The beasts – the creatures of nature, not reason – have no end or purpose except what they do, except *that* they do. This is in a sense one end of aesthetic judgement, too. The purposelessness of gesture is meaning ‘completely’. And yet, the poem ‘rescues’ this ‘line’, it is ‘dichroic’, splitting colours, it is in grateful relation to something else. The beasts’ shout is returned to them at the ‘negative echo line’: the point at which there is no vocal return of echo, but also the line of the poem’s own utterance which is the ‘negative echo’ of the beasts’ calls. The poem’s ‘rescue’ of the aimless utterance is in its own dichroic setting of that utterance. So vocality is, indeed, aimless because it has plural aims; and it is exactly in this plurality that the poem releases that potential aimlessness which constitutes the plurality of community: plurality sustained in the poised ambiguity of a line. So, ironically: ‘Damage makes perfect’. Indeed, it is in the particular damage of language that it can sustain the whole, just as the light wave is damaged into its radiance of colour.

We can read this ‘negative echo line’, as culture’s mediation by return to nature, which is also the inauguration of nature. Culture turns back on itself because nature and art are not dissolved yet. The poem sets the shout dichroically, and this setting allows the utterance to abide in simultaneity. And in that simultaneity that distance which Kant recognised as the gulf set within reason is maintained. But this is the point of ‘rescue’. Is this the rescue of the beasts from aimlessness, the intrusion of meaning into their mute-language? Or is it the poem that is rescued from the dichroic fragmentation of meaning, from the interpolation of distance into its discourse, before the interruptions of identity and control? This is a question of elegy. If, for Adorno reading Hegel, aesthetics has failed to overcome art, to complete that reflective judgement from objective particularity into subjective generality, then why does art return, and how? What is lost? The ‘negative echo’ is the place for echo, the inverse of any response, the space where there should be but is not (yet) response. A ‘wound response’ is similarly organic but crystalline, spontaneous, an autonomous leap; but here it is not creative, it leaps negatively, recoils, from pain, from loss, a movement marked by loss.

We can trace this elegiac history of experience through the ‘diachronic’/‘dichroic’ modulation of snow to white in ‘Es Lebe der König’. The poem immediately establishes a divided terrain: ‘Fire and honey oozes from cracks in the earth’. We might recall here Kantian

crystallisation: fire (caloric) and honey (the promised substance of the land promised in exile in Exodus) simply emerge, oozing from the fractures in the earth, not called to or coaxed. This 'promise' emerges in fractures, a fractured terrain, much as Hill's song emerges at Compline, the boundary of the day. And like Hill's elegy, Prynne's evokes a vegetable landscape, 'grassy slopes', 'trees', 'the plum', 'the alder'; but this is counterpointed by the 'sky', or the abstract 'azure' of the sky, or by the 'animals', 'the long-tailed bird', which occupy the landscape. There is a shift, too, in the first stanza from 'glass format' to 'new snow', shifting figuration from which the 'house becomes technical' like Celan's 'dewindowed' hut. The poem stages the land's movement, the transformations the landscape undergoes: it is temporal, moving, alive with autonomous or at least spontaneous movement. Again, like the 'Centaury', 'you alder beech you fern' which Hill addresses in place of any time to mourn an absent body, Prynne evokes a landscape only to have that landscape not correspond with the evocation. Just as Hill must resolve merely to observe the 'glimmer' of lichen on wood as the only token of elegiac-pastoral faithfulness, so Prynne's landscape undergoes constant transformations, resisting elegiac symbolic weight. The land is outside.

> Sky divides
> as the flag once more becomes technical, the print
> divides also: starlight becomes negative.

The 'flag' which marks territory becomes technical, a mere principle for dividing a territory which is not freighted with any symbolic weight, a no-man's land. This is one fate of the aesthetic I am trying to trace: in the aesthetic no-man's land of cognition there is no determination, division is technical; and when this bleeds into the transcendental 'technic of nature', the grounding orientation which aesthetic work should provide becomes negative, 'negative' (polar) 'starlight', a disorientation as landscape itself. The flag merely maps out this reversal, which, by a pun, reverses into the elegising poet himself: 'Prynne' becomes 'print', and that 'divides also' on the page, the mourning poet separated as caloric from the poem, mapping out in elegy an aesthetic territory which has no ground.

The pun, of course, repeats: 'we too are numbered like | prints in the new snow'. The landscape is covered in new snow, which discloses prints, traces of human activity, in which traces we read back, number, a 'we', the numerous poetic sources (prints/Prynnes). In the numerousness of this source, there is no origin to mourn, no original loss, merely the repetition, in 'we', of loss, traced out in print(s). The poem's material presence is sketched into its formal present. This bleeds into Prynne's transformation of Celan's famous 'Deathfugue': 'It is not

possible to | drink this again'. Where Celan's poem works from the camps' necessary repetition ('We drink and we drink'),[110] a repetition which does not so much establish any communal 'we' as disestablish it in repetitive and aimless labour, Prynne's interrupts precisely that labour: we do not drink, 'It is not possible to | drink this again'. So amidst all this reversibility of identification and materiality, time is figured as irreversible. Slyly, just as Hill enjoins us both to mourn and not to mourn by splitting the verb from its negation ('do not | mourn unduly'), Prynne both exposes the impossibility of repetition and the repetition of labour within this impossibility by splitting the verb's infinitive at the line break into an imperative: 'to | drink this again'. We are enjoined both to 'drink again' and to see that it is not possible to 'drink again', to repeat this impossibility of 'drinking again'. So, where Hill's elegy was framed by the struggle, elegiacally, to 'repeat' the loss that it mourns, and by the way in which that struggle was transported into the elegiac capacity itself, here Prynne's elegiac work (reproducing a lost land as a symbolically freighted monument to the lost poet, Celan) works from within repetition by exposing its impossibility. Repetition is unworking; it is unproductive. It is not the non-organic crystallisation of the 'technic of nature' in aesthetic judgement; rather, it is the unproductive and stark repetition of the failure of crystallisation. The 'snow-fields', outside. Prynne's figures of the landscape overturn the landscape.

It is significant that figuration, bound to the unworking of repetition, also establishes 'we', 'over and over', 'we' who are in the position of Celan's 'you':

> going over and over to
> the landing-stage, where we are. We stand
> just long enough to see you,
>
> we hear your
> fearful groan and choose not to think of it. We

Just so, 'we *too* are numbered like | prints in the new snow', we are the symbolic excess of this un-crystal figuration. Numbering us is the repetitive work by which we find a ground for communal identity. The aesthetic, which should guarantee the possibility of such ground, is here 'unworking'. The aesthetic telos of guaranteeing political communicability from inside subjective experience is exposed as the work of repetition, as a crystalline fiction of figuration. We 'go' 'over and over', but 'choose not to think of it'.

[110] Celan, *Poems of Paul Celan*, 31

The problem, then, is that figures do not figure. The landscape does not stand in for either the mourning poet or the mourned poet. And yet this is precisely where 'we' are, this is the only ground which elegiac work establishes. There is a complex figurative weightlessness here that the poem traces out. The first image, of 'honey' oozing 'from cracks in the earth' is picked up at the end as 'white honey', an internal infection which spreads from a landscape of 'new snow' to a 'patchwork' tablecloth of white, an exterior landscape made ordinary, inside the 'small house', interior. From outside to inside, from snow to white.

> Take it away and set up
> the table ready for white honey, choking the
> white cloth spread openly for the most worthless
> accident. The whiteness is a patchwork of
> revenge too, open the window and the white fleecy
> clouds sail over the azure;
>
> it is true. Over and
> over it is so, calm or vehement. You know
> the plum is a nick of pain, is so and is also
> certainly loved. Forbearance comes into the
> stormy sky and the water is not quiet.

Honey, which is a product of natural crystallisation (nectar which is gathered and transformed by bees into crystalline honey, kept in the honeycomb's cells, storing the bees' labour), becomes 'white honey'; or perhaps 'snow' becomes 'white honey', snow harvested and stored up, symbolising the hope for future plenty, storing up symbolic value of an untapped, naturally recurring surplus, the hope for symbolism itself as the possibility of a future, the possibility of future meaning. So, the table is 'ready for white honey', whiteness which is yet to come. Now it merely reflects, or infects, by 'accident', what is outside it. White proliferates: the white cloth, the abstract whiteness a 'patchwork', the 'white fleecy | clouds' outside the window. In spreading the table in hope for 'white honey', the field is opened up to accident, to the 'revenge' of crystalline whiteness not being stored but spreading, proliferating, 'the most worthless | accident', without any symbolic value. The clouds outside are the revenge of this 'worthlessness': they 'sail over the azure'. The problem staged here is that although the elegy might intend to reconcile its object, the dead poet, to the present by establishing a blank field in which he can be mourned, the blankness of this field only exposes the repetitive worklessness (*désœuvrement*) of this work of mourning. In a most striking echo of Hill's 'September Song', an echo of Hill's struggle to affirm his elegiac work, to say 'it | is true', Prynne quite emphatically says: 'it is true.' The problem, here, is not whether the elegy is 'true'

or not (to its mourned object or to its mourning subject), but that the truth of it repeats. 'Over and | over it is so'. We start mourning and cannot stop. Finally, the landscape offers restraint, in the sky, and unquiet, in the water. They do not mirror each other, are not identical, separated over and over by its elegiac truth.

We can read this anxiety over elegiac capacity, both Hill's and Prynne's, and the two poems' focus on demarcating a landscape, back into Blanchot's anxiety that presence is what displaces the possibility of the present. The elegiac attempt to recompense absence with aesthetic presence becomes, in these poems, precisely what discredits presence. The elegy, rather than reconciling or recompensing any loss, merely repeats the loss. Here, the way this repetition establishes the ground for itself is itself repeated as an elegiac trope: the catastrophe not of reversing an irreversible time, but of exposing the internal reversibility of time as repetition. If presence is already the time of repetition, then what presence could cope with loss? If the elegy tries to establish the monumental recompense to loss, its aesthetic reflection, then it does so from within the repetitive, un-presencing work of the aesthetic.

We might link the kind of elegiac work of landscape, the delimiting of the inside and the outside, to Prynne's commentary on Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey', where the landscape doubles between the totally exterior (with no dwelling except the hermit's nomadic home to mark any inside) and its repetition inside memory. In Wordsworth's poem, this modulates into repetition.

> By such power of transformation the paradoxical vagrancy of local dwelling where no door-entrance offers a threshold between inner and outer space, natural unhoused wandering and its mimicry by the traveller on tour, enlarges into a mighty horizon of human remembrance hinting at closure, the light of setting suns; itself the dwelling or hermitage of vagrant being and presence beyond all simple locality, where the narrative of any one single sunset is subsumed into their constancy of recurrence.[111]

The hints of exterior temporal limitation (the setting sun, Compline, last hours) reflect an interior horizon of hope, the limit of what we might hope for being a reversal of remembrance, a return, recurrence; but precisely this recurrence is also discontinuous, in the sense that each repetition is, exactly in its identity, not identical – the recurrence of the same to the same in proliferating excess of identity. This nonidentity of repetition bleeds into 'Es Lebe der König':

[111] Prynne, J.H., 'Tintern Abbey, Once Again', *Glossator*, 1 (2009), pp. 81-8, 84

‘it is true. Over and | over it is so’, breaking its own assertion of repetition – the ‘stormy sky’ (Hill’s ‘hard summer sky’) held back in forbearance, the ‘water is unquiet’.

Conclusion

Elegy presents an address to loss. Here, elegising Celan means recapitulating Celan’s poetics of figuration, where the image presents loss in its incompatibility with the present. For Celan, this orientates experience towards the future. This non-present experience is exposed to ‘you’, outside, figured into the poem, who is a blank (white) coming which never arrives. The elegiac translations of imagery make these displacements legible. Finally, this traversal across displacement makes legible an aesthetic experience orientated, non-transcendently, by the provisionality of reflective experience. Aesthetic form, reading, that responds to the indeterminacy – borderlessness, endlessness – of its object constituted within the limit of poetic form responds, also, to the indeterminacy of a non-manifest future. In the elegy, we have dispersion, a divestment from the elegised object which speaks to the object’s dissipation, not to its lingering presence. The aesthetic lingers in this reversal, as reserving the form of experience of indeterminacy for these provisional elegies.

The figure is here elegiac: it proposes a disconnection from its object, an indeterminate disconnection from which new reflections fragment. Elegiac work on Celan reproduces this reflexivity. Not proposing to ‘host’ the object (Celan) it loses, such elegy instead hosts its disconnection from that object. And when the object it is disconnected from is already the reflective dispersal of connection, then, contradictorily, it hosts this dispersal in repeating it. Aesthetic reversal – towards the dispersal and fragmentation of judgement registered in judgement itself – is in this way reproduced in the elegy. This reproduction, and this indeterminacy, however, are futural. Thinking the future in its indeterminacy means responding to it reflectively. The reflection that Kant mandated to aesthetic judgement can exceed that mandate. But that means reflectively marking the ways, historically, in which excess can be measured. If art effects a reversal on aesthetics, and contradictorily exposes experience in this reversal to the indeterminacy of the future, then it is through the way such reflection is already exposed to its own indeterminacy.

Making reversal legible means reversing legibility. If legibility is encoded, artistically, in objectivity, then the form of that objectivity has to become legible through experience. The

paths of its legibility that I have been marking – through 'community', through 'dialectics', and through 'poetics' – proceed from the reflecting work of aesthetic judgement and its discontinuities with 'aesthetic' experience. The fate of the aesthetic here is to be exposed to the reversal of its operations. But this reversal is already encoded in aesthetic experience. The paths to objectification that make up this reversal are reflective, not determinate. The turns of experience to an indeterminate outside of experience are reflections. So the future that is exposed in this reversal is elegiacally aesthetic. But this does not mean that aesthetic work 'mourns' its loss, recuperating in that mourning an art-symbol that can replace the objectivity it loses. Instead, it marks loss as a condition for thinking indeterminately of the future. Thinking futurally, then, and not mourning, marks this reversed aesthetic.

Exposed to this discontinuous futurity, the aesthetic responds to form not by producing a symbol for its discontinuity but by exposing itself to its own repetitive work. When Adorno enjoins aesthetics to think through the concept of form, in order not to capitulate to it, I think we can take it in this way. Thinking through form means thinking through the repetitions, the losses, by which that form becomes legible. Adorno's aesthetics are in this way exposed to a non-manifest future, a non-objective, promised future: an unprecedented happiness. And they are also exposed to the unprecedented repetitions of loss to which writing exposes us, as Blanchot suggests. This is how aesthetics lets us think through community: by giving form to the ways 'I lose you to you', to the ways we speak 'as if we could be we without us'.

CONCLUSION

The necessity of indeterminacy: from aesthetics to politics

If 'yes' signals being or presence, then 'no' signals the negative or the negation of that presence. The movement between such affirmation and negation constitutes the dialectic. But as Celan suggests in 'Speak you too', when we speak we should not 'split off No from Yes'.[1] We should not conceive of negation without any presence. There is always 'something' being negated. This 'no', this 'not' (*pas*), this 'negative' that drives dialectics is 'something'. But conceiving it 'as something' is impossible, or at least impossible to determine: any positing of the 'presence' of 'no' would erase that negative. Adorno's and Blanchot's reorientations of dialectics revolve around this impossibility. Each, differently, conceive of aesthetics as a possible sphere for thinking or measuring this impossibility. And this is legibly an aesthetic procedure when read alongside Kant. It becomes a 'presentation' of the indeterminacy of 'presentation', a *negative presentation*. What are the consequences of conceiving, firstly, aesthetics in this way and, secondly, of orientating dialectical thinking in such a way that these aesthetics can be presented, present? The two I want to trace here, finally, are in thinking of the 'future', and in thinking of 'politics'. Both are entwined, to the extent that politics is both constituted by 'presentation' (in defining who or what can speak politically), and of the 'futurity' in which it is conceived: politics is always 'to come' in the sense that what it presents is the negotiation over how change will be shaped and happen. The 'future' of politics is the emergence of new forms of presentation, which, paradoxically, the present of politics shapes.

Rosa Luxemburg: the necessity of indeterminacy

In the introduction to this thesis, I looked briefly at Rosa Luxemburg as a point of orientation for Celan's poetry. We can return to Luxemburg as tracing out more broadly the political context into which Adorno, Blanchot, and Celan write. Each of them respond, in a way, to the failure of revolution to become politically 'present'; or for its presence (in May '68) to match historical presence. Such politics is non-manifest. The 'aesthetics' of non-manifestation each trace makes this politics visible. Luxemburg, too, wrote in response to a revolutionary failure: the Russian revolution. For Luxemburg, advocating for 'revolutionary' politics means advocating for a political spontaneity which defies determination. There can be no prior political determination of what form any revolutionary politics would take. Instead, if it is to open politics to its potential mutability, a revolution must be

[1] Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose*, 76|77

indeterminate. Revolutionary politics requires thinking of a future which is possibly different to the present, and which therefore cannot be pre-determined in the present. Such thinking is therefore required at once to *think* of the future, and not to *determine* it. Luxemburg's attempts to give theoretical form to revolutionary praxis led her to the paradoxical idea of 'spontaneity': that revolution overturns, first of all, its theoretical conditions. This is because the political outcomes of revolution are not determined by either its material conditions or its political means. 'Spontaneity' thinks across this paradox: that the means of revolution are indeterminately related to their ends; that the 'ends' of revolution are strictly indeterminate – and in this way trace out a Kantian, indeterminate teleology. So, Luxemburg argues, 'revolutions do not allow anyone to play the schoolmaster with them'.[2] Class consciousness cannot be adequately taught by theory, but must be learned 'by the living political school, by the fight and in the fight, in the continuous course of revolution'.[3] Any dialectical self-consciousness of politics must be produced 'in the middle of history, in the middle of progress, in the middle of the fight'.[4] The relation of 'mass strikes' to the Russia revolution, to use her example, is indeterminate: 'it is ceaselessly moving, a changing sea of phenomena'.[5] Strikes do not always lead to the social and political reversals of revolution, so why might they sometimes? How could that transition be visible? In their mutable organisation, the revolution becomes a kind of organism, with strikes as its 'living pulse-beat'.[6] When we judge the *historical* relation between means and end, cause and effect, we are asked to judge as if the former does not simply (determinately) produce the other.[7] The 'spontaneous stirrings of exploited masses and the various socialist theories'[8] are connected *spontaneously*, which we might translate as *indeterminately*: political praxis is connected with theory without that praxis offering a terminus for theory, or that theory determining the effects of that praxis.

Hannah Arendt notes how, for Luxemburg, the expansion of capital into new territory was similarly 'spontaneous', in the sense that it was not a singular event but 'expropriation' that necessarily repeats 'time and again'.[9] There are two kinds of necessity in play here. There is the necessity that governs the expansion of capital in unanticipated ways. And there is the necessity that such expansion

[2] Luxemburg, Rosa, *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, ed. by Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 198

[3] Ibid., 182

[4] Ibid., 170

[5] Ibid., 191

[6] Ibid., 192

[7] 'Cause and effect here continually change places' in revolution [Ibid., 195]. As we shall see in detail in chapter one, we are asked to make what Kant calls a 'teleological' judgement: a judgement of relation in which parts are organised as if at once their own cause and effect. Here we can emphasise the reflective character of this judgement.

[8] Luxemburg, Rosa, *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg, Volume I: Economic Writings 1*, ed. by Peter Hudis, trans. by David Fernbach, Joseph Fracchia and George Shriver (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 437

[9] Arendt, Hannah, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 39

is, indeed, *unanticipated*, such that it is open to revolutionary intervention. The 'necessity' of revolution is the necessity of *indeterminacy*. Jacqueline Rose picks up on this spontaneity between Arendt and Luxemburg to describe the need of politics for a 'poetics of revolution'[10] which could account for such indeterminacy at the heart of spontaneity. Leading from Rose, we can suggest that such a poetics would have to account for the ways uncertainty configures not just the revolutionary situation – the repetitious expropriations of capital – but the political freedom invoked by revolution, too, 'the fallibility already at the heart of the revolutionary moment itself'.[11] There is no necessary connection between revolutionary contingency and progressive causes. There is no actionable political teleology where means and end are collaboratively aligned.

The kind of reflective forms of judgement theorised in Kant's aesthetic can give form to the political questions of judgement raised here. In the aesthetic, Kant provides model of judgement that lingers reflectively with contradiction, that can abide indeterminacy. This does not mean that aesthetics *does* politics. It means that the kinds of judgement and form operative in aesthetics can make visible reflective judgements and forms in political discourse. This rebounds against Hegel's sense of dialectics, which, we saw, were driven by the kinds of reflection detected in aesthetics. Hegel's dialectical syntheses are the disclosure in speculation of a unity that pre-exists dialectical reconciliation. In actively reconciling it, the dialectic shows how its material was always unified. Marx's dialectic envisions a future material liberation which will, in the dialectic's future anterior, again be shown to have been inevitable.[12] But in the 'spontaneous' version of the dialectic, the outcome must always remain indeterminate. There is nothing inevitable about liberation. The dialectic is motivated only by its own spontaneous negations. In order to think this negativity, however, we must have a form for its legibility. How could *indeterminacy* itself be thought, if any concept of it would only *determine* and therefore negate it? How could the dialectic be opened to a 'negativity' without negating it? This question of futurity – focused as a political futurity – therefore opens up to the question of the aesthetic. In what form could such indeterminacy be *visible as such*, as indeterminate, without determining it conceptually? Politics develops in unexpected forms. We therefore require a form for reading the unexpected, in which this indeterminacy – this unexpected end, this unanticipated purpose – is readable. The aesthetic conceived by Kant, responsive to the reflection that is its condition, can offer such a form.

---

[10] Rose, *Women in Dark Times*, 40

[11] Ibid., 43

[12] As Simon Jarvis argues, 'What is speculative thinking?' in *Revue International de Philosophie* 227 (2004), pp. 69-83, with reference to Adorno, this opens the way to thought's speculative embodiment. 'A thought which did not wish for anything would not be like anything, would not be a thought. The bodily, because it is at the 'core' of thinking, in its 'innermost cell', is what allows thinking to interpret, without subsuming, the non-identical. Thinking's debt to the body allows it to own its debt to the object.' Thinking thought's debt to its material means thinking speculatively against the negation which constitutes thought. This paradoxical activity makes possible, however, the *negative* realisation that thought does not merely 'embody' itself, but is already 'embodied'.

But it requires us to re-read Kant, and to re-read the aesthetic. And it requires us to develop a form for this aesthetic legibility, as well as this legibility of the aesthetic. By turning to Kant's aesthetics, we can give form to the political necessity of indeterminacy, in which what is necessary is not the manifestation in politics of a determined outcome, but a politics which does not terminate in any given political form. Aesthetics can frame the visibility of this non-manifestation, this indeterminacy. Its operations are therefore *indeterminately* political.

Aesthetic legibility and the politics of indeterminacy – Arendt, Rancière, Sartwell, Ngai

It is possible to distinguish between 'the political' as the condition of politics, and 'politics' as the activity of politics. The political is the 'happening', and politics is what 'happens'. This distinction is clear in autocracies: the monarch, the sovereign, forms the 'political' frame which legitimises the 'politics' of political activity. But in democracy's shared sovereignty, to the extent that equality is an aspiration and shared, this distinction is less clear. Democracy, then, would be the negotiation between the political and politics. This is particularly true in France, which makes this distinction between the political – *le politique* – and politics – *la politique*.[13] If, after the revolution, the republican democracy must form its *political* out of its *politics*, then it is self-generating as it is self-constituting. It functions like a Kantian organism. It must constitute its own ends, without direction or terminus beyond the means of those ends. Such politics is organised indeterminately. Such politics is also organised through measurement. But the terms of such measurement are obscure. The conditions of politics – the political – are not identical with the manifestations of politics itself. The two are indeterminately related. Thinking such indeterminacy requires a form for indeterminacy, and therefore an aesthetics of indeterminacy. And indeed, this relation between an organism's self-generating forms and the reflective activity of measuring such forms is precisely the topos of Kant's aesthetic. We can explicitly think about politics as reflectively organised, and as organising the negotiation of its own reflexivity. And thinking such stakes is given form through Kant's aesthetic.

The legacy of Kant's aesthetic is politically ambiguous, however. As we have seen, he explicitly did not use the aesthetic to say what a community should be, but merely to outline the conditions of communicability that underlie a conception of community. His political 'kingdom of ends' only formally matches this communicability. What those 'ends' are, just as what beauty 'is', lies beyond critical philosophy. So what are the consequences of thinking the indeterminacy of politics through the indeterminacy of the aesthetic, while maintaining that regulative 'indeterminacy' between the two? The relation between the aesthetic and the political is reflective in complex ways. If there is

[13] We shall see in chapter two how this question is mediated through the question of sovereignty; here I want explicitly to emphasise the way its structure parallels Kant's account of reflection, both teleological and aesthetic.

politics, that is because the practice of politics is visibly present. Establishing this visibility is the theoretical work of the political. Not only 'what' is politically possible, but 'who' counts in a political community must be rendered visible. Aesthetics therefore asks questions about visibility that parallel political questions. But politics also implies a kind of 'aesthetics' where this visibility is, as Jacques Rancière argues, apportioned or shared. Politics is already 'aesthetic' to the extent that it implies spectatorship: 'who' is visible, and 'what' is visible, implies a condition of possible visibility. As Hannah Arendt argues, any political praxis depends upon defining this 'spectatorial' aspect of political agency. And such praxis is derived, for her, from a reading of Kant's aesthetics, with its focus on the judger as aesthetic spectator. In Arendt's account, such aesthetic judgements make implicit appeals to 'communicability', and thereby to an actual 'community.

> The it-pleases-or-displeases-me, which as a feeling seems so utterly private and noncommunicative, is actually rooted in this community sense and is therefore open to communication once it has been transformed by reflection, which takes all others and their feelings into account […].[14]

The aesthetic judgement is the transformative 'reflection' in which the private and inner turns out to be public, outer and 'actual'. Aesthetics marks such transformation of private feeling into public actuality through the communications of reflection. Reflection is inherently public, because rather than measuring between a concept and intuition, it measures between the private judgement itself and the community of others who should judge in the subject's place. The reflective structure of aesthetic judgement necessarily actualises its own community through this appeal to reflective, and not conceptual or objective, communication. Here Arendt adjusts Kant's own sense that aesthetic judgements pave the way or set the stage through reflection for sociability. For Kant, aesthetic judgement indicates an inherent 'communicability' to judgements which must be shared, without that communicability being actualised or determined by the judgement itself. Aesthetic judgement shows the necessary form of communicability without communicating anything. Where for Arendt the *act* of judgement *enacts* community, for Kant judgement *registers* a communicability which *prepares* thinking for sociability. Community remains, in Kant's reading, non-actualised; and thus still non-determined, in the future. Kant's account of aesthetics therefore opens the way to Arendt's utilisation of reflection. But it also reserves (reflectively) that utilisation as a possibility for which reflection is the condition. The difference here is that for Kant, the 'work' of reflection in enacting community remains negative, in the sense that it is not actualised. But such reflection might also shape or give form to a certain political *incommunicability*: that is to say, to the indeterminate way the political is related to the actual praxis of politics; to the way the political is conditioned by its negative, indeterminate articulations in politics; to a shared indeterminacy.

[14] Arendt, Hannah, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. by Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 72

An aesthetic is the form of visibility of the conditions of aesthetic experience. We might think here of Rancière's sense of the 'aesthetic regime of art'. For Rancière, aesthetics refers to an 'aesthetic regime' for the 'distribution of the sensible': aesthetics is one historical system of articulation by which artworks become visible as artworks. This distribution of the sensible is the way that things are made visible in a common space and time.[15] There is a politics of visibility operative in aesthetics. 'What' is visibly art to 'whom' depends upon such a 'distribution of the sensible'. And this visibility is not one way: artworks are not merely determined by their historical or political context, they also affect the distribution of visibility itself. Art's visibility legislates for visibility as such by making new forms visible to a common people within a common context. This relation is dialectical, inasmuch as artworks propose their own specific conditions within a context of conditions. It is also social. And this means that there is, as well as this 'politics of aesthetics', an 'aesthetics of politics'. Making something visible means making it visible to some person or people. The capacity to share in this common space thus determines the capacity to take part (to be visible) in politics. But politics also engages in aesthetic procedures to the extent that it functions through such 'distribution' of sensibility, apportioning visibility to certain members of society and to certain possibly political activities. The aesthetic, as a way of thinking about what is visible or not in this common, thus frames the entrance of people into community. This is perhaps why aesthetics terminates for Rancière in democracy, which says essentially that 'there will never be, under the name of politics, a single principle of the community'.[16] As Luxemburg suggested that the revolution emerges both from and into a context of indeterminacy, so Rancière argues that aesthetics is a 'regime' in which political indeterminacy is organised. Democracy is visible as a political relation under the aesthetic conditions whereby art is progressively fragmented. If indeterminacy organises aesthetic experience, then through aesthetics we can experience the indeterminacy that also organises community. Democracy would then describe a specific political relation in which the political is distributed according to its indeterminacy. And that would mean that aesthetics could work out its serial but singular relation to art *in common with* this democratic relation.

But it still remains to establish by what form this *indeterminate* relation between politics and art could be made aesthetically visible. The negotiations over visibility are played out internally to aesthetics itself. By what forms are things experienced *aesthetically*? For Kant this means as 'beautiful' or 'sublime', but the range of such experience is extendable. As Thierry de Duve argues, when 'art' and not 'nature' is the object of judgement, the Kantian question – 'is this beautiful?' – becomes the question 'is this art?' This reorientation exposes Kantian judgement to history by introducing the changing and

[15] Rancière, Jacques, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. by Gabriel Rockhill (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 12 et passim; and *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, trans. by Steven Corcoran (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 13 et passim

[16] Rancière, Jacques, *Hatred of Democracy*, trans. by Steven Corcoran (London and New York: Verso, 2014), 51

producible forms of art.[17] But what are the consequences of this reorientation? Similarly, the relation between the forms of aesthetic experience and the forms of political experience is not simple, but historical. If we are to determine this *relation*, then we can look to the ways aesthetics responds to its own indeterminate relation with art. When we talk about an aesthetics 'of' politics, or a politics 'of' aesthetics, we have to be attentive to the indeterminate form in which aesthetics mediates its judgements. For Crispin Sartwell, art and aesthetics are not just a feature of politics. Politics functions aesthetically itself. For Sartwell, 'an ideology *is* an aesthetic system',[18] not in the sense that its manifestations are artistic, but in the sense that politics operates through a range of objective features we might call aesthetic: through its aural, visual, and literary mediations. This is not a Kantian aesthetic concern with experience, but with material features. [19] This leads Sartwell to argue that politics is mediated through material. This expands the range of what might be considered 'aesthetic', but it also limits the possible range of *experience* of the aesthetic. A useful intervention is made here by Sianne Ngai,[20] who explicitly deals with the politics implied by different accounts of aesthetic experience, and by the expansion of aesthetic experience into new cognitive and emotive spheres – what is 'cute', for example. But I think it is also useful to return to Kant here. With Kant, we locate reflective indeterminacy not merely with possible material features (what could palpably count as art, or at least beautiful), but with the account of experience itself. It is aesthetic experience, and not just the products of art, that is indeterminate, and in which reflection is active. For Sartwell, politics is 'aesthetic' in the sense that it is constituted of material, palpable, 'aesthetic' features. But we can also examine the way that such 'palpability' of aesthetic presence is mediated through aesthetic experience. The reflective capacity to recognise what counts as aesthetic is, as Rancière suggests, generated through the material of aesthetics. And we can further argue, following Kant, that the decision that shapes that recognition is conditioned by aesthetic forms of experience. Experience has a shape and a form – this is axiomatic for Kant. The reflective construction of the forms of experience is not just objective (the production of new things called 'art') but subjective: the construction through reflection of new forms of experience. We can therefore draw Ngai's sense of the construction of aesthetic categories not only into conversation with Adorno (for whom this idea is important), but also with Kant, and finally with the 'politics' of aesthetics and the 'aesthetics' of politics. The production of new aesthetic categories is the construction of new political visibility. But then we are left with the question, how do we reflect on this construction? What are these new forms, and what guides their formation? What kind of *aesthetics* is

[17] de Duve, Thierry, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge MA, London: MIT Press, 1996)

[18] Sartwell, Crispin, *Political Aesthetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 1

[19] Ibid., 5: 'a thing's aesthetic features are the features of a thing that could be relevant to assessment of its beauty'.

[20] Ngai, Sianne, *Our Aesthetic Categories* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2015)

possibly shared between subjective experience and objective product? And how might this shared relation speak to the relations that organise politics?

We would do well to consider, again, the contestation in French between 'politics' and 'the political', *la politique* and *le politique*. The activity of 'politics' is framed by the conditions of its possible experience, which we might call 'the political'. And the form of these conditions of experience requires, following Rancière, a certain visibility. And finally, accounting for this visibility itself requires an aesthetic: an account of the form of transaction by which subjective experience (this is beautiful, or this is art) is translated, if not into effective politics, into the formal condition for objective visibility. This, indeed, returns us to Kant's project in his third *Critique*. If, Kant urges, moral ideas are effective, and not just regulative, in guiding our moral actions, then they must, paradoxically, be both free *from* the world (not merely derived from it) and equally effective *in* the world. Thinking this disconnection as *effective* means thinking of a way disconnection can be conditioned and organised. The aesthetic does exactly this work of organisation: it makes available for experience the reflective way such experience is itself organised. But the difficulty of *presenting* negativity is also a difficulty of the 'negativity' of presence. If, Blanchot argues, there is presence, then it is other, in the sense that it is only 'present' through the negative procedures by which it is made visibly present. And this otherness interrupts any 'presentation' of it. And, Adorno argues, if there is 'negativity', then it is only felt as the 'negative' of determining conceptual practices. There is no grasping of the negative, and therefore no presentation of negativity. An indeterminate politics cannot simply employ or utilise the negativity which motivates it. Such employment is reflectively indeterminate, and negative itself. It works, as we have seen with Celan, figuratively: towards no determinate end. And this reflective figuration is visible as an aesthetic, reflective, procedure.

Thinking the future – expectation, anticipation, hope

My reading of the reflective work of the aesthetic, as it is channelled through Adorno, Blanchot, and Celan, is that it inscribes a kind of 'indeterminate futurity' into aesthetic experience, which responds to the indeterminate ways futurity is organised in politics and dialectics. But given the 'indeterminate' relation between aesthetic philosophy and the work of art, what form could such 'inscription' take? What kind of literature, and what kind of writing, could mediate this futurity, which extends beyond the politics of distribution that characterise Rancière's version of political aesthetics, but also beyond the merely formal distribution of communicability that characterise Arendt's aesthetic politics?

There is a political equivocation between two versions of the logic of aesthetic judgement, and two twin versions of politics and the political. In the first, the reflection of aesthetic judgement is invested into a reflectively valid version of community. In the second, the indeterminate ways reflection operates in aesthetic judgement validates the reflective ways community is experienced, without any

actual communication. The political fate of the aesthetic equivocates thus, either instantiating community, or validating its reflective experience. A turn to a philosophy of fine art, rather than aesthetic experience, could be read as a turn to the objective instantiation of community through art. But a more reflective sense of the way the objective construction of art models experience – constructed both when made and, again, when experienced; constructed both by a subject and by the objective context which structures subjective experience – could show a third way for aesthetics between these two fates. The consequences of such a third way can be traced through re-reading Kant. But they also threaten to unwork Kant; unworking inscribed by the 're-reading' to which he gives form in his aesthetics; a 'reversal'. If reflection is not contained in the aesthetic experience, but neither perfectly recruitable for politics, then its work is uncertain, indeterminate. A third way would require an account of precisely this indeterminacy.

In tracing, in a sense, one part of Kant's reception (or translation, or transformation) in the late twentieth century, when questions of community and of the ends of dialectical history were explicitly under question, we can achieve several things. Firstly, we can see how Kant's account of aesthetics might give form to these questions of community and history, and therefore become a way to read these questions from a perspective of Kantian aesthetics. Community here is a concept that organises social and political relations. History is a concept that organises happening and what happens. Both can be thought reflectively. Secondly, however, those questions also read back into Kant: by posing essentially alien questions to Kant's aesthetics, those aesthetics are exposed to their possible transformation. So the reading is both ways, a 'reversal': Kant reads a historical and theoretical situation, and that situation offers a counter-reading of Kant. And this leads to a third end: that in establishing this relationship of legibility, we also propose a different kind of legibility. In what form could such a *reflective* reading be established? What are the *aesthetic conditions* of such a relationship? Reading Kant, reading history through Kant, prompts us to develop a further reflective turn to the aesthetic. Such aesthetic legibility can be found through reading. Reading poetry does not therefore offer either illustration or illumination of theoretical questions, but what Adorno calls a 'thought-model'.[21] It becomes the crystalline, 'figurative' space in which a certain legibility is prompted, articulated, and, indeed, *thought* through poetry. Poetics is not thus a 'master discourse', but a *reflection* of theoretical questions. It is related indeterminately to theoretical aesthetics in a way that itself articulates the indeterminate relations those aesthetics think.

[21] ND 29/39: 'The call for binding statements without a system is a call for thought models [Denkmodellen], and these are not merely monadological in kind. A model covers the specific, and more than the specific, without letting it evaporate in its more general super-concept [allgemeineren Oberbegriff]. Philosophical thinking is the same as thinking in models; negative dialectics is an ensemble of analyses of models.' This intervention of 'thought-models' into systematic conceptuality mirrors that of 'figures'. This emphasis on specificity is essential.

Poetry acts in this way as a 'measure' of aesthetics, a terminus which remains reflectively indeterminate, and a point by which aesthetic questions are reflectively legible through the act of reading. Measurement is in this sense a relation.[22] But what, exactly, does writing hope to measure here? If the ends of aesthetic judgement are reflective, then how are they measured? If the future remains non-determined by aesthetic judgement – if it does not, for Kant, make any legislative claims about its object – then what, exactly, is this future? We can focus this question by asking another. How do we measure the distance between 'anticipating' the future and 'expecting' it?

We can speculate about some of the modal differences between 'anticipating' and 'expecting'. To anticipate means to regard something as probable: it derives from *anticipat*, to act in advance of something. To anticipate is to think about what will happen. To expect means to defer action, to wait, to look out for something: *ex+spectare*. To expect is to linger, not to know *what* to await; merely to *await*. We can make a distinction, then. To anticipate: to think about *what* will happen. To expect: to think about *happening*. And this, indeed, is the difference measured by aesthetic judgement. An aesthetic judgement makes a valid claim without determining anything about its object. To make such a *reflecting* judgement is not to 'anticipate' a determination of the future, but to 'expect' its happening, its appearance as something to think about. To 'expect' is to think of the future without determining *what* will happen. The aesthetic judgement 'expects' in this sense: that it does not determine its object, but marks its present indeterminacy. The end to which reflection is employed is not determined by judgement, and so reflection as an activity becomes its own end. The 'indeterminacy' of aesthetic judgement is therefore negative: it is a future which is expected, without positive determination of the significance of judgement.

And this also marks the distance between a *determinately* and an *indeterminately* orientated politics: between a praxis that effects change, and an expectation of the possibility of change for which thinking the future makes space. Aesthetics lets us measure this distance by giving form to judgement that is reflecting, indeterminate, and therefore *expects* assent, but does not necessarily *anticipate* its form or formation. We should assent to an aesthetic judgement, but whether or in what form that assent will take place is not decided by that judgement. We should expect community, but we cannot anticipate it. Expectation is the condition of community; anticipation its praxis.

What about to hope? What kind of future can we hope for? And even, *how* do we hope for a future? For Kant, the third *Critique* was to ask what I should hope for – though the third *Critique* he wrote was not the theological treatise he anticipated to answer that question. So for what can we hope? What should we hope to anticipate? In what form can we expect hope? Kant answers the last of these

[22] The etymological link of 'metre' to μέτρον, *métron*, is active here: a defining feature of poetry is its capacity to 'measure' language through its patterning, through the work of verse but also through poetry's employment of figuration as an operative linguistic end in itself.

questions, and therefore draws in the others. If I expect, then I hope, though I do not know for what. If there is a political difference between expecting community and anticipating it, then such difference must be measured. In measuring aesthetic judgement against the possibility of reflective validity shared indeterminately between non-determined subjects as 'common sense', and in measuring aesthetic reflection against teleological reflection, and in measuring subjective reflection against its objective work in art, aesthetics gives form to reflection as its own measure. These three measurements are aligned with the three final chapters of this thesis: aesthetics as a measure of community; aesthetics as a measure of presence and the present; and aesthetics as a measure of poetry. Measuring these different aesthetic forms of reflection provides a measure for a political distinction that might otherwise remain illegible. The reflection registered in aesthetic experience is a condition for a capacity to hope, in that it registers a subjective capacity to think without determining the end of thinking. Even if writing cannot tell us what we can hope *for*, then at least it might tell us that we *can hope*, can expect to.

APPENDIX: Poems

Paul Celan

SCHNEEBETT

Augen, weltblind, im Sterbeklüft: Ich komm,
Hartwuchs im Herzen.
Ich Komm.

Mondspiegel Steilwand. Hinab.
(Atemgeflecktes Geleucht. Strichweise Blut.
Wölkende Seele, noch einmal gestaltnah.
Zehnfingerschatten – verklammert.)

Augen weltblind,
Augen im Sterbeklüft,
Augen Augen:

Das Schneebett unter uns beiden, das Schneebett.
Kristall um Kristall,
zeittief gegittert, wir fallen,
wir fallen und liegen und fallen.

Und fallen:
Wir waren. Wir sind.
Wir sind ein Fleisch mit der Nacht.
In den Gängen, den Gängen.

SNOW-BED

Eyes, world-blind, in the fissure of dying: I come,
callous growth in my heart.
I come.

Moon-mirror rock-face. Down.
(Shine spotted with breath. Blood in streaks.
Soul forming clouds, close to the true shape once more.
Ten-finger shadow, clamped.)

Eyes world-blind,
eyes in the fissure of dying,
eyes eyes:

The snow-bed under us both, the snow-bed.
Crystal on crystal,

meshed deep as time, we fall,
we fall and lie there and fall.

And fall:
We were. We are.
We are one flesh with the night.
In the passages, passages.

[Celan, *Poems of Paul Celan*, Hamburger, 96|97]

ASCHENGLORIE hinter
deinen erschüttert-verknoteten
Händen am Dreiweg.

Pontisches Einstmals: hier,
ein Tropfen,
auf

dem ertrunkenen Ruderblatt,
tief
im versteinerten Schwur,
rauscht es auf.

(Auf dem senkrechten
Atemseil, damals,
höher also ben,
zwischen zei Schmerzknoten, während
der blanke
Tatrenmond zu uns heraufklomm,
grub ich mich in dich und in dich.)

Aschen-
glorie hinter
euch Dreiweg-
Händen.

Das vor euch, vom Osten her, Hin-
gewürfelte, furchtbar.

Niemand
zeugt für den
Zeugen.

ASHGLORY behind
your shaken-knotted

hands at the threeway.

Pontic erstwhile: here,
a drop,
on

the drowned rudder blade,
deep
in the petrified oath,
it roars up.

(On the vertical
breathrope, in those days,
higher than above,
between two painknots, while
the glossy
Tartarmoon climbed up to us,
I dug myself into you and into you.)

Ash-
glory behind
you threeway
hands.

The cast-in-front-of-you, from
the East, terrible.

No one
bears witness for the
witness.

[BIT 62-4|63-5]

LYON, LES ARCHERS

Der Eisenstachel, gebäumt,
in der Ziegelsteinnische:
das Neben-Jahrtausend
fremdet sich ein, unbezwingbar,
folgt
deinen fahrenden Augen,

jetzt,
mit herbeigewürfelten Blicken,
weckst du, die neben dir ist,
sie wird schwerer,
schwerer,

auch du, mit allem
Eingefremdeten in dir,
fremdest dich ein,
tiefer,

die Eine
Sehne
spannt ihren Schmerz unter euch,

das verschollene Ziel
strahlt, Bogen.

LYON, LES ARCHERS

The iron spike, reared,
in the brickniche:
the co-millenium
instranges itself, unconquerable,
follows
your driving eyes,

now,
with glances cast here by dice
you wake, who is beside you,
she becomes heavier,
heavier,

you too, with all
the instrangedness in you,
instrange yourself,
deeper,

the One
string
tenses its pain between you,

the missing target
radiates, bow.

[BIT 130|131]

DIE POLE
sind in uns,
unübersteigbar
im Wachen,
wir schlafen hinüber, vors Tor
des Erbarmens,

ich veliere dich an dich, das
ist mein Schneetrost,

sag, daß Jerusalem i s t,
sags, als wäre ich dieses
dein Weiß,
als wärst du
meins,

als könnten wir ohne uns wir sein,

ich blättre dich auf, für immer,

du betest, du bettest
uns frei.

THE POLES
are in us,
insurmountable
while awake,
we sleep across, to the Gate
of Mercy,

I lose you to you, that
is my snowcomfort,

say that Jerusalem *is*,
say it, as if I was this
your Whiteness
as if you were
mine,

as if without us we could be we,

I leaf you open, forever,

you pray, you lay
us free.

[BIT 438-40|439-41]

Geoffrey Hill

Two Chorale Preludes

ON MELODIES BY PAUL CELAN

1 Ave Regina Coelorum

Es ist ein Land Verloren…

There is a land called Lost
at peace inside our heads.
The moon, full on the frost,
vivifies these stone heads.

Moods of the verb ‘to stare’,
split selfhoods, conjugate
ice-facets from the air,
the light glazing the light.

Look at us, Queen of Heaven.
Our solitudes drift by
your solitudes, the seven
dead stars in your sky.

2 Te Lucis Ante Terminum

Wir gehen dir, Heimat, ins Garn…

Centaury with your staunch bloom
you there alder beed you fern,
midsummer closeness my far home,
fresh traces of lost origin.

Silvery the black cherries hang,
the plum-tree oozes through each cleft
and horse-flies siphon the green dung,
glued to the sweetness of their graft:

immortal transience, a ‘kind
of otherness’, self-understood,
BE FAITHFUL grows upon the mind
as lichen glimmers on the wood.

[Hill, *Broken Hierarchies*, 132]

J.H. Prynne

Es Lebe der König

(for Paul Celan, 1920-1970)

Fire and honey oozes from cracks in the earth;
the cloud eases up the Richter scale. Sky divides
as the flag once more becomes technical, the print
divides also: starlight becomes negative. If you
are born to peaks in the wire, purple layers in the
glass format, re-enter the small house with
animals too delicate and cruel. Their throats fur
with human warmth, we too are numbered like
prints in the new snow.

It is not possible to
drink this again, the beloved enters the small house.
The house becomes technical, the pool has
copper sides, evaporating by the grassy slopes.
The avenues slant back through the trees; the
double music strokes my hand. Give back the
fringe to the sky now hot with its glare, turning
russet and madder, going over and over to
the landing-stage, where we are. We stand
just long enough to see you,

we hear your
fearful groan and choose not to think of it. We
deny the consequence because only thus is the flame's
abstract review the real poison, oh true the
fish dying in great flashes, the smell comes from
shrivelled hair on my wrist. That silly talk is
our recklessly long absence: the plum exudes its
fanatic resin and is at once forced in, pressed
down and by exotic motive this means the rest,
the respite, we have this long.

Only
the alder thrown over the cranial push, the
waged incompleteness, comes with the animals
and their watchful calm. The long-tailed bird
is total awareness, a forced lust, it is that
absolutely. Give us this love of murder and
sacred boredom, you walk in the shade of

the technical house. Take it away and set up
the table ready for white honey, choking the
white cloth spread openly for the most worthless
accident. The whiteness is a patchwork of
revenge too, open the window and white fleecy
clouds sail over the azure;

it is true. Over and
over it is so, calm or vehement. You know
the plum is a nick of pain, is so and is also
certainly loved. Forbearance comes into the
stormy sky and the water is not quiet.

APPENDIX: Abbreviations

[ND]: Adorno, Theodor W., *Negative Dialectics* [*Negative Dialektik*, GS 6, 1966], trans. by E.B. Ashton (New York and London: Continuum, 1973)

[AT]: Adorno, Theodor, *Aesthetic Theory* [*Ästhetische Theorie*, GS 7, 1970], trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2004)

[WD]: Blanchot, Maurice, *The Writing of the Disaster* [*L'Écriture du désastre*, 1980], trans. by Ann Smock (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986)

[SNB]: Blanchot, Maurice, *The Step Not Beyond* [*Le Pas au-delà*, 1973], trans. by Lycette Nelson (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992)

[IC]: Blanchot, Maurice, *The Infinite Conversation* [*L'Entretien infini*, 1969], trans. by Susan Hanson (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993)

[BIT]: Celan, Paul, *Breathturn into Timestead: The Collected Later Poetry*, trans. by Pierre Joris (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 2014)

[CPR]: Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason,* ed., trans. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

[CJ]: Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. by Paul Guyer, trans. by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

[HA]: Hegel, G.W.F., *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art – Volume I*, trans. by T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975)

Note on references and translations

All references to both a translation and an original are marked '-/-', the first number referring to the translation pagination and the second to the original pagination. References to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* include the A/B version pagination from the Academy edition. References to Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* include the academy edition pagination. References to Adorno are to the Suhrkamp Verlag *Gesammelte Schriften* in twenty volumes. References to Blanchot are to the original Gallimard editions.

I have amended Ashton's translation of *Negative Dialektik* throughout, and marked where I have amended other translations. All translations without reference to an English edition are my own.

Bibliography

Adorno, Theodor W., *Negative Dialectics* [*Negative Dialektik*, GS 6, 1966], trans. by E.B. Ashton (New York and London: Continuum, 1973)

———— *Notes to Literature Vol. II* [*Noten zur Literatur*, GS 11, 1974], ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Shierry Weber-Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992)

———— *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason (1959)*, Rolf Tiedemann ed., Rodney Livingstone trans., Cambridge: Polity (2001)

———— *Kulturkritic und Gesellschaft* [GS 10.1] (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003)

———— *Aesthetic Theory* [*Ästhetische Theorie*, GS 7, 1970], trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2004)

———— *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-1965*, ed. and trans. by Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge: Polity, 2006)

Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998)

———— *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999)

Allen, William S., *Aesthetics of Negativity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016)

Allison, Henry E., *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the* Critique of Aesthetic Judgment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Amar, David, 'D'une politique impossible', in *Lignes*, 43 (2014), pp. 140-15

Anderson, Mark M. 'The "Impossibility of Poetry": Celan and Heidegger in France', in *New German Critique*, 53 (1991), pp. 3-18

Antonioli, Manola, 'Nietzsche et Blanchot: parole de fragment', in *Maurice Blanchot et la philosophie*, ed. by Éric Hoppenot and Alain Milon (Paris: Presses Universitaire de Paris Ouest, 2010), pp. 103-110

Arendt, Hannah, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968)

———— *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. by Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982)

Armstrong, Isobel, *The Radical Aesthetic* (Blackwell: London, 2000)

Balibar, Étienne, 'Blanchot l'insoumis', in *Blanchot dans son siècle*, ed. by Monique Antelme et al. (Lyon: Parangon, 2009), pp. 288-314

Bambach, Charles, *Thinking the Poetic Measure of Justice* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013)

Banham, Gary, *Kant and the Ends of Aesthetics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000)

Baugh, Bruce, *French Hegel* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003)

Benjamin, Walter, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 1 — 1913-1926*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1996)

Bernstein, J.M., *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (Cambridge:

Polity Press, 1992)

———— 'Negative Dialectic as Fate', in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. by Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 19-50

Bident, Christopher, *Maurice Blanchot: partenaire invisible* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1998)

———— 'Le Neutre est-il une notion romantique?', in *Blanchot romantique*, ed. by John McKeane and Hannes Opelz (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 75-91

Blanchot, Maurice, *The Space of Literature*, trans. by Ann Smock (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982)

———— *The Writing of the Disaster* [*L'Écriture du désastre*, 1980], trans. by Ann Smock (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986)

———— *The Unavowable Community*, trans. by Pierre Joris (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1988)

———— *The Infinite Conversation* [*L'Entretien infini*, 1969], trans. by Susan Hanson (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993)

———— *The Work of Fire*, trans. by Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995)

———— *Friendship*, trans. by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997)

———— 'The Madness of the Day', trans. by Lydia Davis, in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*, ed. by George Quasha (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1999), pp. 191-199

———— *A Voice From Elsewhere*, trans. by Charlotte Mandell (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007)

———— ''Two letters to J.-B. Pontalis', trans. by Leslie Hill, in *Paragraph*, 30:3 (2007), pp. 23-25

———— *Maurice Blanchot: Political Writings, 1953-1993*, ed., trans. by Zakir Paul (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010)

Blanchot, Maurice, and Derrida, Jacques, *The Instant of My Death/Demeure*, trans. by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000)

de Bolla, Peter, *Art Matters* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2001)

Bonnefoy, Yves, 'Paul Celan', trans. by Joel Golb, in *Translating Tradition: Paul Celan in France*, ed. by Benjamin Hollander, *Acts* 8/9 (1988), pp. 9-14

Bourg, Julian, *From Revolution to Ethics* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007)

Bowie, Andrew, *Adorno and the Ends of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013)

Bowles, M. J., 'Kant and the Provocation of Matter', in *The Matter of Critique: Readings in Kant's Philosophy*, ed. by Andrea Rehberg and Rachel Jones, (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2000)

Brodsky, Claudia, 'Framing the Sensuous: Objecthood and "Objectivity", in Art After Adorno', in *Art and Aesthetics After Adorno*, ed. by J.M. Bernstein et al. (Berkeley: The Townsend Center for the Humanities, 2010), pp. 69-115,

Carson, Anne, *Economy of the Unlost* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999)

Cascardi, Anthony J., 'Prolegomena to Any Future Aesthetics', in *Art and Aesthetics After Adorno*, ed. by J.M. Bernstein et al. (Berkeley: The Townsend Center for the Humanities, 2010), pp. 7-40

Celan, Paul, *Collected Prose*, ed. and trans. by Rosmarie Waldrop (Manchester: Carcanet, 1986)

———— *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. by John Felstiner (New York and London:

W.W. Norton, 2001)

———— *Poems of Paul Celan*, 4th edition, trans. by Michael Hamburger (New York: Persea Books, 2002)

———— *Die Gedichte*, ed. by Barbara Wiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003)

———— *Gesammelte Schriften Band V: Übertragungen II. Zweisprachig*, ed. by Beda Allemann (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003)

———— *The Meridian: Final Version – Drafts – Materials* [*Der Meridian. Endfassung – Entwürfe – Materialien*, 1999], ed. by Bernhard Böschenstein and Heino Schmull, trans. by Pierre Joris (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011)

———— *Breathturn into Timestead: The Collected Later Poetry*, ed. and trans. by Pierre Joris (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 2014)

Cixous, Hélène, *FirstDays of the Year*, trans. Catherine A. F. MacGillivray (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998)

Cohen, Josh, *Interrupting Auschwitz: art, religion, philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2005)

Crowley, Martin, 'Even now, now, very now', in *Blanchot romantique*, ed. by John McKeane and Hannes Opelz (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 247-262

Culler, Jonathan, *Structuralist Poetics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1975)

Danto, Arthur C., *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997)

Davies, Paul, 'A Fine Risk: Reading Blanchot Reading Levinas', in *Re-Reading Levinas*, ed. by Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (London: Athlone, 1991), pp. 201-227

de Duve, Thierry, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge MA, London: MIT Press, 1996)

———— 'Resisting Adorno, Revamping Kant', in *Art and Aesthetics After Adorno*, ed. by J.M. Bernstein et al. (Berkeley: The Townsend Center for the Humanities, 2010), pp. 249-299

Derrida, Jacques, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London and New York: Routledge, 1978)

———— 'Poetics and Politics of Witnessing' [2000/2004], trans. by Outi Pasanen, in *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. by Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 65-96, 77

———— 'Shibboleth: For Paul Celan' [1986], trans. by Joshua Weider (revised by Thomas Dutoit), in *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. by Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 2-64

———— *Parages*, ed. by John P. Leavey, trans. by Tom Conley, James Hulbert, John P. Leavey, and Avital Ronell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011)

Dews, Peter, *The Idea of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008)

Duncan, Robert, *Ground Work: Before the War* (New York: New Directions, 1984)

Duras, Margeurite, *La Maladie de la mort* (Paris: Minuit, 1983)

Eagleton, Terry, *Criticism and Ideology* (London: NLB, 1976)

Erjavec, Aleš, ‘Aesthetics and the Aesthetic Today: After Adorno’, in *Art and Aesthetics After Adorno*, ed. by J.M. Bernstein et al. (Berkeley: The Townsend Center for the Humanities, 2010), pp. 182-209

Eshel, Amir, ‘Paul Celan’s Other: History, Poetics, and Ethics’, *New German Critique* 91 (2004), pp. 57-77

Felstiner, John, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001)

ffrench, Patrick, *After Bataille: Sacrifice, Exposure, Community* (London: Legenda, 2007)

Finlayson, James Gordon, ‘The Artwork and the *Promesse du Bonheur* in Adorno’, in *European Journal of Philosophy*, 23:3 (2015), pp. 392-419

Fioretos, Aris, ‘Nothing: History and Materiality in Celan’, in *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, ed. by Aris Fioretos (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 295-341

Foster, Hal, *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency* (London and New York: Verso, 2015)

Foucault, Michel, ‘Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside’, trans. by Brian Massumi, in *Foucault Blanchot* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 1987), pp. 7-60

Friedlander, Eli, *Expressions of Judgment: An Essay on Kant’s Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015)

Fynsk, Christopher, ‘The Realities at Stake in a Poem: Celan’s Bremen and Darmstadt Addresses’, in *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, ed. by Aris Fioretos (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 159-184

———— *Last Steps: Maurice Blanchot’s Exilic Writing* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013)

García Düttmann, Alexander, ‘Without Soil: A Figure in Adorno’s Thought’, Robert Savage trans., in *Language Without Soil*, Gerhard Richter ed., New York: Fordham University Press (2010), pp. 10-16

Gardiner, Patrick, ‘Kant and Hegel on Aesthetics’, in *Hegel’s Critique of Kant*, ed. Stephen Priest (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 161-171

Gasché, Rodolphe, ‘The Theory of Natural Beauty and its Evil Star’, in *Research in Phenomenology*, 32 (2002), pp. 103-122

———— *The Idea of Form* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003)

Geuss, Raymond, *Reality and its Dreams* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016)

Glazova, Anna, ‘Poetry of Bringing about Presence: Paul Celan Translates Osip Mandelstam’, in *MLN*, 123:5 (2008), pp. 1108-1126

Golb, Joel, ‘Translating Tradition: A Reading of Paul Celan’s “Huhediblu”’, in *Translating Tradition: Paul Celan in France*, ed. by Benjamin Hollander, *Acts* 8/9 (1988), pp. 168-180

Graham, W.S., *New Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004)

Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich, *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004)

Guyer, Paul, ‘Hegel on Kant's Aesthetics: Necessity and Contingency in Beauty and Art’, in *Hegel und die “Kritik der Urteilskraft”*, eds. H.-F. Fulda and R.-P. Horstmann (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990),

pp. 81-99

———— *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 2nd ed. [orig. ed.: 1979] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

———— 'Kant's ambitions in the third *Critique*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. by Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 538-587

Hägglund, Martin, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008)

Hamacher, Werner, 'The Second of Inversion: Movements of a Figure through Celan's Poetry', trans. by Peter Fenves, in *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, ed. by Aris Fioretos (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 219-263

Hart, Kevin, 'From the Star to the Disaster', in *Paragraph*, 30:3 (2007), pp. 84-103

Hegel, G.W.F., *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art – Volume I*, trans. by T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975)

———— *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977)

———— *The Science of Logic*, trans. by George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Heraclitus, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, ed., trans. by Charles H. Kahn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979)

Hill, Leslie, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary*, Oxford: Routledge (1997)

———— '"Distrust of Poetry": Levinas, Blanchot, Celan, in *MLN*, 120:5 (2005), pp. 986-1008

———— ''Not In Our Name': Blanchot, Politics, the Neuter', in *Paragraph*, 30:3 (2007), pp. 141-159

———— *Radical Indecision* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010)

———— *Maurice Blanchot and Fragmentary Writing: A Change of Epoch* (New York: Continuum, 2012)

Holland, Michael, '*État Présent*. "Maurice Blanchot"', in *French Studies*, 58:4 (2004), pp. 533–538

———— 'N'en déplaise. (Pour une pensée conséquente.)', in *Cahiers Maurice Blanchot* 3 (2014), pp. 149-162

Hölderlin, Friedrich, *Selected Poems and Fragments*, trans. by Michael Hamburger (London: Penguin, 1998)

———— *Friedrich Hölderlin: Essays and Letters*, trans. and ed. by Jeremy Adler and Charlie Louth (London: Penguin, 2009)

Houlgate, Stephen, 'Hegel and the 'End' of Art', in *The Owl of Minerva*, 29:1 (1997), pp.1-21

Huhn, Tom, 'Kant, Adorno, and the Social Opacity of the Aesthetic', in *The Semblance of Subjectivity*, ed. by Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaart (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 237-257

Iyer, Lars, 'The Workless Community: Blanchot, Communism, Surrealism', in *Paragraph*, 26.3 (2003), pp. 51-69

Jackson, John E., 'Paul Celan's Poetics of Quotation', in *Argumentum e Silentio: International Paul*

Celan Symposium, ed. by Amy D. Colin (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), pp. 214-222

Jarvis, Simon, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998)

———— 'An Undeleter for Criticism', in *Diacritics*, 32:1 (2002), pp. 3-10+12-18

———— 'What is speculative thinking?' in *Revue International de Philosophie* 227 (2004), pp. 69-83

Jones, Rachel, 'Crystallisation: Artful Matter and the Productive Imagination in Kant's Account of Genius', in *The Matter of Critique: Readings in Kant's Philosophy*, ed. by Andrea Rehberg and Rachel Jones (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2000), pp. 19-36

Joris, Pierre 'Paul Celan's Counterword: Who Witnesses for the Witness?' in *Justifying the Margins*, (Cambridge: Salt, 2009), pp. 79-86

Kant, Immanuel, 'On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy', in *Raising the Tone of Philosophy: Late Essays by Immanuel Kant, Transformative Critique by Jacques Derrida*, ed., trans. by Peter Fenves (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 51-81

———— *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

———— *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. by Paul Guyer, trans. by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

———— 'Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view' [1798], in *Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. by Günter Zöller and Robert B. Louden, trans. by Robert B. Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

Kaufman, Robert, 'Red Kant, or The Persistence of the Third *Critique* in Adorno and Jameson', in *Critical Inquiry*, 26:4 (2000), pp. 682-724

Klossowski, Pierre, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith (London: Athlone, 1997)

Kofman, Sarah, *Smothered Words*, trans. by Madeleine Dobie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998)

Krieger, Leonard, *The German Idea of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957)

Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe, *Poetry as Experience*, trans. by Andrea Tarnowski (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999)

Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe and Nancy, Jean-Luc, *The Literary Absolute*, trans. by Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988)

Laporte, Roger, 'Readings of Paul Celan', trans. by Norma Cole, in *Translating Tradition: Paul Celan in France*, ed. by Benjamin Hollander, *Acts*, 8/9 (1988), pp. 222-227

Lazar, Marc, *Le Communisme, une passion française* (Paris: Éditions Perrin, 2002)

Leighton, Angela, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

Levinas, Emmanuel, *Proper Names*, trans. by Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996)

Liska, Vivian, 'Two Sirens Singing: Literature as Contestation in Maurice Blanchot and Theodor W.

Adorno', in *The Power of Contestation*, ed. by Kevin Hart and Geoffrey H. Hartman (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), pp. 80-100

Longuenesse, Béatrice, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, trans. by Charles T. Wolfe (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998)

Luxemburg, Rosa, Luxemburg, Rosa, *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, ed. by Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004)

———— *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, ed. by Georg Adler, Peter Hudis, and Annelies Laschitza, trans. by George Shriver (London and New York: Verso, 2011)

———— *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg, Volume I: Economic Writings 1*, ed. by Peter Hudis, trans. by David Fernbach, Joseph Fracchia and George Shriver (London and New York: Verso, 2013)

Lyon, James K., *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger: An Unresolved Conversation, 1951-1970* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006)

Macdonald, Molly, *Hegel and Psychoanalysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014

Madou, Jean-Pol, 'The Law, the Heart: Blanchot and the Question of Community', trans. by Thomas Pepper, in *Yale French Studies*, 93 (1998), pp. 60-65

Manoury, Daiana, 'Le Neutre blanchotien, reflets et réflexions à partir de *L'Amitié*', in *Maurice Blanchot et la philosophie*, ed. by Éric Hoppenot and Alain Milon (Paris: Presses Universitaire de Paris Ouest, 2010), pp. 243-257

McLaughlin, Kevin, *Poetic Force: Poetry after Kant* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014)

Mehlman, Jeffrey, *Legacies of Anti-Semitism in France*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1983)

Menke, Christoph, *Die Kraft der Kunst* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013)

Milton, John, *John Milton: The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Orgell and Jonathan Goldgern (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)

Monteiro, Hugo, 'Le Neutre dans les limites de la philosophie', in *Maurice Blanchot et la philosophie*, ed. by Éric Hoppenot and Alain Milon (Paris: Presses Universitaire de Paris Ouest, 2010), pp. 229-242

Müller-Sievers, Helmut, 'On the Way to Quotation: Paul Celan's "Meridian" Speech', in *New German Critique*, 91 (2004), pp. 131-149

Nancy, Jean-Luc, *The Restlessness of the Negative*, trans. by Jason Smith and Steven Miller (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002)

———— 'A Finite Thinking', trans. by Edward Bullard, Jonathan Derbyshire, and Simon Sparks, in *A Finite Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 3-30

———— *Maurice Blanchot. Passion politique* (Paris: Galilée, 2011)

———— *The Disavowed Community*, trans. by Philip Armstrong (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016)

Ngai, Sianne, *Our Aesthetic Categories* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2015)

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Nietzsche Reader*, Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large eds., Oxford:

Blackwell (2006)

Novalis, 'Monologue', in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed., trans. by J.M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 214-15

Nowell-Smith, David, *Sounding/Silence: Martin Heidegger at the Limits of Poetics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013)

O'Connor, Brian, *Adorno's Negative Dialectic* (Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 2004)

Olschner, Leonard, 'Anamnesis: Paul Celan's Translations of Poetry', in *Translating Tradition: Paul Celan in France*, ed. by Benjamin Hollander, *Acts* 8/9 (1988), pp. 56-89

Opelz, Hannes, 'The Political Share of Literature: Maurice Blanchot, 1931-1937', in *Paragraph*, 33:1 (2010), pp. 70-89

Osborne, Peter, *Anywhere Or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London and New York: Verso, 2013)

Payne, Mark, 'Lyric Communication: Pindar and Paul Celan', in *Modern Philology*, 105:1 (2007), pp. 5-20

Perloff, Marjorie, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981)

Peters, Julia, *Hegel on Beauty* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014)

Pöggeler, Otto, *Spur des Worts. Zur Lyrik Paul Celans* (Freiburg and Munich: Karl Abler, 1986)

Pippin, Robert B., 'What Was Abstract Art? (From the Point of View of Hegel)', *Critical Inquiry*, 29:1 (Autumn 2002), pp. 1-24

———— *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014)

Prynne, J.H., Prynne, J.H., *Poems* (Tarset: Bloodaxe, 2005)

———— 'Tintern Abbey, Once Again', *Glossator*, 1 (2009), pp. 81-8

Rancière, Jacques, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. by Gabriel Rockhill (London and New York: Continuum, 2004)

———— *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, trans. by Steven Corcoran (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009)

———— *Hatred of Democracy*, trans. by Steven Corcoran (London and New York: Verso, 2014)

Ravel, Emmanuelle, *Maurice Blanchot et l'art au XXème siècle: Une esthétique du désœuvrement* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007)

Reader, Keith, *The May 1968 Events in France* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993)

Renaud, Bertrand, 'Le passif de mort ou l'éthique à l'impossible: sur *L'Écriture du désastre*', in *Maurice Blanchot et la philosophie*, ed. by Éric Hoppenot and Alain Milon (Paris: Presses Universitaire de Paris Ouest, 2010), pp. 259-277

Reynolds, Chris, *Memories of May '68* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011)

Richter, Gerhard, 'Aesthetic Theory and Nonpropositional Truth Content in Adorno', in *Language Without Soil*, ed. by Gerhard Richter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), pp. 131-146

Rose, Jacqueline, *Women in Dark Times* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014)

Ross, Alison, *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007)

Ross, Kristin, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002)

Sartwell, Crispin, *Political Aesthetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010)

Scarry, Elaine, *The Body in Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985)

Schlegel, Friedrich, 'Athenaeum fragments', in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed., trans. by J.M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 246-60

———— 'Ideas', in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed., trans. by J.M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 261-68

Schmidt, Dennis J., 'Black Milk and Blue: Celan and Heidegger on Pain and Language', in *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, ed. by Aris Fioretos (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 110-129

Schmitt, Carl, *Political Theology*, trans. by George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005)

Schulte Nordholt, Anne-Lise, *Maurice Blanchot: L'écriture comme expérience du dehors* (Droz: Geneva, 1995)

Shelley, Percy Bysshe, *The Major Works*, ed. by Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

Sheppard, Todd, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006)

Sherratt, Yvonne, *Adorno's Positive Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Hans-Michael Speier, 'Paul Celan, Dichter einer neuen Wirklichkeit. Studien zu 'Schneepart' (I)', in *Celan-Jahrbuch 1*, ed. by Hans-Michael Speier (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1987), pp. 65-79

Surya, Michel, 'L'Autre Blanchot', in *Lignes*, 43 (2014), pp. 7-62

Szondi, Peter, *Celan Studies*, trans. by Susan Bernofsky and Harvey Mendelsohn (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003)

Tambling, Jeremy, *Hölderlin and the Poetry of Tragedy: Readings in Sophocles, Shakespeare, Nietzsche and Benjamin* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2014)

Taylor, Charles, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975)

Tobias, Rochelle, *The Discourse of Nature in the Poetry of Paul Celan* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006)

Trakl, Georg, *Georg Trakl: The Last Gold of Expired Stars*, trans. by Jim Doss and Werner Schmitt (Skyesville: Loch Raven Press, 2010)

Ullern, Isabelle and Gisel, Pierre, eds., *Penser en commun? Un « rapport sans rapport »*, (Paris: Beauchesne, 2015)

Wilson, Ross, *Subjective Universality in Kant's Aesthetics* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007)

———— 'Dialectical Aesthetics and the Kantian *Rettung*: On Adorno's "Aesthetic Theory"', *New German Critique*, 104 (2008), pp. 55-69

Wolfson, Susan J., *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997)