

Birdsongs: Celan and Kafka

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Kafka is a cryptic name. Its repeated *ka* sound, separated by a lone thin consonant, suggests an anagrammatic pen name, one elegantly crafted to contain secret correspondences that can be encrypted and decoded. For instance, Kafka pointed out the resemblance of the consonantal and vowel placement in his name to the first half of the name *Bendemann*, the protagonist from «Das Urteil.» For that matter, a similar pattern is on view in the name Samsa from «Die Verwandlung.» In Czech, Kafka means «jackdaw,» a bird similar to a crow, a fact that led Kafka's father to appropriate the jackdaw as the icon of his family business.¹ This connection allowed Kafka's text «Der Jäger Gracchus» to translate into Latin the word «crow» (Corngold 235) so as to encrypt the name in the animal that caws instead of singing. By both encrypting Kafka's name and citing his words in poems and letters, Paul Celan found his own use for Kafka's signature.²

What interests me here is not the issue of coded names as such but the way in which a particular decoded name becomes a source for late poems of Celan. Several nonliterary discourses central for twentieth-century German poetry – phenomenology, empirical science, psychoanalysis, and mysticism – offered a wealth of sources that Celan's poetry could draw on. Yet the assumptions of each discourse also posed limits. Celan's late poems, here demarcated by the final work for *Atemwende*, in September 1965, certainly find sources in these discourses.³ Yet for all these encounters, their effect in the late poetry is a setting-free from the foundational assumptions of psychoanalysis, empiricism, and the spiritualism of the Kabbalah or Gnosticism.⁴ For Celan's late poetry, the difference between on the one hand, «Kafka,» and on the other hand, psychoanalysis, empiricism, and the spiritual resides in the claims available to each. The institutional discourses are able to claim knowledge for themselves, whereas the texts of Kafka claim for themselves a truth. This truth is a source for Celan's late poetry.

This study investigates two of Celan's poems that draw on Kafka and metaphors of singing to assert at once the independence and at the same time the resilience and productivity of poetry beyond historical discursive concerns: «Frankfurt, September» and «Vom Anblick der Amseln.»⁵ Independence is asserted in the poems in the face of discourses that ground knowledge in nature, the psyche, or the spirit. Both poems are biographical, in particular with

regards to biographical caesurae. Celan wrote «Vom Anblick der Amseln» on the last full day of a lengthy period spent in the private psychiatric clinic Villa des Pages in Le Vésinet, a zone where both the discourses of the psyche and empiricism are determining. «Frankfurt, September» inaugurates not only the end of Celan's work with the publisher Fischer but moreover the beginning of the volume *Fadensonnen*. Each poem relies on words of Kafka for a different strategy of self-assertion. In the case of «Frankfurt, September,» the concern is with a singing that will at once outlive death and mark a new language, one that combines silence with the chatter of citations. In «Vom Anblick der Amseln,» the concern is with locating a poetic line to survive catastrophe.

While several late poems of Celan draw on Freudian metaphors,⁶ the poem «Frankfurt, September» is unique in that it relies on the presence of Kafka to articulate an independence from the authority of psychoanalytic discourse, particularly in the area of the dream. Celan's interest in discourses of the mind and the dream is as evident from his poems as it is from his readings. Yet it is equally evident through his texts, readings, and letters that he distanced himself from practical analysis and its claims to empirical knowledge. For all of Celan's fascination with Freud's texts and the poetics of their terminology, «Frankfurt, September» extricates poetry from psychoanalysis as a structuring discourse.

FRANKFURT, SEPTEMBER

Blinde, licht-
bärtige Stellwand.
Ein Maikäfertraum
leuchtet sie aus.

Dahinter, klagegerastert,
tut sich Freuds Stirn auf,

die draußen
hartgeschwiegene Träne
schießt an mit dem Satz:
«Zum letzten-
mal Psycho-
logie.»

Die Simili-
Dohle
frühstückt.

Der Kehlkopfverschlußlaut
singt. (2: 114)

The blindness in «Frankfurt, September» announces that it cannot claim a vision for itself, even if this vision is conceived as one that is higher or inward,

one which might be the result of an exterior blindness. This is also to say that the poem will afford us no insights into discourses that aim to set it up: psychoanalysis, the spirit, and the body. On the positivistic side, as Arno Barnert has shown in the richest commentary of the poem to date (287), the «Stellwand» evokes the publicity display photograph of Freud at the Frankfurt book fair in September, 1965.⁷ This *Stellwand*, one that enforces various sorts of blindness regarding discourses in terms of what they exclude, is marked by the «light-/beard.» The *Lichtbart* refers metonymically to a kind of speech, the *logos lux*. The particular beard that flickers in this line points to Freudian psychoanalysis. Walled in by the blind spot of this discourse are its incendiary gestures, which the poem recognizes at the same time that it notes how the discourse is placed and places things (*stellen*). Yet this wall, because it marks distinctions, is a source at once of discourses and of their blindness.

The key figure behind psychoanalytic discourse appears in the poem's second image from stanza one:

Ein Maikäfertraum
leuchtet sie aus.

The image is that of the «Maikäfertraum,» a term that has sources in works of Freud (II: 290–95). In his *Traumdeutung* Freud used the «Maikäfertraum» to elaborate his notion of the condensation of dreams. Yet at the moment where «Frankfurt, September» seemingly thickens its Freudian entanglement by the mention of the dream, it begins in fact to elide psychoanalysis altogether so as to encrypt lines of Kafka and turn to a kind of productive poetic silence in song. This realignment of poetry, as we shall see, subtracts itself from the discourse of the psyche. And indeed the *Käfer* has a source not only in Freud but also in Kafka. In Kafka's «Hochzeitsbereitungen auf dem Lande,» the character Eduard Raban lies in bed and dreams, comparing his body to that of a *Maikäfer* (*Hochzeitsvorbereitungen* 12).

Unlike both Kafka's text and Freud's case study concerning the *Käfertraum*, this poem does not reveal explicit dream content.⁸ This is because the «Maikäfertraum» «lights up» the wall instead of being illuminated by it. This is also to say that this dream gives rise to a blind discourse rather than a dream that presents a vision. Such a vision would depend on either a discourse or a content, both of which are not present in «Frankfurt, September.» The «cockchafer» does not constitute content but instead a dream *qua* dream in its bare transformative power. This removal from the role played by the dream in psychoanalysis was also at work in Celan's general appraisal of psychoanalysis, the aim of which is to uncover the subject's dream world so as to produce a cure. Celan remained sensitive to what Werner Kraft, in a monograph on Karl

Kraus, referred to as a «tödliche Feindschaft gegen die Psychoanalyse» a remark that Celan underlined in his copy of the book. In a stance that he shared with modernists such as Rilke, Kraus disparagingly wrote that psychoanalysts «greifen in unsern Traum, als ob es unsere Tasche wäre» (Kraft 265). Kraft sums up the resistance in this fashion: «Wer so zu träumen vermag, der muß den leidenschaftlichen Wunsch haben, die Traumwelt für sich zu bewahren und sie gegen jeden fremden Eingriff zu schützen. Der Traum ist für Karl Kraus die stärkste Waffe gegen die Psychoanalyse, die ihn deuten will» (265). We will have reason to return to «the weapon» in the discussion of «Vom Anblick der Amseln.» For now, suffice it to say that a distance on the part of Celan to psychoanalysis as well as psychology is furthermore suggested by his practice of clipping newspaper articles about critics of psychiatry or the unintentional death of clinic residents.⁹ It is not Freudian discourse, which illuminates the wall, but instead it is the dream *qua* dream, which is also the dream in terms of Kafka. The transformative movement of Eduard Raban is seen in this light. He metamorphoses into the *Maikäfer*, a metaphor for the poetic act of destruction and creation.

The *Stellwand* serves as a boundary for the discourse about dreams. As such, it is to be distinguished from the dream itself. While the dream illuminates the boundaries of discourses, the discourses remain blind to the dream. Behind at once the boundary of the discourse about dreams and at the same time the dream itself is Freud's forehead at the moment of its opening:

Dahinter, klagegerastert,
tut sich Freuds Stirn auf,

This is indeed the poem's strangest image. For, a world opens here behind the blind wall. A world is opened up, in the sense that Freud is one of the few figures whose name signifies a discourse that attempts to explain the entirety of human experience. This open consciousness displays the lament matrixed on the forehead. The word *rastern* relates to *radieren*, that is, to writing, scraping, scratching.¹⁰ This is a raster of the lament in the sense that laments, like discourses, produce an event instead of merely copying a foundational wound. The poem likens the way in which this sphere is «opened up by Freud's head» and how it becomes in discourse a *Radierung*, in which this sphere is constructed out of the *Klage*. At the core of psychoanalytic discourse lies the wound transformed into narrative, that is, a lament that gets cathected to other things. As Freud wrote about those wounded by melancholy, «ihre Klagen sind Anklagen» (X: 434). The opened sphere of Freudian discourse is that discourse which is marked and written by the lament. By contrast, as Margarete

Susman wrote in a remark underlined by Celan, «Kafka klagt nicht» (Celan, *Bibliothèque* 545).

In the place of the narrative of lament, «Frankfurt, September» directs its reader toward the nexus of mimesis and song at the poem's end. This allows the poem to withdraw from psychoanalysis, so as to lead, as we will see, to the encounter with Kafka. The caesura at the mid-point of «Frankfurt, September» manages to create an outside, one that is named by the poem and produced by the clash with Kafka's proposition, a clash made possible by the opening of Freud's forehead:

die draußen
hartgeschwiegene Träne
schießt an mit dem Satz:

According to Barnert, «draußen» should be read as that which is strange or not belonging, and for him, this is the incorporation of the foreign citation that follows it and by extension the encounter with reality (Barnert 328). While I agree that *draußen* has the meaning of what does not belong, I suggest that this applies to the silence of the tear. Silence is always outside and thus has no proper belonging. As such, it introduces an outside to the inside of the poetic body. The emergence of Kafka's text in the body of the poem is a kind of silence just like the encryption of the name is a kind of silence in that it reveals as it conceals. The tear is a trace with its origins near its visual source, a proximity which allows vision to become a source for «propositions.»

What appears to be a farewell in stanza three in fact creates the opening for returns and repetitions:

«Zum letzten-
mal Psycho-
logie.»

By permitting the language of the poem to become a kind of chatter, these particular quotations mark the way in which «Frankfurt, September» reflects on its sources. As the scholarship has pointed out, «Frankfurt, September» here borrows a line from Kafka's *Octave Notebooks*, a line that Celan had marked in two different editions of Kafka's works (Barnert 334). The poem's recitative act performs its own analysis, that is, a taking apart of Kafka's statement «Zum letztenmal,» while it contradicts much of its purported finality. This importation and re-formation cannot be a mere affirmation of a content purportedly asserting the end of psychology. If it were true – that psychology had enjoyed its last moment – it would disqualify the statement's repetition. The recitation of Kafka's phrase in «Frankfurt, September» repeats the writing of psychology and the proclamation of its end: the repetition of the

phrase, whose statement argues for finality, reveals this finality's impossibility. The poem's breaking up of Kafka's words further underscores the inversion of Kafka's statement, as well as marking the difference inherent in the quotation.

For Rainer Nägele, «Frankfurt, September» does not «reject the sphere opened up by Freud's forehead,» for Freud was not a supporter but instead a critic of psychology (138). In this view, Celan's poem seems to side with psychoanalysis in rejecting psychology. However, this overlooks how «Frankfurt, September» leaves open or unsaid the issue of a linkage between psychology and psychoanalysis. The latter remains a psychology, that is, an order of the mind. *Psychoanalysis* – a breaking down of the psyche in order for its working parts to be discerned – remains a *logos*, a discourse about the psyche, as Freud remarked (XIV: 289). If Kafka's phrase truly accomplishes «the act of taking leave, forever, from psychology» (Nägele 138) there would be nothing in Celan's repetition of the phrase other than either triumph or nostalgia. This would be in either case the superfluous recollection of a farewell, for there would be no reason to repeat the obvious. The repetition, alteration, and quotation of a statement that announces how it has transcended something would make sense only if it has not yet really been transcended. At issue is not agreement or disagreement with Freud, but the claim that with psychoanalysis we have overcome psychology. We may announce the end of psychology; yet «Frankfurt, September» asserts that despite this announcement, the rumors of its demise are greatly exaggerated. It too, the Freudian attempt to overcome psychology, when carried out within the paradigm of the psyche, remains an immanent psycho-logical critique, an immanent gesture toward transcendence. «Frankfurt, September» does not announce a triumph of psychoanalysis and a farewell to psychology. Instead, it announces itself as a detour from their concerns.

Celan's experience with clinical psychiatry, including his sense of being used as a «guinea pig» for medical science, may have led to this detour from psychology. Be that as it may, «Frankfurt, September» grasps the truth that pronouncements of overcoming are premature. In the context of this insight, the poem itself does not overcome Freud. Instead, with its last line, it inhabits a singing as silence, a line that removes itself from the concerns of consciousness. In March 1970 Celan wrote to Ilana Shmueli: «Du kennst meine Verfassung, Du weißt, wie es dazu gekommen ist, die Ärzte haben da viel zu verantworten, jeder Tag ist eine Last, das, was Du «eine» – genauer: «meine eigene gesundheit» nennst, das kann es wohl nie geben, die Zerstörungen reichen bis in den Kern meiner Existenz hinein» (113).¹¹ We are not obliged to accept Celan's version of physicians, psychology, and treatment. If the under-

standing of treatment that one encounters in his friends' reminiscences and Celan's letters was characteristic for Celan's treatment, there is truth to his assessment of its effects. Demanded by the clinical institution to sever any connection between memory and illness, he instead cut himself off from the establishment, which nevertheless continues to exert its force in constructing subjects.

By breaking open Kafka's proposition, «Frankfurt, September» allows the phrase *zum letzten Mal* to shoot forward like an arrow. «Frankfurt, September» wants to become this *last mark*. As a preliminary act, the poem challenges the reader to mark its removal from psychoanalysis and psychology. Once thus removed from the discourse of the psyche, the poem can become this last *Mal*. This mark presents itself in the «Psycho-/logie,» a word that hovers between soul (psyche) and an animating breath, the *logie/logos*. The last mark is one of a movement whose mark is the appearance of a presence within destruction. Instead of generation, «Frankfurt, September» offers this gesture of «this is.» The poem draws on the metaphor of a life's breath to present itself as a breath of life. It can only do so in its removal from psychology and psychoanalysis but in a form that is still marked by these discourses, a severed mark of «logie,» that is, a word which cannot stand on its own and yet it must do so, for it has subtracted itself from discourses of the mind. It waits for a reader to read this act. Only then can it be translated from *-logie* into a *logos* as action. In the poem's final line, the figure of the glottal stop that sings can be read as this *Mal*, a breath that is silent but animating.

Against the backdrop of the withdrawal from the talk of consciousness in «Frankfurt, September,» the poem's appropriation of Kafka is striking:

Die Simili-
Dohle
frühstückt.

The strange reference to «frühstücken» seems out of place until one thinks not only of a twilight between night and day but moreover of how «Frankfurt, September» itself takes the similarities to Kafka into its body as if consuming them. The poem borrows from Kafka not only in name but also in terms of Kafka's broken citation. From Kafka's name, which is encrypted in the jackdaw, the poem creates its own Kafka. This act of mimetic creation is named in the «Simili.» By announcing itself as song that has emerged from Kafka, «Frankfurt, September» claims Kafka as its source. At the same time, it takes Kafka's phrase and deforms it so as to remove not only the poem but also Kafka from the discourse of consciousness. The *Simili*-Kafka, which the poem relies on, will feed itself.

The focus of the poem's first half was consciousness and vision. Yet there too, light was emitted from the mouth, or more exactly from the beard. With the image of eating at the poem's end, «Frankfurt, September» returns to the site of the mouth and throat where it concludes:

Der Kehlkopfverschlußlaut
singt.

Scholars have pointed out how the k-k sound of «Kehlkopf» further encrypts the name of Kafka and the jackdaw in *kavka*. The k-k pattern also names the laryngeal cancer that reduced Kafka in his last days to silence (Nägele 138). Glottal stop is the sound that is no sound. It is the moment intervening after one sound and before another sound. The poem is able to draw at once on the silence that Kafka encrypts and at the same time on the breath choked off. The pause heard here is not only the pause in the discourse of psychoanalysis and of empiricism but also that of a silent language, the obverse of the poem's citational chatter. In its citations, «Frankfurt, September» reflects on its sources. In its silence, it registers an encounter with the other in the form of a breath of life.

Celan's famous figure of the «Atemwende» bears particularly on this event. In the *Atemwende* text «Vom Anblick der Amseln» the reliance of the poem on a foundational discourse is again at issue, in particular the discourse of Gnosticism. In question too is the relationship of the poem to Kafka as well as to the role of song. Yet in this case, Kafka's encrypted name is the source for a song used as a weapon against a nature that would destroy the self.

«Vom Anblick der Amseln» is first and foremost a poetological lyric, one that conceives its singing as weapon in a struggle for the survival of the poetic voice. In the singing of the birds, it reflects on its origin:

Vom Anblick der Amseln, abends,
durchs Unvergitterte, das
mich umringt,

versprach ich mir Waffen.

Vom Anblick der Waffen – Hände,
vom Anblick der Hände – die längst
vom flachen, scharfen
Kiesel geschriebene Zeile.

– Welle, du
trugst ihn her, schliffst ihn zu,
gabst dich, Un-
verlierbare, drein,
Ufersand, nimmst,

nimmst auf,
Strandhafer, weh
das Deine hinzu –,

die Zeile, die Zeile,
die wir umschlungen durchschwimmen,
zweimal in jedem Jahrtausend,
all den Gesang in den Fingern,
den auch die durch uns lebendige,
herrlich-undeutbare
Flut uns nicht glaubt. (2: 94)

The poem is framed by its concerns with singing: the singing of the birds and the singing of the body. The poem contains an encoded allusion to Kafka's name in its first line:

Vom Anblick der Amseln, abends,
durchs Unvergitterte, das
mich umringt

This first stanza reveals how much it owes its survival to Kafka. While Kafka's name means jackdaw, Kafka noted in a diary entry that his name in Hebrew is Amschel: «Ich heiße hebräisch Amschel» (*Tagebücher* 133) – a shade off Celan's given name, Antschel. This was not lost on Celan, a life-long reader of Kafka. Three years prior to «Vom Anblick der Amseln» Celan had latched onto this correspondence, noting in a letter: «Kafka hieß mit seinem jüdischen Vornamen *Amschel*, Antschel ist eine Nebenform davon; mittelhochdeutsch heißt *amschel* – Amsel» (Celan, *Goll* 566).¹² The poem is undeniably biographical. In May 1965, one day prior to his release from the private psychiatric clinic Villa des Pages in Le Vésinet, Celan writes this poem, which locates in Kafka a weapon for defending the self against an attack.¹³ At this crucial point Celan discovered a source for writing in the aleatory encounter of his given name with that of Kafka's. From Kafka's name is generated the hands that will produce a singing capable of outliving catastrophe, a catastrophe symbolized by the sea in the poem's last lines.

The «unbarred» (*das Unvergitterte*) in «Vom Anblick der Amseln» is at once the Open and at the same time the unprotected.¹⁴ In this language of the unprotected there is the thought of Celan in the clinic and about to be released from the clinic. The self in the poem is surrounded by what is open, unprotected, and unbarred. To be ringed in by the unbarred is to be enclosed by a ring but one that is composed by an Open. To be enclosed by an Open is to be open to the greatest threats. The sight of the blackbirds makes it possible for the self to look through the unbarred and find an expectation for a future. Yet the expected must emerge in an encrypted form, which is evidenced not

only by the ring that surrounds and encrypts the self but also in the encrypted name of Kafka.

A promise or a hope is needed due to the most extreme exposure to the containment of the unbarred Open. In the face of the unbarred and the threat of the unprotected, a line of defense is required. At this point, Celan's poem focuses on vision to display a progression, in which one object of sight provides a source for yet another. In this phenomenal chain, the poem moves from bird-watching and watching Kafka's encrypted name (written over the blackbirds) to the weapons that can offer a defense.

Here Celan drew on Kafka's diary for this poem and for these weapons as a defense in the face of an unprotected open. In his final diary entry, Kafka writes of living in language as a tragic struggle with an order that is as powerful as it is natural. Most striking in the following diary passage is the idea that language in the hands of the divine threatens the self. Kafka writes of inverting this thing turned against the self into a weapon with which to fight:

Jedes Wort, gewendet in der Hand der Geister – dieser Schwung der Hand ist ihre charakteristische Bewegung –, wird zum Spieß, gekehrt gegen den Sprecher. Eine Bemerkung wie diese ganz besonders. Und so ins Unendliche. Der Trost wäre nur: es geschieht, ob du willst oder nicht. Und was du willst, hilft nur unmerklich wenig. Mehr als Trost ist: Auch du hast Waffen. (*Tagebücher* 365)¹⁵

In this most striking passage from Kafka's diaries many questions emerge regarding the nature of «the spirits» and their relation to the word. Scholars have debated the role of Gnosticism in Kafka's texts (Corngold 8–12; 111–25).¹⁶ There is a strong argument to be made for a reading of the diary in terms of a radical Gnosticism, one that privileges writing over belief. According to this view Kafka is seen readying himself for «an assault on the last earthly frontier» (Corngold 125). The diary entry pits the self against the spirits in an infinite and infinitely recursive battle. War militarizes every terrain and there is no neutrality. The word will be used against the self. While there is no zone that remains above the fray, this infinite fray means the self has weapons to fight back with.

In her excellent study of Celan's poetry, Rochelle Tobias argues that Celan's later poems turn away from symbols of the divine to those of the material world (105). Yet the use of such symbols of the divine in his early work was put to an elision of conventional Gnostic-Kabbalistic content in favor of a heaven that places the human at its center. By their notable departure from such symbols the poems of *Atemwende* subtract themselves from the Gnostic altogether. This process of subtraction began earlier but reaches its full flowering with the end of *Die Niemandsrose* and its long poem «Huhediblu» (1: 275–77).

What Celan's «Vom Anblick der Amseln» offers, instead of insights into either Jewish mysticism or the psyche or empiricism, is the poetic line received from nature, the line that the self will use to survive exposure to nature, for which the tide at the poem's end is the strongest metaphor. The sight of Kafka that has metamorphosed into a plurality, one which can take flight, one glimpsed through the unprotected Open, permits the sudden promise of weapons, hands, and the poetic line. In Celan's notes (found in a copy of Hegel's *Ästhetik*) this suddenness is the moment of reality's appearance in the trope of the «Augenblick»: «Der Dichter, mag er dies Wirkliche für den Augenblick des Gedichts auch freisetzen, er fällt nichtsdestoweniger in seine (alte) Befangenheit zurück – aus der ihn, wenn je, erst das nächste Gedicht wieder befreit – auch diesmal nur für einen «Augenblick» (Qtd. in Celan, *Bibliothèque* 135). Seen from the angle afforded us by «Vom Anblick der Amseln,» this suggests resemblance to Walter Benjamin's notion of the «kritischer Augenblick» (2:1, 210), one which describes how imitative similarities flash for just a moment before the eyes. Celan's use of repetition in the word «Anblick» bears on this instant. The gazing at the birds sets in motion a procedure by which the self receives the line with which it will craft its survival.

«Vom Anblick der Amseln» finds a threat and a «more than consolation» in the Open that remains unprotected. The poem recites from Kafka's notion of inverted language in an effort to draw on its defensive strategies. It borrows the weapons forming the source of the poem, weapons that lead to writing:

Vom Anblick der Waffen – Hände,
vom Anblick der Hände – die längst
vom flachen, scharfen
Kiesel geschriebene Zeile.

The weapons derive from the gaze at hands that will write and the «long ago» written line. As a line that some thing or some one wrote long ago, it returns to the voice of this poem because the voice locates in its future a promise. Here the poem reveals a movement from speech to signs. Through the promise to the self, the poetic voice will, or hopes to, be able to receive the line as a promise that comes at once from Kafka and at the same time from the unbarred. The poem hopes to receive the donation of Kafka's name. The word *ver-sprechen* can mean to speak something into being as a future act. Linked to this act is an etymological meaning of *versprechen*, to defend.¹⁷ As this key word is in the past tense, the poem sets both the written line and the act of the hopeful promise in the past.

This poem realizes this promise of the weapon and the line received from another name. «Vom Anblick der Amseln» is the fulfillment of this speech act

as promise. This *Mehr-als-Trost* is Kafka's gift: writing as a weapon. While the poem precedes from the promise the self makes to the self, the poem is not the end of this promise. A future is also at stake, a future that can be seen in the movement from the weapons to the hands and from the hands to the line.

This passage from Kafka's text had special significance for Celan, for it proves to be a source for the future of writing. In place of Kafka's pointed *Spieß*, which is held by the hand of both the writer and the spirits, «Vom Anblick der Amseln» inserts a «flat, sharp» flint. This flint is a result of having observed the hands; from this flint comes the written line. For Kafka writing is both the weapon used against the self and the weapon with which the self will battle the spirits. In the process of the poetic recitation, the name Kafka in the poem experiences the erasure of its singularity so that it can yield to a plurality of singing Kafkas. Once released from its pure singularity this name becomes an arsenal, as it were, which makes weapons available to the poem. The Kafkas/blackbirds promise hands, the line is promised by the hands, which the poem frees from the spirits for itself. The weapons of one songbird, Kafka, are passed onto another: Antschel, Amcel, Ancel, Celan.

As do the weapons, so too does the *Zeile* in «Vom Anblick der Amseln» owe itself to Kafka's notion of a language with an aggressive capacity to control the self. In turning toward the *Zeile*, the poem finds weapons from another place in Kafka's diaries. By directing its gaze at the hands that have been won from the spirits, the poem is able to promise itself Kafka's line from the past. In his copy of Kafka's diary, Celan marked the one passage that most displays a logic similar to that discussed above: «Aber jeden Tag soll zumindest eine Zeile gegen mich gerichtet werden, wie man die Fernrohre jetzt gegen den Kometen richtet» (12). Between these two marked passages, this one from 1910 at the beginning of Kafka's diaries, the one discussed earlier from 1923 at the end of the diaries, there are years of Kafka's life. In both passages, Kafka writes of language, the line, the word, the remark, being turned (*wenden*) or directed (*richten*) against him. Writing appears as a constant danger and an assailant that will either engulf the self in the telescope's encompassing voyeuristic gaze or attack it with a lance. It is an external order, a Pandora's box, an armory, which, once opened, provides the weapon both to use and to defend against.

In this Kafkan notion, language is uncontrollable, spiritual, yet quasi-natural, which ironically turns against its speaker, against which the speaker has only the same weapon of language. In the case of Celan's *oeuvre*, it takes on a particular function, for it enables this *oeuvre* to distance itself from empiricism, gnosticism, as well as psychology. In the place of discursive generalities, each gaze in «Vom Anblick der Amseln» yields a tool with which to continue

to give shape to individual entities. The repetitive gaze provides a weapon. The weapon in turn is one of three objects released by the gaze. Coming at the end of the poem's first section, it also characterizes what follows it as weapons: the hands and the line. In Kafka's text the word will be turned against the speaker. In «Vom Anblick der Amseln» words and things provide the source for things to come. There is no escape from phenomena, the phenomena that resist and undermine the self, and the self must learn to turn phenomena to its advantage.

This is where the image of the wave in stanza four comes into play. This stanza puts into practice the visual procedure presented in the first three stanzas. In this, a vision that is exposed to the Open will force words to yield to other words as weapons. «Vom Anblick der Amseln» returns to the metaphor of vision from Kafka's conception of language. In this case, the weapon in question takes the form of an image of the *Flut*:

– Welle, du
trugst ihn her, schliffst ihn zu,
gabst dich, Un-
verlierbare, drein,
Ufersand, nimmst,
Nimmst auf,
Strandhafer, weh
das Deine hinzu –,

In conjuring up this image, «Vom Anblick der Amseln» finds a way to use its weapons: it presents its own source and achieves self-representation. Long ago the pebble had written the line that the self uses to project a future. The line is a trace or an outline of the pebble, which itself is a result of the wave and the time it has taken to hone it.

Celan most likely borrowed the image of the pebble and the wave from Henri Bergson's *L'Évolution créatrice*. In Bergson's work the pebble and the wave are metaphors for a discussion of the mind and its relation to the entirety of life. For Bergson the mind is a product of life's total material world and this world's evolution. As such, the mind as part cannot grasp the whole of life. To make such a claim would, in Bergson's words, be to claim «that the part is equal to the whole, that the effect can reabsorb its cause, or *that the pebble left on the beach displays the form of the wave that brought it there*» (xx). In Bergson's text, the image illustrates how human instinct preserves a vestigial remnant of the essential vital impulse from which all life derives, yet this human element is incapable of grasping the entirety of what has produced it.

As this stanza shows, Celan's pebble too does not claim to grasp the time that has turned it into a pen, the tool of the writer. As a result, the wave, which

is also to say nature, moved from a state where it cannot be lost, to what now is losable: «Un-/verlierbar[].» Nature provides an instrument of writing for the hands of the poem. In producing the weapon with which to write, the wave gave itself up. That is a decisive moment for the poem, which is why it is its central line. To move from what cannot be lost, which is also to say what cannot be forgotten, to what is now open to loss, is to be exposed to oblivion. The wave gives the stone, which wrote the line, over to the sand which takes it. The beach grass, which stops the sand and which also relies on the sand to live, blows itself to the stone. Enclosed by the dashes, this stanza unites water, sand, and fauna in the movement from what is locatable to what is losable.

In the final stanza, the pebble still bears the trace of the wave, while «the line» returns to water:

die Zeile, die Zeile,
die wir umschlungen durchschwimmen,
zweimal in jedem Jahrtausend,
all den Gesang in den Fingern,
den auch die durch uns lebendige,
herrlich-undeutbare
Flut uns nicht glaubt.

The line becomes the *Flut* at the same time that it mutates further into the singing carried by the fingers, fingers which extend from the hands from stanza three. This singing has its origin in Kafka, that is, the songbird-*Amseln* from the poem's first line. Singing fingers keep the poetic voice from drowning. While these hands bear the mark of Kafka's hand of the spirits, their singing as weapon is directed not against the spirits but against nature and a world of signs that threaten it. In Kafka's diary, words constitute a cosmic order that the self cannot defy. Yet the line carried by the waves to the self in «Vom Anblick der Amseln» is not an adversary. It is a trace through which individuals can traverse in time back and forth, «twice in each millennium.» Furthermore, the song that the self receives from Kafka does not so much invert the structure of belief informing the Gnosticism of Kafka as it nullifies belief as an issue for the self. Instead of the self believing in the divinity of nature, nature is in a position to believe in human singing, which is also to say in the phenomena that the poem produces.

The *Flut* is the other, magnificent and impossible to interpret. While the poem cannot interpret it, it enlivens this other. By swimming through the repeated line with singing in their fingers, the poem's personae make the *Flut* come alive. The fourth stanza offered an image of the wave that, for the sake of writing, gives itself to the bank sand and takes the beach grass with it as it returns to the sea. What in Kafka's text was the threat of self-dissolution

becomes a reciprocal process of giving and taking involving writing and nature. The poem pursues the Kafkan notion that writing cuts both against and with the self. As a weapon, it can offer semblance to nature. Yet in the final stanza, the poem sketches a narrative of mutual creation. The *Flut* made the written line possible. At stake is neither an interpretation of this *Flut* with its apocalyptic hints nor the reading of its inscrutability. At stake is the future of singing as the event of truth, a singing received from what is encrypted in the sign of the bird.

The poem's final image shows the fingers of these hands as they slice through the line armed with a song that is donated by Kafka. The self, now expanded to «wir,» moves through the *Flut* of the *Zeile*. The measured, breath-like motions of the swimmer draw on the line to produce a singing, an end it shares with «Frankfurt, September.» The line has been released from the bird just as it has been released from Kafka's diary. The poem reveals how it takes both weapons and a line from the birds (jackdaws?) to fashion them into singing. The fingers hold the song while they demonstrate how to dwell in the midst of a *Flut*. The *Flut*, as the overwhelming momentum of time, time which is inscrutable and magnificent, will not offer the consolation of belief. Instead, the voice seems to say, if you have singing, then «you too have weapons.»

Notes

- ¹ This is most likely a false folk etymology (Nägele 142–43).
- ² See for instance a letter to Klaus Wagenbach (Celan, *Gedichte* 746). See also the correspondence with Franz Wurm, in which Celan writes several times of the «Dohle» as a code for Kafka, as in his letter of May 1968 which, like «Frankfurt, September,» ciphers Freud and Kafka: «Warum, vor lauter Freud, vergessen Sie den Dohligen, den wir ja beide gelesen haben» (Celan and Wurm 151).
- ³ For discussions of psychoanalysis in Celan's work, see Bollack. For discussions of Kabbalah and mysticism in Celan's work, see Tobias 53–70, 80–91; Schulze, «Mystiker» and Schulze, «Stumbling.» For discussions of empiricism, in particular of the body, see Janz 232; Lyon, «(Patho)Psychologie,» and Tobias 79–117. For an overview of Celan's reception of Heideggerian figures and the relevant criticism, see Lyon, *Heidegger* 31–68.
- ⁴ Tobias refers to «divine dependency» as Celan's addition to «Kabbalist theogony and cosmogony after the Holocaust» (91). Yet in Celan's late texts, she notes, what is most common is the impossibility of a contact or union with a heavenly sphere (91).
- ⁵ Celan became an avid reader of Kafka as a teenager in Czernowitz (Chalfen 77). After the war he translated several of Kafka's texts into Romanian, and later, as an MA candidate in Paris, he planned to write a thesis on Kafka but later abandoned this idea. For discussions of Celan's relationship to Kafka, see Firges 199–205; Goltschnigg 322–25; and Sparr. For extensive discussions of «Frankfurt, September» see Bollack, Maletta, Perels, Vogt, and Nägele 135–69. For an overview of all scholarship on the poem see Barnert 293–94.

- «Vom Anblick der Amseln» has not been widely discussed in Celan scholarship. For brief commentaries on the poem, see Popov/McHugh 123; and Celan, *Die Gedichte* 746.
- ⁶ Unless noted otherwise Celan's works are cited parenthetically in the text with volume and page numbers based on *Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden*. See, for instance, «Schief» (2: 173), «Wirf das Sonnenjahr» (2: 203), «Offene Glottis» (2: 388), and «... auch keinerlei Friede» (2: 201). These poems do not leave Freudian assumptions untouched. «... auch keinerlei Friede», for example, develops notions of repetition and wounds at odds with the assumptions of psychoanalysis. In this context, see Hillard 282–87.
- ⁷ For a discussion of the difference between the date «recorded in the body of the poem» and the «date of its composition» see Derrida (16).
- ⁸ As Böschstein-Schäfer argues, Celan's texts, which often name the word dream, provide scant dream content. One of the reasons for this reticence to reveal dreams, she argues, can be attributed to the experience common to those who live under totalitarian regimes. Dreams, due to their proximity to the unconscious, reveal what is seemingly the real state of affairs – terror and one's complicity in it – as opposed to consciousness's attempts to transform reality into a more palatable image (226–27).
- ⁹ Barnert mentions several of these articles (301).
- ¹⁰ The word thus further relates to Gisèle Celan-Lestrange, whose *Radierungen* were influential for Celan.
- ¹¹ See also Leiser's assessment: «Schließlich hatte er nicht mehr die Kraft, noch eine zum Scheitern verurteilte Behandlung durch einen verständnislosen Psychoanalytiker zu beginnen. Er nahm sich das Leben» (79). Leiser thus makes the suggestion that Celan kills himself under the pressures of the psychoanalytic institution.
- ¹² This is from a March 1962 letter to Reinhard Federmann. Celan refers to this Kafka connection also in his unpublished diaries (Celan and Celan-Lestrange, II: 188), among other places.
- ¹³ About the clinic stay, see Celan and Celan-Lestrange II: 179.
- ¹⁴ On the figure of «das Offne», see Rilke 224, 324, 673–78. For Heidegger's interpretation of the Open, see *Holzwege* 284–316. Heidegger sees the Open in Rilke as «das Ungegenständliche der vollen Natur» (290). The freedom suggested by the Open in Celan's poem is triggered by gazing at the animal, which alone for Rilke is permitted to inhabit the Open.
- ¹⁵ In his copy, Celan marks the entire passage in the margin, leaving a space, so that the last line is marked especially (365). The second line («Jedes Wort ... Geister») is underlined. The first lines are also marked with x, written three times. Celan also cites the passage in a brief poetic reflection in his notes, probably of 1954 (*Mikrolithen* 102).
- ¹⁶ Corngold distinguishes between historical, orthodox «Gnosticism» and «Kafka's late poetic gnosticism», radicalized and more secular (112).
- ¹⁷ Grimm 25: 1498.

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Besprechungen / Reviews

LUTZ KOEPNICK: *Framing Attention: Windows on Modern German Culture*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2007. 312 pp. \$ 49.95.

As Lutz Koepnick observes, «Windows are odd things» – architectural devices which create boundaries which they simultaneously undermine (1). They mediate between inside and outside, interlinking the private and the public, the individual and the collective, past and present, art and politics. Described by Baudelaire as a screen «of imaginary transport and creative displacement» (2), windows enable the viewer to move beyond the ordinary, yet they can also serve a less liberating purpose. They can channel the viewer's gaze and attention, and in this respect can transform a group of individuals into a docile controllable mass. Indeed, as Koepnick's study illustrates, windows are inextricably linked to Germany's fraught history from the nineteenth century to the present, as they are bound up with recurrent attempts to forge a sense of collective identity.

In a series of case studies, *Windows of Attention* explores the evolving role of windows across a range of mostly visual media. Chapter 1 is centred around one particular painting, Adolph Menzel's *Balcony Room* from 1845, which «redefined the entire concept of the window and its role in art» (28). In contrast to the window paintings of Carl Gustav Carus and Caspar David Friedrich, Menzel's picture no longer provides a stable and clearly delineated visual scene but highlights «the fragmentary, fleeting, decentred, and unseen» (28). Ultimately, then, Menzel's paintings present vision as physiologically determined, «a site of bodily transactions at which experiences of scopic sovereignty and perceptual synthesis become elusive» (57).

If Menzel's paintings thus underline the increasingly elusive nature of vision and attention in modern culture, then Richard Wagner's musical theatre both reflects and resists this development. Drawing on the original staging of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1868), Koepnick argues that Wagner's innovations are torn between two conflicting impulses: his perfection of theatrical illusionism coincides with a «challenge to Diderot's fourth wall as it emerged around 1900» (63). Wagner's innovative stage technology captivated his audience, «turning theatre into a window of projective seeing and immersing attention» (91), and this dynamic also extended to the performers. Ultimately, Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* aimed to counteract the fragmentation of modern life by fostering emotional links between *all* participants of this spectacle «to recuperate the foundations of meaningful community» (64).

From Wagner's proto-cinematic theatrical effects, Koepnick turns in Chapter 3 to early film and its role in legitimizing Germany's colonial aspirations under Emperor Wilhelm II. German cinema prior to the First World War proliferated images of the new colonies while simultaneously attempting to control the sense of nomadism and dispersal which accompanied this colonial expansion. For this purpose, German film cameras increasingly focused on the emperor himself, whose charismatic presence served to homogenize the disparate spaces of empire, turning «the unsettling nomadism of modern geopolitics» into a «story of historical progress» (114).