

**UNINTERRUPTED DIALOGUE:
BETWEEN TWO INFINITIES, THE POEM¹**

by

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ABSTRACT

With the attempt to express my feeling of admiration for Hans-Georg Gadamer an ageless melancholy mingles. This melancholy begins as of the friends' lifetime. A *cogito* of the farewell signs the breathing of their dialogues. One of the two will have been doomed, from the beginning, to carry alone both the dialogue that he must pursue beyond the interruption, and the memory of the first interruption. To carry the world of the other, to carry both the other and his world, the other and the world that have disappeared, in a world without world. That shall be one of the ways to let resound within ourselves the line of poetry by Paul Celan, "*Die Welt ist fort, ich muss dich tragen.*"

Will I be able to express, accurately and faithfully, my admiration for Hans-Georg Gadamer?

I obscurely sense, mingling with the recognition and affection that have characterized this feeling for such a long time, an ageless melancholy.

Such melancholy, I dare say, is not only historical. Even if, by some event still difficult to decipher, this melancholy corresponded to some such history, it would do so in a singular, intimate, almost private fashion, secret, and still in reserve. For the first movement of this melancholy does not always turn it towards [*vers*] the epicenters of earthquakes that my generation will have perceived most often, in their effects rather than in their causes, belatedly, indirectly and in a mediatized fashion, unlike Gadamer who will have been their immense witness, nay their thinker. And not only in Germany. Every time we spoke together, in French truth be told, more than once here in Heidelberg, often in Paris or in Italy, and through [*à travers*] everything he confided to me, with a friendliness whose warmth always honored, moved and encouraged me, I had the feeling I understood better a century of German thought, philosophy, and politics—and not only German.

Such melancholy will no doubt have been changed—and infinitely aggravated—by death. It will have been sealed by it. Forever. Yet underneath the petrified immobility of this seal, in this difficult to read but in some way blessed signature, I have a hard time discerning that which dates from the death of the friend and that which will have preceded it for such a long time. The same melancholy, another one but the same also, must have invaded me as of our first encounter in Paris in 1981. Our discussion must have begun by a strange interruption—something other than a misunderstanding [*malentendu*—by a sort of prohibition, the inhibition of a suspension. And also by the patience of indefinite expectation, of an *epoché* that held your breath, and withheld judgment or conclusion. As for me, I stood there with my mouth gaping. I spoke very little to him, and what I said then was addressed only indirectly to him. I was, however, sure that a strange and intense sharing had begun. A partnership perhaps. I had a premonition that what he would have no doubt called an “interior dialogue” would be pursued in each of us, sometimes wordlessly, immediately in us or indirectly, as was confirmed in the years which followed, this time in very studious and eloquent, often fecund, fashion, through [*à travers*] a large number of philosophers who, in the world, in Europe but above all in the United States, attempted [*ont tenté*] to take charge of and reconstitute this exchange still virtual or withheld, to prolong it or to interpret its strange caesura.

I

In speaking of *dialogue*, I use here a word that I confess will remain for a long time and for a thousand good or bad reasons (which I'll spare you the presentation of) foreign to my lexicon, like a foreign language the usage of which would call for worried [*inquiètes*] and precautionary translations. By specifying above all “interior dialogue,” I am delighted to have already let Gadamer speak in me. I literally inherit what he said in 1985, a little while after our first encounter, in the conclusion to his text “*Destruction und Dekonstruktion*”:

Finally, that dialogue, which we pursue *in our own thought* and which is perhaps enriching itself in our own day with great new partners who are drawn from a heritage of humanity that is extending across our planet, should seek its partner everywhere—just because this partner is other, and especially if the other is completely different. Whoever wants me to take deconstruction to heart and insists upon difference stands at *the beginning of a dialogue*, and not at its end.²

What is it that remains, even today, so *unheimlich* about this encounter that was, according to me, all the more fortunate, if not successful, precisely for having been, in the eyes of many, a missed encounter? It succeeded so well at being missed that it left an active and provocative trace, which is promised to more of a future than a harmonious and consensual dialogue would have been.

I call this experience, in German, *unheimlich*. I have no French equivalent to describe in one word this affect: in the course of a single and therefore irreplaceable encounter, a peculiar strangeness came to mingle indissociably with a familiarity at once intimate and misleading, sometimes disquieting, vaguely spectral. I also use this untranslatable German word, *unheimlich*, to revive right here, even as I speak in English and you can read me in English, our common sensitivity to the limits of translation. I also use it in memory of what Gadamer diagnosed concerning what many of our friends hastily interpreted as an originary misunderstanding [*malentendu*]. According to him, the reef of translation had been one of the essential causes of this surprising interruption in 1981. At the opening of *Dekonstruktion und Hermeneutik*, in 1988, a little while after, I assume, our second public debate right here in Heidelberg and with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Reiner Wiehl about Heidegger's political commitments, Gadamer situated the test of translation and the always threatening risk of misunderstanding at the border of languages.

My encounter with Derrida in Paris three years ago, which I had looked forward to as a dialogue between two totally independent developers of Heideggerian initiatives in thought, involved special difficulties. First of all, there was the language barrier. This is always a great difficulty when *thought or poetry* strives to leave traditional forms behind, trying to hear new orientations drawn from within one's own mother tongue.³

The fact that Gadamer names "thought or poetry," rather than science or philosophy, is not fortuitous. That is a thread that we ought not lose track of today. Moreover, in "The Boundaries of Language" (1984), which came before the essay I just quoted from 1988, but which was closer to our encounter (1981), Gadamer dwelled at length on what linked the question of translation to poetic experience. The poem is not only the best example of the untranslatable. It also gives its most proper, its least improper, place to the test of translation. The poem no doubt is the only place propitious to the experience of language, that is to say, of an idiom that both defies translation forever and therefore calls for a translation summoned to do the impossible, to

make the impossible possible in an unheard of event. In “The Boundaries of Language,” Gadamer writes “that [he was just speaking of the “phenomenon of foreign language”] is valid especially when it is a question of translation [and he refers in a note precisely to his essay, “Reading is like Translating”⁴]. And in that case, poetry, the lyrical poem, is the great instance for the experience of the appropriateness and the foreignness of language.”⁵

Supposing that all of poetry belongs *right through and simply* to what we call art or the fine arts, let us also recall what Gadamer specifies more than once, notably in his *Selbstdarstellung*.⁶ He underlines the essential role of what he calls “the experience of art” in his concept of philosophical hermeneutics, next to all the sciences of comprehension that serve for him as a starting point. Let us never forget that *Truth and Method* opened its proper space with a chapter devoted to “the experience of art,” to an “experience of the work of art” that “always fundamentally surpasses any subjective horizon of interpretation, whether that of the artist or that of the recipient.”⁷ Concerning this horizon of subjectivity, the work of art will never hold itself up straight like an object facing up to a subject. What constitutes its being a work is that it affects and transforms the subject, beginning with its signatory. Gadamer proposes reversing this presumed order in a paradoxical formula:

The ‘subject’ of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it, but the work itself.⁸

Yet this sovereign authority of the work, for example that which makes the poem (*Gedicht*) a given order and the dict of a dictation, this sovereign authority of the work is also a call for responsible answers and dialogue (*Gespräch*). You have recognized the title of a work Gadamer published in 1990, *Gedicht und Gespräch*.

I do not know if I have the right, without presumption, to speak of a dialogue between Gadamer and me. Yet should I aspire to it at all, I would repeat therefore that this dialogue was first of all interior and *unheimlich*. The secret of that which sustains [*entretient*] this *Unheimlichkeit*, here, at this very instant, is that this interior dialogue has probably kept [*gardé*] alive, active, and auspicious the tradition of that which seemed to suspend it outside; I mean in particular, by “outside,” in the public sphere. I want to believe that, in an inner conscience [*for intérieur*] that is never so inward as to be closed, this conversation [*entretien*] treasured [*a gardé*] the memory of the misunderstanding with a remarkable constancy. This conversation cultivated and saved

the hidden sense of this interruption in an uninterrupted fashion, whether silent or not—and for me, more often than not, in an interior and apparently mute way.

One speaks often and too easily of interior monologue. Yet an interior dialogue precedes it and makes it possible. Dividing and enriching it, such dialogue commands and orients it. My interior dialogue with Gadamer, with Gadamer himself, with Gadamer living, and living still, if I dare say, will not have ceased since our Paris encounter.

As always with friendship, at least such is how I experience it every time, this melancholy no doubt stems from [*tenait à*] a sad and invasive certainty: one day death will necessarily separate us. Fatal and inflexible law: one of two friends will always see the other die. The dialogue, as virtual as it may be, will forever be wounded by an ultimate interruption. Comparable to no other, a separation between life and death will defy thought right from a first enigmatic seal, that which we will endlessly seek to decipher. No doubt the dialogue continues, pursuing its wake with the survivor. The latter believes he guards the other in himself—he did so already while the other was alive—henceforth, the survivor lets the other speak inside himself. He does so perhaps better than ever, and that is a terrifying hypothesis. But survival carries within itself the trace of an ineffaceable incision. Interruption multiplies itself, one interruption affecting another, in abyssal repetition, more *unheimlich* than ever.

Why insist so much on interruption already? What is the remembrance that makes my memory today feel most disturbed, to the quick? Well, it is what was said, what was done or what happened, since the last of the three questions which, in 1981 in Paris, I had dared to ask Gadamer. This question marked at once the test, if not the confirmation of the misunderstanding, the apparent interruption of the dialogue, but also the beginning of an interior dialogue in each of us, a dialogue virtually without end and, as it were, continuous. At that time, indeed, I called for a certain interruption. Far from signifying the failure of the dialogue, such an interruption could become the condition of comprehension and understanding [*entente*].⁹ Allow me just once to recall my question, the third and last of a series, about good will in the desire for consensus and about the problematic integration of psychoanalytic hermeneutics within general hermeneutics.

Third question: it bears [*porte*] still on this axiomatics of good will. Whether with or without psychoanalytic afterthoughts, one can still raise

questions about this axiomatic precondition of interpretative discourse that Professor Gadamer calls *Verstehen*, “understanding the other” and “understanding one another.” Whether one speaks of consensus or of misunderstanding [*malentendu*] (as in Schleiermacher), one needs to ask whether the precondition for *Verstehen*, far from being the continuity of “rapport”, as was said last night, is not rather the interruption of rapport, a certain rapport of interruption, the suspension of all mediation.¹⁰

As is always the case, the melancholic certainty of which I am speaking thus begins as of the friends’ lifetime itself. Not only by an interruption but by a speech of interruption. A *cogito* of the farewell [*adieu*], this good-bye without return, signs the very breathing of the dialogue, of dialogue in the world or of the most interior dialogue. Mourning waits no longer at that moment. From this first encounter, interruption anticipates death, interruption precedes death. Interruption casts over everyone the gloom of an implacable future anterior. One of us two *will have* had to remain alone. Both of us knew this in advance. And right from the start. One of the two *will have* been doomed, from the beginning, to carry alone, in himself, both the dialogue that he must pursue beyond the interruption and the memory of the first interruption.

And carry the world of the other, which I will say without the facility of a hyperbole. The world after the end of the world.

For every time, and every time singularly, every time irreplaceably, every time infinitely, death is nothing less than an end *of the* world. Not *only one* end among others, the end of someone or of something *in the world*, the end of a life or of a living being. Death neither puts an end to someone in the world nor to *a* world among others. Death marks every time, every time in defiance of arithmetic, the absolute end of the one and only world, of that which everyone opens as one and only one world, the end of the unique world, the end of the totality of that which is or can be presented as the origin of the world for any unique living being, be it human or not.

The survivor, then, remains alone. Beyond the world of the other, he is also in some fashion beyond or before the world itself. In the world outside the world and deprived of the world. In the least, he feels solely responsible, assigned to carry both the other and *his* world, the other and *the* world that have disappeared, responsible without world (*weltlos*), without the soil of any world, thenceforth, in a world without world, as if without earth beyond the end of the world.

II

That would be one of the first ways, but no doubt not the only one, to let resound within ourselves, before or beyond verifiable interpretation, the line [vers] of poetry by Paul Celan, “*Die Welt ist fort, ich muss dich tragen.*”

Pronounced like a sentence, in the form of a sigh or a verdict, so goes the last line of a poem that we can read in the collection *Atemwende*.¹¹ Shortly before his death, Celan gave me a copy of it at the *Ecole normale supérieure* where he was my colleague for several years. Another split, another interruption.

If I make his voice be heard [*entendre*], if I hear it in me, now, it is first of all because I share Gadamer’s admiration for this other friend, Paul Celan. Like Gadamer I have often attempted [*tenté*],¹² in the night, to read Paul Celan and to think with him. With him towards [vers] him. If, once again, I wish to encounter this poem, it is, truth be told, in order to attempt, if not to feign, to address Gadamer himself, himself in me outside myself. It is in order to speak to him. Today I would like to pay homage to him with a reading that will also be a worried interpretation, quavered or quavering, and perhaps even something wholly other than an interpretation. In any case, on a path which would cross his.

GROSSE, GLÜHENDE WÖLBUNG

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

*der verkieselten Stirn eines Widders
brenn ich dies Bild ein, zwischen
die Hörner, darin,
im Gesang der Windungen, das
Mark der geronnenen
Herzmeere schwillt.*

*Wo-
gegen
rennt er nicht an?*

*Die Welt ist fort, ich muss dich tragen.*¹³

We will re-read this poem. We will attempt to listen to it, and then respond in a responsible fashion to what Gadamer often called the

Anspruch of the work, the claim it makes upon us, the demanding interpellation a poem institutes, the obstinate but justified reminder of its right to stand up for its rights. Yet why do I anticipate thus? And why have I quoted first a last line [*vers*], isolating it prior to any other, in what is no doubt violent and artificial fashion: *Die Welt ist fort, ich muss dich tragen?*

No doubt, it is so as to acknowledge its charge. I will try to measure [*peser*] the import or carrying-distance [*portée*]¹⁴ of this charge in a moment [*tout à l'heure*], in order to weigh [*soupeser*] it, in order to endure the gravity of it, if not to think [*penser*] it. What is called weighing [*peser*]? An operation of weighing [*une pesée*]? To think [*penser*] is also, in Latin as in French, to weigh [*peser*], to compensate, to counterbalance, to compare, to examine. In order to do that, in order to think and weigh, it is hence necessary to carry (*tragen*, perhaps), to carry in oneself and carry on oneself. Supposing that we could place all our bets on etymology, which I would never do, it appears that we in French are without the luck of having this proximity between *Denken* and *Danken*. We have a hard time translating questions like those that Heidegger raises in *Was heisst Denken?*

The “thanc,” that which is thought, the thought, implies the thanks. But perhaps these assonances between thought and thanks are superficial and contrived. . . . Is thinking a giving of thanks? What do thanks mean here? Or do thanks lie within thought?¹⁵

If, however, we are not lucky enough to have this collusion or this play between thought and gratitude, and if the commerce of thanking [*remerciements*] always risks remaining a compensation, we do have in our Latin languages the friendship between thinking and weighing (*pensare*), between thinking and gravity. And between thought and carrying-distance [*portée*]. Whence the *examination*. The weight of a thought calls for and is always called the *examination*, and you know that *examination* is in Latin the hand of a scale. We count on this hand so as to measure the accuracy of a judgment concerning what we entrust it to bear.

Another reason why I believed I had to begin by quoting, and then by repeating, the last line, *Die Welt ist fort, ich muss dich tragen*, of this poem was so as to follow faithfully, indeed even to attempt to imitate, up to a certain point and as far as possible, a gesture that Gadamer repeats twice in his book on Celan, *Wer bin ich und wer bist du? Kommentar zu Celans “Atemkristall.”*¹⁶

Gadamer had announced that “following the hermeneutical princi-

ple,” he would begin by the final line that bears the accent of a poem that he was in the process of interpreting: “*Wühl ich mir den / Versteinerten Segen.*”¹⁷ As he explains: “For it contains the core of this short poem.”¹⁸

Today, we are here between two breaths or two inspirations, *Atemwende* and *Atemkristall*. For example, Gadamer accompanies his commentary with the following brief poem by Celan:

WEGE IM SCHATTEN-GEBRÄCH
deiner Hand

Aus der Vier-Finger-Furche
wühl ich mir den
versteinerten Segen

[PATHS IN THE SHADOW-ROCK
of your hand

Out of the four-finger-furrow
I grub for myself the
petrified blessing]¹⁹

No doubt this poem says something of the chance of a benediction or blessing (*Segen*), of a petrified blessing like the seal that fascinated me an instant ago, and of a blessing under the sign of which I would like to inscribe this moment.²⁰ This sign is written with the same hand, with the same fingers, no doubt, as so many other blessings of Celan. For example, *Benedicta*: “*Ge- / segnet seist du, von weit her, von / jenseits meiner / erloschenen Finger.*”²¹

As you have noticed, the “*wühlen*” of the other poem, the one from *Atemwende* (*mit dem sich / hinaus-und hinweg- / wühlenden Schwarzzgestirn-Schwarm*) seems to echo the *wühlen* of this poem, collected in *Atemkristall*: (*Wühl ich mir den / Versteinerten Segen*).

Wühlen: isn’t that the same unquiet burrowing, and every time the movement of a pushing that is subversive and seeking, curious, under pressure to know? Gadamer insists upon this word more than once. Blessing is not given. It is sought for. It seems to be extorted by hand. It exerts a questioning pressure. It strives to open the hand clenched into a fist and closed upon its meaning. A hand would hold the message of blessing still closed. The hand that blesses thus makes reading available, but it also calls for a reading of what it conceals from reading. The hand both gives and withdraws the meaning of the message. It retains the very blessing, as if a blessing acquired in advance, a blessing that you can count upon and calculate—so, a verifiable and

decidable blessing—were no longer a blessing. Shouldn't a blessing, mustn't a blessing always remain improbable?

This poem therefore poses a first problem of interpretation. Gadamer proposes a hypothesis:

The closeness and charity of the benefactor is foregone to such an extent that the blessing is present only in petrification. Now, the poem says: This blessing of the benefactory hand is sought after with the grubbing and despairing fervor of an indigent.²²

He then takes an adventurous, bold step. Across (*à travers*) this vision, he proposes a reading of the scene of reading as one of subversion and reversal. What this poem gives to be read might also be the scene of reading, that is, the provocation that calls for a reading of what the poem itself gives to be read:

Accordingly, the benefacting hand is inverted boldly into the hand where palm-reading can reveal a message of beneficent hope.²³

The blessing *of the* poem: this double genitive says well the gift of a poem that both blesses the other and lets itself be blessed by the other, by the receiver or the reader. Yet this address to the other does not exclude the self-referential reflection according to which it is always possible to say that the poem speaks *of itself*, of the scene of writing, of the signature and of the reading that it inaugurates. This specular and autotelic reflection does not close upon itself. Without any possible return, it is simultaneously a blessing granted to the other, the giving of a hand, *at once open and folded shut*.

What is the hand? What is *this* hand here, the hand of *this* poem? How could its openness and its being folded be at once represented, here, in an image or a tableau (*Bild*)? From his first sentence, Gadamer had announced, I repeat, that “following the hermeneutical principle,” he would begin by the final line of the poem in which, according to him, “the core of this short poem is contained.” Let us accept, at least provisionally and without question, that such would be the hermeneutical principle, and such its evidence. Let us postulate that the last line carries the meaning of the whole poem. In following these two axioms, Gadamer acknowledges very quickly, and he does so explicitly, that his interpretative reading must take more than one interruption into account. His reading must also leave a series of questions suspended, all of which interrupt the decipherment of meaning.

These first interruptions initially follow folds that are also furrows for reading. As Gadamer writes:

The context tells us what “shadow-rock” means. When the hand is clenched a little and the creases cast shadows, then, in the crumbly “rock” of the hand, that is, in the lattice of folds and gaps [*des lignes interrompues*], the breaks [*les ruptures*] interpreted by the palm-reader become visible. The palm-reader reads from them the language of destiny or of character. The “four-finger-furrow” is thus the continuous transverse crease which, without the thumb, comprises the four fingers into a unity.²⁴

Gadamer first describes, it seems, a sort of multiple interruption yet wholly interior, that which, inside the hand, is both given and refused to reading: “in the lattice of folds and gaps [*des lignes interrompues*], the breaks [*les ruptures*] interpreted by the palm-reader become visible. The palm-reader reads from them the language of destiny or of character.” These lines of rupture are already situated *in* a text that is stretched out, giving itself. Here, the hand is a hand that blesses [*bénis-sante*]. Yet it is one that, along these *internal* lines, threatens just as well to deny itself, to conceal itself, to disappear. Without this threat, this risk, without this improbability, without this impossibility of proving—which must [*doit*] remain until the end of time, and which must [*doit*] not be saturated or closed by any certainty—there would be neither reading nor giving nor blessing.

Further on, there is the sudden interruption of an edge, one that this time no longer traverses the inside of the text. Rather, it surrounds the text. An *external* border delineates a suspensive questioning. After a series of sketched-out readings and daring questions, notably on the subject of the “I”—the “I” of the poet or that of the reader questing after a blessing or blessed reading—Gadamer leaves a series of questions undecided, undecidable, on the threshold. Far from stopping interpretative reading, these questions open and liberate the very experience of such reading. This time, it will concern the “you” no less than the “I.” Placed under the question mark, these many affirmations link the possibility of blessing and the future of interpretation to a pensive and suspensive interruption. In order to underline the firm decision of leaving the undecidable undecided, allow me to quote the entire paragraph that concludes without concluding. The right [*droit*] to leave things undecided is recognized as belonging to the poem itself, and not to the poet nor to the reader.

Whose hand is it? It is difficult to see in this benefactory hand that no longer blesses anything but the hand of the hidden God, whose abundance of blessedness has become indiscernible, and only accessible to us as if in petrification, be it in the reified ceremony of religion or the reified power

of human faith. But once again the poem does not decide who “You” is. Its only message is the urgent need of the person who seeks a blessing from “your” hand, regardless of whose it is. What he finds is a “petrified” blessing. Is that still a blessing? An ultimate blessing? From your hand?²⁵

I want to share with you now [*maintenant*] what, rightly or wrongly, I cling to [*tiens à*] above all else, so much so as to want to keep [*garder*]²⁶ it alive in the echo of these last questions. More than the indecision itself, I admire the respect shown by Gadamer at the place [*à l'endroit*] of indecision. This indecision seems to interrupt or suspend the decipherment of reading, yet in truth such indecision ensures its future. Indecision holds [*tiens*] attention in breathless suspension, that is to say, alive, alert, vigilant, ready [*prête*] to be engaged down a wholly other path, to open up to whatever may come, listening faithfully, all ears, to that other speech. Such indecision hangs upon the breath of the other speech and of the speech of the other—right where this speech could seem yet unintelligible, inaudible, and untranslatable. Interruption is indecisive, it undecides. It gives its breath to the question, which, far from paralyzing, initiates motion. Interruption even releases an infinite movement. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer needs to underline what he calls the “infinity of the dialogue.”²⁷ In “The Boundaries of Language,”²⁸ he names at least twice the “infinite process.” *On the one hand*, the infinite process characterizes dialogue in general: from “the hermeneutical standpoint,” dialogue “is never finished until it has led to a real agreement.” If “no dialogue has ever really been finished,” it is because a “real” agreement, a “perfect agreement between two people contradicts the very essence of individuality,” a situation wherein Gadamer recognizes the sign of finitude itself. I would say that interruptive finitude is even that which calls for the infinite process. *On the other hand*, the “infinite process” is named again, two pages further on, in order this time to characterize the interminable dialogue of the translator with himself.

In these last questions about what the poem leaves undecided, that which I am clinging to so as to keep it alive [*je tiens à garder en vie*], is the singular and no doubt intentional fashion in which Gadamer’s rhetoric turns things. In truth, it’s a matter of something other than rhetoric or a turn. Beyond any trope, Gadamer literally says that the poem *itself* will decide nothing. The poem is indeed here the “subject” we evoked a little while ago. If the poem guards the apparently sovereign, unpredictable, untranslatable, almost unreadable initiative, it is also because it remains an abandoned trace, all at once independent

of will-to-say and conscious of the signatory. It errs but in a secretly regular fashion, from one referent to another—and destined to survive, in an “infinite process,” the decipherments of any reader to come. If, as any trace, the poem is thus destinally abandoned, cut off from its origin and from its end, this double interruption makes of the poem not only the unfortunate [*malheureux*] orphan Plato speaks of in the *Phaedrus* concerning writing. This abandon that appears to deprive the poem of a father, to emancipate and to separate it from such a one who would have exposed calculation to the incalculability of interrupted filiation, this immediate illegibility is also the resource that permits the poem to bless (perhaps, only perhaps), to give, to give to think, to give cause to think, to give the possibility of weighing the range of what it carries, to give reading, to speak (perhaps, only perhaps).

From the heart of its solitude and across [*à travers*] its immediate illegibility, the poem can always speak—itsself of itself. Here in transparent fashion, and there resorting to esoteric tropes that require an initiation and a reading technique. This self-reference always remains an appeal (*Anspruch*) to the other, be it to the other inaccessible in itself. This self-reference in no way suspends the reference to the inappropriable.

Even where the poem names illegibility, its proper illegibility, it also declares the illegibility of the world. Another poem of Celan’s thus begins: “*Unlesbarkeit dieser / Welt. Alles doppelt.*”²⁹ And scarcely further on, one hesitates to identify the “you” whom this poem apostrophizes: no matter who, more than one, the poem itself, the poet, the reader, the abyssal profundity of this or that other singularity forever encrypted, any or an entirely other, God, you or me (“*Du, in den Tiefstes geklemmt . . .*”).

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NOTES

1. [Translator’s note: The present essay is taken from a longer version, published in French under the title of *Béliers* (Paris: Galilée, 2003).]
2. *Gesammelte Werke* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1990–), 2:361–72, here 372; translated by Geoff Waite and Richard Palmer, under the title “*Destruction and Deconstruction*,” in *Dialogue and Deconstruction. The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, ed. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 102–13, here 113. My [J.D.’s] emphasis. [Translator’s note: the English translation has been

- modified. Noteworthy here, “dialogue” translates Gadamer’s *Gespräch* (and not “conversation”) since the French translation opts for *dialogue*, and because of what is written elsewhere in this essay about “interior monologue” and “dialogue.”]
3. *Dekonstruktion und Hermeneutik*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, 10: 138–47. Emphasis mine [J.D.]. [Translator’s note: In English, this passage appears in slightly different wording than in either the German or the French quoted by Derrida in the piece entitled “Letter to Dallmayr,” trans. Diane Michelfelder and Richard Palmer, in *Dialogue and Deconstruction. The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, 93–101, here 93. Translation modified here in tune with the aural orientations of Derrida’s essay.]
 4. In *Gesammelte Werke*, 8:279–85, “Lesen ist wie Übersetzen.” [Trans. note: This has not been translated into English essay Brackets in this quote are Derrida’s.]
 5. “Grenzen der Sprache,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, 8: 350–61. Paper presented in 1984, translated by Lawrence K. Schmidt under the title “The Boundaries of Language,” in *Language and Linguisticity in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000), 9–17, here 16. [Translator’s note: Translation modified. “Appropriateness,” *propriété* in the French translation, translates Gadamer’s *Eigenheit*, from *eigen* as “own” or “proper.”]
 6. “Selbstdarstellung,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, 2: 478–508. Translated by Richard Palmer under the title “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Hahn, Library of Living Philosophers (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 3–63.
 7. “Vorwort zur 2. Auflage” (1965), *Wahrheit und Methode. Ergänzungen Register in Gesammelte Werke*, 2: 441. Translated by Garrett Barden and John Cumming under the title “Preface to the second edition [1965],” *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), xix.
 8. *Wahrheit und Methode*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, 1:108, *Truth and Method*, 92.
 9. [Translator’s note: The French for Gadamer’s German word, *Verstehen* (“understanding”) can be *entente*, which is formed from *tendre*, “to reach, to stretch,” in *entendre*, “to hear,” “to understand,” but also in misunderstanding, *malentendu*. In this essay, this word family mixes with both *tenter*, “to attempt,” and with words formed with *tenir*, “to hold,” such as *retenir*, “to retain,” *entretenir*, “to dialogue,” *soutenir*, “to sustain,” etc. “Interview,” in French *entretien*, is formed from the prefix *entre* or “between” and the stem *tenir*, “to hold.” Such association tends to be lost in an English translation. The present translation tries to keep some of this mingling by the use of italics in brackets.]
 10. Jacques Derrida, “Three Questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer,” trans. Diane Michelfelder and Richard Palmer, in *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, 53. [Translation modified.]
 11. Paul Celan, *Atemwende* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967) 93. For a complete translation of *Atemwende*, see *Breathturn*, trans. Pierre Joris (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1995). This poem is also translated by Michael Hamburger in *Poems of Paul Celan* (New York: Anvil Press Poetry, 1995).
 12. [Translator’s note: *Entendre*, “to hear” and “to understand”, and *tenter*, “to try” or “attempt”: the verb *tenter* is formed from the classical Latin *temptare*, “to touch,” from which came the meaning “to test, to try (*faire l’épreuve, l’essai*).” The Latin word, without known etymology, is sometimes noted as *tentare*, whence its confusion with the homonym *tentare*, “to agitate, to disturb [*inquiéter*],” the frequentative of the Latin *tendere*, French *tendre* in the sense “to become taut” and “to reach, to tend, to stretch,” from which comes *entendre*. It is difficult to distinguish what belongs to *tentare* (“to attempt”) and *tentare* (“to tend”). (*Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* [Paris: Le Robert, 1992]).

13. [Translator's note:

GREAT GLOWING VAULT
with the
outward- and away-
burrowing black-constellation swarm:

into the silicified forehead of a ram
I burn this image, between
the horns, therein,
in the singing of the coils, the
marrow of the curdled
heartseas swells.

What
doesn't he
butt against?

The world is gone, I have to carry you.

(In *Breathturn*, trans. Pierre Joris, 233.)

VAST, GLOWING VAULT
with the swarm of
black stars pushing them-
selves out and away:

on to a ram's silicified forehead
I brand this image, between
the horns, in which,
in the song of the whorls, the
marrow of melted
heart-oceans swells.

In-
to what
does he not charge?

The world is gone, I must carry you.

(In *Poems of Paul Celan*, trans. Michael Hamburger, 275.)]

14. [Translator's note: The word Derrida uses, *portée*, has a wide range of meanings, including the "range" or "carrying distance" of a projectile, the "import," "importance," "implications," or "significance" of an idea or an action, but also the "impact" or "consequence" of words or of writings. It is also the "reach," "scope," or "capacity" of a mind to conceptualize or understand. Depending on the context, *portée* is a term that may also be translated as "stave"—a word that, interestingly, refers both to music (the lines which *bear* musical notation) and poetry ("a verse or stanza of a song, poem, etc." [*Oxford English Dictionary*, 1970, s.u. "stave"]). In architectural lingo, *portée* covers such ideas as "loading" and "span." The word, in a rather *pregnant* way, also describes a group of animals born to the same mother at the same time (*litter*). A whole galaxy of verbs clusters around *portée*, including, for instance (and only for instance), *porter*, *importer*, *exporter*, *déporter*, *reporter*, *rappporter*, etc. Obviously, in this paper, *portée* is semantically connected to the German word *tragen* in the line of Celan's poem. This translation uses primarily "import" or "carrying distance" to render *portée*, according to the situation, and "carry" or "bear" for the verb *porter*.]

15. *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray and F. Wieck (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1968), 139.
16. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wer bin ich und wer bist du? Kommentar zu Celans "Atemkristall"* rev. ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986).

If time and audacity hadn't failed me, I would have attempted to read together, in order to give an account of the hands and the fingers, "Aus der Vier-Finger-Furche . . ." and, in *Aschenglorie* (in *Atemwende*), "ASCHEGLORIE hinter / deinen erschüttert-verknöteten / Händen am Dreiweg. . . . Aschen- / glorie hinter / euch Dreiweg- / Händen" (68).

I have proposed a reading of this last poem elsewhere. Cf. "A Self-Unsealing Poetic Text': Poetics and Politics of Witnessing," trans. Rachel Bowlby, in *Revenge of the Aesthetic. The Place of Literature in Theory Today*, ed. Michael P. Clark (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 180–207.

[Translator's note: The title by Gadamer appears in English in *Gadamer on Celan. "Who Am I and Who Are You?" and Other Essays*, translated and edited by Richard Heinemann and Bruce Krajewski, with introduction by Gerald L. Bruns (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997). "Atemkristall" is translated as *Breathcrystal*.

The lines of Celan's *ASCHEGLORIE* have been translated as: "ASH-AUREOLE behind / your shaken knotted / hands at the Threeways / . . . / Ash- / aureole behind you / Threeways- / hands" (*Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner [New York, London: W. W. Norton, 2001], 261); "Ash-glory behind / your shaken-knotted / hands on the three-forked road / . . . / Ash- / glory behind your three-forked hands" (*Speech-grille and Selected Poems*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel [New York: Dutton, 1971], 240); "ASHGLORY behind / your shaken-knotted / hands at the threeway / . . . Ash- / glory behind / you threeway / hands" (*Breathturn*, trans. Pierre Joris [Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1995], 177).]

17. [Translator's note: from the poem, "Wege im Schatten-Gebräch," *Atemwende*, 14.]
18. [Translator's note: *Gadamer on Celan*, 95.]
19. Trans. Michael Hamburger, quoted in *Gadamer on Celan*, 95. [Translator's note: cf. PATHS IN THE SHADOW-BREAK of your hand.

From the four-finger-furrow

I root up the
petrified blessing.

(Trans. Pierre Joris, *Breathturn*, 69).]

20. [Translators' note: Unlike "blessing," "benediction" and *bénédiction* (the word used throughout by Derrida in French) signal the "saying" in a "bene-diction," its "well-saying," as in "to say well" or "to express well," i.e., *bien dire*. English translators of Celan have rendered the German *Segen* by "blessing," not "benediction."]
21. In Paul Celan, *Die Niemandsrose*, in *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 1: 249. [Translator's note: "Be- / be thou blessed, from afar, from / beyond my / guttering fingers," in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York, London: W. W. Norton, 2001), 175.]
22. *Gadamer on Celan*, *op. cit.*, 95.
23. *Ibid.*, 95.
24. *Ibid.*, 95.
25. *Ibid.*, 96.
26. [Translator's note: from *maintenant* (which means "now" but also suggests "tending [tenant] the hand [main]") to *tenir à garder*, Derrida's French is tied to the dialogue form itself, the *entretien* (from *entre-tenir*), linking him to Gadamer.]
27. *Truth and Method*, *op. cit.*, p. xxii.
28. *Language and Linguisticity* in *Gadamer's Hermeneutics* 9–17, here 16. [Translator's note: translation modified.]

29. UNLESBARKEIT DIESER
Welt. Alles doppelt.

Die starken Uhren
geben der Spaltstunde recht,
heiser.

Du, in dein Tiefstes geklemmt
entsteigst dir
für immer.

(“Unlesbarkeit,” in *Schneepart* (1971), in *Gesammelte Werke*, 2:338.)

[Translator’s note:

ILLEGIBILITY
of this world. All things twice over.

The strong clocks justify
the splitting hour,
hoarsely.

You, clamped,
into your deepest part,
climb out of yourself
for ever.

(Trans. Michael Hamburger, *Poems of Paul Celan*, 329.)

ILLEGIBLE this
world. Everything doubled.

Staunch clocks
confirm the split hour,
hoarsely.

You, clamped in your depths,
climb out of yourself
for ever.

(Trans. Felstiner, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, 333.)]

30. [Translator’s note: This translation seeks to: 1) stay as close as possible to Derrida’s French whenever possible, by A) fidelity to the recurrence of turns of phrase—the recurrent expression in French is rendered the same way across the whole translation, when possible, and B) fidelity to the lexeme or seme used by Derrida in French; 2) respect Derrida’s syntax; 3) only use French words italicized in brackets [*italics in brackets*] so as to insert untranslatable French words from Derrida’s text, and to make this choice based on different strings of terms that, running through the French, must be signalled in translation when the translation must otherwise fail to mark them; 4) put in two possibilities in the English when these two meanings exist in a single French expression but wouldn’t in whatever English expression is chosen; 5) keep translators’ notes to a strict minimum.]