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A-voiding representation: *Eräugnis* and inscription in Celan

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Abstract: This essay deals with the poetry of Paul Celan, particularly focusing on the event of appearing of the negative as that which a-voids representation. The key term here is "Eräugnis," a term with important resonances between Celan's poetry and the thought of Alain Badiou, whose evental philosophy centers on the void. Another immediate point of reference is Martin Heidegger, whose thought and language permeates Celan's work, and it is likely from Heidegger that Celan takes his impetus in thinking through the problem of representing the void. In readings of poems like "Heute und Morgen," "Welchen der Steine du hebst," and "Mandorla," I argue that Celan is grappling with the appearing of the negative in its function as foundational figure for representation. Celan tropes the negative in his poetry, and this essay explores the theoretical and philosophical implications of this negative visuality.

Keywords: Celan, Badiou, Heidegger, negative, event, inscription

In *Tarrying with the Negative*, one of Žižek's key images is Magritte's *La lunette d'approche* (1963), the famous gesture toward the negative that emerges in the gap between the frames. This becomes one of Žižek's numerous figures for a pervasive structural gap, and the figuration of this void gets reiterated and repeated in slightly different ways in Žižek's various works, but the focus always returns to the problem of the "parallax gap," which in the case of the Magritte painting is described as "staging the 'Kantian' split between (symbolized, categorized, transcendentally constituted) reality and the void of the Thing-in-itself." Although Žižek makes no great distinction between this and other Magritte paintings in his identification of this painting as establishing the "elementary matrix that generates the uncanny effects pertaining to [Magritte's] work," it is interesting to observe the way the gap here figures directly as a gap: "what we see in the narrow opening which gives direct access to the reality beyond the

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pane is nothing" (1993: 103).[1] The same year that Magritte framed the negative in *La lunette d'approche* (Figure 1) was also marked by the appearance of Paul Celan's *Die Niemandsrose* (1963), arguably his most important volume of poetry, which features the poem "Mandorla." Like Magritte's "postrealist" painting, Celan's poem locates the negative in the gap between the frames. As is well known, the almond-shaped panel or frame known as the "Mandorla" is the negative spatial product of two overlapping circular frames, a vesica piscis, an overdetermined space of representation that has historically functioned as the authoritative, founding figure that legitimizes representation itself, portraying religious icons like Christ and the Virgin – although the mandorla-form was also used for royal insignia and official seals. The mandorla-frame is a founding figure for religious and political representation, but what Celan presents in this frame is "the Nothing" [*das Nichts*]. This poem ekphrastically presents a visual object that, in its function as founding figure, formally and structurally represents representation itself, but of course what founds representation is the unrepresentable, the void. In other words, the gaze constructed in this poem announces the threat of the void, as the surplus of representation: "Und dein Aug – wohin steht dein Auge?/Dein Aug steht der Mandel entgegen./ Dein Aug, dem Nichts stehts entgegen" (Celan 1:244). Opposed to emblematized representation itself is another almond-shaped figure, namely, the eye (which is also the *I*, the subject) of the gaze. This specular spectatorship is even more dangerous than the "uncanny prosopopoeia" that Hillis Miller describes as necessarily risked in each act of looking[2]: this becomes a "negative image" in the spectatorship of a nonentity under a state of representation structured on the exclusion of this particularity. This essay will inspect the image of the negative as that which a-voids representation, but which is also structurally necessary to representation itself. The image's gesture toward the viewer in Celan's poem is one of radical negation. Part of my claim here is that, given Celan's central

1 As Žižek notes, this matrix is at work in Magritte's paintings generally, although most critics, following Foucault, focus on the play of pipes and the "fissure in representation" that presents itself in the gap between word and image – see for example Mitchell's discussion of "Talking Metapictures" in *Picture Theory* (1994: 64–82). Mitchell interprets the pipe paintings as a sort of "negative lesson, an exercise in unlearning or deprogramming a set of habits" (1994: 67), although E. H. Gombrich disputes this sort of reading, arguing that "this is just another version of the doctrine of the innocent eye which I was at pains to combat in my book *Art and Illusion*" (1991: 168).

2 In his response to Mitchell's *What Do Pictures Want?*, Miller writes: "Especially dangerous is looking hard at the words on the page or at the figure on the canvas, giving yourself to gazing. The harder you look the more they seem to look hard back at you in an uncanny prosopopoeia" (2008: S60).

Figure 1: La lunette d'approche, 1963, René Magritte, Oil on canvas; 176.1 × 114.9 cm. The Menil Collection, Houston.

position across contemporary critical-theoretical debates, a consistent reading of Celan has become crucial, not only to Celan specialists, or even to German Studies, but for an understanding of contemporary critical theory and the broad discursive field of representation and its limits.

The first step in this paper will be to isolate the concept of the event as a crucial one in thinking through negative visuality in Celan. The key term here is *Eräugnis*, the event of appearing, which in my argument will be closely tied to

the appearing of the negative, the revelation of the void. I have already tried to preview the argument to be made for a reading of "Mandorla" that takes into account this complexity of representing the gap framed in this crucial poem. And this shorthand version will have to suffice for now, given the time limits of this presentation, but here is the poem:

In der Mandel – was steht in der Mandel?
Das Nichts.
Es steht das Nichts in der Mandel.
Da steht es und steht.

Im Nichts – wer steht da? Der König.
Da steht der König, der König.
Da steht er und steht.

Judenlocke, wirst nicht grau.

Und dein Aug – wohin steht dein Auge?
Dein Aug steht der Mandel entgegen.
Dein Aug, dem Nichts stehts entgegen.
Es steht zum König.
So steht es und steht.

Menschenlocke, wirst nicht grau.
Leere Mandel, königsblau. (Celan 1:244)

1 Event and Eräugnis

In order to situate this argument properly, regarding Celan's figuration and framing of the negative,[3] it is important to work through some of the recent theoretical work on the void and its structural function, for example in Badiou's evental philosophy. But why should Badiou be of any use in reading Celan? Obviously Badiouian philosophy had no impact on Celan, although Badiou's early cultural and academic career in France overlapped with Celan – who lived

3 Of course, critical attention to this problem in Celan has its own history. Regardless of the interpretive focus, though, most essentially agree that "Mandorla" should be read "in visual terms" (Pöggeler 1986: 402). One of the earliest and most extensive studies devoted to this thematic is Georg-Michael Schulz's *Negativität in der Dichtung Paul Celans* (1977). Schulz looks at Celan's figures of negativity from a number of different perspectives, identifying "Mandorla" and "Psalm" as poems generally regarded as "an apex of Celan's poetry," primarily for the provocation contained in their presentation of "the nothing." In a certain sense, every critic must deal with the negative in reading Celan, and this is precisely a motive for the development of a coherent theory of visual negativity.

in Paris after the war – by nearly a decade, rather I would argue that Celan's poetry had a profound impact on Badiou. In fact, he states explicitly that the poetry of Paul Celan is an event of universal relevance, "in the order of the poem, the event is Paul Celan's work" [*Dans l'ordre du poème, l'événement est l'œuvre de Paul Celan*] (Badiou 1989: 66). The theory of negative visuality, I argue, offers a way of moving through the now-familiar "expressing the inexpressible" argument commonly encountered in the critical literature on Celan without losing the problem of the negative, but hopefully opening new avenues of inquiry into the work of this undeniably crucial poet. By retaining a politico-aesthetic inflection, my analysis of Celan's poetics also brings the poet's iconoclasm into conversation with the problem-set articulated in the work of visual culture critics like W. J. T. Mitchell and Jacques Rancière, whose attention to the ideological and political gaps culturally constructed in and through images demonstrates that these gaps are never neutral but that there are always ideological implications of representation, and its limit: a-voiding representation. By this term, I want to indicate the potential rift in the range of visual and verbal representation that may arise in a given situation. The Badiouian event[4] irrupts into the situation out of the void, but this is not an absolute void, as I argue, rather one that is precisely the negative articulation of the state of the situation:[5] just as a photographic negative is precisely what is not seen when we look at the situation to be photographed, this negative vision nevertheless contains the truth of the situation, namely in a point of excessive authenticity, the appearing of the negative. The void is a "point of excess," an un(re)presentable singularity. At

4 Badiou's philosophy of the event focuses exclusively, and somewhat enigmatically, on four areas in which events may occur, these he terms "generic procedures": love, art, science, and politics (2006: 16): "What happens in art, in science, in true (rare) politics, and in love (if it exists) is the coming to light of an indiscernible" [*c'est la venue au jour d'un indiscernable*] (2006: 17, 23–24). This rhetoric of the event's coming to light, becoming-visual, is by no means accidental.

5 I would argue that, in addition to the ties to the Heideggerian *Ereignis*, which I describe below, Badiou's event has distinct similarities to decisionism in Carl Schmitt, most clearly evident in Schmitt's comments on the existential value of the decision, which ensures the existence of the state from anomic chaos, but the decision must be understood as responding to the threat of this void: "die Entscheidung ist, normativ betrachtet, aus einem Nichts geboren" (1922: 38). Comparisons between Schmitt and Badiou meet with resistance on both sides, however, with Schmittians arguing that Schmitt's decision must be understood as concretely situated in historical and cultural specificity and that "it cannot in fact arise out of a void" (Pan 2009: 57), while Badiou himself argues that "there is no decisionism at all in my philosophy," and "I am not a decisionist at all... now [sic]" (Badiou 2003: 172, 273). The important distinction to make is that the event is not itself the void or "on the edge of the void" (Badiou 2006: 181), rather the event is the retroactive naming and interpreting of an evental site in an historical-social situation. On this problematic, see Wright (2008).

a given moment under the state of the situation, there will be competing forms of representation and symbolic signification of authority, differences which would necessarily be mutually exclusive in the most radical sense. A-voiding representation means an exclusion that is socio-historically determined as unrepresentable under a given order, but this exclusion, as the boundary to that order, is also co-constitutive of it: the threat of the void that must be contained, and this precipitates the event.

As we have seen that Badiou identifies the poetry of Paul Celan as *the event* in the domain of the poetic, it is important to consider the concept of the event, which in Badiou's work has distinct ties to the Heideggerian *Ereignis*, a philosophical inheritance that must be recognized throughout Badiou's work, and one that Badiou names in *Logics of Worlds* as especially significant for contemporary philosophy (2009: 381) – and it is crucial for our discussion here of the visuality of the event [*Eräugnis*] that Badiou also implicitly names Wittgenstein's Picture Theory in direct conjunction with Heidegger's *Ereignis*. The term *Ereignis* is a central one in Heidegger's philosophy, occurring with special emphasis in works like *Being and Time*, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, *What is Called Thinking?* and *On the Way to Language*, works that had a significant and lasting effect on Celan.[6] In his study of the complicated relationship between Celan and Heidegger, James K. Lyon has demonstrated the significance of certain Heideggerian keywords for Celan, terms like *Ereignis*, *Bewegung*, and *Unterwegssein* (Lyon 2006: 84). In a certain sense, these borrowings on the part of the poet may be read as an instantiation of Heidegger's notion of Er-eignis as a poetic event of appropriation, "das wesentliche Ereignis der Sprache" (Heidegger 1971: 39), but there is another sense in which Heidegger uses the term Ereignis by which he engages with the word's more likely ocular etymology.[7] In his 1959 essay "The Way to Language," Heidegger consciously plays on the visual dimension of the term *Ereignis* – despite his emphasis here, and elsewhere, on the spokenness[8] of language and man's aural access to Being through language:

6 The importance of this term in Heidegger's philosophy becomes particularly clear in *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)* [*Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*], although Celan would not have known this work. Written privately and published posthumously (Heidegger 1989b), this work includes significant meditation on the concept of "Ereignis."

7 In the entry on "Ereigniß" Adelung's *Grammatisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch* states quite forcefully, "Aus allem erhellt, daß ereignen unstreitig von Auge abstammet, und wenn die Abstammung das höchste und einzige Schreibegesetz wäre, so müßte man es allerdings noch eräugnen schreiben, wie seit Vorstii Zeiten von mehreren Sprachlehrern wirklich empfohlen worden" (1970 [1793–1801] : 1885–1886).

8 As an example of this oral/aural emphasis, consider the following: "Weil das Zeigen der Sage das Eignen ist, beruht auch das Hörenkönnen auf die Sage, das Gehören zu ihr, im Ereignis" (Heidegger 1989a : 12:248).

"Das Ereignis ereignet in seinem Er-äugen des Menschenwesens" (Heidegger 1989a: 12:249). Here we have a case of Heidegger's familiar strategy of exploiting faint, and sometimes apparently contradictory, etymological echoes in his keywords, and the philosopher unflinchingly asserts the relevance of both root relationships, both appropriation (*eigen*) and visuality (*augen*), resulting in the play of polyptota characteristic of his thought paths through language. A moment later in the "Weg zur Sprache" essay, Heidegger articulates *Ereignis* as transforming into *Ein-Blick*, with a footnote clarifying, "Er-eignen – Eräugen, Er-Blicken, Er-Blitzen" (Heidegger 1989a: 12:253). The philosopher makes similar comments on the visual roots of *Ereignis* in *Identität und Differenz*, which like *Unterwegs zur Sprache* was among the works personally dedicated and sent to Celan by Heidegger and one that we know the poet to have read in August, 1959: "Er-eignen heißt ursprünglich: er-äugen, d.h. Erblicken, im Blicken zu sich rufen, an-eignen" (Heidegger 2002: 100–101). Here Heidegger does more to resolve the apparent disparity of appropriation (*eigen*) and visuality (*augen*).[9] Recorded in a notebook among the papers and notes Celan used in drafting the "Meridian" address, we find what appears to be evidence of the poet's reaction specifically to Heidegger's shift in treatment of *Ereignis*. His note reads: "Ereignis = Eräugnis?? vor Augen ––" (Celan 1999: 98). On this note and its implications for the Celan-Heidegger relationship, Lyon writes, "In characteristic fashion Celan's notation, which echoes this passage, modifies the second term only slightly but otherwise keeps Heidegger's formulations intact." Lyon concludes his consideration of Celan's attention to this matrix of *Ereignis* = *Eräugnis* in Heidegger's philosophy with the observation, "What he intended with this equation is unclear, but its provenance with Heidegger seems unmistakable" (Lyon 2006: 114). Considering that Celan had utilized the unusual word "Eräugtes" in his earlier poem "Heute und Morgen,"[10] this discovery in Heidegger must have struck the poet with unusual force.

In addition to offering this important point of connection with the becoming-visual of the event, "Heute und morgen" is significant to our discussion of

9 See Pöggeler (1994: 80–85) for a discussion of *Er-eignis* and *Gelassenheit*, the very interesting for the problem of apotropaism as will be discussed here; on the fact that these works were dedicated and sent to Celan by Heidegger, see Lyon's helpful chronology of Celan's known readings of works by Heidegger (Lyon 2006: 220).

10 This poem's initial genesishas been dated to early March, 1955, although various revisions continued until 1958 (Celan 2003 5.2: 126–137) – regarding this key term's appearance in the revisions, the only changes that impact "Eräugtes/Dunkel" are that in some versions these two words appear together on the same line, and in some *Eräugtes* is not capitalized. Heidegger's *Unterwegs zur Sprache* was published in 1959, this being one of the volumes that the philosopher personally dedicated and sent to Celan (Lyon 220).

negative visuality because not only does this poem contain the word "Eräugtes," but "Eräugtes/Dunkel":

> So steh ich, steinern, zur
> Ferne, in die ich dich führte:
>
> Von Flugsand
> ausgewaschen die beiden
> Höhlen am unterm Stirnsaum.
> Eräugtes
>
> Dunkel darin.
> Durchpocht
> von schweigsam geschwungenen Hämmern
> die Stelle,
> wo mich das Flügelaug streifte.
>
> Dahinter,
> ausgespart in der Wand,
> die Stufe,
> drauf das Erinnerte hockt,
>
> Hierher
> sickert, von Nächten beschenkt,
> eine Stimme,
> aus der du den Trunk schöpfst. (Celan 2000: 1.158)

Although Sabine Könneker's study of the relationship between verbal representation and visuality in the poetry of Paul Celan includes near-exhaustive references to the poems and prose involved in the "Wahrnemungsproblematik" in Celan (Könneker 1995: 77–84), no consideration is given to this instance of what Könneker elsewhere calls the "apotropäische Wirkung" of ocular imagery (Könneker 1995: 44). I would argue that the most important frame of reference for this poem is the biblical narrative of Lot's flight before the divine destruction, a foundational myth of apotropaism. As the poem begins, it would almost appear that the poetic voice has become the victim of this dangerous and radically negative image, "So steh ich, steinern," but as the enjambed line continues with "zur/Ferne, in die ich dich führte," it would seem that this speaker is "steinern" only in his continued resistance to look back – the speaker in the poem remains oriented toward the distance (*zur Ferne*) into which he had been leading the 'Thou.' If we read this directly together with the biblical intertext, then the speaker is effectively Lot, and the 'Du' is his wife, who "looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt" (Gen 19: 26), consumed by the negating vision. The desert landscape of the biblical narrative provides the imagery of the abrasive "Flugsand," which assaults the ocular cavities of the pillar-statue of Lot's wife, punished precisely for

failing to avert her gaze: "Eräugtes/Dunkel darin." Petrified by the forbidden vision, she holds this "darkness" within the walls of her mind, a space represented quite explicitly in the memory-images of the fourth stanza. The third stanza, however, shifts momentarily back to the condition of the speaker. Since he has assumed a stance parallel to that of his wife – "steinern" – he is also being pounded by the flying sands; but what is "die Stelle,/wo mich das Flügelaug streifte"? Shira Wolosky insists that this "wing-eye" is a sort of dismembered, exteriorized self, which arguably corresponds to the broken and disjointed experience of the self generally in Celan and particularly involving disembodied eyes: "The distribution and dissolution of self represented here recurs throughout Celan's work. Different parts of the body are often isolated in grotesque or even violent fashion... In this dismemberment, the eye has a special place. It recurs, disembodied, again and again from Celan's earliest to his last poems" (Wolosky 1995: 144–145). It is difficult to argue with Wolosky on this point as a pervasive thematic that obtains in many poems, but here I would argue that there is a more direct specificity to the apotropaism evoked by the narrative of Lot's wife. One of Celan's many poetic neologisms, *Flügelaug* would seem from this context to be a non-figure for that divine force, which Lot and his wife were warned not to behold – eyes feature prominently in the iconography of apotropaic images,[11] and the image here of an eye with the capacity for flight seems an effective expansion of the magical powers normally attributed to the apotropaic image, animating the panopticism (all-seeing) usually associated with the divine while resisting any directly visual representation of the destructive power of a god that prohibits figuration: the fact that the speaker in the poem relies almost exclusively on a haptic register (*ausgewaschen*, *durchpocht*, *streifte*) in order to construct the frame for the negative image (*Eräugtes/Dunkel*) indicates the extent to which this poem functions in the terms of a negative visuality. Klaus Voswinkel picks up on the violence (*durchpochen*, *Hämmern*) of some of the imagery here, which he reads as part of Celan's reliance on a linguistic register of geological and mining terminology (1974: 28–29), but I argue that in "Heute und morgen" this relates more directly to the catastrophic spectacle. The cavernous images that Voswinkel reads as demonstrating an "Abstieg ins fremde Menscheninnere," through the terminological specificity of the "Unterreich" and excavatory activity, certainly engage with general problems addressed in Celan's oeuvre, but again I would argue that this may be read as relating more directly to the narrative of

11 See Gombrich's *The Sense of Order* (1979: 171–172, 251–284); see also Gombrich's discussion of projection and perception in *Art and Illusion* (1960), where he argues that finding likenesses – particularly eyes and other facial characteristics, exemplified in the experiments of caricature (2000: 330–258) – in natural objects is anterior to any mimetic production: 2000: 105–15, 181–241. The apotropaic eye obtains as an immensely potent image.

Lot, who ultimately winds up in a cave, after first fleeing to Zoar. Of course, this brush with the radically apotropaic image, even in terms of a disrupted vision, still has a powerfully corrosive (or erosive) effect on the senses of the speaker in the poem: is it possible to read this poem without thinking of the "Strahlenwind" of "Weggebeizt" – or perhaps even more importantly for this context of blindness, blinding, and apotropaism, the earlier occurrence of "Strahlenwind" in "Gesang zur Sonnenwende," one of the poems in Celan's earliest volume of published poems, and a poem replete with references to blindness (2000: 3:49)? The final stanza sinks, or rather seeps, into an ambiguity perhaps not entirely contained in the biblical narrative, although we might speculate that the references to "Nächten" and "Trunk" and a certain loss of clarity might correspond to the incestuous scene with which Lot's story ends, his daughters intentionally intoxicating him in order to procure progeny (Gen 19: 30–38), and this scene of intoxication and mistaken sexual contact on Lot's part would also explain what would otherwise seem a contradictory continuation of the address to a lost "Du."

Alternatively, and perhaps more appropriately for reading Celan, we might consider the position of the speaker, in his condition of standing "steinern, zur/ Ferne," as a figure in which the characters of Lot and his wife are collapsed, with the speaker functioning as a speaking, living image, petrified by the impossible and prohibited vision, "Eräugtes/Dunkel," which he nevertheless has seen; in this reading, the 'Thou' becomes something of a question, but considering Celan's insistence on the essentially dialogical nature of poetry (Celan 2000: 3.198), we might reasonably assume the poem's addressee to be the reader. Celan's poetry leads the reader into alterity [*die Ferne, in die ich dich führte*] in his representations of that which a-voids representation, which to a certain extent includes his self-presentation.[12]

My reading of "Heute und morgen" focuses, then, principally on the intertextual relationship to this foundational myth of apotropaism, but Celan's poetry is never so one-dimensional as to exclude other layers of reference, and, while I would argue that the multivalence in "Heute und morgen" centers on the apotropaic negative image situated as the blind spot at the heart of this poem, the negative event of visuality, even without historicizing Celan, it is clear that

12 The presentation and preservation of alterity in Celan's poetics is part of Kligerman's argument, particularly in his discussion of "Und mit dem Buch aus Tarussa" (2007: 10–17). On the problem of self-presentation, I mean to suggest the issue of survivor's guilt, which may be read as part of the complexity in Celan's construction of the "Du," something that becomes especially clear in "Gesang zur Sonnenwende": "O steinerne Masten der Schwermut! O ich unter euch und lebendig!/O ich unter euch und lebendig und schön, und sie darf mir nicht lächeln..." (Celan 2000: 3.49).

this thematic field must also extend to include "das, was geschah" – Celan's euphemism for the Shoah – and the discourse on the danger of "looking back." It is certainly noteworthy that the title of the poem makes an important exclusion in this regard: the lyric temporality is constructed with today and tomorrow as possible objects, but the other conceivable temporality of yesterday is avoided, as if this were the impossible darkness of "Eräugtes/Dunkel." The title's temporal construction negatively articulates the problem of "looking back," which the poem will demonstrate to be a sort of "destructive spectatorship." Martin Harries does a good job of attending to this thematic in his recent monograph *Forgetting Lot's Wife: On Destructive Spectatorship*, a study that devotes itself to two epochal events of destruction represented in figural terms borrowed from Lot's wife: first, the double-event of destruction presented in Germany, that of German cities, the clearest example being the rubble of Hamburg resulting from the massive-scale bombing raid called by the Allies "Operation Gomorrah," but also the destruction of European Jewry at the hands of the Germans – Harries makes no essential distinction here, effectively treating both of these as one undifferentiated catastrophic event, reading the figuration of destruction as re-presenting the problem of destructive spectatorship both for German civilians regarding the destruction of their cities and for the problem of "what it means to 'look' at genocide" (2007: 19); the second event Harries considers is the destruction of the World Trade Center.[13] In considering these events of spectacular destruction, Harries focuses on the "formal logic of spectatorship," arguing that "the twentieth century had a particular investment in the formal logic that placed the spectator in a spot where that spectator had to contemplate her own destruction" (2007: 9). One part of this formal logic of spectatorship that Harries develops is on the point of political subject-formation, drawing on Althusserian theories of interpellation to develop the point that subject-destruction is also a part of this process of reconfiguration. In our discussion of *Eräugnis* in Celan, it will be important to recall that this is precisely the challenge of apotropaic negative images, the threat of destruction contained in the case of radical visual disruptions.

Of course, there are certain complications to the story of Lot, particularly on the point of sexuality and its highly problematic position in the narrative – and this is something that the narrative never entirely resolves – which make the application of this story in a reading of Celan's poem somewhat fraught,

13 This almost seems to disrupt the course of the study, forcing itself on Harries, who was himself a witness: he "watched the towers burn, saw falling windows and small forms that even that distance [in Greenwich Village] were unmistakably falling bodies, and saw the first of the two towers fall" (2007: 103).

particularly considering the possibility of reading certain homologies that appear in this myth of apotropaism in apposition to the case of the Nazis: as the violence of the National Socialists directed toward homosexuals (as much as other groups) could potentially be read as a structural positioning of the violence of National Socialism as equivalent to divine violence, essentially validating their own perverse perspective. In addition, a psychoanalytic reading of the narrative is almost impossible to resist, especially in a discussion featuring the apotropaic, which Freud influentially conceptualized in the "Medusenhaupt" manuscript (1922/1940).[14] The overlap here is significant between the petrifying vision of the Freudian "Apotropæon" and Celan's comments, in his speech in acceptance of the Büchnerpreis ("Meridian"), on the problem of representation as it arises in Büchner, particularly the famous line from *Lenz* depicting the two girls brushing one another's hair, to which is added: "Man möchte manchmal ein Medusenhaupt sein, um so eine Gruppe in Stein verwandeln zu können" (Büchner 2002: 109). A psychoanalytic reading certainly suggests itself, then, and it should certainly extend to include "Heute und morgen" and its scene of petrification – but this is an argument that I leave to others.[15] The focus of my argument is on the structure of verbal and visual representation in postwar Germany's attempt to picture theory, more specifically that which a-voids representation.

Regardless of these complications, or rather perhaps in virtue of them, it seems a defensible claim that Celan's poem presents a picture of visuality in which picturing itself breaks down. Because the intertextuality with this foundational narrative of apotropaism has been overlooked, however, critics have also missed a crucial connection between "Heute und morgen" and Anselm Kiefer's important painting *Lots Frau* (1989), despite the considerable attention recently devoted to Kiefer's visual interpretations of Celan's poetry (Figure 2).[16] Andrea Lauterwein has perhaps come closest to putting "Heute und morgen" together with *Lots Frau*: In *Anselm Kiefer/ Paul Celan: Myth, Mourning and Memory* (2007). Here Lauterwein provides an excellent account of Kiefer's occupation with Celan's poetry,

14 The manuscript is dated 1922, but it was first published in the *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse und Imago* 25, 1940.

15 Julia Hell (2003) takes this route in her "Eyes Wide Shut: German Post-Holocaust Authorship," and one must also consider Kligerman's analysis in his reading of Celan's "Meridian," in the section entitled "Freud's Uncanny: Doubles, Repetitions, Ghosts, Blindings, and the Medusa's Head."

16 See for example: Eric Kligerman's chapter on "Re-Figuring Celan in he Paintings of Anselm Kiefer" (2007: 187–232); Theo Buck's *Bildersprache: Celan-Motive bei László Lakner und Anselm Kiefer*; Sabine Könneker (1995).

Figure 2: Lots Frau [Lot's Wife], 1989, Anselm Kiefer (German, b. 1945), Oil pain, ash, stucco, chalk, linseed oil, polymer emulsion, salt and applied elements (e. g., copper heating coil), on canvas, attached to lead foil, on plywood panels; 350 × 410 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna, Jr. Fund 1990.8.

and in a chapter entitled "The Ubiquity of Ashes" she mentions both of these two works, without however making any direct connection between them; indeed, very little direct attention is given to either of these texts: *Lots Frau* is included essentially as a further illustration of a larger discussion of railway iconography, specifically works like *Eisen-Steig*, which Lauterwein examines as an approximation of "the emotional tonality of the landscapes developed by Celan in his poetry" (2007: 143). "Heute und morgen" is briefly mentioned in connection with the images of sand-swept ruins like the "irregular shapes of the eroded bricks" pictured in Kiefer's *Der Sand aus den Urnen* (2007: 202), the title an explicit reference to Celan's poetry, but where Lauterwein connects this painting to the importance generally of sand as an image in Celan's poetry, I read this image as more deeply connected to the visual field of the apotropaic narrative of Lot's wife. Sand-blasting the image, Kiefer essentially re-enacts the

destructive event of negative visuality that a-voids representation in Celan's poem. Now, even if Kiefer is not specifically interpreting "Heute und morgen" in *Lots Frau*, which admittedly lacks specific visual reference to things like "Flugsand," the textual reference supplied in the chalk-scrawled title applied directly to the work's surface, on the recto of the lower panel, immediately inserts this painting into the discussion of apotropaic, negative images. It is impossible not to view the "burned canvas and the coating of ashes" (Hinson 1993: 183) as implicitly referencing the Holocaust, but just as "Heute und morgen" focuses on the darkness of a disrupted and disruptive vision, *Lots Frau* centers on a pair of railroad tracks that extend into a dark obscurity. Below the brighter skyline on the horizon, but before the tracks intersect with this horizon line, there is a gap, a charred space into which the tracks should continue, but they simply disappear into the ash: "Eräugtes/Dunkel darin."[17]

To return to Lyon's implicit question as to what Celan intended with his note on *Eräugnis*, I am perhaps in no better position to say for certain, but I would argue that it has to do with the essential visuality of the event, particularly the structural necessity of the negative as a constitutive component of representation.

2 Void and event

In one of his most direct attempts to define the void, Badiou writes, "The 'nothing' is what names the unperceivable gap" (2006: 54), but at the same time he insists on the term "void" rather than "nothing," because "the 'nothing' is the name of the void correlative to the *global* effect of structure (*everything* is counted); it is more accurate to indicate that not-having-been-counted is also quite *local* in its occurrence" (2006: 56). As indicated above, the void is in fact situated, historically and socially, and it is this situatedness that potentially results in specific, even *singular* evental sites, although it is a concept of structural necessity to every situation. Despite this situatedness, the indiscernibility of the void is a key feature and part of the reason that its nomination is

17 For a more detailed analysis of this painting, consider Harries' excellent reading, which locates a number of other visual disruptions, like the holes burned through the canvas in various spots, as well as the positioning of the heating coil, that "long, delicate vertical mark" in Hinson's words (1993: 183), a three-dimensional object that hangs off and out into space precisely at the point where the railroad tracks' regularity appears to offer a consistent visual experience. This heating coil becomes for Harries "synecdochic representative of Lot's wife" (2007 : 90–102).

always only retroactive – its appearance, the event, constitutes a rupture that may only be recontained by an act of naming that simultaneously initiates the process of subjectivization that Badiou outlines in *Being and Event* but then refines, turning this into the focus of *Logics of Worlds*. This recent "sequel" to *Being and Event* sets itself the task of providing a "new definition of the object," in opposition to the critical philosophical definition of Kant and Husserl, by explicating the logic of "appearing" – specifically the question of "what makes truths appear in a world; the starkness of their imposition on the laws of what locally surrounds them; everything whose existence is summed up by the term 'subject,' once its syntax is that of exception" (Badiou 2009: 46).[18] Badiou's formal theory of the subject is articulated within the same syntactical structure of the exception, claiming that there are three "subjective figures" appropriate to the radical change effected by the event: the faithful subject, the reactive subject, and the obscure subject. Each of these subject positions corresponds to an accepted level of visibility in positioning the subject relative to the (in) existence of the material trace of the event, although in the extreme case of the "obscure subject," this visibility is entirely negated (occultation, obscurantism, iconoclasm). Regarding the event, Badiou devotes the fifth book of *Logics of Worlds* to the problem of true change and its mode of appearing, taking seriously the possibility that radical change, which is something more than mere modification or the becoming that is already contained in the appearing of the world, "might remain purely and simply unthinkable" (2009: 360). Void and event are terms of the situation that are oppositionally bound together, with the appearing of the event emerging precisely from the indiscernible gap of the void.

Badiou describes the event as the "appearing of the inexistent" or the "revelation of the void" (2009: 368). Here it is worth noting the indirect importance of Kant's critical eventalism for Badiou's philosophy. In the second analogy of experience in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Kant addresses the problem of alteration and its relationship to phenomenal appearance. This is one of Kant's most visual chapters – perhaps even more so than the third critique, because here Kant verbally presents a series of visual experiences – and it deals precisely with the representation of an event, or "Eräugnis" (A199/B244).[19] The

18 It is also worth indicating here that, although Badiou resists association with Schmitt (see footnote 5), the rhetoric of the exception is only more pronounced in *Logics of Worlds*, along with a certain sort of decisionism that links all political, artistic, amorous, and scientific truths to the instance of a *decision*.

19 Kant returns to this same term in his discussion of the possibility of human freedom in the third antinomy in the first critique, the "Erläuterung der kosmologischen Idee einer Freiheit in Verbindung mit der allgemeinen Naturnothwendigkeit" (1995: 462). Thus, for Kant, not only does "Eräugnis" feature in the transcendental analytic, but also in his dialectical engagement

argument is that experience is the synthesis of successive apprehension, and Kant's first example is a house, which he uses to reiterate his previous point on the persistence of substance: in order for the house to appear to us as an object of experience, it must exhibit a certain persistence. Then he turns to the problem of the event: "something happens." Given Kant's definition of change, "successives Sein und Nichtsein" (or the obverse of "Nichtsein und Sein"), at its most radical a reading the house as an event would require either its construction or its destruction. As it is, he proposes an arguably clearer case of change in the moving picture of a ship driven downstream – but the point is that the event means the appearance of something that a-voids representation in the first instance, and therefore, for the present discussion, I propose that the house is actually a more useful example than the ship in thinking of the commonalities between Kant's subjective continuity of experience and Badiou's irruption of the event, because although the house's other states (creation and destruction) are just as bound up in the causal chain that includes its apparent permanence, there is a significant temporal remove. The moment of the house's destruction cannot objectively coincide with the moment of its apparent stability, but the coexistence in the perceiving subject of these two distinct moments is precisely what is required for the house to be viewed as event. Events require subjects to witness.

But this is also the point at which Badiou's "event" diverges from Kant's "Eräugnis," because the continuity offered by the subject's sensual perception of change is the sole requirement for marking an event for Kant, while otherwise fitting firmly under the law of causality;[20] Badiou's "event" essentially radicalizes the passage between "Sein" and "Nichtsein" to be read as an exceptionality, at least in its maximal mode of appearance.[21] Perhaps more importantly, then, for the house's destruction to be considered an event for Badiou, its consequences must include a radical change for the subjectivity of the multiples included in the situation. Badiou argues that every event (strong singularity) may be considered an event of destruction in that the logic of the evental site means a structure of representation legitimated by the subjection of the

with the possibility for the appearance of a genuinely emergent event, evental irruption of the void, the human choice that is its own cause (1995: 462–463).

20 Badiou gives a brief accounting of his objections to the Kantian model of appearance and the notion of the Transcendental Object in *Logics of Worlds* (2009: 231–241).

21 Badiou allows for change that does not exhibit the "strong singularity" of the true event, and it is specifically the maximal and enduring consequences of the event for its process of subjectivization that distinguishes the points along the gradated spectrum, from mere modification to the factual, to event. See "The Four Forms of Change" in *Logics of Worlds* (2009: 363–380).

inexistent. This structure must be destroyed for the void to appear. Clearly, this is not always the case in every instance of physical destruction, but on the other hand it would be easy to identify instances when an event of destruction might be viewed as an irruptive event, along with the processes of subject-formation Badiou describes – the most obvious such event would be the destruction of the World Trade Center, mentioned above in connection with the thematic of Lot's wife. This event has clearly produced the matrix of "subjective forms" that Badiou describes as initiated by a strong singularity: faithful subjects for whom the destruction signaled the advent of a new present, reactive subjects who resist the transformative power of this event and almost immediately categorized it and effaced its singularity, and obscure subjects who concede almost no acknowledgement of the catastrophe as an event. These subjective figures either affirm or negate the material trace of the event, but the basic requirement for true change to be regarded as such, instead of mere modification, is the initiation of this process of subjectivization. Once again: events require subjects to witness.

Now, the problem in reading Celan in these terms (void and event) is the question of what an event would look like in Celan's poetry. To put it bluntly, one might say that what is "happening" in the poems is sometimes difficult to determine, producing the very problematic of the event. Of course, we have already considered the important example of "Heute und morgen," in which Celan attends to the problem of what I term the apotropaic negative image, but, significantly, the concept of "Ereignis" also appears in Celan's *Bremer Rede* (1958), and it occurs in direct relation to the problem of the void. Speaking of language as singularly "unverloren," Celan situates the event of poetry as an orientation point in chaos: "Es war, Sie sehen es, Ereignis, Bewegung, Unterwegssein, es war der Versuch, Richtung zu gewinnen" (Celan 2000: 3.186). The event of poetic inscription is cartographically figured in order to give a stable sense of place and position at a moment when this stability appears impossible in the "uncharted post-Holocaust terrain" (Baer 2000: 2). Certainly, one aspect of this instability is legible in the fact of Celan's exile, and the disappearance of the Bukowina.[22] The passage of Celan's homeland from being into non-being is a crucial event

22 On this point see the first chapter of Amy Colin's *Paul Celan: Holograms of Darkness*, in which she specifically addresses this thematic of return to "a non-place on an imaginary map from childhood," connecting "place and non-place, Celan and the Bukovina" (1991: 3). See also *Die Bukowina: Studien zu einer versunkenen Literaturlandschaft*, edited by Dietmar Goschnigg and Anton Schwob, particularly Kurt Rein's contribution on "Politische und kulturgeschichtliche Grundlagen der 'deutschsprachigen Literatur der Bukowina'" (Rein 1987: 27–48).

for the poet, and one that he articulates with unusual clarity and specificity, although it is a negative event, the collapse of a culture. As noted, this thematic matrix receives clear expression in his poetological essays, the "Bremer Rede" and of course the "Meridian," as well as in poems like "Eine Gauner- und Ganovenweise"[23] and "Und mit dem Buch aus Tarussa," poems with certain Eastern European geographical orientation points that effectively triangulate the lost Bukowina.

Arguably, this homelessness is also felt in poems devoid of any explicit reference to place, but where this spatial and cultural displacement from the "versunkene Literaturlandschaft" – as the Bukowina has come to be called in an amalgamation of descriptions offered by Rose Ausländer and Paul Celan of this lost place, this u-topia – is legible in images of extreme exposure, most notably in poems like "Welchen der Steine du hebst" and "Niedrigwasser," poems focused on the experience of an extreme visual dis-closure. In the former poem, this gaze into interiority is associated with a certain risk, both for the object of the gaze as well as for the viewing subject, as critics have connected the poem's images of gathering stones, chopping wood, and speaking words, with a biblical passage from the book of Ecclesiastes: "Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt herewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby... The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself" (Ecc. 10: 9, 12).[24] Celan's adaptation of the biblical imagery shifts the focus to the vulnerability of those subjected to extreme exposure – "die des Schutzes... bedürfen" (1:129). I would argue that this is a clear case of the instantaneous revelation of the void, that precarious site of exposure in which the inexistent suddenly appears but may just as suddenly disappear again. In Celan's poem, the extreme exposure is almost immediately recontained – "nackt,/erneuern sie nun die Verflechtung" – but the poet also retains an unmistakable sense of anxiety about the process by which this vision will be verbally represented (i. e. the event of inscription).

Welchen der Steine du hebst –
du entblößt,
die des Schutzes der Steine bedürfen:

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23 In Celan scholarship, "Eine Gauner- und Ganovenweise" is the title conventionally used to refer to this poem, but Celan's full, and unusually verbose, title is "Eine Gauner- und Ganovenweise/gesungen zu Paris emprès Pontoise/von Paul Celan/aus Czernowitz bei Sadagora" (1:229). See John E. Jackson's (1987: 215–216) reading of intertextuality in Celan on the source of the title to this poem, as well as on the inverted geographical of "Czernowitz bei Sadagora," the latter being a microdistrict in Czernowitz.

24 See Jerry Glenn's discussion of the poem in *Paul Celan* (1973: 85–87).

nackt,
erneuern sie nun die Verflechtung.

Welchen der Bäume du fällst –
du zimmerst
die Bettstatt, darauf
die Seelen sich abermals stauen,
als schütterte nicht
auch dieser Äon.

Welches der Worte du sprichst –
du dankst
dem Verderben. (Celan 2000: 1:129)

In the first line of the final stanza, structurally parallel to the first line of the poem, the act of exposure has shifted from lifting stones to speaking words, clearly indicating that the act of poetic inscription is also marked by that act of violent exposure evoked in the first stanza. Visually, there are a number of things happening when a stone is lifted to reveal this state of exposure. First, in this act of laying bare, there is left an indelible sort of frame, the imprint of the now-absent stone, which orders the experience. In fact, in each of the three stanzas of this poem the dangerous activity of exposure and removal is also simultaneously the construction of a frame of experience. In each case this visual frame is marked by the fact that what should be contained in the frame is, effectively, nothing. If we connect this void (exposure, vulnerability, absence) back to the problem of Celan's exile and lost access to a socio-political structure that recognizes Bukowiner as such, then we regain the problematic of void and event in its representational dimension. Politically, representation had become an impossibility as early as 1940: while the Bukowina had been a *selbstständiges Kronland* in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, receiving its own *Landesverfassung* in 1850,[25] the (first) Soviet occupation of North Bukowina in June, 1940, prompted the emigration of approximately 100,000 "Volksdeutschen," with forced Soviet deportations of "unzuverlässigen Elementen" to Siberia beginning in summer, 1941 – which primarily affected the German-Jewish population (Rein 1987: 33).

25 See Hannes Hofbauer's "Bukowina 1774 bis 1918: Österreichs Osterweiterung" for more on the particular circumstances by which Bukowina became home to such a diverse, multicultural population, although Hofbrauer challenges the multicultural nostalgia applied in retrospect to the region, which was "viel eher von sozialen und nationalen Trennungen gekennzeichnet als von einem interethnischen, interkulturellen oder klassenübergreifenden Aufeinanderzugehen ihrer BewohnerInnen. Deutsche, Rumänen, Slawen, Griechen; Juden, Katholiken, Unierte, Orthodoxe lebten mehr neben- als miteinander. Einzig in der Hauptstadt Czernowitz ergab sich ein kulturelles Gemisch, das mitteleuropäische Dimensionen annahm" (Hofbauer 2002: 13).

Celan's poetry expresses this exposure, this homelessness, as the truth of the situation.

Of course, the obligatory reference in this discussion of exposure is the singular line that Celan published, in 1970, in *L'Éphémère*: "La poésie ne s'impose plus, elle s'expose" (3:181). Dated March 26, 1969, this line appears far removed from the problem of exposure laid out in "Welchen der Steine du hebst" – Baer's reading of this line is at the crux of his strategy of reading Baudelaire with Celan through an implicit reference to Valery,[26] but I want to read this line as directly relating to the problem of the event, as an appearing of the inexistent. The common assumption about poets and artists is that they see the world in a different way, or rather that they in fact see more of the world, and that this extra measure of visual perceptivity is the source for their "artistic vision." To turn back to Baer's thesis, it will be noted that this is certainly part of Baudelaire's legacy, as exemplified in his important essay "The Painter of Modern Life," which describes the flâneur's experience of modern life as equivalent to that of the convalescent who must re-learn how to live, someone who learns to see and feel *more*, and more intensely. Regarding Celan, there is no doubt as to the intensity in which he experienced life, but I would argue against the application of this sentiment of the artist's vision to Celan. The implicit question raised by Celan's line is rather how poetry might expose itself, as opposed to imposing itself. It is certainly clear that Celan's poetry imposes fewer formal restrictions on language, in terms of syllabic structure, metrics, and rhyme, than one finds in the strict formalism of French Alexandrines, for example, but very little exposes itself to the reader in the extreme brevity of Celan's poetry, especially the later poems contained in the volumes *Fadensonnen*, *Lichtzwang*, and *Schneepart*, which are closer to the date inscribed into this enigmatic piece of prose. It would seem that, rather than exposing itself, poetry imposes itself on the eye of the poet as a set of language-schemata for representing the world.

In fact, if we accept Gombrich's argument about the strategies of representation and perception as composing a series of adjustments, applications of schemata and subsequent correction for accuracy, then the artist "does not necessarily see more than the layman. In a certain sense he sees even less (as he shows when he half closes his eyes)" (2000: 326).[27] Gombrich returns us here

26 See the inter-chapter "Straitening," in Baer's *Remnants of Song* (2000: 156–165).

27 In this segment of the larger discussion of schema and correction as the strategy of visual discovery, Gombrich references André Malraux's *Voices of Silence* to make this particular point about seeing and not-seeing (Gombrich 2000: 279).

to Kantian schematism as the essential structure of perception – "All representations are grounded on schemata which the artist learns to use" (2000: 313) – but Gombrich also extends this point to the sorts of representations produced through the "humble activity" of photographers, whose work, despite widespread assumptions to the contrary, is never a pure re-production of lived experience, because the artist faces choices at every stage of the process, including in the darkroom. To illustrate this point, Gombrich includes two photographic prints marked by distinct visual differences and then reveals that both were printed from the same negative (2000: 34–36). The choice of how to process the negative dramatically alters the experience of the visual object, but at the same time Gombrich insists that there is nothing inherently unnatural about reading the negative image for itself, rather that "the negative image is as easy to decode as the positive" (2000: 40), and that the eye learns to decipher these cryptograms in exactly the same way, by interpreting the binarism of the visual code: the relationships appear inverted in comparison to the "positive" image, but the oppositional character of these relationships is otherwise precisely retained in the negative. The limit case is, then, not the negative image with its inverted values but the untrained viewer who cannot decipher the picture simply because of a lack of training in the conventions of viewing. In later essays, Gombrich returns to the negative image in order to again probe the limits of representation, and it is interesting that he repeatedly links photographic negatives to the conventional practices of cartographic representation, both metaphors for a kind of visual hyper-authenticity, but both requiring a certain hermeneutic to correctly read these cryptograms.[28] If we think of Celan's maxim in this context, as addressing the problem of poetry itself and its relationship to visual events, then it would seem that a "poetic vision" is exactly a kind of negative visuality. Celan's texts, as traces of the event, represent the appearing of the negative, the revelation of the void.[29]

28 See "Mirror and Map: Theories of Pictorial Representation" and "Image and Code: Scope and Limits of Conventionalism in Pictorial Representation" in *The Image and the Eye* (Gombrich 1982). These essays explicitly link cartographic representation to photographic representation for their emphasis on "informational content," but note the tacit correspondence between the photographic negative, which Gombrich clearly considers the most "unnatural" moment of representation conceivable, and a sort of excessive authenticity. Mitchell's (1986) response to Gombrich, in *Iconology*, interrogates the ideological implications of the rhetoric of the "natural" here – see chapter 3, "Nature and Convention: Gombrich's Illusions."

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