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Hope and silence.

Heidegger and Celan on the subject of poetry

Abstract

This article contends that, despite sharing substantial concerns on the modern dominion of technology and the “aesthetic” conception of art, Celan departs from Heidegger with regard to the role poetry (and art) can and should play on the background of the historical experience of the Shoah. This departure is connected to diverging views of the poetological position occupied by the subject, resulting in irreconcilable views of the ethico-political role of the post-Shoah subject as such.

Keywords

Heidegger, Celan, Poetry

It is only for those without hope that hope is given
Walter Benjamin

This article contends that, despite sharing substantial concerns on the modern dominion of technology and on the modern “aesthetic” conception of art, Celan departs from Heidegger with regard to the role poetry (and art in general) can and should play in our time, and specifically on the background of the historical experience of the Shoah. This departure is, as I will further argue, implicitly but structurally linked to diverging views of the philosophical-poetological position occupied by the subject, which ultimately result in irreconcilable views of the ethico-political role of the post-Shoah subject. My claim will then be that there is a deep philosophical opposition between the two authors,

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which led to the unresolved character of the attempted dialogue between them². The article is divided as follows: 1) I sketch what I reckon to be the core tenet of Heidegger's conception of poetry and art, namely his "poetic antisubjectivism"; 2) I then turn to the element of hope in Celan's conception of poetry, and in his confrontation with Heidegger, an element that 3) relies on Celan's radical poetics of individuation. Finally, 4) I draw some broader conclusions on the philosophical reasons of the unresolved dialogue.

1. Heidegger's poetic antisubjectivism

Heidegger equates poetry and authentic art, namely art that is not a manipulation of the artist, but the place of unconcealment of a truth on which the artist and the artwork rely: "All art, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of beings, is, in essence, poetry. The essence of art, on which both the artwork and the artist depend, is truth's setting-itself-into-work" (Heidegger 2002: 44). Briefly, "art is, then, a becoming and happening of truth" (Heidegger 2002: 44), and insofar it is wholly opposed to the metaphysical split of subject and object, i.e. to "modern subjectivism, [which,] of course, misinterprets creation as the product of the genius of the self-sovereign subject" (Heidegger 2002: 48), and which is the groundwork of the dominion of technology. Poetry is a non-objectifying language, as long as we are able to conceive of it and of art in general not in the modern sense, i.e. as individual production, but in the original Greek sense of *techne*. The original, authentic meaning of art has nothing to do with the "making" of a subject: "As knowledge experienced in the Greek manner, τέχνη is a bringing forth of beings in that it brings forth what is present, as such, out of concealment, specifically into the unconcealment of their appearance. Τέχνη never designates the activity of making" (Heidegger 2002: 35).

The centrality of this "antisubjectivism" in Heidegger's poetics becomes even more evident when its application to Hölderlin's poetry is investigated. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that, for Heidegger, listening to Hölderlin's poetry may have been the only way to prevent the horrors and the annihilation that Celan's poetry tries to

² I am referring to the title of Lyon 2006, see also 158.

confront³. For Heidegger, modern subjectivism, the whole Western history of metaphysics of presence, art as the making of a subject, and the unchained dominion of technology are just different aspects of the same constellation, to which Heidegger refers as *das Ge-stell*⁴. To this constellation belongs also “the production of corpses in the gas chambers and extermination camps” (Heidegger 2012: 27). The Shoah is for Heidegger ultimately an outcome of the Western metaphysical-subjectivistic-technological compound. Neither ordinary nor metaphysical language can tackle this compound without being absorbed by it: only truly poetic language may have prepared a way out⁵.

To develop this point, I will now comment on a passage from the conclusion of Heidegger’s lecture on Hölderlin’s hymn *Der Ister*. The passage begins by stating that Hölderlin’s “poetizing does not revolve around the poet’s own ego. No German poet has ever achieved such distance from his own ego as that distance that determines Holderlin’s hymnal poetry” (Heidegger 1996: 165). The meaning of the term I am introducing here, poetic antisubjectivism, is openly put forward by Heidegger in this bold statement about Hölderlin’s hymnal poetry. This poetry, rather than being rooted in the poet’s ego, is defined by such a distance from the poet’s ego as we cannot find in any other German poet. Hölderlin does not put his own ego into poetry: on the contrary, he puts the biggest distance between his ego and his poetry. This, Heidegger continues, is the very reason why his poetry has a hard time encountering the right kind of audience: “This is the real reason why we of today, who despite all ‘community’ remain metaphysically, that is, historically entangled in subjectivity, have such difficulty in bringing the right kind of hearing to encounter the word of this poetry. What has for a long time hindered modern, contemporary human beings, who think in terms of self-consciousness and subjectivity, from hearing this poetry is simply this: The fact that Hölderlin poetizes purely from

³ On Heidegger’s and Celan’s “writing on the disaster” see Von Chamier 2001.

⁴ See the Bremen lecture with the same name (Heidegger 2012).

⁵ I agree with Bambach that Heidegger’s interpretation of Hölderlin delineates a conception of justice as non-human event (see Bambach 2013: 7-8, 99ff., 171ff.). This is also why Heidegger does not and cannot believe in the post-war restoration of justice by the Allies, which appears to him “as the mere continuation of NS machination (*Machenschaft*) caught in the frame of the *Gestell* that was everywhere leveling modern existence in the epoch of technology” (Bambach 2013: 154).

out of that which, in itself, essentially prevails (west) as that which is to be poetized" (Heidegger 1996: 165).

Despite all talk of community, we are in fact still stuck in the subjectivist point of view, which makes it hard to respond adequately to a poetry that is in its essence not about the subject. The human beings of our time have a form of thought and a view of the world and of themselves entirely revolving around self-consciousness and subjectivity. This very fact, then, prevents them from listening to Hölderlin's poetry, which only comes out of that which in its essence has to be poetized, not out of his particular ego or subjectivity. Furthermore, since our time is the time of the unrestrained domination of technology and subjectivism, even our conception of art has fallen prey to this domination. For us, art is a leisure time product, a hobby, in the best case a cultural phenomenon or the subject of an aesthetic experience, pleasure, and investigation. If specific artistic expressions or products do not serve such purposes nor neatly fit within the narrow space left by modernity to art, we have a hard time receiving that art. It appears as if we are stuck in a circle: only authentic poetry can save us, but in order to listen to that poetry we should already have been saved. *Vis-à-vis* this circle, Heidegger's statement from the *Contributions to philosophy* should not come as a surprise: "The historical destiny [*Bestimmung*] of philosophy culminates in the recognition of the necessity of making Hölderlin's word be heard" (Heidegger 1999: 297). While philosophy itself cannot tell that absence (as Being and time's "failure" proved), it can at least work to the aim of making the only language that can tell the absence be heard. Even more: its very mission is to accomplish this.

2. Celan's hope

The ambivalent character of Celan's attitude towards Heidegger has been emphasized by scholars in different contexts⁶. The poet's indebtedness to the philosopher is undeniable⁷, yet so is the power of his criticism. The latter is particularly virulent in the draft of an unsent letter to Heidegger written by Celan in the last five months of his life: "You [...] have decisively weakened that which is poetic [*das Dichterische*]

⁶ See e.g. Bambach 2013.

⁷ "It is not too much to say that Celan went to school with Heidegger and could be counted among his most serious students" (Lyon 2006: 215).

and, I venture to surmise, that which is thinking [*das Denkerische*], in the serious will to responsibility of both” (quoted in Lyon 2006: 207). Lyon claims that “though [Celan] failed to state explicitly how Heidegger’s powerful influence had compromised both poetry and thought, the clearly implied cause was his involvement with the Nazi Party and his failure to publicly write about it after the two men’s first meeting in 1967 as Celan had hoped” (Lyon 2006: 207-8, 187). However, the tone of Celan’s accusation does not seem to be directly political. The quoted passage displays an opposition at the philosophical level, in the way poetry and thought, and their responsibility, are understood and practiced by the two authors. In order to make sense of this philosophical opposition, and in particular of the connection implicitly or explicitly established by the two authors between the conception of poetry and the understanding of its political responsibility, I will consider, in their connection, two very different texts by Celan, both fundamentally related to Heidegger. First, the poem *Todtnauberg*, written right after the 1966 encounter with Heidegger, but published in 1970, and titled after the location of the philosopher’s famous cabin in the Black Forest, where the meeting took place, and, second, the *Meridian speech* (the 1960 Darmstadt acceptance speech in response to the awarding of the Georg Büchner Prize).

Todtnauberg reads:

Arnica, eyebright, the

draft from the well with the
star-die on top,

in the
Hütte,

written in the book
– whose name did it record
before mine? –,
in this book
the line about
a hope, today,
for a thinker’s
word
to come,
in the heart,

forest sward, unlevelled,

orchis and orchis, singly,
raw exchanges, later, while driving,
clearly,
he who drives us, the mensch,
he also hears it,
the half-
trod log-
trails on the highmoor,
humidity,
much
(Celan 2014).

Even though it is impossible even to simply attempt an in-depth deciphering of the poem, two things stand out even at a superficial reading. First, the large employment of spatio-temporal references and naturalistic descriptions. Second, the underlying presence of an inner feeling, giving tune and structure to the whole poem, namely a hope. My reading of the poem, admittedly neither an exhaustive nor an exclusive one, revolves on the connection between these two aspects. I suggest that this connection is made explicit by Celan himself in the *Meridian speech*. Scholars concur that the *Meridian speech* is to a good extent a critical confrontation with Heidegger's conception of poetry and art⁸: it is therefore useful to link it with the poem retelling the material encounter.

In the first part of the speech, Celan opposes art and poetry. Art is interpreted as an artificial, technical activity, which – along Heideggerian lines – can be aesthetically admired even just as an “automaton” (Celan 2011: 2) without human content⁹. Insofar, “art creates I-distance” (Celan 2011: 6), and produces a self-forgetfulness, which however is not interpreted positively in the Heideggerian antisubjectivistic sense, but

⁸ “Celan, meanwhile, would soon embark on what counts as his most significant public response to Heidegger – his '*Meridian*' speech. Among other things, it would simultaneously be an acknowledgment of his debt to the thinker and a declaration of independence from him” (Lyon 2006: 107). See also Fóti 1992: 99.

⁹ See Cameron 2014: 4, 100.

rather negatively in the Heideggerian sense of *Gestell*¹⁰. On the contrary, poetry is a momentary interruption of the *Gestell*, “an *Atemwende*, a breatherturn” (Celan 2011: 7) making place for the “estranged I set free here and in this manner” (Celan 2011: 7). The I is liberated not through the mechanic artifices of art, but through the estrangement of poetry¹¹. The freedom warranted by poetry is not, however, unrestrained arbitrariness. The main and most significant constraint is imposed on the poem by historical dates: “Perhaps one can say that each poem has its own ‘20th of January’ inscribed in it? [...] But don’t we all write ourselves from such dates?” (Celan 2011: 8)¹². Thus, every poem is historically marked: it is neither (with Heidegger) the arbitrary and capricious manifestation of the poet’s ego, nor (against Heidegger) the opening place of an I-transcending truth. Instead, the poem oscillates between the two poles of the inescapable, tragic historical determination on the one hand, and the sheer, irreducible individuality of the poet on the other hand: “But the poem does speak! It stays mindful of its dates, but – it speaks” (Celan 2011: 8). While staying mindful of its dates, the poem cannot be reduced to them: it speaks, it says something else and something more than the experience marked by the dates. Being anchored in and determined by the dates does not prevent the poem from being free, but this freedom comes in the form of estrangement, of a “breatherturn”.

In this way, the poem can put forward a hope: “I think that it had always been part of the poem’s hopes to speak on behalf of exactly this strange – no, I cannot use this word this way – exactly on another’s behalf – who knows, perhaps on behalf of a totally other” (Celan 2011: 8). Hope, one of the central elements in *Todtnauberg*, is also central in the *Meridian*: “Perhaps an encounter of this ‘totally other’ kind with a not all too distant, with a very close ‘other’ is [...] thinkable – thinkable again and again. The poem tarries and tests the wind [*verhofft*] – a word related to the creaturely – through such thoughts” (Celan 2011: 8). The hope is the hope for encounter, “a word related to the creaturely”, and for conversation: even “desperate conversation” (Celan

¹⁰ See, however, Miglio 2005: 141-2.

¹¹ The subversive character of this turning, or “revolution”, of breath is emphasized by Di Cesare 2012a: 189. See also Cameron 2014: 106.

¹² On the meaning of the “20th of January”, the date marking both the poet Lenz’s walk through the mountains addressed by Celan in the speech, and the 1942 Wannsee conference that gave way to the “Final Solution”, see Bambach 2013: 196ff.

2011: 9). It is a desperate, extreme hope, as today “the poem shows, unmistakably, a strong tendency to fall silent” (Celan 2011: 8). The poem lives on the edge between complete silence, i.e. annihilation, and word, i.e. existence: “The poem stands fast at the edge of itself; it calls and brings itself, in order to be able to exist, ceaselessly back from its already-no-longer [*Schon-nicht-mehr*] into its always-still [*Immer-noch*]. This always-still can only be a speaking” (Celan 2011: 8-9). Since, however, speaking belongs not only to poetry but also to art in Celan’s negative sense, the next step is to specify what sort of speaking, i.e.: “Not just language as such, nor, presumably, just verbal ‘correspondence’ [*Entsprechung*] either. But language actualized, set free under the sign of a radical individuation that at the same time, however, remains mindful of the borders language draws and of the possibilities language opens up for it” (Celan 2011: 9)¹³. Here Celan opposes to the Heideggerian semi-passive conception of language as “correspondence” (*Entsprechung*) to Being the idea that the poem that truly speaks and is truly “always-still” is actualized, liberated language manifested by and manifesting a radical individuation¹⁴. More precisely: “This always-still of the poem can indeed only be found in the work of the poet who does not forget that he speaks under the angle of inclination of his Being [*seines Daseins*], the angle of inclination of his creaturli-ness. Then the poem is [...] one person’s language-become-shape [*gestaltgewordene Sprache eines Einzelnen*], and, according to its essence, presentness and presence [*Gegenwart und Präsenz*]” (Celan 2011: 9)¹⁵.

Hence, the two elements highlighted in *Todtnauberg*, namely the large employment of spatio-temporal references and descriptions, and the hope structuring the poem are indeed connected, in the following way. The poem struggles to pull itself back from the “already-no-longer” into the “always-still”. The “always-still” is speaking in the sense of actualized language: language that, on the background of the possibility of total annihilation and horror, tells the “always-still”, the

¹³ Joris translates *Entsprechung* with “analogy”. I changed it into “correspondence”.

¹⁴ See Jamme 2017: 165 and Derrida 2015: 4 on the poem’s “logic of individuation”.

¹⁵ Here, as in other passages, Celan clearly employs Heideggerian terminology (*Dasein*, *Präsenz*, etc.) in a (partly) anti-Heideggerian fashion.

enduring existence and experience of an individual solidified into poetic word¹⁶. In this sense, it is also language set free: it is the free, open, actively hopeful word of an existing individual against the always-lurking possibility of the “already-no-longer”. The “always-still” is only made possible through this radical individuation, by the emphasis put on the particular existence and even physical nature (creaturliness) of the poet. Celan strongly, desperately vindicates the right and the force of the single individual existence with its particular, radically individualized spatio-temporal situation, against both the homologizing and totalizing risk of artistic-technological abstraction and Heidegger’s claim that words and truths are independent of the poet’s ego.

3. *A poetics of individuation*

The ambivalence of Celan’s stance concerning Heidegger thus acquires a more precise contour. On the one hand, Celan clearly concurs with Heidegger in denouncing the dehumanizing, totalitarian character of modern technology and of the artificial language connected to it. On the other hand, he openly rejects Heidegger’s antisubjectivism and argues for the impossibility to disentangle radical individuation and authenticity of language, against Heidegger’s idea that it is language that speaks, not the author. As Lyon points out, the departure between Celan and Heidegger “becomes noticeable when Celan sets out to restore the subject to modern poetry, a subject that in Heidegger’s writings had come to play an almost nonexistent role” (Lyon 2006: 127). Celan’s speech vindicates the poem as “one person’s language-become-shape, and [...] presentness and presence”, as spatio-temporally situated individual language, which gives form to the irreducibly free, particular, and contingent existence of the individual author on the background of the possibility of total annihilation¹⁷.

Celan’s anti-Heideggerian vindication of the here and now thus bears a deep philosophical meaning. Heidegger’s reference to the unconcealment of Being via Hölderlin ultimately results, from Celan’s

¹⁶ This is also in line with Celan’s understanding of poems as “crystals [...] in which the experienced time has consolidated into language” (André 2001: 212, my translation).

¹⁷ See also the interesting observations by Von Chamier 2001.

point of view, in a denial of the constraints imposed by history with its unforgiving dates¹⁸. Heidegger still refers to art as essentially poetic, without really questioning the very possibility of poetry itself after the Shoah. On the contrary, as Fóti argues following Derrida, for Celan “as the mark of a significant historical conjunction, as historical signature, the date marks the implacable resistance of the historical to hermeneutical appropriation”¹⁹. Heidegger’s hermeneutical appropriation of Hölderlin’s poetry can be read as an attempt to trespass the constraints imposed by history (and, clearly, by the Shoah on the first place) on the poem’s capacity to unconceal the truth, a truth which is conceived of as superior to and independent of historical dates. In this way, Heidegger ultimately tends to neutralize history and the Shoah.

What is more, Heidegger appropriates Hölderlin under the motto of the “homecoming”, of a (German) return to a (Greek) origin. This is, however, obviously not possible for the Shoah-survivor, exile Jew Celan. Again, the point is not just biographical. Heidegger’s hermeneutical strategy implies a neutralization of the geographical-historical duress and reality of the Shoah, and his poetic longing for rootedness, symbolized by the very *Todtnauberg Hütte*, not only ignores the condition of the exiled Jew²⁰, but that of the post-Shoah subject as such. For the latter, the experience of alienation and displacement is not just a momentary disease, but a structural condition, and authentic language is only possible as estrangement. While Celan attempts to address this condition and to find ways in which the subject may still speak and be heard, Heidegger is simply not interested in a conversation with this subject and with his (desperate) being here now. Against Heidegger’s monological conception of language and following Martin

¹⁸ Given the space constraints I will not touch comment on Celan’s own reading of Hölderlin.

¹⁹ Fóti 1992: 104; for Derrida 2005: 16, “a date functions like a proper name”. See also Di Cesare 2012a: 191: “Remaining mindful of the date means freeing the poem from every presumed a-temporality in order to emphasize its extreme temporalization”.

²⁰ Bambach 2013: 3, 195: “Celan will take up the Heideggerian-Hölderlinian *topos* of remembrance or *Andenken*, but in a radically different and deconstructive sense. Abjuring Heidegger’s philhellenic idyll of an Odysseus-like ‘poetic homecoming’ as the ‘proper’ task of the poet, Celan will rather seize on the Levinasian theme of Abrahamic exile as a way to contrast the German-Jewish experience of remembrance”. Bambach 2013: 233 also remarks the devastating outcome of Celan’s extreme and dashed hope of a “homecoming” to Jerusalem.

Buber's dialogical one²¹, Celan conceives the poem as essentially tending to the other: "The poem wants to head toward some other, it needs this other, it needs an opposite. It seeks it out, it bespeaks itself to it. Each thing, each human is, for the poem heading toward this other, a figure of this" (Celan 2011: 9). This tension to the other is then characterized as "attention", not in the sense of instrumental focus, but rather in the sense of an inner concentration²². In this way "the poem becomes [...] the poem of someone who – always still – perceives, is turned toward phenomena, questioning and addressing these; it becomes conversation – often a desperate conversation" (Celan 2011: 9), where the addressed "brings its otherness into this present" (Celan 2011: 9).

The poem looks for the precise time and place of encounter with the Other, even with the absolute Other: "Even in this here and now of the poem – for the poem itself, we know, has always only this one, unique, momentary present – even in this immediacy and nearness it lets the most essential aspect of the other speak: its time. When we speak with things in this way, we are also always confronted with the question of their where-from and where-to: a question that 'stays open', 'does not come to an end', that points toward the open, empty and free – we are far outside. The poem, I believe, searches for this place too" (Celan 2011: 9-10). To be sure, Celan's anti-Heideggerian rehabilitation of the "immediate" spatio-temporal dimension is not to be understood in the sense, criticized by Heidegger, of physical measurement and calculation. Instead, the "place" searched by the poem is in truth a non-existing place, i.e., literally, a utopia revealed by the poem's attention: "And once, due to the attention given to things and beings, we also came close to something open and free. And finally, close to utopia" (Celan 2011: 11). This utopia, this non-existing place, is at the same time the point of departure (the origin) and the point of arrival. The poem traces paths from the poet's origin to his destination, but, and not only as a result of the Shoah, "none of these places can

²¹ See Cameron 2014, 193, Miglio 2005, 66-7, and, on the problem of language after Auschwitz, Di Cesare 2012a, 197ff.

²² "The attention the poem tries to pay to everything it encounters, its sharper sense of detail, outline, structure, color, but also of the 'tremors' and 'hints', all of this is not, I believe, the achievement of an eye competing with (or emulating) ever more precise instruments, but is rather a concentration that remains mindful of all our dates" (Celan 2011, 9).

be found, they do not exist” (Celan 2011: 12). Nevertheless, while looking for non-existing places, the poem and its author are “always-still”, safe from the non-existence of the “already-no-longer”. While looking for places that cannot be found because they do not exist, the poet has found something which, just like language, is “immaterial, yet terrestrial, something circular that returns to itself across both poles while – cheerfully – even crossing the tropics: I find [...] a meridian” (Celan 2011: 12)²³.

The proposed reading of the *Meridian speech* confirms Celan’s philosophically and not just biographically motivated ambivalent attitude toward Heidegger. Celan wants to restore the subject to poetry (against Heidegger), yet he is also mindful (with Heidegger) of the nihilistic implications of an objectifying language. The subject and his spatio-temporal situation are not just affirmed in their presence: Celan’s poetic strive is to depict them in their absence, silence, obscurity, from which the poem calls them back into the “always-still”²⁴. The poem thus depicts, or more precisely is constituted by, the unexpected, recalcitrant re-emergence of the individual from the absolute darkness and annihilation.

4. *The thinker’s silence*

We can now go back to *Todtnauberg*. I have already suggested a connection between the two visible elements of the poem, namely the naturalistic description and the accuracy of the spatio-temporal setting on the one hand and the tune-giving feeling of hope on the other hand. Based on my observations on the *Meridian*, I argued, more precisely, that the former element lays the ground for the second. This, however, not in the sense of an affirmative presence of the subject in the poem: as a matter of fact, Celan’s “I” only appears, in *Todtnauberg*, through

²³ I concur with Di Cesare 2012b: 33, that Celan’s “radical displacement becomes the condition of a new freedom” (my translation).

²⁴ This strive is present in the *Meridian speech* itself. See Cameron 2014: 5: “In *The Meridian* the silences make themselves felt as ominous, or ‘awkward’ – like those halts in conversation which make evident what conversation is often designed to cover up: the physical presence of the other, of a fellow-mortal. In *The Meridian* Celan was particularly interested in emphasizing his own physical presence before this audience”.

the possessive “mine”, referring to his name written in the same guestbook which previously recorded the names of Heidegger’s “accomplices”. The conversation itself is only a “raw exchange”, the importance of which is elliptically stressed by the reference to the driver and only witness to the encounter, the scholar Neumann²⁵.

The “attention” of the poet for the spatio-temporal circumstances attempts to open a space, however obscure, silent, and estranged, for the encounter with the Other. The Other is in this case, I suggest, the dark side of Heidegger’s past and his continued refusal to publicly confront it, and Celan’s hope is “for a thinker’s word to come”. I want to emphasize here that “a thinker” is not just a circumlocution for Heidegger’s name: again, there is a philosophical point. As we saw, Celan accused Heidegger of having weakened both poetry and thought in their responsibility. Celan’s hope “for a thinker’s word to come” means that Heidegger’s coming word is not just expected as the clarifying, univocal warning of a controversial yet authoritative public figure. It is also the philosophical acknowledgment that certain philosophical tenets are potentially dangerous, starting with the attempt to (re)attribute to poetry an ultimate veritative power, which goes along with a weakening of the relevance of individual existence and of the dialogical essence of language. Celan arrives to this conclusion despite substantially sharing Heideggerian concerns. Hence his own attempt of a non-objectifying language, i.e. of a poetry that can tell the absence and danger. However, Celan realizes very well that his own poetry – or any poetry – is not enough to dispel the danger. There needs to be a philosophical accountability, a direct, open, dialogical engagement with the present moment. For Celan, Heidegger’s coming word becomes philosophical readiness to engage in a discourse “here and now”, clearly addressing past and present responsibilities and dangers²⁶.

Celan’s hope, as we know, was dashed: Heidegger’s word never came. A number of personal, psychological, and political reasons can be invoked as an explanation. Once again, however, I will insist on the philosophical core of the “failed” conversation, and, more in general, of the troubled Celan-Heidegger relationship. Celan “shows himself

²⁵ See Lyon 2006: 184.

²⁶ To Heidegger’s philosophical wait for the coming word and the Event, Celan opposes the desperate urgency of the “now.” See Bambach 2013: 224 and Cameron 2014: 68.

convinced that Heidegger's refusal to speak to the here and now, to speak as a human being addressing himself to the Face of the Other, constitutes a refusal of the 'coming/word' to be expected of a thinker. This refusal also cuts short a genuine interlocution between poet and thinker (one which would respect the alterity and the 'time' of the poet)" (Fóti 1992: 106)²⁷. The unreconciled opposition between Heidegger's involvement in National Socialism and Celan's at the same time desperate and hopeful search for Heidegger's public word derives from this deeper opposition. In this sense, *Todtnauberg* cannot be fully reduced to an "anti-Nazi template" (Lyon 2006: 178). Even though, of course, reference to this template is inescapable, one needs to appreciate its philosophical groundwork in order to assess the full import of the ambivalence of the relationship. Heidegger's obstinate silence is certainly, in Celan's eyes, a particularly painful and bewildering instance of the general German attitude of silence, or even "expedient amnesia" (Bambach 2013: 199) toward the Shoah and the resurgence of anti-Semitism during the 1950s-1960s. Yet, Celan does not only, and maybe not so much, blame Heidegger on purely political grounds.

Heidegger's reasons are, in turn, philosophical before political. In fact, my concluding thesis is that not only Celan's hope, but also Heidegger's silence has to be philosophically interpreted. Corresponding to Celan's hope "for a thinker's word to come" would have, from Heidegger's point of view, given legitimation to the very reasons of the historical events he was asked to condemn. In other terms, for Heidegger to correspond to Celan's desperate hope would have involved a self-contradiction, namely to condemn and distance himself from the historical events of National Socialism in the name of a subjectivism which, in Heidegger's eyes, constituted the very root of National Socialism's horrific outcome itself. The only savior could (have) come from an altogether different approach, and Hölderlin was the way leading there. But this is so exactly because, as we saw, Hölderlin is for Heidegger the anti-subjectivist poet par excellence.

Celan chooses a different, in many respects opposite model of poetry, revolving on the idea of radical individuation, and he hopes for a redeeming word by Heidegger, when in fact for Heidegger this choice and this hope are mutually exclusive. A poet of the radical individuation cannot and will not save us from the catastrophic compound which has led to the very events for which the same poet is now asking

²⁷ See also Di Cesare 2012b: 34-5.

“for a thinker’s word”. Hence, I believe it would not be unfair to say that, in thwarting Celan’s hope, Heidegger is not just – or maybe not at all – acting cowardly and avoiding responsibilities. On the contrary, Heidegger is being philosophically consistent, and one could even say that Celan, by choosing a poetics of the radical individuation, thwarted Heidegger’s hopes just as much as the contrary is the case²⁸. Hence the main point is, rather than explaining – and condemning – Heidegger’s silence on a personal-political basis, to point out some philosophical tenets which may look perfectly reasonable or even attractive in themselves, but are hard to disentangle from problematic implications²⁹. Understanding how Heidegger, in Celan’s eyes, weakened both poetry and philosophy in their responsibility is only possible by reconstructing in a philosophical way, as this article attempted to do, their different philosophical views of poetry and the subject as constituting the real motive behind the scene of their unresolved dialogue.

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²⁸ Lyon 2016: 170 (“It seems, ironically, that [Heidegger] was the one who was frustrated and disappointed” by the meeting).

²⁹ For a development of this criticism see Siani 2012.

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