

“Eyes talked in-to Blindness”: Paul Celan and György Kurtág

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I. Silence in song

Within Kurtág’s œuvre, my attention has always been drawn to his work with the human voice. Indeed, Kurtág’s striking preoccupation with words, whether poetic or literary, and the way in which words enter into and pass through his music give pause for thought.

In this paper, my focus will be on what one could call Kurtág’s ‘pre-compositional’ world, that is all those thoughts and ideas, formal concerns and semantic possibilities a composer may consider before turning a literary or poetic text into sound or music to become a vocal composition. There will thus be an interpretative emphasis on *what* Kurtág was dealing with as regards his textual basis, as well as on *how* he dealt with his chosen *solar plexus*. The text chosen by Kurtág which I shall look at in some detail is the poem *Tübingen, Jänner* by Paul Celan of 1961. This poem transmogrified into a vocal piece for baritone solo by Kurtág as part of his most recent, as yet unpublished op. 35, the *Hölderlin Gesänge*.¹ My aim here is to explore extreme notions of the lyric when confronted with what one can call an image/word-dichotomy. Theoretically speaking, we can say that the split between image and word tends to occur when the experience of extreme internal or external visions or images exceeds the word, that is when words are not enough, or when there are not enough words. Words then transcend into non-sense, noise, or silence. While one may think that, strictly considered, the maximal aesthetic effect of these versions of non-symbolism amount to

¹ For a more detailed discussion of Paul Celan’s poem *Tübingen, Jänner* and the aspect of linguistic disfigurement in his poetry in general, see my article ‘Extra-humain, infra-humain, animalier. L’exile poétique de Paul Celan en-dehors et au-delà de sa langue,’ in *Paul Celan, Le Genre Humain*, ed. by Maurice Olender and Bernard Badiou (Paris: Éditions du Seuil), forthcoming. Other contributors raising similar issues as discussed here include Yves Bonnefoy, Julia Kristeva, Maurice Olender, Carlo Ossola, and Jean Starobinski.

zero, this turns out to be an underestimation. After Romantic poetry (say, at the extreme end of this tradition, the poetry by Baudelaire, Char, Rimbaud or Mallarmé) had aimed for the profound while already risking the rhapsodically obscure, and when aiming even further towards total linguistic dissolution, lyric language most naturally passes through, on the one hand, *Gesang* or song, or indeed, on the other, nonsense, noise or silence.

Two major figures in German poetry, Friedrich Hölderlin and Paul Celan, both explored the poetics of silence. As if seeking to fill such silence with sound, as well as sense, Kurtág's *Hölderlin-Gesänge* must be considered one of the most intense and intriguing compositional responses to the poetics of silence.

Certainly, in Hölderlin's case, no other poet has attracted the attention of today's artists and intellectuals as much. As one of the last to have had the Orphic ambition of writing a hymnic poetry that would succeed equally as a philosophical proposition, Hölderlin's chosen retreat into silence through madness has been interpreted in terms of a kind of sincerity that sees real value in what lies beyond poetry, namely the very act of renunciation. What remains unsaid is here believed to be truer than words.²

If Hölderlin's poetic collapse came from within, having pushed linguistic and syntactic possibilities to breaking point,³ the 20th century was to provide the kind of facts and images capable of working language from without. Overwhelmed by a hitherto unknown measure of brutality, amazed and bedazzled by the passion for death that characterised the Holocaust, language found itself *wanting*: wanting words to speak, and yet lacking them altogether.⁴

This needs mentioning because the poetry by Paul Celan is, for biographical reasons, intimately involved with these historical events. Born in Czernovitz/Romania in 1920 of Jewish parentage, Celan's mother tongue was German. After his family's disappearance in the Holocaust, he lived in Paris for almost 25 years where, in 1970, he took his own life. His poetry, no-

² "Silence here stands for the word surpassing itself, it stands for the realization not in another medium, but in that which is its echoing antithesis and defining negation, silence." Georg Steiner (1985), p. 47.

³ Adorno (1974), pp. 447–491.

⁴ Maurice Blanchot, by saying "We have no words for the extreme; dazzling joy and great pain burn up every term and render them all mute" describes a crisis of communication that already inspired the Early Romantics to widen the linguistic horizon in order to capture a modern sensibility increasingly more aware of the irrational aspects of both lived experience and language itself. By weakening its causal chains, by exalting language to mere "acoustic configurations of thoughts" (Novalis), and by turning it into "pure movement, freed of the object", language was invited to loosen up the net of referentiality and aspire to the conditions of music. Blanchot (1995), p. 106.

toriously difficult, and sometimes considered hermetic due to its seeming and – as we shall see – at times real symbolic obscurity, can be said to carry silence within itself. As Celan himself asserted, when commenting on the condition of contemporary poetry in his seminal text *Der Meridian*:

Das Gedicht zeigt ... eine starke Neigung zum Verstummen. Das Gedicht behauptet sich am Rande seiner selbst.⁵

[The poem shows a strong tendency towards silence. ... The poem holds its own at the edge of itself.]

My interest was to follow up this relatively recent, highly self-conscious flirtation with silence, in order to understand its achievements better, that is, to see how this kind of poetry could have any cathartic potential at all. One also wonders how musical sound could possibly embrace it. In this regard Kurtág no doubt amazes us in his persistent preference for literary and poetic texts whose nerve-structure is organised around as well as empowered by a forward drive and intent to enter silence.⁶

II. Celan’s poem

Celan’s famous poem *Tübingen, Jänner* is another of Kurtág’s indicative choices to find a resonant way into silence. Written in 1961 as a complex tribute to Hölderlin, this poetic and poetological reflection on the great predecessor already captures in the opening two lines – “Zu Blindheit über-/redete Augen” (Eyes talked in-to Blindness) – what is essentially the invisibility of a crisis affecting the poet’s identity.

	Tübingen, Jänner	Tübingen, January
1	Zur Blindheit über-	Eyes talked in-
2	redete Augen.	to blindness.
3	Ihre — “ein	Their — “a
4	Rätsel ist Rein-	riddle is pure-
5	entsprungenes” — ihre	ly arisen” —, their
6	Erinnerung an	memory of
7	schwimmende Hölderlintürme, Möven-	floating Hölderlintowers, gull-

⁵ *Der Meridian* (1983), p. 197.

⁶ Kurtág’s vocal piece *What is the word*, based on Samuel Beckett’s poem *Comment dire* is perhaps the most paradigmatically silent of his works. See two admirable investigations by Judit Frigyesi and Martin Zenck in the present volume.

	Tübingen, Jänner	Tübingen, January
8	umschwirrt.	enswirled.
9	Besuche ertrunkener Schreiner bei	Visits of drowned carpenters to
10	diesen	these
11	tauchenden Worten:	plunging words:
12	Käme,	Came, if there
13	käme ein Mensch,	came a man,
14	käme ein Mensch zur Welt, heute, mit	came a man to the world, today, with
15	dem Lichtbart der	the light-beard of the
16	Patriarchen: er dürfte,	patriarchs: he could,
17	sprach er von dieser	if he spoke of this
18	Zeit, er	time, he
19	dürfte	could
20	nur lallen und lallen,	only babble and babble,
21	immer-, immer-	ever-, ever-
22	zuzu.	moremore.
23	("Pallaksch. Pallaksch.")	("Pallaksch. Pallaksch.")

The split between the linguistic and the visual realm comes through in the hyphenated “über-redete” (talked in-to), at once linking as well as separating “Blindheit” (blindness) and “Augen” (eyes): on the one hand it suggests that an excess of the word defeats the visual sense; on the other it presumes the perception of blinding images, impossible to name. Then follows in lines 3–5 a quotation from Hölderlin’s major poetic hymn, *Der Rhein*. In the original, “ein Rätsel ist Reinentprungenes” (a riddle is purely arisen) is followed by “Auch/der Gesang kaum darf es enthüllen” (Also/Gesang may hardly reveal it). From here onwards the poem recedes into the past, with the keyword “Erinnerung” (memory) in line 6 introducing a floating of sense that the “schwimmende Hölderlintürme, Möven-/umschwirrt” (floating Hölderlintowers, gull/-enswirled) confirms. The “tauchende Worte” (plunging words) in line 11 then introduces the poem’s central concern, leading into the last stanza (lines 12–22), made up of various forms of verbal repetition and rhythmic hesitation, of pauses and syllabic clusters. And it is this discord that finds its strongest expression in the poem’s final and highly enigmatic

("Pallaksch. Pallaksch."), a sonorous expression parenthetically kept apart from the poem, yet dominating it.

No doubt, "Erinnerung" (memory) is for Celan no neutral word. And indeed, it seems to be the experience of memory as well as its projective inversion, hypothesis or speculation (note "käme", "dürfte", and "spräch"), which provokes throughout the poem's last stanza a radical expression of faltering speech and signification. If the "lallen und lallen" (babble and babble) of line 20 as a form of inarticulate speech is decidedly onomatopoeic and as such semantically explicit, the triple repetition of "käme" in lines 12, 13 and 14 is acoustically the first sign of a stutter that lines 21 and 22 impressively evoke ("immer-, immer /zuzu").

The closing "Pallaksch. Pallaksch." is a linguistic fabrication. It seems like an intensification as well as an abstraction of the earlier, already highly strenuous attempts of communication, the babbling and the stuttering. Given that Celan's quotation from Hölderlin's hymn tacitly alludes to song, or more precisely "Gesang", and considering also that *Gesang* is a central, arguably even *the* most central characteristic of Hölderlin's poetry, the following statement by Celan made in 1958 is of particular interest.

Die deutsche Lyrik ... Dürsterstes im Gedächtnis ... kann .. bei aller Vergegenwärtigung der Tradition, in der sie steht, nicht mehr die Sprache sprechen, die manches geneigte Ohr immer noch von ihr zu erwarten scheint. Ihre Sprache ist nüchterner, faktischer geworden, die mißtraut dem "Schönen", sie versucht, wahr zu sein. Es ist also, wenn ich, das Polychrome des scheinbar Aktuellen im Auge behaltend, im Bereich des Visuellen nach einem Wort suchen darf, eine "grauere" Sprache, eine Sprache, die unter anderem auch ihre "Musikalität" an einem Ort angesiedelt wissen will, wo sie nichts mehr mit jenem "Wohlklang" gemein hat, der noch mit und neben dem Furchtbarsten mehr oder minder unbekümmert einhertönte.⁷

[German lyric poetry, ... while still remembering darkest matters ... can no longer, despite its awareness of the tradition to which it belongs, speak the language which many a sympathetic ear still seems to expect from it. Its language has become more sober, more factual; it is suspicious of the 'Beautiful'; it attempts to be true. To look for a word in the visual realm, while keeping an eye on the polychrome of what seems to be in fashion today, it is so to speak a 'grayer' language. It is a language which – among other things – wishes to place its 'musicality' where it will no longer share that 'melodiousness' which still resounds more or less unconcernedly in accordance as well as side by side with the greatest horrors.]

⁷ P. Celan (1983), p. 167.

Working from within the German language after it had been steeped so deeply in the linguistics of the inhuman, from within a language paralysed as it were by all it remembered, Celan's attempt was to unlock within this language a linguistic potential that could nevertheless open up again to speak the 'truth' of his world. In this attempt, the act of forgetting played no minor part.⁸

More than a decade before Freud's first publications on the subject, Friedrich Nietzsche, in his late psycho-philosophical text *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, spoke about the functions and dysfunctions of memory and the uses of forgetting:

Vergesslichkeit ist keine bloße vis inertiae, wie die Oberflächlichen glauben, sie ist vielmehr ein aktives, im strengsten Sinne positives Hemmungsvermögen ... Die Thüren und Fenster des Bewusstseins zeitweilig schliessen ... ein wenig Stille, ein wenig tabula rasa des Bewusstseins, damit wieder Platz wird für Neues [...] – das ist der Nutzen der, wie gesagt, aktiven Vergesslichkeit.⁹

[Forgetfulness is no mere vis inertiae as is assumed by the superficially-minded; it is much rather an active, in the strictest sense a positive capacity of inhibition ... Let us occasionally close the doors and windows of [our] consciousness ... [let us have] a little silence, a bit of tabula rasa of the conscious so that there be space again for something new ... – this is ... the use of active forgetfulness.]

Poetically, Celan sought out a *tabula rasa*. In the correspondence with his wife Giselle Celan-Lestrange, we find a comment by Celan about Paul Klee's painting *Der Schöpfer* (The Creator)¹⁰ that may well be regarded self-referential as to the poet's own difficulties and creative efforts.

J'ai surtout regardé ... et admiré, du fond de mes découragements, cet immense courage : "Le Créateur" par exemple, sur fond violet, labyrinthes de lignes cherchant à se perpétuer à l'intérieur d'un contour extra-humain, infra-humain, animalier.¹¹

[Above all I looked at ... and admired, from the depths of my discouragement, this immense [image of] courage: "The Creator" ... against a violet background, labyrinths of lines trying to carry on inside an extra-human, infra-human, animal-like contour.]

Celan's own poetic labyrinths seem like these lines trying to carry on within the monstrous linguistic framework that the German language had become for him. And as if etched across the monochrome of this language, it is with these lines that Celan finally breaks away: he cleaves through linguis-

⁸ See also the poem *Das Vergessen schenkt dir Gedächtnis* (Forgetting grants you memory) in Celan (1997), p. 272.

⁹ Nietzsche (1967), pp. 291–292.

¹⁰ Paul Klee's *Der Schöpfer* of 1934 is housed in the Paul-Klee-Stiftung, Kunstzentrum Basel. A reasonable reproduction of this painting can be found in *Paul Klee* (1987), p. 275.

¹¹ P. Celan – G. Celan-Lestrange (2001) I, p. 153.

tic space, and by cleaving his way through, he emerges into space and finally takes possession of space.

How could this be done? And what were the risks? Celan's notebooks and papers of the Fifties – as yet unpublished and housed in the Deutsches Literatur Archiv in Marbach – contain endless alphabetically organised lists of verbal inventions, derived from words that he fabulously and severely deformed.¹² He created a new vocabulary, as unknown as that of a foreign language, and with it new linguistic territory, his 'Celania'.¹³ Here, only tone and resonance – and this is important – remain resolutely German. His screening of highly specialised dictionaries and his consistent preoccupation with etymology, taking words back into an un-heard-of past, as well as his permanent taste for verbal invention reaching into a novel linguistic future, all this informs Celan's language with a real sense of uncanny strangeness: it sounds familiar; yet it is incomprehensible.

In this way Celan's poetry, more than any since Hölderlin, recalls to the German ear the wide magnificence of its legacy. And in the effort to escape the shadow which Celan felt this legacy now cast, the German language emerges from Celan as if rising from the ashes – or so one might think. Yet, such radical manipulation of language contains risks. For as Celan presses to alter words polluted by a recent past, determined to raze historical events written within, in order to either create new words or discover words so old and distant as to seem new again, brand-new, as if no human touch had yet tarnished their shine, no human voice yet distorted their resonance, Celan risks aiming for a pure language, a language cleansed off its unclean past, purified at last. As Celan calls back to life words long lost and forgotten or words as yet unheard, the attempt is to make them confess a truth, which coincides, nevertheless, with a corresponding degree of a never-to-be-known. And it is in this restless movement into the distance, either backwards into a past or forwards into a future that Celan's 'Celania' obtains its full sense: as an act of linguistic estrangement in a constant attempt to take root in lost origin, to live a time before all time. Such striving locks the mind to an absolute past or an absolute future,

¹² As one of many manuscripts of this kind, see one of Celan's notebooks in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach: D 90.1. 3258 (Lektürenotizen, Wendungen, Vokabeln).

¹³ For a particularly brilliant exploration of the notion of 'Celania,' see J. Kristeva's article in *Paul Celan, Le Genre Humain* cited above where, by way of opposing Heidegger and Celan, Kristeva affirms that the philosopher chose to "be at home" in his language while the poet as "radical foreigner" attempted to "hold his own" ("tenir") in the sense of poetry being "a held tension within the fragmentation of all languages, of all beings and of extreme solitude". For the term 'Celania,' see P. Celan – G. Celan-Lestrangé (2001) I, p. 214 (letter no. 207). See also the commentary by Bertrand Badiou concerning the word 'Celania,' first used by Gisèle Lestrangé, in terms of Celan's German as the poet's "nomadic language," 'Notice éditoriale,' in P. Celan – G. Celan-Lestrangé (2001), I, 10–11.

both sites of irreality whose powerful attraction is, however, to keep the present in eternal abeyance. Celan the poet was seriously aloof.

To emphasise what is essential, there is one element that remains stable in Celan's language. If the French language is graced with a natural shimmer, a radiance around almost each and every single word which famously lends it its poetic, sensual atmosphere; if the magic swing and melodic punctuation of the Italian language easily elevates it to pure rhythm and rhyme, few equivalents of such exquisite sonorous pleasures can be found in the German language: its splendour primarily lies not with resonance, but with reason. Significantly then, Celan chose to preserve its factual, grayer *resonance* and discarded its *reason*.

At first sight and without further information from the secondary literature, it is the *resonance* of "Pallaksch" combined with a complete absence of sense that gives this word its enigmatic fabric and makes for its uncanny sonorous strangeness. Not lexicalised in any language, "Pallaksch" seems like a lingo-creature without semantic identity, a wraith of a word, and a linguistic cripple.

Kafka, whom Celan admired very much, describes in one of his short stories, *Die Sorge des Hausvaters*, the shape and action of a similarly unknown word or 'entity'. It is Kafka's subtle shift of tone, gliding from harmlessness into morbidity, that eventually captures the eeriness of that which is not even as much as determinable: a strange word at first, a thing next, then something like an animal that speaks like a child and suddenly disappears as quickly as it descended down from a meta-world of sub-humanity:

Die einen sagen, das Wort Odradek stamme aus dem Slawischen und sie suchen auf Grund dessen die Bildung des Wortes nachzuweisen. Andere wieder meinen, es stamme aus dem Deutschen, vom Slawischen sei es nur beeinflusst. Die Unsicherheit beider Deutungen aber läßt wohl mit Recht darauf schließen, daß keine zutrifft, zumal man auch mit keiner von ihnen einen Sinn des Wortes finden kann.

Natürlich würde sich niemand mit solchen Studien beschäftigen, wenn es nicht wirklich ein Wesen gäbe, das Odradek heißt. [...] das Ganze erscheint zwar sinnlos, aber in seiner Art abgeschlossen. Näheres läßt sich übrigens nicht darüber sagen, da Odradek außerordentlich beweglich und nicht zu fangen ist.

Er hält sich abwechselnd auf dem Dachboden, im Treppenhaus, auf den Gängen, im Flur auf. Manchmal ist er monatelang nicht zu sehen; [...] Manchmal, wenn man aus der Tür tritt und er lehnt gerade unten am Treppengeländer, hat man Lust, ihn anzusprechen. Natürlich stellt man an ihn keine schwierigen Fragen, sondern behandelt ihn – schon seine Winzigkeit verführt dazu – wie ein Kind. »Wie heißt du denn?« fragt man ihn. »Odradek«, sagt er. »Und wo wohnst du?« »Unbestimmter Wohnsitz«, sagt er und lacht; es ist aber nur ein Lachen, wie man es ohne Lungen hervorbringen kann. [...] ¹⁴

[There are some who say the word Odradek is of Slavonic origin, and they try to account for its formation on that basis. Others again believe that it derives from the German and is merely influenced by Slavonic. The uncertainty of both interpretations, however, probably justifies the conclusion that neither is correct, especially since neither permits one to attach a meaning to it.

No one, of course, would occupy himself with such studies if a creature called Odradek did not in fact exist. ... the whole thing certainly appears senseless, and yet in its own way complete. It is not possible to state anything more definite on the matter since Odradek is exceptionally mobile and refuses to be caught.

He resides by turns in the attic, on the stairs, in the corridors, in the entrance hall. Sometimes he is not to be seen for months; ... Sometimes when one comes out of one's room and he happens to be propping himself up against the banister down below, one feels inclined to speak to him. Naturally one doesn't ask him any difficult questions, one treats him – his diminutive size is itself sufficient encouragement to do so – like a child. ‘What's your name?’ one asks him. ‘Odradek,’ he says. ‘And where do you live?’ ‘No fixed abode,’ he says, and laughs; but it is only the sort of laughter that can be produced without lungs. ...]

In his famous essay on Kafka, Walter Benjamin has called Odradek “eine Figur des Vergessens” (a figure of what has been forgotten), in other words a form which contains, in its very formlessness or strangeness, the forgotten past.¹⁵ The past is remembered as a malformation, like some of Kafka's other great figures of forgetting, Gregor Samsa for example, turned infra-human in *Die Verwandlung*, the crossbred cat and lamb in *Die Kreuzung*, or indeed Benjamin's own extra-human figure of forgetting *Das bucklicht' Männlein* (The little hunchback) developed from a German children's song of the same name.¹⁶

Within this scenario, and as if emerging out of Celan's linguistic *tabula rasa*, “Pallaksch” appears in a somewhat sharper light as something like a Benjaminian figure of what has been forgotten. Speaking about memory and forgetting in *Der Meridian*, Celan stated:

Vielleicht – ich frage nur –, vielleicht geht die Dichtung [...] mit einem selbsvergesenen Ich zu jenem Unheimlichen und Fremden, und setzt sich [...] wieder frei?¹⁷

[Perhaps – I am only asking –, perhaps poetry turns, with a self-forgotten ‘I,’ towards ... this uncanny strangeness and foreignness, and [thereby] sets itself ... free again?]

¹⁵ See W. Benjamin (1978).

¹⁶ See W. Benjamin, ‘Das bucklichte Männlein,’ in *Berliner Kindheit. GW IV/1*, pp. 303–304, also in comparison with Benjamin's famous text ‘Engel der Geschichte’ (Angel of history) in connection with Paul Klee's drawing *Angelus Novus*, where Benjamin's characterisation is strikingly similar to the ‘bucklicht' Männlein,’ *GW I/2*, 697. See also P. Szondi (1978), pp. 275–294.

¹⁷ P. Celan (1983), p. 193.

If a figure such as Kafka's Odradek seems like an incarnation of the *Unheimliche*, of uncanny strangeness, Celan's "Pallaksch", presented with such singular formal concern at the poem's end as if of cadential significance, marks the decisive moment when poetry, having escaped a conscious 'I,' transforms language and turns strange or foreign. Throughout the poem's second part, Celan has been announcing this moment of change, with "babbling" and stuttering signifying a gradual erosion even before the eventual and conclusive relinquishing – through "Pallaksch" – of the poet's articulate enactment of identity. This is what is at issue here. And the question to be asked is, could the non-identity thus achieved then be considered an effective means in the search of poetic freedom?

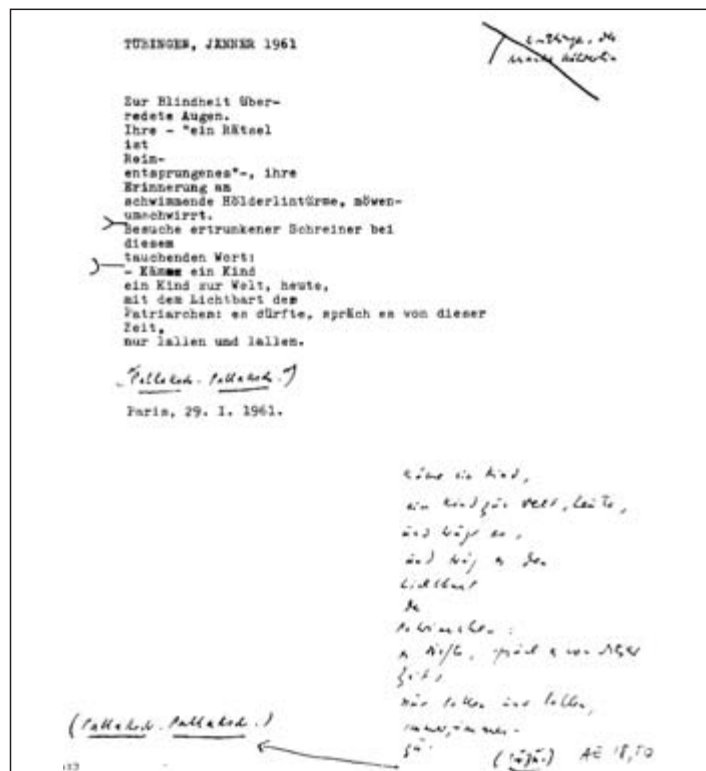
Hölderlin, as I mentioned earlier, is held to have achieved 'poetic freedom', arguably in its most absolute form, by surpassing the poetic world through silence. In this respect, it is therefore arresting to consider finally also the textual origin of "Pallaksch." For "Pallaksch" evokes Hölderlin directly in so far as Hölderlin, according to one of his first biographers, Waiblinger, was said to have uttered "Pallaksch" as a kind of multivalent response during his years of madness. As can be seen from the typed manuscript of Celan's poem *Tübingen, Jänner*, Celan added in handwriting "Waiblinger, der kranke Hölderlin" in the upper right hand corner¹⁸ (*Example 1*).

According to Waiblinger, "Pallaksch" meant at times "Yes", at times "No" – as undefined and undefinable as the identity of the person uttering a word such as "Pallaksch". Linguistically it seems like a move to escape clear definitions and to find, through the invention of such undefinable meta-language, a new sense of identity.

III. Kurtág's song

With "Pallaksch", I wanted to know what would become of such radical denial of both lyricism and logic when confronted with musical sound or thought. If Celan's language were at this very moment in the poem really and truly wrecked, with sense suspended in the absence of both image and verbal meaning, then a composer would be faced with a challenge. Would 'Gesang' still be possible under these circumstances and, if yes, what would become of such non-symbolism? (See *Example 2*.)

¹⁸ Reproduction of the first known manuscript of *Tübingen, Jänner* (D AE 18, 49) with the kind permission of the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach and Eric Celan.



Example 1: Paul Celan, *Tübingen, Jänner*, manuscript
(Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach)

The "Pallaksch" in Kurtág's *Tübingen, Jänner* follows one of the most lyrical passages in Kurtág's vocal oeuvre. It is set off from the song's second *arioso* part, cutting through the fluency of an expansive vocal stream that reaches its greatest lyrical intensity with "lallen und lallen". Based on the falling minor second (A natural–G sharp, then B natural–A sharp), each "lallen" has been celebrated by a couple of grace notes that seem stylistically rather anachronistic, or perhaps just clumsily ironic, so as to add to the indicated *dolce* a somewhat more dolorous shade. A sense of nostalgia is introduced by the second "lallen" a step higher, in sequence to the first, allowing it to rhyme musically. What makes Kurtág's "lallen und lallen" a particularly poignant moment is its stylistic singularity: it is the only moment in the song that one remembers with the ease and satisfaction of listening to an idiomatically lyrical passage. It appears unexpectedly in an apparently randomly pitched, occasionally erratic environment, itself much more extensive in

Paul Celan: Tübingen, Jänner

Robert Klein in Erinnerung

Sehr bewegt, unruhig Kurtág ppmp

mp

Zur Blind-heit ü-ber-re-de-te Au-gen.

[poco stento]
PPP, dolcissimo

Ih-re - „ein Rät-sel ist Keim-ent-sprun-ge-mes“

zögernd - allmählich im tempo zurückkehrend
p

Ih-re Er-in-ne-rung an schwim-men-de

[quantissimo]
flüchtig
ppp

Höl-der-lin-tür-me Mö-wen-um-schwin-nt. Be-

sub stento [geduldet]
p-mp

su-che er-tum-be-mee Schrei-mer bei die-ren

tau-chen-den Wör-tern:

Example 2: Kurtág, Tübingen, Jänner, manuscript
György Kurtág Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel

-2-

Andante
Molto largamente
pp, p, esp.

Kä-me, kä-me ein Mensch, kä-me ein

[poco più andante]
poco

2 poco
pp
mp
languente, pesante

Mensch zur Welt heu-te, mit dem Licht-bart der

zögernd
intemp[er]er[er]
molto

Pa-tri-ar-chen: er düf-te spräch er von

ruhig anfangen
p, dolce, c[re]s.

die-ser Zeit, er düf-te nur lal-len und

allmählich erregter werden
temp[er]o c[re]s
allmählich

lal-len, im-mer, im-mer zu-zu, zu-zu.

im unersetzten Blut auf Verzweiflung:
quasi p[er]c[us]s
ff

molto
geräuschvoll, gleichsam ersticken und einatmen

Pal-laksh, Pal-laksh, Pal-laksh,

Example 2 (cont.)

time and space, so that the bold lyricism of “lallen und lallen” stands in contrast with everything prior or after, and with “Pallaksch” in particular.

The distortion of the word “Pallaksch” is achieved with considerable efficiency by positing the first of its two syllables on the extreme upper end of the vocal register, and the second on its lower end. The gap created within the word is due to this as well as the fact that here, for the first time, Kurtág no longer links the syllables by a slur, as he has done consistently throughout the song. Instead, inverted accents indicate the markedly dissociated pronunciation of “Pallaksch”.

Kurtág himself insists that sense must not be forced upon a sound. And indeed, regarding “Pallaksch” simply as a curiously malformed, subliminally violent utterance without further interpretation, the advantage of leaving the “Pallaksch” undefined may well be to allow it to work more directly on the nervous system. On the printed page, the violence explicit or implicit in “Pallaksch.” is contained by the sobriety of the quotation marks; and it is framed, on either side, almost stylishly so, by parentheses. Such fairly detailed formal rigour, setting “Pallaksch.” apart from the rest of the poem, indeed enhances the word’s inherent energy. Once set free, however, as in Kurtág’s *Gesang*, “Pallaksch” becomes explosive.

Just as slurred speech can mean both the sound of yet unformed speech as well as the utterance of delirious decline, the stutter carries a similar semantic ambiguity of becoming and unbecoming within itself. Onomatopoeia, however, as with “Pallaksch”, and despite its regressive overtones, catches the human language in *statu nascendi*, not in a state of decline. It is a sound not yet become word, reverberating around a force field of potentiality. In this sense “Pallaksch” is a password of hope.

It is remarkable, I think, how Kurtág makes “Pallaksch” not only speak but live, with a voice that succeeds in impersonating something, or creating something that, in Celan’s poem, had not yet had as much substance. In Kurtág’s *Gesang*, “Pallaksch” truly becomes alive, and noisily so: “in äußerster Wut und Verzweiflung” (in utmost anger and desperation), *cre-scendo, molto, ff*, “geräuschvoll, gleichsam erstickend einatmen, beinahe brüllend” (noisily, breathing as if to suffocate, almost shoutingly) – these are some of the indications marked in the score that return to “Pallaksch” an aesthetic of emotional plenitude that Celan had aimed to erase. This is precisely, then, where Celan’s poem differs, and crucially so, from Kurtág’s compositional reading. For in contrast to such emotional intensity as is

shown in Kurtág's song, the "Pallaksch" in Celan's poem could be said to be echoic of the future for Paul Celan announces here – and in memory of Hölderlin's social suicide through madness – years before his suicide, that that which lies outside language lies outside life.

In closing, I am tempted to say that Kurtág's song may have more cathartic potential than Celan's poem. At this level of raw vocal energy, as is exposed at the end of Kurtág's song, perhaps Kurtág's *Gesang* is really just this, the sonorous, indeed resounding drama of a naked desire to speak. But it is about the heightened desire of someone condemned to stutter, whose every word is traded at a very high price, spitting out syllables one by one, brutally voiced under the pressure of an agonising, strangely syncopated respiration, between moments of suffocating silence. It is in these moments of silence, forced upon a voice bent to speak to the point of "utmost anger and desperation", that Kurtág's music obtains its tremendous tension. In the end, it is the immediacy of Kurtág's "Pallaksch. Pallaksch." that bespeaks a desire to be perceived solely in its very utterance, painful and courageous, distorted and meaningless, until its sudden and fleeting disappearance ("plötzlich flüchtig"). And it is this utter *desire* to speak, stripped naked to its physical core, that may indeed be more important, more significant, than the *knowledge* of what has actually been said.

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