## No Less Poetry Than Thought—On Werner Hamacher's Philology

In "WASEN: Um Celans Todtnauberg," Werner Hamacher proposes to read Paul Celan's poem as a "nicht weniger gedichtete als denkende Antwort," a no less rhymed than reasoned response, to Martin Heidegger's poetology.[1] His close reading of Celan, together with his affirmation that poetry can think, is a powerful testament to Hamacher's sense of the futility of holding on to the notion of a clear border between literature and philosophy. Indeed, in showing how poetry [*Dichtung*] thinks, in proposing *Dichtung* as the condition for understanding itself, Hamacher's philology can be viewed as a response to—whom else?—Plato.

For Plato, there can be no philosophical understanding, or knowledge, without goodness. But what is goodness? Despite his brother Glaucon's insistences, in Book VI of the *Republic* Socrates declares himself incapable of defining the Good. In lieu of a definition, he offers an analogy. The Good is, perhaps, like the sun. Just like the sun enables sight, so the Good "enables the objects of knowledge to be known by the mind."[2] And like the sun, the Good does not only facilitate perception but also allows things to come into being. The "sun gives to visible objects not only the power of being seen, but also their generation and growth and nourishment, not being itself generation."[3] Similarly, "you may say of the objects of knowledge that not only their being known comes from the good, but their existence and being also come from it, though the good is not itself being [*epekeina tes ousias*] but transcends even being in dignity and power."[4] Although A.D. Lindsay, the translator here, deviates from this, *epekeina tes ousias* is traditionally translated as "beyond being."[5] According to Stanley Rosen, this "beyond being" can be read in two ways: either as suggesting that the Good does not exist at all, or that it exists *beyond* being.[6] A third, more

interesting, option is to view the Good as "a member of the domain of genesis, the members of which wander between being and nonbeing."[7] The Good is, in fact, "liminal": it allows being whilst not being *part of* being itself. In the end, Plato's analogy of the sun is "too cryptic to be amenable to an entirely satisfactory explanation," and Rosen settles on taking Socrates' "*beyond*", "in the metaphorical sense that it is neither this nor that of a separate and definable kind but is rather a property or set of properties of Platonic Ideas, namely, intelligibility, stability, and eternity."[8]

A little further on in the *Republic*, these Platonic Ideas, or Forms, again become the object of analogy. With the analogy of the cave Plato argues that each particular, material object is, though seeming tangible and "real" to us, in fact a mere shadowy imitation of a single immaterial Form, the *true* Form. Considering Rosen's remark on the liminal nature of "beyond being," it is interesting that, as Julia Annas notes, both the analogy of the cave and the analogy of the sun "use light as a metaphor for truth," whilst themselves "resist[ing] visual representation."[9] It is important to note, too, that whilst the image of the sun—fixed, removed, powerful—conveys the solidity Plato bestowed on his immaterial Forms, the varied, inconsistent, and contradictory nature of the shadows is no less due to the irregular surface of the cave wall then to the dangerous flickering of fire itself. Indeed, the shadows that the fire generates and throws onto the cave's wall are, for Plato, only parasitic to the sun's generative, but un-generated, Form. Whilst fire is changeable, it seems that the sun, like "the beautiful itself," as Plato suggests in *Phaedo,* does not "admit any change whatsoever."[10] The generating power of light, that which, emanating from sun and fire, allows for shadows and sight,  is therefore duplicitous: it can both enlighten and mislead.

When Plato returns to the question of Form in Book X, in the context of the proposed banishment of all imitative poetry from the republic, he again does this through analogy. As in the case of the cave, the analogy of the bed differentiates between true Forms and

shadowy, inconsistent apparitions. Going further, Plato here differentiates not merely between Form and material objects, but between Forms, material objects and imitative art. Being an imitation of an imitation, a painting of a bed is, so Plato argues, thrice removed from the Form of the bed; it is thus even more shadowy and potentially more misleading than material objects themselves. The danger of the powers of an art that is, for Plato, in equal measure compelling and misleading becomes clear once the bed analogy is returned to its proper place in Plato's critique of imitative poetry. Imitative poetry, such as that of Homer, is dangerous because, whilst its subject matter is ethical, "all poets…are imitators of images of virtue and all of the other subjects on which they write and do not lay of truth."[11]

How to square Plato's expulsion of imitative poetry in the context of his suggestion in Book III that it can, at times, be beneficial? In the discussion of the role of literature in the guardians' education across Books II and III, Plato overlooks his concern about the inherently problematic mimetic character of imitative poetry, as expressed in Book X, in order to concede that, if practised by a "man of measured character" (who by nature of his character would be able to discern good speech and action and only imitate that), imitative poetry can be useful for the guardians' education.[12] And how to reconcile the banishment of imitative poetry with Plato's own use of analogy? Indeed, are not analogies fundamentally imitative? Are they not trading in shadowy forms, albeit for the "greater good" of gaining philosophical knowledge and understanding?

More than anything, the *Republic*'s sun analogy is perhaps about the power of analogy itself: just like the sun allows things to be generated without itself being part of that generation, just like the Good allows knowledge and understanding to grow whilst still remaining beyond being, so the analogy of the sun facilitates philosophical understanding whilst itself remaining outside of the argumentative economy. Like the light of fire and sun, analogies can not only enlighten, but also obfuscate. For Rosen, Plato's sun analogy is "too

cryptic" to facilitate an unequivocal reading. Similarly, Annas finds the sun and cave analogies "philosophically frustrating", warning readers to be mindful of "Plato's own warning on the limits of the kind of thinking that is guided by images and illustrations."[13] This "poetic" thinking that analogy does, even if Plato's own, is not to be trusted. *Poieo* means "to make, produce, first of something material, as manufacturers, works of art …," "do," but also "to bring about" or "cause." What is it in the language of Plato's analogy that brings about philosophical understanding or, indeed, frustration? What makes or produces this signifying force that can be used both to illuminate and confuse? What can produce meaning whilst itself escaping any conclusive interpretative or hermeneutic attempt? Whatever it is, this generating poetic force, which is not itself generation, is the object of what Werner Hamacher calls "philology."

Despite often finding himself at the nodal point of contemporary literary theory, Hamacher has long been an underrated figure. He studied first with Peter Szondi at the Freie Unversität zu Berlin, and then with Paul de Man in Paris, where he wrote his PhD on Hegel. Called to the chair of German literature at Johns Hopkins University in 1984, he returned to Germany as the chair of the newly founded Institute for General and Comparative Literature at the Goethe Universität Frankfurt in 1998. As a translator, for example of Lacan and de Man into German, and co-founder and long-time editor of the deeply influential Stanford University Press' series *Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics*, he facilitated the transition of texts and thoughts from one linguistic, geographic or disciplinary space into another. In doing so, he silently set the tone for his discipline. That the question of what precisely his discipline was remains a topic for debate reflects the productive liminality of Hamacher's way of thinking. His obituaries call him a "poststructuralist"[14], "German deconstructionist," "Komparatist"[15] and a "Literaturtheoretiker and Philologe."[16] Of these titles, there is, I believe, only one that Hamacher would have wholeheartedly embraced (or, at least, as

wholeheartedly as he was ever going to be able to—he, who increasingly tended to suspend his thinking, not in self-doubt, but in the suggestion that all thought, his first and foremost, was only ever a rough draft or sketch,): that of *Philologe.* Hamacher's work engages with, to name just a few thinkers and authors, Hegel, Kant, Nietzsche, De Man, Schlegel, Kleist, Benjamin, Kafka, and Celan. In these encounters (because his texts are at heart reading events), Hamacher was, perhaps more than any other theorist, comparatist, or "philologist" of his generation, concerned with what accounts for the "performativity" of language. I shall term this its *poietic* force. We might call Hamacher a thinker and explorer of the fundamental conditions of language, but only if we understand these fundamentals to be themselves without foundation or, in Hart Nibbrig's phrase, "*bodenlos.*"[17]

It is, thus, not surprising that we should find in Hamacher's philological manifesto the formula with which Plato describes the power of the sun to generate without being generated—a formula that, as suggested above, also describes the conditions for the ability of analogy to produce and withdraw philosophical knowledge. Thesis 7 of his "Ninety-Five Theses for Philology" reads:

> The object of philology is – in extension and in intensity (reality), as well as in the intention directed toward it – infinite. It lies, as Plato might say, *epékeinas tes ousías.* It is therefore not an object of a representation or of a concept, but an idea. [18]

The object of Hamacher's philology remains "beyond being." Applying Rosen's three possible readings to Thesis 7, we would have to choose between deciding that the object of his philology does not exist, that it exists "in some higher realm," or that, it facilitates

passages from the former to the latter, remaining between non-being and being ("beyond being").

I will argue that the textual graft of the Platonic *epekeina tes ousias* in Thesis 7 of "Ninety-Five Theses for Philology" does two things. First, it suggests that Hamacher's "philology" is concerned with *poietic* force, (with, for example, what in Plato's use of analogy in the *Republic* generates meanings without itself being generated). Second, that when thinking about philology with Hamacher, we must take *epekeina tes ousias* literally as the place where such *poietic* power must be located. It means that, on the traces of Hamacher's philology, we must turn our attention to moments of silence or interruption. It is precisely this that I do in this article.

I begin by attending to a conversation of sorts between Hamacher and Jacques Derrida across a number of texts: *Specters of Marx,* Hamacher's response "Lingua Amissa," the closely "Afformative, Strike" and Derrida's gesture towards Hamacher in "Marx & Sons." As I show, this exchange is traversed by moments of silence in which Hamacher moves subtly, but decisively, away from Derrida. In this section, I thus begin to counter the view of Hamacher's philology as mostly derivative of Derrida's way of looking at texts. Through close engagements with "Ninety-Five Theses" and *Premises* in particular, the second section considers Hamacher's critical creative problematisation of moments of silence or interruption as what (though remaining itself "beyond being") lends language its *poietic* force.  In the final section, I turn to Hamacher's engagement with Benjamin, in for example "Intensive Langauges" and his reading of Celan's "Meridian," in order to suggest that for Hamacher the silent condition of language itself is *Dichtung*, or poetry. By way of conclusion, I return to Hamacher's reading of Plato to suggest that philosophy's understanding depends on the movements of *poietic* language to which philology is attuned.

<u>"what Hamacher here says about and does with what ... I called the 'perverformative'"</u>

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida falls back on the same phrase Plato uses to characterise the generating but ungenerated power of the Good to describe the phenomenal oscillation of the ghost of Hamlet's father in Shakespeare's play: "visibility" itself, like audibility itself, is "by its essence" not seen, "which is why it remains *epekeina tes ousias*, beyond the phenomenon or beyond being."[19] Derrida is here not merely speaking of the spectral character of the father's apparition in the play, he is also, not unlike Plato, raising the question of what power *poiesis* (Shakespeare's in this case) can have for philosophical argument. Like the ghost does in *Hamlet*, the syncopating appearance/disappearance of *Hamlet* in *Specters* disrupts linearity. Like Plato's use of analogy, it complicates the possibility of a straightforward philosophical reading. Derrida's reading of *Hamlet* with Marx is, in fact, an example of what he calls performative interpretation. In other words, it is a reading which brings about not merely philosophical knowledge but also, potentially, political change.

Hamacher's response to *Specters* deals at a very fundamental level with the conditions of such performative interpretation. "Lingua Amissa: The Messianism of Commodity-Language and Derrida's *Specters of Marx*," opens with the question of what language Marx may be using to speak about commodity language. "One must presume," he writes, that Marx "speaks … two languages: the language in which the cloth expresses itself, weaves itself and joins with comparable fabrics, and another language which speaks *about* and *beyond* that cloth-language, loosens its weave, analyzes its relation to other, loosened weavings, entangling it in another categorical wrap."[20] In order not to remain under the spell

of the very economy it seeks to criticise, Marx's language must "fulfil at least one condition which cannot be filled by the language of cloth".[21] The language with which Marx speaks of cloth-language must then in some sense be "beyond" it. It is in this "beyond" that Hamacher's answer to Plato lies.

"Lingua Amissa" is the only text in *Ghostly Demarcations*, a collection of essays on *Specters*, which Derrida singles out for praise:

> Because I find myself in close agreement with Hamacher, and am prepared to follow him down all the paths he thus opens up, I can do no more here than pay him simple, grateful homage. (Thus there is, despite appearances, nothing paradoxical about the fact that I say very little about his essay here, contenting myself with inviting the reader to read and reread it while weighing its every word.)[22]

This is a *chapeau* in Hamacher's direction just as much as it is a postponement of a serious engagement and thus, essentially, a silencing. The silence is, of course, not absolute. Derrida points us towards Hamacher's work on the performative: "what Hamacher here says about and does with what ... I called the 'perverformative'" is "one of the many luminous, powerful gestures of his interpretation, in a text that is impressive, admirable and original."[23] As Derrida's phrasing suggests, Hamacher does not adopt his notion of the perverformative but does something with—and perhaps also something against or beyond?—it.

What, then, is Derrida's "perverformative" and what does Hamacher do with it? *Specters* testifies to the fact that Derrida is not only an avid practitioner of performative interpretation, but that he is also concerned with *querying* or *qualifying* the performative:

for a long time [I have] been attempting to transform the theory of the performative from within, to deconstruct it, which is to say, to overdetermine the theory itself, to put it to work in a different way, within a different 'logic'—by challenging, here again, a certain 'ontology', a value of full presence ....[24]

This ongoing transformation depends on a radical fissuring of "ontology," the avowal of *différance*. Derrida's querying of the performative is, therefore, anchored in his understanding of what fundamentally conditions it—namely, on what may be called *différance*, or "the trace of writing," or the formation of form. Perhaps more *ultra* than *contra* Austin, Derrida rethinks speech act theory, taking *différance* into consideration. It is because of this that in "Envois" Derrida substitutes the word performative with *perverformative*.[25] Against a Searlian reading of Austin, Derrida insists that, regardless of the intentions of the speaker, what a performative ultimately achieves is incalculable. Like the missals of Derrida's "Envois," their sender and addressee remain opaque; like Poe's purloined letter its trajectory is never directed but always winding [*vertere*] and thus per*verted*. In short, the performative is subject to what *The Post Card* calls the PP, the postal principle. It is noteworthy that, in *The Postcard*'s second text—"To Speculate – on Freud"—the PP also stands for the *pépé*, the grandfather Freud who observes his grandson Ernst throw and gather a little spool whilst saying *fort!* [ ] *da!*, the same words used by Derrida to punctuate the enter/exit of *Hamlet*'s ghost in his book on Marx.

For Hamacher, the problem with speech act theory, Derrida's included, is that it cannot account for the "performativity" of its performatives. In order to see what Hamacher does with Derrida's perverformative we must turn to an earlier piece, "Afformative, Strike",

that Hamacher had written about Walter Benjamin's "Critique of Violence." In "Critique of Violence," Benjamin is not out to criticise violence—indeed for him the problem lies in distinguishing between good and bad, justified and unjustified violence in the first place—but to reclaim violence as "pure means." Such "pure means" are to be found not only in the proletarian strike which is the focus of Benjamin's analysis, but also, so Hamacher suggests in "Afformative, Strike," in language: "Like language, the strike as pure means would be non-violent, neither coercion nor extortion, neither instrument nor the anticipation of transformed power relations, but, in its sheer mediacy, the overthrow itself."[26] Introducing the neologism of the "afformative" Hamacher disrupts speech act theory by arguing that there is just such "sheer mediacy," "pure means," and "overthrow itself" in language itself:

I have already indicated that the series *afformation, afformance*, and *afformative* was formed in contrast to *performation*, *performance*, and *performative*; similarly, the use of *afformative event* is to contrast with the use of *performative act* – implying that affirmatives are not a subcategory of performatives. Rather, afformative, or pure, violence, is a "condition" for any instrumental, performative violence, and, at the same time, a condition which suspends their fulfilment in principle. But while afformations do not belong to the class of acts – that is, to the class of positing or founding operations – they are, nevertheless, never simply outside the sphere of acts or without relation to that sphere. The fact that afformations allow something to happen without making it happen has a dual significance: first, that they let this thing enter into the realm of positings, from which they themselves are excluded; and, second, that they are not what shows in the realm of positings, so that the field of phenomenality, as the field of positive manifestation can only indicate the effects of

the afformative as ellipses, pauses, interruptions, displacements, etc., but can never contain or include them. [27]

The afformative as what makes the performative, and hence also performative speech acts, possible, is closely connected to Benjamin's notion of "pure violence" or "pure means." And just as pure violence "decays in its positing," so the afformative vanishes as soon as it has inaugurated the performative.[28] Indeed, throughout the passage, Hamacher's discussion of the afformative stands in close correspondence to the terms Plato's Socrates uses to describe the "beyond being" of Forms: the afformative does not "belong to the class of [speech] acts," they are still "in relation to them," they allow entrance into "the realm of positings" without themselves being part of them, or vice versa. Indeed, "in the field of phenomenality" they can only appear as an absence of perception. He concludes: "the afformative is the ellipsis which silently accompanies any act and which may silently interrupt any speech act." [29] Let us listen, then, to Hamacher's philological investigations into "ellipses, pauses, interruptions, displacements, etc."

"the fundamental aporia – the aporia of positing, of founding itself."[30]

Something intervenes between thesis forty-eight and thesis forty-nine in Hamacher's "Ninety-Five Theses on Philology"—a caesura, perhaps.[31] It interferes at 48, Hamacher's year of birth. It interferes between a thesis about the fact that language's ability to speak is located in its ability "to speak in the absence of meaning," its ability to be expressionless perhaps, and a thesis which asks us to listen with "a philologist's ear," an ear which would

precisely enable us to listen to this silent speaking of, or in, language.[32] Every thinking of what posits without ever being itself posited, must, it seems, dwell in the absolute silence or emptiness of thesis forty-eight. And every thinking of thesis forty-eight in terms of silence, absence, pause or break must at the same time be a rethinking of silence, absence, pause or break. We are here not simply dealing with a lack, but rather with something more interfering, eloquent, unsettling, and also abiding and unchanging.

Daniel Heller-Roazen has noted that "Hamacher's works constitute perhaps the most powerful contemporary attempt to delineate and interrogate [the] aporetic structure, by which language, in its classical philosophical and theoretical elaboration, is simultaneously constructed and effaced, identified as such and destituted of all propriety."[33] This investigation into this fundamental "aporetic structure" takes Hamacher, as Heller-Roazen shows, to language, but, as I suggest, also to the *poietic* beyond language that is poetry or *Dichtung.* It is true that a rethinking of language is central to Hamacher's work, and yet something always interferes when he thinks about language. These interferences are, I show, both objects of Hamacher's philology, as well as expressions of it.

Much of his writing, like thesis forty-eight, homes in on what makes language possible, what allows it to speak, to be language. When in "Lingua Amissa," for example, Hamacher speaks about "commodity-language," he does not speak of a particular type of commodity, which "in addition, [is] endowed with a particular language"; he is rather thinking about what in language allows commodities to be commodities, what about language allows language to be language.[34] His discussion of commodity-language thus reveals that commodities, as well as language, owe their capabilities to what he calls *the promise of language.* The promise *of* language works both ways: it denotes both language's ability to promise and language's dependence on the act of promising. The promise is not merely an ability of language: rather, it is its very possibility. Not merely promises, but even more

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"thetic or constative" uses of language only work as promises, remaining fundamentally and structurally "unfulfilled."[35] Put differently, "language is only language at all in view of a future language."[36] "Language," Hamacher writes also in "Lingua Amissa," "is nothing but this unfulfillable, unrealizable promise of language."[37] Promising is, in other words, not something that language does but what does language. "Intensive Languages," a reading of, amongst other texts, Benjamin's work on translation, similarly homes in on what makes language language. But here the talk is not of commodity-language or the promise of language, but of language's "translatability."[38] And like commodity-language, translatability is described not as a secondary, subsequent capability of language, but as what, lying structurally at its heart, so to say, lends it its capability in the first place.[39] Like the promise of language, translatability is never itself posited, is never described as *there*; it is rather understood as the "demand for another language."[40] Again, what makes language language, this other language, is described as athetic, "unfulfillable" and "unrealizable."[41] Perhaps the object of Hamacher philology is not language at all.

In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida speaks of the promise along similar lines as the ones just sketched out. Like Hamacher and de Man, Derrida believes that "an immanent structure of promise […] informs all speech"[42]:

> Each time I open my mouth, each time I speak or write, I *promise*. Whether I like it or not: here, the fatal precipitation of the promise must be dissociated from the values of the will, intention, or meaning-to-say that are reasonably attached to it. The performative of this promise is not one speech among others. It is implied by any other performative, and this promise heralds the uniqueness of a language to come."[43]

In contrast to Hamacher for whom the promise of language is in itself the foundational operation of language, for Derrida this promise is itself subject to *différance*:

> This appeal to come [*appel á venir*] gathers language together in advance. It welcomes it, collects it, not in its identity or its unity, not even in its ipseity, but in the uniqueness or singularity of a gathering together its difference to itself: in difference *with itself* [avec soi] rather than difference *from itself* [d'avec soi].[44]

In this view, for a promise to be a promise it itself needs to escape positing, it must "allo[w] itself to be haunted by the possibility, of its perversion."[45] It is important to note that for Hamacher the promise of language, just as its translatability, is not merely presented as what makes every statement athetic, but is conceived of as athetic itself. At the most fundamental level, Hamacher's discussion of commodity language in "Lingua Amissa," as well as his discussion of translatability in "Intensive Languages," deals with this foundational and yet unfulfilled possibility: this is what the Introduction to *Premises* calls "the fundamental aporia – the aporia of positing, of founding itself."[46]

This is the "aporetic structure" which, as Heller-Roazen has justly argued, lies at the heart of Hamacher's contribution. For Heller-Roazen, however, it is a contribution not dissimilar to Derrida's, for whom, he writes in his own translation of *Marges*, "the impossibility of the copresence and simulatenity of the 'nows' is what makes the present actually present as such."[47] In this account the "aporetic structure" prominent in Hamacher's work is congruent with a Derridean understanding of "an original difference," despite Heller-Roazen's later claim that "Hamacher … displaced Derrida's problematic onto a terrain that is altogether its own," because it presents *différance*'s timing and spacing as "operations of reading and writing," and thus "irreducibly tied to language and its occurrence."[48] It is true

that Hamacher's oeuvre gives a more prominent place to language than Derrida's, but it is mistaken, I consider, to suggest that for Derrida *différance* is not already understood also in terms of language. The difference between Hamacher and Derrida lies not in the fact that one understands the aporia of positing as a function of language and the other does not; for both, what posits language, as well as everything else, is posited by what escapes all positing. What would we call…this thing?

A Derridean *différance*, even if linguistically transposed, is not what Hamacher's idea (that what posits the athetic must itself be athetic) amounts to:

A positing that is supposed to be unconditioned must be a positing without presupposition and thus a subjectless positing. It must purely posit itself; but by positing itself, *it* already posits *itself*, and so the positing that it is first supposed to perform must already *allow* itself to be presupposed. But such an allowance, admission, or concession of a presupposition can no longer be thought according to the logic of positing. It must be other than a presupposition and other than a positing of a prior support; on the contrary, in the very act of positing it must be precisely the opening that remains independent of the positing, an opening onto another that itself withdraws from the power, the faculty, and the possibility of positing. But if positing can be a positing only by allowing something other than itself—other than its thetic Being—then an original positing cannot be performed. It is in need of a difference with respect to itself that can under no condition be reduced to a thetic act.[49]

Positing can, precisely because it posits, not be posited itself. Such a pre-positing, for lack of a better term, cannot be thought of in terms of an antecedent positing. It has to be, Hamacher

writes, an opening that together with what it makes possible withdraws from positing. It is precisely because positing can only posit itself, insofar as it allows or lets in something other—*and something other than a thetical being*—that we cannot think it in terms of an originary positing, indeed in terms of positing at all. It is *not*, but it also *is* not. It is not merely the absence of something, but the absence of something other than a thetical being; in fact it is not even the absence of an athetical being, it's, perhaps, a question of aa dynamic of *diminuendo* and *crescendo* towards and within it.  This also does not mean that positing does not happen. Something posits, or something is posited, albeit always-not-quite. Considering the prominence attributed to Hamacher's interventions into our concept of language in the reception of his work so far, it is important to note that he does not exclusively think about this aporia of positing in terms of language, or even in terms of a non-language.[50] Like translatability or commodity-language, the afformative here is not a subcategory of the capability it describes, but what athetically posits its possibility in the first place. In *Premises*, the motif of the aporia of positing sets the tone for Hamacher's attempt to understand understanding itself, precisely as a not-understanding.[51] In the untranslatable "Fragen und Keine. Philosophy," it is put in motion to think the question and to think philosophy.[52]

It is of course impossible to abstract any one master term, such as the "aporetic structure" of positing, from Hamacher's readerly encounters with other philosophical or literary texts. Because, of course, this is what his writings fundamentally are—readings. As Hamacher writes in "Lectio: De Mans Imperative," "the language of reading is therefore another language, perhaps something other than language, in any case a 'language' that does not manage without a distancing through quotation marks: a 'language' 'of' 'language'." His work, therefore, partakes in a mode of thinking that does not easily lend itself to a distillation of a central or fundamental tenet.[53] Hamacher, in fact, never posits the central tenet of his thought. This perhaps becomes most clear in the mercurial nature of his critical vocabulary,

in the flexibility with which he is prepared to tackle a question or problem from different positions even within the same text. Hamacher's is not a philosophy that delivers answers to questions, as we are also given to understand in "Fragen und Keine. Philosophie," a "rough draft" text posing non-question after non-question to think about how and what philosophy asks. (It is worth noting that this is a text that has been rewritten from scratch for the second edition of the edited volume in which it was first published.) As with "Fragen," many of Hamacher's texts always retain their sketch-like character; they strike me as movable, flexible things, always about to shape-shift. The aporetic is, in this sense, not merely the subject but also the character or his thought.

And yet, all these different modulations on the aporia of positing are, it seems, in silent conversation with Plato's *epekeina tes ousias*. In "Lectio: De Mans Imperative," Hamacher speaks of "die sprachliche Grundoperation des Versprechens der Sprache", or "the basic linguistic operation of understanding [promising] language."[54] Promising is the *Grundoperation* of language, and because it is a "basic *linguistic* operation," it is itself made of language. What makes language possible is still language and yet—as "Lingua Amissa" and "Ninety-Five Theses" make clear—it is also still not language. "Lingua Amissa" calls it "not, perhaps, a talking thing, perhaps a thing which does not—or does not simply—speak, something which, still unspeaking, *nonetheless* promises itself a language in advance of itself—."[55] What makes language possible is thus neither language nor something understood in terms of language. It must be altogether non-thetical and non-posited and thus cannot for its expression rely on something that is nameable or even thinkable.

What is at matter here, Heller-Roazen is right to point out, is "the rest of language."[56] "The rest of" is something that exceeds, that is left over. It is also something that rests, that lies and remains still. The rest of language is something which, being "irreducible to meaning," remains silent.[57] In a de Manian sense, the "basic linguistic operation" is not

merely a promising [*versprechen*] but also a *ver-sprechen*, a slip of the tongue, a lapse, a pause, a silence. It is, in this vein, significant that "Intensive Languages" concludes by speaking of and towards an athetical "linguistic being ... as ex-position: orphaning, externalization, singularization, stoppage, pause."[58] And this stoppage or pause in or of language has everything to do with a sort of giving up of language. It is a surrender of language that "Ninety-Five Theses" describes as a giving and withdrawing of and in and therefore not by language: "It is language that gives (itself) and language that withdraws (itself, this giving)."[59] This same surrender of language is also performed in the title of "Hamacher's "Lingua Amissa." The phrase *Lingua a-missa* plays on the homophones between the past participle passive of the Latin verb *amittere* (to lose) and the past participle passive of the Latin verb *mittere* (to send) with an alpha privativum. *Lingua amissa* thus means both a language that has not been sent and a language that has been lost, that has been let go [*aus-lassen*], perhaps even a language of omission [*auslassen*], of falling silent. "Lectio" similarly speaks of a *lapsus linguae* as not merely the ground of language but also of theory: "The 'ground' of language, of understanding, of literary scholarship is—a *lapsus*."[60] Like in "Fragen und Keine. Philosophie" *auslassen* is here both an *aus-lassen*, an allowing, as well as an *auslassen*, an ommission.[61]

In Hamacher's work the interruption of language is not merely thought about, it is performed. I, of course, started with one example of such a performance: the second, silent forty-eighth thesis of "Ninety-Five Theses." If we listen closely we can also hear the interruption in the break—marked by a comma—between afformative and strike in "Afformative, Strike." Another example of this is the full stop in "Fragen und Keine. Philosophie." What is at stake in Hamacher's thinking of "the aporia of positing, of founding itself" is not merely a non-language, or a language of nothing, but a moment of silence, a moment which transposes the "beyond being" to the ear.

<u>"Dichtung ist die erste Philologie"</u> [62]

For Hamacher, the silent interruption of the afformative is not simple. One could think it in terms of what Hamacher calls the "self-contraction of absence" in "The Second of Inversion: Movements of a Figure through Celan's Poetry".[63] If this not-yet-and-still-not had a shape, it would be that of prolepsis because it strives towards that which underlies it; and it would be one of pro-lapsus, a slippage, a fall, because what underlies it is not *there*—it is itself the lapsus, pause, silence.[64] One could, in this sense, not merely *not* think of the foundational aporia in terms of a simple silence, or as something that interrupts. In "Intensive Languages" Hamacher, in fact, speaks of what makes language possible not as something which interrupts, but rather as what is itself interrupted: "This saying, which speaks alongside [*mitspricht*] in all expression, is itself what is sayable in no expression: language speaks or languages [*die Sprache spricht*] only from out of the expressionless and into it."[65] In this view, then, what speaks alongside every expression, but which is itself not sayable is not what interrupts language, but what makes language possible: language emerges out of it.

What makes the positing of language and every other positing possible is, very much along lines traced by Benjamin, thought of not as a break that interrupts language, for example, but as an unthinkable continuum out of which it emerges:

> Benjamin ... concludes from the aporia of the linguistic continuum that the continuum of language is to be founded in the caesura, according to his study of Hölderlin or in the expressionless according to the translation essay and a little later in the piece on elective affinities. Where no ground can be found in the continuum, the

expressionless and the caesura offer foundations for the dissolution of the solution, the deliverance of the continuum in its discontinuity.[66]

The continuum of language, that which posits, is founded in what is itself without foundation: this is what in Benjamin's study of Hölderlin is called "caesura" and what in his essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities* is called the expressionless or the *Ausdruckslose*. Benjamin finds two examples of the *Ausdruckslose* in Goethe's novel: first "the interpolated novella that appears in the middle of the second volume under the title 'The Strange Neighbour Children'"; the second is a sentence—"Hope, like a star falling from heaven, soared above their heads and away"—that marks the last possible moment in which the lover Ottilie and Eduard may be united.[67] Although taking form in his reading of Goethe, Benjamin's *Ausdruckslose* originates in Hölderlin (again, displacement):

> As a category of language and art and not of the work or of the genres, the expressionless can be no more rigorously defined than through a passage in Hölderlin's *Anmerkungen zum Ödipus* [Annotation to Oedipus]. The passage reads: "For the tragic transport is actually empty, and the least restrained.—Thereby, in the rhythmic sequence of the representation wherein the transport presents itself, there becomes necessary what in poetic meter is called caesura, the pure word, the counter-rhythmic rupture—namely, in order to meet the onrushing change of representations at its highest points, in such a manner that not the change of representation but the representation itself very soon appears.[68]

Although Hölderlin speaks of the *Ausdruckslose* in terms of language itself, his is an understanding of language that is inextricably connected to a particular idea of poetry, or,

rather, *Dichtung*. In fact, for Hölderlin, the expressionless is a category of language *and* of art itself. In other words, a description of the *Ausdruckslose* only in terms of language is insufficient. And although, for Hölderlin, "caesura" interrupts poetry or *Dichtung,* in other parts of Hamacher's work—particularly in his readings of Celan—the silence of "caesura" becomes the dwelling place for something like *Dichtung* itself.

In "Fragen und Keine. Philosophie", Hamacher writes, "Sprechen wir während der Ebbe des Sprachmeers. Bewegen wir uns, sprechen in Watt. Sprechen wir Watt."[69] "Do we speak during the low tide of the sea of language. Do we move, do we speak in the mud flats. Do we speak mud flats." My translation is inadequate not merely because it is impossible to render the conditional, grammatical effect of the question-mark-less-interrogative of Hamacher's German. "Watt" is the German word for mud flats; it is, however, also the title of Samuel Beckett's novel about the failing of language. Beckett's contribution to a thinking of the failing of language is, in fact, less cryptically marked in thesis forty-seven when Hamacher draws, still rather elliptically, on Dionysus, Maimonides and Beckett to think the name with no name.[70] Here, however, literature is not drawn on for its depiction of the failing of language, but is itself presented as what fails language and what make language and thinking possible.

Yet, there is still more to this passage. What might seem to be a strange metaphor of the ebbing sea is in fact a Kantian echo, or, rather, a reversal of a Kantian image. For, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant uses precisely the sea to illustrate the aesthetic judgement of the sublime. Whereas the sea can be thought of as an empirical object (in other words, a concrete thing doing a concrete action or serving a concrete purpose), Kant encourages us to

consider the ocean merely as the poets do, in accordance with what its appearance shows, for instance, when it is considered in periods of calm, as a clear mirror of water bounded only by the heavens, but also when it is turbulent an abyss threatening to devour everything, and yet still be able to find it sublime.[71]

For McLaughlin, "this ability…to see the sea before it has been claimed as a substantial thing" is an example of poetic force which bears with itself the "'not' of unforce.[72] Hamacher's insistence on mud flats, indicating not merely the absence of the sea, but also the condition of its appearance, characterizes poetic force in terms of such an unforce. Again, the terms of Hamacher's discussion of poietic force echo Plato's sense of beyond-beingness of the Forms. Like the continuum of language, "any absolute beauty" or "true being," as Plato writes in *Phaedo*, does "never admit to any change whatsoever."[73] Like the light in the analogies of the sun and cave, the duplicity of water (implied in Hamacher's echoing of the sea's "clear mirror", or "turbulent abyss", as described by Kant in his image of mud-flats) refers us to the pure means of *poietic* force.

It is just these pure means of *poietic* force that Celan addresses in a moment of self-interruption in "The Meridian":

But I do think—and this thought can hardly surprise you by now—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*. This "who knows," to which I see that I have now arrived, is all I can add, here, today to the old hopes.[74]

Before Celan can say what it is that poetry always hoped to speak of, there is an interruption and the sentence continues in a different direction, out of and into the unthinkable continuum. The poem cannot speak of it but only on its behalf. It is a speaking into and out of it, which is itself, being punctuated by a "who knows" and a "perhaps" athetic. All Celan can do is use *Dichtung* itself ("The Meridian" is, of course, nothing but a poem), to add to poetry's old hopes.

Celan continues: "Das Gedicht verweilt oder verhofft—ein auf die Kreatur zu beziehendes Wort—bei solchen Gedanken."[75] This is how Pierre Joris translates this sentence: "The poem tarries and tests the wind—a word related to the creaturely—through such thoughts."[76] Hamacher picks up on this word "verhoffen" in his Celan essay in *Premises*, in order to speak of a dash or hyphen—again a moment of "caesura"—in one of Celan's poems.

If the nothing of language were not received and perceived, its inversion into being would not be possible. This possibility of the impossibility of its own existence breaks open in Celan's poem only in the *dash* before the *doch* (yet), in the interruption of tropic language, in the mute hesitation of receiving and perceiving. This graphic pause—Celan later found for a similar moment the word *verhoffen*, as state of expectancy to which the alternatives of hope and despair do not apply, as in the alarm of animals when faced with a hunter—opens in poetic speaking a hole that cannot be closed by the logic of inversion; it opens a distance that cannot be transformed into a nearness, a difference that cannot turn into a unity, a mute site that cannot change into a topos of an eloquent image. This is the site of an absence that must still remain unreachable to every absence that could change into our own, into the presence of our language."[77]

*Verhoffen* is difficult to translate. This may have been the reason why the English version of Hamacher's text contains a definition of the word that the German version does not.[78] Verhoffen: a "state of expectancy to which the alternatives of hope and despair do not apply, as in the alarm of animals when faced with a hunter." This is I think a better strategy of translating this word than Joris's "tarries and tests the wind," which loses out so much of what *verhoffen* does in Celan. *Verhoffen* comes from hunting language, indicating that moment when game stands still and listens in order to listen or to pick up a scent. Celan's *verhoffen*, however, is also a *ver-hoffen*, a losing of hope [*Hoffnung*].[79] In this view, *Dichtung* is an abiding in the presence of neither hope nor despair. It is, simply, an abiding out of which what is posited—language, for example, but also being—emerges. For Hamacher, *Dichtung*, poetic force itself, is "the aporia of positing, of founding."[80]

I have suggested that *Dichtung* is what remains *epekeina tes ousias*, that it becomes for Hamacher a quasi-metaphysical presence, or, rather, a quasi-metaphysical and continual withdrawal or subtraction from being.  If taken seriously, this suggestion would entail the all but disappearance of the ancient quarrel between literature and philosophy. When literature becomes not only the *metier* of critical inquiry, but when *Dichtung* as poietic force itself, as what generates without itself being generated, allows itself for thinking then philosophy does not merely need philology but it becomes it. As much is suggested in Hamacher's brief account of Plato's *Phaedrus* in "For – Philology." Falling in love with language, with what in languages loves, Socrates becomes, Hamacher suggests, himself an *aner philologicos*, a man who thinks under the conditions of signification and thinking that philology investigates. Whatever we do, whether we rhyme or reason, we do it by grace of the movement of language.[81]

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**Endnotes**

[1] Hamacher, "Wasen: Um Celan's Todtnauberg," 4.

[2] Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's* Republic, 245.

[3] Plato, *Republic*, 203.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Rosen, *Plato's* Republic*: A Study*, 262.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's* Republic, 256-7; 257.

[10] Plato, *Phaedo*, 273.

[11] Plato, *Republic*, 202-3.

[12] Ibid., 78-9

[13] Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's* Republic, 256.

[14] Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig, "Nachruf auf Werner Hamacher: Spurenlese im Bodenlosen."

[15] Alexandru Bulucz, "Das habe ich so nicht gesagt."

[16] Thomas Meyer, "Nachruf: Sprache ist Abschied."

[17] Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig, "Nachruf auf Werner Hamacher: Spurenlese im Bodenlosen."

[18] Hamacher, "Ninety-Five Theses," 9.

[19] Derrida, *Specters*, 125.

[20] Hamacher, "Lingua Amissa", 168.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Derrida, "Marx & Sons," 224–5.

[23] Ibid., 224.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Derrida, *The Post Card*, 136.

[26] Hamacher, "Afformative, Strike," 121-2.

[27] Ibid., 128.

[28] Ibid.,112,

[29] Ibid., 128.

[30] Hamacher, *Premises*, 13.

[31] Hamacher, "Ninety-Five Theses on Philology," 53.

[32] Ibid., 52, 54.

[33] Heller-Roazen, "Language, or No Language," 23.

[34] Hamacher, "Lingua Amissa," 173.

[35] Ibid., 189.

[36] Ibid., 189.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Hamacher, "Intensive Languages," 487.

[39] See Ibid., 491.

[40] Ibid., 493–4.

[41] Hamacher, "Lingua Amissa," 189.

[42] Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 21.

[43] Ibid., 67.

[44] Ibid., 68.

[45] Ibid., 93

[46] Hamacher, *Premises*, 13.

[47] Derrida, *Marges*, 63. See Heller-Roazen, "Language, or No Language," 27.

[48] Heller-Roazen, "Language, or No Language," 28.

[49] Hamacher, *Premises,* 13–14.

[50] Heller-Roazen, "Language, or No Language," 37.

[51] Hamacher, *Premises*, 10.

[52] Hamacher, "Fragen und Keine. Philosophie," 204.

[53] Hamacher, *Premises*, 199.

[54] Hamacher, *Entfernes Verstehen*, 190; Hamacher, *Premises*, 218.

[55] Hamacher, "Lingua Amissa," 169.

[56] Hamacher, *Premises*, 330.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Hamacher, "Intensive Languages," 541.

[59] Hamacher, "Ninety-Five Theses," 60.

[60] Hamacher, *Premises*, 219. See also: "As finite, language is never already constituted but is always in the process of its constitution; it is language always only as promised [*Sprache ist sie immer bur als versprochene*]. But since its promise [*ihr Versprechen*] can never be fulfilled by itself as promised, this promise, which is also the suspension of language, brackets *itself* – language – and confesses, since it is 'effective' despite its endless suspension, despite its impossibility, that it is a failed linguistic performance, a parapraxis, *lapsus linguae.*" Hamacher, *Premises*, 219 and *Entfernes Verstehen*, 191.

[61] See "Müßte die Sprache des Fragens, die sie herbeiführt, müsste sie nicht, ist sie elliptisch, eine verletze Sprache sein; eine Sprache der Auslassung; eine Auslassung der Sprache; eine Sprache, die die Sprache auslässt; die – in jedem Sinn, aus jeden Sinn – ausgelassene Sprache." Hamacher, "Fragen Und Keine. Philosophie," 196.

[62] Hamacher, "Für–die Philologie," 14.

[63] Hamacher, *Premises*, 345.

[64] See "Prolepsis is thus less the founding principle of every possible experience than the proposition [*Satz*] – the leap [*Sprung*] – in which alone a basis for experience emerges, without however ever being fixed as availably given or as produced." Hamacher, "Intensive Languages," 514.

[65] Ibid., 530.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Goethe, *Elective Affinities*, 207.

[68] Benjamin, "Elective Affinities," 340–41.

[69] Hamacher, "Fragen und Keine. Philosophie," 205.

[70] Hamacher, "Ninety-Five Theses," 47.

[71] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 153.

[72] McLaughlin, *Poetic Force*, 4; xii.

[73] Plato, *Phaedo*, 78d.

[74] Celan, *The Meridian*, 8.

[75] Celan, *Der Meridian*, 8.

[76] Celan, *The Meridian,* 8.

[77] Hamacher, *Premises*, 348.

[78] Compare with "Würde das Nichts der Sprache nicht angenommen und vernommen, so wäre ihre Inversion in Sein unmöglich. Diese Möglichkeit der Unmöglichkeit ihrer eigenen Existenz tut sich in Celans Gedicht [

letztes Gedicht aus Gegenlicht] allein im Gedankenstrich or dem *doch* auf, im Aussetzen der tropischen

Sprache, in der stummen Vezögerung des Nehmens und Vernehmens. Mit diesem graphischen Innehalten –

Celan hat für einen ähnlichen Augenblick später das Wort *Verhoffen* gefunden – öffnet sich im poetischen

Sprechen eine Lücke, die zu schließen nicht in der Macht der Inversionslogic steht, ein Abstand, der in der

Nähe, eine Differenz, die nicht in Einheit, ein stummer Ort, der nicht in den Topos eines sprechenden Bildes

verwandelt werden kann. Es ist dies der Ort einer Abwesenheit unerreichbar bleiben muß, die sich in unsre, in

die gegenwart unserer Sprache verwandeln könnte." Hamacher, *Entferntes Verstehen,* 334.

[79] I thank Ronald Mendoza de Jesús for drawing my attention to this ulterior meaning of *verhoffen*.

[80] Hamacher, *Premises*, 13.

[81] Hamacher, "Für–die Philologie," 36.