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Symbolic Death and the Eccentric Sphere: “Remarks” on Hölderlin’s *Oedipus*

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Abstract: Insofar as the caesura of tragic temporality and the movement of “tragic transport” are said to be shaped by a tendency toward the “eccentric sphere of the dead” in Friedrich Hölderlin’s “Remarks on Oedipus”, the privileged position of this sphere within Hölderlin’s “Remarks” solicits further analysis of what this topos signifies within both Hölderlin’s poetological writings and his translation of *Oedipus the King*. How does the “eccentric sphere of the dead” relate to Hölderlin’s formal descriptions of the caesura that lends tragic succession a certain equilibrium, and what is implied in the qualification of this region as an “eccentric sphere”? How does the “eccentric sphere of the dead” register in the language of Sophocles’ tragedy? And conversely, what does the language of *Oedipus the King* indicate concerning the constitution and parameters of the “spheres” of the living and the dead? These are the questions that will be pursued in this essay, beginning with the broader resonance of the terms to which Hölderlin takes recourse in his “Remarks”, and proceeding to the ways in which the limits of life and death are articulated in Sophocles’ drama and Hölderlin’s translation. Those elaborations of the “eccentric sphere of the dead” will, in turn, allow for a reinterpretation of the more formal determinations of “tragic transport” that Hölderlin offers.

Keywords: Friedrich Hölderlin; Sophocles; Immanuel Kant; tragedy; translation



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The first section of Friedrich Hölderlin’s tripartite “Remarks on Oedipus” (“Anmerkungen zum Ödipus”) ends with a characterization of the seer Tiresias as the one who, in both *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*, “enters into the course of fate, as overseer over the power of nature that tragically transports man from his living sphere, from the middle point of his inner life, into another world and tears him into the eccentric sphere of the dead” (“Er tritt in den Gang des Schicksaals, als Aufseher über die Naturmacht, die tragisch, den Menschen seiner Lebenssphäre, dem Mittelpunkt seines innern Lebens in eine andere Welt entrückt und in die exzentrische Sphäre der Todten reißt”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 251).¹ Indicating a shift in focus, if not a rupture, these concluding lines present Tiresias as a persona whose speech instantiates the caesura that Hölderlin had initially described in formal terms as that which structures tragic temporality, rendering its successive unfolding “more equilibrium than pure succession” (“mehr Gleichgewicht, als reine Aufeinanderfolge”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 250). The passage thus not only marks the end of Hölderlin’s reflections on tragic temporality but also a transition to Sophocles’ drama that prepares for the discussion of selected sequences from *Oedipus the King* that Hölderlin will offer in the next section of his “Remarks”. Although the first part of Hölderlin’s “Remarks on Oedipus” primarily concerns the temporal form of tragedy in general, the emphasis thus falls in the end upon Tiresias’ prophetic vision of the power that draws humans into the “eccentric sphere of the dead”. It is a visionary mode of speech and a specific topos that mark the final word on the caesura in the first division of Hölderlin’s “Remarks”, as well as a turning point in the organization of his text. What began as a matter of time is assigned a particular spatial orientation and verbal character, lending greater precision to Hölderlin’s characterization of the movement that he also designates as “tragic transport” (“tragische[n] Transport”)

Insofar as the caesura of tragic temporality and the movement of “tragic transport” are said to be shaped by a tendency toward the “eccentric sphere of the dead”, the privileged

position of this sphere within Hölderlin's "Remarks on Oedipus" solicits further analysis of what this topos signifies within both Hölderlin's poetological writings and his translation of *Oedipus the King*. How does the "eccentric sphere of the dead" relate to Hölderlin's formal descriptions of the caesura that lends tragic succession a certain equilibrium, and what is implied in the qualification of this region as an "eccentric sphere"? How does the "eccentric sphere of the dead" register in the language of Sophocles' tragedy? And conversely, what does the language of *Oedipus the King* indicate concerning the constitution and parameters of the "spheres" of the living and the dead? These are the questions that will be pursued in the following essay, beginning with the broader resonance of the terms to which Hölderlin takes recourse in his "Remarks", and proceeding to the ways in which the limits of life and death are articulated in Sophocles' drama and Hölderlin's translation. Those elaborations of the "eccentric sphere of the dead" will, in turn, allow for a reinterpretation of the more formal determinations of "tragic transport" that Hölderlin offers.

1. Situating the "Eccentric Sphere"

Among the more conspicuous traits of Hölderlin's formulation for the "eccentric sphere of the dead" are the ways in which it presents a variation upon terms that he had deployed in his earlier writings on tragedy from around the time that he was working on *The Death of Empedocles*. As Karin Dahlke has observed in one of the few studies of Hölderlin's "Remarks on Oedipus" that includes extensive commentary upon the "eccentric sphere of the dead",² his evocation of this sphere recalls his discussions of the "Aorgischen" or the "aorgic" tendency of nature that he had situated in a dynamic opposition to art and organic life in his poetological fragment on the "Basis of Empedocles" ("Grund zum Empedokles") (Dahlke 2008, p. 457).³ As Violetta Waibel has observed, this term "seems to be a neologism that Hölderlin coined and that he opposed to the organic, but not in the sense of the inorganic"; instead, his usage of the "aorgic" suggests at once associations with the "wild, the coarse, the culturally unshaped", as well as with the Greek word for "fury" (ὀργή), and it is this dimension of passion that also distinguishes the "aorgic" from suggesting merely disorganization (Waibel 2021, pp. 99–100). Similarly to the way in which Hölderlin speaks in his "Remarks" of "the power of nature" ("Naturmacht") as that which tears the human from "the middle point of his inner life", Hölderlin had introduced the "aorgic" in the "Basis of Empedocles" as that which draws the tragic individual to abandon his organized particularity to the same extent that he opposes the force of disorganization, thereby becoming more like what he opposes, and by virtue of this very opposition. This dynamic thus displaces the gravitational center of the individual from (organized) life to (aorgic) death:

In der Mitte liegt der Tod des Einzelnen, nemlich derjenige Moment, wo das organische seine Ichheit, sein besonderes Daseyn, das zum Extreme geworden war, das aorgische seine Allgemeinheit nicht wie zu Anfang in idealer Vermischung, sondern in realem höchstem Kampf ablegt, indem das besondere auf seinem Extrem gegen das Extrem des aorgischen sich thätig immer mehr verallgemeinern, immer von seinem Mittelpunkte sich reißen muß, das aorgische gegen das Extrem des besondern sich immer mehr concentriren und immer mehr einen Mittelpunkt gewinnen und zum besondersten werden muß [. . .]. (Hölderlin 1985, p. 871)

At the midpoint lies the death of the individual, namely the moment when the organizational dispenses with its egoity, its particularized existence, which went to the extreme; the aorgic dispenses with its universality, not in the ideal mixture, as it was at the commencement, but in its real supreme struggle; such dispensing occurs when the particular, having gone to its extreme, increasingly universalizes itself and becomes active against the extreme of the aorgic; the particular has to tear itself away from its midpoint more and more, while the aorgic, acting against the extreme of the particular, has to concentrate itself more and more; it achieves for itself with ever greater success a midpoint, thus becoming something superlatively particular [. . .]. (Hölderlin 2008, p. 145; trans. modified)

The parallels between the two passages could thus be construed to suggest that the “power of nature” is simply another name for the aorgic force that brings humans to tear themselves away from a vital “midpoint” (“Mittelpunct”). Hence, Wolfgang Schadewaldt interprets Hölderlin’s “Remarks on Oedipus” to address the “aorgic striving of the human towards unification, towards pairing with the divine power of nature” (“das [...] aorgische Streben des Menschen nach Einswerden, Paarung mit der göttlichen Naturmacht”), which would accordingly seem to drive Oedipus as it had driven Hölderlin’s Empedocles (Schadewaldt 1966, p. 139). If this were the case, then Sophocles’ drama would primarily consist of a dramatic contest between aorgic and organic powers as they express themselves through the tragic individual who, like Empedocles, serves as their medium of presentation.

But there are also critical differences that disrupt this alignment. Death holds only a temporary place within the dynamic that Hölderlin traces in the “Basis of Empedocles”. If the “death of the individual” centers Empedocles’ drama, it is not implied that this center holds since the accent in Hölderlin’s “Basis of Empedocles” falls upon the opposition of organic and disorganizing forces, which not only produces death but also exceeds death’s occurrence. By contrast, Hölderlin’s “Remarks on Oedipus” suggest that the “sphere of the dead” is among the constant topological coordinates that determine human destiny and inhuman nature.⁴ Even when, in his “Remarks on Antigone”, Hölderlin more closely approximates his rhetoric from the “Basis of Empedocles”, writing that nature “in her virtuosity tends towards the all-too-organic to the very degree that man approaches the aorgic” (“in ihrer Virtuosität in eben dem Grade ins Allzuorganische gehet, wie der Mensch sich dem Aorgischen nähert” (Hölderlin 1988, p. 415), he returns shortly thereafter to speaking of the “wild world of the dead” (“wilden Welt der Todten”), again conferring it a consistency that it does not seem to have in the “Basis for Empedocles” (Hölderlin 1988, p. 418).⁵ Yet if the assignation of the dead to a sphere or a world distinguishes death in Hölderlin’s “Remarks” from a transitory function of opposing forces, its persistent association with the aorgic also provokes the question as to how the dead could constitute a sphere or a world, especially if the “aorgic” should signify “the inconceivable, the insensible, the unbounded” (“d[as] Unbegreiflich[e], d[as] Unföhlbar[e], d[as] Unbegrenzt[e]”) or “the inconceivable, the unconscious, the involuntary” (“d[as] Unbegreiflich[e], d[as] Unbewußt[e], d[as] Unwillkürlich[e]”), as Hölderlin had insisted in the “Basis of Empedocles” (Hölderlin 2008, pp. 145, 151; trans. modified; Hölderlin 1985, pp. 871, 877). For “world” implies nothing if not organization, as Hölderlin underscores in the fragmentary essay titled by editors “The Fatherland in Decline” (“Das untergehende Vaterland”), where “world” designates a “particular reciprocal relation” (“besondere Wechselwirkung”) between “nature and humans” that has “become ideal”, forging a particular “nexus of things” (“Verbindung der Dinge”) that suppresses every other possible “kind of relation and matter” (“Beziehungsart u. Stoffart”). As a consequence, he continues, “in it, as in language, little or nothing subsisting as living” appears “on the one side”, while “all seems to lie on the other” (“so daß in ihm, so wie in der Sprache, von einer Seite weniger oder nichts lebendig Bestehendes von der anderen Seite alles zu liegen scheint”) (Hölderlin 2008, p. 153; trans. modified; Hölderlin 1979, p. 136). Here, “world” names the relational nexus of all that, “as in language”, conveys manifest and comprehensible significance, creating the semblance that there is nothing “living” or “subsisting” besides what is already known and spoken. “The inconceivable, the insensible” and “the unbounded” would be that which each world suppresses or forecloses.

Just as “world” suggests ordered relations, “sphere” evokes not only the ideal geometrical form defined as “compris[ing] an infinite number of points equidistant from the center” (Cole 2017, p. 59) but also the compass of efficacy within a context of “reciprocal relation” (“Wechselwirkung”) that both Hölderlin and his contemporaries repeatedly describe as a sphere in order to circumscribe the finite range of various powers and actions.⁶ In his earlier draft of an essay “On Religion”, which was also published under the title “Fragment of Philosophical Letters” (“Fragment philosophischer Briefe”), “sphere” (“Sphäre”) is the word with which Hölderlin designates the particular religious nexus of relations that would

be operative each time that humans relate to their respective worlds as something “more than a machinated course” (“mehr als Maschinengang”) (Hölderlin 1979, p. 45).⁷ There, he locates the central power of each sphere in the “spirit” (“Geist”) that “rules” (“herrscht”) in it, whose laws so intimately bind “activity” (“Thätigkeit”) with “its element” (“ihr[em] Element”) that no law can so much as be “thought” apart from a “particular case” (“besondern Fall”) (Hölderlin 1979, pp. 48, 47). As Waibel has shown, these reflections upon the constitution of a religious sphere build, in turn, upon the “sphere” of natural right as it had recently been presented by Johann Gottlieb Fichte in his book on the *Foundations of Natural Right* (Waibel 1996/1997, pp. 169–72).⁸ Early in his exposition, Fichte had deduced natural right from the conditions of possibility for subjective freedom as such, which include the intersubjective establishment of a limited “sphere” (“Sphäre”) for each subject involved, “within which no one may disturb him and beyond which he, for his part, may not go” in exercising his freedom to act efficaciously (Fichte 1845, SW III, p. 15; 2000, p. 15).⁹ The geometrical register that Fichte evokes to describe the limited “sphere” of individual activity is, moreover, not a metaphor but rather a reminder of the “original schema for activity in general”, which Fichte aligns with the (geometrical) operation of “drawing [...] a line”. In so doing, Fichte echoes Kant’s claim that we “cannot represent time without, in drawing a straight line [...], attending merely to the action of the synthesis of the manifold through which we successively determine the inner sense”, which not only “first produces the concept of succession” but also, as Fichte underscores, yields an intuition of “the I” (Fichte 2000, p. 55; cf. Fichte 1845, SW III, p. 58; Kant 1998a, p. 258; cf. Kant 1998b, p. 195). Fichte’s formulations for mutually exclusive individual spheres of activity extend the linear intuition of subjective activity, as such, to a three-dimensional, intersubjective space.

These notions of a world and a sphere are at odds with Hölderlin’s association of death with the cancellation of “egoity” (“Ichheit”), as well as his characterization of the aorgic as a “disorganizing” force that opposes the “formative drives” of thought and life (Hölderlin 2008, pp. 145–46; trans. modified; Hölderlin 1985, pp. 871–72). Or, to put it in terms of the Kantian vocabulary that resonates throughout the first section of Hölderlin’s “Remarks”, the ordered relations that are suggested by the spherical determination of the “eccentric sphere of the dead” could not obtain in this field, if only because death will have struck those subjects of conscious experience who could give coherence to a sphere or form the regulative idea of a world.¹⁰ Shared among an indefinite plethora of “the dead” in an indefinite manner and to an indefinite extent, the “eccentric sphere of the dead” would thus seem to be “eccentric” (“exzentrisch”) not only with respect to the “middle point” of man’s “inner life” but also thanks to its remove (“ex-”) from every conceivable organizing center (“-zentrisch”) and, therefore, too, from every viable sphere.¹¹ Thus, as the human is said to be torn from his “living sphere” into the “eccentric sphere of the dead”, the “sphere” that seems to carry over in Hölderlin’s articulation of this “transport” does not suture the tear that is evoked but rather renders it more conspicuous.¹² As the designation of a topos that resists the concept, shape, and limits that are assigned to it, the syntagma “eccentric sphere of the dead” marks an instance of catachresis or “hard jointure” (“harte Fügung”), which is the term that Norbert von Hellingrath adopts for the style of poetic construction that, like the caesura of tragedy, disrupts “the frictionless sequence of logical connection” (“die widerstandlose folge des logischen zusammenhangs”) (von Hellingrath 1910, p. 5).

2. Oedipus’ Place

“Hard jointure” is the style that Hellingrath shows to be characteristic of Hölderlin’s translations of Pindar and Sophocles, as well as his late poems. But the logic of place—the topology—that is articulated in Hölderlin’s translation of *Oedipus* also disrupts the “frictionless sequence of logical connection”, especially when it comes to the demarcation of the living and the dead, rendering the catachrestic syntagma “eccentric sphere of the dead” the verbal correlate to the spatial relations that structure the drama. In Hölderlin’s translation, indices of death and aorgic wilderness are repeatedly superimposed upon the “sphere” of the living in a manner that allows them to figure within the compass of the latter while, at

the same time, troubling its bounds. The passages in which this superposition takes place offer, in turn, a further elucidation of what is at stake in Hölderlin's remarks on Tiresias' role "as overseer over the power of nature that tragically transports man from his living sphere, from the middle point of his inner life, into another world and tears him into the eccentric sphere of the dead" (Hölderlin 1988, p. 251).

One of the most pronounced moments in which the "sphere of the dead" encroaches upon the "living" scene of discourse can, in fact, be located in the lines where Tiresias reiterates his announcement that "the murder" of Laios "falls upon Oedipus" himself ("Des Manns Mord, den du suchst, ich sag', auf dich da fällt er"), before adding that Oedipus fails to know "where" he is "in misfortune", along with those who are "most dear" to him ("Ganz schändlich, sag ich, lebst du mit den Liebsten/Geheim, weist nicht, woran du bist im Unglück") (Hölderlin 1988, p. 117, l. 366, 370–71). Reprising and expanding upon the latter formulation, Tiresias declares the following:

Gesehen hast auch du, siehst nicht, woran du bist,
Im Übel, wo du wohnst, womit du haußest.
Weist du, woher du bist? du bist geheim
Verhaßt den Deinen, *die hier unten sind*,
Und oben auf der Erd', und ringsum treffend
Vertreibt von der Mutter und vom Vater
Dich aus dem Land der Fluch gewaltig wandelnd,
Jetzt sehend wohl, hernach in Finsterniß;
Und deines Geschreies, welcher Hafen wird
Nicht voll seyn, welcher Kithäron nicht mitrufen bald? (Hölderlin 1988, p. 123, l. 418–27; my emphasis)

You, too, have seen, see not, where you are in evil, where you dwell, with what you house. Do you know from where you are? You are secretly hated by yours *who are here below* and above upon earth, and, striking the mark all-around, the curse drives you out of the land, the one of the mother and the father, mightily wandering, now seeing, later in darkness; and of your cry, what harbor will not be full, what Cithaeron will not soon call along?

The corresponding passage in Sophocles' Greek reads as follows:

οὐ καὶ δέδορκας κοῦ βλέπεις ἴν' εἴ κακοῦ,
οὐδ' ἔνθα ναίεις, οὐδ' ὅτων οἰκεῖς μέτα.
ἄρ' οἶσθ' ἄφ' ὧν εἶ; καὶ λέληθας ἐχθρὸς ὦν
τοῖς σοῖσιν αὐτοῦ νέρθε κατὰ γῆς ἄνω;
καὶ σ' ἀμφιπλήξ, μητρός τε καὶ τοῦ σοῦ πατρὸς
ἐλᾷ ποτ' ἐκ γῆς τῆσδε δεινόπους ἀρά,
βλέποντα νῦν μὲν ὄρθ'. ἔπειτα δὲ σκότον.
βοῆς δὲ τῆς σῆς, ποῖος οὐκ ἔσται λιμὴν;
ποῖος Κιθαίρων οὐχὶ σύμφωνος τάχα. (Hölderlin 1988, p. 122, l. 418–21)

You, even though you have seen clearly, also do not glimpse where you are in evil, nor where you dwell, nor with whom you house. But do you know from whom you come? And has it escaped you, how you are hated by those of yours down below as well as upon the earth above? And striking on both sides, from the mother and your father, the terrible-footed curse shall drive you from this earth, you who see rightly now; but later, darkness. Of your cry, what shall not be a harbor; what Cithaeron shall not swiftly resound with it?

In Hölderlin's version, the repetition of "you are" ("du bist") in the sequence that proceeds from the question "Do you know from where you are"? ("Weist du, woher

du bist"?) to the statement "You are secretly hated by yours" ("du bist geheim/Verhaßt den Deinen") could seem at first to imply that Tiresias is about to answer the question that he had posed, e.g., "Do you know from where you are? You are from X". But rather than revealing a trajectory that would lead back to Oedipus' provenance, Tiresias abruptly shifts registers to speak of a "secret" hate for Oedipus that is harbored by those relatives "who are here below and above upon earth". The presentation of Oedipus as a subject of ignorance thus gives way to one in which he appears as an object of hatred; the question of his provenance provokes word of his affective significance here and now; and, most significantly, the dialogue between Oedipus and Tiresias comes to be situated in the underworld with the phrase "here below" ("hier unten"), either in distinction from or in addition to "above upon earth" ("oben auf der Erde"), depending upon whether the "and" is construed to be additive or explicative. The adverbial $\nu\epsilon\rho\theta\epsilon$, which signifies "below" or "from below" in ancient Greek, is substituted in Hölderlin's translation with a deictic index that renders "below" a determination of the place where Oedipus and Tiresias speak, marking a displacement of the "live" scene of dialogue to the topos, if not the sphere, of the dead.¹³ At the same time, the ambivalence of the "and", which may or may not link "here below" to the terrain "above", renders directionality, and with it, any center of orientation is impossible to establish. Oedipus thus does not simply fail to know "where" he is, as Tiresias says, but also could not know it on such terms.¹⁴

Hölderlin's substitution of "hier unten" for $\nu\epsilon\rho\theta\epsilon$ has significant implications for the action, character, space, and time of Sophocles' drama, as well as the caesura of succession and movement of transport that he associates with the speech of Tiresias in his "Remarks". This substitution may, to be sure, belong among the deviations from Sophocles' Greek that commentators such as Schadewaldt have noted, underscoring how "Hölderlin" often "confuses" ("verwechselt") grammatical "forms" that have "external similarity with one another" (Schadewaldt 1966, p. 122). Yet, whether it is the result of "confusion" or intention, the formulation "Verhaßt den Deinen, die hier unten sind" also marks a deviation from Sophocles' Greek "behind" which "something true stands" ("hinter denen ein [...] Wahres steht"), like the apparent "errors" in translation that Schadewaldt and Karl Reinhardt find to disclose, among others, the religious dimension of Sophoclean tragedy (Schadewaldt 1966, pp. 122, 125–26; cf. Reinhardt 1960, p. 382).¹⁵ For it shows that just as Oedipus can simultaneously occupy the positions of kinship and enmity with respect to "his" own, the underworld of those "below" does not exist at a stable distance from the world of the living but as a site within a relational nexus whose terms remain distinct even as they are subject to superpositions that disrupt their individual integrity and oppositional complementarity. These ruptures in "logical connection" are multiplied as Tiresias goes on to assert the materially impossible coincidence of two figures in the same place, declaring that the widow of Laios occupies "One bed with the father and his murderer" ("in Einem Bette mit/Dem Vater und sein Mörder") (von Hellingsrath 1910, p. 5; Hölderlin 1988, p. 127).¹⁶ Nor are such formulations merely indicative of a profound disturbance in the relations that are more usually understood to organize the world, for whether it is a matter of the place that is said to be held by both the father and his murderer or the site of dialogic exchange that is situated above and below, such determinations attest to the turn that Hölderlin describes in his "Remarks" from "the striving from this world into the other" ("das Streben aus dieser Welt in die andre") into "a striving from another world into this one" ("einem Streben aus einer andern Welt in diese") (Hölderlin 1988, p. 415).

If these utterances of Tiresias should exemplify what Hölderlin calls "tragic transport" (Hölderlin 1988, p. 250), then this "transport" does not refer to local motion or $\varphi\omicron\rho\acute{\alpha}$ in the Aristotelian sense, where a body changes its place, and where place is understood as the "innermost motionless boundary of what contains" a corporeal thing (Aristotle 1984, *Physics* 211a 20). It also does not merely evoke associations with ecstatic passion, whose relevance to Hölderlin's "Remarks" Charles Lewis has demonstrated, tracing the phrase "tragic transport" back to Nicolas Boileau's rendition of *ekstasis* with "transport" in his translation of pseudo-Longinus' treatise on the sublime (Lewis 2011, p. 119; Lewis 2019, pp. 83–100;

cf. Balfour 2015, p. 76). Instead, it signifies a topological rearticulation of Oedipus' position that locates him, among others, within what could be called the "eccentric sphere of the dead", and whose catachrestic designation as a "sphere" corresponds with the way in which terms for spatial orientation such as "above" and "below" undergo abuse, marking coincidences that resist synthesis and order.¹⁷

The passages from Tiresias' speech that have been discussed thus far give some indication, then, as to what it could mean to say that the seer "enters into the course of fate, as overseer over the power of nature that tragically transports man from his living sphere, from the middle point of his inner life, into another world and tears him into the eccentric sphere of the dead" (Hölderlin 1988, p. 251). But the placement of Oedipus among the dead frequently repeats in Hölderlin's translation, and with manifold variations whose analysis further elucidates the implications of the "eccentric sphere" that Hölderlin emphasizes in his "Remarks". As he explains his self-blinding, for instance, Oedipus claims ἐγὼ γὰρ οὐκ'οἶδ'ὄμμασιν ποίοις βλέπων,/πατέρα πότ'ἄν προσεῖδον εἰς ᾗδου μολών/οὐδ'αὖ τάλαιναν μητέρ' ("For I do not know with what sort of eyes, looking, I ever could have looked upon my father if I came to Hades, nor, in turn, my wretched mother") (Hölderlin 1988, p. 230, l. 1368–70), which Hölderlin renders in a manner that suggests Oedipus has already made his journey to the underworld: "Ich wußte nemlich nicht, mit welchen Augen ich/Den Vater angesehen, zum Hades wandelnd,/Und auch die arme Mutter" ("I did not know with which eyes I [would have] seen the father, wandering to Hades, and the poor mother as well") (Hölderlin 1988, pp. 230–31, l. 1396–98). In this formulation, the use of the preterit "wußte" rather than the present "weiß" ("know"), together with the use of the past participle "angesehen" rather than the infinitive "ansehen", implies that the elided auxiliary verb would have been "hätte", as if Oedipus did not know "with which eyes" he would have seen his parents in the underworld had he been endowed with vision when he arrived there ('Ich wußte nemlich nicht, mit welchen Augen ich den Vater angesehen hätte, zum Hades wandelnd'). In this way, the verses "say" that Oedipus' arrival in the underworld has already taken place. The prospect of glimpsing his progenitors in the realm of the dead is not, in other words, presented as one that is yet to come but as a past potential that Oedipus' self-mutilation effectively allowed him to evade.

Similar implications are conveyed with a different accent when the chorus retells Oedipus' history towards the end of the play in the sequence that reads as follows:

Getroffen hattest du es über die Maas,
Und gewonnen durchaus glücklichen Reichthum,
O Zevs, und verderbet sie mit krummem Nagel,
Die wahrsagende Jungfrau,
Aufstehend in den Todten meines Landes ein Thurm,
Woher du auch mir König genannt bist.
Und geehrt am höchsten,
Im großen Thebe regierend.
Wo höret man aber jezt, von einem, der
Mühseeliger wär' im Wechsel des Lebens

In Arbeit wohnend, in Quaalen wild? (Hölderlin 1988, p. 213, l. 1222–32)

You had met the mark beyond measure and won thoroughly fortunate wealth, o Zeus, and [you] made her perish, the one with crooked talons, the soothsaying virgin, standing up as a tower amidst the dead of my land, whence you are also named king to me. And honored most highly, ruling in great Thebes. But where does one now hear of anyone who was more toilsome in the vicissitudes of life, dwelling in labor; in torments, wild?

In the corresponding passage from Sophocles' version of the text, the formulations read as follows: κατὰ μὲν φθίσας τὰν γαμψώνυχᾶ/παρθένον χρησιμώδον,/θανάτων δ'

ἐμᾶ χώρᾳ πύργος ἀνέστας/ἐξ οὗ καὶ βασιλεὺς καλεῖ ἐμὸς (“and, having made to perish utterly the crooked-taloned virgin who sang oracles, you arose, a tower in my land against deaths, whence you are called my king”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 212, l. 1206–09).¹⁸ There, the Greek construction θανάτων. . . πύργος lends itself to the interpretation that various commentators have proposed, namely “tower against death” or “tower against deaths”, where the genitive is interpreted as a genitive of separation, and πύργος is taken to signify not simply “tower” but, more specifically, “tower of defense”, as it is used in other contexts as well (Bollack 2010, 3:787–88; Finglass 2018, pp. 530–31; Kamerbeek 1967, p. 224). Hölderlin, by contrast, renders the genitive with a prepositional phrase that situates the “tower” within or in the midst of “the dead”, suggesting that Oedipus’ initial rise to rule was an ascendance over a dead polis. Thebes is characterized as an underworld, which accords, in turn, with the rhetoric that the priest of Zeus had deployed to exalt Oedipus in the prologue, where Hölderlin translates the lines σωτήρα κλῆζει τῆς πάρος προθυμίας./ἀρχῆς δὲ τῆς σῆς μηδαμῶς μεμνώμεθα,/στάντες τῆς ὀρθόν, καὶ πεσόντες ὕστερον (“one calls you a savior from out of your earlier towardness of heart, yet let us not remember the reign that was yours, such that, having stood upright, we fell again at a later time”) as follows: “Es nennt das Land/Den Retter dich vom alten wilden Sinne;/Zu wenig denkt man aber deiner Herrschaft,/Sind wir zurecht gestellt und fallen wieder” (“The land names you the savior from the old wild sense; but too little shall one think of your rule if we are set right and fall again”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 84, l. 48–50, p. 85, l. 47–50). There, the signifier for Oedipus’ former “willingness of heart” or “goodwill” (προθυμία) towards Thebes is rendered in a manner that ascribes a “wild sense” (“wilden Sinn”) to the polis, drawing out the associations of θυμός (“temper”, “seat of the passions”) with “rage” (ὀργή), and associating this wilder, “aorgic” sense at the root of προθυμία with the Thebans’ senses during the epoch of the Sphinx.¹⁹ Insofar as these associations do not correspond with the sense that προθυμία generally conveys in Greek, Schadewaldt cites this passage as an example of the way in which Hölderlin often seems not to “connect the word with the right sense” or to find “the nuance of sense” that is “demanded” in the particular “passage” (Schadewaldt 1966, p. 120). Yet in ascribing a “wild” disposition to the Thebans in his construal of σωτήρα τῆς πάρος προθυμίας, Hölderlin indicates that the devastation wrought by the Sphinx was not, or not merely, an external misfortune from which the Thebans needed to be saved but a state of wild passion and a preponderance of the “aorgic” tendency, which had rendered the city akin to the “wild world of the dead” (“wilden Welt der Todten”) so long as it was not set right (ἐς ὀρθόν) through Oedipus’ intervention (Hölderlin 1988, p. 418).²⁰ In this way, the “wild sense” that the priest attributes to Thebes anticipates the chorus’s claim that Oedipus rose as a “tower amidst the dead of [its] land” in its recapitulation of Oedipus’ trajectory. Between these two passages from, respectively, the beginning and the end of the play, the Thebans are presented as dwelling in a state of death when Oedipus first arrived, which is also the state to which Thebes has returned in the present reign of corporeal disease and disturbed senses, forming, as Hölderlin writes in his “Remarks”, “a world” of “plague and sense-confusion and universally enflamed soothsaying spirit” (“Pest und Sinnesverwirrung und allgemein entzündetem Wahrsagergeist”) (Hölderlin 1988, pp. 257–58).

Tiresias’ placement of himself and Oedipus among the dead “here below” thus finds resonance in the public discourse of the priest and the chorus, where death is interpreted as a possible mode of existence, and Oedipus is viewed as a “tower amidst the dead of my land” (“in den Todten meines Landes ein Thurm”). But whereas the priest of Zeus had emphasized Oedipus’ resurrection of the polis from the wilderness and death that had prevailed under the influence of the Sphinx, the chorus’s later formulation implies that the population remained dead even as Oedipus rose. In this way, the chorus also places Oedipus on a par with the Sphinx and, thus, with an agent of death, which the syntactic ambiguity of Hölderlin’s verses further underscores, insofar as the participial phrase “Aufstehend in den Todten meines Landes” may be construed not only as a further determination of Oedipus’ rise but also as an appositional determination of the “wahrsagende[n] Jungfrau”.²¹ The fact that the Sphinx and Oedipus are equally plausible subjects of the participle “aufstehend”

corresponds with the fundamental ambiguity of Oedipus; for if the plague that is besetting the city at the outset of *Oedipus the King* is the effect of the pollution caused by Oedipus' crimes, then his arrival, like the arrival of the Sphinx, is one that plays a privileged role in catalyzing a deadly epidemic of "wild sense" where disease, anxieties, and deaths proliferate (Hölderlin 1988, pp. 83, 95, 97). As Jacques Lacan astutely observes in his seminar on *The Logic of the Phantasm*: "The full jouissance of the king of Thebes and the Savior of the people, of the one who raises the scepter that had fallen [...] this jouissance, what does it cover? The rotting decay [*pourriture*] that finally explodes with the plague" (Lacan 2023, p. 307). By the time the chorus recapitulates Oedipus' history in the end, Oedipus not only figures among the dead but also as a Sphinxlike savior who revived the city in the past only in order to give new impetus to the spread of death and devastation.

Whether it is an issue of the narrower circle that Tiresias and Oedipus foreground, naming, respectively, the hatred of Oedipus' relatives "here below" and the unbearable prospect of a parental encounter in the underworld, or whether it is a matter of the dead population that the chorus evokes in recalling Oedipus' defeat of the Sphinx, Oedipus' drama is one that has, from his arrival in Thebes onward, played out within the "eccentric sphere of the dead". This sphere is nowhere in particular, and it knows no definite bounds; rather, it is the spacetime that takes shape wherever absent instances of power and wilderness prevail over the present. Although it is emphatically associated with Oedipus, then, the incursion of the dead upon the living as well as the concomitant spread of "wild sense" depend first and foremost upon the symbolic nexus in which a "curse" ("Fluch") can outlast its sources in order to expel the accursed "from the land" ("aus dem Land") (Hölderlin 1988, p. 123, l. 424); the hatred of a murdered father can turn the here-and-now of the guilty son into a "here" that is "below" (Hölderlin 1988, p. 123, l. 421); and the seemingly living members of a plague-ridden city can already find themselves submerged in an "abyss" that turns their world into an underworld ("heben kann das Haupt/Vom Abrund sie nicht mehr") (Hölderlin 1988, p. 83, l. 23–24).

It would exceed the scope of this essay to offer detailed commentaries upon all of the passages where the independence of this symbolic nexus from embodied, "living" presence is made pronounced.²² Yet, the consequences of the symbolic determination of sense and space, life and death, are perhaps most drastically exposed in the speech of the messenger whose report of Jocasta's suicide and Oedipus' self-blinding culminates in the announcement that Oedipus continues to beget ills with his wife even after she has ended her life:

Und so frohlokend stieß er öfters, einmal nicht,
Die Wimpern haltend, und die blutigen
Augäpfel färbten ihm den Bart, und Tropfen nicht,
Als wie von Mord vergossen, rieselten, sondern schwarz
Vergossen ward das Blut, ein Hagelregen.
Aus einem Paare kam's, kein einzeln Übel,
Ein Übel zusammen erzeugt von Mann und Weib. (Hölderlin 1988, p. 221, l. 1305–11)

And so, rejoicing, he thrust often, not once, holding the lashes, and the bloody apples of the eye colored his beard, and drops trickled down, not, as if shed from murder, but blackly the blood was shed, a rain of hail. From a single pair it came, no single evil, an evil engendered together by man and wife.

Connected to Jocasta only by the "golden needles" (χρυσήλατους περόνας, "die goldenen Nadeln") that he takes from her robe, this minimal metonymic link between her needles and her body would seem to be all that it takes for the self-mutilation of Oedipus to be eroticized, which Hölderlin underscores in rendering the participle that, in Greek, suggests the utterance of a refrain (ἐφύμνω) with "frohlokend" ("rejoicing") (Finglass 2018, p. 557). Through the metal accessories that symbolically pin him to her, Jocasta remains instru-

mental as Oedipus performs a simultaneously punitive and copulative act of penetration while ejaculating cries of joy. And just as their intimacy comes to hinge upon metallic matters, so, too, does the bodily fluid that Oedipus sheds over Jocasta's corpse assume the appearance of an aorgic meteorological phenomenon rather than that of blood flow: "drops trickled down, not, as if shed from murder, but blackly the blood was shed, a rain of hail [ῥμβρος χαλάζης, *ein Hagelreegen*]"²³ What is engendered in this wild pairing of destructive drives and piercing metal is dead matter, petrified hail. Nearly every element of eroticism becomes emphatically marked as dead, from Oedipus' partner to their offspring. Ultimately, however, this distinction holds true for himself as well insofar as the organs that he attacks bear a privileged association with his proper name, the first part of which spells "knowing" (οἶδα, "I know") from εἶδον ("I saw"), in addition to "swelling" (οἰδέω, "I swell").²⁴ In piercing his eyes, Oedipus joins the dead Jocasta not merely in spawning inorganic hail but also in begetting the symbolic annihilation of "Oedipus" as the one who "sees" and "knows". This scene of suicide, sex, and generation, among partially inanimate matters, is possible only on the basis of the symbolic nature of life and death.²⁵

Yet, it is also upon this basis that Oedipus' violent performance of symbolic annihilation legibly functions as a repetition. If to be "dead" is to be discursively situated in a particular way, located in the symbolic arena of "wild sense", then Oedipus' life will have unfolded within this topos from the outset, long before his reenactment of murder and incest over Jocasta's dead body. The precedence of death over life in Oedipus' case is made explicit, at the latest, when a Corinthian messenger and a former servant of Laios deliver speeches that convince Oedipus to identify with the infant whom Laios and Jocasta intended to expose on Cithaeron so as to circumvent the prophecy that "it would kill the parents" ("Es tödte die Eltern, war das Wort") (Hölderlin 1988, p. 211). It is upon hearing this latter "word" of his intended death that Oedipus cries the following:

Iu! Iu! das Ganze kommt genau heraus!

O Licht! Zum letztenmal seh' ich dich nun!

Man sagt, ich sei gezeugt, wovon ich nicht

Gesollt, und wohne bei, wo ich nicht soll', und da,

Wo ich es nicht gedurft, hab' ich getödtet. (Hölderlin 1988, p. 211, l. 1207–11)

Io! Io! the whole comes out exactly! O light! For the last time I see you now!

One says that I was begotten by those of whom I should not have been and dwell where I should not, and there, where I was not permitted, I have killed.

Although, as Frederick Ahl has meticulously argued, no conclusive evidence is provided by either of the messengers who provoke these conclusions, their words produce the effect of truth, and that truth entails that Oedipus' entire life, from conception onwards, "should not" have been (Ahl 1991, p. 207).²⁶ Such is the discordance at the core of Oedipus' existence within the symbolic order, which Hölderlin exaggerates further in this passage through the "hard jointure" of Oedipus' outcries ("Iu! Iu!") with a confession that takes the form of reported speech rather than first-person narrative ("Man sagt, ich sei").²⁷ In this way, Oedipus repeats through the modulation of his enunciations the reduction that he has undergone, first, in learning that his life has been, before all else, an effect of others' discourse and, second, in learning that this discourse has defined him both as one who was meant by his parents not to live and as one who was destined to violate those who gave him life. All that remains of Oedipus in the wake of these deaths—both the death that he escaped and the deaths that he caused—is an instance of speech who cannot but cancel himself in addressing the untenable place among the living and the dead that he has been assigned. This place is untenable because it is constituted by the mutually incompatible parental and oracular injunctions that have determined his life to be a course of annihilation that should have been annihilated in advance.

It is also in accordance with this extreme discordance that Oedipus will reprise his history once again under the auspices of negation, beginning with a curse that gives way to an impossible wish:

Zu Grunde gehe, wer es war,
 Der von der wilden
 Bewanderten Haide die Füße
 Erlöst' und von dem Mord
 Errettet und erhielt, zu Dank
 Nichts that er. Denn damals gestorben
 Wär' ich den Lieben nicht, nicht mir ein solcher Kummer.
 [...] Wohl wäre ich nicht der Vaters Mörder
 Gekommen noch der Bräutigam genannt,
 Von denen ich erzeugt ward,
 Mühselig bin ich nun. (Hölderlin 1988, p. 229, l. 1377–88)

May he perish whoever it was who released the feet from the wild, traversed woodland and saved from death and preserved [them], he did nothing to be thanked. For dead at that time, I would not have been such a grief for my loved ones, nor for myself. [...] I would very well not have come, the murderer of the father, or been named the groom of those from whom I was begotten, now I am troubled.

Left in the end with nothing more to realize concerning the failed curses of his parents and the fulfilled prophecies of the oracle, Oedipus curses the man who spared his life and utters the unfulfillable wish for death that would have made his life impossible. These utterances are the sequel to the gestural repetition of his history that Oedipus had performed with Jocasta's needles, just as his self-negating confession in the form of reported speech was the prelude to the latter.

Different as these iterations of Oedipus' symbolic annihilation may be, however, they all reaffirm the position among the dead that Tiresias first assigned to Oedipus, and they demonstrate the "wild sense" that prevails in the speech of a tragic subject who is situated exactly in the zone that, in his analyses of Sophocles' *Antigone*, Lacan calls "the-between-two-deaths" ("l'entre-deux-morts") (Lacan 1986, p. 369; 1992, p. 320), where corporeal death has not yet occurred, but symbolic death in the context of social relations already "encroaches upon life", radically isolating the subject by reducing the subject to "the cut [coupure] that the very presence of language installs in the life of man" (Lacan 1992, pp. 285, 279; trans. modified; Lacan 1986, pp. 331, 325). Symbolic death is the a priori for Oedipus that renders the physically impossible scenario of speaking and acting when dead not only possible but also necessary. If it is thanks to the presence of language that curses and oracles will have "already named [Oedipus'] destiny even before he was born" and even killed him (Lacan 1988, p. 239),²⁸ it is also thanks to the presence of language that he can continue to speak in the wake of that "destiny" (Lacan 1986, p. 325; 1992, p. 279). "Outside of language", as Lacan further explicates, "it is inconceivable" that "the being of him who has lived" could "be detached from all he bears with him in the nature of good and evil, of destiny, of consequences for others, or of feelings for himself" (Lacan 1992, p. 279). But within language, the subject can wish for the impossible and curse all that will have been, approaching the limit of the speakable that Lacan aligns with the "cut" that splits the subject of the signifier (Lacan 1986, p. 325). The curse that Oedipus utters upon the man who spared him thus anticipates the "maledictions" that he will utter in *Oedipus at Colonus*, which constitute his ultimate refusal of the "Eros" governing intersubjective life (Lacan 1988, p. 230; 2006, p. 263).

In *Oedipus the King*, however, Oedipus is not yet at the point of cutting all familial and political ties to Thebes as he will later do at Colonus. The curse upon his anonymous childhood savior instead attests to Oedipus' more immediate desire to realize the curses of his parents retroactively, which becomes still more pronounced when Oedipus pleads with Creon not only to banish him, in accordance with the punishment that the Delphic

oracle is reported to have decreed for the murderer of Laios (Hölderlin 1988, pp. 235–37, l. 1464–65; cf. Hölderlin 1988, p. 89, l. 99–100), but also to permit him to dwell upon the mountains “where my Cithaeron is here famed, which, still living, mother and father elected as gravestone for me” (“wo berühmt ist/Hier mein Kithäron, den, noch lebend,/Mutter und Vater mir zum Grabmal auserkoren”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 237, l. 1480–82). The phrase “my Cithaeron” is Oedipus’ equivalent to Antigone’s appeal to “my Zeus” (“Mein Zevs”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 309, l. 467): a singularizing gesture of appropriation and an exorbitant claim that affirms a relation beyond all communally recognized relations, and in “beyond” that is not so much transcendent as it coincides the mortal limit marked by death and burial.²⁹ It is only in dwelling upon his “elected” grave, Oedipus adds, “that I may die through those who destroyed me” (“d]aß ich durch jene sterbe, welche mich verderbt”), which is desirable not because it would fulfill the will of his dead parents nor because it would avenge their deaths but because it is solely in being exposed on Cithaeron that Oedipus “could have” died, as he will explain in a formulation where, once again, verbal form marks his death as a past event despite his being spared: “This I know very well, neither illness nor anything else could have destroyed me; not from death have I been saved but for this great evil” (“Wiewohl ich dieses weiß, mich konnte Krankheit nicht,/Nichts sonst zerstören; nicht bin ich vom Tod’/Errettet, denn zu diesem großen Übel”) (Hölderlin 1988, pp. 237–39, l. 1483–84).³⁰ In this way, Hölderlin’s version draws out the “wild sense” of Oedipus’ wish: by reformulating this thought in a counter-factual utterance that excludes all alternative manners of death besides death on Cithaeron, Hölderlin’s Oedipus does not merely isolate Cithaeron as the site where his life was meant to end but also verbally realizes his wish to be killed there in an oblique affirmation of the very death that remains to be desired. What Hölderlin says of the language of the drama as a whole could also be said of this single speech: “Alles ist Rede gegen Rede, die sich gegenseitig aufhebt” (“All is speech against speech that mutually cancels itself”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 257).

As self-contradictory as it may be for Oedipus to imply that exposure on Cithaeron has caused the very death from which he admits to being saved—which is exactly what he does in claiming not that nothing else *could* still kill him, but that nothing else “*could have*” done so (besides, presumably, what did)—his claim is also perfectly logical according to the symbolic determination of Oedipus as one who is situated among the dead from birth onward.³¹ It is along similar lines, moreover, that Hölderlin renders Oedipus’ final reiteration of his crimes to Antigone and Ismene: “Euren Vater/Ermordete der Vater, die Gebährerin/Hat er gepflügt, von der er selbst gesäet ward” (“the father murdered your father, he ploughed the child-bearer from whom he himself was sown”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 241, l. 1526–28). For in so doing, Hölderlin inverts the grammatical subject and object of Sophocles’ clause, τὸν πατέρα πατὴρ/ὕμῶν ἔπεφνε (“the father of you slew the father”), so that it is Oedipus who is said to have been murdered (Hölderlin 1988, p. 240, l. 1493–94). Both this deviation from Sophocles’ version of the passage, as well as the one that emerges through the counter-factual construction cited above, could, to be sure, be considered further errors on Hölderlin’s part when measured by the standard of syntactic and semantic equivalence. But these errors also expose the truth of the fact that, within the recent history of Theban royalty, the child of Laios and Jocasta had been pronounced dead long before the supposed stranger named Oedipus arrived in Thebes, defeated the Sphinx, and took the widowed Jocasta as his wife. Oedipus’ life initially rests upon the local fiction of his death, which therefore determines his identity even though it failed to arrive.³² Nor is this “hard jointure” without a basis in Sophocles’ Greek. Oedipus’ exposition as the exposed child of Jocasta and Laios retroactively brings about the coincidence of birth and death that Tiresias had predicted when he responded to Oedipus’ question, “[W]ho among mortals engendered me?” (τίς δέ μ’ ἐκφύει βροτῶν, “wer zeugt mich unter Menschen?”), with the words: ἥδ’ ἡμέρα φύσει σε καὶ διαφθερεῖ (“this day will engender and destroy you”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 124, l. 443); or, as Hölderlin more ambivalently puts it: “Der Tag, der! wird dich zeugen und verderben” (“The day, that one! will engender and ruin you”) (Hölderlin 1988, pp. 124–25, l. 443–44).³³ This engendering

(φύειν) and destruction (διαφθερεῖν) take place at once, and they can do so because birth and death are as much symbolic functions as the guilt that Oedipus incurs by virtue of his place within the symbolic orders of law and lineage.

It is the engendering and annihilation of a linguistic subject that are at stake in the day that arrives in *Oedipus the King*, which depends not upon the calculable diurnal course of heavenly spheres but upon the eccentric course of spoken encounters that Sophocles presents, lending truth not only to many of Hölderlin's apparent errors but also to the coincidence of birth and death that is latent in Sophocles' text and that Hölderlin's translation draws out. Such is, moreover, the truth of the error that appears in Wilhelm Böhm's edition of Hölderlin's "Remarks", where the sentence concerning Tiresias' role is printed as follows: "Er tritt ein in den Gang des Schicksals als Aufseher über die Naturmacht, die tragisch den Menschen seiner Lebenssphäre, dem Mittelpunkt seines innern Lebens in eine andere Welt entrückt und in die exzentrische Sphäre der Toten zeigt" ("He enters into the course of fate, as overseer over the power of nature that tragically transports man from his living sphere, from the middle point of his inner life into another world and shows him into the eccentric sphere of the dead") (Hölderlin 1905, 3:280).³⁴ For besides showing the power of nature to be one that "tears" ("reißt") humans into the "eccentric sphere of the dead", Hölderlin's translation also lets the power of nature be seen as one that "shows" ("zeigt") humans into that wild "sphere", which thereby shows itself to be not an area of material extension but a matter of determinations that are both established and unsettled by language, from the words of the seer to the speeches of Oedipus in the wake of his demise.

3. Signs of "Transport"

Against this background, it is possible to return to the opening of Hölderlin's "Remarks on Oedipus" and to reinterpret "tragic transport" as a movement affecting subjects of symbolically constituted life and death. Hölderlin's formulations are, to be sure, more resonant with the vocabulary of Kant than with the speeches of Sophocles' drama that have been discussed thus far. When Hölderlin first evokes "tragic transport" in his "Remarks on Oedipus", the phrase appears in an isolated line that seems to sum up his immediately preceding elaboration upon the specificity of tragic succession:

Das Gesez, der Kalkul, die Art, wie, ein Empfindungssystem, der ganze Mensch, als unter dem Einflusse des Elements sich entwickelt, und Vorstellung und Empfindung und Räsonnement, in verschiedenen Successionen, aber immer nach einer sichern Regel nacheinander hervorgehn, ist im Tragischen mehr Gleichgewicht, als reine Aufeinanderfolge.

Der tragische *Transport* ist nemlich eigentlich leer, und der ungebundenste. (Hölderlin 1988, p. 250)

The law, the calculus, the fashion in which, a system of sense-reception, the entire human, as under the influence of the element, develops, and representation and sense-reception and reasoning emerge one after another, in different successions [*Successionen*], but always according to a secure rule, [this] is, in the tragic, more equilibrium than pure succession [*Aufeinanderfolge*].

The tragic *transport* is, namely, actually empty and the most unbound.

In the next paragraph, Hölderlin unfolds the way in which this "equilibrium" presents itself ("sich darstellt") through recourse to the register of metrics:

Dadurch wird in der rhythmischen Aufeinanderfolge der Vorstellungen, worinn der *Transport* sich darstellt, *das, was man im Sylbenmaaße Cäsur heißt*, das reine Wort, die gegenrhythmische Unterbrechung nothwendig, um nemlich dem reißenden Wechsel der Vorstellungen, auf seinem Summum, so zu begegnen, daß alsdann nicht mehr der Wechsel der Vorstellung, sondern die Vorstellung selber erscheint. (Hölderlin 1988, p. 250)

Through this, what becomes necessary in the rhythmic succession [*Aufeinanderfolge*] of representations in which the *transport* presents itself is *that which one calls in metrics [Sylbenmaasse] the caesura*, the pure word, the counter-rhythmic interruption, in order, namely, to encounter the tearing alternation of representations at

its peak, such that it is no longer the alternation of representation, then, but the representation itself which appears.

Suspending all questions of meaning or plot, prophecy, and history, Hölderlin thus turns to the quantitative measures of poetics to exemplify and clarify the formal relations that render “tragic transport”, before all else, a matter of time. As Rodolphe Gasché has extensively demonstrated, what is at stake is the dimension of experience that Kant associates with “inner sense” or the a priori form of intuition comprising the “determinations of the mind” (“Bestimmungen des Gemüts”) (Kant 1998a, p. 163; 1998b, p. 109). Since this form is temporal, the determinations in question would, to be sure, include the objective order of succession that the subject grasps through the application of the category of causality to the sensible manifold of experience, which obtains even in cases where cause and effect appear to coincide, as when a ball is understood to make an impression upon a “stuffed pillow” (“aufgestopften Küssen”) (Kant 1998a, p. 312; 1998b, p. 300). But the “determinations of mind” would also, and more initially, include all notions that come to mind or, as Hölderlin puts it in his “Remarks”, all “representation and sense-reception and reasoning” (“Vorstellung und Empfindung und Rasonnement”). The latter occurrences, insofar as they affect the inner sense, would be instances of “sense-reception” (“Empfindung”) whether they proceed from outer affection or spontaneous thought.³⁵ It is consistent with this consequence of Kantian thought, moreover, that “representation and sense-reception and reasoning” can, in Hölderlin’s remarks, all appear under the auspices of the “system of sense-reception” (*Empfindungssystem*) that is said to make up “the entire human” (“de[n] ganz[en] Mensch[en]”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 250).³⁶ This would have to be the case once it is recognized that even reasoning is experienced each time only insofar as it fills a moment of time and thereby registers in the mind’s inner sense.

“Sense-reception”, however, is itself not successive since succession is already a synthetic notion, as Kant illustrates in the passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason* that was cited in the first part of this essay to contextualize Fichte’s geometrical figures for intuited subjective activity: “We cannot even represent time”, Kant writes, “without, in drawing a straight line (which is to be the external figurative representation of time), attending merely to the action of the synthesis of the manifold through which we successively determine the inner sense, and thereby attending to the succession of this determination in inner sense” (Kant 1998a, p. 258; cf. Kant 1998b, p. 195).³⁷ It is only if we “attend solely to the action in accordance with which we determine the form of *inner sense*”, he continues, that “the concept of succession” can emerge “at all. The understanding therefore does not find some sort of combination of the manifold already in inner sense” but “first produces it, by affecting inner sense” (Kant 1998a, p. 258; cf. Kant 1998b, p. 195). Yet, besides the activity of synthesis, each construal of successive moments also presupposes the punctual and fleeting “instant” (“Augenblick”) of “sense-reception” (“Empfindung”) that is anticipated and mediated through the category of “reality” or “the quantity of something insofar as it fills time” (“Quantität von Etwas, so fern es die Zeit erfüllt”), which varies in degree of intensity rather than in magnitude of extent (Kant 1998a, p. 275; 1998b, p. 244). As Gasché concisely elucidates: “The temporal modus of a single sense-reception [*einer einzelnen Empfindung*] of something in space and time is that of the instant [*Augenblick*]”; hence, “before every objective determination, apprehension as the sense-reception of something real [*Empfindung von etwas Realem*] is an apprehension of the unity of a manifold of the real [...] as sheer intensive magnitude” (Gasché 2004, p. 437).³⁸ The priority of “sense-reception” in its instantaneous and intensive character over the derivative, synthetic form of succession is, in turn, the presupposition that would allow one to claim as Hölderlin does that the elements of temporal experience may enter into another arrangement than that of “pure succession”.

The other presupposition underlying Hölderlin’s initial remarks on tragic temporality, however, is that the category of reality, as well as the temporal form of its reception, are linguistic functions.³⁹ Hence, the Kantian question of the a priori conditions and limitations of cognition is reformulated at the outset of Hölderlin’s “Remarks on Oedipus” in terms of

the poetic “principles and limitations” (“Prinzipien und Schranken”) by which something might show “that it is something, i.e., that it is cognizable in the means (moyen) of its appearance” (“daß es Etwas ist, d.h. daß es in dem Mittel (moyen) seiner Erscheinung erkennbar ist”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 249). Similarly, Kant’s claim regarding the way in which the “matter” (“Materie”) of a given “sense-reception” (“Empfindung”) “cannot be anticipated” is transferred in Hölderlin’s “Remarks” to the “living sense” (“lebendige[n] Sinn”) of poetic composition, which, like the material content of sensation, “cannot be calculated” in advance (Kant 1998a, p. 291; 1998b, p. 266; Hölderlin 1988, p. 250). Elsewhere, in another famous text on tragedy, Hölderlin explicitly characterizes “the tragic” as a signifying structure of intensive magnitude in which “the sign is, in itself, unmeaningful, without effect, but the original is straight out. Properly speaking”, he continues, “the original can appear only in its weakness, yet insofar as the sign is posited in itself as unmeaningful = 0, the original, the concealed ground of every nature can present itself” (“Im Tragischen nun ist das Zeichen an sich selbst unbedeutend, wirkungslos, aber das Ursprüngliche ist gerade heraus. Eigentlich nemlich kann das Ursprüngliche nur in seiner Schwäche erscheinen, insofern aber das Zeichen an sich selbst als unbedeutend = 0 gesetzt wird, kann auch das Ursprüngliche, der verborgene Grund jeder Natur sich darstellen” (Hölderlin 1979, p. 383).⁴⁰ At issue in these formulations concerning degrees of meaning and force is not the conscious subject of Kantian “sense-reception” but rather the sense of the tragic sign that presents “the concealed ground of every nature” to the degree that its meaning is “posited” as null. In this way, as Gasché points out, Hölderlin adopts “Kantian” terms for the intensive continuum of “sense-reception” to describe the dynamic structure of the linguistic sign (Gasché 2004, p. 437).⁴¹

This connection establishes a continuum between the Kantian formulations that Hölderlin deploys at the outset of his “Remarks” and the language of the tragedy by Sophocles that he translates. The “Remarks on Oedipus” formally indicate that reality, meaning, effect, intensity, and time would all be at stake in the spoken signs of Sophocles’ drama. Thus, when Hölderlin writes in his “Remarks on Oedipus” that “tragic *transport* is, namely, actually empty”, this transport may be read as an alternative articulation for the evacuation of sense that he associates elsewhere with the tragic sign, whose emptiness of meaning allows it to serve as a vehicle for the presentation of what Hölderlin calls “the concealed ground of every nature”. Insofar as it is “concealed”, moreover, this ground lends itself to alignment with death and the dead, especially if, as Hölderlin writes in “The Fatherland in Decline”, there are always two sides to the texture of linguistically structured experience, “so that [. . .] little or nothing subsisting as living” appears on the one side and “all seems to lie on the other”, foreclosing access to whatever dead possibilities may remain latent (“so daß in ihm, so wie in der Sprache, von einer Seite weniger oder nichts lebendig Bestehendes von der anderen Seite alles zu liegen scheint”) (Hölderlin 2008, p. 153; trans. modified; Hölderlin 1979, p. 136). Yet, whether or not it is the other side of the meaningful and efficacious sign—the dead side that appears to be nothing and that therefore escapes all but formal indications—the “concealed ground of every nature” would still be a dimension of language to the extent that it can be mediated by signs. Similarly, the empty “sense-reception” that distinguishes the tragic sign would still be related to the subject of experience that concerns Kant insofar as Hölderlin defines “the entire human” in his “Remarks” as “a system of sense-reception” (Hölderlin 1988, p. 250). But the latter system would have to be understood not as an organization of the mind but as an organization of signs to which the human is subjected.

Remote as the opening passages of Hölderlin’s “Remarks on Oedipus” may at first seem to be from Sophocles’ drama, then, the structure of linguistic experience that he elaborates there may be read to correspond with the many passages that register the vicissitudes of “sense-reception” that linguistic signs undergo as they lose or accrue effect, and as the personae of the drama come to be affected by these affections of the sign. As Ian Balfour has briefly but incisively observed in his commentary on Hölderlin’s “Remarks on Oedipus”, Tiresias’ “speeches” constitute a “discourse with a not-yet-real referent” and thus

expose “the character of representation” by suspending “its function of representing the represented” (Balfour 2015, p. 77). Although they span the past, present, and future of both Oedipus and Thebes, filling the “gap” (“Lücke”) in the “course of the world” (“Weltlauf”) that had been created with the unsolved murder of Laios (Hölderlin 1988, p. 258), Tiresias’ pronouncements at the same time present an empty moment of discourse, a discourse without recognizable meaning not only for Oedipus but also for the chorus of Theban elders. Hence, in the stasimon that immediately follows Tiresias’ departure, the chorus takes his prophecies to be void by refusing to acknowledge the “conflict” that Tiresias has just evoked between Oedipus and Laios:

Denn was ein Streit ist zwischen
Den Labdakiden und Polybus’ Sohn
Nicht vormals hab’ ichs
Gewußt, noch weiß ich jetzt auch [...]. (Hölderlin 1988, pp. 129–31, l. 496–99)

For whatever a conflict there is between the Labdacidae and Polybus’ son, I did not know it before, nor do I know it even now.

Although Tiresias has revealed the conflict in question, the chorus professes to know nothing about it “even now” and thus “says” that he has not uttered signs whose meaning and effect would found a claim to knowledge on their part. Without saying so directly, in other words, they “say” that the signs he utters are “unmeaningful = 0” (Hölderlin 1979, p. 383).

For his part, Oedipus takes a violent, *ad hominem* approach to doing the same, in accordance with the way in which Tiresias’ words concern not only his knowledge, as is the case for the chorus, but also his very civic identity, casting him both as the murderer of Laios and as one who lives “entirely shamefully” (“[g]anz schändlich”) “with those most beloved” to him (“mit den Liebsten”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 117, l. 370–71). The decisive provocation, however, arrives precisely when Tiresias appeals to the “force of truth” (τῆς ἀληθείας σθένος) or the “power of truth” (“der Wahrheit Macht”) that sustains his speech, evoking the intensity and force that Hölderlin foregrounds in his theoretical remarks on the tragic sign. Acknowledging this force while denying it to Tiresias, Oedipus replies: “It holds valid, [but] not with you, to you this does not belong; blind in ear you are, in mind and eyes” (“Sie gilt, bei dir nicht, dir gehört diß nicht, / Blind bist an Ohren du, an Muth und Augen”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 119, l. 373–75). With this response, Oedipus ascribes the qualities of force and sensibility to speech in order to qualify Tiresias as a speaker who is deprived thereof: without sense, without power, and without truth. In this way, Oedipus, like the chorus, posits the signs of the seer “as unmeaningful = 0”, but he does so in placing the accent upon their “weakness” (“Schwäche”) and with reference to the very signs through which the “concealed ground” of his nature has been brought “straight out” unbeknownst to himself (Hölderlin 1979, p. 383). This nature is nothing if not the position that Oedipus holds within symbolic orders that situate him among the dead “here below” (“hier unten”), rendering his “concealed [...] nature” the side of the sign upon which “little or nothing” appears “subsisting as living” (“lebendig Bestehendes”), and in more than one sense (Hölderlin 1988, p. 123, l. 421; 2008, p. 153; trans. modified; Hölderlin 1979, p. 136).⁴²

These traits of Oedipus and Tiresias’ exchange would thus invite the alignment between Tiresias’ speech and the caesura that Hölderlin arrives upon towards the end of the first division of his “Remarks on Oedipus”, as well as the alignment between prophecy and the zero-degree tragic sign that scholars such as Balfour have proposed. But the nullification of sense and force that plays out in the dialogue between Oedipus and Tiresias is also, upon closer examination, irreducible to Oedipus’ and the chorus’s refusal to acknowledge the truth of Tiresias’ words. Just as Oedipus denies force and sight to the person, and thus to the speech, of the seer, Tiresias also emphatically denies Oedipus all “feeling” or αἴσθησις for the truth that he has conveyed, which ranges from Oedipus’ culpability in the murder of Laios to the indefinite plethora of evils in which he and his incestuously begotten children are embroiled: “Do you not feel”; Tiresias says, “the marriage, how you

have landed in good sailing upon the shoreless? The crowd of other evils *you also do not feel*", he continues, "the ones that at once strike you and your children" ("Fühlst [καταίσθη] *du* die Hochzeit, wie *du* landetest/Auf guter Schifffahrt an der Uferlosen?/Der andern Übel Menge *fühlst* [ἐπαίσθη] *du auch nicht*,/Die dich zugleich und deine Kinder treffen") (Hölderlin 1988, p. 123, l. 428–31; my emphasis). A symmetry thus emerges between these verses and Oedipus' attack upon Tiresias that is not without significance for the "tragic transport" that Hölderlin locates in the temporary interruption of succession and meaning through prophetic intervention (Hölderlin 1988, p. 250). For Oedipus, Tiresias' words have no true power, and for Tiresias, Oedipus' responses have no sense, creating a deadlock that is also an equilibrium. It is this tense balance between Tiresias' and Oedipus' respective affirmations and denials that arguably brings the successive movement of the drama to a breaking point and temporarily deprives the linguistic sign of meaning and effect. Not only the truth but also the status of those who claim to pursue or convey it has become undecidable: is the highest instance of political authority in Thebes a criminal, or does the seer with supposed access to the divine lack sight? At the same time, what is thereby rendered questionable far exceeds the two nominal personae who are in conflict. Nothing less than the very foundation of symbolic authority comes to be at stake as public discourse supports the claims of Oedipus, whereas Tiresias locates the "power of truth" with the gods and the dead, i.e., with those instances of speech who are not present, but who function as "pure word" (Hölderlin 1988, p. 250).⁴³ As the dialogic opposition between them unfolds, different institutions of significance and truth are alternately invoked and called into question, suspending the very possibility of meaningful and efficacious discourse.

Unlike in Hölderlin's remarks on the caesura or in his poetological fragment on the tragic sign, however, this suspension is made pronounced in Sophocles' episode through the rage—the "wild sense"—that supplements the absence of sense and the vacuum of authority that temporarily opens. The chorus will respond to Oedipus' attack upon Tiresias by ascribing rage to both of them: "They seem to us to be said in rage at once, the words of that one and yours, Oedipus" ("Es scheinen uns zugleich von dem die Worte/Im Zorn [ὀργῇ] gesagt und deine, Oedipus") (Hölderlin 1988, p. 121, l. 409–10). In so doing, the chorus places both speakers under the aegis of the "wild sense" ("wilden Sinn") that the priest of Zeus had associated with the influence of the Sphinx and that Hölderlin will associate with the "wild world of the dead" ("wilden Welt der Todten") in his "Remarks on Antigone" (Hölderlin 1988, pp. 85, 418).⁴⁴ It will be to this rage that Hölderlin recurs again in his "Remarks" when he underscores how the "peaceful" ("[f]riedliche") speech of the chorus, precisely because it is peaceful, is also not conciliatory but rather conflicted with the dialogue, which, in turn, aims to "tear the soul" of the chorus in what Hölderlin calls "its"—the dialogue's—"enraged sensibility" ("in seiner zornigen Empfindlichkeit") (Hölderlin 1988, p. 257).⁴⁵ This "enraged sensibility" of the dialogue is the wild and deadly correlate to a situation in which the symbolic basis of speech is rent, voiding the sense or "sense-reception" ("Empfindung") of the sign as such.⁴⁶ It is therefore not only through the breach in symbolic foundations that arrives with the deadlock between Tiresias and Oedipus but also through the wild and deadly rage that arises in this gap that "tragic transport" can be seen to occur as humans are torn "from the middle point of [their] inner life [...] into the eccentric sphere of the dead" (Hölderlin 1988, p. 251).

This moment of nullified signs and intense rage does not, however, merely mark the pause that precedes the increasingly rapid movement toward catastrophe where, as Hölderlin puts it in his remarks, "raging unmeasure [zornig[e] Unmaas], [...], in destructive jouissance [zerstörungsfroh], merely follows the riptide of time [der reißenden Zeit]" (Hölderlin 1988, p. 253). It is also already a turning point. For if the presumed validity of public discourse prevails up to Tiresias' entrance "into the course of fate" (Hölderlin 1988, p. 251), Tiresias' initially void declarations will accrue force and meaning over the remainder of the drama.⁴⁷ The supposedly empty signs of the seer already begin to gain sense for Oedipus when Jocasta reveals the details of Laios' fatal journey, describing the route that Laios took, as well as his physical likeness to Oedipus (Hölderlin 1988, p. 161). Having heard

her account, Oedipus responds: “Poor me. I may well have, as I violently broke out just now in curses, known nothing! [. . .] Violently I fear whether the seer may not be seeing” (“Ich armer. Wohl hab’ ich, da ich in Flüche/Gewaltig ausbrach eben, nichts gewußt! [. . .] Gewaltig fürcht’ ich, daß nicht sehend sei der Seher”) (Hölderlin 1988, pp. 161, l. 764–67).⁴⁸ When Jocasta adds the further detail that Laios was in the company of four men with only one wagon, Oedipus cries out again: “Woe, woe, now it is revealed” (“Weh! Weh! nun ist es offenbar”) (Hölderlin 1988, pp. 161, l. 774). Initially declared null, Tiresias’ utterances thus turn out to be the third party of this dialogue; they are what provoke outcries of pain, and they are what new tidings are interpreted to contest or to confirm.

But it is when a former servant of Laios reports the prophetic motives for Laios’ and Jocasta’s decision to kill their child that Oedipus’ outcries suggest that he has finally received, sensed, and felt the full reality of Tiresias’ prophecies. “Io, io, that all of these things should come out clearly” (ἰού, ἰού, τὰ πάντα ἄν ἐξίκοι σαφῆ), Oedipus begins, which Hölderlin renders: “Tu! Iu! das Ganze kommt *genau heraus*” (“Io! Io! The whole *comes out exactly*”), echoing his formulation for the tragic sign: “Now, in the tragic, the sign is, in itself, unmeaningful, without effect, but the original *is straight out*” (“Im Tragischen nun ist das Zeichen an sich selbst unbedeutend, wirkungslos, aber das Ursprüngliche *ist gerade heraus*”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 211, l. 1207; 1979, p. 383; my emphasis). What ensues is Oedipus’ violent reenactment discussed above of the “entirely shameful” comportment that Tiresias had ascribed to him, as Oedipus penetrates his eyes with the needles that he takes from Jocasta’s robes, coupling self-punishment and copulation to yield “an evil engendered together by man and wife” (“Ein Übel zusammen erzeugt von Mann und Weib”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 221, l. 1311). And when Oedipus returns to the stage blinded, his speech will henceforth consist of virtually nothing but a series of further variations upon his criminal history in which he figures not only as the agent of murder and incest but also as one who has already been long pronounced dead.⁴⁹

The empty signifiers of Tiresias’ prophecy thus become fulfilled, and those of Oedipus become annulled, reducing the rupture that had opened with the discrepancy between the signs of the seer and the “representation and sense-reception and reasoning” of public discourse (Hölderlin 1988, p. 250). In his translation of *Oedipus the King*, Hölderlin draws out these qualitative alterations of the linguistic sign, from the crisis in authority that suspends significance to the “wild sense” that prevails in the absence of an internally consistent symbolic order, allowing life and death to coincide to the very degree that the “power” of prophetic “truth” approaches a maximum. In the first division of his “Remarks on Oedipus”, Hölderlin offers a formal description of this dynamic that accentuates its implications for the temporality of experience, whose transcendental forms and categories Hölderlin reconceives, in a departure from Kant, as determinations of language. Inner sense, sense-reception, quality, and reality become articulated there and elsewhere in Hölderlin’s poetological writings as affections of the sign rather than affections of the mind. But as the initial nullification and incremental realization of Tiresias’ prophecies indicate, the formal structure of linguistic experience that Hölderlin elaborates also entails that each subject of language and each worldly nexus are structurally exposed to vicissitudes that may interrupt the course of succession, reconfigure the historical past, expose the latent side of the discursive world, and draw human life into the “eccentric sphere of the dead” (Hölderlin 1988, p. 251).

Tragedy emerges as a function of both transcendental linguistic structures and contingencies that bring the symbolic order to a breaking point. Since these structures and contingencies are also those that shape the meaning of reality and the order of succession, tragedy emerges as a historical structure as well, exposing both poetry and experience to be a question “of knowing where there may ever yet [. . .] reside something that would be of the order of prophecy”—and where we may stand with the dead (Lacan 2024, p. 299).

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Notes

- ¹ All translations, unless otherwise noted, are mine (KM). It should be noted that the verb that is rendered “transports” in the passage cited above is “entrücken”, whose connotations include “spiritual transport”, as Priscilla Hayden-Roy has kindly and helpfully reminded me in a personal communication from 23 November 2024.
- ² There is a theoretically and philosophically inflected range of commentaries on Hölderlin’s “Remarks on Oedipus” that are centered primarily upon Hölderlin’s initial, more formal remarks on the caesura; among the most far-reaching contributions on this aspect of the “Remarks on Oedipus” and “Remarks on Antigone” are Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s study of the “Caesura of the Speculative” and the responses that it has not ceased to provoke. Building upon his prior arguments that Hölderlin’s notion of tragic “transport” displaces Aristotelian “katharsis” to the drama itself, whose “antagonism” is purified through “infinite separation”, Lacoue-Labarthe construes this “transport” as an “active neutrality” that inhibits privileging any direction of representational succession, issuing into the momentary “absence of every ‘moment’” and thereby reestablishing equilibrium in the face of radical and irrecoverable “loss” (Lacoue-Labarthe 1986, pp. 67–68; 2000, p. 127). This suspension does not, however, “suppress the logic of exchange and alternation” but rather preserves that logic in and through this pause; in this way, the caesura exposes, too, the “(dis)appropriation” (“(dé)propriation”) that “secretly constitutes” the “speculative” (Lacoue-Labarthe 1986, pp. 67–68). While addressing the strengths of Lacoue-Labarthe’s argument, Samuel Weber suggests that if emptiness and *unboundedness* are, as Hölderlin says, characteristic of “tragic transport”, then the caesura would have to be interpreted as a *binding* instance; only then, he argues, could an equilibrium among moments established (Weber 2016, p. 49). Weber accordingly reads Tiresias’s arrival as the caesura that interrupts Oedipus’ present search for the murderer of Laios in a manner that binds Oedipus’ project back to its mythic inception, and he interprets the “eccentric sphere of the dead” to signify that which exceeds finitude individual and collective awareness (Weber 2016, pp. 52, 57). Reinterpreting the function of the caesura as the interruption that first “makes it possible to confront reality *as such*”, which presupposes each time “a suspension, a pause” that allows it to come to view, Françoise Dastur contests the construal of Hölderlin’s caesura as a “‘caesura of the speculative’ in the sense that it would interrupt the speculative process of self-reflection” (Dastur 1997, pp. 69–70, cf. 74). Complementing Lacoue-Labarthe’s and Dastur’s studies, which hint only briefly towards the relevance of Immanuel Kant’s thought to Hölderlin’s articulation of the caesura, Rodolphe Gasché has developed a compelling demonstration of how Hölderlin’s “Remarks” cannot be understood without considering the way in which he operates with concepts drawn from Kant’s first critique, arguing that the “caesural cut in phenomenality” exposes the “fundamental character of time” that Kant elaborates as the “instant” (“Augenblick”) of “affection of the inner sense” (Gasché 2004, pp. 433, 435). Even those scholars who discuss the connections between Hölderlin’s “Remarks” and his translation in greater detail, however, tend not to examine the significance of the “eccentric sphere of the dead”. Death is rapidly aligned with the obscure and the cold, and no analysis is developed concerning its assignment to a “sphere” when Wolfgang Schadewaldt writes: “After Tiresias has spoken his revelatory word, Oedipus in *Oedipus the King*, just as much as Creon in *Antigone*, is swung about like the comet at its perihelium, and they torn from now on upon an eccentric course into the sphere that is remote from the sun, which is the sphere of the dark, the cold, and death” (“Ödipus in ‘König Ödipus’ ebenso wie Kreon in der ‘Antigone’ werden, nachdem Teiresias sein offenbarendes Wort gesprochen hat, von nun an wie der Komet im Perihel herumgeschwungen und auf exzentrischer Bahn in die sonnenferne Sphäre hingerissen, die die Sphäre des Dunkels, des Kalten, des Todes ist”) (Schadewaldt 1966, p. 138). Over the course of her excellent study of the way in which Hölderlin reconceives tragedy after his unfinished *Empedokles*-project as a “form of presentation that makes the materiality of the sign and the insuperable difference between signifier and signified the point of departure for tragic presentation” (“Darstellungsform, die die Materialität des Zeichens und die unüberwindbare Differenz zwischen Signifikant und Signifikat zum Ausgangspunkt der tragischen Darstellung macht”), Anja Lemke argues: “The caesura as the interruption of dialogic exchange no longer presents the entrance of the power of nature into the tragic occurrence as a linguistic structure of referentiality; the sign is rather posited ‘=0’” (“Die Zäsur als Unterbrechung der Wechselrede stellt den Eintritt der Naturmacht in den tragischen Geschehensvollzug nicht mehr als sprachliche Verweisstruktur dar, das Zeichen wird vielmehr ‘=0’ gesetzt”), but she only briefly notes the implications of this reading for an interpretation of the “sphere of the dead”, which she equates with an exposition to the “moment of finitude” (“Moment des Endlichen”) (Lemke 2004, pp. 413, 414). Giving less weight to the oracular and mythic significations that the caesura might expose than to the rearrangement of sense that it prepares, Gabriel Trop interprets the caesura to mark a moment of “unintelligibility” in which the death of both the “tragic hero” and the “extant normative order” compel “the entire culture” to “rethink” itself and “fill the void of pure possibility” but without entering further into the implications of the “sphere of the dead” as a region with a distinct structure and dynamic (Trop 2013, p. 594).
- ³ David Farrell Krell more briefly alludes to this connection in his monograph on *The Tragic Absolute*, where he argues that “the appearance of Tiresias marks the moment of caesura, or counterrhythmic interruption, if only because Tiresias is the mediator between the immortals under the aegis of Zeus and the mortals under the reign of nature’s more aorgic power, represented by

Kronos the Titan. The more aorgic power of nature is the power that will eventually transport mortals to the underworld" (Krell 2005, p. 303; cf. p. 299).

- 4 Dahlke interprets these coordinates along the lines of the death drive, or the unconscious and destructive "desire for death" ("Todesbegehren") of which Tiresias gives word, and she argues that, whereas Hölderlin presents the aorgic as a natural force in the "Basis of Empedocles", he reconceives it as a linguistic function in his "Remarks on Oedipus": "Hölderlin now approximates the recognition that destructive forces do not radiate from the aorgic [thrust] of spirit alone, but that an aorgic force is to be supposed in language itself, which must dissolve all, lead all into lifelessness, and annihilate all limits, forms, and differences, and, ultimately, language itself" ("Hölderlin nähert sich nun der Erkenntnis, dass die zerstörerischen Kräfte nicht allein vom Aorgischen des Geistes ausstrahlen, sondern auch eine aorgische Kraft in der Sprache selbst zu vermuten ist, die alles auflösen, alles ins Leblose überführen und alle Grenzen, Formen und Unterschiede und schließlich die Sprache selbst vernichten muss") (Dahlke 2008, p. 474). Drawing upon Jacques Lacan's discussions of foreclosure and the Name-of-the-Father, Dahlke also reads Hölderlin's formulations for the eccentric sphere of the dead as indications of the "Loch" or "hole" in Hölderlin's subjective economy "in which the dead father is absent" ("in dem der tote Vater abwesend ist"); hence, she argues that it is "to the extent that he approaches this absence" ("in dem Maße, wie er sich diese Abwesenheit nähert") that "destructivity is released" ("die Destruktivität frei [wird]") and that "death arrives in the presence of Hölderlin's language" ("der Tod in der Gegenwart der Sprache Hölderlins an[kommt]") (Dahlke 2008, p. 457).
- 5 Emphasizing the rhetoric of "protection" that Hölderlin deploys in his "Remarks" on the caesura, which intervenes towards the beginning of those tragedies in which "the first half, so to speak, must be protected against the second" ("die erste Hälfte gleichsam gegen die zweite geschützt [werden muss]"), Dahlke also underscores the consistency that Hölderlin now presents as an effect of the caesura: "the caesura should thus not only tear away and tear forth, as from a middle point, but serves the protection of something as well" ("die Zäsur soll also nicht nur hin- und fort- sowie aus dem Mittelpunkt reißen, sondern sie dient auch dem Schutz von etwas") (Dahlke 2008, p. 495). She does not, however, speak of the consistency that is suggested by Hölderlin's use of the signifiers "sphere" ("Sphäre") and "world" ("Welt") with respect to the "eccentric sphere of the dead, of the aorgic, that has irrevocably opened with the caesura in Hölderlin's poetics" ("exzentrischen Sphäre des Toten, des Aorgischen, die sich mit der Zäsur unwiderruflich in Hölderlins Poetik geöffnet hat") (Dahlke 2008, p. 495).
- 6 In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant presents "reciprocal relation" ("Wechselwirkung") as a causal concept that objective simultaneity presupposes, insofar as the "perception" of one object followed by the "perception" of another could not yield the understanding that "the objects are simultaneous" unless the manifold was apprehended through "a concept of the understanding" according to which "if the one is then the other also is in the same time" (Kant 1998a, p. 317; 1998b, 307). He will go on to reformulate this relation as the "reciprocal influence" ("wechselseitige[n] Einfluß") that establishes "a real community (*commercium*) of substances, without which the empirical relation of simultaneity could not obtain in experience" (Kant 1998a, p. 319; 1998b, p. 310).
- 7 The particularity of each religious sphere is especially pronounced when Hölderlin writes: "And each would, accordingly, have his proper god insofar as each has his proper sphere in which he acts efficaciously and undergoes experience, and only to the extent that multiple humans have a common sphere in which they humanly act efficaciously and suffer, that is, in which they do so in a manner that is elevated above need, only to this extent do they have a common divinity; and if there were a sphere in which all humans simultaneously lived, and with which they felt themselves to be in a relation that exceeds need, then, but only to that extent, would they all have a common divinity" ("Und jeder hätte demnach seinen eigenen Gott, in so ferne jeder seine eigene Sphäre hat, in der er wirkt und die er erfährt, und nur in so fern mehrere Menschen eine gemeinschaftliche Sphäre haben, in der sie menschlich, d.h. über die Nothdurft erhaben wirken und leiden, nur in so ferne haben sie eine gemeinschaftliche Gottheit; und wenn es eine Sphäre giebt, in der zugleich alle Menschen leben, und mit der sie in mehr als nothdürftiger Beziehung sich fühlen, dann, aber auch nur in so ferne, haben sie alle eine gemeinschaftliche Gottheit") (Hölderlin 1979, p. 45). The reason why this religiosity would correlate with the experience of "more than a machinated course" ("mehr als Maschinengang") is provided in the immediately preceding passage, where Hölderlin argues the following: "The proof lies in few words. Neither from himself alone nor solely from the objects that surround him can the human experience that there is more than a machinated course, that a spirit, a god, is in the world, but this can very well be the case in a more living relation in which he stands with what surrounds him, [a relation] that is elevated above need" ("Der Beweis liegt in wenigen Worten. Weder aus sich selbst allein, noch einzig aus den Gegenständen, die ihn umgeben, kann der Mensch erfahren, daß mehr als Maschinengang, daß ein Geist, ein Gott, ist in der Welt, aber wohl in einer lebendigeren, über die Nothdurft erhabnen Beziehung, in der er steht mit dem was ihn umgiebt") (Hölderlin 1979, p. 45). Because, moreover, the experience of a "higher" nexus of relations is irreducible to the subjective ("aus sich selbst allein") and the objective ("aus den Gegenständen") poles of experience, Hölderlin deduces that it must owe itself to an otherwise indeterminate, intensive quality, which he at first indicates with the comparative qualifier "more living" ("lebendiger") and goes on to relate to spirit and god. This qualification resonates with Hölderlin's remarks on the "living" side of language cited above, as well as with his characterization of the linguistic sign according to (intensive) degrees in a poetological fragment discussed below.
- 8 In a clause that is left incomplete, Hölderlin explicitly contrasts the maintenance of "freer relations" within the religious sphere with the enforcement of a natural right, writing that the limiting function of the latter becomes "positively" manifest only when the "relations of right" ("Rechtverhältnisse") suffer a "disturbance" ("Störung") through an "act of violence" ("Gewaltthat")

that is “in turn, inhibited and limited through violence and compulsion” (“wieder durch Gewalt und Zwang gehindert und beschränkt”) (Hölderlin 1979, p. 48). Hölderlin then goes on to add “by contrast, those freer relations, so long as they are what they are and subsist undisturbed” (“da hingegen jene freieren Verhältnisse, so lange sie sind was sie sind und ungestört bestehen”), at which point the sentence breaks off (Hölderlin 1979, p. 48).

- 9 Subjective freedom entails the existence of a world as well as the existence of other subjects who mutually recognize one another by spontaneously limiting their respective freedom because, as Fichte puts it, “the subject finds itself as something that *could* exercise its efficacy” only if there is something upon which it can act and only if it “is summoned to exercise its efficacy” in such a way that it “can just as well refrain from doing so” (Fichte 2000, p. 33; cf. Fichte 1845, SW III, p. 34). This summons can solely take place, he continues, through an encounter with another subject whom the subject posits “as free, and thus as a being that could also have overstepped the sphere that presently determines it, and could have overstepped it such that the subject would be deprived of its ability to act freely”: insofar as the other “being did not freely overstep this sphere” but rather “limited its sphere of those actions that were possible for it”, that other being has also, and in the same moment, recognized “the subject’s (formal) freedom” and “summoned the [subject] to act freely” (Fichte 2000, p. 41; cf. Fichte 1845, SW III, p. 41). Shortly thereafter, Fichte accordingly defines the “concept of individuality” as a “reciprocal concept” (“Wechselbegriff”), arguing that “[t]his concept can exist in a rational being only if it is posited as *completed* by another rational being” (Fichte 1845, SW III, p. 47; 2000, p. 45). The notion of a “reciprocal concept” is the correlate to Kant’s concept of “reciprocal relation” or “reciprocal efficacy” (“Wechselwirkung”).
- 10 Late in his first critique, Kant explicitly characterized the regulative idea of a world as a rationally necessary extrapolation from the conscious syntheses of phenomenal experience. In response to the question as to whether “there is anything different from the world which contains the ground of the world order and its connection according to universal laws”, Kant writes, first, that “the world is a sum of appearances, and so there has to be some transcendental ground thinkable merely by the pure understanding”; and then, that “we may [...] think this being different from the world in accordance with an *analogy* with objects of experience [Analogie mit den Gegenständen der Erfahrung]”, albeit “only as object in the idea and not in reality, namely, only insofar as it is a substratum, unknown to us, of the systematic unity, order, and purposiveness of the world’s arrangement, which reason has to make into a regulative principle of its investigation of nature” (Kant 1998a, pp. 618–19; 1998b, pp. 750–51).
- 11 The figure of the “eccentric path” (“exzentrischen Bahn”) is also prominent in, among others, Hölderlin’s novel *Hyperion*, on which see Bay (2002).
- 12 Even if, moreover, it were to suggest the kind of interpenetration that Hölderlin had located in the figure of Empedocles, where the aorgic begins to assume “the form of consciousness and particularity” (“die Form des Bewußtseyns und der Besonderheit”) at the apex of its conflict with formative forces, the “sphere” that Hölderlin transfers from his characterization of the living to his invocation of the dead would be just as illusory and fragile as the reconciliation of nature and art that Empedocles appears to represent (Hölderlin 1985, pp. 872, 874; 2008, pp. 146, 148).
- 13 This interpretation may, in part, be motivated by the prior phrase *ἐνθα ναίεις* (“wo du wohnst”), which exposes the possible use of the suffix *-θε* to form adverbs with a locative sense, as in *πρόσθε* (“in front”) or *ἐνθα* (“there”, “where”).
- 14 For an excellent commentary on the pivotal passages in which the Greek signifiers for “knowing” (*οἶδα*) and “where” (*ποῦ*) are deployed in a manner that renders a distorted anagram of Oedipus’ name legible, see Knox 1985, p. 184.
- 15 Wolfgang Binder also reads Hölderlin’s translation as an exposition of the “hiddenness” (“Verborgenheit”) of the divine (Binder 1992, p. 37). More recently, Dastur has interpreted tragedy as a divine event where the “frontier between the human and the divine” is tested and where the god ultimately “withdraws in order not to lose *himself* insofar as he is divine in” the “narrow familiarity with mortals” that tragic hubris threatens to establish (Dastur 1997, pp. 71, 69). She does not, however, focus on the particular translation choices that support this interpretation.
- 16 The topos of the bed is Hölderlin’s addition. The Greek passage concerning Jocasta reads *καὶ ἔξ’ ἐφ’ οὗ γυναικός, υἱός, καὶ πόσις, καὶ τοῦ πατρὸς ὁμόσπορος τε, καὶ φονεὺς*, which could be rendered: “And the woman from whom he was born, [he is] the son, and the spouse; and of the father, the same-in-seeding, and the murderer” (Hölderlin 1988, p. 126). On these lines, Jean Bollack concisely notes that “the identity of father and son in common engendering (*ὁμο-*) is the object of a destruction intimately attached to the form of their union. The son rejoins the father (cf. *τε καί*, l. 460, after two simple [instances of] *καί*), in engendering and murder, unites with him in the bed where he was born (*ὁμόσπορος*) and kills him” (Bollack 2010, 2:288; my translation). By emphatically locating two figures “in One bed” (in *Einem Bette*), with the implication that their presence occurs at the same time, Hölderlin articulates a topological order that differs from an order of material extension according to which two bodies could not occupy the same place at the same time.
- 17 The closest that Hölderlin comes to evoking a spherical domain at all in this passage occurs in his version of the verses that read *καὶ σ’ ἀμφιπλήξ, μητρὸς τε καὶ τοῦ σοῦ πατρὸς/ἐλξ’ ποτ’ ἐκ γῆς τῆσδε δεινόπους ἄρά* (“and, striking on both sides, the terrible-footed curse of the mother and your father shall one day drive you from this earth”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 122, l. 422–32): “und ringsum treffend/Vertreibt von der Mutter und vom Vater/Dich aus dem Land der Fluch gewaltig wandelnd” (“and, striking the mark *all round*, the curse drives you out of the land, the one of the mother and the father, mightily wandering”; or “and, striking *all around*, the curse drives you from the mother and the father out of the land, mightily wandering”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 123, l. 422–24; my emphasis). But even if a spherical compass is ascribed to the “curse” that “strikes the mark *all around*”, the expulsion that it is said to effect indicates an outside without center or limits, nor does the direction of the curse remain steady by the time the phrase “mightily wandering” (“gewaltig wandelnd”) arrives, which may be construed to modify either

the movement of Oedipus or the movement of the curse, loosening the implicit association of the latter with a radial extension to all points of a surrounding periphery. As in the prior lines concerning those “who are here below and above upon earth”, the course of the curse loses definition, and soon, the very ground to be traversed is replaced or liquidated through an elliptical allusion to waters as Tiresias evokes the harbors that will be filled with Oedipus’ outcries: “and of your cry, what harbor will not be full” (“Und deines Geschreies, welcher Hafen wird nicht voll seyn”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 123, l. 426–27).

- 18 Priscilla Hayden-Roy underscores the significance of the chorus’s unique assignation of the epithet “king” (βασιλεύς) to Oedipus in this passage, noting that it is only “at the moment when Oedipus is recognized at once as the son and murderer of the king, as the legitimate son of Laios and husband of his mother” (“in dem Augenblick, wenn Ödipus zugleich als Königssohn und Königsmörder, als legitimer Sohn von Laios und zugleich Gemahl seiner Mutter erkannt wird”) that the chorus calls him βασιλεύς, which title was reserved for legitimate royal successors, in distinction to τύραννος (Hayden-Roy 2022, p. 49, cf. 48).
- 19 Tiresias will soon evoke this association when he says to Oedipus, οὐκ’ ἄν περὰ φράσαιμι. πρὸς τὰ δ’ εἰ θέλεις/θυμοῦ, δι’ ὀργῆς, ἢ τις ἀγριωτάτη (“I wish to speak no further. Towards these things, if you wish, be wroth [θυμοῦ], through a rage [δι’ ὀργῆς] that is the most wild”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 114, l. 348–49). Hölderlin translates as follows: “Nicht weiter red’ ich. Zürne, wenn du willst,/Darob mit Zorn, der nur am wildesten ist” (“No further shall I speak. Be enraged if you will, and with a rage that is but the most wild”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 115, l. 347–48).
- 20 Through detailed analysis of other formulations from the priest’s description of the plague, Binder demonstrates that Hölderlin consistently tends to “subjectivize the objective occurrence and thereby make it more horrible”; he also relates this tendency to the intention that Hölderlin expresses elsewhere of making the original drama of Sophocles “more eccentric” (Binder 1992, pp. 76–77). For Binder, however, “eccentricity” is associated with the “fire from heavens” that Hölderlin finds to be the native strength of the Greeks (Binder 1992, pp. 66–70).
- 21 The ambiguity is complicated further, should one also notice that the participial phrase may also be used in apposition to Zeus, whom the chorus had apostrophized in the midst of its address to Oedipus.
- 22 To cite one more exemplary passage, Jocasta presents the dead Laios as a subject of endless talk: “Man sagte das, noch ist es nicht geendet” (“One said that, and still it has not ended”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 159, l. 751). Sophocles’ Greek implies the same: ἡὐδ’ ἔπειτα γὰρ ταῦτ, οὐδέ περ λήξαντ’ ἔχει (“these things were uttered, not yet has it abated”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 158, l. 746). Although he is dead, Laios survives thanks to his inscription in the symbolic order and continues to occupy the city in the discourse that relentlessly continues concerning his murder. As a subject of language, Laios need not figure as a living, embodied presence in order to play a major role in public life.
- 23 Both the Greek phrase concerning a “rain of hail” and the phrase suggesting that Oedipus “held up” his own eyes while striking them (ἐπαίρων βλέφαρα, “Die Wimpern haltend”) have been considered dubious. As Finglass puts it in his commentary, the collocation “does not make sense, and also violates the metre”, nor have “attempts to salvage the phrase” through emendations “been happy” (Finglass 2018, p. 558). For this reason, he recommends “deleting the lines” (Finglass 2018, p. 559).
- 24 It is from the latter verb that the messenger from Corinth derives Oedipus’ name. Although he comes to bear tidings of Polybus’ death, his further dialogue with Oedipus issues into his claims to have been the one who found and saved Oedipus in his infancy. He reports, namely, that when he received the disowned child from a shepherd on Cithaeron, the child’s feet were pierced and bound, to which he adds the following: “So daß genannt du bist nach diesem Dinge”) (“So that you were named after this thing”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 193, l. 1060). The Greek verse reads ὥστ’ ὠνομάσθης ἐκ τύχης ταύτης (“such that you were named from this chance occurrence”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 192, l. 1047). For a discussion of the significance of “chance” in this formulation, see (Knox 1985, p. 179). In his monograph on *Oedipus the King*, Knox elaborates on the many puns upon οἶδα and οἰδέω as well (Knox 1985, pp. 182–84). Frederick Ahl underscores the significance of the Corinthian messenger’s deviation from “all the previous etymological plays on Oedipus’ name up to this point in the play”, which were “based on taking the *OID* element in his name as ‘know,’ not ‘swollen’” (Ahl 1991, p. 182).
- 25 Without drawing the connection between the organ that Oedipus attacks and the significance of his proper name, Binder also suggests that Oedipus’ self-blinding is an act of symbolic annihilation, writing, “Whosoever blinds himself *thereby brings to expression* that he has nothing more to seek in the world. It is otherwise, however, than if he were to kill himself” (“Wer sich blendet, *bringt damit zum Ausdruck*, er habe in der Welt nichts mehr zu suchen. Jedoch anders, als wenn er sich tötete”) (Binder 1992, p. 52; my emphasis). Later, he reiterates: “The dead are not those who passed away here, but those who have become dead to life like Oedipus” (“Die Toten sind hier nicht die Gestorbenen, sondern die dem Leben abgestorbenen [wie] Ödipus”) (Binder 1992, p. 90).
- 26 Ahl also teases out the many contradictions and omissions with which the Corinthian messenger’s account is fraught, attributing the conviction that it inspires to Oedipus’ fears, which Jocasta had foregrounded at the start of the scene: “he proves the correctness of Jocasta’s observation that he believes the person who frightens him. He accepts, then, that he is a foundling with an astonishing lack of resistance. He seeks no further assurance as to the Corinthian’s identity or any corroboration of his claims” (Ahl 1991, p. 178).
- 27 It would seem that Hölderlin translates πέφασμαι not as the first-person perfect, middle (or passive) form of φαίνω (i.e., “I have shown myself” or “I have been shown”), but as a form of φημί (‘to say’) (“One says”, “Man sagt”). This passage could thus be read as an instance of what Hellingrath and Schadewaldt have identified as “the most conspicuous kind of errors” in Hölderlin’s

translation; namely, “the many confusions of similarly sounding words” (“die auffallendste art von fehlern sind vielleicht die vielen verwechslungen ähnlich lautender wörter”) (von Hellingrath 1910, p. 78; cf. Schadewaldt 1966, p. 120). However, these “confusions” also arguably disclose possibilities of evocation that are immanent in Sophocles’ text, where the production of sense has frequently been shown to emerge in no small part through verbal ambiguities, anagrams, paronomasias, and puns see (Ahl 1991, pp. 180–87; Knox 1985, pp. 182–84; Pucci 1979, pp. 130–33; Vernant 2001, pp. 33–36). As Pucci has elegantly put it, even if the permutations of the signifier that can be traced in the text “emerge[d]” by “chance”, they “constellate the text (δελνός(ν)... ὄνειδος(ος), 1035, etc.) and make sense in the text by creating all sorts of emphases through the sounds; it is at this level that they are subtracted from the mere irrationality of chance and become part of the rules of the game that control the text” (Pucci 1979, p. 123). To this, one might add that they are also “part of the rules of the game that control” Hölderlin’s translation.

28 In his second seminar, Lacan elaborates upon the position that Oedipus attains in the wake of the discovery that had unfolded over the course of *Oedipus the King* as follows: “When the oracle’s prophecy [*parole*] is entirely fulfilled, when the life of Oedipus has completely passed over into his destiny, what remains of Oedipus? That is what *Oedipus at Colonus* shows us—the essential drama of destiny, the total absence of charity, of fraternity, of anything whatsoever relating to what one calls human feeling” (Lacan 1988, p. 230). In his later seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan underscores that his formulations concerning Antigone’s place between two deaths are the further development of what he had “already discussed” in his interpretation of *Oedipus at Colonus* (Lacan 1992, p. 285; cf. Lacan 1986, p. 330).

29 As Lacan puts it in his analysis of Antigone’s appeal to Zeus in her rejection of Creon’s laws, “the limit in question is one on which she establishes herself, a place where she feels herself to be unassailable, a place where it is impossible for a mortal being to ὑπερδραμεῖν, to go beyond the νόμιμα, the laws. These are no longer laws, νόμος, but a certain legality which is a consequence of the laws of the gods that are said to be ἄγραπτα, which is translated as “unwritten” because that is, in effect, what it means. Involved here is an invocation of something that is, in effect, of the order of law, but which is not developed in any signifying chain or in anything else” (Lacan 1992, p. 287; cf. Lacan 1986, pp. 323–24).

30 Sophocles’ formulation, by contrast, presents an infinitive construction as the object of Oedipus’ “knowing” that does not come nearly so close to presenting Oedipus’ death on Cithaeron as a *fait accompli*: καίτοι τοσοῦτόν γ’ οἶδα, μήτε μ’ ἄν νόσον/μήτ’ ἄλλο πέρσαι μηδέν. οὐ γάρ ἄν ποτε/θνήσκων ἐσώθην, μὴ τί τω δεινῷ κακῷ (Hölderlin 1988, pp. 236–38, l.1452–54). One could approximate the syntax of the Greek lines: “And indeed, this much I know: [I know] neither illness nor anything else to be able to destroy me, for never would I, dying, have been saved, if not for terrible evil”.

31 Coming to light as the son presumed dead, Oedipus also cannot remain among the Thebans alive: “Concerning me”, Oedipus orders in the end, “do not consider it worth the trouble for this patrimonial city to have me alive as a fellow dweller” (“Mein wegen halt’ es nicht der Mühe werth/Daß mich die väterliche Stadt lebendig /Zum Mitbewohner habe”) (Hölderlin 1988, pp. 236–37, l. 1478–79).

32 As Binder concisely observes in his study of Hölderlin and Sophocles, “Jocasta no longer thinks of the child that was once exposed; it was taken from her, and the one who took it from her, Laios, is long dead” (“Tokaste denkt nicht mehr an das einst ausgesetzte Kind; es ist ihr genommen worden, und der es ihr nahm, Laios, ist längst tot”) (Binder 1992, p. 40).

33 Hölderlin’s formulation is ambivalent because his demonstrative use of the definite article “der” points to a particular day without deictically indicating that the day in question is “this one” (ἥδε) as Sophocles’ formulation had done. At the same time, the revelation that Tiresias predicts in this passage does happen over the course of the same “day” when Tiresias utters these words. At the level of dramatic logic, the “day” that Tiresias designates thus remains “this” one, creating a tension between what he says in Hölderlin’s version and the timing of what appears to unfold. This disorienting implication of Hölderlin’s translation choice, however, corresponds with the way in which the present day turns out to be thoroughly determined by other, prior moments, rendering the here and now at once another time, and exposing time to be out of joint.

34 Hellingrath mentions this mistake in his dissertation (von Hellingrath 1910, p. 70). The error is also unique to Böhm’s edition, in contrast with the other editions of Hölderlin’s translations that would appear in the twentieth century. The final word of Hölderlin’s clause as it is printed in Böhm’s edition differs from the final word that appears in Norbert von Hellingrath’s, Friedrich Beißner’s, and D.E. Sattler’s respective critical editions, where one reads instead of the “Naturmacht, die tragisch, den Menschen seiner Lebenssphäre, dem Mittelpunkt seines innern Lebens in eine andere Welt entrückt und in die exzentrische Sphäre der Todten reißt” (Hölderlin 1913, p. 177; 1952, p. 197; 1988, p. 251).

35 When Kant clarifies his reasoning for characterizing the inner sense as a form of “sensibility” (“Sinnlichkeit”) rather than spontaneity, he underscores that the very capacity to be conscious of what lies in the mind requires an affection of mind to produce the apprehension of its state: “if all of the manifolds in the subject were given *self-actively* through that alone”, he begins, “then the inner intuition would be intellectual. In human beings, this consciousness requires the inner perception of the manifold that is antecedently given in the subject, and the manner in which this is given in the mind without spontaneity must be called sensibility on account of this difference. If the faculty for becoming conscious of oneself is to seek out (apprehend) that which lies in the mind, it must affect the latter, and it can only produce an intuition of itself in such a way” (“wenn [durch das Bewußtsein seiner selbst] allein alles Mannigfaltige im Subjekt *selbsttätig* gegeben wäre, so würde die innere Anschauung intellektuell sein. Im Menschen erfordert dieses Bewußtsein innere Wahrnehmung von dem Mannigfaltigen, was im Subjekte vorher gegeben wird, und die Art, wie dieses ohne Spontaneität im Gemüte gegeben wird, muß, um dieses Unterschiedes willen, Sinnlichkeit heißen. Wenn das Vermögen sich bewußt zu werden, das, was im Gemüte liegt, aufsuchen (apprehendieren) soll, so muß es

dasselbe affizieren, und kann allein auf solche Art eine Anschauung seiner selbst hervorbringen") (Kant 1998a, pp. 189–90; 1998b, pp. 123–24). Every affection is, as Kant will later put it, an instance of "sense-reception" ("Empfindung"), and although he largely focuses upon the "sense-reception" that pertains to empirical "perception", he will also speak emphatically, albeit in passing, of the "state of representations" ("Zustand der Vorstellungen") "through which we internally determine our sense itself" ("wodurch wir unsern Sinn selbst innerlich bestimmen" (Kant 1998a, pp. 290, 374; trans. modified; Kant 1998b, pp. 265–66, 390). In his elucidating study of self-affection in Kant, Gasché offers powerful arguments that the "act by which the manifold of intuition is combined into a unity is one that attends to itself (as an act)", affecting the inner sense and "mak[ing] it possible to attend to the very concept by which the determination of inner sense occurs"; he also incisively points out that this shift in "focus" entails an "interruption of the continuous determination of inner sense", which he relates to Hölderlin's "caesura" (Gasché 2008, p. 9).

Weber underscores the fact that the "middle term" ("mittlere Terminus") of Hölderlin's triad "representation, sense-reception, reasoning" ("Vorstellung, Empfindung, Rasonnement") is also the term under which all faculties are grasped insofar as the human is defined as a "system of sense-reception" ("Empfindungssystem"), although Weber does not relate the use of "sense-reception" ("Empfindung") here to the Kantian notion of inner sense (Weber 2016, p. 60). For a broad contextualization of Hölderlin's appeal to the "entire human", see Gaier 1994.

Later, Kant will underscore the synthetic, reproductive character of succession, writing that "[i]f, in counting, I forget that the units that now hover before my senses were successively added to each other by me, then I would not cognize the generation of the multitude through this successive addition of one to the other, and consequently I would not cognize the number; for this concept consists solely in the consciousness of this unity of the synthesis" (Kant 1998a, pp. 230–31; cf. 1998b, pp. 212–13).

In his reading of Kant's transcendental "principle" of the "anticipation of perception", Werner Hamacher similarly observes that the "anticipation of the material of perception", which constitutes the a priori condition for sensation (*Empfindung*), "is not subordinated to extension in time and space and does not present a successive synthesis—but rather, as Kant writes, in each case fills 'only an instant' and immediately grasps a whole (A167/B209)"; hence, "anticipation of the material is in each case precisely a singular *instant* filling time through an intensive real" (Hamacher 2012, p. 504).

In his study of Hölderlin's notion of the human as a "system of sense-reception" ("Empfindungssystem"), Gaier also elaborates the way in which Hölderlin reconceives subjective faculties and ontological categories as "linguistic forms of being" ("Sprachformen des Seins"), but Gaier does so primarily in the context of Klopstock, Baumgarten, and Herder rather than Kant (Gaier 1994, pp. 737–38, 742–45). It is similarly a dimension of language that Werner Hamacher finds to be at stake in Walter Benjamin's articulation of intensive magnitude as a "linguistic relation", writing in his study of the "Task of the Translator" that Benjamin's "Kantianizing" formulations for translation as the "intensive, i.e., anticipatory [...] realization" of language do "not refer to an ever higher degree in the continuum of communications—in this, [...] [translation] would reach only one among the virtual infinitude of languages—but rather concern their 'buried relation' [*verborgenes Verhältnis*] (GS IV: 12)", which "is realized intensively, transcendently, and anticipatorily because no temporally, spatially, or idiomatically distinct, and thus extensively determinable language is indicated there, but rather the mere fact of uttering itself" (Hamacher 2001, p. 220; 2012, p. 528). Hamacher further reiterates that "it is only intensively, i.e., anticipatorily, that [translation] realizes the language of language because its accomplished actuality in any finite language is held back by its semantic load" (Hamacher 2001, p. 220; 2012, p. 528).

In my translation of this passage, I have borrowed "straight out" from Jeremy Adler and Charles Louth's rendition of the passage in *Essays and Letters* (Hölderlin 2009, p. 316). I thank Priscilla Hayden-Roy for encouraging me to adopt this solution for "gerade heraus".

Construing the "ground of every nature" to mean the "time itself", Gasché goes on to interpret Hölderlin's discussion of the tragic "sign" to imply that time as such would be revealed only "in a moment to which no *realitas phaenomenon* corresponds", and he suggests that time and phenomenality would be linguistic functions when he exemplifies such moments with the syntactic and metrical caesurae that repeatedly disrupt the progressive synthesis of "representations" ("Vorstellungen")—or: significations—in Hölderlin's late hymns (Gasché 2004, pp. 437, 444). What is less emphasized in Gasché's study, however, is the drastic alteration of Kantian notions that occurs when, in the poetological fragment on tragedy discussed above, Hölderlin presents the sign as the implicit subject of "sense-reception" ("Empfindung") whose "sense" or "meaning" may vary along a scale from 0 to 1, and whose approximation to zero allows the function of the sign to shift. Precisely when it ceases to receive meaning and produce effects or precisely when it is "unmeaningful" ("unbedeutend") and "without effect" ("wirkungslos"), the empty sign allows something else to emerge that Hölderlin calls "concealed ground of every nature" (Hölderlin 1979, p. 383). When Hölderlin writes in his "Remarks on Oedipus" that "tragic transport is, namely, actually empty", his assertion resonates with this fragment, in which the void sign is evoked as a vehicle for exposing grounds that would, as such, precede the possibility of meaning and efficacy.

It is in this direction that Dastur also points when she interprets the tragic protagonist to be the zero-sign of the poetological fragment on tragedy cited above: "In the particular human artform that tragedy constitutes, which brings to light precisely the veritable nature of the relation between nature and art, nature does not appear in an original manner, but through the mediation of a sign, and that sign is the tragic hero, who is the 'weakest gift' [*don le plus faible*] of nature. He is 'insignificant and without effect' (*unbedeutend und wirkungslos*) because he can do nothing against the nature or the destiny that finally come to destroy him" (Dastur 1997, p. 117). In her characterization of the tragic hero as a "sign", however, she does not enter into the way in which the tragic subject, as well as tragic destiny, are functions of the signifier.

- 43 Jean-Joseph Goux also interprets the conflict between Oedipus and Tiresias as one that concerns not merely two individuals but rather “two forms of knowledge, two rationalities, two irreconcilable modes of sovereignty [*deux savoirs, deux raisons, deux modes inconciliables de souveraineté*]. The one is an *old sage*, priest of Apollo, knower of destinies and interpreter of divine signs, perpetuator of immemorial wisdom; the other is the *young philosopher* who believes only in his proper reflection, who believes only in man, and who holds for certain only those facts which a detailed inquisition has furnished him” (Goux 1990, p. 97).
- 44 The intricate connections among rage, “wild sense”, and death are elaborated above, in my discussion of the priest of Zeus’s characterization of Oedipus as a savior.
- 45 Binder similarly emphasizes the significance of rage in this passage, writing the following: “Rage is a key word in this late language [of Hölderlin] and does not mean rage over someone or something, but precisely what the Greek word *orgé* means: an objectless being-enraged, a rage in itself, so to speak” (“Zorn ist ein Leitwort dieser späten Sprache [Hölderlins] und bedeutet nicht Zorn über jemandem oder etwas, sondern genau wie das griechische Wort *orgé* ein objektloses Zornigsein, sozusagen Zorn an sich”), although he will go on to interpret this affect as a particular “constitution of the subject in himself” (“Verfassung des Subjekts in ihm selber”), glossing over its trans- and impersonal role in the dialogue (Binder 1992, p. 97). By contrast, Jochen Schmidt underscores in his study “Der Begriff des Zorns in Hölderlins Spätwerk” that Hölderlin often ascribes “rage” (“Zorn”) to “the aorgic phenomena of nature, which are the select ones for Hölderlin” (“den aorgischen Naturerscheinungen, die für Hölderlin die auserkorenen sind”), and that it constitutes the “infinite ‘element’” (“unendliche ‘Element’”) of Hölderlin’s *Oedipus* in particular (Schmidt 1967/1968, pp. 130, 157).
- 46 It is, moreover, a similar coincidence of insensibility and resistance that Hölderlin articulates in the fifth stanza of “Brod und Wein” (“Bread and Wine”): “Unempfunden kommen sie erst, es streben entgegen/Ihnen die Kinder, zu hell kommet, zu blendend das Glück./Und es scheut sie der Mensch, kaum weiß zu sagen ein Halbgott/Wer mit Nahmen sie sind, die mit den Gaaben ihm nahn” (“Unsensed they come at first, the children strive against them, too brightly, too blindingly, it comes, the good fortune, and humans shy from them, hardly does a demigod know to say who with names they are who near him with gifts” (Hölderlin 1976, pp. 214–17, l. 73–76). The privation of “sense-reception” (*Empfindung*) that is indicated with the initial word of the stanza (“unempfunden”) marks another moment in Hölderlin’s writings where the arrival of divine gifts (if not signs) is initially without meaning or effect, although in this case, reception hinges upon the capacity to say and to name.
- 47 Or, to put it differently, the words of Tiresias will come to life, like the ever-living oracles that the chorus vaguely conjures in the first stasimon, and in formulations that Antigone will echo when she appeals to the ever-living unwritten laws of the gods: “The prophecies he flees, which, from out of the middle of the earth, fly about all the time, living” (“Die Prophezieungen fliehet er/Die, aus der Mitte der Erd’ [τὰ μεσόμφαλα γᾶς] /Allzeit lebendig fliegen umher [ἀεὶ ζῶντα περιποτᾶται]”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 129, l. 487–89). Commenting upon the difficulty that Sophocles’ genitive construction τὰ μεσόμφαλα γᾶς μαντεία poses for construing the relation between the prophecies and the navel of the earth, Bollack notes that there is no lexical or morphological indication that the oracles are emitted from the navel of the earth; instead, Sophocles’ formulations suggest that they *are* the navel of the earth even as they surround the fleeing criminal, insofar as the oracle bears “the signs and structure” of the “sanctuary from which it emanates” (Bollack 2010, 2:307). Bollack also draws a connection between the life of these oracles and the verses from *Antigone* in which the eponymous protagonist speaks of the “unwritten and unshakeable laws of the gods” (ἄγραπτα κάσφαλλῃ θεῶν νόμιμα) that “live not now and yesterday, but at all times” (οὐ γάρ τι νῦν δε κᾶχθές, ἀλλ’ ἀεὶ ποτε/ζῆ ταῦτα) (Bollack 2010, 2:308). On the characterization of Delphi as the navel of the earth, Martin West writes, “Behind it there may lie an old myth that this was the place where heaven and earth were once joined and where their separation was effected, or where there is still a line of communication between them. [. . .] It is to the cosmic centre, where heaven, earth, and underworld are all connected, that the Asiatic shaman repairs (in spirit) in order to pass from one world to another and obtain hidden knowledge, converse with the gods or the souls of the dead, and so on. [. . .] At Delphi, an oracular site on a mountain, claimed as the centre of the earth, there was said to be direct access from the sanctuary to the underworld. Thus the Delphic ‘navel of the earth’ appears as an organic element in a diviner’s cosmology” (West 1997, p. 150).
- 48 The initial words of Oedipus in Sophocles’ version include the conventional ejaculation of lament, οἶμοι τάλαια (“Oimoi, wretched me” (Hölderlin 1988, p. 160, l. 759; Finglass 2018, p. 401). In this way, Oedipus could be seen as beginning to issue the cries that Tiresias had predicted he would soon utter: “And of your cries, which harbor will not soon be full, which Cithaeron will not soon call along?” (“Und deines Geschreies, welcher Hafen wird/Nicht voll seyn, welcher Kithäron nicht mitrufen bald?”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 123, l. 426–27).
- 49 In one of those speeches, Oedipus will also reiterate nearly verbatim the terms that Tiresias had used to describe his “entirely shameful” (“ganz schändlich[e]”) manner of living with those whom he most loves, apostrophizing marriage: “O marriage, marriage! You planted me, and since you planted me, you sent out the same seed and displayed fathers, brothers, children, a single related blood, and maidens, women, mothers and *only the most shameful things* that arise among humans!” (“o Ehe, Ehe!/Du pflanztest mich. Und da du mich gepflanzt,/So sandtest du denselben Saamen aus,/Und zeigtest Väter, Brüder, Kinder, ein/Verwandtes Blut, und Jungfrauen, Weiber, Mütter,/Und *was nur schändlichstes* entstehet unter Menschen!”) (Hölderlin 1988, p. 233, l. 1429–34; my emphasis).

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