

## “A Self-Displaced Person”: Peter Szondi, Being-Jewish, Comparative Literature

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Une herméneutique différente – Hommage à Peter Szondi  
(1929-1971)

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# *“A Self-Displaced Person”: Peter Szondi, Being-Jewish, Comparative Literature*

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## **Prologue**

The association of Peter Szondi with the “Jewish question”, namely his experience of being-Jewish<sup>1</sup>, the experience of exile and of (non-)belonging, tradition and its secrets, memories, and states of oblivion, are documented in his letters and can also be traced in his scholarly writings<sup>2</sup>. Better argued: Szondi’s writings reveal, albeit in concealment, impressions, visions and ideas, tensions, anxieties, affinities, and acts of resistance towards the Jewish world. Szondi’s broken affinities to Judaism were, however, not separated from, but rather associated with his concerns regarding his own vocation, *Beruf*, as a scholar of Comparative Literature.

In what follows I will introduce – in the form of “Notes” – a few lines of thought suggesting certain correspondences between Szondi’s reflection of being Jewish and his scholarly and institutional engagement, mainly in the 1960s, during his

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<sup>1</sup> The term “being Jewish” – an insufficient, tentative term, refers to a mode of existence, not ethnic/religious or national alone, but to the experience of liminality, an exilic form of being. It stands as a challenge to major, territorial (national) modes. Neither Judaism, nor Jewishness can capture the open modes of being (double identities, becoming, ambiguities of belonging), reflected in this mode of existence, which the Jew was doomed (or blessed?) to signify. Compare with Emmanuel Levinas (2007). “Being Jewish”, *Continental Philosophical Review*, vol. 40, n° 3, p. 205–210; Jean-François Lyotard (1990). *Heidegger and ‘The Jews’*, translated by Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

<sup>2</sup> On Szondi’s experience of being-Jewish, and the impressions/implications of his experience in his letters and scholarly work, compare with: Christoph König and Andreas Isenschmid (2004). “Engführung. Peter Szondi und die Literatur”, *Marbacher Magazin*, vol. 108, p. 57–63; Andreas Isenschmid (2013), “Peter Szondi. Philologie und jüdische Erfahrung”. In Monika Boll and Raphael Gross (eds.), *Ich staune, dass Sie in dieser Luft atmen können. Jüdische Intellektuelle in Deutschland nach 1945*. Frankfurt am Main, S. Fischer Verlag, p. 62–86; Andreas Isenschmid (2014). “Peter Szondi. Portrait des Literaturwissenschaftlers als junger Mann”. In Nicolas Berg and Dieter Burdorf (eds.), *Textgelehrte. Literaturwissenschaft und literarisches Wissen im Umkreis der kritischen Theorie*. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014, p. 389–408.

tenure at the Freie Universität Berlin. Our point of departure is Szondi's statement, confession perhaps, in a letter to Gershom Scholem from May 1969, reflecting himself as a "self-displaced person"<sup>3</sup>. This sentence addresses his biographical experience as a Jewish refugee from Hungary, a survivor of the Nazi camp of Bergen Belsen, who was saved with his parents by the Kasztner Transport, an emigrant (first to Switzerland [1944] and later to West Germany [1959]), who refers to himself as being a man of no real homeland, and who often admits his foreignness, solitude, and distress. Szondi, who – following his own confession – forgot, never learnt, or learnt improperly (*verlernt*) the meaning of being at home (*Heimat*), also provides in his letters a keen, critical, perspective on the conditions of Comparative Literature. Szondi's experience and expression of his Judaism, anchored in displacement (forced or voluntary), can be traced as a figure, a line of thought, interwoven in his understanding of Comparative Literature as an area of study, a research enterprise, and a cultural paradigm. Displacement, while referring in Szondi's statement to the consequences of deportation, imprisonment, refuge, the de/resettlement of the Jews during the 1940s, attesting to the experience of (chosen) migration, hints at certain conditions of existence (non-belonging), signifying, however, degrees of freedom, emancipation, and paths of escape. This experience, we argue, can be traced as one of the conditions of his work, framing his path (his method) as a scholar of Critical Theory and a reader of Comparative Literature<sup>4</sup>.

The argument of this essay is based on a few of Szondi's letters, his correspondence with Ivan Nagel, Gershom Scholem, Theodor Adorno, Paul Celan, and Emil

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Szondi (1993 [3 May 1969]). *Briefe*, edited by Christoph König and Thomas Sparr. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, p. 267.

<sup>4</sup> On Szondi's affinities with the German school of critical theory and his contribution to major fields of literary studies compare: Gert Mattenklott (1981). "Peter Szondi als Komparatist". *Deutsch-Französisches Jahrbuch*, vol. 1, p. 127-142; and Dieter Burdorf (2014). "Der letzte Textgelehrte. Bemerkungen zu Peter Szondi", in *op. cit.*, p. 409–426.

Staiger, among others. In Szondi's letters one finds major references attesting to the experience of Judaism associated with reflections of displacement, which are not detached from the core issues of literature and scholarship. Reference to these letters thus implies a short survey of "intellectual biography": The letters are acts-of-writing, in which Szondi's life is re-presented. A strong sense of subjectivity, albeit a fragile, personal attitude is expressed in his letters. However, the letters also involve dialogue, responses, and debates. The letters contain not only a "date" (time and place, singularity) and a "signature" (proper name, subjectivity) but also an "addressee". The letter is written for and sent towards – the other. Letters themselves are attached to acts of displacement. They signify departures, travels, paths, and detours, but not without the hope for reception. The letter is the documentation of a conversation, deferred, somewhat "ghostly", of displaced, absent bodies.

### **Note I: Uncertainty**

An early letter by Peter Szondi from April 1953, enclosed in his correspondence with his friend Ivan Nagel, presents an attempted interpretation of a short story, a fragment by Franz Kafka (1883–1924), "ein kleines altes Wandschränkchen", a little, old wall cabinet. The text was included in the volume *Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande und andere Prosa aus dem Nachlaß*, published by Max Brod (1953). It tells the story of a cupboard, "ein einziges Erbstück", an inheritance, acquired by a neighbor. The cupboard, however, had neither key nor lock and could not be opened. It had perhaps "ein geheimer Mechanismus", a secret, concealed mechanism that only an experienced person might find, or perhaps, it says, the cupboard was not meant to be opened, but only to be broken.

Szondi's note on this short story by Kafka – a story which itself seems like "a little, old wall cabinet", a secret text, namely a fragment (short, cut and closed)

that does not let itself be opened to its readers, was written as a response to Nagel's own reading of the fragment. The note, however, signifies Szondi's early interest in Kafka's writings, culminating in a plan, never fulfilled<sup>5</sup>, of writing a book on Kafka. In his note on Kafka's fragment, Szondi initially refers to the absurdity that governs Kafka's world: "Ueberall sah Kafka das Absurde"<sup>6</sup> (Szondi, *op. cit.*, 1993: 24). It is not the Inhalt, the content, the theme of Kafka's stories, but rather their formal aspect, das Formale, Szondi writes, which serves as an allegory of a senseless world. However, the "Wandschränkchen", the little wall cabinet, Szondi writes later, belongs as a motif of the religious sphere: the cupboard that does not let itself be opened is the symbol of religion itself (*ibid.*, 25). One may even argue, he writes, that this little old cabinet signifies Tefillin, a little sealed box used in Jewish prayer, a box that is not intended to be opened. The Jewish believer, a man of faith, Szondi writes, knows what the Tefillin holds inside it (four short biblical texts), but has no need to open the box, which, he writes, has no opening mechanism – "[es] ist für alle Zeiten verschlossen", it is locked forever. In Kafka's world, however, this box, turns into a secret, the unknown: "Kafka ist dagegen über all das im Unsicheren. Er weiss nicht, was im Wandkästchen ist. Und er weiss auch nicht, ob man es öffnen kann und öffnen soll. Ob es überhaupt ein Wandkästchen ist"<sup>7</sup> (*loc. cit.*).

The religious experience expressed in Kafka's text is affiliated with a crisis: Kafka does not know the extent and function of tradition in the world. His understanding of religion is distinguished, Szondi writes, by Ungewissheit, Uncertainty, and by Ambivalenz, ambivalence. This, he writes further, is the origin

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<sup>5</sup> A draft of an essay, a review of Kafka's novel *Amerika*, was left in Szondi's *Nachlass* – never published (Peter Szondi, "Einige Gedanken über Kafkas *Amerika*" (Manuskript), 88.9.1177 [HS00830624X]).

<sup>6</sup> "Everywhere Kafka saw the absurd" [my translation].

<sup>7</sup> "Kafka, on the contrary, is uncertain about all this. He does not know what is in the wall cabinet. And he also doesn't know whether it can be opened and should be opened. Whether it is a wall cabinet at all" [my translation].

of the absurdity in Kafka's world. One cannot advance in this world. Kafka hints at the impossibility (Unfähigkeit, incapability) of leaping (Sprung) (*loc. cit.*).

Szondi's short note on Kafka's literary engagement with religion as an ambivalent, uncertain, somewhat secret experience, can be traced as a note on the modern experience of Judaism, as it was discussed by Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem – an experience of tradition whose scripts have been sealed, made unreadable once their (hermeneutic) key was lost<sup>8</sup>.

Was this note, the remark on Kafka's cupboard signifying the ambiguous experience of (Jewish) religious tradition, also representing Szondi's own uncertain experience, his own displacement in the Jewish world of letters? Szondi's short comment may hint, alongside his effort to "open up" Kafka's fragment, while addressing the blind spots of the Jewish author (Kafka "who didn't know"), at his own ambivalent experience of being Jewish. Szondi poses a question regarding the impossibility of a meaningful experience, which may lead to absurdity. Yet, his reading of Kafka also hints at the complexities of belonging. The experience of tradition signifies an obstacle, a secret, something unknown, unfamiliar, through which Szondi also senses curiosity and affinity. Szondi, as he relates to Kafka, experiences Judaism as a "black box", a sealed, inaccessible heritage, which nevertheless, serves as grounds for a meaningful experience, grounds for engagement and exchange. Being-Jewish stands for this experience of non-belonging, a reflective, distant (ironic) affinity, an engagement that does not resolve itself in identities or in solutions of homecoming.

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<sup>8</sup> The correspondence between Benjamin and Scholem on the experience of tradition in Kafka's world left its traces in Benjamin's essay on Kafka, noting on the students of Tora who left the synagogue, carrying with them the scriptures, their meaning is unrevealed. Walter Benjamin (1981). "Franz Kafka: Zur Wiederkehr seines Todestages". In Hermann Schweppenhäuser (ed.), *Benjamin über Kafka. Texte, Briefzeugnisse, Aufzeichnungen*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, p. 9-38.

**Note II: Silence**

Szondi's experience of Judaism was deeply bound up with his friendship with the poet Paul Celan (1920–1970). Szondi's correspondence with and about the poet concerning the latter's work began in 1959, and deals, among others, with Celan's distress and anxious impressions of anti-Semitism, associated with the "Goll affair". Furthermore: Szondi's unfinished project, the Celan-Studien, which includes essays on Celan's poems "Engführung" and "Du liegst", alongside an article on Celan's translations of Shakespeare's sonnets, provides us with strong evidence of his engagement with Celan's poetics of memory and witnessing. In his essays, notably in his major chapter on "Engführung" – perhaps the most significant piece written on Celan's poem, Szondi attended well Celan's poetics of witnessing, as it enfolds in ambiguous semantic textures, in rhythmic repetitions and inversions, and in rhymes, displaced and silent<sup>9</sup>. The experience of displacement, the articulation of not being at home, alongside acts of deferment, efforts of gathering, and (broken) Hebrew liturgical expressions, play a crucial role in Szondi's reading of Celan's poem. Displacement, the arrival of the reader at yet-unknown terrain, is the condition, the point of departure, in Szondi's encounter with Celan's poetry.

Szondi's double binding with Celan concerning Judaism, associated with longing, engagement, and solidarity, yet – with anxieties, distance, and solitude, with "Ambivalenz" (ambiguities of belonging), are represented in a letter to Rudolf Hirsch from 1960, referring to Celan's prose "Gespräch im Gebirg". In his letter Szondi formulated his experience, also associated with a recollection of a silent journey with Celan, noting the failures (or inability) to express what is Jewish in his own world, writing: "(es fällt) mir schwer, etwas darüber zu sagen, was übers

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Szondi (1978a). "Durch die Enge geführt. Versuch über die Verständlichkeit des jungen Gedichts". In Wolfgang Ietkau and Jean Bollack (eds.), *Schriften*, vol. 2. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp (Taschenbücher Wissenschaft 220), p. 345–389.

Persönlichste (mein Judentum und die Erinnerung an die Spaziergänge mit Celan in Sils, die langen Minuten des Schweigens vor der fremden Natur) hinausginge" (*ibid.*, 97–98).

Szondi's experience of Judaism, while attached to Celan's silence (during a walk in the mountains...) is doomed to be left unspoken. Like the protagonists of Celan's prose, Gross and Klein, Szondi is left without proper words. "His Judaism", he writes, was something "personal". However, the intimacy, the trust, the friendship with Celan belong perhaps to the realm of collective (Jewish) silence, as described by Franz Rosenzweig: it is the (liturgical/poetic) sphere, in which being-Jewish is expressed without words, withdrawing from the public, daily life realms of language<sup>10</sup>. One is allowed to search for traces of a (partly silent) dialogue in his letters and encounters with Celan, a conversation, a detour of displaced Jews. In his essays on Celan's "Engführung" and "Du liegst" Szondi himself is present not only as a reader of Celan's poetry, but also as its witness.

The silence, however, is not solely an omission – a failure. It is also an inherent dimension in the discourse of the witness. Szondi refers to the dialectical implications of silence in his reading of "Engführung", following these lines in Celan's poem:

Wir  
taten ein Schweigen darüber,  
giftgestillt, groß,  
ein  
grünes  
Schweigen<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Compare with Rosenzweig's remarks on the modes of liturgical silence, in which Judaism expresses itself beyond words (cf. Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1988, p. 328–330).

<sup>11</sup> We / decked it in silence, / poison-hushed, huge / a / green / silence [translated by Paul Felstiner, Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose*, New York, Norton, 2001, p. 125].



Against the “green silence”, the humid, poisoned silence of the plants, associated with darkness that covers and buries, Szondi mentions the stillness of the stones in Celan’s poem – white and bright, which carries the potential of witnessing (Szondi 1978a: 370–371). The stone in Celan’s poetry is the substance of a poetic language, the material of a script, inscribed, painful, that bears – the word.

In this context (how to read Celan’s poem, how to serve as its witness?) one may associate Szondi’s critique of Hans Egon Holthausen’s interpretation of Celan’s poetry, dealing with his reading of the phrase “Todesmühlen” as if it were a surrealistic one, while denying its association with death in Auschwitz (Szondi, *op. cit.*, 1993: 162–168). Szondi’s critique of Holthausen, published as a short “reader letter” in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in May 1964, was elaborated further in his correspondence with the editor Rolf Michaelis, revealing his attitude regarding Celan’s poetry as a “Zeugnis”, a witness. In Celan’s case, Szondi argues, the death in the camps was not simply a “theme”, but the condition of writing. An echo of this debate is heard in Szondi’s broken dialogue with Gadamer concerning the hermeneutic approach to Celan’s poetry, as presented in his reading of “Du liegst”<sup>12</sup>.

Szondi engaged himself in critical discussions, both scholarly and in public, calling for responsible readership, and opposing methods of denial, abstraction, and forgetfulness in literary study, recalling rather the historical and biographical contexts in which Celan’s experience, his displacement as a Jew, were traced. Szondi’s argument for an autonomous, or even formalistic interpretation of Celan’s poem “Du liegst” was not suggested at the expense of the historical-biographical context (Celan’s visit to Berlin), but rather in relation to its complexities, offering an analytical (structural) perspective as a method of meaningful reading. In

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Szondi (1978b). “Eden”. In Wolfgang Fietkau and Jean Bollack (eds.), *Schriften*, vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 390–398.

Szondi's reading of Celan's poem, the (Hebrew) word "Eden" itself – that stands in the middle (the core, the heart) of this poem, expresses ambiguities, double meanings, the dialectic of existence implying death, but also birth, revival and resistance (Szondi 1978b: 396–398). Eden, the place from which man was a refugee, dis-placed on earth, is a name for orientation in being that finds no comfort or solutions of homecoming. Szondi recalls this word as a title of his own unfinished project. As we know, the biographical context of the poem "Du liegst" was not Celan's alone; it was also Szondi's, the scholar who accompanied the poet during his visit to Berlin.

Engaging with the hermeneutic complexity of Celan's poetry and asking about the proper method of reading, serves Szondi as a detour for reflecting on what is Jewish. His own writings, his letters and essays, following Celan's verses, were a kind of resonance. His own experience of being-Jewish was partly an echo of Celan's Judaism – a voice, somewhat silent.

### **Note III: Freedom**

Szondi's experience as a "misplaced person" associated with being-Jewish, can also be traced in his reflections of his academic path in Switzerland and Germany. His critique of certain academic traditions in West Germany, his confrontations with German scholars and conservative intellectuals who were affiliated with the fascist movement during the Nazi era, serve as evidence of his critical engagement with current academic and public issues. However, to his critical engagement also belongs his debate with his own mentor Emil Staiger, concerning the dubious, reactionary implications of Staiger's aesthetic thesis (*op. cit.*, 1993: 219–222), attest to Szondi's commitment, expressing both his ethical and political responsibilities as a scholar and as a public intellectual.

Szondi's letters often provide evidence of his commitment to the establishment of Comparative Literature as a critically oriented discipline in philological studies, moving through and beyond the national borders of literature, providing a theoretical perspective for multilingual and multicultural research that is dedicated to a humanistic, albeit Eurocentric (or Western) view. Displacement, while bearing witness to deportation and exilic (traumatic) experience, also refers to the experience of travel, freedom, and exchange. Displacement, understood as an act of migration, crossing, moving through the borders – of nations and languages, was also to serve as a condition of studying that is necessary in Comparative Literature<sup>13</sup>.

Szondi's letters to Rudolf Walter Leonhardt from January 1967 concerning the plan of academic reform in German institutions of Higher Education, attest to this view. Szondi's critique of the reform touches upon the implications of reducing the length of study ("Studienzeitbefristung"), as advocated in the plan<sup>14</sup>. The plan, Szondi argues, impairs the students' right for proper learning, first and foremost the acquisition of foreign languages and gaining interdisciplinary skills and international training. In his letter he associates his critique with a remark on the illiberal nature of the plan, which he regards as a "secularist form of fascism" (*op. cit.*, 1993: 214), imprinted in the economic planning of the German reformists. The freedom of studying, implied in terms of time and space, namely the freedom for dis/replacement, is presented in his letter as a condition of an open intellectual and political worldview. Szondi's earlier statement, in a letter to Hans Egon Hass from July 1963, "am liebsten wäre mir eine Dozentur nicht für Germanistik, sondern für

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<sup>13</sup> There is no need for idealizing Comparative Literature as a multicultural discipline, nor to celebrate the travel as a literary trope, but rather to acknowledge the significance of displacements (travel, migration, exile) as a biographical and theoretical experience in the history of this field of study. Compare with: Ben Hutchinson (2018), *Comparative Literature: A Very Short Introduction*. New York, Oxford University Press (Very short introductions 556); and David Damrosch (2020), *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 50–83.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Szondi (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 208–212 and p. 214–215.

Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft"<sup>15</sup> (*ibid.*, 132), should thus not be understood as solely an academic expression in its narrow disciplinary, institutional meaning. In Szondi's case, the vocation of a comparatist also implies a cultural decision. Szondi's Germanist writings, his essays on Hölderlin, which were partly associated with a critique of false, (politically) reactionary receptions of his poetry, his engagement with the German philosophical School of Idealism, as presented in his essay *Versuch über das Tragische*, attest to both his scholarly investment in and intellectual devotion to German studies. Yet, the comparatist approach was the method, namely the path, and the theory, namely the reflection, that Szondi had chosen (or – led to, escaped into) on migrating to Germany.

Was the self-understanding of his vocation as a scholar of Comparative Literature associated with his experience as a Jewish refugee during and after the Second World War? The answer to this question seems inevitable. The conditions, the contexts, the detours of Szondi's academic path were not free from the same ambivalence and tensions that characterized his attitude towards Judaism, as already shown in his reading of Kafka's fragment and, even in a different mode of urgency – in his reading of Celan's poems. Szondi's enterprise of Comparative Literature was anchored in his own historical and biographical experience and cannot be separated from reflections and expressions of displacement, the same term with which he affiliated himself to Judaism, which embodies not only the echo of deportation, forced migration and exile, but also a joyful voice of freedom.

#### **Note IV: Displacement**

Our short tour through Szondi's letters finally brings us back to discuss his correspondence with Gershom Scholem from May 1969 and the implications of his statement regarding his experience as "a self-displaced person". Szondi's note

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<sup>15</sup> "I would prefer a lectureship not in Germanistic, but in General and Comparative Literature" [my translation].

refers to his decision not to accept the invitation to serve as a professor of Comparative Literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The invitation was associated with Szondi's visit to Jerusalem at the beginning of 1968, serving as a guest professor of comparative literature at the Hebrew University, replacing Lea Goldberg, herself an established Hebrew poet, an author and a gifted reader of European literature. During his stay in Jerusalem Szondi taught (in French) courses on European poetry and drama<sup>16</sup>. Shortly after the visit, in a letter to Geoffrey Hartman from April 1968 (op. cit., 1993: 247–248), Szondi reveals his decision not to immigrate to Israel, although the visit made him aware of the limited, "wenig definitiv", implication of his tenure in Berlin (*ibid.*, 248). The decision was associated with his attachment to the German language, which he now found "unentbehrlich", indispensable (*loc. cit.*). Both as a medium of cognition and of expression, Szondi felt the German language as an essential academic and social vehicle. In May 1969, in his letter to Scholem, confessing himself as a "self-displaced person", attesting to his "choice" of displacement, yet admitting Israel as a "Fixpunkt", a fixed point, in his internal geography, Szondi also acknowledges his ambiguous conception of Heimat, homeland: "Heimweh ist eine seltsame Sache", he writes (*ibid.*, 267). One may find his homeland again without knowing or accepting this, Szondi additionally writes, while commenting on his short visit to Jerusalem. "Aber das ist kein Briefthema", this, however, is not a theme for a letter, he writes, and signs his letter to Scholem with his name, noted as the "kleiner Szondi", the little Szondi.

A few months later, in October 1969, after his own visit to Israel, Paul Celan will record a similar, yet different impression of an impossible homecoming, as the

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<sup>16</sup> On Szondi's visit to Jerusalem: Thomas Sparr (2015). "Peter Szondi in Jerusalem". In Susanne Zepp (ed.), *Textual Understanding and Historical Experience: On Peter Szondi*. München, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, p. 155–162; On his teaching during his visit: Susanne Zepp (2015). "Mallarmé in Jerusalem. Peter Szondi's Lectures on French Literature", *ibid.*, p. 139–153.

visit left him with a cesura, a rupture, a turning point. Szondi possibly experienced the tension, unsolved, regarding the national Jewish project, aiming to provide a homeland for the Jews. Travel to Jerusalem, however, according to a certain (exilic) Talmudic tradition, is associated with a deferment: the arrival should always be postponed. Was Szondi "faithful" of that tradition (without "knowing it", as he referred to Kafka)?

In another letter to Scholem, from February 1970, writing about his decision not to accept the invitation to serve at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, confessing his inability, his unwillingness, although his wishing ("kann nicht, will nicht, obwohl möchte"), for a change ("Wechsel") of language, surroundings, and actions, Szondi again refers to failures of homecoming and the ambiguities of being at-home as biographical fact (*ibid.*, 301–304). Already in his childhood, Szondi writes, he "[hatte] verlernt", lost, never knew, never learnt properly the meaning of "zu Hause zu sein", being at home. This, he writes, was his experience already in Budapest, and later in Zurich. In Jerusalem, he writes further, he felt not only "being at home", but also the inability to bear this experience. What he does not possess, Szondi says, is the power to overcome this inner resistance, the attitude against homecoming. Szondi refers to the core experience of broken affiliation. The experience of belonging, in his case, remained a rupture, its mode of existence was of Unheimlichkeit.

In the next sentence of the letter, Szondi shortly refers to the event of the burning of the Altersheim der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde in Munich. The horrifying event was yet not to cause him to change his mind regarding the emigration to Israel. With this "cesura" (the sign of a crisis) in the letter, acknowledging anxiety and depression, Szondi moves from the personal mode of displacement and impressions of homelessness to academic concerns regarding the study program of Comparative Literature at the Hebrew University of

Jerusalem. This turn from the acknowledgment of his own displacement as a Jew, into scholarly reflection on the future of Comparative Literature is, we argue, essential. Displacement is a given name to an experience of not being at home, deportation, forced migration and being in exile. This same word also refers to travels, movements, states of freedom and refuge. In the double-binding of this term, we may assume Peter Szondi's path as a scholar and a witness of Comparative Literature.

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