

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Fatal Light:

Poetry, Theory and the Holocaust

by

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A THESIS

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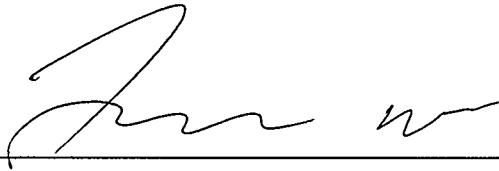
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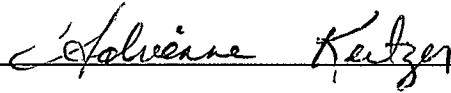
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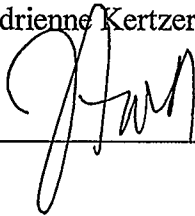
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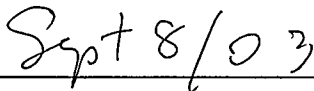
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## ABSTRACT

*Fatal Light: Poetry, Theory and the Holocaust* is a creative and critical thesis examining issues of narrative and representation concerning the Holocaust. James E. Young's idea that the historicity of the Holocaust is inextricably tied to its narrations becomes the springboard in which to launch an argument for a critical analysis of emotive responses and poetic narrations as methods of inquiry. Raymond Williams's structure of feeling theory provides a theoretical framework for exploration into how emotive articulation shapes and is shaped by the lived experience of trauma. The works of Imre Kertész and Jean Améry are cited to highlight the necessity of seeing the connection between daily life and the extremity of genocide.

The poems, entitled *Hollow Articulations*, enact the trauma of disjunction and the impact of Holocaust memory on the psyche of two people born years after the war as they navigate the reality of an "after-Auschwitz" existence.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To Richard Raymer, without whom there never would of been birds to write of in the first place, thank you for your unfailing belief in the possibilities of flight.

*In memory of my grandmother, Ida Abramovitch*

*who always loved to see me dance*

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to fail the memory of  
thought springs  
to you the next thing  
may sentence now  
a question sustains  
(wail)

or sing?

to hold  
measures  
a small bird  
weights  
still in the palm  
a hand wonders at  
the still weightlessness

a resonance of sea air  
conducts  
measure  
sighs by  
wingspan  
you have waited long for direction  
feathers articulate  
the hollow your eyes take



begin

an arm weighted  
the sentence  
over  
small clauses translucent petals  
orders  
skin to the border  
far from my own  
perspires a fish song  
textures the flat notes  
of suffering  
by breathing your name into  
my chest  
a momentary relief  
from birds  
cause and effect  
the above line  
a catch  
reflects the feathers  
of what comes before  
note books  
pound into walls  
up ahead  
lost to direction  
whales sound  
what turns morning  
turns daylight unbearable

I turn over  
lips crack  
an echo  
whales roll  
skin translucent  
tears as it stretches over bone

there are windows out there  
that fool birds  
a cruel trick of light  
without trees beyond  
there my reflection fails  
shards of glass broken into wings

rustles and  
the memory of  
hollow rock  
of sound  
rebounds off of leaves

what folds in your eyes  
may sentence now  
the hollow of green

for you always for you  
birds gather their bread  
abandon their trees

(what the sentence carries  
the line breaks)  
a way to approach morning  
magpies swoop left  
for imagination  
right the rail to song  
one imagines  
I shocks  
the awe in falling  
two terrains  
full water at my feet  
what hair derails  
memory writes  
(no numbers on my forearm  
just bruises from an iv)  
shaved and beaten  
winged  
the above line broke  
for continuity  
my ribcage runs the rails  
fingers outline  
a perfect bone  
the infinitive  
to tend to  
a temporary blindness  
with the rise of the sun  
the salt that runs  
I mistook your body  
for sea

I write this at night  
bacteria culture from the Caspian sea  
ferments into yogurt  
story takes the shape of rhyme  
magpie (imagine)  
a small girl on a train  
way of approaching subject  
matter  
salty eyed  
sleepless while she slept  
lemons come later  
for now remember  
how the depth of her sounding  
woke wails

air

do I remember  
what the sentence carries  
in currents  
what memory fails  
image restrains  
a flock of events  
shock of brown  
hair falling  
a bathtub or train  
memory settles  
re echoes into  
waves  
take the rail  
before  
water  
before  
train

forced  
without  
the stench  
whatever cloth comes available  
whatever can stop sickness  
his handkerchief  
falls  
waves repeat  
feathers  
can this happen  
herded  
boarded  
air reminds  
his hand  
falls  
to fetch  
to catch  
to pull  
up  
as in weeds

his mouth  
the stench  
bends  
to gather  
cloth  
retrieves  
strands of hair  
fill his hands  
cloth faced  
yellow stained  
what breathes  
underneath

wrapped now in his coat  
he asks for a name  
when she opens her mouth to speak  
magpies escape her throat

(imagine) a small child on a train  
bodies for a bed  
taste of wool pulls her under  
mothers wail

kisses eyelashes whispers  
mother is waiting  
(mothers wait)  
the train makes a line  
the sentence comes to a full stop

questions:

a mother's lost  
echoes  
she is arms weighted by herons

needle point repeats  
her veins are small  
they hide  
break

tropical flowers geometric shapes  
zebra striped sickness  
head dresses

whose story ?  
smoke stacks or radiation tables

traded a pocketful of beans for train tickets



[...] <sup>2</sup>

[...] <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “Writing must emerge inside the problematics of the concept of writing itself, that the purpose of certain writing should be to raise these problems, that writings contemporaneity is always an historical problem and that the problem of history itself is, to a large extent, the problem of ideological inscription.”

<sup>3</sup> i laughed and it sounded like donkeys.

end point

trucks back in

walls

glide

the child drops her arms to her sides

emphasis on

a table setting

a wall hanging

a dancer spinning

splinters stress

constant

skirt whips

rocks gather

he bends gathers

saves her from knotweed

choking grass

noise in the street

breaks

hard cons tenant

mother less

removes glass

pale green

cloth

moves soft sounds

a mothers mess

out to save

sewn

with silk cream thread

what's left

of spinning

a fan

stitched open in her small hands

questions:

the memory of loss  
my hair  
mother tied to the bathroom floor

subject matters  
remake the train  
metal railings  
smell of antiseptic cleanser  
green tile  
a fairy tale  
to turn earth plant bulbs in the sun

skirting whips planks  
lucky with aprons

herded into leather recliners  
by poles  
iv's  
picture  
a bouquet of women wear silk scarves

monday morning's volunteer has a full head of hair numbers burnt into her arm she  
offers answers to questions I have not asked she is she tells me she echoes two times  
a two time survivor she tells me about the strength of youth the selections convinced  
it was poison in the factory air that I will not be chosen she sounds pole-like bird calls  
between pouring juice between heaven and earth I opt for ginger ale a French  
Canadian nurse Chantal the poison in the factory air runs the tube into my arm she is  
a derivative of song these two birds these two song women flocking around me  
sweeping away hair attempts to console between a flutter of blue and white coats  
presses the vein the tube is in always on the first run blood returns

questions:

who was he did he help her did he hide her underneath his coat her mother shot at the station she spit in one of their faces they put a bullet in her mouth right then and there someone grabbed the little girl pulled her right onto the train no one came to clean up the mother they left her there until her face was smashed into stone  
whose testimony  
imagine

he walked into the room at this moment and said  
gather me in your coat I am cold they shot my mother

whose memory

enough for tonight my thoughts are closing in too tight(ly) the sentence is a noose the sentence is hard sounding where does it rhyme spontaneously where does it sound like magpies?

enough for tonight it takes imagination to read this thought to take it for truth to separate out the letters know on their own they are meaningless sounds like the empty sound (the imaginations noise ?) of a magpie caught in your throat

the sentence she wrote he repeated  
the bullet went in then out the back of her throat

carried across  
wind tossed  
transported  
where the sentence leaves off

likely an event will occur  
once she set the place for tea  
left lemon  
sliced  
once a stone  
smashed through window  
shattered saucer  
sliced her cheek  
the probability of occurrence  
young men  
doing what they were told

$p+q$  = the social  
the rest chance

before  
he awoke

morning  
windows shatter

his wife prepares tea  
a little milk a slice of lemon

what stirs outside  
sends everything flying

his gray overcoat  
hurtled to the transport without

him?

inherent in the sentence is violence  
inconsolable he screams unable to speak  
doomed to repeat  
trebles the sentence before her

what breaks his breath against her back  
with the first mention of morning  
of bones of tracks  
shards of broken glass

inherent from sentence to sentence  
carried at the end torn from her body  
in her hair his fingers flail  
lifts different strands as if  
her hair bleeds through his hands

inherent from sentence to sentence  
her face smashed into a system  
resettlement means a shower is  
a system of rules and thus proceeds  
from terror to terror  
dragged by hair  
each word a violence a stone  
a stop



riding on his coat tails  
so to speak  
would mean the end

to write a wail  
scream deep within  
not to break the letters  
to play them like notes

I draw flowers with my fingers on his back  
he laughs  
imagine the simplicity to things  
that my hair on his chest can erase him the way birds can erase a patch of sky  
when they fly by

the phone rings  
they shot your mother

a voice says so to speak  
would bring the butt of a gun down on her head  
splatter her blood on his shoes  
so to speak would mean to gather her hair thick  
with what is inside her skull  
he is beaten into the ground beside her  
as an example  
for others  
not to hide small birds in their coats

to ease the sorrow of  
head thrown forward  
hair ripped through his hands

he tries to console  
unlikely  
gathered linens from the bed  
a small child thrown on a train

to soothe intensively  
if the purpose is not to console?  
what he said  
a word can be an intensive  
horribly soothing  
what he repeated  
your hands gathering in my hair

only an echo  
night

carried across  
wind tossed and trans  
ported

this was who he  
face so like her mothers  
same blood smashed into stone

birds trail the train  
her in their kitchen  
face cut open  
begged them to let him have a coat  
they let him have a coat  
then slit her

lost now without

trained in orchards  
fatal light awareness  
kept them apart  
t  
the birds used to pry  
rotting fruit shot through the windows  
glass in his eyes

she cleaned wounds with lemon juice  
worked blind

bodies held shaped of branches  
taken down from wire

what the sentence carries  
events

when they finish  
what is left of her eyes

wing blown  
hair torn  
kisses for her apple cheeks

she an ellipse  
defect to the sentence  
in many cases

her feathers efface  
she left to exchange  
a hero

what displaces  
erases  
by morning

she returns  
with the remains  
of a wading bird

image reads  
pulled rip bloodied  
his fingernails render the wood  
her arms the weight of herons

all night the sound of anchors being dropped into the waves

the simplicity to things  
her neck the contour

unnoticeable a breeze  
whispers in  
hair sweeps across his chest  
takes his breath

breathless  
she weeps  
escapes the scene  
with small bones hidden in her sleeves



this is what comes before  
the rhymes  
I knew  
I counted  
fingers, my fingers  
he shrieks

hold my hand  
pulls at his coat  
they break her tiny bones  
broken he dreams

eyes blind with feathers  
he emerges  
sea spent and clawing at the side of a boat

bodies rendered  
by emaciation  
perfectly sculpted into barbed wire  
I press up against bone  
my face torn by an elbow

tired the next morning over tea  
lemons squeezed into water  
drink this lemon water he offers  
its good for you

traces the circles under my eyes  
as ashes trail down his cheeks  
you look so tired I try to cover him with blankets  
he stumbles off of the train

repeats the scene in circle  
a man in a large gray overcoat  
he sees this as the lemon clouds the water as my touch clouds his eyes  
he reads his coat torn  
a pocket gone  
your grandfather made pockets didn't he?  
there is confusion  
bodies scatter 2 are shot the rest put into rinds  
he is alone now  
faces 3 guards 3 guards 3 pairs of jack boots  
rifles one  
forward pulls out the child he has hidden under his coat  
3 laugh  
pregnant they call  
schwangere zitrone

saw in the flap of wings  
where the trees left off  
and the birds began

mouths this  
for me  
sea months at last

to who (you) this next  
thing is the plane  
a may's distance now

in wingspan sing  
wine months calla  
the lack of rain

endless to stop  
movement if only to be  
left windswept

ideas that never lie  
or me flown back  
this height of plant

spring through  
the wind turned  
white end in end

unwording of worldling  
this my arm reaching  
endless differing of my arm

finds difference on  
skin  
see ahead

the green of  
eyes  
dry I a leaf

nothing burnished  
after sunset  
weeks before spring

am unpredictable I  
planned for  
the release of shoots

wonders in  
the slap of endings  
the flap of wings

my small green  
bird  
shivers and

I leaf

once  
when the blue river  
called and you wept  
outside the museum and  
the smoke of children  
wept with you

once  
it was still dark you  
looked for me beside  
you but I  
had moved across the room  
while you slept

once  
when we walked the  
coastline you said  
nothing you had done  
was good enough

I wanted to heave your  
history from the rocks

magpies underline  
sea slippage  
an incongruity  
wails rise between

sound on the bed  
salt water drains  
her eyes  
he carries her outside

sowed in shallow drills  
she grows only at the end  
of I  
where sentences aspire  
whales to fly

he trades the window for air  
a metal spoon scrapes repeatedly at the bottom of a bowl  
she's empty  
skin soft as soap  
rail thin  
a metal moon collapses  
air whistles a train approaching song

wane yellow of a face  
caught by the neck

these rhymes  
screamed  
sentence  
an event  
endless  
movement  
left  
a tourniquet of trains  
indistinguishable  
one person's remains from the next



a gardeners concern with difference  
seeded when

winter springs

the magpie outside  
utters in difference

no up rising to celebrate  
only that the nut grass did not choke the morning glories

questions:

are these the rhymes you mean he asks tearing the hair from his head

tell me she never made it off the train

torn from his coat

head in hands

damp cloth at neck

to sing about birds

while your shirt loses buttons

shallow means

beaten to death

I brought you in for witness

when a body is still breathing (the imagination's corpse)

morning is an association for magpies

with his head in his hands I am alone with these birds the sentence rhymes (buried alive) sick with association the absurdity of the birds strikes him full in the face an echo a twisted shape still breathing the same rules apply and still he breathes with nothing left outside headlights travel as schools of fish reflect their shine through vertical blinds across our bedroom wall his breath turns to drowning and I stumble to unhook his mouth

questions:

he asked me this morning what place does dialogue have in the poem why write these words from my mouth what do you want freed from your throat

I pull the words from his coat

why not dispense with the poem entirely

I cannot give up the possibility of rhyme

threadbare  
(the myth of echo  
)

I draw a button from his mouth  
he coughs thanks me  
hurry I say my arms stretching upward  
you're horribly late  
you'll miss the train

questions

there has to be some thinking some thinking  
some thinging  
some singing?

for some birds  
love in language or other wise sings  
a possibility

sums up  
morning  
she goes about her mother in the other room  
unfettered she watches the lines spread  
tucked into the nest of her bed  
the hard spine of feathers tears into her mouth

once she did would grow a beautiful yellow beak  
her songs did would dissolve the air into stars

the myth of spring  
(echo and  
)

to suffer  
word play

impossible a lost button  
probable  
smashed into stone  
stomach full of sand  
screams echo

device springs  
the idea  
what thought provokes  
stuttering magpies  
over a button hole

inseparable  
as the book  
torn bodies raked beneath  
trees what makes sense  
words are helpless  
barbed as the pointed edge of  
small green leaves  
about flowers (an echo)  
hand tied by sentences

she places a vase in the hallway

a hero to mourn  
at some point  
the blazes turned  
I lost  
unlike the heroine (flowers)  
my arms weak as thread

begin  
again  
sounds off  
shore  
this song  
in the interest of  
an echo  
to right the whale



lose all power of speech  
sentenced only to repeat

she pines with the trees  
this brilliant echo towards  
an indifferent flower  
her mouth a constant motion  
sentenced only to repeat.

trains run the length of rivers  
bird calls choke between  
sentenced only to repeat  
in her reflection she sees  
a collector of wings

abandoned by the water  
she ties rocks with string to her feet

once upon an easy sleep  
device springs shut

(echo and her flowers  
)

at night she suffers smoke stacks  
in her dreams she can't breathe

sentenced only to repeat  
lost buttons

words and other bodies  
reduce to bird feed

the scene buried with blankets  
the shape of a neck lends contour to the twilight  
an echo) full moon)

a descriptive sentence noted  
to simply state who one is  
identity in the gullet of a bird

reshapes the procession  
neck snaps into frame

pregnant  
kicked until  
dogs specially trained

the waning yellow of a face  
a domestic scene  
set with blankets  
come morning  
the dogs are fed  
to the magpies on the window's ledge

questions

I try a damp cloth  
across his forehead  
sick from the smell  
what poetry is  
sentence or line  
where line breaks  
word or fragment  
rescue or resolve  
for philosophy  
negate the historical  
make of lemons matter  
whales rhyme  
or death  
word fragment  
the limits swell  
salted rhymes  
water rises  
wind washes the sentence  
yellows the wood  
possibility of salt air  
I try a damp cloth  
on the back of his neck  
this far from sea  
my pretend eyes  
sting

a snap  
sharp shot  
without memory  
what shoots (these small green leaves)  
sentences spring  
an echo  
to cave a chest hollow  
an offer a bullet  
for tea  
feathers plucked  
birdcalls choke  
between  
orders for another  
brought in  
strip stripped whip  
for what?  
the barbs of her feathers disconnect  
shape of her belly  
swell of her breast  
against the wall  
ein schwanger!  
and shot without question

once birds  
fly an eternal  
past feathers  
disrupts  
an image of leaves  
greens impossible  
tempers  
the light and the light

in disbelief  
the dying of so many  
to state simply  
the picture window is the probable cause

what emerges  
knees bent  
scrawls

to proceed from the concrete event  
words turn into flesh  
windows intact  
spines snap

school days

in another poem children are tossed from ledges into carts  
what remains breathing is carted over mud towards the railroad station

in 1973 the lunch bell rings and again the children are told to stay inside. the windows are protected with steel links. the children can safely watch the hail of rocks, tin cans, fruit juice boxes some with the straws still intact. the children can once they finish lunch go down to the library to read for the remainder of time. they can the librarian says look at any books they want and do not worry about clean up just leave the books on the tables or please take one out if it interests you. this is to compensate for having to stay inside for not playing ball or champ. in a way its an escape from having to stand while the captains pick who they want on their teams who can spike the ball hardest – the boys always chosen first except for one or two. the library is a nice enough place and the librarian goes out of his way to make the children feel welcome. one child chooses a book on whales. this child reads about humpback whales specifically. what the child liked was the other name given to these whales “songsters of the sea.” the bell rings again and the children return to class. not one takes their books out from the library.

the librarian is a bit disappointed but he understands. the children would rather play outside when they get home. many of them have their own backyards or live on quiet streets where it is safe. where no one will shoot rocks at them. this is nothing new to the librarian. they will graduate the school remembering books and stones and other things thrown. some will spend their own lives writing books about it. obsessed with things that fly overhead or down below. rarely touching ground.



shop days

either it was a point of pride for some to plant more trees than others or they truly believed that one day from their own windows they could see the treetops reach over for black or green figs they would return with ten sheets she never put the trees in her own name instead her grandmother's voice from the back of the beauty shop rings turn that desert into an oasis you kids did and no one can uproot you now are you a plum or an orange her grandmother squeezed her hard you're an orange go ask the ladies under the hair dryers for pennies

shop days

tired of words without branches or buds   tired of squatting on windowsills  
a shower was   a cattle car is   solution was not   hair pins lodged in  
her windpipe  
she cart wheeled a windmill  
she floated a leaf

shop days

her grandmothers hand the weight of almonds the first to bloom in spring she never  
tasted a fig 10 pennies a leaf carted over mud driven barefoot a blue solution floats  
the combs she curls her hair with rocks drives her neck down into the earth I know I  
know what resettlement means the way to liberation through a smoke stack stinks her  
hair she dreams will help the whales keep warm to light the sea and swallow  
submarines

he does not want to  
sick  
apart  
with waves  
torn  
crashing the bed  
hear these stories anymore  
questions  
the weight of a still  
bird their small  
backs his cheek  
against my palm  
a bed time story  
stolen library books  
picture books  
for salt  
skeletons in striped shirts  
an arms length  
swollen faces in uniform  
smiling doctors pose  
measures  
a question  
frames the event  
fooled by wingspan  
a body with its stomach cut  
out  
watch  
out  
through wire  
how long till  
broken bones  
embedded  
covered in our blanket  
a gulf  
between us  
a gurney's width of breath

an arm drops  
weighted by bone  
movement tears  
sheets elbows  
as if to say light as a feather  
morning brings out the magpies  
in your eyes  
a relief of your body  
a cave drawing of a man in flight  
an echo  
that dogs over run

my current occupation  
to defend what movement questions  
the possibility of salt air  
this far from the sea

you rewind me  
by the banks of the

---

no possibility exists in the present  
resigned  
only past and future rhymed

testify by open sores  
arms twisted into legs  
the attempt to claw her still breathing body out

the part unseen  
hairpins lodged in her throat  
a pocket from an overcoat she clutches in her hand

later the book reveals  
notes shaped like bird's feet  
cawed into the dirt

to tend to  
on hands and knees  
rail driven  
forward  
by tropes that figure you here  
where breath is vapour  
bodies spectres  
wraiths of wading birds  
wail  
all mourning  
and first words  
disfigured by sound  
grief echoes  
between wire and word  
and hangs

a directive of (and her flowers)  
flowered  
or bullets  
figures between us  
morning to touch  
what hands can't grasp  
(hands grasp)  
my ears choose this  
located outside with birds  
my hero tangles with feathers  
the mottled skin of trains  
whistles  
to sing steam rising  
beyond the din of falling  
carefully rehearsed  
much of me  
(much too much of me)  
ashed and riven in him

what was pleasant was unpleasant (likely)  
love the sentence is binding



love comes with a liability he put his head on her shoulder as he read  
that sentence is meant for you what you bring between the words is the sound of the  
air passing through your mouth and what if I stop breathing

easy there never would have been birds to write of in the first place

you don't know the feeling of \_\_\_\_\_ it all meets up echoes in some familiar way  
that what is remembered still is not a school auditorium and a slide show of tiny  
bones but the wire on the window the bird caught between

begin

without air  
mothers wait  
watch the sky  
birds unworld to come home

to think about dogs being trained  
to snap necks  
rip flesh

what is to think about  
an echo  
sleepless while he slept

how to survive the question  
with grace?  
birds make their way across the water

I write at night  
a different end  
in lower cases  
a gesture  
what was possible at the beginning of day  
a stone thrown  
the line bends  
birds scatter wide into the sky  
in reply  
this is what comes before  
thrown from windows  
carted to stations  
with what is left of the light  
emerges in red brick  
seaweed  
a tea cups worth  
of flight

travel days

in his dream she is the one with eyes stinging and fish hook wounds deep in her wrists finger tips so tired that her arms swing from her torso

she is a thin coat wrapped for warmth around a thin body on the deck of a ship at this moment she has just yet found her sea legs and now the anchors have dropped

sliced from ear to ear she emerges green in cloth and stinking of birds traded so easily her mother's longing for fire wood he leans his head onto her shoulder whispers into her falling ears what world sings you here

### Fatal Light: Poetry, Theory and the Holocaust.

*For days on end they had been hungry and thirsty above all. They had been cold, lying almost naked on boards without straw or blankets. Locked up with dying or crazy women, they awaited their turn to die or go mad. In the morning, they stepped outside. They were driven out by cudgel blows. Blows imparted to the dying and the insane. The living had to pull out into the yard those who died during the night, because the dead had to be counted also. The SS walked by. He enjoyed setting his dog on them. This was the howling heard at night. Then silence. The roll call was over. It was the daytime silence. The women still alive went back. The dead women remained in the snow. They had been stripped naked. Their clothes would be used by others.*

(Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After* 19)

#### *The Butterfly*

*The last, the very last,  
So richly, brightly, dazzlingly yellow.  
Perhaps if the sun's tears would sing  
against a white stone...*

*Such, such a yellow  
Is carried lightly 'way up high.  
It went away I'm sure because it wished to  
kiss the world goodbye.*

*For seven weeks I've lived in here,  
Penned up inside this ghetto  
But I have found my people here.  
The dandelions call to me  
And the white chestnut candles in the court.  
Only I never saw another butterfly.*

*That butterfly was the last one.  
Butterflies don't live in here,  
In the ghetto.*

(Written June 4, 1942, by Pavel Friedmann who was born January 7, 1921, in Prague and deported to Terezin on April 26, 1942. He died in Auschwitz on September 29, 1944.)

*Without trust in the world I face my surroundings as a Jew who is alien and alone, and all that I can manage is to get along with my foreignness. [...] Where there is a common bond between me and the world, whose still unrevoked death sentence I acknowledge as a social reality, it dissolves in polemics. You don't want to listen? Listen anyhow. You don't want to know where your indifference can again lead you and me at any time? I'll tell you.*

(Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits* 95)

*Over the decades and one by one I rejected the misleading slogans of a misleading freedom such as "an inexplicable historical error," "cannot be rationalized," and other tautologies of that kind. They are the gestures of one who wishes to stand above the fray. I have never succumbed to the temptation of self-pity, nor, it may be, to that of true sublimity and divine perspicacity, but I have known from the beginning that my disgrace was not merely a humiliation; it also concealed redemption, if only my heart could be courageous enough to accept this redemption, this peculiarly cruel form of grace, and even to recognize grace at all in such a cruel form. – And if you now ask me what still keeps me here on this earth, what keeps me alive, then, I would answer without any hesitation: love.*

(Imre Kertész<sup>1</sup>)

*Thus my voice is empty, but I speak and sing  
only of this.*

*In time's deep well,  
my shallow heart has flooded.*

(Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *The Fold* 3)

In writing *Hollow Articulations*, I strove to reflect the trauma and suffering of the Holocaust onto the surface of a life born in its shadow. Tears and song are the materials of this manuscript. While writing I have wept almost daily, and through this writing “my shallow heart has flooded.” This essay following the poems attempts a claim for a poetics that utilizes emotional response as a method of inquiry into Holocaust studies. Scholar James E. Young writes in *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* that to study the Holocaust is to study its representations (5). According to Young, the historicity of the Holocaust is inextricably tied to its narrations, and a critical analysis of the ways in which

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<sup>1</sup> Imre Kertész's speech at the Nobel Banquet, December 10, 2002. © 2003 The Nobel Foundation.

the Holocaust is represented after the event can lead us to interpretations of what shaped and contributed to the events of the Holocaust. Young writes: "world views may have both generated the catastrophe and narrated it afterward [...] [H]istory never unfolds independently of the ways we have understood it" (5). For Young, inquiry into theories and concepts of representation as a way of approaching Holocaust studies is important because he feels that too much of Holocaust study is weighted by the "sheer horror" of the subject at hand. This weight leads toward a thematic discussion as opposed to an inquiry into "how historical memory, understanding, and meaning are constructed in Holocaust narrative" (i).

Young's configuring of history and narration as both tied to and underlying, perhaps even driving, the Holocaust is akin to what Raymond Williams calls "a structure of feeling":

A way of defining forms and convention in art and literature as inalienable elements of a social material process: not by derivation from other social forms and pre-forms, but as social formation of a specific kind which may in turn be seen as the articulation (often the only fully available articulation) of structures of feeling which as living processes are much more widely experienced. (133)

Williams's idea of removing the objective barriers between social constructs and artistic constructs, highlighting the intertextuality of the two, and showing how they drive each other, can be attributed to many cultural theorists. Specific to Williams, however, is the acknowledgement of the language of "sheer horror" as a mode of representation, or in Williams's language an "articulation," that offers illuminating insights into "views that may have generated the catastrophe and narrated afterwards" (Young 5). Where Young

acknowledges the sense of sheer horror often as an end point or a black hole in Holocaust studies (i), Williams's theory allows for inquiry into the social processes that underline how we come to know the Holocaust through the myriad representations and figurations and allows for an inquiry into how we feel about the knowledge and emotions such representations evoke.

The structure of feeling articulates the tears and songs of persons living under specific social conditions by conflating the public with the personal. Williams's structure of feeling discusses how art and literature do not exist outside or apart from the day-to-day lives of communities and other social formations, but are inextricable parts of these processes. In fact, art and literature are often the only available means by which to articulate the lived experiences of social groups.<sup>2</sup> This necessary articulation of living processes can be seen as the driving force under which Theodor Adorno recants his earlier claim that it is barbaric to write poetry after-Auschwitz. After reading the poetry of Paul Celan, Adorno concludes that "[p]erennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream" (362). Adorno's sense that suffering has a right to articulation in art is Williams's structure of feeling torn down to its core. The scream, whether articulated in African American Blues poetry and song or in the work of writers like Paul Celan and Charlotte Delbo, points to the social and material conditions that arise to evoke such emotive articulations. If the generalized response to the

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<sup>2</sup> For example one could look at Blues music and writing as a structure of feeling for an African American Experience in the United States. Blues music is directly born from the oppressive lived experience of a social group and articulates the experience of social oppression in song.



Holocaust is sheer horror, I suggest that Williams's formulation brings both observation and the lived or life-world together into consideration of the material social processes that drive the collective scream.

I contend that embedded in the historicity of the Holocaust and inextricably tied to its narrations are emotional reactions that, given critical analysis, can lead us to interpretations of what shaped and contributed to the event. In other words, as in the case of the representations and narrations that Young discusses, the way the Holocaust is represented, written, and reacted to in some ways performs the range of emotion inspired and provoked by the event in the first place. Emotive responses feed and construct those very same narratives and representations that Young interrogates. I cannot conceive of weeding out inquiry into what Young calls the "numbing shock evoked by the calculated murder of a people" (i). Numbing shock deserves an articulation, and its articulation is central to my poetics. Silencing that shock and delineating representations of the Holocaust are dangerous actions. What happens when language makes sense of certain applications and procedures that are otherwise unthinkable, that is, when language removes its own shock value? For example, the repeated associations of the Jewish people with vermin made the "extermination" processes palpable to a human sensibility, and thus made it almost natural to use a product like Zyklon-B -- a pesticide -- to deal with the "problem." Subtracting the humanness from the Jewish people allowed the Nazis the pretence to distance themselves. To the Nazis, the Jews were not experiencing human suffering but something foreign, something belonging to an entirely different genus.

The semantic capabilities of language to interpellate human beings as insects and reduce whole ranges of experience to generalized empty statements is holographic of the social processes that allow for a passive community spectatorship of genocide. The calculated murder of millions is not separate from the numbing shock such murders provoke. Desensitization allows for the recurrence, the repetition of said events. Instead of interrogating the reaction to trauma so extreme that a profound dissociation occurs, semantics chalks it up to the sheer horror of the event. Once the language of "sheer horror" is invoked, a collective shoulder shrug of acknowledgement ensues and to delve further, as Young states, is to end up on some ineffable plane such as a black hole. When the language of sheer horror does get taken up as a way to understand the Holocaust and the subject of genocide, sheer horror becomes a theme, a way to discuss figuratively events too extraordinary to be part of daily existence. Thus, a separation occurs and emotive response gets shuffled off into the aesthetics of art and more realist discussion moves on to historical and theoretical analysis; what we know rather than how this made us feel. If I do not articulate the scream, the shock, the horror when I talk about families torn apart, herded into cattle cars, tortured, starved, and dying, I am a passive spectator. At worst, I imagine myself outside and apart; the possibility of such an experience becomes unthinkable. If something is ultimately unthinkable, then how can I speak of it?

The language of sheer horror, and not its a/effects, is prohibitive of further inquiry in much the same way that I believe the naming of the "unspeakable" functions within language as a dead end to generative discussion. To say the Holocaust is unspeakable when obviously it has been spoken is not a literal interpretation, but rather a suggestion

that the Holocaust is inconceivable, ungraspable, unfathomable, and therefore outside of human comprehension. What defense, recourse, or responsibility can we attach to an event that within the construct of language semantically points to its being non-existent? Between 1933 and 1945 Hitler and his Nazi regime conceived, discussed and put into action the idea of genocide. Nothing about the Holocaust is inconceivable; what is troubling is that a distance in language is affected between the possibility of the Holocaust and our day-to-day mode of living. I need to problematize this distance, this sense of the unspeakable and to highlight the connections between day-to-day life and the Holocaust. Williams's concept gives the unspeakable an articulation "not by derivation from other social forms and pre-forms, but as social formation of a specific kind." A structure of feeling joins the semantic value of the term with a cultural value and makes available the comprehension of a "social and material process" that can lead to the kinds of violence encapsulated in the use of roach gas to rid Europe of undesirable human beings. The inverted logic that occurs on the linguistic plane, the empathy and compassion it obscures can lead -- and did so in this instance -- to the reality of the crematoria.

Without an inquiry into the language of emotion and the emotional responses that evoke phrases like "sheer horror," the concept of an event being hellish acts as a deadlocked emotional response that is easy to disregard in favour of further interrogation of fact and representations of fact. As Holocaust survivor and writer Imre Kertész states, words such as "unspeakable" or "hell" are misleading slogans because they belie day-to-day experiences and ultimately become tautologies, referring to nothing but themselves.

In other instances the act of naming something “unspeakable” or “hell” separates the object from the subject or objectifies subjects. By interpellating events in ways that deem them outside of everyday social processes, we erect a semantic barrier between the possibilities of what a group lives and what a group experiences in the course of that life. The semantic barrier that renders an experience of an event unspeakable profoundly disconnects the would-be speaker from the world. What kinds of impact on agency does this disconnection have? These forms of representation do hold a danger and not in the way Young formulates as forcing a thematic discussion, but rather in the way Imre Kertész conceives of as something he calls *kitsch*: “any representation of the Holocaust that is incapable of understanding or unwilling to understand the organic connection between our own deformed mode of life (whether in the private sphere or on the level of “civilization” as such) and the very possibility of the Holocaust” (2001). Thus using language like “sheer horror” — the descriptive language at our disposal, which attaches words to events we cannot find easy words for — negates the potential to see the day-to-day connections between experiences and events and, as well, how narrations influence and construct ideologies. By posing as natural ways of seeing the world, repressive ideologies prevent us from understanding the material/historical conditions in which we live because they refuse to acknowledge that those conditions have any bearing on the way we see the world.<sup>3</sup> In the novel *Fateless*, Kertész’s protagonist George’s response to

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<sup>3</sup> I owe this idea to Henry Louis Gates Jr. In his essay “What’s in a Name?: Some Meanings of Blackness,” Gates recounts the story of a white man calling his father George. As his father’s name is not George the young Gates is confused. His father responds that the white man calls “all coloured people

a journalist seeking George's story of Auschwitz survival sums up how the language of sheer horror occludes the connection between life (i.e. social and material processes) and the Holocaust:

'Son, wouldn't you like to tell me about your experiences?' I was a little surprised and told him that I couldn't tell him very many interesting things. Then he smiled a little and said, 'Not to me, to the world.' Even more astonished, I replied, 'What should I talk about?' 'The hell of the camps,' he replied, but I answered that I couldn't say anything about that because I didn't know anything about hell and couldn't even imagine what it was like. (181)

George attempts to make the reporter understand that George imagines hell as a place in which you cannot be bored; however, "you can be bored in a concentration camp, even in Auschwitz – given of course certain circumstances [...] There is the unfortunate disadvantage that you somehow have to pass away the time." George realizes that the journalist cannot imagine this, and so concludes, "That's probably why they say 'hell' instead" (182).

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George" (136). While different in circumstance than the issues I am discussing in my essay, what is salient is the way ideology (and language is ideological) oppresses and constructs identities by dismissing the lives and experiences of "others." Inherent in this dismissal is the need to seize on the power of articulation. Foucault states: "discourse is not simply that which manifests (or hides) desire – it is also the object of desire; [...] discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is seized" (240). When the lived experiences of people are reduced to the unspeakable, when their identities are reduced to "Georges," all power, all agency is lost.

Language functions to try to make sense of what we cannot understand, and words like “hell” substitute a complete range of experiences that when dissected reveal not the supernatural but the “organic connection to our own deformed mode of life.” The camps did not exist on some ineffable plane; they existed in the center of Europe. It is imperative that the feelings the events provoke are never weeded out from their representations, for the language of representations cannot be trusted.

Language is not just textual, language is “inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world” (Thiong'o 16). Language carries ideological weight and thus language that attempts to silence or dissociate those connections between social conditions and their articulations serve to reinforce the dominant ideological agenda which is to keep minorities in their place and perpetuate the interpellation of the “other.” This aggressive disassociative process, this reliance on “sense” that makes objects of subjects, makes me think of a line from Shelley: “Lift not the painted veil which those who live call life” (Sonnet 1824), for when it is lifted reality is almost too much to bear. The ideology behind the veil is the need to make the veil appear natural as opposed to a social construct that allows for the perpetuation of the status quo. I believe that this compulsion to veil is embedded in the representations and ways of thinking about representations to which Young alludes. As Young points out, it may be our very way of interpreting events that can give us insight into understanding how these events occur. The impulse to distance oneself emotionally from the extreme suffering of others in order to proceed with a more theoretical analysis is the continuum of the emotionally numbing

reaction of delving too deeply into said suffering. Where Young feels that the sheer horror of the Holocaust has “swamped more important historical and literary questions” (preface), I contend that without an inquiry into the idea, language, and experience of sheer horror, in fact the very deforming of experience, we can only label such events as the Holocaust as *hell*. In that case, how can we even begin to touch on important historical and literary questions?

### **A Fatal Light Awareness: Birds and Weeping**

Tinted or clear, glass is invisible to birds. If it reflects their natural habitat -- the trees, shrubs or sky where they would normally take refuge from perceived dangers -- chances are good they'll fly towards it.<sup>4</sup>

The phenomenon of birds mistaking windows for sky, tree or ground is called fatal light awareness. Because the windowpane reflects the outdoor environment, birds are incapable of recognizing glass and therefore, these fatal collisions occur. I consider the phenomenon of fatal light awareness as a metaphor in which to discuss the hazards, the pitfalls, and in the most extreme sense the fatalities, of representing historical events. Specifically, as in the case of the Holocaust, where an event is already loaded with so

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<sup>4</sup> Information taken from the Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP) website. FLAP is a group devoted to saving the one hundred million to one billion birds that die each year in North America alone due to collisions with glass structures.

much representational baggage, navigating your way through its representations can be extremely precarious. The written attempts at historical representation are often misleading, subjective, and, depending on your preferred theoretical bent, constructed by the dominant ideology. The surface that writing gravitates towards fails to represent what memory wants to grasp. What is revealed instead are shards and fragments of the event, and never in the exact order of occurrence. In my experience, what is represented on the surface, what I remember as the past, disappears when I try to touch it. In the wake of this disappearance a new reality of the present occurs. I relate this shattering of illusion to the way trees disappear for birds when the birds hit the surface of glass. *a fatal light awareness tore them apart*. Especially as it concerns the Holocaust, writing becomes a life and death affair. In the most profound sense, writing about the Holocaust defies Himmler's spoken words that this is an event which will never be recorded.<sup>5</sup>

I cannot separate myself and my sense of poetics completely from the practice of representation. What I am searching for is a way to navigate through these representations of genocide that have had such a profound effect on my world view. The photographs of human beings reduced to walking skeletons, of their twisted bodies lying in piles, are part of who I am and are indelible parts of how I remember the past. These images are not my memories from experience; they are my experience of memory. When I think of myself as a Jew and of my own experiences of anti-Semitism, these are the

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<sup>5</sup> Himmler's October 4, 1943 speech given in the city of Posen (Pozen). Himmler states that the Nazi extermination of the Jews is a "glorious page in our history that has never been written and shall never be written" (<http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/h/himmler-heinrich/posen/oct-04-43/>).



memories that surface for me. This kind of remembering is dangerous in its own right because these are not my memories but an appropriation of the memories of others. Thus memory itself becomes its own site, a point where the experience of receiving traumatic information constitutes a memory of the event. Seeking to restate memory is part of a framework of traumatic repetitions, of the constant return to the site of the event, to the deaths of so many. The site itself displaces the event, as the after-Auschwitz speaker displaces the victims of the Holocaust, and the site becomes its own event that holds all the trauma of memory in tow. In this site are the images of Pavel Friedmann's butterflies juxtaposed with the decay and death of ghetto life. The site is where I believe my experience of the Holocaust dwells.

My experience of the Holocaust is through representations of the Holocaust. This is the only claim to the event that I have. I need to generate something more from this site, not to obscure the event that brought the site into being but to interrogate the language of the repetitions, to feel what thought provokes. I wish to create an avenue in which memory is allowed to expand outward and not, as is so compelling when confronted with Holocaust history, to collapse inward in despair. I need to generate something more, *some thinging, some singing*, while remaining vigilant against easy platitudes and messages of hope, for the simple reason that I am still breathing. Poetry is an extension of this breath. Therefore, my writing in the shadow of the Holocaust is truly a matter of life and death. To compare my struggle for poetry after-Auschwitz to the life and death struggle of those who lived the experience would be ludicrous. I am struggling to navigate an inherited trauma, the part of my being that is Jewish, what Jean Améry

schoolyard, I felt relief at not having to deal with schoolyard politics. *in a way it's an escape from having to stand while the captains pick who they want on their teams who can spike the ball the hardest.*

The Anti-Semitic signs of swastikas and bomb scares were givens of my day-to-day life and were not yet placed under the rubric of *Holocaust*. The poems awoke me, and the fate of the young poets instilled in me a feeling of being unsafe in the world, first as a child, and later, as I came to deeper understanding, as a Jew. I do not think this feeling has ever left me. Thus every word, every thing I want to write becomes a trick of light, a distorted figure, a shadow. *what is remembered still is not a school auditorium and a slide show of tiny bones but the wire on the window and the bird caught between.* I recant my earlier words: there is no critical ground. There is only a reflective surface flooded with reflection upon reflection. In respect to the birds and others that seek freedom, I only hope that there is more room for flight than walls of glass within the work.

to tend to  
on hands and knees  
rail driven  
forward  
by tropes that figure you here  
where breath is vapour  
bodies spectres

wraiths of wading birds

wail

all mourning

(from *Hollow Articulations* 57 )

Poetry, as an interpretive practice, opens up space for inquiry, for possibilities to question the real. I begin with the problem of trying to understand how to navigate this inherited narrative of the Holocaust, and the deeper I delve, the more questions arise. The phenomenon of fatal light awareness occurs: meaning, facts, and representations are illusions. I gravitate towards mutable poetic language, as opposed to the more traditional language of explanations. When I think of birds, I often think of poems. Something about poetic language invites thoughts of winged creatures. Again and again, I return to the possibility and metaphor of flight. Yet it is important to recognize that just as the language of sheer horror is weighted and points to a host of ideological claims about suffering and truth, so does the language of having birds stand in for words so that I can form a semantic escape. What is inviting to birds in some cases can be fatal. More questions arise.

### **Question #1 : What Weights in Your Hand?**

Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream.

(Theodor Adorno 362)

Although most of the poems in the manuscript are untitled, there are a few called “questions.” These questions occur when I feel the weight of the poem taking over and directing the lines into a narrative, into a shape that provides answers. But I do not have answers and the deeper I delve into this study the more questions arise. How do I turn, or at least attempt to turn, to bend the light, to change the word *Holocaust* into less of an object, less of an “it”, into more of a \_\_\_\_\_? How do I deflect the power of the windows to deceive? How do I suggest a change of course without imposing one? How do I reflect beyond the fatal collision with the glass and open up a space to make a last-minute turn even if on a different plane the collision keeps repeating itself? The non-linear, abstract construction of the poems is my attempt at a last-minute turn, not entirely for the sake of hope or redemption, but more for the smallest possibility of a grace period<sup>6</sup>, of one more second of flight. This longing for grace materializes in the way I use language as a conveyer not of sense, but predominately of sound. Instead of having the words echo only one meaning, I am hoping that a myriad of possibilities for thought and feeling exist in every line.

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<sup>6</sup> Grace as a word has many different connotations. While inherent in the movement of the poems and the figurative ideas of the birds is the idea of a beauty of form, I am thinking of grace more as a reprieve, a moment of clemency as in the idea of a “day’s grace.” I chose grace over reprieve for the very reason the term makes me uncomfortable; grace implies an upward movement, ascension, while the movement of a reprieve feels more horizontal. For creatures with the ability of flight, grace seems more suited to the idea of granting them more space. As well, grace with its variable meanings carries many echoes.

The notion of echoing plays a central role in my critical poetics and is crucial for sounding out the traumatic repetitions of a consciousness constructed around the Holocaust. As this is writing “after-Auschwitz,” the wall of consciousness is always already there. Echoing allows for a different take than the language of representations allows. But if I am writing “after-Auschwitz,” then I am still writing, no matter how opaquely, in some kind of representative time. I am writing in the language of seconds and minutes, the semantics of time. Time wants to put itself in order and cannot conceive of making a turn seconds after the collision. Thus, I need to deal with the collapse and the collision that satisfies the desire for the language of sheer horror each time I venture into the world of the camps. It is in the interstice between the language of sheer horror and the imagination that I suggest the concept of the echo to facilitate a moment of grace from the inevitable collision with the window, to see in the language of sheer horror the flap of wings. The collapse is reductive: what is generated is a stagnant and over-determined identity. The echo by its very nature is expansive: it flows outward endlessly from the site. Sheer horror permits the image of the Jew as a site of suffering, as “squatting on the windowsill” of life and poems (Gerontion, L7-8). At its worst, the collision is not only fatal but also fated. I want to sound out the echoes of that collision. To do this, I conceptualize a way of approaching language informally, and reflectively. In poetry, sound and song reiterate and reverberate off the walls of representative yearnings, prompting the desire for authenticity of fact into a change of course. In turn (both literally and figuratively), what is achieved is language that acts generatively, language that can for a moment override its entropic course.

I view this representative process not as an attempt to (re)write history or events but simply as an echo of a traumatic sense of history. I can conceptualize my experience of the Holocaust as the echo of another's lived experience. I am not so much appropriating memory as drawing away from it, abstracting the memory in the same way an echo abstracts the end phrases of sentences. In the myth of Echo, the nymph is doomed to only repeat the last lines of an already spoken sentence and is unable to create any original material of her own. This repetitive echoing almost has the ability to act generatively; the echo becomes its own phrase with its own echoes. Embedded in the notion of Echo is what is hidden and what is revealed. For example, the echo of "do not come to me" may only repeat the latter part of the sentence: "come to me." Whereas previously movement was not an option, now it is. Inherent in the response to this command, however, is also danger. The office tower says, "I am a glass structure; do not come to me," but the reflection of light beckons, "come to me." Intention and meaning are derailed in the repetitions. The words leave the mouth/keyboard of the speaker/writer and are generated into something new by the listener/reader. The idea of double meanings, of variance, is performed in poetry through devices like reiteration. A given phrase repeated throughout a poem's lines both takes on different meanings with each new movement as well as reflects the context of the original phrase. Nothing ever sounds exactly the same way twice, and allowing for this difference opens up space for inquiry. Figuratively and literally, a sentence -- be it the undersentences of Blau's poetry that support the images of the Holocaust, or the sentences that contain people's identities, ideas or hope -- does not end: it keeps repeating and within those repetitions, change

occurs. Thus, in the repetitive return to the site of trauma there are possibilities for new meanings to be generated. Changing meaning, showing meaning's variance, problematizes maybe not the historical site, but perhaps a static, over-determined identity that history interpellates onto individuals. The new meaning still carries the fatality of the original statement, the now parenthetical "do not," but also offers possibility for a change, an alteration of the course.

The language of flight and the notion of escape is its own literary trope, often symbolized by a bird, and therefore can be reductive in its own right. It is too easy for the mind to turn to the sky when it cannot handle what it sees happening on the earth. This detachment is an extension of the numbing shock that precedes the language of sheer horror. I cannot make a good case for the birds. As a writer of poems and a purveyor of figurative language, I am attached to the birds because they appear to have come along with the poems. I try to not use birds in my manuscript merely as symbols of freedom; instead, I use birds as symbols of freedom that are fated to fly into towers because signs are misleading and the idea of freedom heavily depends on ideological constraints. In other words, freedom depends on sentences.

Anthropologist Steven Feld's research with the Kaluli tribe of Papua New Guinea uncovers another figurative way of seeing birds as embodying the flipside to freedom, the impetus that forces a person to take refuge in flight. As well, the Kaluli's mythology works well with the type of inquiry I am conducting into structures of feeling and the creative capacities of life, by pointing to the underlying material and social processes that are the impulse for certain articulations as well as the possibilities for change. I use poetic

language to articulate the creative capacities of life because poetry is well suited to reflect an inquiry into structures of feeling and the extremity of genocide. Because of the structure of poetic language, its non-linearity and disjunctions, and the way signs/words can escape their referents/meanings, poetry can echo trauma in a way the explicit language of representations cannot. I do not think trauma can ever be adequately represented in language, as many retellings are necessary for the full story to come across and even then something is always missing or lost. Within the manuscript, words and phrases link to the Holocaust as an event, but not with the intention of transmitting a truth about the event. My intention is to convey that representative language has failed us in our understanding of genocide. To believe and teach the idea that if we remember an event then it will not happen again is, if history has proven anything, a big lie. What is wrong with our way of remembering that allows for the continual mass murders of groups? Germany murdered millions of Jews before other countries got involved: did we not learn anything from this tragedy, or did our way of learning lead, for example, to the tens of thousands murdered in Bosnia? I do not think writing semi-abstract poetry is going to change the world and stop genocides from happening. I do, however, hope that poetry motivates people to think about the ways in which words make sense out of forgetting and genocide and all the other seemingly natural ways in which we oppress and suppress human rights. Poetic language is never enough. It is, after all, the testimonies, stories, and documentations that provide the basis, the ground, from which this poetic language takes off.



saw in the flap of wings

where the trees left off

and the birds began

(From *Hollow Articulations* 29)

### **How to Write the Wail**

Anthropologist Stephen Feld discusses the way in which the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea conceptualize music and poetic language, both of which they associate with birds and weeping. The Kaluli have a song about a boy who, denied food by his sister, turns into a bird and flies away. In flight, his cries continue and become a song, “semiwept and semisung” (Mackey, 232).

For the Kaluli then, the quintessential source of music is the orphan’s ordeal – an orphan being denied kinship, social sustenance, anyone who suffers, to use

Orlando Patterson’s phrase, ‘social death’ (Mackey, 232).

Again, Williams’s structure of feeling is a particularly apt theory to describe articulations that represent or arise from social crises. The articulation of “semiwept and semisung” is poetic language that reflects a traumatic break with society and the environment. For Jean Améry nothing signified that break more than the proclamations of the Nuremberg laws in 1935:

It didn’t begin until 1935, when I was sitting over a newspaper in a Vienna coffeehouse and was studying the Nuremberg Laws, which had just been enacted

across the border in Germany. I needed only to skim them and already I could perceive that they applied to me. Society, concretized in the Nationalist Socialist German state, which the world recognized absolutely as the legitimate representative of the German people, had just made me formally and beyond any question that I was a Jew [...] If the sentence that society had passed on me had a tangible meaning, it could only be that henceforth I was a quarry of Death. [...] I do not believe that I am inadmissibly projecting Auschwitz and the Final Solution back to 1935 when I advance these thoughts today. Rather, I am certain that in the year, at that moment when I read the Laws, I did indeed already hear the death threat – better the death sentence – and certainly no special sensitivity toward history was required for that. (85)

Unlike the Kaluli myth, Améry could not transform into a bird and take flight. Rather he was beaten by police and transported to Auschwitz. The absurd irony of the Kaluli myth juxtaposed with the Holocaust, as Améry goes on to say, is that the sole duty of the Jew was “to disappear from the face of the earth” (86). This disappearance was not by way of transformation into a bird; rather, the Nazi imagination conceived of the Jew’s disappearance via smoke through a crematorium chimney.

### **Question #2: But isn’t it Barbaric?**

Feeling unsafe in the world means I experience a constant low-level state of paranoia, with a background movement that sounds like jack boots approaching.

Everything has a hidden secondary meaning. It is hard for me to trust even what I write

because I myself do not trust the language of explanations. What explanation is there for the Holocaust? Is it ethical even to look for meaning in Auschwitz? Here Adorno's oft cited dictum rears itself: "[i]t is barbaric to write poetry after-Auschwitz." In an upside down world in which children are not saved, where doctors use their skills to torture and kill, civilization itself is barbaric. There are countless genocides to write of. I am sitting on the physical site of one of the largest and most ongoing genocides, that of the Native North Americans. So much of this world is too much to bear. But language like "too much to bear" and "sheer horror" allow the painted veil to remain. I wish to avoid generalizing phrases that allows the surface to (incorrectly) presume to speak for the whole, and for the status quo of groups treated as sub-citizens/-human to perpetuate. It is no small concern that in formulations of meaning and address lies the power to annihilate the ways of, and the lives of, entire groups of people. Who am I to make poetry out of the suffering of others, and yet how can I not call attention to this suffering? How can this poetry be anything other than "semi-wept and semi-sung"?

The best argument for writing poetry after-Auschwitz comes from the poet Lyn Hejinian. Hejinian interprets Adorno's dictum as a call not so much to abstain from the practice of poetry, but to highlight and pronounce the barbaric. Hejinian reads *barbarism* epistemologically:

as it comes from the Greek *barbaros*, means "foreign" – that is, "not speaking the same language" (*barbaros* being an onomatopoeic imitation of babbling) – and such is precisely the task of poetry: not to speak the same language as Auschwitz.

(326)

Thus to challenge the ideological language behind sheer horror, the familiar and reductive language that reduces people, is to make the language of sheer horror barbaric. In Hejinian's conception, the language that leads to genocides should become foreign to the "cultures that produce atrocities" (326). One point that I find troubling is that I do speak the same language as Auschwitz.<sup>7</sup> Even more troubling is that the idea of making everyday language feel foreign was a strategy employed by Hitler's regime. The Nazis became experts at taking the seemingly familiar and making it barbaric.<sup>8</sup> As Améry notes:

The SS was employing a logic of destruction that in itself operated just as consistently as the logic of self preservation did in the outside world. You always had to be clean shaven, but it was strictly forbidden to possess razor or scissors, and you went to the barber only once every two weeks. On threat of punishment no button could be missing on the striped inmate suit, but if you lost one at work,

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<sup>7</sup> Not in terms of literal spoken languages, but in the respect that I share a Western European cultural heritage.

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that in 1940, Hermann Rauschning, a former National Socialist and member of Hitler's inner circle, published an account of Hitler's table talk. In that talk Hitler seems to revel in the idea of being barbaric. "They regard me an uneducated barbarian," [Hitler] exclaimed jubilantly. "Yes, we are barbarians! We want to be barbarians! It is an honorable title. We shall rejuvenate the world! The world is near its end. It is our mission to cause unrest" (Hirsch 258). When I read something like this I feel the full weight of futility descend. Language never stays strange for long, it is a characteristic of language that it can shape and fit even the most extreme of thought. When it comes to enacting violence, language seems quite suited to the task.

which was unavoidable, there was practically no chance to replace it. You had to be strong, but you were systematically weakened. Upon entrance to the camp everything was taken from you, but then you were derided by the robbers because you owned nothing. (10)

What Améry notes as the “logic of destruction,” the Nazi project of making meaning senseless, useless, and ultimately non-utilitarian, resonates with a postmodern attitude towards language and meaning. As well, if you make language foreign to the cultures that commit atrocities, what are you doing for the victims who live in those same cultures and whose experiences of atrocity are embedded in the language of the culture and which is their only available articulation? Does not this distance the victims from their own experiences and deny them their own pain and self-expression? Hejinian’s theory of barbarism is not intended to silence the victims but to challenge the language that constructs victims and of ideologies that interpellate. However, the language of theory and deconstruction is intimately tied to those same ideologies. After all, the grandfather of postmodern theory is Martin Heidegger, a card-carrying Nazi. As Young states, “What is remembered of the Holocaust depends on how it is remembered, and how events are remembered depends in turn on the texts now giving them form” (1). If we remember Auschwitz as foreign, then is this not an “outside” way of remembering? What occurs if we remember Auschwitz using the theories of Nazis? Does this distorted perception not suggest a fundamental disconnection between ways of living and ways of perceiving? Were not the Jews always perceived as outsiders, barbaric, strange and foreign, even to the inhabitants of countries where they lived for generations? There is no outside.

How people live, their actions, and the philosophies, theories, and art they create, are not separate from one another. What happens when the ideas of a brilliant intellectual are taken up by the very group that suffers from the kinds of racism this same intellectual supports? If the ideas are taken up with full knowledge that their author supported the murder of innocents, does this then become an act of anarchy that subverts original intention and helps a group find a means of expression, an articulation? Or is acceptance of a racist person's ideas measured by degrees, a few racial slurs here and there are acceptable, wearing a white hood and burning crosses is not? Stated simply, are bad people capable of writing great books, pieces of music, or philosophical treatises? Apparently. Should these works be studied outside of the historical sites and ideologies in which they were influenced and conceived? I don't think so. I cannot conveniently forget the Heidegger who "could be passionately interested in a Celan poem dedicated to Rene Char, but when one read him Celan's translation of Osip Mandelstam's Jerusalem poem 'The Priests,' he brusquely shoved the book from the table" (Anderson 17). Why would Heidegger so violently disregard Mandelstam's poetry? It could not be purely for the fact of Mandelstam's Jewishness; Celan after all was a Jew. Perhaps Heidegger reacted in this manner because Mandelstam rebelled against a revolution that turned fascist while Heidegger never publicly declared any regret at all for his participation in Hitler's Germany. This is pure conjecture and there are many more compelling arguments that highlight the extremity of Heidegger's anti-Semitism. However, this simple act of brushing a book off a table, echoes with what Améry realized in 1935: for the anti-Semite, the sole duty of the Jew was to disappear from the table, the page, the earth.

Where they have burned books, they will end in burning human beings.

(Heinrich Heine, *Almansor* 1821)

device springs (shut)

the idea

what thought provokes

stuttering magpies

over a button hole

(From *Hollow Articulations* 45)

Instead of using the logic and over-intellectualizations of deconstructionism, I wish to inquire into the structures and constructions of feeling, in the way these constructions are tied to social and material processes. I wish to move outward in the disembodied body of the echo, to see what the imagination can do with these forms and to grasp the way ideologies create painful environments and the way language makes an ideology out of pain and suffering. Is it not predictable that poetry that takes the Holocaust as subject is comprised of weeping and song, the language and sounds of pain and suffering? I am challenged by the mutable language of emotion. Like the towers that reflect light, emotions are difficult to read. However, once again I am trapped between. Like the cultures that create "social fraud" I rely on polarities to make meaning. I need to set something up so I can fly around it. I need to keep repeating fatal collisions so that I

can keep moving forward. I see another false reflection, a deception. Inherent in the song are lies.

### **The Trauma of Flight: A Cruel Trick of Light**

Jean Améry writes of those of us who were not at Auschwitz but who nevertheless are compelled to study it:

[O]nly we, the sacrificed are able to spiritually relive the catastrophic event as it was or fully picture it as it could be again. Let others not be prevented from empathizing, let them contemplate a fate that yesterday could have been and tomorrow can be theirs. Their intellectual efforts will meet with our respect, but it will be a skeptical one and in conversation with them we will soon grow silent and say to ourselves: go ahead, good people, trouble your heads as much as you want; you still sound like a blind man talking about colour. (93)

The imagination is all that we have at our disposal to make any kind of sense of the world. Imagination is both its own light and its own fatal flight. My poetry does not seek to re-present a past or a future; it draws away from these surfaces and follows, like a songbird on a migrating path, the bend of the light. Encapsulated in the light is the experience of trauma -- "of a fate that yesterday could have been and tomorrow can be [mine]" -- and as well, of the knowledge that the poem itself is only another construct, an ideological weight, that tells me that I can make something sound like songbirds while the ground beneath me is littered with bodies. I am torn. I leave representation for



theories of distortion and reflection. Essential to the concept of fatal light awareness is the metaphor and the material of the light, because in the end it is the light, the imagination's noise, that deceives.

In certain constellations light stands for knowledge, peace and salvation. The light in the Jewish religion is the flame that cannot be extinguished. Jewish traditions, from Shabbat candles to Yarzheit mourning candles commemorate and celebrate light. The story of Chanukah, the festival of lights, is the miracle of a single oil lamp meant to burn for only one day but that kept burning for eight. This light signified to the Jewish people that G-d was still with them as they rebuilt and sanctified their desecrated temple. The light is easy to believe in. Culture and learning and books are the light. Germany was perceived as a seat of enlightenment. The light, because of its draw and the phenomenon of fatal light awareness, is threatening. Consider the figure of Leo Baeck, the famous Berlin rabbi who sat down to pay his electric bill before the SS dragged him off to Theresienstadt (Gubar 200). There is a moment of shattering, a moment when the light bends and what is revealed is the fatal collision with the window's pane/pain. One only has to think of the horrific implications of Kristallnacht<sup>9</sup> – the night of broken glass – to

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<sup>9</sup> On the nights of November 9 and 10, 1938, gangs of Nazi youth roamed through Jewish neighborhoods breaking windows of Jewish businesses and homes, burning synagogues and looting. 1000 synagogues and almost 7,500 Jewish businesses were destroyed. 26,000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps, thousands of Jews were physically attacked and beaten, and 96 Jews were killed (Snyder, Louis L. *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich*. New York: Paragon House, 1989: 201).

hone the horrifying connections that bring the idea of fatal light awareness out of the metaphoric realm and into the realm of the Nazi death camps.

### **Question #3: With/without?**

[I]t may have been wrong to say that after-Auschwitz you could no longer write poems.

(Theodor Adorno 362)

the myth of spring

(echo and

)

to suffer

word play

(From *Hollow Articulations* 39)

“The Failure of Poetry” was my first idea of a title for this work. The sentiment has nothing to do with the writing of poetry; it attacks Keats’ ideological definition of a poet as the one who pours a balm onto the world. There is no comfort being provided here, no transcendent value being offered. In *At the Mind’s Limit*, Jean Améry provides an excellent illustration of the failure of poetry to transcend and represent when silhouetted against the Auschwitz world. Améry and the other prisoners are returning back to the camp from a hard day’s labour. Out of the corner of his eye Améry notices “a

flag waving in front of a half-finished building” and he recalls a line from a Hölderlin poem: “The walls stand speechless and cold, the flags clank in the wind” (7). As Améry attempts to focus on the poem and the “emotional and mental” response that historically had awakened in him, he concludes that “the poem no longer transcended reality. There it was and all that remained was objective statement: such and such, and the Kapo roars ‘left,’ and the soup was watery and the flags are clanking in the wind” (7). For Améry, the idea of the “intellectual word game [in poetry] no longer had any social relevance” (8). It is known that Dr. Mengele himself would recite Hölderlin (Hirsch 71). Again, the language that produces atrocities is also the language of its victims.

How do I poeticize a way of life that would have someone still believe in the presence of SS guards that if he pays his electrical bill there will be light when he returns? I am both arguing for a space of feeling and reflection in representations of the Holocaust and parading out Kertész’s line that writing should “understand the organic connection between our deformed mode of life (whether in the private sphere or on the level of “civilization” as such) and the very possibility of the Holocaust” (269). To use an everyday occurrence to signify a deeper truth, such as Leo Baeck paying his electrical bill to make a point about the deception of light, or Heidegger shoving a book from a table, reads a lot like realism. And what is there left to do about realism than to deconstruct the language of the real that makes the language of genocide “natural?”

Michael Rothberg calls for a “traumatic realism” that “attempts to produce the traumatic event as an object of knowledge and to program and transform its readers so that they are forced to acknowledge their relationship to posttraumatic culture” (109).

Instead of criticizing realism's failure to represent the connection between the everyday and the extremity of the Holocaust, Rothberg highlights and works through that failure by forcing recognition that the very failure of realism to convey trauma is in itself a traumatic event. In other words, for Rothberg, readers must be forced to acknowledge the relationship between trauma and the events that caused the trauma. Isn't this Kertész's sentiment in a nutshell? I do, however, find Rothberg's language a little demanding: "to produce," "program," "transform," "forced." As well, the term "object of knowledge" speaks of ideological constructs or totalizing organizational principles. Is this the language of realism, the kinds of demands realism makes on the language that forces a more authoritarian and autonomous approach to the writing and reading? Is there something inherently transparent about the aims of realism to convert what we see into truth and, at its most ambitious, to define revolutions and political movements? Rothberg is certainly not using realism transparently, as he is aware of all these permutations; he is using realism traumatically, thus expanding the definition of realism:

[A] realism in which the scars that mark the relationship of discourse to the real are not fetishistically denied, but exposed; a realism in which the claims of reference live on, but so does the traumatic extremity that disables realistic representation as usual. (106)

Rothberg's argument is compelling, as it highlights the limits imposed on representation by trauma. However, I still believe that behind even innovative theories of realism is a totalizing organizational principle that is useful in addressing those "important and literary questions": realism as it relates to cause and effect. On the other hand, realism, as

a mastery of efficiency and bureaucracy, a supreme totalizing organizational structure, echoes the structure of the Holocaust. If the traumatic realist project is to make this structure explicit, then I can see its “light,” but if its project is to create more objects of knowledge, more totalizing structures, then is not this the language of cultures that promote, in Hejinian’s words, social fraud?

I am involved in the excess, the spill and spin-off, the glare and light and filth of the relationship of language and trauma. Trauma acts as a structure of feeling, a way to talk about the manuscript and the way social and material processes are embedded in traumatic formulations. Rothberg captures this notion succinctly in answering his own question of how to represent the space of the concentrationary universe: “this space can only be represented traumatically as the registration of a repetitive structure of time” (100). Trauma, with its repetitions of returning to a site that no longer exists except in time (or no time), its dysfunctional chronology, and its emphasis on gaps and absences, echoes with the structure of my poems. The structure of my poems for the most part is non-narrative and non-linear. The poems highlight gaps and focus on obsessive returns to specific events. Like trauma, within these returns details are lost and retrieved randomly. The poems enact disjunction and the inability of language to accurately represent the historical memory being sought out. I am traumatized by the Holocaust, or more specifically traumatized by stories, photographs and poems written during the war and after. Therefore, what I experienced as a child in the school auditorium was a traumatic realization, and this realization is actualized in my writing. I am not outside. I come to the Holocaust, as Young suggests, through representations of the Holocaust. And as the

representations that spoke to me strongest were poetic, it is through poetry that I attempt to work out this imprint.

Perhaps my move into poetry and away from a more realistic or representational mode is in itself embedded in the notion of trauma. Thus, the abstraction has less to do with poetry's word play and more to do with the need to disconnect from events that are too horrible to face. I am not proud of this impulse. The desire to disconnect from events or actions that are overwhelming or extreme is part of a coping mechanism. However, perhaps it is not only sites of extremity that I want to disconnect from but also the realism of everyday life, of sitting in a school auditorium and hearing about children being tossed from windows. The most obvious enactment of this idiosyncrasy occurs in language, in the way pronouns replace names. It is born in the language of "us" and "them," of "I" and "you," and in the most traumatic of cases the "I" that dissociates from itself. The moment I write "I" down on paper, a disassociation occurs. Trauma not only becomes a psychological discourse, but is materialized and becomes the schema that supports the poem. From the outset the "I" enacts that traumatic break -- that "after-Auschwitz" of Adorno's quotation. If Adorno's dictum is synthesized with Hejninian's interpretation of barbarism, then the "I" on paper is the ultimate enactment of traumatic disconnection. The "I" is foreign, a strange event unto itself. What is an "I" that is no longer me? Taken to the extreme, as in the case of the Holocaust, in a figurative sense I am no longer *I* because all ties with meaning have been lost. One only has to refer to the Nazi's systematic project of degradation in order to render the I meaningless. The most graphic example of a degraded I exists in the form of the Muselmenn, the name given to camp

prisoners who suffered from extreme starvation, sickness and exhaustion. In *Fateless*, Kertész identifies these people as walking question marks. For Améry they are:

the prisoner who has given up and was given up by his comrades, he no longer had room in his consciousness for the contrasts good or bad, noble or base, intellectual or unintellectual. He was a staggering corpse, a bundle of physical functions in its last convulsions. (9)

These inmates were beyond being robbed of their identities; no longer an I or a You but a body on the verge of death. For those inmates that were lucky enough to maintain a will to live, they knew enough to avoid the Muselmann. As Kertész writes “when one looks at them, one loses all desire to live” (*Fateless* 35). To not look, to look away and think of something else, is to disconnect from the situation. Once this need for disconnection is noted as real, as tangible, material, and figurative, if the individual does not die, the next stage of existence is abstraction. To abstract, from the Latin *abstractus*, to draw away, becomes the only alternative for survival.

At each stage of writing these poems I could see the mirrors between the structural demands of language, the organizational, linear demands of the poem, the way history compresses experience, and the way in which traumatic history leads to abstraction. Trauma as a language of feeling in everyday life -- that is in the lived-world of after- Auschwitz -- articulates the disconnection in the language of communities that allows for the spaces of violence to exist. The language of “us” and “them,” a dissociative function that must take place on some level, conscious or not, allows such cruelty to perpetuate. In this manuscript I am working with pronouns, blurring

boundaries, and highlighting, performing, and compensating for that gap between the “you” and the “I,” the “us” and the “them” that can fill with so much violence. What I hope comes through is confusion about who is speaking and the absence of a dominant *I* and a subservient *you* controlling the spaces of subjectivity within the work. At the same time as I am attempting to collapse those spaces, I do feel the gap is important, as it plays some role in survival. At times, the veil is necessary.

### **Traumatic Repetitions: Echo and an Endless Wish for Flight**

at night she suffers smoke stacks  
 in her dreams she can't breathe  
 sentenced only to repeat  
 lost buttons  
 words and other bodies  
 reduce to bird feed

(From *Hollow Articulations* 45)

The danger inherent in abstracting or poeticizing is the possibility of negating or trivializing the experiences of those who were murdered, those who suffered, and those who continue to suffer. However, attempts at realistic renderings appear transparent in creating a work of poetry, fiction or film that addresses the Holocaust. Not because



factual accounts of the Holocaust cannot be given but because attempting to fictionalize those facts can appear incomplete, inauthentic and contrived. As Young points out:

[t]he point is that neither violence per se nor the sheer extremity of the Holocaust 'killed' realism [...]. But rather, in Robert Scholes's words, 'It is because reality [itself] cannot be recorded that realism is dead. All writing, all composition, is construction. We do not imitate the world, we construct versions of it. There is no mimesis, only poesis. No recording, only construction.' (17)

Within Scholes's concept of poesis, a distinction needs to be made between Holocaust testimony and the poetic constructions that artists take on to deal with the subject. We have recordings, documents, and testimonies about what happened. Bearing witness does have an obligation towards accurate representation. History is traced from these representations. The point is to inquire into the implications and impact of the knowledge of the Holocaust and to propose poetic possibilities within this devastating context. I conceptualize poetic language as the sounds of the Kaluli of Feld's research, as "the semi-weep and semi-sung," in order to materialize in the poetry the sounds of weeping born from "social death." I have utilized Williams's structure of feeling theory to bring to the idea of feeling a structure in which to think about the ways in which this emotive articulation shapes and is shaped by the lived experience of trauma. I have then added the notion of an echo so that I am no longer writing those experiences about which I have no claim and to which I could not do justice. I am writing the residues of weeping, the sounds of sorrow that came from the camps and ghettos to my ears. For Charlotte Delbo,

who was there, who lived what Améry lived and therefore does not need to imagine, there is no use for birds. The condemned women are the materialized cry.

The women pass near us. They cry out and we hear nothing. This cold and dry air would be conductive if we were in an ordinary earthly environment. They cry out to us but no sound reaches us. Their mouths cry out, their outstretched arms cry out, and every bit of them cries out. Each body is a cry. So many torches that flame in cries of terror, so many cries that have assumed the bodies of women. Each woman is a materialized cry, a scream that is not heard. The truck moves silently over the snow, passes under a portico, and disappears. It carries off the cries. (33)

The *it* that “carries off the cries” is where my poetry begins. The poems are echoes. How far can a poet “draw away” from the Holocaust and still make a claim of historicity? How far can a poet “draw away” from the Holocaust without negating the memories and experiences of those who died and those who survived genocide? One answer is that one could draw as far as the echoes will sound to the ear. I am not intending to create a poetic rendering of the years 1933-1945; I am erecting a structure of feeling and as such turn objects back into subjects, to light the organic connections, not as portraitures but more as traumatic repetitions. My project is to create not an object of knowledge, but a subject of feeling in which thought provokes feeling and vice versa, where an intersubjective relationship between the reader and the word can take place.

#### **Question #4: What World Sings You Here?**

I am an echo. An echo of the books I have read in preparation for this project. An echo of other poets. An echo of a Jew who hardly ever participates in any religious ceremony and who upholds none of the traditions, yet who cannot escape the connection. My identity in terms of being a Jew is best illustrated by an anecdote told by Shlomo Carlebach after a lifetime of visiting American campuses: "I ask students what they are. If someone gets up and says, I'm a Catholic, I know that's a Catholic. If someone says, I'm a Protestant, I know that's a Protestant. If someone gets up and says, I'm just a human being, I know that's a Jew" (Sacks 31). It is not only the need to not be identified as a Jew that lurks somewhere in the unconscious; it is also the need as a Jew to be identified as a human being. That is what I think lies at the root of all minority groups' struggles: to be accepted as human and thus become privy to basic human rights, including the right to exist. To explore this basic human right I am searching for articulations that are more intuitive, that have their basis in social and material process and yet still open a space for flight, for the moment when the boy is transformed into a bird. Even though the hazards of flight -- from the fall of Icarus to the deadly allure of office towers -- are well documented, I strive for the moment when the shallow heart that has flooded can and will soar.

### **Attraction and Repulsion: The Inevitability of the Glass**

In the end what have I accomplished here? Nothing. Another poetic rendering of an experience that yesterday was not mine, but tomorrow could be. I perceived the poem

as light and flew blindly toward it. I have argued against language that is both overtly intellectual and deconstructive using the very same language. Intention and meaning plummet together. Once the language writing, however innovative, is written into culture, it becomes absorbed and assimilated by that same culture that commits atrocities. This is why I feel making language barbaric and strange is a failed project.

When I was seven years old I stopped believing in fairytales because I found myself confronted by a world in which there is no happily ever after. How do we console children, how do we console ourselves, in a world in which we cannot simply “heave our history from the rocks” (*Hollow Articulations* 31)? I do not have the answers. Hejinian uses her art to “provide us with this chance that is/Perhaps it is the role of art to put us in complicity with things as they happen” (*Happily* 13). After-Auschwitz is a world that precludes innocence. There is no way not to know, and it is impossible to forget. To close this paper I present a lullaby written by Aleksander Kulisiewicz in 1943 at Sachsenhausen. Kulisiewicz wrote the lullaby for the four-year old son of a fellow prisoner.<sup>10</sup> The lullaby evokes many emotions for me, one of the hardest to process is the realization that in an After-Auschwitz world the sentiment expressed in the lullaby is the kind of wishes we hope for, the only consolation available. I cannot read the following

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<sup>10</sup> The father Tomasz Kotarbinski received it as a keepsake when he was sent with a death transport to KL Auschwitz. Kotarbinski’s wife and three children had already been sent. Kortabinski, a music teacher, memorized the song hoping that he would be able to sing it to his son in Birkenau. The information comes from the liner notes of Aleksander Kulisiewicz album *Kolysanka Dla Birkenau* (Hirsch 291, n43). The reference note for the lullaby is ( Hirsch 155).

piece without crying. And fittingly, I feel, after this long essay in which logic and argument betray each other at every turn, this lullaby uses language such as hell to describe the concentrationary world. Written by a concentration camp inmate, let him leave his words for those of us who were not there to quibble over their multiple meanings and dangerous ideologies, those of us who are still breathing, who have the time and luxury for such things.

Fall asleep, fall asleep,

My little man.

Sleep here,

On the floor of Hell.

Maybe tomorrow Mr. Mengele

Won't be poisoning children.

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