

**« The burning space between one letter and the next » : rule-generated poetry in *Fourteen Stations* by Arie Galles  
and Jerome Rothenberg.**

In 1987 Charles Bernstein introduced his volume *Artifice of Absorption* with a quotation from Edmund Jabes's *The Book of Questions* : « Then where is the truth but in the burning space between one letter and the next. Thus the book is first read outside its limits » (6). This statement originates in the Talmudic view that saying contains « an inexhaustible surplus of meaning » which remains locked in Hebrew words and letters, in [what Emmanuel Lévinas calls] all the « materiality of the saying » (109). It is up to the interpreter to blow on the « glowing coals » of the letters, and « the flame that thus comes alive depends on the interpreter's length of breath » (Lévinas Note 8, 210). Interpretation is co-natural to letter reading in the context of the Hebrew Bible, Hebrew is a consonant-based language whose writing becomes meaningful when the reader adds vowels to the written consonants. And the Biblical text uses no punctuation but blank spaces and silences that visually and rhythmically determine reading.

I find the metaphor of the burning space between letters felicitous when applied by analogy to poetry and art. It is in the empty space between letters whose power is to generate words and meanings that truth becomes possible. Individual letters cannot produce meanings on their own but words create *and* frame meanings in static totalities. When conceived as a process and not as a fulfilled content awaiting its seeker, truth becomes an effect and its deconstruction. Herein lies the interest of the burning space : as a critical moment it posits that a non-ending, unresolved principle of postponed certainty in art is in keeping with the « negative dialectics » appropriate to our time for Theodor Adorno :

If negative dialectics calls for the self-reflection of thinking, the tangible implication is that if thinking is to be true- if it is to be true today, in any case- it must also be a thinking against itself. (Adorno 1973, 365)

The idea that art has to unhinge its own thought-structures offers an epistemological way out of the well -rehearsed double binds of Holocaust art which Arie Galles, a visual artist, and Jerome Rothenberg, a poet, confront in their installation *Fourteen Stations* : the impossibility of writing vs the impossibility of not writing, the failure of language vs the need for language, the retreat into silence vs the need to state the value of ethics in language, the search for unmediated forms vs the fact of artistic mediation, the inadequacy of narrative fictionality vs the narrativity of all discourse, the fictive mode vs the testimonial imperative, the legitimacy of facts vs the illegitimacy of interpretation, the inadequacy of artistic means vs the magnitude of the event, and so forth. What makes *Fourteen Stations* special is that it

first objects to the rhetoric of the unsayable, the unimaginable, the unrepresentable by approaching the Shoah but maintaining a « distance » from the event which remains a *Tel Olam*, the desolate place that is not appropriated (Parshas *Devarim* 13:17, *Joshua* 8:28). Jerome Rothenberg clearly states,

As Galles worked from documentary photographs to establish some pretense at distance (= objectivity), I decided to objectify by turning again to gematria (traditional Hebrew numerology) as a way to determine the words and phrases that would come into the poems. (Rothenberg 1996, 100).

Secondly, *Fourteen Stations* breaks away from the legacy of representational art and its belief in grand Art, in the sublime achievement which carries away the viewer who emotionally forgets about artistic artifice. The installation makes the oppositional choice of non-emotional distance and *Radical Artifice* (Marjorie Perloff). It uses procedural constraint and defamiliarization to neutralise « the absorption of images » (Charles Bernstein), the surfeit of images, films and narratives accumulated around the Shoah. *Fourteen Stations* faces the event while suspending certainty about interpretation. It forces viewers to experience « a poetic leap » in the words of Steve McCaffery :

Such a leap demands the knowledge of how and when to delay knowing; how to be active in a state of suspended certainty, [...] a « forgetting, at the proper moment, what we know. » (McCaffery 2).

It is not a holistic representation/interpretation functioning as a surrogate for history and experience. It is a presentation/installation which is premised upon the capacity of the artwork « to claim the status of *being* rather than *representing*. » (Drucker 10). My hypothesis is that *Fourteen Stations* explores the aporetic position of an autonomous artwork which claims to retain purchase on history and the present. It does so by stressing both art's powerlessness, art's disempowerment and its accountability. No organic poetic or visual form will retrieve the Shoah (Bernstein 1986, 260). The past is opaque and hard to read, however, to quote Terry Eagleton in *The Ideology of the Aesthetics*, « [a]n aesthetic thought is one true to the opacity of its object » (Eagleton 341). So my guiding question is, how is *Fourteen Stations* true to the opacity of its object ? I offer three answers, by resisting the aesthetic object « as such », then blocking the transparent reading of the event, and finally asserting the immanent, material opacity of the artwork.

### **Resisting the Aesthetic Object « As Such »**

*Fourteen Stations* is true to the opacity of its object when it resists the aesthetic object « as such » ( Steve McCaffery). To begin with, the museum installation is not complete unless taken as the sum total of all its components (texts, images) and modes of access. These are the currently travelling museum exhibition entitled *Fourteen Stations Hey Yud Dalet*, then the 1996 paper publication *Fourteen Stations* which comes at the end of *Seedings & Other Poems* published by New Directions, and finally the digital installation hosted by at least five websites. The most notable websites are E P C, Electronic Poetry Center at SUNY, Buffalo (

2

<http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/rothenberg/14.html>), the Virtual Museum of Holocaust Art (<http://fermi.phys.ualberta.ca/~amk/galles/index.html>) at the University of Alberta, Canada, and Minneapolis Virtual Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, ([http://www.chgs.umn.edu/Visual\\_Artistic\\_Resources/visual\\_artistic\\_resources.html](http://www.chgs.umn.edu/Visual_Artistic_Resources/visual_artistic_resources.html)).

שְׁנֵעַד

## FOURTEEN STATIONS

הַיְדָלֵת

## HEY YUD DALET

---

A suite of fifteen charcoal drawings by  
ARIE A. GALLES

and the associated poems by  
JEROME ROTHENBERG

on fourteen Nazi death camps

---

Arie Galles :

FOURTEEN STATIONS / HEY YUD DALET  
(The suite description)



KHURBN - PROLOGUE



Station One :

AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU



Station Two :

BABI YAR



Station Three :

BUCHENWALD



Station Four :

BELZEC



Station Five :

BERGEN-BELSEN



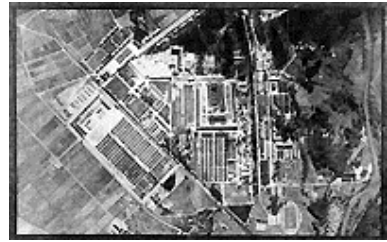
Station Six :

GROSS ROSEN



Station Seven :

DACHAU



Station Eight :

CHELMNO



Station Nine :

TREBLINKA



Station Ten :

MAUTHAUSEN



Station Eleven :

MAIDANEK



Station Twelve :

SOBIBOR



Station Thirteen :

RAVENSBRÜCK



Station Fourteen :

STUTTHOF



Arie A. Galles :

FOURTEEN STATIONS / HEY YUD DALET:  
Small and Large Charcoal Studies,

Pen&Ink Drawings and Woodcuts



Arie A. Galles :

THOUGHTS ON  
"FOURTEEN STATIONS / HEY YUD DALET"



<p><u>Andrea Liss :</u></p> <p><u>RITUALS OF MOURNING AND MIMESIS</u>  <u>in Arie A. Galles' <i>Fourteen Stations</i></u></p>	
<p><u>Frank Fox :</u></p> <p><u>KADDISH IN CHARCOAL</u></p>	
<p><u>Stephen C. Feinstein :</u></p> <p><u>TOWARD A POST-HOLOCAUST THEOLOGY IN ART :</u></p> <p><u>The Search for the Absent and Present God</u></p>	
<p><u>Andrew Weinstein :</u></p> <p><u>ON ARIE GALLES' FOURTEEN STATIONS</u></p>	
<p><u>Biographical notes on</u></p> <p><u>Arie Galles and Jerome Rothenberg</u></p>	

---

Thank you ! You are the visitor number :

---

Last update: May 16, 2002



Copyright © 2001 [Arie A. Galles](mailto:Arie.A.Galles)

[Virtual Museum of Holocaust Art](#)

Designed by [Andrew M. Kobos](#)

The digital installation *Fourteen Stations Hey Yud Dalet* further coalesces text and visual elements in its fifteen units which have a common structure (except for *Khurbn-Prologue*): the title name of a camp, the archive photography of this camp taken by German, American or British military aerial reconnaissance cameras during the war, an « unmarked » (Drucker 95 sq.) rule-generated poem next to a « marked » poem inscribed in a charcoal drawing with the name of the camp in Roman alphabet at the top and in Hebrew alphabet at the bottom, followed by the drawing of an enlarged element taken from the photograph in which a verse from the *Kaddish* is inscribed in Hebrew alphabet, a box containing the whole verse in Hebrew, followed by its transliteration into Roman alphabet and by a parenthesis which gives the translation into English of the same verse. Finally, the arborescent, hyperlinked table of contents includes an all-drawing and photograph section, the poem-photograph-drawing section and metapoetic articles from artists and critics (Arie Galles, Andrea Liss, Frank Fox, Stephen Feinstein, Andrew Weinstein, Jerome Rothenberg).

When the artwork leaves both the boundaries of the book and those of the museum for the web, it changes its status and calls for a phenomenology of the reading experience in a hypermedia environment. The installation is spatially and temporally contemporaneous to viewers since web pages are available everywhere anywhere with a mouse click, access being unlimited albeit impermanent- lasting as long as the hyperlink is left active. Next, even if webpages still owe much to paper-print technology, they destabilise the silent conventional experience of poetry reading. They transform the reader into an online navigator who scrolls up and down pages, activates links that branch out to other pages into multiple, open-ended paths. This is not the same as turning the pages of a book.<sup>i</sup> Even going back to the arborescent overview does not mean reaching a stable center but a « decenterable network of connections » (Landow 1997, 85). The metaphors of the nexus (Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Peter Quatermain), or rhizome and plateau (Gilles Deleuze, Felix Gattari) help visualise hyperlinked poems. They acquire a transient and temporary centrality at the time of reading but reading with a mouse and an arrow on the screen becomes « a non-linear, multisequential circumnavigation » (Landow 1997, 85) which pulls the poem away from its own center towards the outside, towards an infinite periphery. Lost centrality collapses the distinction between high culture and commercial culture and further affects the material borders of the poem which is a discrete, permeable object in a borderless structure of documents functioning as a super archive. This, in turn,

raises epistemological questions about the definition of what is or is not the artwork : do metapoetic articles belong to the original artwork corpus? Do criticism and poetry belong to separate aesthetic territories? Is reading aesthetically, ideologically influenced by the host site? Is the reception of the artwork modified by metapoetic assessments? And if the artwork loses its autonomy, separation and univocality, can authorship still be defined as the overlapping of a name, a will to say and a unitary, bounded text? What function do the photographs of the artists at work have? By incorporating these questions, the installation includes its own centrifugal disorientation, its own unhinging.<sup>ii</sup>

The second mode of resistance to the traditional aesthetic object is achieved through the use of typography. I wish to turn to the same poem first read in the print version of *Seedings & Other Poems* :

THE THIRD STATION: BUCHENWALD

deliver me  
from them

your cattle  
rising

your assembly  
lords of fat

deliver me  
from color

(*Seedings & Other Poems* 103)

and then on the webpage :

***FOURTEEN STATIONS / HEY YUD DALET***

---

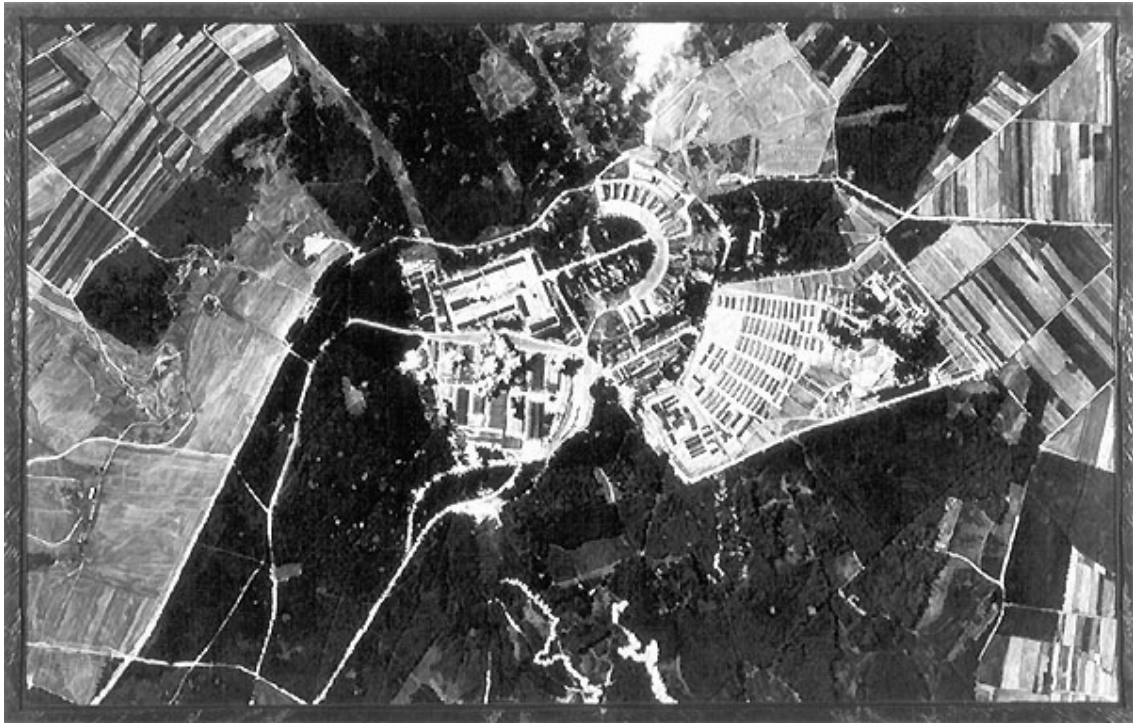
**A Suite of Fifteen Charcoal Drawings**

**by**

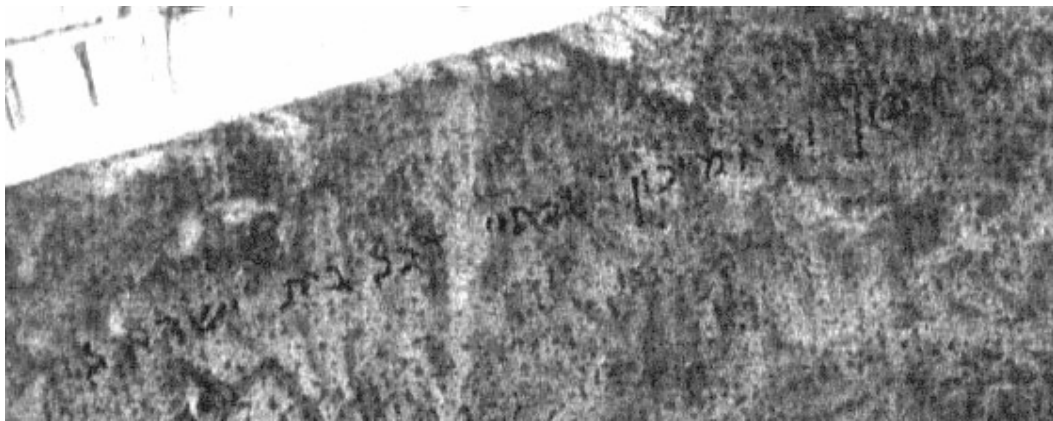
**Arie A. Galles**

***Station Three: Buchenwald***

---



**Arie A. Galles, *Station Three: Buchenwald.***  
 47½" x 75", charcoal and white Conté. (Photo: Tim Volk)



**The third verse of the Kaddish embedded in Station Three: Buchenwald (Stage 3, detail).**

**בְּחַיֵּינוּ וּבְיוֹמֵינוּ וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל**

"b'cha-yei-chon u-v'yo-mei-chon u-v'cha-yei d'chol beit Yis-ra-eil,"  
 (in our own day, in our own lives, and in the life of the entire House of Israel)



**Jerome Rothenberg**

**THIRD STATION:  
BUCHENWALD**

**deliver me  
from them**

**your cattle  
rising**

**your assembly  
lords of fat**

**deliver me  
from color**



Arie Galles: Poem/Drawing  
*Buchenwald*.  
47½" x 15", charcoal.

The print and web versions exemplify two differing modes of typographic enunciation. Typographic choices point to the poem's enunciative apparatus. In the absence of a lyrical subject in the poem, authorship reappears as the site of enunciation and subjectivity in the material choices of font, typeface, bold, roman, italic, colors, black and white, spatial arrangement on the page, the vertical and horizontal axis of the page established through the visual centerpoint. In her landmark study *The Visible Word Experimental Typography and Modern Art 1909-1923* Johanna Drucker distinguishes marked from unmarked texts and traces the distinction back to Gutenberg's archetypal inventions, the unmarked

[...] printed bibles, with their perfectly uniform grey pages, their uninterrupted blocks of text, [...] in which the words on the page « appear to speak themselves » without the visible intervention of author or printer. (Drucker 95)

They have become the norm of the literary text. The enunciative presence of the writer is effaced and transformed into « The Author of the Text as Pure Word- with all the requisite theological resonance. » (Drucker 46). In contrast, the Indulgences printed by Gutenberg were marked as they « [...] recognized and utilized the capacity of typographic representation to manipulate the semantic value of the text through visual means. » (Drucker 95). One may then see the print poem and web poem on the left as « unmarked » and the web palimpsest poem/drawing on the right as « marked ». No format is a natural occurrence but a cultural-visual construct. Therefore, once typography is read as a sign of enunciation in writing, it is less a transparent medium pointing to an outside signified and referent. It draws attention to the other devices used to block the transparency of reading.

### ***Blocking the Transparency of Reading***

*Fourteen Stations* is true to the opacity of its object when it further blocks the transparency of representation and constructs opacity visually. If we return to the same web poem *Buchenwald*, we note the occurrence of Hebrew under the poem. The general viewer cannot decipher the foreign letters which point to an unknown signified. Hebrew blocks the process of reading which spontaneously transforms the visual form of letters into sound and meaning and points to an outside referent, the camp. The foreign letters do not index a place (*Buchenwald*) but become an iconic drawing, a hieroglyph. The main title (*Hey Yud Dalet*) and the *Kaddish* are similarly valued for their ability to block reading. Even

their delayed translation (*Hey Yud Dalet* is the acronym for « God will revenge his blood ») or their conspicuous translation confirms their power to defamiliarize reading.

One should add here that visual opacity fits into Jerome Rothenberg's wider metapoetic concern with « closed *Logos*, *Final Cause*, coercive propositional language mastering the world rather than participating in it ». In *Pre-faces & Other Writings*, this is what he points out:

[...] I would like to desanctify & demystify the written word, because I think the danger of frozen thought, of authoritarian thought, has been closely tied in with it. I don't have any use for « the sacred » in that sense- for the idea of book or text as the authoritative, coercive version of some absolute truth, changeless because written down & visible. (Rothenberg 1981, 10)

Choosing to go back to hieroglyphics or to ideograms is a way of restoring speech and orality in poetry by obscuring or obfuscating the clarity and transparency of the written word. Charles Olson's « distinction between language as the act of the instant and language as the act of thought about the instant » (*Pre-Faces* 10) helps understand why the iconic weight of Hebrew is used in *Fourteen Stations* to unhinge the transparent status of the English written word. What I also find particularly striking is that this attack on *Logos* leads Jerome Rothenberg to a rejection of the institutional reception of texts which have been read as sacred while Edmund Jabes' similar wish to destabilise *Logos* leads him to an investigation into the reading practices generated by the Hebrew Torah. Their converging attempt to break word totalities originates in diverging reading practices.

Visual opacity in *Fourteen Stations* is next derived from the proximity of the camp name (Buchenwald) to the photograph and poem. The name works as a metonymy of the facts but the poem and photograph block a visualization of the signs, blot out the bodies and the faces which we have come to associate with and anticipate from those sites of industrial death. For the average person, the photographs point to but do not actually show the « thing that has been » (*le ça a été*) which is for Roland Barthes the essence or *noeme* of photography. Naturally, this does not suspend the truth value, the authentication of the photograph for an aerial reconnaissance specialist but the average viewer sees without recognising what was happening when the photograph was taken. Chelmno or Sobibor are two other striking examples of this impossible visual recognition of the signs of the Shoah. To be sure, traces were erased voluntarily. But this historical explanation does not do justice to the viewer's sense of puzzlement. If seeing and recognising do not quite coincide, then the viewer experiences a visual oxymoron, an invisible presence or a visible absence. This questions the metaphysical belief in analogous photography which is premised on the idea that « [e]very photograph is somehow co-natural with its referent » (Barthes 76), is « an emanation of the referent » (80) or « a certificate of presence » (87). This suggests we are more likely to see what we recognise and expect to see and less likely to see and decipher the unexpected, the unpredictable present. Heightening the divide between seeing and recognising stands to me in clear contrast to Christian Boltanski's installations. I have in mind the early 1975 installation *Le voyage de Noce à Venise* (*The honeymoon trip to*

*Venice*) which assembled picturesque photographs presenting familiar sights from Venice while disclosing that no photograph had actually been taken in Venice (Perloff 1998, 253 sq). Viewers were thus made to realise that they recognised reality through a set of visual clichés unconsciously absorbed. This was meant to show that « *photography lies, that it doesn't speak the truth but rather the cultural code.* » (Perloff 1998, 252). Christian Boltanski's more recent installations *Humans* (1994 Guggenheim Museum Bilbao) and *Lights and photographs* (2002 Guggenheim Museum New York) further mobilized Holocaust-inflected memories in a montage of light bulbs and small photographs of disturbingly anonymous faces in a sort of funeral parlour atmosphere. This was meant to arouse a sense of loss and absence in the viewers who could not know if those were perpetrators' or victims' photographs. Blurring historical specifics while mobilizing the accretion of memories around the Shoah is Christian Boltanski's way to make us reflect on how slippery historical memory is. This is markedly different from *Fourteen Stations* which blocks the very projection of the predefined meanings Christian Boltanski reactivates to make viewers doubt what they see. <sup>iii</sup>

Arie Galles' choice of military photographs is not morally ambiguous, it does not make us doubt what we see but rather wonder about the invisibility of suffering. Invisibility is at one with the camp « biopolitical project » which was planned to ensure the blindness of viewers. The camp was planned to be an « event without witness » (Shoshana Fellman), a non-site without trace, archive or survivor in Giorgio Agamben's analysis. The aerial reconnaissance photographs concretize the aporia of Auschwitz, « the aporia of historical knowledge: the impossible coincidence of facts with reality, of recording with understanding » (Agamben 1999, 11). Note how invisibility works on the outside: the camp is transparent to the outsiders, we who view the installation today and to the people who lived in the vicinity of the camp. Two worlds coexisted but camp inmates were specters who watched the world without being seen. Ultimately, blindness coincides with technological sophistication which allows for killing and watching at a remove while doing away with individual responsibility. A panoptic view does not warrant understanding or approaching the event.

A third cause of visual opacity comes to the fore in the poem itself. I turn again to *Station Three: Buchenwald* which is « a Place without Description » to paraphrase Wallace Stevens. Like all the other poems and photos in the installation it pointedly sidesteps visual description and representation. The potentially referential « deliver me from them » or the metaphorical « deliver me from color » do not activate recognizable representations. Lines and stanzas are open-ended, unpunctuated, paratactic rather than coordinated and it is impossible to assign them to an imperious lyrical subject, a mediating I. The absence of description is thus correlated to the absence of the master decipherer of the matrix of the event. This is also the case in 1989 *Khurbn & Other Poems* <sup>iv</sup> which further stresses that a sovereign lyrical subject would be « a delusion of the absolute », an untenable posture which would duplicate the absolute, nomologic power structure of the camp. This is

totality here	a parody of telos	of completion	
in the monstrous mind of the masters		those who give them-selves authority	
over the rest of life	who dole out life & death	propor-	
	tioned		
to their own appetites as artists		they forge a world	a
shadow image of our own			
& are the artists of the new hell		the angels of the possible	
the vision			
passed from them down to the present		of what art can do	
what constructs of the mind			
are thinkable	when power assists their hands	in the de-	
lusion of the absolute			

(*Khurbn & Other Poems* 21)

Once discourse is seen as a metaphor of society, then it leads to a binary view of discursive constructs which either condone or resist dominant social power structures. The words « them-selves, propor-tioned and de-lusion » are hyphenated to indicate resistance can only be achieved by reflexivity in writing. In *Fourteen Stations* the blanks, the irregular truncated lines, the voluntary absence of an assignable source of discourse turn the poems and photographs into discrete, isolated elements which are not made to cohere in a chronological or interpretive metanarrative. They cannot be assigned to a single source of authorship. Both Arie Galles and Jerome Rothenberg do away with the architectonic control of a unique creator teleologically oriented toward a closed ending, an overall meaning. They forego the possibility of an ultimate signifier of the event. This is the political *Content of their Form*.

This act of *po-ethical* resistance further debunks the naive- albeit well-intentioned- view of contemporary writing as testimony. I draw this conclusion from the other poems Jerome Rothenberg devoted to *Di Magilas fun Aushvits (The Scrolls of Auschwitz)* in *Khurbn & Other Poems* (27). The scrolls had been originally written by *Sonderkommando* men who recorded what they were witnessing in the gas chambers using their own blood as ink. They buried their scrolls in the hope that their testimonies would be uncovered after their deaths. In *DER VIDERSHTAND (THE RESISTANCE)* (29) Jerome Rothenberg opposes their writing to present-day Holocaust writing which cannot claim the same status. It is impossible to claim that a present-day poet's hand will « bring the letters & the pain together ». Acknowledging this means giving up the delusion that writing and experience can ever coincide :

	thus the epic was verified
& brought into our time	the poem
began with it & followed the movement	
of the dead man's hand	as if each written word
had such a hand behind it	
that brought the letters & the pain together	
written with his blood (the scroll says) in the light	
of human bodies burning	but what is interesting
here (he writes) is the psychology of man	
who refuses to accept	
evil thoughts	no matter how clearly he sees
he speaks	for this is not

the whole truth    the truth as it really exists  
is immeasurably more tragic & terrible.  
(*Khurbn & Other Poems* 29-30)

The notion that the signifier connects with the signified, that the poem is the outward form of inward poetic feelings is gone. The disappearance of the lyrical subject questions the expressive function of poetical language and is at one with the repudiation of a depth-model of reality: the artwork invalidates the metaphysics that would posit a depth-relationship between an inside and an outside, a metaphor and its referent, words and experience. *Fourteen Stations* opts for a surface-model of reality.

### **Rule-Generated Opacity**

This takes me to the last form of opacity created by a « poetry of numbers » (Rothenberg 1981, 156-157), a « poetry of correspondences » (158), *ie* by Gematria and procedural constraints. Rule-generated poems are nothing new, Isidore Isou (Lettrism), George Perec, John Cage, Jackson Mac Low or Lyn Hejinian are practitioners in an ancient tradition of permutations. Nor is a concern with numbers new to poets who learned their trade in meter and metrics. What is specific to Jerome Rothenberg is that his use of Gematria contributes to defamiliarize the thought process by blocking referential and metaphorical readings. This is why the device becomes a particular « stance toward reality » (157).

*The Third Station: Buchenwald* does not originate in the true voice of feeling but in « a Poetics of Chance », a procedural constraint which generates the poems. Basically, a constraint is not a fixed form, a preexistent mold like the sestina or sonnet but a chance operation which generates as many poems as one wants according to a rule. Jerome Rothenberg explains :

[...] I decided to objectify by turning again to gematria (traditional Hebrew numerology) as a way to determine the words and phrases that would come into the poems. The counts were made off the Hebrew and/or Yiddish spelling of the camp names, then keyed to the numerical values of words and word combinations in the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. It is my hope that this small degree of objective chance will not so much mask feeling or meaning as allow it to emerge. (*Seedings & Other Poems* 100)

This procedural constraint is based on the principle that every letter of the Hebrew alphabet « is also a number, & that words or phrases, the sum of whose letters are equal are at some level meaningfully connected » (Rothenberg 1994, 165) when read in the codified context of the Torah. However, no matter how clearly presented, the rule in *Fourteen Stations* seems impenetrable. The reader comes up against a total interpretive blank. In my case, abstruse obscurity proved an irresistible call to try and trace the steps back to the submerged encoding process. I turned to Jerome Rothenberg's *Gematria* in *A Big Jewish Book* (1981, 159) and to Marc-Alain Ouaknin's numerical chart (Ouaknin 2000, 334) and

analysis. Judging from the chosen spelling on the drawing, **בוכענוואלד**, the numerical correspondence for

Buchenwald may be the following, from right to left:

<b>ב</b>	bet =	numerical value 2	
<b>ו</b>	vav =	numerical value 6	
<b>כ</b>	kaf =	numerical value 20	
<b>ע</b>	ayin =	numerical value 70	
<b>נ</b>	nun =	numerical value 50	
<b>ו</b>	vav =	numerical value 6	
<b>ו</b>	vav =	numerical value 6	
<b>א</b>	aleph =	numerical value 1	
<b>ל</b>	lamed =	numerical value 30	
<b>ד</b>	dalet =	numerical value 4	Sum total= 195

I turned to *The Spice of the Torah-Gematria* n°195 (Locks 100) and found the segments which have the same numerical value :

195	קצה
<i>Genesis</i>	<i>בראשית</i>
the rib	2: 22 הצלע
now, once	2: 23 הפעם
cattle, a purchase (Gen. 49:32)	13: 7 מקנה
deliver me	32: 12 הצילני
colors	37: 23 הפסים
from them	42: 24 מעליהם
cattle	46: 32 מקנה
a purchase	49: 32 מקנה
<i>Exodus</i>	<i>שמות</i>
border, the utmost (Num. 22:41)	16: 35 קצה
<i>Numbers</i>	<i>במדבר</i>
loathes	21: 5 קצה
<i>Deuteronomy</i>	<i>דברים</i>
your assembly	5: 19 קהלכם
that rise up	28: 7 הקמים

One recognises the segments, « deliver me/from them/ your cattle/ rising/ your assembly/ lords of fat/ deliver me from color ». Even such a limited decoding helps show that if all segments and words have the same numerical value, then order and lineation are irrelevant. Words are discontinuous, meaning is neither located in the source word (Buchenwald) nor in the chosen words which are culled from different hermeneutic sites in the Torah. A constraint-generated poem invalidates a view of writing as the product of intention, of style as a marker of individuality and of reading as spontaneous interpretation. New semantic effect may or may not arise in the aleatory coincidence of words which can be read from top to bottom or bottom to top, or be associated differently (« deliver me from your assembly », « color rising

from your cattle », « deliver me rising »). The function of the rule is to unhinge our reading habits, to introduce « burning spaces » in word meaning and interpretation. A tentative look at the other poems further shows that word combinations often place numerically equal words at random, as seems to be the case in *The Seventh Station: Dachau* (numerical value 32) and in *The Twelfth Station: Sobibor* (numerical value 276/285). Word combinations may also create partially recognizable segments as in « a thing/spoken/speaks in me / I see/the spoken/thing » in *The Eleventh Station: Maidanek* (numerical value 206). I was struck to notice how this segment branches out to the enigmatic trope from *Exodus* 20: 19, « And all the people saw the voices » *Vekhol haam roim èt haqolot*, Ouaknin 2000, 298). *The Ninth Station: Treblinka* (numerical value 541) also jumbles « the voices, thunders & the voices » in the first and third grouping thus creating a stanza effect. Word combinations finally encourages the circulation of serial segments from one volume to another, from one intertext to another. The 1994 volume *Gematria* includes « THE SHOVELS / dyed red. » and « WORDS for William Carlos Williams, A red wheel/barrow. » (48) in the poem *Gematria* 316. These segments are taken up again in *Khurbn Gematria* [266] « a wheel/dyed red/an apparition/ set apart/out of the furnace » (156) and in the installation of *Fourteen Stations* (*Khurbn Prologue*). This rule-generated circulation of serial segments concretizes at book level what the empty « burning spaces » achieve at word level. Circulation breaks the closed totalities of completed volumes or finished artworks and testifies to the generative power of letters :« Consider their words as seeds or treat the dead themselves as seeds » (Rothenberg 1996, 6).

So the installation may be true to the immanent opacity of its object when it does not endeavor to upheave or sublimate the aporias which are said to trap art today. It goes against the narrative of the « end of art », or « the end of the poem » by working it through so as to allow the paradox of deconstructed truth (the « burning space ») to be heard. In our late capitalist culture, its « cultural » impact originates in Jerome Rothenberg's ethno-poetic project which uses the ignored and unknown heritage of Jewish textuality as an antidote to the discursive, eurocentric powers of English. Jewish culture becomes a weapon targeted at eurocentric *Logos*. This is in keeping with his view of Jews « as mental rebels » (Rothenberg 1981, 123) whose refusal of mainstream consensus and authority is « the model for the Great Refusal to the lie of Church & State » (123), the lie of « the triumph of Church & Synagogue » (125). Whether the Synagogue is or is not the « triumphant » mirror image of an oppressive Church (127) is less relevant to our reading of *Fourteen Stations* than Jerome Rothenberg's use of interpretive procedures handed down by tradition. His *Gematria*-generated poems can be viewed positively as the consequence of the unalienable right of any reader to free interpretation; or negatively as a betrayal and instrumentation of Jewish culture; or derisively as an artwork unreadable by the masses it purports to enlighten; or etymologically as a sublime achievement (*sub limes*) which probes the limits of artistic creation. In my view,

they pertain to a « negative aesthetic experience » (Adorno) which holds that committed art is powerless *and* accountable. One may see the artwork as autonomous and immanent or as contained by the market and pacified by the culture industry. In both cases, Edmund Jabes' « burning space » problematizes the paradoxical, ambiguous purchase art and religious culture retain on our empirical present.

## WORKS CITED

- Adorno, Theodor. *Negative Dialectics*. (Trans E.B. Ashton). London: Routledge, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. *Prisms, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought*. (Trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber). Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983, 17-34.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Ce qui reste d'Auschwitz. L'archive et le témoin, Homo Sacer III* (Pierre Alferi, trad.). Paris: Payot & Rivages, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. *The End of the Poem, Studies in Poetics*. (Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen). Stanford U P, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. *Homo Sacer, le pouvoir souverain et la vie nue*. Paris: Seuil, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. *Moyens sans fin, Notes sur la politique*. Paris: Payot & Rivages, 1995.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida : Reflexions on Photography* (trans. Richard Howard). New York: Farrar Strauss, 1981.
- Bernstein, Charles. *Artifice of Absorption*. Singing Horse Press/Paper Air, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. *Content's Dream, Essays 1975-1984*. Evanston: Northwestern U P, 1986.
- Chard-Hutchinson, Martine. Ahokas, Pirjo. (eds). *Reclaiming Memory, American Representations of the Holocaust*. Turku University Press, 1997.
- Didi-Huberman, George. *Images malgré tout*. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 2003.
- Drucker, Johanna. *The Visible Word, Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909-1923*. Chicago U P, 1994.
- Eagleton, Terry. *The Ideology of the Aesthetics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.
- Felman, Shoshana. Laub, Dori. *Testimony, Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Galles, Arie. Rothenberg, Jerome. *Fourteen Stations*.  
<http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/rothenberg/14.html>  
<http://fermi.phys.ualberta.ca/~amk/galles/index.html>.
- Jabes, Edmund. *The Book of Questions: Yael Elya Aely El, or the Last Book* (trans. Rosemarie Waldrop). Middletown : Wesleyan U P, 1983.
- Landow, George P. *Hypertext 2.0, The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins U P, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. (ed). *Hyper/Text/Theory*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins U P, 1994.
- Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Beyond the Verse, Talmudic Readings and Lectures*. (Trans. Gary D. Mole). London: Athlone Press, 1994.
- Locks, Gutman G. Schochet, Immanuel. *The Spice of Torah-Gematria*. New York: Judaica Press, 1985.
- McCaffery, Steve. *Parapoetics a Soft Manifesto for the Nomad Cortex*. (Friday, August 3 2003 @ 12:03:27)  
<http://www.poetics.yorku.ca/article.php?sid=5&mode=&order=0>  
 The North American Centre for Interdisciplinary Poetics (<http://www.poetics.yorku.ca/>)
- Ouaknin, Marc-Alain. *Mystères de la Kabbale*. Paris: Editions Assouline, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. *Les mystères de l'alphabet, l'origine de l'écriture*. Paris: Editions Assouline, 1997.
- Perloff, Marjorie. *Radical Artifice Writing Poetry in the Age of Media*. U Chicago P, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. *Poetry On and Off the Page, Essays for Emergent Occasions*. Evanston: Northwestern U P, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. *Introduction to 21st Century Modernism, the "New" Poetics*, (Blackwell Manifestos). Blackwell P, 2002.
- Rothenberg, Jerome. *Seedings & Other Poems*, New York: New Directions, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. *Khurbn & Other Poems*. New Directions, 1989.
- \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. *Gematria*. Sun & Moon Press, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. *Pre-Faces & Other Writings*. New Directions, 1981.

---

<sup>i</sup> Jerome Rothenberg aptly added in a personal letter that « [...]this would hold equally well for reading the poems & viewing the images on a wall while walking around them. That makes the poems into public inscriptions in some sense, which I very much like.» (letter dated mercredi 9 juin 2004 20:34).

<sup>ii</sup> Jerome Rothenberg added this insightful comment about the web site in the same letter dated mercredi 9 juin 2004 20:34 « [...] Arie and I would think of it as informational – a report about the "actual work." That actual work is the installation consisting of the large framed charcoal drawings, the poems (also framed and drawn in charcoal), and possibly the curatorial notes and subsets of smaller drawings, the latter (notes & subsets) varying from museum to museum and not necessary for *Fourteen Stations* as a whole. » The point made is that «[...] so far it hasn't come to rest in a completely final version, but that anyway would make up the work as a work. In addition, of course, I've published the

---

poems separately and, in that form, I think of them as an independent text. But the framed drawings & poems, exhibited together, are the basic work called *Fourteen Stations*.»

I gather from this that an « explanatory web site » has a metapoetic role but also a genetic function since it shows a work in progress and allows us a glimpse at a not-yet-completed creation. The web site allows incompleteness to be seen positively, the artwork appearing in one of its potential formats rather than as an unfinished, best-forgotten stage of creation prior to publication or museum exhibition.

<sup>iii</sup> The Artist's Statement of *Humans*: « Christian Boltanski's art marks the transitory nature of life. Since the late 1960s, he has worked with photographs collected from ordinary and often ephemeral sources, endowing the commonplace with significance. By appropriating mementos of other people's lives and placing them in an art context, Boltanski explores the power of photography to transcend individual identity and function instead as a witness to collective rituals and shared cultural memories. At once personal and universal in reference, *Humans* (1994) is one of several large-scale works by Boltanski that serves as a monument to the dead, hinting at the Holocaust without naming it .» (Guggenheim Museum New York)

<sup>iv</sup> « *Khurban* (Yiddish, from Hebrew *khurban*): destruction, ruin, devastation, havoc, holocaust; used traditionally to describe the fate of the Jerusalem temple(s), thereafter for any wide-spread human disaster.» (*Khurban & Other Poems* 112)