A Poetics of Survival: Figures and Forms of the Ethical in Poetry after the Shoah

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Spring 2011

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Abstract

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This dissertation considers poetic responses to the Shoah: the critical and cultural consequences of the genre in relation to this catastrophe have been largely neglected or discussed primarily in light of Theodor Adorno's narrow statement questioning the possibility of writing poetry after Auschwitz. I maintain, however, that it is vital to engage the transnational and multi-lingual breadth of poetry, which lays claim to the problems as well as the significance of its endurance, as it confronts attempts to regulate creative impulses on the one hand and to mandate forms of testimony and commemoration on the other hand. In what I term a "poetics of survival," the works I examine employ intertextuality to question the ethical implications of situating poetic voice and address. These works explore the limits of poetic form, in order to foreground poetry as a literary mode that is involved in critical discourse and ethical critique rather than invested only in aesthetic or historical representation. Thus, the poets insist upon their dialogues and disputes across genres ranging from correspondence to philosophy, as they confront cultural and textual traditions that seek to mourn and commemorate devastating loss.

In the Introduction, I focus on theoretical and critical conceptions of survival, illustrating the ways in which a poetics of survival problematizes literary forms that attempt to make sense of individual and communal suffering, both through authoring and through reading. Chapter One investigates Rachel Blau DuPlessis' long poem "Draft 52: Midrash," which argues with Adorno's famous declaration that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric."[1] Through elaborating and responding to her interpretation of Adorno's claim, DuPlessis' poem urges us to reconsider the categorical understanding of his pronouncement, which has shaped critical discourse. I take up DuPlessis' poetic challenge to Adorno's critical authority at the same time that I investigate the manifold ways in which he himself modulated this argument throughout his oeuvre. Chapter Two reflects on the intertextual resonances in both the poetry and the correspondence between Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs: I examine their figurations of breath, which I read as the critical boundary that simultaneously separates and binds together life and death, and as the mutual foundation and limit of poetry and existence after the Shoah. Chapter Three offers readings of the Yiddish poet Malka Heifetz Tussman, whose work confronts,

[1] Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber Nicholson, *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003), 162.

refutes, and reimagines the viability of a poetics of survival in a language whose very existence has been called into question through the annihilation of so many of its speakers.

Ultimately, I postulate that a poetics of survival both institutes and explores a crucial tension between experience and expression. This tension takes shape as a limit-space, where the urgency and difficulty of the poetic emerge with particular force, since poetry is the genre most intimately and consciously bound up with the consequence of voice and address in the context of an exploration of form. By looking at the complicated relationship between body and text – particularly through the ways in which the writers figure survival as a condition that entangles life and language – I illuminate the intertwined pressures of ethics and memory, while questioning implicit hierarchies that seek to regulate the connections between the literal and the figural, the critical and the poetic, the historical and the aesthetic.

For my mother and father, with gratitude and love

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My enduring interest in the possibilities and limits of poetic encounters has been shaped by my exchanges with the many people who contributed to this dissertation – I thank them for their conversations, which enriched my thinking, and for their support and encouragement, which sustained me during the realization of this project.

My committee was unfailingly committed to my intellectual growth, and I am deeply grateful for their engaging discussions, their attentive readings, and their perceptive comments. One and all, they have been unparalleled role models of scholarship and teaching. Always generous with her time and her reflections, Judith Butler urged me to articulate my theoretical and critical positions and my intellectual convictions to the best of my abilities. Her abiding concerns with critique and the ethical in relation to stories and histories of loss and mourning have deepened my thinking about these questions. Chana Kronfeld welcomed me to graduate studies at Berkeley: Her enthusiasm for poetry – both for its beauty and its political and cultural importance – is moving, and her care for her students' well-being is both nourishing and heartwarming. Robert Alter's seminar on translation attuned my ear to the expressive nuances of a project on multilingual and intertextual poetry, and his guidance on many matters from the intellectual to the organizational has been invaluable. Winfried Kudszus' dedication to exploring literature as a meditative process that conjoins the aesthetic, historical, and critical has encouraged me to appreciate poetry's inimitable way of combining the pleasurable and the philosophical.

I am also indebted to other interlocutors, whom I met as a graduate student: I learned much from Ernst van Alphen, Michael André Bernstein, Yael Chaver, and from Bluma Goldstein, whose humor, wisdom, and friendship are equally exceptional.

Alvin Rosenfeld, who first mentored me at Indiana University Bloomington, not only encouraged the course of my intellectual development but impressed me with his whole-hearted dedication to his field and with the lucidity and force of his thought. I also benefited from Dov-Ber Kerler's wealth of knowledge about Yiddish language, literature, and culture.

The Department of Comparative Literature at UC Berkeley has been a wonderful intellectual home. Erica Roberts has gone above and beyond the call of duty many times, saving me from organizational distress with grace and kindness. I thank the Jewish Studies Program for the periods of generous fellowship support, which enabled me to research, write, and present my work at academic conferences. I am also indebted to the departments of Comparative Literature and Germanic Studies for their support of various summer research projects, which inform Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation.

With the aid of the DAAD (the German Academic Exchange Service), I spent a year in Berlin working on this project, and I thank Joseph Vogl, of the Humboldt Universität Berlin, for inviting me to do so.

Because I have moved a lot over the past several years – from the Bay Area to Berlin and then to Paris – friends are scattered far and wide. Whether currently in the same country or not, I am grateful for laughter and stories shared with them, for their lasting interest in and observations on my work. Cara Berends, Yaira Urban, Victoria Gosling, Catherine Lees, Sandra Bedenk, Tania Teague, Lilja Sautter, Erika Otto, Anne Stähr, Hannah Frahm, Judith Mormann, Katie Jones, Kerri Hardman, Jane Weston, Celine Piser: To the good times we've had together, and to many to come!

Theodor Shulman, my brother, has been a true friend, especially in these last months, when our correspondence has cheered me: Teddy knows how to combine commitment, intellectual rigor, and kindness, and I admire him for these qualities and many others.

Guillaume Conan, who listened patiently to infinite versions of my thoughts and concerns, who soothed all worries with his optimism and cooked delicious dinners every night for months so I would be free to write, who believes in me and articulates his love and his support in the most constant and profound forms, is inscribed in this work and in my life in a way that goes beyond the words I can find to express my gratitude.

Ultimately, this project began with my parents, Heidemarie and Michael Shulman, who raised me to believe in the importance of pursuing knowledge and led me to experience the joy that comes with immersing oneself in study. Their abiding faith in my abilities has nurtured me and made it possible to conceive and carry out this work. My mother, the most well-read and discerning of critics, shaped my taste and appetite for reading from the start: She offered me books from her vast library, and her choices and recommendations were unerringly precise and eye-opening. Throughout the years, she has read and commented on my writing and has, without fail, improved it immeasurably. Her passion for teaching and learning and her dedication to her students inspires me. My father, though a scientist by training, took an active interest in both the intellectual and practical aspects of this dissertation, reading about newly published books in my field, suggesting avenues of inquiry, and urging me to complete this work in the best time possible. From my parents' examples, I have learned the value of courage, conviction, and integrity. I dedicate this dissertation to them, with gratitude and love.

INTRODUCTION
Critical and Poetic Models

"Vom Zuviel war die Rede, vom / Zuwenig."
Paul Celan, "Zürich, zum Storchen," Für Nelly Sachs

"There was talk of Too Much, of / Too Little."
Paul Celan, "Zurich, at the Stork," For Nelly Sachs[1]

I begin with the poem: the poem, which is also already an address and an argument, involved in a critical debate. This poem does not end with knowledge, or even with a determined weight or measure: "Wir / wissen ja nicht, weißt du, / wir / wissen ja nicht, / was / gilt." ["We / really don't know, you know, / we / really don't know / what / counts."][2] Nevertheless, in its struggle with excess and lack, with hope and doubt, with what remains singular and what may be shared, the poem demonstrates both the potential and the limits of its own continuation. It manifests, I argue, a poetics of survival. In responding to a vast suffering, which undoes the cognitive frameworks meant to help us make sense of the relationship between creation and destruction, what forms of articulation survive? The poetry I examine in this study poses this question time and again, and it does so by foregrounding the cultural, aesthetic, and ethical consequences of its own survival, by exploring both the corporeal and the poetic in their entwined, precarious forms of endurance.

Thinking about the beginning of Paul Celan's poem "Zürich, zum Storchen," dedicated to his interlocutor Nelly Sachs, I confront the "Too Much" and the "Too Little" both of a poetics of survival that responds to the atrocities of the Shoah and of the critical thought that meditates upon the relationship between experience and expression. Necessarily, I come up against the simultaneous surplus and insufficiency, of which Celan speaks so hauntingly, at every turn. Granting that this is so—that the very notion of a definable, measured, "proper" knowledge is not only "out of place" but excessive and reductive at once—seems crucial to any reflection on the concerns that a poetics of survival raises.[3] I thus attempt to trace not only the "Too Much" and "Too Little" of poetic speech but also its correlated risks in reading and in critical reception. Celan's implication that *Rede* is both occurrence and conversation (*es war die Rede*) criticizes obliquely the dangers of an anonymous, uninvolved speech, which does not account for or take into account the singular experiential realities that constitute its topic. Indeed, these realities—

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[1] Paul Celan, *Die Gedichte: Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Barbara Wiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 126-127, and translation modified from Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York: Norton, 2001), 141. Felstiner's translation of these opening lines reads: "Our talk was of Too Much, of / Too Little." While I find his decision to use capital letters as a way of rendering the German substantivized adjectives very astute, I have altered the beginning of the first verse, because Celan's poem emphasizes the agentless anonymity of this talk, rather than ascribing it to particular speaking subjects identifiable by personal pronoun.

[2] Celan, *Die Gedichte*, 126-127, and Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose*, 141.

[3] In his essay "The Poetics of Unspeakability," Michael Heller suggests that this realization of what is out of place – both in the spatial and the ethical sense – lies at the root of the dilemmas we face when confronting the relationship between the historical events of the Shoah and the literature that follows them: "Our paradox: the Holocaust displaces literature, and literature tends to displace the Holocaust." See Heller, *Uncertain Poetries* (Cambridge, UK: Salt, 2005), 151.

their incompatability with received frameworks of making meaning—are the literal and figured grounds of departure (*vom* Zuviel, *vom* Zuwenig) for a speaking that interrogates their lasting impact.

The Limits of Survival: Questioning the Nexus of Experience and Expression

In the discourse about trauma and testimony—a discourse that encompasses historical, psychic, cultural, and literary-critical concerns and in which the Shoah occupies a paradigmatic place—the figure of the survivor, both physical and imagined, appears as a kind of medium. In such portrayals, the survivor negotiates the tensions between the extreme nature of the catastrophe and the need to "integrate" the fact of its happening in our contemporary world, to relate it to daily existence through various forms of expression and remembrance. (While trauma theory argues that such integration is difficult if not impossible in psychic terms, cultural efforts—sustained by pedagogical and commemorative practices—cannot evade positioning the events in relation to our own lives, if for no other reason than to be able to think and speak about them.)[4] In this discourse, in relation to the dead, the survivor seems both a lacking figure (who did not experience the catastrophe in its entirety, to its "final limit") and a privileged one (who lived through the event and may now recount that experience to a world of others who did not).[5] So it appears as though the survivor must negotiate an "incomplete" experience with a surplus of potential expressive capacity. At the same time, in relation to the living, the survivor is also the one who has experienced too much, and this excess of experience, in its traumatic revisiting, explodes conventions of recounting and representation and displays the impoverishment of available language. The tension between experience and speech, in which the figure of the survivor both exceeds and falls short of the frameworks of both, structures conceptions of testimony and the attendant efforts to think through the ways in which the testimonial negotiates the lived and the articulated. Indeed, such investigation may be an endless task, entailing—in Jorge Semprun's wrenching account—that the one who tells the story "lives fatally" in the space in which experience and expression conjoin:

> You can tell all about this experience. You have merely to think about it. And set to it. And have the time, of course, and the courage, for a boundless and probably never-ending account, illuminated (as well as enclosed, naturally) by that possibility of going

[4] As I argue at various points throughout this study, such positioning is crucially bound up with the inescapable spatial metaphoricity of our language. See, for instance, George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989) and Denise Riley, *The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), 38, 44-45.

[5] I mean the term "privileged" here to designate not a "fortunate" status, of course, but one that possesses knowledge or experience that others do not. Gary Weissman argues, however, that much of the critical scholarship on the Shoah *does* in fact imply that the survivor is a "privileged" figure in the former sense, inasmuch as those who think critically and intellectually about these events "fantasize" their own involvement. See Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004). Weissman maintains that a "hierarchy of suffering" is established between the survivors of the Shoah and the generations of their children, evermore distant from the event: "*Fantasies of Witnessing* proceeds from my belief that there is something akin to this hierarchy of suffering—complete with much jockeying for position over who *really* understands the Holocaust and 'what it was like' to be *there*—amongst those scholars and critics who have little connection to the Holocaust other than their personal interest in the subject and (usually) their Jewishness. Whereas family connections grant the children of survivors a 'position of privilege' closer, as it were, to the Holocaust, non-witnesses must work to convince themselves and others that they too occupy a privileged position in relation to the event" (21).

> on forever. Even if you wind up repeating yourself. Even if you remain caught up in it, prolonging death, if necessary—reviving it endlessly in the nooks and crannies of the story. Even if you become no more than the language of this death, and live at its expense, fatally.[6]

If the discourse about the ethical, cultural, and commemorative stakes of "telling the story" privileges the testimonial over the artistic, then Semprun makes the opposite claim. In order to engage the experience in language, he muses, one must refuse the regulation of form, leave it aside, as it were, while one transforms testimony into the space of art, even if that space opens into the endlessness of a story endured to the death:

> I start to doubt the possibility of telling the story. Not that what we lived through is indescribable. It was unbearable, which is something else entirely (that won't be hard to understand), something that doesn't concern the form of a possible account, but its substance. Not its articulation, but its density. The only ones who will manage to reach this substance, this transparent density, will be those able to shape their evidence [*leur témoignage*] into an artistic object, a space of creation. Or of re-creation.[7]

Bearing in mind Semprun's avowal of the limitless "space of creation" that is at the same time the enclosure of a mortally stricken existence, it is one of my aims in this project to examine the ways in which a poetics of survival interrogates not only the position (and figure) of the survivor but also the *condition* of continuing at the indefinable limit of life and death, a condition that may extend beyond the individual's endurance. The term "survival" already marks excess linguistically, incorporating etymologically the claim that it reaches past life. This integral excess also comes to underwrite any notion of survival as a (negative) form of sublime transcendence. In the terms that scholars use to anglicize the Latinate word, the knotted understanding of survival as an existence that both exceeds and falls short of life emerges yet again: living on, outliving, or overliving. In each case, the affixed preposition highlights an irreducible, vexed relation between the disruptive force of the event endured and the continuity of existence and narration.

In the essay "Living On," Jacques Derrida thematizes the difficulty of relating these apparently synonymous terms, as he dwells upon the necessary gaps that occur in the process of translation, when the French *survivre* is rendered, for instance, as the English *living on*: "Translating (almost, in other words), the Latin *dē*, the French *de*, or the English 'of,' 'on' immediately comes to contaminate what it translates with meanings that it imports in turn, those other meanings that rework 'living on' or 'surviving' (*super, hyper,* 'over,' *über,* and even

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[6] Jorge Semprun, *Literature or Life*, trans. Linda Coverdale (New York: Penguin, 1997), 14. In French: "On peut tout dire de cette expérience. Il suffit d'y penser. Et de s'y mettre. D'avoir le temps, sans doute, et le courage, d'un récit illimité, probablement interminable, illuminé – clôture aussi, bien entendu – par cette possibilité de se poursuivre à l'infini. Quitte à tomber dans la répétition et le ressassement. Quitte à ne pas s'en sortir, à prolonger la mort, le cas échéant, à la faire revivre sans cesse dans les plis et les replis du récit, à n'être plus que la langage de cette mort, à vivre à ses dépens, mortellement." Semprun, *L'écriture ou la vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 26.

[7] Semprun, *Literature or Life*, 13. In French: "Pourtant, un doute me vient sur la possibilité de raconter. Non pas que l'expérience vécue soit indicible. Elle a été invivable, ce qui est tout autre chose, on le comprendra aisément. Autre chose qui ne concerne pas la forme d'un récit possible, mais sa substance. Non pas son articulation, mais sa densité. Ne parviendront à cette substance, à cette densité transparente que ceux qui sauront faire de leur témoignage un objet artistique, un espace de création. Ou de récréation." Semprun, *L'écriture ou la vie*, 25-26.

'above' and 'beyond'). It would be superficial to attribute this contamination to contingency, continuity, or contagion."[8] The proliferation of prepositions—both temporal and spatial, in their intimate association—demonstrates the difficulty of attempting to regulate and categorize their meanings. Why does Derrida remark on the process of contamination as one that resists juxtaposition or synonym? It would seem that contamination is at once something more invasive and more elusive than any of the other modes of relation he mentions, since the structure of the bond between the contaminating force and its object refuses mapping, as the two come to inhere in one another, moving past positions of agency and passivity. In any event, the play on the common prefix "con-" asks us to examine the ways in which we imagine and negotiate the irresolvable fact of "being with" another, of having to struggle with a relation that imposes itself just as much as it may be desired. Derrida argues that we cannot think about survival—the lived experience and the linguistic articulations, as well as their intertwining—without considering those forms of being and non-being that border upon and infiltrate it. Thus, a poetics of survival negotiates ceaselessly its relation to the boundaries of both life and death, examining how each acts as a force upon the other and thus affects the possibility of expressing continuous existence in any bounded or unified language.

While Derrida investigates the kinship and contagion between the various terms we use to delineate the condition of survival, other critics distinguish starkly between them, in the attempt to parse out their subtleties. Emily Wilson, for instance, employs the term "overliving" to indicate a necessarily vexed experience, which she opposes to the "positive connotations" of survival:

> Overliving is an essentially questionable, paradoxical form of survival. Although the Latinate word 'survival' has precisely the same root meaning as 'overliving,' the connotations of the two terms are distinct and even opposed. Briefly, 'survival' paints the concept of continued existence with positive connotations, 'overliving' with tragic ones. The object of the verb 'to survive' is usually some event that might have been expected to destroy the survivor. One survives earthquakes and shootings; one overlives oneself. 'Survival' implies that existence is an unexpected triumph; 'overliving' implies that it is a paradox.[9]

But how does a comparative project, which deals not only with problems of terminology but with their multi-lingual and inter-lingual manifestations, complicate Wilson's contrast between the English and the Latinate words? How, for instance, do the German *überleben* and the Yiddish *iberlebn* affect this constellation of terms, given their grammatical and etymological resonances but also their divergences in a terrible historical reality, as Nazism abused a rhetoric of selective survival to justify political and genocidal actions, while the Yiddish word, for its speakers, fused

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[8] Jacques Derrida, "Living On," trans. James Hulbert, *Deconstruction and Criticism*, Harold Bloom et al. (London: Continuum, 2004 [1979]), 63. In French, the play on multilingualism is yet more evident: "Traduisant (à peu près, autrement) le *de*, du moins en latin ou dans ma langue, *sur* vient aussitôt contaminer ce qu'il traduit des sens qu'il importe à son tour, de ces autres sens qui travaillent 'survivre' ou 'sur' 'vivre' (*super, hyper, over, über*, et même *above*, et encore *beyond*). Il serait superficiel d'attribuer cette contamination à la contingence, à la contiguïté ou à la contagion. Du moins l'aléa fait-il sens et c'est ce qui m'intéresse ici." Derrida, "Survivre," *Parages* (Paris: Galilée, 2003 [1986]), 112.

[9] Emily R. Wilson, *Mocked by Death: Tragic Overliving from Sophocles to Milton* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004), 2.

the certainty of suffering and the constant threat of physical and verbal annihilation, rather than heralding the promise of continued, triumphant existence?

Emily Wilson's assertion of the problematic self-reflexivity of "overliving" is one that Giorgio Agamben, in turn, attributes to "survival," thus troubling the particular distinction Wilson wishes to make. If the act of surviving is bound up critically with its object, this fact is already linguistically inscribed both in relation to the external *and* to the internal, since, as Agamben notes, "[t]he term 'to survive' contains an ambiguity that cannot be eliminated. It implies the reference to something or someone that is survived." The uncertainty arises from the dual possibility that this "something or someone that is survived" may be located either outside of or within the self, because "from the beginning, the verb also has a reflexive form when referred to human beings, which designates the striking idea of survival with respect to oneself and one's own life. In this form, the one who survives and the person to whom something survives thus coincide."[10] Agamben thus inscribes the ontologically vexed nature of survival in its linguistic construction. By insisting upon the ambiguous relation that the term stages—in the sense that the "someone" survived is both another and the self, indistinguishably—Agamben's musings highlight the inescapable realm of the ethical as the critical space in which we negotiate the tensions between self and other, investigating how we are involved in each other's existence in lasting ways. Thus, according to a recent collection of essays on *The Turn to Ethics*, ethics allows for (and demands) "a process of formulation and self-questioning that continually rearticulates boundaries, norms, selves, and 'others.'"[11]

The realization of being oneself implicated in the losses inscribed in survival also complicates Wilson's claim that we generally consider the term to signal an "unexpected triumph." But even in debates about the specific historical context of the Shoah, there are voices that maintain that survival designates an achievement and, indeed, a loosening of the bonds that tie the self to its own (unreflected) existence. Dominick LaCapra's assessment of the distinction between "living on" and "surviving"—and between the respective positions of subjective power and agency which each term bespeaks—suggests that survival constitutes a psychic accomplishment: "[V]ictims may indeed work through trauma to become, in significant measure, *not only survivors* but social and political agents. Of course it is possible that a victim may, at least in crucial ways, *live on without surviving* and be overwhelmed by a traumatic past."[12] Implicitly developing a trajectory of agency, this passage positions the survivor as a middle figure, "present" in both the temporal and spatial sense, capable of living without being subsumed entirely by the past, yet at the same time unable to contribute to shaping his own future. LaCapra takes up this hypothesis again, in order to examine the relationship between the position of survival and that of testimony:

> Insofar as the victim lives on but remains a victim, he or she exists in the melancholic aftermath of trauma and is haunted or possessed by the traumatic experience, as if reliving it time and again. […] [I]t is possible, I think, for the victim not only to live on, caught in a crushingly oppressive past, but also to survive, even if that survival never,

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[10] Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 132.

[11] Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, introduction, *The Turn to Ethics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), viii.

[12] Dominick LaCapra, *History and its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2009), 66, emphasis mine.

> with respect to extremely traumatic experiences, fully overcomes depression or melancholia and fully heals traumatic wounds. The ability to give testimony is itself one important component of survival. It requires a certain distance from a past that nonetheless remains all too pressing, painful, and at times unbearable. Still, despite the forms of breakdown, bewilderment, and seeming recapture by the past that mark many testimonies, giving testimony is an indication that one is not simply bearing witness to trauma by reliving the past and being consumed by its aftereffects.[13]

According to the logic of LaCapra's argument, and although he allows that the transition is "perhaps never fully successful," the survivor leaves the status of victim behind by claiming the agency to testify to the traumatic events he has experienced. Aligning survival with testimony and victimhood with witness, LaCapra suggests that the necessary distance of the space of relation enables putting experience into a language that reflects upon pain rather than simply undergoing it. [14]

If the figure of the survivor is generally considered the medium—as voice—of testimony, then we must attend to the relationship between a poetics of survival and the testimonial mode. In a move that strikes me as both instructive and problematic, Giorgio Agamben considers the figure of the poet as a witness, and poetry as a form of testimony. He sketches out the relationship between survival, testimony, and poetry in terms of its spatial unsettlement, emphasizing that the poet-witness (self-)consciously displaces and replaces himself in language in a way that responds to the violent dislocation perpetrated upon bodies deported and murdered:

> [T]o bear witness is to place oneself in one's own language in the position of those who have lost it, to establish oneself in a living language as if it were dead, or in a dead language as if it were living – in any case, outside both the archive and the *corpus* of what has already been said. It is not surprising that the witness' gesture is also that of the poet, the *auctor* par excellence. Hölderlin's statement that "what remains is what the poets found" (*Was bleibt, stiften die Dichter*) is not to be understood in the trivial sense that poets' works are things that last and remain throughout time. Rather, it means that the poetic word is the one that is always situated in the position of a remnant and that can, therefore, bear witness. Poets – witnesses – found language as what remains, as what actually survives the possibility, or impossibility, of speaking.[15]

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[13] LaCapra, *History and its Limits*, 75-76.

[14] It is useful to bear in mind here how LaCapra distinguishes between the acts of bearing witness and giving testimony. "Bearing witness," he writes, "refers to the act of someone having the experience of an event, and it can take various forms that are nonverbal, including posttraumatic symptoms." "Giving testimony," on the other hand, "involves the attempt to address or give an account of the experience one has had oneself and through which one has lived. In a sense, one might understand giving testimony as the fallible attempt to verbalize or otherwise articulate bearing witness. Testimony is itself both threatened and somehow authenticated or validated insofar as it bears the marks of, while not being utterly consumed and distorted by, the symptomatic effects of trauma." It is instructive that the verbs that describe these acts themselves indicate the patience of endurance (to bear) and the agency in relation (to give). Moreover, if we follow the consequences of LaCapra's distinctions, the frequent conflation (or interchangeable use) of these terms reveals the difficulty of separating neatly between experience and its verbalization. See LaCapra, *History and its Limits*, 61.

[15] Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 161.

While I appreciate Agamben's nuanced appraisal of the ways in which (poetic) language struggles with and responds to the vexations of survival, his juxtaposition – indeed, his equivalence – of poetry and the act of bearing witness, of the persons of the poet and the witness, gives me pause. His claim that the poet *is* or *acts as* a witness raises once more the question of what basis in experience this language "founded as a remnant" must have. For although his proposal of the intimate bond between poet and witness occurs at the end of his study *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and The Archive*, he has, at the text's start, already linked the figure of the survivor to the witness, via the Latin *superstes*, which "designates a person who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it."[16]

But it seems to me that the constellation between survivor, poet, and witness—and the ways in which the relation between experience and expression emerges and changes for each—entails further inquiry. The poetics of survival complicates Agamben's inferred spatial model of the relation between poet and discourse. Implying once again the difficulty of dividing the internal and the external, Agamben insists that witnesses—and, in their capacity as authorial witnesses, poets too—occupy language by imagining its uninhabitability: "To bear witness is to place oneself in one's own language *in the position of those who have lost it*, to establish oneself in a living language *as if* it were dead, or in a dead language *as if* it were living" (emphasis mine). This inversion and reworking of the speaker's position in a dispossessed language places their speech beyond past and present realms of discourse, "outside both the archive and the *corpus* of what has already been said."

Agamben's meditation on the position of the poet-witness within a language that is doubly outside the margins of discourse illuminates the difficulty of "claiming" speech, of assuming that language belongs to its speaker or that speakers can reside in language remade as a virtual home. However, the double relocation of the witness's speech—and, with it, the poet's—risks essentializing and valorizing its position "beyond the limit."[17] This risk strikes me as akin to the one that Chana Kronfeld formulates in her appraisal of the binaries of center and periphery in critical processes of canon formation and literary historiography: "Discussions of marginality face an almost unavoidable temptation to treat the 'minor' condition of a literature or a writer as an achievement, a nothing which is something, a status attainable only by an elite consisting of the 'marginally correct' (those who currently qualify as 'marginal,' 'peripheral,' 'decentered,' 'ec-centric,' in a culturally acceptable way)."[18] If we conceive of the poet-witness' speech, in its radical reformation of life and death, as so far "outside" the limits of discourse that there are no

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[16] Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 17.

[17] Dominick LaCapra criticizes Agamben's work for what he considers its dehistoricizing tendencies and has claimed that Agamben, among others, has found in trauma "something like a negative sublime." See LaCapra, *History and its Limits*, 67; see also 163-175. He expands this criticism in the essay "Approaching Limit Events: Siting Agamben," in which he characterizes the urge to construct a "transcendent sublime" of the limit event: "[T]he problem that is occluded or at least insufficiently addressed in the second perspective [namely, the transcendent sublime] is that of the transitional 'space' or mediating and mitigating (but non-totalizable) links between absolutes or sublimities, that is, the sublunar or subastral space of ethical and political life. This is the space in which the primary question is the variable relation between limits and excess, including transgression and the limit event or situation, in various institutional settings and sociopolitical forms of activity." LaCapra, "Approaching Limit Events: Siting Agamben, *Witnessing the Disaster: Essays on Representation and the Holocaust*, eds. Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2003), 267.

[18] Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996), 225.

points of contact, we may no longer attend to the ways in which a poetics of survival does, in fact, seek to engage these limits, to investigate and negotiate the mutual borders of critical discourse and poetic speech.[19] As I read it, this poetics emphasizes the ways in which a condition of survival not only impels but also resists claiming testimony as an articulation of what lies beyond the limit of comprehension and daily life ("the *corpus* of what has already been said"). It refuses to place itself either entirely within or outside the boundaries of discourse (or inside the outside, as Agamben would have it) but rather foregrounds its travels at the limit, as it crosses and re-crosses the borders of the lived and the spoken, the literal and the figurative, the experienced and the anticipated. In this way, a poetics of survival also refuses to distinguish summarily between accounts of creation and destruction, since it is necessarily involved in both.

Thus, the poems I examine in this study ask in what ways experience constitutes the necessary grounds of departure for a testimony to the condition of survival, and they question the imperative that the poet must occupy the position of witness. I propose that we may consider survival as a condition experienced not only by those who lived through the event "from beginning to end" but also by those who did not, particularly since the poetics of survival considers the ways in which physical, psychic, social, cultural, and linguistic wounds are interlinked. In reading together writings by Theodor W. Adorno and Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs, as well as by Malka Heifetz Tussman, I examine not only the work of those who are biographically survivors but also of those for whom the Shoah's impact endures, affecting the possibilities and conditions of lived and poetic voice. What position, what stance remains for the poet who wishes to respond not only to catastrophe but to the critical claims of those who would wish to constrict poetic license, to consign poetry to the realm of the impossible? And what of the pressures of writing in a language that, like Yiddish, endures at the limits of extinction (a language that has itself suffered the catastrophe, inasmuch as the survival of a language is bound up with the lives of its speakers)?

While all the writers whose work I examine here are Jewish, I do not argue that we must assume that this automatically includes them in the "group" of Shoah survivors nor that this excludes non-Jewish authors (as my references to Semprun at the opening of this study also indicate).[20] Instead, I analyze the ways in which these writers explore the mutual limits of

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[19] I emphasize this strand of Agamben's argument in order to highlight the risks involved in dwelling upon a language that situates itself far beyond the limits of what we know. But it is also important to acknowledge that Agamben examines as well how these limits emerge in central ways, how the extreme informs the everyday. Nevertheless, I argue, privileging witness (and here, poetry) as a speech that does not navigate the limit as a point of contact but rather either positions itself outside of or infiltrates the language of quotidian life strikes me as a problematic move precisely because it does not interrogate the friction between the two. Dominick LaCapra makes a similar claim about Agamben's portrayal of the human, arguing that Agamben's tendency to construct a binary between the human and the inhuman (even as he examines how each inheres in the other) also constitutes "an elimination or downplaying of a view of the human being as a compromise formation (in a sense even a 'threshold of indistinction') between body (not reducible to naked or mere life) and signifying practices that are social, political, and ethical in various ways." See LaCapra, "Approaching Limit Events," 297.

[20] Polemically, various authors have claimed that Jewish identity after the Shoah inevitably entails being a survivor. Thus, George Steiner declares that "[a]bove all else, to be a Jew in the second half of this century is to be a survivor, and one who knows that his survival can again be put in question." See Steiner, "The Long Life of Metaphor: An Approach to the 'Shoah'," *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. Berel Lang (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988), 160. In a letter to *The New Yorker*, Cynthia Ozick responds to a complaint by a Shoah survivor about her (mis)use of others' experiences as basis for the portrayal of an imagined survivor in the short stories *Rosa* and *The Shawl*. She argues that this act of imagination translates a historical reality, in which all Jews endure suffering together: "Every Jew [...] should feel as if he himself came out of Egypt. ... The Exodus took place 4,000 years ago, and yet the *Haggadah* enjoins me to incorporate it into my own mind and flesh, to so act as if it happened directly and intensely to me, not

language, literature, individual body, and collective remembrance, as their work interrogates how cultural and textual traditions have sought to regulate these respective relations. Thus, the authors question the meaning and validity of such traditions in seeking to define and shore up the boundaries that contain community. This poetics of survival is also, then, a poetics of argument. I want to sketch out two major shapes such argument takes. Firstly, the poets confront a Biblical tradition of relating—and making sense of—tales of creation and destruction. They simultaneously employ and resist this tradition, inquiring into the ethical and aesthetic viability of accounts that claim an organic or meaningful relation between the creative impulse and the reality of annihilation. In so doing, they engage intertextually Biblical tales that establish a link between acts of creation, expression, and (imperiled) life: As the poets investigate the importance of divine breath and human figure, they question how such associations can hold for an understanding of the poetic process, which responds to a history of violence and destruction that defies any attempt to figure meaning through the injured human body. Secondly, I attend to the vexed relationship between gender and genre: If these poets must contend with the restrictions and regulations that cultural and critical traditions seek to impose and with the neglect or misappropriation that their writing faces, then these restrictions are further compounded for women poets, who struggle with realities of textual, critical, and cultural exclusion, to which they reply by examining the ethical consequences of claiming (and refusing) poetic voice.

In exploring the ways in which corporeal and textual survival entwine, a poetics of survival depends upon arguing with a discourse that privileges only survivors' responses to the Shoah. For, in Susan Gubar's words, "if only the reports of those who personally witnessed the destruction of the Jewish people can be judged meaningful, if efforts to make the event consequential by and for those born after it are deemed a profanation of the dead or an exoneration of their murderers, then the Holocaust is doomed to expire."[21] Thus, a poetics that struggles with the shapes of poetry and memory—and with their attendant aesthetic and ethical stakes—cannot be conflated with the testimonial voice of the survivor. If the poetics of survival constitutes an exploration of lived and literary existence at its imperiled boundaries, I argue also that it resists critical claims that would stipulate the voice or the form that a testimonial expression must take. Indeed, it even resists the notion that survival mandates testimony. Such

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as mere witness but as participant. Well, if I am enjoined to belong to an event that occurred 4,000 years ago, how much more strongly am I obliged to belong to an event that occurred only 40 years ago." Quoted in S. Lillian Kremer, *Women's Holocaust Writing* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1999), 175.

[21] Susan Gubar, *Poetry After Auschwitz*, 4. It seems to me that while Gubar's statement makes a powerful claim about the value and importance of poetry after Auschwitz, the personifying characterization of the Shoah as "dying" or "doomed to expire" further obfuscates the tensions between the corporeal and the constructed, the literal and the figurative. (At the same time, the image of the Shoah as "doomed to expire" also evokes the concept of an "expiration date" and its claims about nourishment and usability, which in turn suggests the ways in which social and cultural practices of commemoration may be bound up with political calculations of what is profitable and marketable.) Amy Hungerford critiques practices that personify textual representations of the Shoah, avowing at the same time that these practices have shaped the frameworks within which we comprehend genocide: "[T]he idea of personification is required in order to make sense of what would otherwise be the incomprehensible notion of a murdered text. And it is that notion that lies at the heart of our contemporary understanding of genocide." Hungerford, *The Holocaust of Texts: Genocide, Literature and Personification* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003), 6-7. In fact, though, I would argue with Hungerford's claim that the "notion of a murdered text" is incomprehensible unless we take recourse to the figurative practice of personification, for, as I maintain throughout this study, the near-annihilation of Yiddish literature through the devastation of its speakers demonstrates the intimately and painfully entwined destruction of bodies and texts.

resistance does not necessarily appear as an outright refusal but may also emerge in the negotiation of the boundaries of what can, what may, and what must be said. If the *figure* of the survivor stands, in much of the critical literature, synonymously for the one who bears witness (in the sense of experience) and for the one who must give testimony (in the sense of expression), then I contend that examining the *condition* of survival urges us to reflect upon the critical space that preserves the tension between the experience of suffering and its expression. The notion of a critical space may help us to imagine the simultaneity of bond and distance, as each institutes the other while nevertheless refusing their collapse. This critical space allows for the tension between life and art without erasing their differences, subordinating one to the other, or claiming them as separate, entirely distinguishable entities. And so, we must investigate the stakes and implications of survival as an ongoing condition, a process that continues to change, since it is of necessity not only the traumatic or remembered return to the event (and its testimonial recounting) but also the daily unfolding of the lived.

I contend that foregrounding the figure of the survivor and the (im)possibilities of his or her testimony has led to a critical neglect of the ways in which poetics struggle with the condition of survival, a neglect compounded—and attention diverted—by the legacy of responses to Theodor W. Adorno's formulation that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (a debate to which I will return below).[22] While I do not, of course, discount the value and importance of testimony for how we understand the Shoah as history, the trauma of those who lived through it, and our ever-changing relationship to its cultural impact, I argue that it is vital to consider a poetics of survival in its own right, as an exploration of the implications of *poetic form* in articulating the vexed bonds of life and language after the Shoah. For the poetics of survival open up a critical space, which negotiates and calls into question these bonds between experience and expression, as it interrogates the position and agency of voice and the constitution of figure, thus troubling the established link between the person of the survivor and the act of bearing witness. In so doing, the poetics of survival resists the exclusive privileging of the testimonial mode, emphasizing the multiple other cross-generic and intertextual bonds that offer vital paths of exploring the parameters of its own endurance.

Between Fragility and Tenacity: The Limit-Space of Poetics

In order to address the implications of a poetics of survival as an arena *between* poetic and critical thought, fact and figure, life and art, I turn to Walter Benjamin's essay "Zwei Gedichte von Friedrich Hölderlin" ["Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin"]. This text emphasizes the continual exchange between poem and critic—the process of reflecting on poetry's possibilities—as an important limit-space. In this way, Benjamin's essay indicates the productive and problematic confluences of poetry and criticism, in the moments when poetry is engaged in critical (self-)reflection, as well as when criticism encounters poetry. His

[22] Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber Nicholson, *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003), 162. In German: "nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch." Adorno, "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft," *"Ob nach Auschwitz sich noch leben lasse": Ein philosophisches Lesebuch*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 205. Two remarkable exceptions to this general neglect of poetry and its relation to survival are Susan Gubar's *Poetry After Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew* and Sara Guyer's *Romanticism After Auschwitz* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007). Incidentally, both titles also betray the ways in which Adorno's statement has shaped the very language of the frameworks in which discussions of poetic responses to the Shoah situate themselves.

understanding of the elusive frame of the limit-space helps me to theorize the consequences of a poetics of survival, which is similarly engaged in an exploration of what endures at the shifting boundaries of corporeal and textual relation.

Benjamin develops a poetics of process, which conjoins the conditions and tasks of poetry, as well as the circumstances and aims of its reading. These necessary yet indeterminable bonds mean that neither poetry nor reflection on poetry can constitute a perfect origin, since each must come into being on the basis of the other's demands: "The poetic task, as the preliminary condition of an evaluation of the poem, is to be established. The evaluation cannot be guided by the way the poet has fulfilled his task; rather, the seriousness and the greatness of the task itself determine the evaluation."[23] Poetry's *Aufgabe*—a term that, in its evocation of a charge encompassing spiritual, mythical, and ethical dimensions, is not entirely rendered by the English "task"—is at once source and destination of the critical enterprise. Since *Aufgabe* also refers to a giving-up, or release, it suggests the poem's vanishing point as well, highlighting that the poem cannot be fully grasped, either by its author or by its reader.

The exchange between the poetic and the critical, aiming to elucidate this *Aufgabe*, thus occurs at the material and textual boundaries of poem and reading. What emerges in the process—*das Gedichtete*—is the ever-present and ever-elusive necessity of poetics, bearing upon both the poem and the act of interpretation:

> Nothing will be said here about the process of lyrical composition, nothing about the person or worldview of the creator; rather, the particular and unique sphere in which the task and precondition of the poem lie will be addressed. This sphere is at once the product and the subject of this investigation. It itself can no longer be compared with the poem; it is, rather, the sole thing in this investigation that can be ascertained. This sphere, which for every poem has a special configuration, is characterized as the poetized [*das Gedichtete*]. In this sphere that peculiar domain containing the truth of the poem shall be opened up.[24]

Benjamin depicts *das Gedichtete* as an arena that takes shape around a boundary, establishing a singular, incomparable contact zone between the poetic and the critical. By claiming that the poem's condition and its task lie in a unique sphere simultaneously produced by and subjected to critical study, Benjamin refuses to submit the poem to the critic's investigation only as an object of analysis. The sphere that "contains" the poem's task (and, if we return to the suggestion of *Aufgabe* as vanishing point, its dissolution) is also its precondition. At the same time, this sphere

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[23] Walter Benjamin, "Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin: 'The Poet's Courage' and 'Timidity,'" *Selected Writings: Volume 1, 1913-1926* (Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard UP, 1996), 18. In German: "Die dichterische Aufgabe, als Voraussetzung einer Bewertung des Gedichts, ist zu ermitteln. Nicht danach kann die Bewertung sich richten, wie der Dichter seine Aufgabe gelöst habe, vielmehr bestimmt der Ernst und die Größe der Aufgabe selbst die Bewertung." Walter Benjamin, "Zwei Gedichte von Friedrich Hölderlin: 'Dichtermut' – 'Blödigkeit,'" *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 21.

[24] Benjamin, "Two Poems," 18-19. In German: "[Nichts über den Vorgang des lyrischen Schaffens wird ermittelt, nichts über Person oder Weltanschauung des Schöpfers, sondern die besondere und einzigartige Sphäre, in der Aufgabe und Voraussetzung des Gedichts liegt. Diese Sphäre ist Erzeugnis und Gegenstand der Untersuchung zugleich. Sie selbst kann nicht mehr mit dem Gedicht verglichen werden, sondern ist vielmehr das einzig Feststellbare der Untersuchung. Diese Sphäre, welche für jede Dichtung eine besondere Gestalt hat, wird als das Gedichtete bezeichnet. In ihr soll jener eigentümliche Bezirk erschlossen werden, der die Wahrheit der Dichtung enthält." See Benjamin, "Zwei Gedichte," 21.

both arises from and allows for critical analysis, which cannot, however, begin its work without encountering the poem. The boundaries between what is internal and what is external, what is proper to the poem and what is proper to criticism, remain at once indispensable and impossible to determine or locate. Each is simultaneously inside and outside the other, yielding to the other's claims while exerting its force in return. *Das Feststellbare* – what can be ascertained, but also what can be captured and grounded – becomes the space of poetry's truth, even though (or because) it cannot be compared to the poem and remains in this sense elusive. In fact, Benjamin's refusal of comparison, of *vergleichen*, underscores that the process of interpretation and the exploration of relation cannot consist in measurement or balance, for the attempt to establish equality or likeness would run the risk of eliding singular difference.

The sphere that arises in the temporally and corporeally vexed encounter between poem and criticism thus belongs only to itself; it does not admit appropriation. Truth is not attainable: as a boundary-sphere that both brings into contact and separates world and poem, *das Gedichtete*—where the truth of poetry is not enclosed but rather opened up (*erschlossen*)—depends upon its liminality, which ceases to exist as soon as one tries to inhabit or characterize it. Indeed, in conceptualizing the liminal, one must recognize it as a space of encounter, "since a limit-concept is possible only as a limit between two concepts."[25] *Das Gedichtete* disrupts and destabilizes the organic entity of both poem and life; it does not allow itself to be subsumed in one or the other. Instead, "the poetized emerges as the transition from the functional unity of life to that of the poem."[26] In this way, the poetized must remain process rather than accomplishment: Benjamin insists that critical study of the poetic must acknowledge "that it is not elements but relations that are at stake, since the poetized itself is, after all, a sphere of relation between the work of art and life, whose unities themselves are wholly ungraspable."[27]

This notion of the poetic as process rather than substance is crucial to my examination of a poetics of survival. Moreover, the particular relation between art and life, which, according to Benjamin, is the concern rather than the content of poetics, will, in my interpretations, emerge as the problematization of the relation between poem and body and as the attendant investigation of voice and figure, which straddle the corporeal and poetic realms. I focus on the ways in which *das Gedichtete* negotiates the simultaneous bonds and distance of life and art, of the experience of corporeal suffering and its poetic expression. The poems I examine address the problem of survival by questioning what bodies may survive (in) the poem and what poem survives the body, what a language of survival may be and how and in what forms language survives. As Benjamin notes, however, the search for what structures these relations between life and poetry approaches but does not reach its destination. After all, the critical and the poetic cannot merge, since this would erase the poetized as their mutual limit and as the space of their encounter: "The disclosure of the pure poetized, the absolute task, must remain—after all that has been said—a purely methodological, ideal goal. The pure poetized would otherwise cease to be a limit-

[25] Benjamin, "Two Poems," 19. In German: "wie denn stets ein Grenzbegriff als Grenze zwischen Begriffen nur möglich ist." Benjamin, "Zwei Gedichte," 22.

[26] Benjamin, "Two Poems," 19-20. In German: "das Gedichtete erweist sich also als Übergang von der Funktionseinheit des Lebens zu der des Gedichts." Benjamin, "Zwei Gedichte," 23.

[27] In the German: "daß es sich nicht um Elemente, sondern um Beziehungen handelt, wie ja das Gedichtete selbst eine Sphäre der Beziehung von Kunstwerk und Leben ist, deren Einheiten selbst durchaus nicht erfaßbar sind." Benjamin, "Zwei Gedichte," 24 and "Two Poems," 20.

concept: It would be life or poem."[28] Ultimately, and already in its linguistic articulation, *das Gedichtete* indicates at once past and perpetuity. Its agentless – indeed neuter – action is always in the process of becoming a substantive condition. It is happening made manifest, in an area that refuses to become delineable form, even as it takes singular shape (*besondere Gestalt*) in each emergence.

A poetics of survival, I argue, examines voice as the site where the injuries sustained by body and language conjoin, recalling Benjamin's insistence on the radical shape (*Gestalt*) of the poetized as a negotiation of shape's literal and figurative, physical and imagined senses. Voice, in a poetics of survival, emerges not as a literary, aesthetic, or rhetorical feature but as a manifestation of singular speech, which endures bodily, psychic, and lingual wounds.[29] Therefore, this poetics brings together aesthetic and ethical concerns: inasmuch as an investigation of the ethical asks us to consider the parameters of our vexed relations with others, we must attend not only to poetic voice but also to its travels, to the ways in which it frames (or refuses to frame) its search for a receiving other. In acknowledging the shifting relations between poetic voice and listening ear, we may also recognize the changing temporal, geographic, linguistic, social, and cultural circumstances within and across which such relations constitute themselves. Here, a focus on voice serves also to negotiate the bond between the individual human body and the language that circulates and is accessible to collective use and abuse. A poetics of survival complicates the binary of single and plural speech: it questions, on the one hand, on whose behalf the poetic voice may and must speak, and demands, on the other hand, what modes of adaptation, appropriation, and transformation remake a common language in the singular and subjective.

In this way, contemplating the ethical concerns raised by poetic voice leads me also to consider how voice is bound up with figure, once again at the intersection of its corporeal and literary senses. The poems I investigate posit the body as simultaneously monstrous and fragmented: what endures is not an image of the human but an insistent inscription of its remaining parts, which live on paradoxically and perilously. If it is no longer possible to imagine the sanctity and wholeness of the human figure, it is nevertheless crucial to describe the sites of its fragmentation, at the boundary of poem and world. Inasmuch as a poetics of survival asks us to examine the consequences of damaged figure, it counters claims that poetry exhibits its tropes purely for their own sake. Consider, for instance, John Stuart Mill's frequently cited argument that poetry as a genre is distinguished by being language "overheard."[30] Exploring the

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[28] In the German: "Die Ermittelung des reinen Gedichteten, der absoluten Aufgabe, muß nach allem Gesagten das rein methodische, ideelle Ziel bleiben. Das reine Gedichtete würde aufhören Grenzbegriff zu sein: es wäre Leben oder Gedicht." Benjamin, "Zwei Gedichte," 24 and "Two Poems," 20-21.

[29] In this sense, we may also understand the testimonial mode—the act of witnessing—in the poetic.

[30] See John Stuart Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties," *Autobiography and Literary Essays*, eds. John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger (London: Routledge, 1996), especially 348-349. Mill writes, "Poetry and eloquence are both alike the expression or utterance of feeling. But if we may be excused the antithesis, we should say that eloquence is *heard*, poetry is *over*heard. Eloquence supposes an audience; the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener. Poetry is feeling, confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude, and embodying itself in symbols, which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind. Eloquence is feeling pouring itself out to other minds, courting their sympathy, or endeavouring to influence their belief, or move them to passion or to action." He goes on to maintain that poetry is only possible if the poet "can succeed in excluding from his work every vestige of such lookings-forth into the outward and every-day world, and can express his emotions exactly as he has felt them in solitude, or as he is conscious that he should feel them though they were to remain for ever unuttered, or (at the lowest) as he knows that others feel them in similar circumstances of solitude. But when he turns round and addresses himself to another

implications of this notion for our experience and understanding of the figure of apostrophe—the impossible poetic address of the dead or inanimate—Jonathan Culler famously argues that the reader's relation to this figure consists in the attempt to take on a subject-position (at various degrees of remove) whose occupation is, finally, embarrassing, in its flaunting of superfluity and insufficiency at once:

> I take as my point of departure the claim that lyric is fundamentally discourse overheard: a poetic speaker produces utterance which readers overhear. Now it seems to me that for the better understanding of the lyric, one must combine this claim with the recognition that lyrics, unlike novels, are also spoken by the reader. When we read a lyric, aloud or silently, we utter the words, we temporarily occupy the position of the speaker […]. We are not simply overhearing the speech of another, whom we strive to identify from this speech but are ourselves trying out, trying on this speech. And some of the embarrassment of apostrophe comes, I think, from the fact that we ourselves engage in this preposterous act of addressing clouds, birds, and the spirits of the dead.[31]

A poetics of survival problematizes Culler's claims about the effects of apostrophe, which do not differentiate between the equally "preposterous" acts of "addressing clouds, birds, and the spirits of the dead." A poetics of survival that responds to the atrocities of the Shoah cannot imagine the dead simply as spirits: the dead remain bodies, and the poem cannot situate, categorize, or compare these bodies, because they were murdered and denied a grave. The dead are nowhere and everywhere at once, yet even though (and because) it is impossible to locate them, the poet cannot establish a stable speaking position in relation to their absent presence. Precisely because the uncertain position of the poetic voice confounds the demarcations of the living poet and the bodies of the dead, it troubles the notion of apostrophe as a self-conscious rhetorical flaunting of the boundary between the animate and the inanimate. No longer only a poetic figure, a potential form of textual embarrassment, apostrophe instead mandates an ethical awareness of the consequences of re-positioning poetic voice, demonstrating the anguish of the traveling voice that cannot reach its destined addressee.

In this sense, a poetics of survival negotiates apostrophe as an inevitable pressure, akin to Barbara Johnson's understanding of apostrophe as "a form of ventriloquism through which the speaker throws voice, life, and human form into the addressee, turning its silence into mute responsiveness."[32] In Johnson's formulation, the speaker is both captive and creator. The act of "throwing voice into another" is a kind of divine violence that puts its actor under the other's spell too, as the silent answer of the apostrophized other cements their inescapable relation. What does it mean to attempt to inhabit another's voice? What aesthetic and ethical concerns may this attempt raise, when the poem becomes the vehicle that allows for—indeed enables—the appropriation of another's experience through the adoption of his or her speech? How do we vocalize our ghostly investment in the deaths of others, whom we survive? Voice, as the site

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person; when the act of utterance is not itself the end, but a means to an end—viz. by the feelings he himself expresses, to work upon the feelings, or upon the belief, or the will, of another,—when the expression of his emotions, or of his thoughts tinged by his emotions, is tinged also by that purpose, by that desire of making an impression upon another mind, then it ceases to be poetry, and becomes eloquence" (349).

[31] Jonathan Culler, preface, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001 [1981]), xv.

[32] Barbara Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986): 30.

where the surviving body and language intersect, destabilizes the division between life and death as well, dwelling on ethical implications of seeking out their convergence or maintaining their distinction. In the condition of survival, are life and death not bound up with one another in such a way that they traverse the boundary between experiential and articulated reality? Or, as Barbara Johnson puts it, "Who, in the final analysis, exists by addressing whom?"[33] In this sense, apostrophe is not a potentially embarrassing trope but a marker of what endures through the presenting of an absence.

A poetics of survival explores the traveling voice as the shifting site of relation between body and language. This relation, as I have shown, takes the shape of a limit-space in the Benjaminian sense. It does not, therefore, automatically figure body as text or text as body. Scholars have maintained that not only literature but also the critical discourse about tales of others' suffering risks such substitutions. Thus, Patricia Yaeger warns us of the dangers of inscribing others' physical pain in the fabric of our intellectual work (and in the pleasure and profits we gain from it). She urges us to question "the role of the critic's own writing in producing someone else's death as 'text,'"[34] and she suggests that this textualization of others' suffering is akin to a physical—indeed, a quasi-cannibalistic—act, that of "consuming trauma." We may situate the ethical dilemma at this nexus of the inextricable dangers of the figure, which is at once "too much text" and "too little body," and vice versa. Yet recourse to figure is inevitable, even as we remain unable to balance the demands and the pressures of its corporeal and imagined forms. And so, Yaeger argues, we face "a binary impasse: Either (1) the ghost speaks, or (2) we must endure—that is, become complicit in—its silence, in the attenuation of the dead within the oblivion of approximate figures (figures designed to communicate, but always encountering the emptiness of the concept, the flatness of theory, the excess of lurid projections, or the instrumentality of the body made spectacle)."[35] With its conscious and self-reflexive examination of voice and figure at the borders of body and text, a poetics of survival may help us think about the ethical consequences of our relation to and investment in the histories of the dead. What stories can survive through our retelling, and in what form?

In her compelling meditation *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust*, Eva Hoffman assesses the conflicting desires of contemporary culture in relation to the Shoah, desires that cause us to return to the topic obsessively yet perceive our remove from the events evermore acutely. She describes attending a ceremony held to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the atrocities committed in the town of Jedwabne, where the Poles killed their Jewish neighbors under the supervision of the German army.[36] Reflecting on the palpable sense of unease among those in attendance at the commemoration, Hoffman characterizes this unsettlement as evidence of the audience's conflicted sense of simultaneously excessive and insufficient interest in this history, which must determine the stakes of their engagement with it:

> The slight uncertainty that can be sensed among those gathered in the square surely has to do partly with this: the possibility of inappropriate response, of emotional bad faith. Emotion recollected in too much tranquility, or in not enough, in too much detachment, or in too much rage. But what is the appropriate emotion—the appropriate response?

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[33] Johnson 34.

[34] Patricia Yaeger, "Consuming Trauma; or, The Pleasures of Merely Circulating," *Extremities*, eds. Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2002), 30.

[35] Yaeger 37.

[36] For a historical analysis of this event, see Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001).

> What is the appropriate emotion for me—for those of us who came after? This has everything to do with me, I think; this has so little to do with the actualities of my own life.[37]

In her description of the perceived conflict between the claims that the past makes upon the present and that the present makes upon the past in turn, Hoffman evokes this ambivalence by alluding to Wordsworth's famous characterization of poetic creation in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*: "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind."[38] The organic relation between memory, imagination, sensation, and experience depends upon the condition of tranquility—signaling an undisturbed calm both within the individual and in the environment—, which furnishes the basis for the process of poetic making. In Wordsworth's account, poetry arises from a sensory recall, generating an emotion that corresponds with the remembered one to create the experience anew in the mind and to translate its impression into language. It is this doubled experience—tangible and ephemeral at once—that grounds poetic production as a symbiosis of what is remembered, imagined, and felt (both in the physical and the emotional sense).

Hoffman suggests that the disruptive force of the Shoah undoes not only the organic conditions of creativity but also those of its reception: we must attend now not only to the literary, critical, and commemorative attempts to respond to the catastrophe but must also gauge the significance of our own responses. The reality of the Shoah has fragmented the unity of Wordsworth's desired creative universe, so that the monstrous and the insignificant, the grotesque and the trivial overlap. The conditions of memory and the relationship between the remembered and the imagined are now both excessive and lacking; emotion is "recollected in too much tranquility, or in not enough." But in questioning the possibility of "appropriate emotion," Hoffman also alludes to the question of what may—in ethical as well as aesthetic terms—become the basis for poetry. In conjuring Wordsworth's words not in the context of poetic but of cultural analysis, Hoffman suggests that the relationship between memory, history, and imagination must not be discounted but rather rethought: What forms and genres do we employ in order to engage the mutual pressures of past and present, the varying demands of individual and community, the incommensurability of experience and expression? Because—not despite of—the fact that the conditions of its writing have been called into question, poetry is vital to such a rethinking, inasmuch as it negotiates the borders of form and sustains the ambivalent engagement with voices whose claims we cannot measure or define.

Ultimately, then, it is my aim, to offer a counter-trajectory to readings that submit poetry as the object of critical study and that locate poetic speech outside the boundaries of critical discourse, refusing its contribution to debates about the relation between contemporary culture and the Shoah. I investigate instead the ways in which the poetics of survival posit the poem as a critique of claims that would seek to regulate the voices and forms of expression "after Auschwitz." Of course, this formulation references Theodor W. Adorno's (in)famous saying

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[37] Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 222.

[38] William Wordsworth, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," 1802, *Lyrical Ballads*, by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (New York: Routledge, 2005), 307.

that "to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric," which I already mention above, and which continues to exert a profound influence on contemporary understandings of the ethics of poetic production.[39] His statement serves as the implicit frame for many critical considerations of poetry written after the Shoah, offering a point of departure and a basis for argument that Susan Gubar likens to a religious mandate, "taken to be as axiomatic as the biblical commandment against graven images."[40] Gubar's association of Adorno's "verdict" with an interpretation of the Biblical interdiction of representing the human face doubles the perceived ethical force of Adorno's claim, as it underscores the stringent framework of a cultural and textual tradition, which a poetics of survival challenges.

The poetry I discuss in the three chapters of this study opens up, engages, and critiques the wide range of critical responses to the ethics of poetic production after the Shoah, from doubts about its permissibility to avowals of its necessity. Rather than positing Adorno's meditations on the problems of literature after the Shoah as the central reference point or origin of such an investigation, in Chapter One I approach his claim (and its many re-articulations in his oeuvre) from the vantage of an argumentative, intertextual conversation launched by Rachel Blau DuPlessis' long poem "Draft 52: Midrash," which grapples with Adorno's statements about poetry, ethics, and survival. Itself a critical enterprise, "Draft 52" institutes the poem as a communicative and memorial space over and against an imagined elaboration of Adorno's bases for an ethical interdiction of the poetic as such. The poem alternates direct queries to and challenges of Adorno with self-reflexive questions about the possibilities and limits of post-

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[39] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism," 162, and Adorno, "Kulturkritik," 205. While I deal with the complexity and ambiguity of Adorno's formulations about the relationship between the poetic and the catastrophic in Chapter One, let me note here that the extreme interpretations—indeed misattributions—of his words insist that he revokes the possibility of poetry entirely, both on moral and aesthetic grounds. I offer Cynthia Ozick's musings as a paradigmatic example, particularly instructive because she presents herself both as creative writer and as critic, concluding that she is destined to endure the rift between her desire to write literature after (and about) the Shoah on the one hand and her realization that the fulfillment of this desire results in a form of transgressive speech on the other hand: "In theory, I'm with Theodor Adorno's famous dictum: after Auschwitz, no more poetry. And yet, my writing has touched on the Holocaust again and again. I cannot *not* write about it. It rises up and claims my furies. All the same, I believe that the duty of our generation, so close to the events themselves, is to absorb the data, to learn what happened. I am not in favor of making fiction of the data, or of mythologizing or poeticizing it. If we each had a hundred lifetimes, there would not be enough time to assimilate the documents. I constantly violate this tenet; my brother's blood cries out from the ground, and I am drawn and driven." Ozick's allusion to the story of Cain and Abel dramatizes the psychic and ethical conflict she claims, portraying the writer's imaginative license as a form of fratricide, as though the creative act violates the memory of the dead and makes us—both as writers and as readers—complicit in their deaths. "Roundtable Discussion: Raul Hilberg, Cynthia Ozick, Aharon Appelfeld, Saul Friedländer," *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. Berel Lang (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988), 284.

[40] Gubar, *Poetry After Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew*, 4. For a sustained analysis of Adorno's stance on the *Bilderverbot* [the interdiction of images], see Elizabeth A. Pritchard, "*Bilderverbot* meets Body in Theodor W. Adorno's Inverse Theology," *Theodor W. Adorno, Volume One (Sage Masters of Modern Social Thought)*, ed. Gerard Delanty (London: Sage, 2004), 183-212. Pritchard maintains that critics have primarily analyzed Adorno's avowal of the necessity of the *Bilderverbot* in terms of its theological or political implications, and she argues that "Adorno pledges his allegiance to the *Bilderverbot* in order to focus attention on the lived realities of 'damaged life,' i.e., the antagonistic social relations and material deprivations that make a mockery of any and all depictions of reconciliation. Alternatively stated, Adorno's 'inverse theology' entails not the concealment of the divine, but the revelation of our fallen reality. Indeed, for Adorno, to insist that the absolute is unspeakable, and thus unknowable, prevents us from coming to terms with the precise features of reality that keep reconciliation beyond our reach" (185). As Pritchard's analysis suggests, it is crucial to understand Adorno's seeming refusal of representation – in aesthetic, visual, and literary terms – not as a simple moral interdiction but as a rejection of representation as a transparent rendering (or, indeed, a sublimation) of lived existence.

Shoah poetry. Each address also implicitly invokes the poem's audience, revealing the changing encounters of the traveling voice. The multiple directions of the poem's address contest any conventional acceptance of Adorno's claim by asking that we reconsider the ethical stakes of a space that conjoins commemoration of the victims of extraordinary violence and the reflection of our daily existence.

For both Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs, whose correspondence and poetry I examine in Chapter Two, breath—as the carrier of voice—manifests the vital relation between body and writing, for it positions both at the limit between existence and extinction. In Celan's work, the *Atemwende*, or breath-turn, constitutes a crucial moment of suspension, which refuses temporal or spatial certainty and hovers indeterminately on the edge of suffocation, while anticipating the pressures of a return to life. For Sachs, breath's wound and the wound breath inflicts—the *Atemwunde*—figures the injuries of body and language alike, presenting the absence of the dead as an intimate wound sustained by the surviving voice. Engaging their resonances in poetry and in their exchange of letters, I emphasize the importance they accord to the voice whose travels explore the limits of its own constitution in relation to the simultaneously awaited and difficult encounter with another.

My study ends with an analysis of poems by Malka Heifetz Tussman, which refute critical claims that would mandate poetic engagement and expression on the basis of belonging to a community that endures and mourns devastating losses. Tussman's writing marks the ruptures of linguistic, geographic, and familial ties sustained by the Yiddish poet writing in America, and her poems struggle with their contested space, even as they contest in turn the frameworks of their reception. The Shoah's devastation of Europe's Jews manifests itself also as a wounding of the Yiddish language. But Tussman's use of Yiddish does not maintain it as a relic that testifies to the absence of its speakers and thus dwells upon its own silence. In the poem "*tselokhes*" ("In Spite"), Tussman protests the assumption that she must write about the Shoah because she is a Jewish poet who writes in a Jewish language. Through her sustained refusal of expectation, she transforms the poem into an arena in which to mourn the catastrophe precisely by arguing against lament, by inscribing over and over what she will not say and by revising a tradition of figuring the female body as the spectacle of a ravaged community or as a disembodied voice that mourns collective losses.

In the constellations of the poetic and critical conversations I trace in these chapters, I hope to counter the primacy of established pairings. If Theodor W. Adorno and Paul Celan are arguably considered the two major, even canonical, voices of criticism and poetry that deals with the Shoah, I read them here not in this constellation but in intertextual encounter with other, lesser-known writers. Claiming that "no consideration of the poetry of Paul Celan is possible, it seems, without reference to Adorno's dictum that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,'" Sidra deKoven Ezrahi likens the relationship between their work to the archetypical dialogue of Jewish men: "Said to have been originally occasioned by a reading of Celan's 'Todesfuge,' Adorno's statement has become explicitly linked with that poem so that the two are as intertwined as a talmudic commentary and its biblical source."[41] Interestingly, Ezrahi's formulation leaves ambiguous which text ultimately constitutes source and which commentary, since she portrays Adorno's statement as a response to his reading of Celan's poetry on the one hand and suggests on the other hand that this poetry (and the interpretation of the one reading it) refer to the philosopher's assertion. I interrupt this doubly canonical pairing in order to make a

[41] Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, "'The Grave in the Air': Unbound Metaphors in Post-Holocaust Poetry," *Probing the Limits of Representation*, ed. Saul Friedländer (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992), 259, 260.

case for the value of attending to the multiple, fractured, and contingent forms of other intertextual conversations, as they question the borders through which we construct and interpret dialogue.

Such a reading of intertextual resonance foregrounds the movement of voices engaged in debate across linguistic, geographic, and temporal divides. In different ways, the English-, German-, and Yiddish-language poets I discuss all forestall the desire to textualize and historicize suffering in a quasi-Biblical tradition by arguing with and reconsidering the ways in which this foundational text expresses the relationship between the experience of suffering, the mourning of loss, and the avowal of survival. One might argue that a poetics that seeks to demonstrate the Shoah's continuing impact upon our lives must counter a process of canonization that would resemble Biblical scope. As Geoffrey Hartman muses,

> It is hard to give up the idea that a *Yizkor* or memorial book will emerge with something of biblical strength, one that could be read and understood by all. The very idea of such a book, at the same time, might produce a deceptive sense of totality, throwing into the shadows, even into oblivion, stories, details and unexpected points of view that keep the intellect active and the memory digging. Every ambitious writer, nevertheless, projects a work of that kind, or a poetics leading to it—though the idea of the Great Book is receding, and with it that of a canonical work about the Shoah.[42]

Finally, then, I query how a poetics of survival both employs and critiques the generic and stylistic forms of the poem by exploring the pathways of its voices, the consequences of its figures, and the intertextual conversations and debates in which it engages. In so doing, this poetics demonstrates its crucial involvement in the limit-space between life and art. A poetics of survival, I suggest, asks not to be subsumed by other genres—be they chronicle, testimony, or narrative—which critical debates have put forward as more relevant or capable of defining the relations between experience and expression. Meta-poetically, a poetics of survival thus argues for its own significance, even as it claims nothing more than its precarious endurance.

[42] Geoffrey Hartman, "The Book of the Destruction," *Probing the Limits of Representation*, ed. Friedländer (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992), 319.

CHAPTER ONE
Addressing the Critical/Poetic Divide: Rachel Blau DuPlessis' Arguments with Theodor W. Adorno

Genre Debates: Between Poetry and Philosophy

In an interview from 2008, poet and critic Rachel Blau DuPlessis discusses her trilogy *Drafts* and in particular "Draft 52: Midrash," which takes up the ethical dilemmas the contemporary poet faces in writing about the Shoah. [1] The poem attempts a sustained response to the challenge of Theodor W. Adorno's (in)famous statement that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric."[2] Though Adorno amended this claim repeatedly, his formulation prompted manifold critical and artistic responses as well as various misattributions contending that he claimed there could be no poetry after Auschwitz.[3] Opening the temporal, geographic, linguistic, and generic span of this dissertation, I offer a reading of DuPlessis' poem in conjunction with selections from Adorno's work, in order to trace the argumentative dialogue between the critical and the poetic in their writings and to investigate how an ethics of representing and commemorating survival figures in their texts.

DuPlessis offers compelling reasons for her sustained engagement with Adorno's words. Examining the paradoxes that govern his situation as critic and survivor, she depicts his claim both as absolute and as contextually relative,

> One of the notable poems in that book [*Drafts 2*], Draft 52: Midrash, makes an endless, unresolved gloss on Adorno's sententia, After Auschwitz to write a poem is barbaric, taking his statement as an important ethical talisman. […] I truly thought his comment was beyond what would normally be seen as provocative in a cultural conversation […] and came from an emotional and political space far, far beyond anything that could be called nuisance. There are always some people who mouth off about poetry and what poetry should or should not do, and articulate orders for poets but Adorno is far beyond

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[1] Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "Draft 52: Midrash," *Drafts: Drafts 39-57, Pledge, with Draft, Unnumbered: Précis* (Cambridge, UK: Salt, 2004), 141-157.

[2] Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber Nicholson, *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003), 162. In German: "[N]ach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch." Adorno, "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft," *"Ob nach Auschwitz sich noch leben lasse": Ein philosophisches Lesebuch*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 205.

[3] As Robert Kaufman points out, the scope and force of responses (initially in the German but later also in the Anglophone context) is surprising: "Adorno's words have generated such controversy that it has seldom been remarked how bizarre it is – given how slim the chances initially would have seemed – that one barbed aphorism and its reformulations could come to have so much influence on, could create a six-decade donnée for, reflection on consummate horror and on art and culture's ability – or incapacity – to address such horror humanely and critically." Kaufman, "Poetry's Ethics? Theodor W. Adorno and Robert Duncan on Aesthetic Illusion and Sociopolitical Delusion," *New German Critique* 33 (2006): 74. While it exceeds the scope of this study to pursue differences in cultural reception, it is interesting to note, as Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi does, that the legacy of Adorno's statement and the questions it imposes does not often figure in contemporary Israeli discourse about literary representations of the Shoah: "The critical questions over aesthetic boundaries that were inaugurated by Theodor Adorno and have informed most readings of post-Holocaust poetry in America and Europe are rarely invoked in discussions of the Holocaust in Israel." Ezrahi, "'The Grave in the Air': Unbound Metaphors in Post-Holocaust Poetry," *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution,"* ed. Saul Friedländer (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992), 259.

> being one of those people. His statement comes from the most wrenching revulsion, grief and human anguish. Therefore, because it was so absolutist, I respected it as such. However, because it was so absolutist (plus annihilating, as morally wrong or uncivilized, my desire to write poetry), I felt it had to be discussed. Not answered, discussed. Opened out. Exfoliated. Looked at again and again from any number of angles or facets. That is what my serial poem does. Each time I approach the statement, in the 27 sections of this poem, I try to honor the level of ethical revulsion and grief from which it came. So each of the sections tries to invent an answer to the question why did he say this in the immediate post-war context. What was he getting at by singling out poetry.[4]

The repeated assertion that Adorno's claim occurs "far beyond" the limits of the controversial leads DuPlessis to declare it instead "an important ethical talisman." Situating his claim within the realm of ethics, she also associates it – through the image of the talisman – with the magical or supernatural, portraying it as thought that exceeds the critical faculties. Analyzing the position from which Adorno makes his claim, she argues that its extremity instigates in turn a response in which speechlessness and argument converge. By maintaining dialogue, the poem becomes a way of "honor[ing] the level of ethical grief and revulsion" that Adorno's words manifest. The poem offers commentary on his statement without seeking either to refute or to validate it, and at the same time, such commentary becomes a form of continuous self-examination and -questioning. By likening this process to an "exfoliation," DuPlessis does not merely invoke renewal and regeneration: Instead, the dermatological/textual layers removed to reveal the level below—that is, the old become new—demonstrate the intertwining of body and writing in the intertextual enterprise, which operates at the point of contact between the material and the imagined trace. Indeed, DuPlessis emphasizes repeatedly that her interest is not in "answering" Adorno but in inventing potential answers, in order to allow an ongoing confrontation between texts, so that the possibility of conversation beyond the hierarchical division of critical claim and poetic defense may emerge.

I wish to respect this continuous dialogue and to embed the respective readings of Adorno's and DuPlessis' work in an interpretation of their resonance with the other's voice. For I am reluctant to follow the path sometimes discernable in scholarly writing that deals with literature about and after the Shoah, in which analysis begins with the requisite mention of Adorno's statement, only to move on or answer it by validation or refutation, on the basis of the literature discussed. This strikes me as a problematic method, because it inevitably instantiates a hierarchy, which posits the creative literature as the prooftext for the veracity of the critical claim, rather than assuming that the literary work may establish critical claims in its own right or that the criticism may operate in literary (even poetic) fashion. Furthermore, it does not do the critical work justice to cite a phrase in isolation, as so frequently happens with the claim that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric." While it is of course impossible to expect an exhaustive analysis of a complete oeuvre, particularly of an author as prolific as Adorno, there is nevertheless a case to be made for the insights we glean from putting his various formulations and meditations on the possibility and tolerability of literature after the Shoah into conversation with one another, as well as illuminating their dialogue with the issues raised by a poem engaged with these very claims.

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[4] Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Adam Fieled, "Feature Poet Interview: Rachel Blau DuPlessis," *Adam Fieled: Poetry*, December 2005 – January 2006: http://artrecess2.blogspot.com/2006/01/feature-poet-interview-rachel-blau.html.

In fact, "Draft 52: Midrash" invites its critics and readers to grapple with the interpenetrations necessary for both creative and critical thought, and it does so in ways that question the boundaries between genres, as well as the dichotomy of content and form. For the poem (as part of the entire trilogy, *Drafts*, and of volume 2 in particular) not only employs poetic license and device but also foregrounds its own scholarly and critical apparatus, through the use of footnotes, annotations, citations, and a précis of the included works.[5] The allusions to scholarly works, incorporated in the body of the poem and elaborated in its annotations, diffuse the boundary between these two modes of writing and depict the scholarly as poetic, while rendering the poetic scholarly. In this vein, the poem also offers a complex and layered exchange with Adorno, demanding that we re-embody both the figure and the voice of one whose claims have been taken out of context so often and who has been too frequently overlooked as one who himself survived the cataclysm of the 20th century. As we shall see, Adorno seems reluctant to call himself a survivor, but DuPlessis' project also does not seek to impose this term upon him as a restrictive label. Rather than treating Adorno only in the role of stringent theoretician of an absolute and uncompromising interdiction, she investigates the intersections of his figure and his critical words, assuming the ethical challenge of reading their inseparability in the body's expressivity and the text's corporeality.

One way in which she articulates this inseparability is by insisting that one must understand the material conditions of poetry's production and recognize these conditions within the poem itself.[6] Beyond such sensitivity to the process of poetic creativity, DuPlessis' citations from a critical text that questions the ethical status of poetry indicate from the start that the poem enters (and must enter) into a dialogue with the conditions of its own making, not only in the sense of its individual production but in that of its inherent struggle to negotiate the frictions instituted by inescapable social and cultural parameters. Indeed, DuPlessis writes that the poem as argument with pre-existing social and ideological conditions bears witness to its own coming-into-being and thus its marking by these very conditions. In her essay "Manifests," a title which plays on the notion of involuntary revelation *and* of authorial will (through alluding to the formulation of a meta-poetic credo), DuPlessis explains the difficulty of a critical project that originates in the context it seeks to transform, an issue that Adorno addresses and articulates as well in various ways:

> As much as I resist Romantic lyric or narrative, or make critiques of their normalizing and naturalizing of gender, of causality, of trajectory, of telos, of memory—my resistance is also porous. It is riddled by holes through which leak these discourses and their histories of use, their vast influences. My resistance itself is contained within a complex cultural netting in which the very histories of these genre(s) are constructed by the materials I would (claim to) resist and may want to appropriate.[7]

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[5] Describing the historical development of poetic responses to the Shoah, Susan Gubar mentions the notable presence of female voices in contemporary Anglo-American poetry. Often, she finds, these poets add supplementary materials to indicate their "indebtedness" to first-generation poets and to scholars. In DuPlessis' case, I would argue that the critical apparatus and the supplementary materials she includes in her poetrry function not simply to emphasize debt and gratitude but to enter a debate that extends beyond hierarchical or genealogical lineage to allow for and even promote argument across temporal and generic divides. Gubar, "The Long and the Short of Holocaust Verse," *New Literary History* 35.3 (2004): 457-458.

[6] See, for instance, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "Manifests," *Diacritics* 26.3-4 (1996): 31-53, and DuPlessis, "Poetry, Poetics, and Social Discourses," *Journal of Modern Literature* 28.4 (2005): v-viii.

[7] DuPlessis, "Manifests," 50.

This passage destabilizes the position of authorial agency, since the exchange of individual speech and collective discourse occurs through the porous (rather than defined) boundaries of structures, which cannot separate the internal and the external, since they both threaten and allow for appropriative movement.

Indeed, we find this notion delineated even more stringently in Adorno, when he describes art as bearing the marks of a paradoxical and paralyzing compromise. He goes so far as to question the possibility of a revolutionizing impulse in art, as he presents its fundamental dilemma, namely that the desire to negotiate apparently opposing conditions necessarily renders the revolutionizing impulse moot. Such is the situation of art that he describes, for instance, in his essay "Those Twenties": "Whatever stirs in it [contemporary art] as the protest of artistic form – and no artistic form is thinkable anymore that is not protest –, itself falls into the planning (*das Geplante*) that it opposes and bears the marks of this contradiction."[8] Here, art is at once protest and submission, and it is characterized by the endurance of this paradox; we cannot be certain whether this endurance is a sign of strength or of passivity.

In DuPlessis' view, the poet's vexed position of simultaneously resisting cultural histories of influence and being infiltrated by them leads to the liberating movement of appropriation. Appropriation is not a usurping or fraudulent attempt but a form of dialogue that testifies to the ways in which the poet works within and against a tradition at the same time. It is a negotiation of cultural conditions and as such especially important for a feminist poetics: the notion of appropriation as practice enables the female poet to make visible the politics of ownership and even adaptation, processes from which she has heretofore been excluded. DuPlessis rejects the position of "woman in poetry," for as she explains, woman can only occupy a central space as the object of a male view, not as agent of her own making. Short poems – and particularly the lyric – preclude the woman writer from accessing the figure of the female, because she does not own her authorial position.[9] She expresses this challenge of the intersection of gender and genre in spatial terms, as a dispute over a delimited poetic universe, which the female poet, in an inversion of conventional sexual imagery, must seek to penetrate:

> I'm not trying to exclude "the lyric" from poetry, because that would be truly a quixotic gesture. I wanted to surround it, to build through it, and to rupture it – to break it up inside to become something else. I wanted to break a monochromatic subjectivity, a limit in tone, a smallness which builds one iconic object against the void and does not acknowledge the void inside the text. And I am also rejecting poems that are centered only in the private world, not a social and political world. This position was enabling for me. There are any number of other interlocking reasons: awe, grief, astonishment, the plethora, being overwhelmed. Then there is the whole area of cultural ambition, to open up into the largest kind of space, the challenge of scope itself. I just want to write a lot of women's words right now because, basically, there are so many absent women in my generation, in generations past, and in all of culture.[10]

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[8] Translation mine. In German: "Was in dieser [der gegenwärtigen Kunst] als Protest der künstlerischen Form sich regt – und keine künstlerische Form wäre länger denkbar, die nicht Protest ist –, fällt selber in das Geplante, dem sie widersteht, und trägt die Male dieses Widerspruchs." Theodor W. Adorno, "Jene zwanziger Jahre," *Gesammelte Schriften 10:2*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 506.

[9] Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Jeanne Heuving, "An Interview with Rachel Blau DuPlessis," *Contemporary Literature* 45.3 (2004): 403.

[10] DuPlessis and Heuving 403.

The vocabulary of forces that both move out and move into the textual space—the trajectories of exclusion, enclosure, penetration, and rupture—make it impossible to determine from which side she approaches the framework, whether she speaks from within or outside of its borders, from an individual position or on behalf of a collective. Indeed, even the phrase "I just want to write a lot of women's words right now" contains a grammatical ambiguity, since we wonder whether "a lot of" modifies "women" or "words" (or both). This ambiguity proliferates potential implications: Does it designate the single author speaking for and to others in a quasi-prophetic mode (another form of expression traditionally denied women)? Does it conjure the scribe translating the invisible into the visible, by archiving the silenced voices of the many for remembrance? Does it lay claim to a canonical, Whitmanian tradition, in which the self contains multitudes? This passage asserts a challenge to conceptions of both poetic and godly creation (and the way the two are presented as intersecting in the figure of the divinely inspired male poet): in "opening up the largest kind of space," the female poet reminds us that she works continuously to fill this vast, limitless universe with its missing texts, traditions, and genealogies.

As I will discuss in greater detail below, both DuPlessis and Adorno refuse the possibility of a writing that is situated either entirely in the private or entirely in the public world, for as they demonstrate repeatedly, neither experience nor expression obey this division. For DuPlessis, the interpenetration of the public and the private – with the attendant need to negotiate social, cultural, political, and aesthetic realities – also mandates a refusal of conventional generic boundaries, since to write within these boundaries would signify complicity with their practices of exclusion.

If DuPlessis laments the lack of a developed tradition of women's writing and the exclusion of female writers from the literary canon, she simultaneously considers implicit assumptions about the genre of poetry, which align it with a "feminized" domesticity and triviality. In Section 4 of "Draft 52: Midrash," she generates numerous, paradoxical pairings of neat containment and messy sentimentalism, so as to wonder whether such a conception underpins Adorno's choice of poetry as the particular genre made impossible by the Shoah:

> "After Auschwitz
> to compose music, to write novels, is barbaric."
> Is "poetry" the only affirmative décor in this house?
> Kitsch collectible gathering dust on the shelf? Pearly button off a ripped shirt?
> Is it the blandishments of poems, their automatic adhesion
> to attraction, glades of sparkle, birthday offerings, tears at graves,
> female visitants, house finch eating pear blossom,
> awe-struck thoughts on planets, stars and moon –
> is it the modest size of poems, their nicely tuned endings,
> the diction and gestures they normally exclude,
> their status as tender, elegant tokens
> (concealing ferocious, self-fascinated delight)
> that makes of "poem" a particular insult and blight?

By beginning the stanza with a presumed citation that is at once an adaptation, DuPlessis emphasizes the poem's authority to take on another's voice and to re-imagine another's speech. While we may understand this as a form of empowerment – the ability to oppose what seems a

categorical statement by refashioning it from within –, we remain aware at the same time that in the context of the Shoah, this use of another's voice, more particularly the voice of one who can no longer respond, presents us with an ethical dilemma that both authors address. Of course, speaking in a common language is already a form of borrowing another's voice—one that, in the final analysis, cannot be located in any particular speaking position but that exists in circulating. Therefore, the citation in the final line takes on particular force: Whose word is the speaker citing? We may imagine that it is Adorno's, but we recall also that the stanza begins with a citation that is not one, so that the word "poem," which would have appeared in the "proper" quote (or at least, and creating yet another layer of distance, in its German version), does not in fact do so.

Moreover, these quotation marks may not only perform the "borrowing" of another individual's voice (whose language is already collectively accessible) but may also serve to emphasize and critique the confines of genre, visualizing the boundaries that enclose what is considered a "poem." Within this defined space, we find the poem authored by a woman poet doubly enclosed, so that the quotation marks imply what cannot be taken seriously, since it is supposed to remain in the private realm and to subsist as a single (rather than universal) articulation. These critiques operate at the intersection of the senses—or at the spot where their boundaries unravel—for while the quotation marks stand out to the eye reading the poem, the listening ear must be attuned to a subtle difference in tone and intonation to set the cited word apart.

Quotation marks are not the only restraining force at work here, however: poetry's narcissism emerges only within parenthetical boundaries, from which it threatens, nevertheless, to explode. The parenthetical enclosure is contained a second time, now not only by syntax but by poetic form. The stanza's final couplet (following as it does upon free verse) evokes the strictly prescribed style of the sonnet, which male poets used to describe their female muse or beloved, melding her body, as an object of visual and physical pleasure, with the aesthetic enjoyment derived from and epitomized in the poem. In the stanza of "Draft 52: Midrash," however, the final verses appropriate the function of the sonnet couplet, utilizing its simultaneous effect of a surprising turn and satisfying closure. But such containment cannot hold, for the concluding question demands response, so that the final verses employ form as its own critique, revealing the impossibility of neat endings. Anticipating its self-liberation and performing its own (meta-)poetic defense, the poem refutes the amassed clichés that proclaim its impropriety in dealing with matters of grave importance, of human experience and especially of human suffering.

In the case of "Draft 52: Midrash," the ambition to exceed the restrictions of generic form can thus be traced to two intertwined arguments, one concerning the implicit gender politics of literature and the other the ethical dilemma of its commemorative project. In her interview with Jeanne Heuving, DuPlessis characterizes "Draft 52" as an "essayistic enterprise." It is possible to see it as such, she explains, because

> as a mode of practice, poetry is capacious of genres. […] Poetry can explore many discursive spaces. And most importantly, a poem can be a path for thinking through material. Adorno's sententia presented itself to me, first in *Draft 29: Intellectual Autobiography*, but then as central to *Draft 52*, as necessary for me to think through in a serial form that honored, rejected, returned to, resisted, became angry at, became sympathetic to the claim he made. A serial mode allows the conflictual vectors of

> thought and their nuanced gradations to be presented. It's a stark, stunned, and stricken poem on Adorno's intransigent statement.[11]

Again, DuPlessis generates a list of verbs to describe her multi-faceted and ongoing conversation with Adorno. While she speaks here of his "intransigent statement," it seems to me that the intransigence resides more in the scholarly reception of the phrase (to the frequent exclusion of its context and his repeated amendments) than in the statement itself. However, at the same time, as a reader of DuPlessis' work, I feel compelled to honor her perception of his claim as a painful impingement on her desire to write poetry, much as she feels bound to honor the position of suffering from which Adorno speaks.

Indeed, Adorno himself expressed surprise and dismay at the virulent reactions occasioned by his phrase. Taking his oeuvre as a whole, it seems impossible to determine a single stance on the relation between culture, aesthetics, and ethics in his thought, especially since he seeks to think through this relation by way of negative dialectics. In one of the university lectures published posthumously in *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, Adorno reveals his astonishment that so many critics have neglected to read the sentence "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" within a negative dialectical framework, which already supposes that the opposite problem – not to write poems after Auschwitz – holds in equal measure. He maintains that one must always understand his writing as philosophical, which is to say "that nothing is meant quite literally. Philosophy always relates to tendencies and does not consist of statements of fact."[12] If "nothing is meant quite literally," then the philosophical is already akin to the poetic, to a use of language that serves not only factual description but also figurative evocation. Thus, he states, those who read his famous sentence as a categorical claim misinterpret it both in content and in form:

> It is a misunderstanding of philosophy, resulting from its growing closeness to all-powerful scientific tendencies, to take such a statement at face value and say, 'He wrote that after Auschwitz one cannot write any more poems; so either one really cannot write them, and would be a rogue or a cold-hearted person if one did write them, or he is wrong, and has said something which should not be said.' Well, I would say that philosophical reflection really consists precisely in the gap, or, in Kantian terms, in the vibration, between these two otherwise so flatly opposed possibilities. I would readily concede that, just as I said that after Auschwitz one *could not* write poems – by which I meant to point to the hollowness of the resurrected culture of that time – it could equally be said, on the other hand, that one *must* write poems, in keeping with Hegel's statement in his *Aesthetics* that as long as there is an awareness of suffering among human beings there must also be art as the objective form of that awareness. And, heaven knows, I do not claim to be able to resolve this antinomy, and presume even less to do so since my

[11] DuPlessis and Heuving 402.

[12] Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2000), 110. In German: "daß nichts ganz wörtlich gemeint ist; Philosophie bezieht sich eigentlich immer auf Tendenzen und besteht nicht in statements of fact." Adorno, *Metaphysik: Begriff und Probleme*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998 [1965]), 172.

> own impulses in this antinomy are precisely on the side of art, which I am mistakenly accused of wishing to suppress.[13]

Quoting critical citations of his own words, Adorno does not dwell upon the fact that the language others attribute to him does not in fact correspond with his claim about the *barbarism* of writing poetry after Auschwitz. Instead, the critical opinion of his work, as he summarizes it, consists in opposing the impossibility of writing poetry after Auschwitz and the condemnable status of the one who does so anyway. This shift in emphasis—upon which Adorno does not comment—demonstrates the ways in which the ontological and ethical questions that poetry faces are necessarily entangled in the critical discourse.

The intimate voice of Adorno's lectures – the constant reiteration of the "I" as well as the unfinished, "drafted" style of his musings, to allude to DuPlessis' sense of the term – heightens the impression of his inability (which is also his refusal) to pronounce a categorical judgment on the viability of literature after the Shoah. Indeed, in his choice of the term *schlichten* (to arbitrate), Adorno evokes the task he must refuse as one that conjoins the act of disciplinary, juridical, and ethical mediation, which would seek to dissipate a violence that is threatening to erupt. He cannot serve in this impartial capacity, because his impulses (equally eruptive and disruptive forces) position him on the side of a defense rather than a condemnation of art and make it impossible for him to reconcile these two conflicting perspectives. Moreover, he suggests that the philosopher is neither a neutral nor an external observer, and so he locates philosophy as discipline (and "philosophical reflection" as genre) in their limit-space (*Zwischenraum*), which both separates and binds together the seemingly absolute oppositions of avowal and interdiction.[14]

DuPlessis, too, emphasizes the importance of a tradition committed to the space of argument and debate, one that would not seek to collapse its various positions. However, she models not a dialectical but a cumulative dialogue. Contemplating the effect of Adorno's statement from various angles – taking seriously its impact and elaborating its potential ramifications –, DuPlessis emphasizes that a poetics need not define itself through defiance or through a defense of its own imperiled position. Rather, she proposes a way of moving towards rather than delimiting a question, modeled, as the title suggests, on midrash as a particular form of writing characterized by parallel rather than hierarchical reflections on a text. As Daniel

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[13] Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 110. In German: "Es ist bereits ein Verkennen der Philosophie durch ihre Annäherung an die allherrschenden szientifischen Tendenzen, daß man einen solchen Satz nun so auf den Tisch legt und sagt: 'Also er hat geschrieben, man kann nach Auschwitz keine Gedichte mehr schreiben; also entweder man kann wirklich keine mehr schreiben, man ist ein Schurke oder ein kaltherziger Mensch, wenn man eines schreibt, – oder er hat Unrecht und hat etwas gesagt, was man so nicht sagen darf.' Ja, ich würde sagen: die philosophische Reflexion besteht eigentlich genau in dem Zwischenraum oder, Kantisch gesprochen: in der Vibration zwischen diesen beiden sonst so kahl einander entgegengesetzten Möglichkeiten. Ich würde gern zugeben, daß man so gut wie ich gesagt habe, daß man nach Auschwitz *kein* Gedicht mehr schreiben kann – womit ich das Hohle der auferstandenen Kultur habe bezeichnen wollen –, andererseits *doch* Gedichte noch schreiben *muß*, im Sinn des Satzes von Hegel aus der "Ästhetik", daß es solange, wie es ein Bewußtsein von Leiden unter den Menschen gibt, eben auch Kunst als die objective Gestalt dieses Bewußtseins geben müsse. Und ich maße mir weiß Gott nicht an, diese Antinomie zu schlichten, und kann es mir schon deshalb nicht anmaßen, weil meine eigenen Impulse ja in dieser Antinomie ganz genau auf der Seite eben der Kunst sind, von der man mit Mißverständnis mir vorgeworfen hat, daß ich sie unterdrücken wollte." Adorno, *Metaphysik*, 172-173.

[14] Here, I am reminded of Benjamin's notion of the poetized as the condition and production of a similarly liminal space, one that exists between critical thought and poetry, arising through their encounter but refusing to be assimilated to one another (see my analysis of Benjamin in Introduction).

Boyarin points out, this refusal to categorize or reconcile even conflicting interpretations of the same text is characteristic of midrash:

> One of the most puzzling features about the way that midrash reads is its apparent willingness to tolerate directly opposed interpretations of the same passages. This has often been taken in both traditional and scholarly literature as evidence for the unseriousness of midrash *as hermeneutic*, that is, for the location of its interest not in a reading of the biblical text but in an either extra-textual space of ideology or an inner-textual realm of semiotic play.[15]

Boyarin emphasizes the critical importance of midrash as an intertextual reading practice, which negotiates and questions what is internal and external to a text. This interpretation illuminates the significance of DuPlessis' poetic project, as it seeks to comment both on its own parameters and on its relation to other texts.[16]

In another interview from 2008, DuPlessis explains her choice to evoke the midrashic tradition as follows: **"**These poems are open to transformation, part of an ongoing process of construction, self- commentary, and reconstruction, similar to the genre called 'midrash' in Hebrew textuality. That means that none of the poems is perfect, iconic, static."[17] Of the exegetical genres in the Hebrew tradition, midrash is the most literary. DuPlessis explains that

> [m]idrash is a textual mode of perpetual gloss in Hebrew textuality. The people who did midrash are obviously only the trained, highly educated rabbis, and they did it only on sacred text. […] When I discovered midrash, it became a metaphor for what I was already doing, which is a perpetual gloss on secular text. So *Drafts* are built by a midrashic sensibility. The midrashic element of *Drafts* is the fact that similar lines or quoted lines come back in new contexts, and the poem is like a self-gloss mechanism.[18]

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[15] Daniel Boyarin, "Inner Biblical Ambiguity, Intertextuality, and the Dialectics of Midrash: The Waters of Marah," *Prooftexts* 10.1-1 (1990): 29.

[16] See also Daniel Boyarin, "Old Wine in New Bottles: Intertextuality and Midrash," *Poetics Today* 8.3-4 (1987): 539-556: "Midrash is the way the Sages of the Talmudic period (the first five centuries of the Christian era) read the Bible, as well as the written evidence for that way of reading. Much of midrash presents itself in the form of a paraphrase of the Biblical text in which verses and parts of verses from many places in the canon are combined into a new discourse. It is accordingly openly and radically intertextual (by Kristeva's definition) in its very foundations, inasmuch as it lays bare (almost precisely in the formalist sense) the mosaic-structure of quotations from which the text (all texts) are built" (539-540). This practice of working quotation into a new text so as to create the space for debate describes DuPlessis' poetic process as well, as we have already seen.

[17] Rachel Blau DuPlessis and CA Conrad. "A Visionary Practice of Cultural Critique: Interviewing Rachel Blau DuPlessis." *PhillySound: New Poetry*. March 31, 2008. http://phillysound.blogspot.com/2008_03_01_archive.html.

[18] DuPlessis and Heuving 407. I would argue not only that midrash may serve as a metaphor of DuPlessis' poetic process but also that it signals the multilingual structure of this particular poem. Indeed, in addition to the poem's use of German and English, midrash references Hebrew textuality *and* a broader Jewish multilingualism, whose communicational approaches adopt the structure of foundational religious texts, if we follow Benjamin Harshav's argument about a "semiotics" of Yiddish discourse. Harshav describes the ways in which "Yiddish internalized and schematized some essential characteristics of 'Talmudic' dialectical argument and questioning." From the Yiddish, such forms of thought and expression were then exported to other languages – including English – in which Jewish literature is written. Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990), 91, 112-113. DuPlessis' understanding of her poetry as a secular remaking of the midrashic mode thus parallels the notion of Yiddish as a language that displays the structures of Talmudic discourse.

Thus, the midrashic mode combines constant change and adaptation with a continuous return to the sources. The midrashic structure of DuPlessis' poetry demonstrates that the poem as argument does not have a conclusive goal and so does not seek to "win a case." In a patently too-neat rhyme, Section 23 ends, "Is this midrash on Adorno done? No. / Midrash is never over, / being neither lost nor won." Pointing out the necessity of dispute beyond the goal of resolution, the poem reassesses the values of criticism, which transcend generic boundaries and become part of poetic effort as well. This hybridity contributes to poetry's consequence, as it enters into and sustains debates of literature and ethics without seeking to determine a "correct" or "definitive" response.

"Draft 52: Midrash" not only contributes to the midrashic structure of the *Drafts* trilogy as a whole but performs midrash on Adorno's words as well. Between title and opening section, the poem positions epigraphically two excerpts from Adorno's essay "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft:" It cites first the German version of the famous sentence, and then offers that sentence in the context of its paragraph in English translation. What do we glean from this initial turn to Adorno, a turn towards an interlocutor that precedes the poem's own beginning? These citations offer us the origin of the poem's dialogic impulse, its call-into-being and its call-to-response. To say as much is not to claim a hierarchical genealogy but to highlight the ethical pressures that invite the poem's making. Indeed, the notion of the poem as response fuses the ethical and the erotic through the irresistible impulse of authorial desire, as DuPlessis intimates: "For me, *Drafts* are compelled. The project is called – in the sense of vocation. *Drafts* are a poem of desire, so I am a desirer. I work into the page that called me."[19] In "Draft 52: Midrash," the "call of the page" occurs in a two-fold way, in the simultaneous invitation of the blank space and of the particular figure with whom the poem seeks dialogue.

To extend the question of that dialogue to the problems of context, translation, and readership, one might ask why DuPlessis cites both the German and English version of Adorno's statement, and why, moreover, she chooses to quote only the famous sentence in German but embed it within its context in the English epigraph. The transition from the first to the second instance of Adorno's formulations depicts the apparent finality and indisputability of the sentence on its own giving way to its position as part of the logic of an entire argument, which does not simply refute the viability of poetry but displays the tension between poetic production and the criticism that comments upon it. Yet "Draft 52: Midrash" reverses the direction of commentary: Poetry now remarks on the critical, thus rejecting any determined position of agency or origin.

By juxtaposing the two epigraphs, the poem mediates what is legible from the outset. Both textually and visually, it takes on the traditional structure of rabbinic exegesis, in which translation is a necessary part of the process of interpretation. At the same time, it highlights the break with the Jewish languages of the rabbinic texts, which are replaced here with German (and its complicated and harrowing role in Jewish history) and English (which marks both linguistic and geographic displacements). Furthermore, since one cannot assume that all of the poem's readers understand the German version, the decision to commence with the German and then present the English passage makes Anglophone readers more comfortable, even as it compels its audience to confront the limits of comprehension and to think about what may be lost in the process of making another's speech legible.

[19] DuPlessis and Heuving 404.

For those who do know both languages, the comparison of the German and English versions reveals tensions that require explanation, not least because they may make a difference for the interpretation of Adorno's claims in the English-language context. As Robert Kaufman points out, the translation is problematic in various ways, including the translators' division of the long sentence into several and, more importantly for the discussion at hand, the choice to render the singular/representative "ein Gedicht" (a poem) as the universal plural-in-the-singular "poetry."[20] The friction between these two terms in DuPlessis' juxtaposition of the epigraphs extends across a language boundary and implicates the reader in a rethinking of linguistic and generic limits.

Whatever the reasons motivating the translators' choice to render "ein Gedicht" as "poetry" – be it a concern about the different lexical fields connoted, hesitations about the sound and impact of their selection, or their philosophy of the aims of translation – the difference is one that DuPlessis plays on and that she brings to the fore not only through the parallel epigraphs but also through the conclusion of the poem's third section. In examining Adorno's words, she again queries his motivation in singling out poetry as artistic and literary genre. Demanding repeatedly why he vetoes "only poetry," she implies that while poetry possesses particular importance, it is nevertheless not viewed as a medium of influence in contemporary life. In long and prose-like verses, she proposes other media and genres – ranging from the broad to the highly specific – which Adorno could have refuted as well. Concluding the stanza, we find the contracted lines, "why was it / only poetry? / Only 'a poem'?" Playing with the meaning of citation – for she puts in quotation marks not the translators' term but the other possible rendering of the German, which they did *not* choose –, DuPlessis also responds to the categorization of genre in Adorno's thought. She does not discount the concept as such but argues with it throughout her work, in order to expose implicit assumptions about generic limitations and about the interplay of the material conditions of production on the one hand and authorial agency and responsibility on the other.

It is the complicated bond between material conditions and individual agency that also structures the essay in which Adorno's claim appears. The essay's title, "Cultural Criticism and Society," already indicates that its main concern is not poetry, literature, or even art more generally but the relationship between cultural criticism and the society which produces it and which it addresses. In examining the passage that includes the sentence in question, one discovers that it is in fact part of a larger argument, whose implications bear further elaboration. As much as the statement seems to be a categorical interdiction when read on its own, it offers instead an invitation and a challenge to response when taken as part of the essay's conclusion:

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[20] Kaufman writes, "A serious case could be made that rendering the single German sentence into three English sentences, along with other aspects of the translators' choices here, loosens or unravels Adorno's carefully constructed web of tensions, where the initial, seeming separation of identities (conveyed by the different designative words) *culture* and *barbarism* is what allows them so profoundly and infernally to inform if not become one another; where the initial appearance of poetic art is *not* the genre or generality 'poetry' but the particular work, 'a poem' (*ein Gedicht*), suggesting a dynamic between the particular and the general or universal in which the sense that it's now become barbaric to write *a* poem leads to the sense that to write *poems* or *poetry* (*Gedichte*) has become impossible; and where the sentences' unity-in-tension, constructed from the various, painful moments, marks the critic who in 1949 faces in these lines an also barbaric and impossible task." Kaufman, "Poetry's Ethics?," 88-89. For an illuminating discussion of the characteristics of the example and the tension between the singular and the universal, see also Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993), a work which DuPlessis engages in the poem as well, especially in Sections 22 and 23. See DuPlessis, "Draft 52," 154-155 and 231.

> The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own. Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today. Absolute reification, which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely. Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self-satisfied contemplation.[21]

The sentence generally excerpted serves as an illustration of the most extreme dialectic of culture and barbarism. It also introduces the claim that follows, namely that recognition of the impossible grounds for literary production is compromised by criticism's paralysis within an absolute society, which prevents the critical faculties from freeing the subjugated spirit and thus annuls their purpose.[22]

The passage explicates the consequences of a totalizing society, which, in its endless process of dehumanization, subsumes and disperses individuality. Criticism is powerless to navigate the boundaries of a reified world, since it is either completely subsumed (*aufgesaugt*) or remains separate (*bei sich bleiben in selbstgenügsamer Kontemplation*), both positions insufficient to perform the reflective work to which cultural criticism lays claim. Yet the paragraph's structure announces a challenge to its readers by indicating that these conditions of society and criticism – and their attendant relations – are not final; rather, they anticipate involvement and intervention. While the first sentence confronts us with the correlation between a totalized society and the reification of the spirit, in doing so, it suggests that one may counteract this development. Indeed, the passage maintains throughout this notion of an impending threat, characterizing the inevitable bond between the extremes that paralyze us (*je totaler ... um so verdinglichter ... und um so paradoxer*), as our best insights and intentions lose all critical force and we find ourselves confronting the apocalyptic vision of the final dialectic of culture and barbarism. Yet the passage ends by inviting us, implicitly, to avert this threat, asking us to prevent critical language from dissolving into babble. The final phrase, indeed, joins warning and implicit summons (*solange*) in the promise that the critical spirit may and must change.

If the language of criticism must be guarded from becoming babble, then the language of poetry faces the danger of becoming barbaric. What barbarism might mean in this context is difficult to determine. In *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, Giorgio Agamben analyzes barbaric speech as a language that the speaker himself does not understand or

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[21] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism," 162. In German: "Je totaler die Gesellschaft, um so verdinglichter auch der Geist und um so paradoxer sein Beginnen, der Verdinglichung aus eigenem sich zu entwinden. Noch das äußerste Bewußtsein vom Verhängnis droht zum Geschwätz zu entarten. Kulturkritik findet sich der letzten Stufe der Dialektik von Kultur und Barbarei gegenüber: nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch, und das frißt auch die Erkenntnis an, die ausspricht, warum es unmöglich ward, heute Gedichte zu schreiben. Der absoluten Verdinglichung, die den Fortschritt des Geistes als eines ihrer Elemente voraussetzte und die ihn heute gänzlich aufzusaugen sich anschickt, ist der kritische Geist nicht gewachsen, solange er bei sich bleibt in selbstgenügsamer Kontemplation." Adorno, "Kulturkritik," 204-205.

[22] I use both the terms "spirit" and "mind" here, although each renders only partially the German "Geist," which connotes a fusion of the faculties of mind, spirit, and soul.

realize himself to be speaking.[23] Agamben does not refer directly to Adorno, though given the pervasive association of Adorno with the critical notion of the barbaric in post-Shoah discourse, the reader may nevertheless understand Agamben's analysis as an implicit response. The religious practice of "speaking in tongues," glossolalia, which Paul mentions in Corinthians,

> means that the very principle of speech becomes something alien and "barbaric:" "If I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me" (14:11). The literal meaning of the term *barbaros*, a "barbarian," is a being not gifted with *logos*, a foreigner who does not truly know how to understand and speak. Glossolalia thus presents the aporia of an absolute desubjectification and "barbarization" of the event of language, in which the speaking subject gives way to another subject, a child, angel, or barbarian, who speaks "unfruitfully" and "into the air."[24]

If, as Agamben maintains, the movement from a speaking subject who understands his own speech to one who does not marks the transition into a "barbaric" language, then this transition also precludes language from functioning as communication, since it severs the relation between the speaker and the—simultaneously primary and final—listener, the self.

In fact, Adorno's conception of the lyric, which he formulates in the essay "On Lyric Poetry and Society," postulates that the language of poetry must not participate in the functionalism of communicative speech but must transform the subject into voice:

> [T]he highest lyric works are those in which the subject, with no remaining trace of mere matter, sounds forth in language until language itself acquires a voice [*bis die Sprache selber laut wird*]. The unself-consciousness of the subject submitting itself to language as to something objective, and the immediacy and spontaneity of that subject's expression are one and the same: thus language mediates lyric poetry and society in their innermost core. This is why the lyric reveals itself to be most deeply grounded in society when it does not chime in with society, when it communicates nothing, when, instead, the subject whose expression is successful reaches an accord with language itself, with the inherent tendency of language [*wohin diese von sich aus möchte*].[25]

Here, Adorno offers an important (re)consideration of the relationship between poetry, cultural criticism, and society, by advocating poetry as a space that may at once enable self-creation or self-sufficiency and mediate between language and society, so that the speaking (poetic) subject

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[23] Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 114.

[24] Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 114.

[25] Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society," *Notes to Literature Volume One*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), 43. In German: "Die höchsten lyrischen Gebilde sind […] die, in denen das Subjekt, ohne Rest von bloßem Stoff, in der Sprache tönt, bis die Sprache selber laut wird. Die Selbstvergessenheit des Subjekts, das der Sprache als einem Objektiven sich anheimgibt, und die Unmittelbarkeit und Unwillkürlichkeit seines Ausdrucks sind dasselbe: so vermittelt die Sprache Lyrik und Gesellschaft im Innersten. Darum zeigt Lyrik dort sich am tiefsten gesellschaftlich verbürgt, wo sie nicht der Gesellschaft nach dem Munde redet, wo sie nichts mitteilt, sondern wo das Subjekt, dem der Ausdruck glückt, zum Einstand mit der Sprache selber kommt, dem, wohin diese von sich aus möchte." Adorno, "Lyrik und Gesellschaft," *Noten zur Literatur*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), 56.

is simultaneously individual agent and the means of negotiating cultural claims. The subject is both desiring and forgetful of the self; this *Selbstvergessenheit* and its ringing in language (*in der Sprache tönen*) resonate with Agamben's depiction of the glossolalic or barbaric speech-act, in which the subject does not grasp his own speech. (Indeed, both assertions also share a mystical echo). It is not my contention, however, that Adorno offers the relation between self and lyric language, as he depicts it in this passage, as another version of the dialectic between poetry and barbarism. Rather, I want to highlight the importance of attending to the varieties and nuances of Adorno's musings on the lyric and on the condition of culture and existence "after Auschwitz," for only in doing so can we counteract the idea that Adorno's thoughts on this subject were unilateral or categorical, as we come to appreciate instead the context and contingency of his thought.[26]

Lyn Hejinian offers one such attempt to reconsider in radical terms the meaning of Adorno's oft-cited sentence. Seeking to describe the relation between the poetic and the barbaric spurs Hejinian to interpret barbarism not as a quality intrinsic to language but as a political posture, one that the poet may co-opt and transform into a position of potential agency:

> Adorno's statement can be interpreted in another sense, not as a condemnation of the attempt 'after Auschwitz' to write poetry but on the contrary, as a challenge and behest to do so. The word 'barbarism,' as it comes to us 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*. Poetry after Auschwitz must indeed be barbarian; it must be foreign to the cultures that produce atrocities. As a result, the poet must assume a barbarian position, taking a creative, analytic, and often oppositional stance, occupying (and being occupied by) foreignness—by the barbarism of strangeness.[27]

Hejinian's insistence on the poet's displaced position and stance, on the conflicting forces—both exerted and experienced—of occupation and appropriation, determines that the critical and poetic will of argument resides neither inside nor outside the powers it opposes.

And so, in DuPlessis' poem, the doubt about what literary forms are possible in relation to a culture that allowed genocide to happen (and therefore may allow it again) must emerge repeatedly. Her investigation of the shape the poem takes in response to its imperiled viability includes attempting to locate the point at which language becomes insufficient and can no longer bear the ethical pressures of grappling with the reality of the Shoah. This attempt exposes its own fragility, as it pursues the intertwining of the critical and the poetic to its point of disintegration into a near-babble. So for instance in Section 5:

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[26] In his analysis of "On Lyric Poetry and Society," Robert Kaufman offers a compelling argument against the many critics who have read this essay as privileging the social over the poetic. In fact, as Kaufman explains, Adorno sustains the critical bond between the two by remarking upon the ways in which an exploration of the aesthetic may help structure our understanding the social: "Aesthetic thought-experience in some way precedes conceptual-objective, content-and-use-oriented thought; in that sense, the aesthetic is formal because, rather than being determined by, it *provides the form for* conceptual thought or cognition." Kaufman, "Adorno's Social Lyric, and Literary Criticism Today: Poetics, Aesthetics, Modernity," *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 362. In this sense, Adorno makes a claim for poetry's critical necessity and its philosophical import.

[27] Lyn Hejinian, "Barbarism," *The Language of Inquiry*, (Berkeley: U of California P, 2000), 325-326.

Poem: symbol of normal culture. Culture:
has become barbaric. Therefore, the poem: and so on.
The syllogism rests.

Or another. Words fail at the exact point of this.
Poetry is made of words.
Therefore, write no poem.

Alt.: write a poem in which words fail.

(was the poem invested with so much
unsortable toll it must in this time silent fall?
was poetry always now impossible?
we could further never write it, and now, in neither
we cannot ever write it for a doubled reason.)

Exercising the various logical arguments that might motivate an interdiction of poetry – its inseparability from a condemnable culture, its failure in the moment of encounter with the reality of suffering – the stanzas retreat into the enclosure of the parenthetical and of the hovering, unanswerable question. The last verses dispense with logic as a mode of making sense of the world and avow only the negation of authorial agency. At the same time, we may read the final stanza as performing a Talmudic logic of questioning by visualizing the entanglement of opposing voices left to stand next to one another in an unreconciled fashion, thus highlighting the indeterminacy of the intertextual.[28]

"Draft 52: Midrash" thus investigates the tension between the poem as documentary and aesthetic artifact on the one hand and the author's efforts to produce it on the other. The aim to locate language's breakdown – "Words fail at the exact point of this" – demonstrates the tension between needing to insist upon the reality of suffering and being unable to articulate it. This unrelenting gesture towards the unnameable reality often occurs, both in DuPlessis' and in Adorno's writing, by way of deixis, the linguistic practice that, while defining a precise subject- or object-position, nevertheless resists delimitation, because it shifts its designation depending on the context in which it is used.[29] The demonstrative "this" gestures towards the horror without

[28] See references to Daniel Boyarin's analysis of the intertextuality of midrash cited in footnotes 15 and 16 of this chapter.

[29] In *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, Susan Stewart argues that "[d]eixis fuses form, expression, and theme as one event in place and time—the inseparability of frame and context in deictic forms is evident in the impossibility of paraphrasing or abstracting them. We therefore could not speak of the specificity of the deictic as translatable or transportable to other locations, for it is its own location. Yet we can understand its meaning or significance independent of its reference to the here and now of apprehension. The form creates or defines its location and the listener, viewer, or apprehender finds his or her position established in relation to the concrete determinants of the form—everything 'matters' as an aspect of the manifestation. In this way the artwork's very specificity, its 'finality of form,' enables its context independence. The theory of deixis in linguistics has implications for presentational forms more generally, helping us consider framing the time and space of apprehension, the mutuality, reciprocity or nonreciprocity, of relations between positions and perspectives, the reversibility of things amid the unidirectionality of everyday time, and assumptions of intention and reception." Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000), 156. Stewart's emphasis on the tension between fluidity and structure, particularity and universality in the deictic suggests its mediating function, while Agamben's characterization of the deictic as a form of the "desubjectifying experience" implicit in all human existence and epitomized in the "barbaric" speech of

being able to capture it in language. Similarly, when Adorno refers to "what has happened" (*das, was geschehen ist*), the use of the deictic marks the incapacity to assign a name and thus define as subject what demands, rather, to be evoked as occurrence.[30]

In Section 6 of the poem, DuPlessis addresses the problem of definition, claiming that at the bottom of questioning creative effort lies the doubt in language's ability to express the workings of human behavior. Such doubt may make writing beside the point, as the first stanza indicates, with its list of proliferating and seemingly unanswerable questions:

> Why should anything be written or not
> what is a "crisis"
> what is an "event"
> what is a "policy"
> what is "normal"
> what is "hegemony"

Since there are no question marks, the requests for response, merging into one another unpunctuated, become a litany whose differences in substance are overshadowed by the monotony of their parallel form. At the same time, however, we may interpret this form once more as an allusion to the style of Talmudic exegetical practice, which launches its arguments with an inaugurating, quasi-rhetorical question.[31]

While this stanza, read on its own, may seem to indicate despair in the power of language to articulate various conditions of experience, the next stanza again situates this doubt of language's capacity in relation to poetry as genre. By querying whether poetry in particular is unable to use and situate such terms appropriately, DuPlessis allows for the possibility of an affirmative answer to this question but implies, at the same time, that poetry's limitations or even impropriety should not necessarily mandate its categorical refusal:

> Does poetry ignore crisis
> trump up event
> say policy does not matter to it
> accept the normal
> prettify hegemony?
> should it therefore be forbidden?
> And by whom, exactly? and how best?
> Is there an enforcement mechanism
> you'd like to suggest?

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glossolalia posits deixis as an indication of what cannot be mediated (see Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 114-116). Both notions are productive currents for an analysis of the conflict between poetic excess and inadequacy, as we encounter it in Adorno's and DuPlessis' work.

[30] Robert Kaufman remarks that Adorno's formulation to "what has happened" (*das, was geschehen ist*) may well refer to Celan's "what happened" (*das, was geschah*). Kaufman thus suggests an intertextual echo that turns the critical back to the poetic. See Kaufman, "Poetry's Ethics?," 95.

[31] To refer once more to Benjamin Harshav's analysis of the ways in which the forms of Talmudic discourse enter the structure of Yiddish discourse – and by way of Yiddish, other languages Jewish authors use –, it is vital to note that the question functions both as a solicitation or demand *and* as an expression of doubt: "[A]sking a question is equivalent to questioning, raising a difficult or problematic point in an argument." Harshav, *Meaning*, 112.

In the final line, the poem invokes Adorno as addressee, yet the reader cannot be certain whether the "you" designates only this single interlocutor or whether it doesn't also demand of its readers their position on poetry's interdiction. The stanza's only rhyme, between "best" and "suggest," performs (in a playful yet sarcastic tone) the threat of the "suggestion" as a verdict that imposes a formal framework, in which only a replication of similitude is possible. Thus, the section exposes such prohibition as a restriction of freedom (and, in this way, a form of violence), which reproduces what it seeks to avoid.

By demanding in such varied ways why poetry should be the particular art form made impossible by the Shoah, DuPlessis implicitly holds Adorno accountable for delivering an explanation of what constitutes the poem and what, in this constitution, makes it uniquely unsuitable to post-Shoah existence. Moreover, she insists – frequently through a direct address of Adorno as her interlocutor, whose response she might expect, an issue to which I will return below – that he exhibit an awareness of the medium of his own reflections and of the fluidity of generic boundaries. In highlighting this fluidity, and particularly the crucial exchanges between poetic and critical writing, DuPlessis' use of the non-Western midrashic mode, which collapses the figurative and argumentative, is crucial.

Indeed, the undoing of generic limits operates not only through poetry's use of the critical mode, but also vice versa. In the notes to the poem, DuPlessis explains that the conclusion of Section 9 involves a quotation of her own writing, from "Draft 29: Intellectual Autobiography" (a title that itself hints at the importance of a poet's critical self-reflection).[32] The lines she cites from her earlier poem reveal a continued preoccupation with Adorno's statement, whose words she portrays not as scholarly analysis but as a poetic discourse that casts its spell on her: "Still, 'chortle under the stark curse / you entitle 'Adorno's verse.'' / Because his statement, irreducible and bleak, / makes intricate play with rhetoric and metaphor, / enacting poetry against itself. So to speak." The duality of radical minimalism and figurative proliferation is not an empty opposition, for the two are intertwined. DuPlessis' rhyme on "irreducible and bleak" and "so to speak" suggests as much, hinting at language's incapacity to capture and arrest experience. Ultimately, these lines indict "Adorno's verse" of a potentially transgressive speech-act, which founds the condition of its own speaking—"so to speak" read as "thus to speak" or "to speak in this way"—upon the self-destructive turning of poetry "against itself." Of course, in doing so, it must annihilate itself, since its "verse," if spoken on the basis of poetry's self-obliterating movement, can speak at all only in the process of being eradicated too. But because the speaker insists at the same time on highlighting her own involvement and intervention—by foregrounding self-citation and self-reference—we also remain aware of the necessary distance between Adorno's critical statement and "Adorno's verse." The former remains to haunt a discursive and poetic tradition, while the latter seems to obliterate itself: but what is their relation? What are the implications of the ways in which Adorno's language survives and exerts influence on both critical and poetic traditions?

Figuring "What Happened": The Body and the Text

It seems indeed a worthwhile task to examine the literary fashioning of Adorno's writing. In the final passage of "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft," the claustrophobic position of the individual in a totalized society emerges in the diction, as it documents moral outrage through

[32] Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "Draft 29: Intellectual Autobiography," *Drafts 1-38: Toll* (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2001), 179-186.

images of monstrous physical relations, which the human being seeks to survive. Contesting movements of compression and expansion collide at the site of the imagined social body, metaphorized through a vocabulary of desperate struggle and cannibalistic urges, which the German terms foreground yet more forcefully than the translation: escape (*entwinden*), degenerate (*entarten*), corrode (*anfressen*), and absorb (*aufsaugen*). At the same time, however, the essay charges cultural criticism with divorcing physical and spiritual being, thus evading the confrontation with a suffering that stymies all reflection. In abstracting human anguish, the critic participates in the process of reification, because the act of conceptualization denies any recognition of suffering as an individually experienced reality: "He [the culture critic] shifts the attack. Where there is despair and measureless misery, he sees only spiritual phenomena, the state of man's consciousness, the decline of norms. By insisting on this, criticism is tempted to forget the unutterable [*das Unsagbare*], instead of striving, however impotently, so that man may be spared [*daß es von den Menschen abgewandt werde*]."[33] The critic inflicts a dual injury, distorting the tasks of representation *and* commemoration. Criticism's insistence on finding words for what cannot be captured in language risks, paradoxically, to obliterate memory, tempting us to forget that the victims' suffering is an enduring anguish. Thus, the notion of "the unspeakable" (*das Unsagbare*) does not only imply a refusal of representation on moral grounds; rather, it marks language's inherent inadequacy. Furthermore, the symbolic charge of "the unspeakable" allows us to assimilate unquestioningly the phrase *das Unsagbare abwenden*, which conjoins lingual and corporeal forces, underscoring the ways in which language participates in exerting (or averting) the pressures perpetrated upon the body.

DuPlessis takes up this problem of the "unspeakable" in Section 2 of the poem, embedding it in Jewish traditions of textual study as a form of commemoration. By utilizing the image of reading Torah scrolls, the poem joins the ethical and textual difficulties already encountered with the problem of religious faith after the Shoah. This section begins *in medias res*, so that we must find our bearings upon confrontation with the reality of suffering:

> and face What Is, that it is, that this
> happened. As such. The finger points –
> troubling toll through sediment –
> at unspeakable untellable yod,
> wood, leather, fabric, organic char, ash of ash, then
> also there is the tiredness
> of pursuing anything
> like this.

As in Adorno's elliptical reference to "what has happened," the section evokes the inescapable existence (both in the present and in the past) of a reality that cannot be named except to be repeated insistently through the deictic avowal of its occurrence. The image of the finger pointing towards an unreachable goal conjures the "yad," the Jewish ritual pointer, which mediates between the sacred text and physical touch in materialized deictic form. Initially, one

[33] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," 146. In German: "Er [der Kulturkritiker] verschiebt den Angriff. Wo Verzweiflung und unmäßiges Leiden ist, soll darin bloß Geistiges, der Bewußtseinszustand der Menschheit, der Verfall der Norm, sich anzeigen. Indem die Kritik darauf insistiert, gerät sie in Versuchung, das Unsagbare zu vergessen, anstatt wie sehr auch ohnmächtig zu trachten, daß es von den Menschen abgewandt werde." Adorno, "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft," 187.

might construe any analogy between the awe inspired by the divine and the terror of the Shoah as a sublimation of this cataclysm. But the Hebrew term "yad," evoked by the finger directing our gaze, signifies not only the hand but refers also to a place of and for memory, one which, as these verses suggest, is not fully accessible. The divine, the commemorative, and the aesthetic intertwine in the effort to point towards an irrefutable yet nevertheless elusive reality.

In fact, DuPlessis maintains that the trilogy as a whole originates in a commitment to the deictic, which underscores existence while refusing the positive aspect of identification through naming. In this characterization, she manifests a great affinity with Adorno, who eschews the affirmative for a position of negative dialectics. Once more, however, DuPlessis expressly refuses duality, be it of the positive and the negative or, in linguistic terms, of gendered language, as the deictic neuter designates individuality beyond (gender) identity: "*Drafts* began with a sense of 'It.' It's all *It*. So the sense of language in the poems is, in part, deictic and yet not affirmative, not part of affirmative culture. If I were certain we were using the words the same way, I'd say that *Drafts* is a poem of negativity, but not negation. However, on the third hand, the deictic function, just pointing, might be imagined to preclude sound and the music of poetry, to be just the dry 'this.'"[34]

Yet the verses of Section 2 do put the deictic into tension with sound and music, particularly through the resonance of the toll. The toll is another structural aspect of the volumes as a whole: it is the subtitle of the first book, *Drafts 1-38: Toll*, whose epigraph cites John Keats' poem "Ode to a Nightingale": "… the very word is like a bell / To toll… ." Referencing an iconic Romantic poem, *Drafts* asks us to consider the Romantics' belief in the ability of language to produce a complete aesthetic and synaesthetic experience, while it also calls into question our ability to compare language to other forms of expression. Although "Ode to a Nightingale" is the first volume's epigraph, the recurrence of the word "toll" also invokes, via an allusion to Ernest Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, our mortality and the inevitability of judgment. In *Drafts* and particularly in "Draft 52," such judgment is bound up with the ethical burden of seeking a form of expression that recognizes others' suffering, even while the poem remains unable to capture such anguish fully.

Ultimately, language's deictic capacity has a triple function in this section, for in addition to the designating function of the "this," the pointer "yad" and the "unspeakable untellable yod" replicate this linguistic gesture in ritual and religious form (and, of course, in Hebrew, thus marking the gap between gesture and meaning once more for readers to whom this language is unfamiliar). The evocation of the "yod," the smallest of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet, mimics the deictic function of the pronoun, for it signifies what escapes language, while maintaining its presence as the nominal entity of being. Moreover, it straddles the existential,

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[34] DuPlessis and Heuving 406. In Lecture 14 of *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, Adorno states, "In face of the experiences we have had, not only through Auschwitz but through the introduction of torture as a permanent institution and through the atomic bomb – all these things form a kind of coherence, a hellish unity – in face of these experiences the assertion that what is has meaning, and the affirmative character which has been attributed to metaphysics almost without exception, become a mockery; and in face of the victims it becomes downright immoral." Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 104. In German: "Diese These von der Sinnhaftigkeit dessen was ist, die ist, als eine ontologische These verstanden, mit den Erfahrungen, die man gemacht hat nicht nur in Auschwitz, sondern auch durch die Einführung der Tortur als einer Dauerinstitution und durch die Atombombe – all diese Dinge bilden ja eine Art von Zusammenhang, eine höllenhafte Einheit, – diesen neuen Erfahrungen gegenüber wird die Behauptung eines Sinnes dessen was da ist, der affirmative Charakter, der fast ausnahmslos der Metaphysik zukam, zum Hohn; und wird gegenüber den Opfern zum schlechterdings Unmoralischen." Adorno, *Metaphysik*, 162.

linguistic, and religious realm, as DuPlessis explains, referring to the yod's importance in mystical conceptions of its power and energy:

> It is ontological: there's nothing like us out there, so far as we can find out, and somehow we're here, and so you have this little teeny dot of a mark, which in Hebrew is called the yod. Here is this little yod, set in a vast universe in which anything could happen, and it did—which is the motif of the Holocaust for me, and the other genocides that formed modernity. Then you look out there at the great arc of things, and you're this little speaking dot—it's most amazing.[35]

In a fashion that might strike some as problematic, she allows the "yod" to signify both the potential of shattering cataclysm and of productive wonder. The poem thus becomes the space of negotiating these possibilities.

The question of whether there is an "appropriate" forum for the poem and whether it submits or must submit to a containable form finally raises the issue of poetry as a space that houses memory, even as it cannot enclose it. This notion emerges in section 15 through a juxtaposition of the sites of the Shoah's atrocities and the poem as a (perhaps impossible) place, which collects and assembles the words that re-present these atrocities: " 'murder locations' all across the nations / In 'forests, streets and squares, synagogues, gravel pits' // Where are the words that would say this?" The citation of a catalogue of killing sites is followed by the deceptively simple question about the place of articulable speech.[36] This question evokes both the authorial problem of finding words to express vast human suffering and language's resistance to such expression, by way of circumscription or evasion. Thus, the stanza continues, "Where are the words that would say this? / They are gross and vague, literal and flat, condensed and imploded." As the deictic "this," with its simultaneous precision and anonymity, confronts the potential profusion of words, these verses ask us to consider the crassness of the desire to find a contained space within language for a suffering that manifests itself everywhere, in the terrible ubiquity of the crime scenes.

Yet neither Adorno's nor DuPlessis' adamant use of the deictic proposes that we should stop trying to search for modes of expressing through language the reality of suffering. Rather, this insistence on deixis highlights the hesitation and even the fragmentation of the authorial subject, the *Zwischenraum* (to cite again Adorno's reflections on the nature of philosophy) that arises between competing versions of the self. I turn to two of Adorno's lectures, which he gave at the university in Frankfurt am Main as part of a course offered in 1965 on metaphysics and which were published posthumously as *Metaphysik: Begriff und Probleme*. In doing so, I want to foreground the ways in which these lectures impress upon us the intimate and subjective voice of one who struggles with the notion of considering himself as a survivor but who seems compelled to bear witness not only to the condition of survival but to the ways in which it impinges upon the forms of expression available to him. In these lectures, we encounter Adorno as a commentator on his own writings, and in this capacity, he does not shrink from self-criticism, nor does he refuse to express self-doubt. Moreover, his words are directed explicitly as an address – not, as in correspondence, to a private individual, but to a public student body.

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[35] DuPlessis and Heuving 404.

[36] The citations come from Jonathan Webber, "Personal Reflection on Auschwitz Today," *Auschwitz: A History in Photographs*, eds. Teresa Swiebocka, Jonathan Webber, and Connie Wilsack, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993), 287, 286. See DuPlessis, *Drafts 39-57*, 231 (citation confirmed by personal e-mail).

Looking at some key passages about the ethics of both philosophical and literary writing after Auschwitz in the context of his views on metaphysics, I want to interrogate the implications of both this voice and this address. For here we encounter the figure that DuPlessis characterizes as speaking from a position of "the most wrenching revulsion, grief and human anguish."[37]

Indeed, in Lecture 14 of his *Metaphysics*, Adorno offers an intimate and compelling reflection on why one must seek to find a language for suffering even in the face of great difficulty or seeming impossibility. He answers those who claimed he should simply "do away with himself," if, as obliquely expressed in his essay "Commitment," he felt that the survivor did not live his own life but was "just the emanation of a wish of some victim of Auschwitz."[38] In a moving testament, Adorno counters that he possesses an ethical duty to aid a faltering language, which persists despite the threat of failure: "But as long as I can express what I am trying to express, and as long as I believe I am finding words for what otherwise would find none, I shall not, unless under extreme compulsion, yield to that hope, that wish." [39] The German words portray even more forcefully the notion that there is something that seeks but does not find language on its own (*was sonst nicht zur Sprache findet*). Adorno's writing must act as aid and mediator in this search: since suicide would enact the permanent dissolution of the relation between language and body, it can only occur as a response to the force of the extremity (*das Äußerste*) where relation as such unravels. The deictic "what" (*dem*) points precisely, at the same time as it marks the inability to designate or identify its subject beyond a shifting context. The subject remains hidden in the deictic, recognizable only through its inability to conclude its search for an inhabitable speaking position (*dem …, was sonst nicht zur Sprache findet*). Adorno justifies his ethical vocation by laying claim to his position as one who must negotiate this tension between language's failure and its instantiation.

Given the debates about who possesses the authority to depict the horrors of the Shoah through language, a debate which, as we have seen, both Adorno and DuPlessis address in various ways, the problem of experience – of its definition, its appropriation, and its expressibility – arises time and again. "Draft 52: Midrash" ponders the central correspondence established between the human body and the text as the basis for the translation of experience into language, meditating on the possibility of transposing the body onto the page in the corporeal singularity of each letter. So for instance in the following long stanza that concludes Section 14:

> Every mourner as a black Letter unwritten
> every body, stick, or piece of body ash
> a silent blanked out sentence inside a syntax of systematic
> revulsion, here's the point – there is no accurate lexicon.
> Barring that "word," half measures are indecent.

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[37] DuPlessis and Fieled, http://artrecess2.blogspot.com/2006/01/feature-poet-interview-rachel-blau.html.

[38] Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 111, 110. In German, he references the feeling "nur noch die Emanation des Wunsches irgendeines der Opfer von Auschwitz zu sein," and concludes, "Nun, – auch daraus hat das Geblök des Einverständnisses sofort das prompte Argument gemacht, es sei doch nun sozusagen höchste Zeit, daß jemand, der so dächte wie ich, sich auch endlich umbrächte, – worauf ich nur sagen kann: das könnte den Herrschaften so passen." Adorno, *Metaphysik*, 173.

[39] Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 111. In German: "Solange ich noch das, was ich versuche auszudrücken, ausdrücken kann, und solange ich glaube, damit dem zur Sprache zu verhelfen, was sonst nicht zur Sprache findet, werde ich, wenn nicht das Äußerste mich dazu zwingt, dieser Hoffnung, diesem Wunsch nicht nachgeben." Adorno, *Metaphysik*, 173.

Language not equal to itself.
The only poem is blackened, barred-out lines.
To write poetry – to pretend to find
that word or this, filling the unfillable space –
is grotesque, obtuse, barbaric.
You need imagine the rest of this writing as black blocks.
But this, then, would be indistinguishable
from the "censored," from the "erased."

Dense with the imagined relations between physical and textual being, the stanza reflects upon and then seems to refute the transformation of body to letter. Entangling the literal and figurative in its insistence that "here's the point," the stanza returns us to the "tiny dot" of the yod, which marks human insignificance in a vast universe, at the same time as it articulates the movement of deixis and thus undercuts the colloquial ease and brevity of a phrase that claims to summarize and distill knowledge. The figurative notion of "barring the word" – that is, of excluding certain expressions, or verbal expression as such – evokes in turn a literal bar obstructing sight, a crossing-out of language, which is "not equal to itself" and thus cannot produce meaning through analogy. Yet the seeming assurance of this solution, which leads the speaker to advise the reader that "you need to imagine the rest of this writing as black blocks," nevertheless begs the question why the poem does not instantiate this commandment itself, why, instead of recommencing as a literal barrier to sight, it mandates instead the necessary discrepancy between its continuation in words and the reader's task to envision its obstruction. What happens to writing *and* to reading in this process, in this space in which the reader takes part in the poem's making, or, in this case, in its dismantling? The stanza concludes that its injunction to "bar the word" is itself impossible, because imagining such an act would at the same time recall the Nazis' erasure of writing, in the form of banned and burned books and—by the figurative extension that summons the horrific reality—of human beings.

In fact, the poem instantiates the barring of words two sections prior to postulating this necessity, and it does so while experimenting with the tension between adaptation, adoption, and appropriation of the voice of an anonymous individual, who experienced the Shoah's horrors. As I discussed above, DuPlessis regards appropriation not as a moment of usurpation – and thus, implicitly, of violence – but as a potential form of empowerment, as a way of resituating speech in order to become aware of its position. In Section 12, however, it seems that she considers the parameters of such an argument anew:

"I stared out."
Forced to work in this factory
killing, stripping, burning,
or killed and stripped and burned
"I am put in this place."
[redacted]
Personal pronouns are moot. Eye only.
Poetry constructed of enormity:
mounds – of faces, limbs, shoes, rags.
The shadow line of times and places.

By establishing the homophonic correspondence between the "I" and the "eye," this section addresses the problem of whether only the person who has experienced atrocity may bear witness to it. (In this case, vision, as an immediate form of sense impression, stands in metonymically for experience.) If the stanza declares the authority of a speaking subject who was (and is) witness to the horrors (*"I stared out," "I am put in this place"*), it also presents this authority as already mediated. Not only are these statements quotations – the borrowing, that is, of another's voice – but the quotation "I am put in this place" hints at the very process of substitution, as the subject adopts the other's position in an endlessly repeatable cycle. The phrase "I am put in this place" (and its imagined corollary " 'I' is put in this place") reveals deixis as the movement of substitution, in which the particular and the general circulate endlessly, and so it demonstrates the ways in which the pressures of language and body act upon one another. But it also locates the ethical dilemma at their nexus: If the language we use to describe the experiences proper to us is a language that circulates freely, then where do we draw the line—the poem's black bar—that prevents us from impinging upon the experiences and expressive capacities of another, of appropriating their lives into our versions of a common language? At the same time, of course, we mediate the impulses of empathic recognition through this shared language as well, so in this sense, its capacity to be adopted and reworked may serve a vital ethical function.

The practice of putting the self in another's place is thus interrupted in the poem by an obstruction of the I/eye, in the form of the thick black bar that invades the middle of the stanza. Is the bar at the center of the stanza also "the shadow line of times and places," entering the poem by necessity, a visual reminder of the annihilation of words and, simultaneously, of the obliteration of vision as a tool for understanding? It appears to signal both the eradication of words and the impossibility of vision (in the double sense of sight and illumination). Interpreting this bar as an interruption of poetic creation or, alternatively, as its basis, the following verses present both possibilities: "Personal pronouns are moot. Eye only. / Poetry constructed of enormity: / mounds – of faces, limbs, shoes, rags. / The shadow line of times and places." The movement of reduction and impoverishment (signaled by words such as "moot" and "only") is countered by a growth that is only the accumulation of devastated fragments, the remnants of crimes committed: "mounds – of faces, limbs, shoes, rags." In accordance with Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" and Susan Gubar's notion of "remembering what one never knew," the temporal and spatial "shadow lines" also offer a "negative image" (photographically speaking) of the ways in which surviving humanity is haunted by the horrific suffering inflicted upon others, elsewhere, in the past.[40]

At the same time, of course, the poem has a particular figure of simultaneous presence and absence in mind. In accordance with a poetics of questioning and of dialogic response, DuPlessis foregrounds the various invocations of Adorno as interlocutor, presenting him both as apostrophized partner in argument and as the figure for the survivor, who confounds the demarcation of life and death. Survival takes on yet another dimension, since apostrophe—both emphasizing and ignoring its status as posthumous address—demonstrates the ways in which

[40] But there are also those who argue that we are not haunted but exactly the opposite, since the Shoah has little or no impact on our daily lives. According to such interpretations, the "negative" quality of "the shadow lines" might highlight their waning, ephemeral, and weightless nature, as they are merely inversions of what we perceive as reality. Consider, for instance, Gary Weissman's argument that contemporary commemorative practices which attempt to offer an "experiential" access to some aspect of the catastrophe hope to counteract "an encroaching sense that the Holocaust seems unreal or pseudo-real in American culture, which, in the aftermath of the event, fails to reflect in meaningful enough ways that the Holocaust occurred." Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004), 22.

dialogue seeks to endure, attending to the voice of another beyond the physical limits of his or her existence. One might argue that the poem, written decades after Adorno's death, can only ask for his attention and participation in conversation by sustaining – and asking its readers to sustain – a disregard of the boundary between real and imagined time and between physical and remembered existence. Yet, as the section dedicated to "Draft 52" in "Draft, Unnumbered: Précis" indicates, the traversal of this boundary is precisely necessary in order to engage in the task of remembering and commemorating others' suffering: "If I were to cry out / the questions why or how or / who would hear us – / I'd say the only ones to hear this / are ourselves. / Therefore it is scrupulous to listen. / Especially to shadows." Through enjambment, the questions about historical fact and meaning (*why or how or who*) become questions about the very possibility of communication (*why or how or who would hear us*). Thus, these verses reveal a tautological experience, in which the speaker and the listener are one and the same. But such enclosure does not relieve us of the twinned tasks of asking and listening; rather, it demands our attention. Indeed, the synaesthesia of the final lines – the image of listening to shadows – instructs us not in a proliferation of sensory experiences but in the ethical demand entailed by the brutal curtailing of the senses. Shadows, as negative traces of the visible, stand in for the muted voice. To listen to shadows emphasizes the struggle involved in attending to an ephemeral yet tenacious reality, at a dual remove from our own sensory experience.

Thus, Adorno and DuPlessis urge us to confront the wounding and fragmentation of lived realities and the concomitant effects on their recounting, as both writers interrogate the ways in which experience might be shareable. In a late lecture, Adorno submits that experience is not contingent upon one's immediate relation to an event, particularly one of such horrific magnitude:

> [I]t might be said that in view of what we have experienced – and let me say that it is also experienced by those of us on whom it was not directly perpetrated – there can be no one, whose organ of experience has not entirely atrophied, for whom the world *after* Auschwitz, that is, the world in which Auschwitz was possible, is the same world as it was before. And I believe that if one observes and analyzes oneself closely, one will find that the awareness of living in a world in which that is possible – is possible *again* and is possible *for the first time* – plays a quite crucial role even in one's most secret reaction.[41]

By suggesting that experience occurs as a visceral physical sensation, transmitted to our consciousness by its own organ (which he does not further identify), he leaves us to wonder what language might translate this corporeal sensation. Indeed, he claims, it is not only the past and present reality of suffering but also its constant potential that mandates the diffusion of experience. To pretend that there is such a thing as temporal continuity – to gloss over the radical rupture of the Shoah – amounts to a self-maiming, as the very capacity to experience shrivels. But he goes on to clarify, in the same lecture,

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[41] Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 104. In German: "[M]an könnte sagen, daß angesichts dessen, was wir erfahren haben, – und lassen Sie mich sagen: erfahren haben es auch die, an denen es nicht selber unmittelbar verübt worden ist; es kann für keinen Menschen, dem nicht das Organ der Erfahrung überhaupt abgestorben ist, die Welt *nach* Auschwitz, das heißt: die Welt, in der Auschwitz möglich war, mehr dieselbe Welt sein, als sie es vorher gewesen ist. Und ich glaube, wenn man sich genau beobachtet und analysiert, daß man findet, daß bis in die geheimsten Reaktionen hinein, die man hat, eben das Bewußtsein, in einer Welt zu leben, in der das möglich – *wieder* möglich und *erst* möglich – ist, ihre ganz entscheidende Rolle spielt." Adorno, *Metaphysik*, 162.

> When I said that these experiences affect everyone, and not only the victims or those who narrowly escaped them, I did not mean only that the experiences I have tried to characterize are of such terrible violence that no one whom they have touched, even from a distance, so to speak, can ever escape them […] By saying that I also referred to something objective, and, again, my intention in pointing this out is that you should not simply equate the things I am speaking of today with the subjectivity of the person who experiences them.[42]

Insisting that there is "something objective" in experience, Adorno warns us that we cannot contain it within a notion of personhood that would seek to separate neatly between the individual and social or cultural forces.

The uneasy relation between the subjective and objective and the resulting difficulty of situating experience either within or outside of the personal emerges with full force in the dialogue that DuPlessis' poem establishes with Adorno's writing in Section 10. Here, she arranges his words on the ethical dilemma of the survivor. The passage she adapts occurs in the late essay "Meditations on Metaphysics," in which Adorno describes the phenomenon of survivor's guilt. Amending the discussion about the viability of literary production about and after the Shoah, he turns to a shared ethical dilemma that inheres both in post-Shoah art and post-Shoah existence:

> Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as the tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems. But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living—especially whether one who by rights should have been killed, may go on living. His mere survival calls for the coldness, the basic principle of bourgeois subjectivity, without which there could have been no Auschwitz; this is the drastic guilt of him who was spared. By way of atonement he will be plagued by dreams such as that he is no longer living at all, that he was sent to the ovens in 1944 and his whole existence since has been imaginary, an emanation of the insane wish of a man killed twenty years earlier.[43]

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[42] Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 109. In German: "Wenn ich sagte, daß diese Erfahrungen alle betreffen, und nicht nur die Opfer oder die, die gerade eben noch so daran vorbeigekommen sind, so meine ich damit nicht nur das, daß die Erfahrungen, die ich versucht habe, hier Ihnen zu bezeichnen, von einer so furchtbaren Gewalt sind, daß keiner, der sie auch nur gleichsam von fern berührt hat, dem je wieder entgehen kann […] Sondern ich meine damit zugleich auch etwas Objektives, und das möchte ich Ihnen doch sagen, abermals mit der Intention, daß Sie diese Dinge, über die ich heute rede, nicht einfach in die Subjektivität des Erfahrenden auflösen." Adorno, *Metaphysik*, 170.

[43] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton, (New York: Continuum, 1983), 362-363. In German: "Das perennierende Leiden hat so viel Recht auf Ausdruck wie der Gemarterte zu brüllen; darum mag es falsch gewesen sein, nach Auschwitz ließe kein Gedicht mehr sich schreiben. Nicht falsch aber ist die minder kulturelle Frage, ob nach Auschwitz noch sich leben lasse, ob vollends es dürfe, wer zufällig entrann und rechtens hätte umgebracht werden müssen. Sein Weiterleben bedarf schon der Kälte, des Grundprinzips der bürgerlichen Subjektivität, ohne das Auschwitz nicht möglich gewesen wäre: drastische Schuld des Verschonten. Zur Vergeltung suchen ihn Träume heim wie der, daß er gar nicht mehr lebte, sondern 1944 vergast worden wäre, und seine ganze Existenz danach lediglich in der Einbildung führte, Emanation des wirren Wunsches eines vor zwanzig Jahren Umgebrachten." Theodor W. Adorno, "Meditationen zur Metaphysik," *"Ob nach Auschwitz noch sich leben lasse": Ein philosophisches Lesebuch*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 473.

Reconsidering once more his interdiction of poetry on an ethical and moral basis, Adorno legitimates the poetic expression of suffering by likening it to the screams of a tortured individual, thereby establishing a correspondence between the human body and the poem. In a guarded formulation that seems both impersonal and provisional, he qualifies that "it may have been wrong" to postulate an interdiction of poetry after Auschwitz on ethical grounds. Parallel to this question about the viability of literary creation, he wonders whether the survivor may continue to live, whether existence is possible not only in ontological but also in ethical terms. While the question maintains the universality and anonymity of the deictic third person, it nevertheless strikes the reader as intimately painful.

Indeed, Adorno's meditations on this question are harrowing to read, because his analysis of survivor's guilt – a feeling to which many survivors bear witness – also seems to testify to this guilt. For the word choice in this passage appears intertwined with the very subject matter of which it speaks. The passage does not utilize the term "survivor" but designates this person instead as the one who was spared (hinting both at chance and, obliquely, at divine intervention). Yet it quickly becomes clear that survival is not only arbitrary but even morally questionable, since it is accidental and defies the implicit, paradoxical justice of this death. Claiming that survivors are those who "rightfully" (*rechtens*) should have died, he seems to suggest that this persecution was not only destined but bore a horrible logic. I am not trying to say, of course, that Adorno condones the perpetrators' convictions; rather, I want to point out how his words claim that survival expresses an innate culpability that shapes experience in a lasting way. Most poignantly, he claims that survival enables and justifies the conditions of isolation and preoccupation with the self that contributed to the atrocities committed. The survivor is punished for this guilt, he attests, by dreaming that survival is not life but "afterlife," or a life beyond death that blurs the distinction between the two: For the living body becomes a figment of the imagination of one murdered in the gas chambers, a doubly ghostly image. Thus, survival can only refer to a life that is no longer one's own and to which one is not entitled.

While it seems that in "Meditations on Metaphysics," Adorno identifies only obliquely with this anonymous figure of the survivor, he tells the story in a more intimate way in one of the lectures included in *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, in a passage to which I have already referred above:

> Yet one must ask a further question, and this is a metaphysical question, although it has its basis in the total suspension of metaphysics. … It is the question whether one can *live* after Auschwitz. This question has appeared to me, for example, in the recurring dreams which plague me, in which I have the feeling that I am no longer really alive, but am just the emanation of a wish of some victim of Auschwitz.[44]

The possible question of the essay has become an urgent one in the lecture, one that Adorno must pose. The critical function of the metaphysical question manifests itself as an involuntary, even unwanted physical experience: the nightmares of the survivor, who feels his existence only as an evanescent substitution of another's being.

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[44] Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 110. In German: "Man muß doch darüber hinaus wirklich sich fragen – und das ist nun eine metaphysische Frage, obwohl sie in der äußersten Suspension von Metaphysik ihren Grund hat […], ob man nach Auschwitz überhaupt noch *leben* kann: so wie ich es selber erfahren habe etwa in den immer wiederkehrenden Träumen, die mich plagen und in denen ich das Gefühl habe, eigentlich gar nicht mehr selbst zu leben, sondern nur noch die Emanation des Wunsches irgendeines der Opfer von Auschwitz zu sein." Adorno, *Metaphysik*, 173.

Section 10 of DuPlessis' poem reworks Adorno's musings on survival, using his formal essay rather than the more personal revelations of the lecture as a basis. The occasions of direct address are thus not the only way in which the poem seeks dialogue with Adorno, as author and as a figure of a Shoah survivor. While the poem as a whole takes up Adorno's role of critic—emphasizing this focus by citing from his writings and annotating these citations—it also attempts to portray the interpenetration of public and personal existence: "He was the person his culture turned against. / Anyone who got out / Lives a posthumous life in his head. / Dreaming he was gassed in 1944, / when he 'awakes' he thinks / he, the life he is inside of, is the dream / of someone who was killed, someone already dead." By putting the act of awakening into quotation marks, DuPlessis compounds the difficulty of distinguishing between dream and reality, between sleep and consciousness. Paradoxically, the feeling of having escaped becomes the realization of containment, for the multiple and incongruous shards of existence "after Auschwitz" force the survivor to "live a posthumous life in his head," one marked by dual isolation, since it is neither shareable nor even fully accessible to experience.

Yet if survival is a spectral phenomenon, then the ongoing reality of suffering, as we have seen, pervades and transforms the very possibility of existence after the Shoah. Indeed, this reality – confounding the boundary between the subjective and the objective – enters into the constitution of the world's substance, into its geological make-up. Section 2 of "Drafts 52: Midrash," which I discussed at length above, emphasizes the way in which this experience becomes a material part of history, as "[t]he finger points – / troubling toll through sediment – / at unspeakable untellable yod, / wood, leather, fabric, organic char, ash of ash." Evoking a double remnant, the "ash of ash" reminds English speakers of the phrase "ashes to ashes, dust to dust", central to the Anglican burial service. This phrase in turn originates in passages from the Hebrew Bible, such as Genesis 3:19 ("Dust you are, and to dust shall you return") and Ezekiel 28:18 ("I have turned thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee").[45] In the context of the Shoah, however, the hope gained from divine promise of a natural, cyclical return to one's origins becomes instead a doubly inflicted violence, manifested in the ephemeral yet tenacious trace of the injuries sustained, as the "ash of ash" recalls the palpable absence of the murdered victims cremated in the camps.

How does literature document such reality? Like DuPlessis, Adorno offers various depictions of an experience of suffering that has entered the world's geological and archaeological substance and so also the material of language. He commends to his students Jean Améry's essay "On Torture" (while expressing reservations about Améry's philosophical convictions as a whole, in particular his adherence to existentialism), because it "does quite admirably express the changes in the rock strata of experience which have been brought about by these things."[46] The "rock strata," like the "sediment" of DuPlessis' poem, underscores experience as a never-ending medium that accumulates and bears the traces of history. What ramifications does such an understanding of experience have for its representation in literary form? Adorno concludes "Those Twenties," an essay marked by a Cold War perspective, with

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[45] *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*, trans. Robert Alter (New York: Norton, 2004), Genesis 3:19, and *The Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955 [1917]), Ezekiel 28:18.

[46] Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 106. In German: "doch die Veränderungen in den Gesteinsschichten der Erfahrung, die durch diese Dinge bewirkt worden sind, in einer geradezu bewundernswerten Weise zum Ausdruck bringt." Adorno, *Metaphysik*, 166.

the observation that the art scene in the "entire Eastern area" (*dem gesamten Ostbereich*) is suffocated by cultural criticism, which institutes conformity rather than dismantling it:

> [But that says nothing less than that the ground has been shaken by art, that] an unbroken relation to the aesthetic sphere is no longer possible. The concept of a culture after Auschwitz is illusory and nonsensical, and for this reason any creation that arises at all has to pay the bitter price. However, because the world has survived its own demise, it yet has need of art as its unconscious recording of history. The authentic artists of the present are those in whose works there shudders the aftershock of the most extreme terror.[47]

This passage offers a powerful plea for the necessity of continued creative production, and it does so by avowing that the damaged relationship between experience and aesthetics mandates documentation, not only in the writing of history but in art. The paradox of culture "after Auschwitz" exacts a price on creative expression, which does not simply represent the catastrophe but bears its traces. Thus, "authentic artists" are not automatically those who endured the experience first-hand but those who sustain its effects in their work. The image of the earthquake appears twice in this passage:[48] First, Adorno indicates that the ground has been shaken by art, thus acknowledging both its potential power and threat, since the word "erschüttern" connotes not only physical upheaval but the figurative movement of transformative shock. Second, the response of "authentic" artists must be to transmit the aftershocks of the "most extreme horror."[49] Insisting on an analogy from the physical world, Adorno refuses

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[47] Cited from Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 56, translation amended. In German: "Das besagt aber wohl schließlich nicht weniger, als daß der Boden von Kunst selber erschüttert, daß ein ungebrochenes Verhältnis zum ästhetischen Bereich nicht mehr möglich ist. Der Begriff einer nach Auschwitz auferstandenen Kultur ist scheinhaft und widersinnig, und dafür hat jedes Gebilde, das überhaupt noch entsteht, den bitteren Preis zu bezahlen. Weil jedoch die Welt den eigenen Untergang überlebt hat, bedarf sie gleichwohl der Kunst als ihrer bewußtlosen Geschichtsschreibung. Die authentischen Künstler der Gegenwart sind die, in deren Werken das äußerste Grauen nachzittert." Theodor W. Adorno, "Jene zwanziger Jahre," *Gesammelte Schriften 10:2*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 506.

[48] It seems to me that Adorno uses several potentially ambiguous constructs here: because German is a gendered language, the referent of "*ihrer* bewußtlosen Geschichtsschreibung" remains undetermined and could refer to the unconscious writing of a history of the *world* ("die Welt") and / or of art ("die Kunst"). Moreover, "Geschichtsschreibung" itself evokes both the chronicling of history and its unfolding (through the idiom *Geschichte schreiben*, which describes significant events that we come to remember as shaping history). Finally, although not as strong as the other two associations, not least because it requires a grammatically incorrect reading (though one now popularly used), one can hear in "daß der Boden von Kunst selber erschüttert […] ist" [that the ground has been shaken by art] also its near-inverse, "daß der Boden *der* Kunst selber erschüttert […] ist" [that the ground of art has been shaken]. While I do not assume that Adorno intended this last possibility for multi-reading (or perhaps the others), their echoes nevertheless strike me as relevant, because they make it impossible to declare with certainty where the boundaries between nature, culture, art, and history lie.

[49] The image of the earthquake is one that appears also, for example, in Jean-François Lyotard's *The Differend*, in which Lyotard writes, "Suppose that an earthquake destroys not only lives, buildings, and objects but also the instruments used to measure earthquakes directly and indirectly. The impossibility of quantitatively measuring it does not prohibit, but rather inspires in the minds of the survivors the idea of a very great seismic force. The scholar claims to know nothing about it, but the common person has a complex feeling, the one aroused by the negative presentation of the indeterminate." Lyotard, *The Differend*, trans. Georges van den Abbeele (Minneaplis: U of Minnesota P, 1988), 56. One might note, though, that this metaphor of the earthquake—both in Adorno's and Lyotard's case—is highly problematic, since, by figuring the atrocity as a natural disaster, it appears to absolve the perpetrators of their guilt (even if unintentionally so).

transcendence as a structuring principle of metaphysics. He convicts the idea of a "resurrection" of art after the horrors of the Shoah as illogical, because it cannot convey the irreversible traces that the world bears, since the world's survival is now the condition of human existence.

Despite our limited capacity to articulate the experience of suffering, then, we must seek to prevent the perpetuation of the crimes that bring it about. Akin to DuPlessis, Adorno reformulates the challenge to our post-Shoah existence as well, locating the challenge in the ethical rather than the metaphysical realm, so that each individual bears an innate responsibility. In "Meditations on Metaphysics," Adorno voices the necessity of ensuring that the Shoah never repeat itself – despite our apparent powerlessness to safeguard against its recurrence – as a version of the Kantian categorical imperative. Instead of resulting from choice, this new ethics has been forced upon us, paradoxically, by Hitler, whose name thus comes to stand metonymically and metaphorically not only for the identity of a single man but for the crimes committed by many people and an entire system:[50]

> Hitler has imposed a new categorical imperative on human beings in their state of unfreedom; to arrange their thoughts and actions in such a way that Auschwitz should never be repeated, that nothing of the sort should ever happen again. This imperative is as resistant to explanation as was the given nature of Kant's imperative in its day. To treat it discursively would be an outrage: it gives us a bodily sensation of an external moral factor. "Bodily", because it represents our active sense of abhorrence in the face of the intolerable physical pain to which individuals are exposed, even after individuality, as a spiritual form of reflection, begins to disappear.[51]

By alluding to the Kantian categorical imperative, Adorno suggests that we must confront Hitler as an inversion of the figure of the philosopher. Adorno asks that this "new categorical imperative" be accepted unquestioningly, in accordance with his claim that language – and especially the critical project – cannot describe the demands that others' suffering exerts upon us. Indeed, he goes so far as to say that its analysis or explanation would constitute a moral wrong-doing (*Frevel*). Instead, this new imperative bids us feel a physical compulsion, in addition to what morality and custom (*das Sittliche*) demand. This excess (*das Moment des Hinzutretenden*), experienced as a physical pressure, reveals what remains necessarily tangible of the Shoah's horrors. Our recoiling must then make its way into language, and it must do so not

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[50] In this sense, I would argue, we might interpret the figure of Hitler in this passage as possessing a symbolic charge that operates similarly to the phrase "after Auschwitz," as a referent that both exceeds and falls short of what it calls to mind.

[51] Quoted from Rolf Tiedemann, Introduction, trans. Rodney Livingstone, *"Can One Live After Auschwitz?": A Philosophical Reader*, by Theodor W. Adorno (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003), xiv, translation expanded. In German: "Hitler hat den Menschen im Stande ihrer Unfreiheit einen neuen kategorischen Imperativ aufgezwungen: ihr Denken und Handeln so einzurichten, daß Auschwitz sich nicht wiederhole, nichts Ähnliches geschehe. Dieser Imperativ ist so widerspenstig gegen seine Begründung wie einst die Gegebenheit des Kantischen. Ihn diskursiv zu behandeln, wäre Frevel: an ihm läßt leibhaft das Moment des Hinzutretenden am Sittlichen sich fühlen. Leibhaft, weil es der praktisch gewordene Abscheu vor dem unerträglichen physischen Schmerz ist, dem die Individuen ausgesetzt sind, auch nachdem Individualität, als geistige Reflexionsform, zu verschwinden sich anschickt." Adorno, "Meditationen zur Metaphysik," 475-476.

through the discourse that explicates and legitimates abstract moral claims, but through a recounting of the physically felt refusal to accept the infliction of pain on another.[52]

Despite and because of the Shoah's dehumanization of the individual, what remains as communicable experience is therefore this recoiling in the face of others' suffering. The incarnation of a sentiment that combines the physical and the moral – *Abscheu* as both instinctive revulsion *and* reflected condemnation – is one that refutes the possibility of its own explication, in dialectical opposition to the logical transparence of the Kantian sentence. It is precisely the embodiment of the new logic – the discourse of ethics given physical expression in each of us rather than vice versa – that renders the desire to legitimize it in language not only unnecessary but immoral. As Adorno invites us to "feel" rather than to dissect this new categorical imperative, feeling (*fühlen*) already gestures towards empathy (*mitfühlen*) as a physical confrontation with the other's limits of endurance.

Temporality and the Ethics of Commemoration

If a 21st-century poetics is not only a "post"-phenomenon but a departure and a beginning, then how does it grapple with the continuing legacy of suffering and the demands of commemorating the particular atrocities of the Shoah? As I have sought to show, DuPlessis' "Draft 52: Midrash," written from March to July of 2002, imagines various dialogues with Adorno's statement, in order to institute the poem as a communicative and memorial space over and against any interdiction of the poetic as such. DuPlessis rejects the attempted enclosure of memory and the delimitation of forms of commemorative expression. Instead, she wishes to open up the poem's space as a constantly evolving forum of exchange, one that negotiates the ongoing tasks of memory work with the pressures of anticipation, producing the poetic as a challenge to the concept of a historical continuum. The poem does not distinguish proper from improper memorialization; rather, it presents memory as operating always through an *alternate* space.

The Shoah enters DuPlessis' poetics by way of an initial retelling of tales constitutive of the Jewish tradition. These appearances are involuntary, as she avows,

> Fairly early on in writing *Drafts*, I was startled to see that motifs around my particular kind of attenuated Judaism really started coming in, especially key biblical stories […]. [T]he emergence of these stories was unexpected, yet something I needed to honor. And then the long shadow of the Holocaust began to appear in the poem. […] [T]here is a transgenerational phantom in our century. I think it haunts modernity […] The Holocaust is only one horror among other horrors […] The unthinkable above another unthinkable. The fact that we've lived in a century of enormity. It's just amazing to me – and that that's part of this void … the enormity and the void that started coming into my work. There was nothing that I could do about it one way or another. I was only careful not to

[52] As Gerhard Schweppenhäuser points out, Adorno formulates this imperative at the necessary intersection of foundational and contingent conditions of human life: "Adorno's new imperative combines fundamental normative reflection with reflection on the historicity of ethical problems rooted in the specificity of the situation. Adorno thus fashioned a new moral principle which, contrary to Kant's imperative, is bound with a unique historical and social constellation." Schweppenhäuser, "Adorno's Negative Moral Philosophy," trans. Cara Gendel Ryan and Michael McGettigan, trans. ed. Simon Krysl, *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 344. See also Schweppenhäuser, *Ethik nach Auschwitz: Adornos negative Moralphilosophie* (Berlin: Argument-Verlag, 1993).

> claim more than I understood or knew, because of my poetics, really the ethics, of Objectivism.[53]

DuPlessis underscores that her poetics do not simply articulate an aftermath but exist in a present moment, which maintains awareness of the ongoing demands of commemoration while also constituting a departure from the limitations of temporal categories. Negotiating a poetry that is at once reflective and anticipatory means questioning the continuously shifting tasks of the present. In other words, DuPlessis asks what the notion of existence "after Auschwitz" means, when this expression suggests a linearity that the complexity of time belies.

Indeed, the language in this passage even evokes the temporal structure of traumatic recall.[54] The poet finds herself "startled" by recurring motifs, by "the emergence of unexpected stories," by "the long shadow of the Holocaust." Akin to those critics who maintain that the traumatic impact of the Shoah extends beyond the individual lives of survivors, DuPlessis maintains that it is "a transgenerational phantom in our century," one that "haunts modernity." Critiquing implicitly those who would offer trauma as a tale of the origins of the self, DuPlessis instead articulates wonder about the ways in which the "void" begins to enter her work unbidden. Since this void also alludes to the emptiness that inaugurates the Book of Genesis, it plays upon the notion of the poet as divine creator, though it is now the void that shapes the creator rather than vice versa. Nevertheless, the void that enters the female poet's work figures her poetry as one that can take in the vastness of an unshaped universe (as well as its devastations), recalling us to DuPlessis' insistence on "the largest kind of space, the challenge of scope itself," as she seeks "to write a lot of women's words right now."[55] Yet while it is important to remark upon the ways in which her account of the Shoah's impact on her poetry, critical theories of traumatic memory and its chronicling in testimonial form, and even accounts of divine creation resonate with one another, it is equally important to maintain the space that separates them: thus, DuPlessis avows her commitment "not to claim more than I understood or knew," a commitment she locates in the parallel bonds of the poetics and ethics of Objectivism.[56]

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[53] DuPlessis and Heuving 407.

[54] In Susan Gubar's view, the poetic lends itself to a reflection on and of the traumatic precisely because its form may render the temporality of trauma: "Like symptoms in the aftermath of trauma, lyrical utterance often announces itself as an involuntary return to intense feelings about an incomprehensible moment. But recollected in relative safety, if not tranquility, such a moment rendered in writing allows authors and readers to grapple with the consequences of traumatic pain without being silenced by it." Gubar, *Poetry After Auschwitz*, 8. (We may note as well that Gubar, like Eva Hoffman in the passage I cite in the Introduction, plays with and adapts Wordsworth's famous description of the process and aims of poetic production.)

[55] DuPlessis and Heuving 403.

[56] On Rachel Blau DuPlessis' relationship to the Objectivist poets, see also her edited volume of the letters of George Oppen, her friend and mentor: *The Selected Letters of George Oppen*, ed. Rachel Blau DuPlessis (Durham: Duke UP, 1990). Consider, for instance, the letter Oppen wrote her on August 16th, 1965, in response to one of her graduate school papers, which dealt with William Carlos Williams: "the fact is that the myth vs. the singular ----- is not the problem. For the problem is beneath the myth, and even beneath the singular ---- which I agree is more profound. Obviously. It's what happens" (117). Oppen's play with the tension between profundity and the obvious appears akin to the ways in which DuPlessis characterizes the emergence of the Shoah in her poetry. See also a letter Oppen writes her on April 13th, 1976: "Dear Rachel: / to occupy the 'idea'; to live in it - - this is simply and precisely the undertaking of poetry / there is no prescription for the doing / *Talk* in the poems as if speaking to divinity … does this phrase help? Speaking to divinity - - i.e., the vertical dimension - - - / 'vertical dimension': one of the things the line-break is *for* / (when one is not in the vertical dimension, when one is talking only to the reader, the lines *lengthen*" (316). One might say, then, that DuPlessis' avowal of her commitment to the poetics and ethics of Objectivism includes also this belief in the poem's three-dimensionality, in the necessity of exploring both its

Stressing the interplay of various temporalities, she assesses Adorno's choice of phrase and its implication of a temporal progression by opening Section 1 with a version of his claim, which triangulates three terms from the dialectical statement. What appears most evident is the disappearance of certain words, as she renders the phrase "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" in the juxtaposition "Poetry / Auschwitz / barbaric." The slashes between the terms perform and visualize the feminist poet's will to "surround" a male-authored tradition, "to build through it, and to rupture it – to break it up inside to become something else."[57] By eliminating both the active verb "is" and the temporal relation "after," DuPlessis wonders what binds the remaining three terms together. The slashes come to indicate the threat and potential of such fluid relation, since it is no longer clear how these terms modify one another. Furthermore, when this verse is read as a response to the citation from Adorno, the slashes take the place and thus mark the disappearance of the very terms that seek to express sequence and consequence, the manner in which happenings unfold:

> Poetry / Auschwitz / barbaric.
> Oblique triangle.
> Also
> human litter
> has not ceased / to be / created.

By portraying the three terms adapted from Adorno's statement as an "oblique triangle"—one that does not contain right angles—DuPlessis refuses the viability of a hierarchical or prescriptive bond between them. The pivotal verse "also" further highlights the difficulty of reconciling the notion of a "post-Shoah" reality and ongoing violence. In a terrible paradox, the verses "human litter // has not ceased / to be / created" depict the destruction of human existence as a continuous process of making. Thus, DuPlessis criticizes a possible extrapolation from Adorno's use of the phrase "after Auschwitz," namely the suggestion that these atrocities are part of a completed history and that our current concern is not present suffering but the representation of past suffering.[58] Yet "Draft 52: Midrash" asks that as writers and readers in the 21st century, we remain aware that we live not only "after" but "with" the Shoah.

The idea of living "with" various temporalities, which overlap rather than forming a continuum, summons us to confrontation. A reasoned yet distanced recognition of concluded realities does not suffice; our continued implication in the atrocities of the Shoah demands active response. In Section 7, the poem evokes "rampaging policies and piles of bone / time after time. And once. At once. / Anyone and everyone stands poised there / in the event. / What, then, is the size of this loss? // Beyond unrecoverable." These verses grapple with the different forms of temporal experience that commingle in any moment: repetition (*time after time*), uniqueness (*and once*), simultaneity (*at once)*, excess (*beyond*), and disappearance (*unrecoverable*). Nevertheless, while these lived temporalities are not to be reconciled, they collectively position

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vertical and horizontal dimensions, its arguments with the divine as well as with the human aspects of creative (and destructive) potential.

[57] DuPlessis and Heuving 403.

[58] As the passages from Adorno's writings examined in this essay indicate, he himself did not subscribe to the claim that the Shoah is now part of a finished past; nevertheless, DuPlessis asks us to consider this interpretation in order to make us aware of the ramifications of his choice of phrase "after Auschwitz," which, in its use of metonymy and in its conflation of time and place, is already overdetermined.

humanity – "anyone and everyone" – "in the event." This image of "standing poised there / in the event" suggests not simply an inescapable containment but an ethical stance that anticipates involvement, one that is reminiscent of Adorno's claim that we share in the experience of the Shoah whether or not it was perpetrated upon us first-hand.

Yet while Adorno makes this claim about inescapable experience, he also offers an interpretation of its temporal perspective that suggests that the very immediacy of the horrors preclude their assimilation, so that they remain only as traumatic impressions. Given the breadth of Adorno's oeuvre and his recurrent interest in probing the parameters of experience and its relation to ethics, it is clear that he offers a variety of perspectives, which are not always reconcilable with one another or are so only through assuming their dialectical tension. While the passages from the late writings I discuss above claim the necessary omnipresence of experience, a segment from the 1944 portion of *Minima Moralia* portrays experience itself as impossible. If in some of his late writings, Adorno explains that the Shoah's horrors continue to pervade experiential reality, he claims in this early piece – written before the extent of those horrors was known – that war annuls the potential to feel and to experience. He explains that the trauma of modern warfare has transformed the possibility of a articulable reality into the certainty of fragmentation and paralysis. Life is no more than a series of shocks, which exceed both discourse and temporality:

> Just as the war lacks continuity, history, an "epic" element, but seems rather to start anew from the beginning in each phase, so it will leave behind no permanent, unconsciously preserved image in the memory. Everywhere, with each explosion, it has breached the barrier against stimuli beneath which experience, the lag between healing oblivion and healing recollection, forms. Life has changed into a timeless succession of shocks, interspaced with empty, paralyzed intervals. But nothing, perhaps, is more ominous for the future than the fact that, quite literally, these things will soon be past thinking on, for each trauma of the returning combatants, each shock not inwardly absorbed, is a ferment of future destruction.[59]

War annuls the ability to capture impressions in either language or memory. Adorno's words trace the various forms in which it does so, moving from a diction of depletion (*sowenig ... sowenig*) to one of pervasive impingement and invasion (*überall, mit jeder Explosion*) to one of rupture (*durchbrochen, Zwischenräume klaffen*). Experience (*Erfahrung*) is not immediate; rather, it can come into being only if there is a buffer that shields the subject from the event.[60]

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[59] Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Verso, 1984), 54. In German, "Sowenig der Krieg Kontinuität, Geschichte, das "epische" Element enthält, sondern gewissermaßen in jeder Phase von vorn anfängt, sowenig wird er ein stetiges und unbewußt aufbewahrtes Erinnerungsbild hinterlassen. Überall, mit jeder Explosion, hat er [der Krieg] den Reizschutz durchbrochen, unter dem Erfahrung, die Dauer zwischen heilsamem Vergessen und heilsamem Erinnern, sich bildet. Das Leben hat sich in eine zeitlose Folge von Schocks verwandelt, zwischen denen Löcher, paralysierte Zwischenräume klaffen. Nichts aber ist vielleicht verhängnisvoller für die Zukunft, als daß im wörtlichen Sinn bald keiner mehr wird daran denken können, denn jedes Trauma, jeder unbewältigte Schock der Zurückkehrenden ist ein Ferment kommender Destruktion." Adorno, "Meditationen zur Metaphysik," 76.

[60] When translating the term "Erfahrung" as "experience," it is vital to bear in mind the tension, in German, between "Erfahrung" and "Erlebnis," which each designate a version of the more inclusive term "experience." See, for instance, Walter Benjamin's essay "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire," *Illuminationen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977). In English: Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," *Selected Writings: 1938-1940*, ed.

Using a psychoanalytic term, Adorno refers to this buffer as a "Reizschutz," that is, a guard against the irritation of immediacy. Primarily, this buffer allows a necessary temporal development, in which the relation between "healing forgetting" and "healing remembrance" appears. It is only through this bond to the past (albeit one that relies on distance as much as on intimacy) that we can exist as sentient beings in the present and, moreover, as beings who can articulate their existence (for, as the passage's opening line tells us, warfare has eradicated continuity, history and the story [*Geschichte*], and the "epic" element). Metonymically, the explosions of warfare rupture not only the auditory sense but all human senses, so rendering futile any attempt to position oneself or to establish relation. Spatial and temporal dislocation are linked: trauma's eradication of temporal bonds makes it impossible to "think of" a future. Adorno emphasizes that "to think of a future" is not a figurative expression – to indicate, for instance, how one might imagine the time to come – but denotes, instead, the "literal" act of thought. If the future has become unavailable as a topic of reflection – if it no longer occupies a space accessible to thought in the human brain, following the psychoanalytic conception introduced by the notion of the "Reizschutz" – then its experience becomes impossible as well. In this way, experience (and even more basically, physical sensation) cannot come into being without a prior ability to conceptualize its possibility. Thus, the only future imaginable is structured by the unresolved trauma of the survivors (those who return, *die Zurückkehrenden*), which breeds and perpetuates the destruction of anticipation as well as anticipated destruction.

The ways in which survival confounds temporal continuity are manifold, as we have seen, and not only for human experience: language and its forms of expression have survived the Shoah as well. To make such a claim is neither to avow language's capacity to describe suffering (as I have sought to show at length, this capacity is precisely at issue for both authors), nor is it to anthropomorphize the word in any simple way, for the interweaving of body and text open the negotiable realm of ethics. According to the poem, what emerges as most important about Adorno's statement is not its truth-value but its survival, its tenacious existence, which continues to demand response. I would argue that what may seem like an apostrophe of Adorno – and, on one level, it certainly is that, in its insistent address of a deceased author – is in another sense a metonymic transfer, so that the address is a response to the call of "the sentence." Interestingly enough, however, the section in which this transfer operates most explicitly does not include a direct address but refers to Adorno only in the third person. Paradoxically, the words of supposed interdiction become the catalyst of continued critical contemplation and commemoration as well as of poetic creation:

> Relentless, the sentence returns.
> So it is plausible that he meant
>
> it would take a long time, longer
> than a life, a fact strangely moot, to absorb fully
>
> that many dead, and the pre-quels and encores

Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard UP, 2006). Martin Jay argues that in this particular passage, as in others, Adorno's notion of experience is in fact deeply indebted to Benjamin's understanding of it. See Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2005), 312-360, 345. Citing the passage from Adorno above, Jay claims that "Here the war in question was the Second World War, not the First, but Adorno was simply rehearsing the points Benjamin had made about its predecessor" (345).

of this event, that desire systematically to exterminate

named populations as such, for their regular
being It would take a long time. If ever.

Thus, as a marker of that sadness,
to write poetry is barbaric, barbarous.

Those very words snuck up again,
to beg the questions.

The refusal of poetic production comes back persistently, a re-creative moment at odds with the temporality of the post-existence that it seems to express. As these verses make clear, the time of comprehending suffering and the time of mourning do not coincide. The simplicity and categorical absoluteness of Adorno's verdict is deceptive, for it reemerges over and over as supplication and query, uncertain of an appropriate response and manifesting itself outside of its critical boundaries.

The simultaneous diminishment and excess of language that these verses describe returns us to the relationship of the temporality and ethics of commemoration, asking us to think poetry outside of generic restrictions. Indeed, it is the liminal space (what Adorno calls the *Zwischenraum*) that constitutes both the separation and the bond between experiencing or recognizing another's suffering on the one hand and the modes of seeking to express this incontrovertible reality on the other. But to honor and commit to the exploration of this gap may be impossible, as the final stanza of Section 20 of "Draft 52" reminds us, "The interstice is a stark revolting site. / We are not frightened enough, nor enough engaged / to be riven by this, to live by this." What does the parallelism of being riven by something and living by it entail? What does it tell us about the condition of survival? The aims of ethics and representation seem to fail at once: just as the deictic "this" twice marks language's inability to capture that which it seeks to express, so we resist the conscious existence that our understanding of the Shoah's reality would mandate. Nevertheless, we must continue to explore the gap – the "stark revolting site" – because to do so, to bear in mind the distance between our efforts to comprehend and the horror of reality, means to engage in the work of commemoration. The poem ends with a citation of Adorno's injunction against oblivion, from the essay "Commitment:" "'The abundance of real suffering / permits no forgetting.' / Yet memory does not work that way. / It works another way, halfway, a ground lens, / a great stark. One little scrap where something is. / Incommensurate."[61] The scrap returns us to the bit of paper, to the draft. The incommensurate –

[61] DuPlessis' citation is taken from the following passage in Adorno's essay: "I do not want to soften my statement that it is barbaric to continue to write poetry after Auschwitz; it expresses, negatively, the impulse that animates committed literature. […] But Hans Magnus Enzensberger's rejoinder also remains true, namely, that literature must resist precisely this verdict, that is, be such that it does not surrender to cynicism merely by existing after Auschwitz. It is the situation of literature itself and not simply one's relation to it that is paradoxical. The abundance of real suffering permits no forgetting […]. But that suffering—what Hegel called the awareness of affliction—also demands the continued existence of the very art it forbids; hardly anywhere else does suffering still find its own voice, a consolation that does not immediately betray it." Adorno, "Commitment," trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?: A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003), 251-252. In German: "Den Satz, nach Auschwitz noch Lyrik zu schreiben, sei barbarisch, möchte ich nicht mildern; negativ ist darin der Impuls ausgesprochen, der die engagierte Dichtung beseelt. […] Aber wahr

refusing the possibility of analogy, and particularly the equation of lived and textual reality – precludes the finality of this last word. It promises instead the lasting space between two versions of existence, between being and its remembrance, life and its representation: a space that is integral rather than prohibitive. What remains, in the end, is this arena "where something is."

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bleibt auch Enzensbergers Entgegnung, die Dichtung müsse eben diesem Verdikt standhalten, so also sein, daß sie nicht durch ihre bloße Existenz nach Auschwitz dem Zynismus sich überantworte. Ihre eigene Situation ist paradox, nicht erst, wie man sich zu ihr verhält. Das Übermaß an realem Leiden duldet kein Vergessen […]. Aber jenes Leiden, nach Hegels Wort das Bewußtsein von Nöten, erheischt auch die Fortdauer von Kunst, die es verbietet; kaum wo anders findet das Leiden noch seine eigene Stimme, den Trost, der es nicht sogleich verriete." Adorno, "Engagement," *"Ob nach Auschwitz noch sich leben lasse": Ein philosophisches Lesebuch*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 299-300.

CHAPTER TWO
Figuring Relation: Breath's Travels in the Work of Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs

Introduction

I turn from the critical and poetic limit-space between Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Theodor W. Adorno to consider the literary kinship that emerges in reading the correspondence between Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs as well as the intertextual resonances we discover in their poetry. In doing so, DuPlessis' reflections on the importance of correspondence for an understanding of poetics resound. Introducing *The Selected Letters of George Oppen*, her friend and mentor, she describes "[t]he controlled dialogue which letters provide—a forum for hearing oneself, as well as for conversation with others."[1] Indeed, in this doubling of voice and ear, which allows each person to hear both their own words and those of their interlocutor, the letter-writer is kin to the poet. In Susan Stewart's depiction, too, the poem depends upon such a dual framework of speaker and listener, which highlights the transition between *and* simultaneity of the private and the public: "First-person expression in lyric is related existentially to the context of the poem as a whole; it is the poem that makes first-person expression emerge in its individuality as it engages the reader in the eidetic task of the appearance of the 'you.' The doubled 'I' (authorial intention, the expression of first-person voice in the text) encounters a doubled 'you' (the reader's intention toward reception, the implied addressee in the text)."[2] Voice, figure, and form intertwine: as readers, we are drawn into the creation of the text's voice, even as we remain outside of its boundaries, awaiting its address.

In fact, one might assume that one of the greatest generic differences between the letter and the poem lies in their disparate frameworks of circulation and their intended audiences: If the letter is considered a private conversation between two individuals (perhaps including greetings from or to a third party, but ultimately an intimate text), then the poem is traditionally assumed to be a public work, one in which any intimations of solitude or intimacy are taken as rhetorical or figurative trope (as, for instance, in John Stuart Mill's paradigm of poetry as language "overheard").[3] Reading the affinities of these genres allows us to complicate such assumptions, particularly as we consider the correspondence between two poets: what do we make of letters by individuals who had reason to imagine that their exchanges might become accessible to a wider public at some point?[4] How do we read unpublished poems included as part of the correspondence and in the context of the letter's personal address? And what do we make of instances in which the writers incorporate or rework sections from the correspondence as part of the poem? In encouraging us to pose these questions, an intertextual reading of Celan's and

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[1] Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Introduction, *The Selected Letters of George Oppen*, ed. DuPlessis (Durham: Duke UP, 1990), vii.

[2] Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002), 47.

[3] See John Stuart Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties," *Autobiography and Literary Essays*, eds. John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger (London: Routledge, 1996), 348-349.

[4] Of course, it is impossible to say with certainty to what extent Celan and Sachs reflected on this possibility, but it is safe to say that by 1960, when they were most deeply in conversation, both poets were established figures, although both also felt deeply isolated from the German-language poetry scene, confronting over and over the wounding sense of rejection and misunderstanding that expressed itself in its most virulent form in Celan's struggles with the plagiarism attack launched against him by the surrealist poet Yvan Goll's widow Claire Goll and in Sachs' frequent hospitalizations, resulting from recurring fears about anti-Semitic plots against her.

Sachs' letters and poems trouble the boundary between the private and the public, the categorization of genres, and the containment of textual form.

While one might argue that in considering the relationship between speaker and recipient we must make a qualitative distinction between the letter's doubled voices, which relate to one another in life as well as in writing, and those of the poem, which seek to establish a semblance of lived relation through the medium of language, I argue that these genres, read together in the context of a poetics of survival, trouble the mutual limit-space of life and writing. If the epistolary as a mode has been read primarily in the context of narrative (particularly through the genre of the epistolary novel), I propose that it proves vital for a consideration of both correspondence and poetry to read together the ethical and aesthetic frameworks of their traveling voices, of their invocations of address and response. In doing so, letters' poetic figurations emerge in equal measure with the lived and enduring demands of poetry.

It is therefore vital to attend not only to the biographical, social, cultural, and historical contexts in which letters are composed but also to their literary construction. DuPlessis suggests that this literariness is bound up with the genre's negotiation of the threshold between private and public speech, since "[l]etters are both intimate and declarative—a curious mixture of semiprivate and semipublic utterance; letters come from need, and there is an immediacy of provocation and response to them which helps dramatize ideas and personalize social and moral trends."[5] Susan Stewart similarly maintains that the poem always both commits to and exceeds the framework of its dialogic desires:

> The poet *intends* toward another, even if the other is the poet apprehending the work in a later time and other space. Because that intention proceeds in time, the objectification of the other is also subject to transformation. Hence, in lyric poetry, especially, the presentation of face-to-face communication is always triangulated. The poet speaks to another in such a way as to make the communication intelligible to more than one person. The communication is not simply intimate: it is constitutive of the social, mutual, intersubjective ground of intimacy itself. It is the kind of thing one knows that others say when they are face-to-face.[6]

Stewart's description, unlike Mill's notion of poetry as language "overheard," posits a triangulated relation between reader, speaker, and addressee from the outset. Here, we encounter the promised gains as well as the potential ethical problems of listening to others' conversation: for if we gain our knowledge of others' relations from participating vicariously in their exchange, how do we assess our agency; how do we gauge the stakes and pressures of our engagement? What are the consequences of partaking in others' intimate exchanges, of becoming privy to what they say to one another "face-to-face," as it were, both in letters and in poetry? If we generally read a poem addressed to another without hesitation, supposing that its intimate address is simply a poetic convention, then, in reflecting on the relations between poems and letters, we come to wonder what the lived and contingent politics of this address and of our encounter with it are. Concomitantly, we may approach the letter not only to discover what it reveals about individual lives but also to explore the ways in which its voices and figures—akin to those we hear in poetry—complicate the boundary between the lived and the written, resisting our attempts to read the letter as a transparent representation of the quotidian. I deal with the

[5] DuPlessis, Introduction, *The Selected Letters of George Oppen*, vii.

[6] Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, 12-13.

productive intersections of the voices that travel between the epistolary and the poetic in order to highlight Celan and Sachs' conception of a poetics of survival as a tension between realities experienced and expressed, in which the endurance of the voice depends upon the negotiation of a liminal boundary, the threshold of existence and extinction.

I must preface my examination of their shared commitment to a poetics of survival with some comments on the particular difficulties posed by a comparative reading of their work. It is impossible for me to ignore the imbalanced attention these two authors have received: writing about Celan has become what Helmut Böttiger calls a "show-off discipline in German Studies" [*germanistische Paradedisziplin*].[7] If Celan scholarship has increased exponentially over the years, interest in Sachs' work has largely waned, although an updated and annotated edition of her writing, which recently appeared with the Suhrkamp Verlag, promises renewed attention, as does an exhibit dedicated to her life and writing, which opened in spring 2010 at the Jewish Museum in Berlin.[8] To date, Sachs has been read most often within a circumscribed framework of women's literature, Jewish writing, or writing about the Holocaust, rather than in her own right as a poet or in the mainstream of "world poetry."

Moreover, I seek to balance the prevalent readings of their relationship: Much of the criticism that deals with the two authors' writing in conjunction is preoccupied with biographical details.[9] These interpretations frequently posit an implicit hierarchy of influence and worth: critics point to Sachs' repeated formulations of a universal humanity, to her declarations of a desire for peace, and to her propagation of forgiving love as an indication of her incompatability with Celan, whom they credit with more nuanced reflections on questions of crisis, faith, and knowledge. While scholarly considerations of Sachs' work generally account for Celan's influence on her writing, the opposite is not the case: Otto Pöggeler's analysis of Celan's sense of competition with male poets does not leave much room for female poets, whom he describes primarily as friends rather than as literary voices who impact Celan's work in any profound way.[10] Similarly sobering is Barbara Wiedemann's claim in her contribution to a recent volume dedicated to Sachs, that only one of Sachs' writings – a drama – had any recognizable effect on Celan's work.[11] Michael Eskin, who claims that Sachs was one of the poets who "had a significant impact on Celan's development and self-definition as a poet," nevertheless presents her primarily as the medium for another conversation, that with Mandelshtam, to whose memory

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[7] Helmut Böttiger, *Orte Paul Celans* (Wien: Paul Zsolnay, 1996), 16, translation mine.

[8] See Nelly Sachs, *Werke: Kommentierte Ausgabe in vier Bänden*, ed. Aris Fioretos (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010) and the companion volume to the Nelly Sachs Exhibit at the Jewish Museum Berlin: Aris Fioretos, *Flucht und Verwandlung: Nelly Sachs, Schriftstellerin, Berlin / Stockholm* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010). Nevertheless, one must note that the reissuing of Sachs' work did not happen without difficulty: In "Mitteilung über ein verabschiedetes Projekt" ["Notification about a Dismissed Project"], Günter Holtz describes his arguments with Suhrkamp in 1992-1993, when they at first reluctantly agreed to publish an annotated, new edition of Sachs' works and then rescinded their agreement. Holtz, "Mitteilung über ein verabschiedetes Projekt," *Nelly Sachs: Neue Interpretationen*, eds. Michael Kessler and Jürgen Wertheimer (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1994), xxi-xxii.

[9] As two extreme examples of such an analysis of the poets' correspondence, note Jean Bollack and Peter Hamm, critics who were also friends with Celan and Sachs respectively. See Jean Bollack, "Nelly Sachs," *Dichtung wider Dichtung: Paul Celan und die Literatur*, trans. and ed. Werner Wögerbauer (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006), and Peter Hamm, *Der Wille zur Ohnmacht: über Robert Walser, Fernando Pessao, Julien Green, Nelly Sachs, Ingeborg Bachmann, Martin Walser, und andere* (München: Hanser, 1992).

[10] Otto Pöggeler, *Spur des Worts: Zur Lyrik Paul Celans* (Freiburg: K. Alber, 1986).

[11] Barbara Wiedemann, "'Schweig, / hol Atem bei dir, laß mir / die Toten': Neues zum Verhältnis zwischen Paul Celan und Nelly Sachs," *Lichtersprache aus den Rissen: Nelly Sachs – Werk und Wirkung*, ed. Ariane Huml (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008), 176.

Celan dedicates the volume *Die Niemandsrose*.[12] In nearly identical terms, Eskin dwells twice on the way in which Sachs's work helps Celan to articulate his relationship with Mandelshtam: "Sachs's voice in particular allows Celan to respond to and author Mandel'shtam from within his co-existential situation as a Holocaust survivor."[13] While I appreciate Eskin's awareness of the multi-vocal engagements of Celan's poetry and of the ways in which Sachs' voice in particular enables him to articulate a poetics of survival (as I term it), I maintain also that an assessment of the intertextual resonances *between* Sachs and Celan will illuminate their shared concerns and conversations without subsuming the voice of one as a medium for the poetic tasks of the other. An intertextual reading, which pursues tensions of similarity and difference, of dialogue and dispute, on the level of language rather than of biography, seeks to counter this tendency towards a unilateral interpretation, which would assign to either poet (but especially to Sachs) an unequivocal stance on the difficult bonds between suffering, language, and ethics.

We may trace the convergences and divergences of the two writers' poetics: after all, movement and transformation are necessary components of relation, mandating not only a bond but also difference and therefore division. Jean Bollack notes that there can be no relation without a space that removes the self from the other: "The creation of a relation is the creation of a distance."[14] Since the act of entering into relation engenders separation, the bond refuses to function as a fixed framework. The bond's irreducible gap allows us to read the space of encounter as one of argumentative negotiation, which resists the appropriation or assimilation of alterity, and the language of exchange performs these tensions: " 'To answer' assumes that one has taken a position in a face-to-face encounter, just as 'to address' implies a distinction."[15] While the language of the letter and the poem seeks attention and response, it does not guarantee understanding. Instead, in offering a potential space of encounter, these genres both necessitate and challenge their limits. Jacques Derrida avows the vital link between the movements of confluence and demarcation by emphasizing their linguistic resonance: "If we are to approach [*aborder*] a text, it must have an edge [*un bord*]."[16] Recognizing the distance inherent in any bond is a critical move, because its irreducible tension refuses the image of relation as enclosure or security, which would figure agency as the ability to minimize separation rather than maintaining or even creating it. Thus, I do not claim for the two poets an exclusive mutual understanding, as, for instance, Ehrhard Bahr would have it when he finds that "[i]t is a remarkable circumstance in the history of the modern German lyric to see these two German poets of the Holocaust united and strengthened in a dialogue that allowed them for a decade to write and so to survive."[17]

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[12] Michael Eskin, *Ethics and Dialogue in the Works of Levinas, Bakhtin, Mandel'shtam, and Celan* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 248.

[13] Eskin 253. On the following page, Eskin writes: "With the help of Sachs's voice, Celan authors Mandel'shtam and his text from within his unique post-Holocaustian co-existential situation" (254).

[14] In French: "La mise en relation est une mise à distance." Jean Bollack, *L'écrit: une poétique dans l'oeuvre de Celan* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003), 6, translation mine.

[15] In French: " 'Répondre' suppose que l'on ait pris une position dans une face-à-face, comme 's'adresser' implique une distinction." Bollack, *L'écrit*, 15.

[16] Jacques Derrida, "Living On," trans. James Hulbert, *Deconstruction and Criticism*, Harold Bloom et al. (London: Continuum, 2004 [1979]), 69. In French: "Pour aborder un texte, il faudrait que celui-ci eût un bord." Derrida, "Survivre," *Parages* (Paris: Galilée, 2003 [1986]), 118.

[17] In German: "Es ist ein bemerkenswerter Umstand in der Geschichte der modernen deutschen Lyrik, diese beiden deutschen Dichter des Holokaust in einem Dialog vereint und gestärkt zu sehen, der ihnen das Schreiben und damit

I, too, want to interrogate the literary kinship between Celan and Sachs, in which writing and survival are bound up with one another. Yet I maintain that it is imperative to examine the differences that underwrite the relation between experience and expression and to probe the disagreements as well as the unity that characterizes the writers' endeavors. Therefore, I investigate their intertextual resonances, which enact such shifting relations between texts, in the limit-spaces of life, writing, and discourse. Rosmarie Waldrop remarks that the notion of interaction is more fruitful than that of influence: "Whether we are conscious or not, we always write on top of a palimpsest. This is not a question of linear 'influence' and not just of tradition, but of writing as a multiple dialog with a whole web of previous and concurrent texts, with tradition, the culture and language we breathe and move in, and that conditions us even while we help to construct it."[18] Marcel Beyer reflects that intertextual exchange need not be intentional, that it may, in fact, arise in the reading rather than the writing process: "[S]ometimes it seems to me that texts also respond to one another, independently of their authors' knowledge or opinion of each other, whether each knew the other's work or not. While reading I then have the impression of listening to a conversation of two works of different origins."[19]

Julia Kristeva's elaboration of intertextuality speaks to the problem of the intentionality of intertextual exchange. In the essay "Revolution in Poetic Language," she distances herself from those who equate the study of intertextuality with an investigation of the ways in which texts rework their predecessors:

> The term *intertextuality* denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign-system(s) into another; but since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of 'study of sources,' we prefer the term *transposition* because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of the thetic – of enunciative and denotative positionality. If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an intertextuality), one then understands that its 'place' of enunciation and its denoted 'object' are never single, complete and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated.[20]

While Kristeva's analysis of poetic language focuses on the ways in which the reconfigurations performed by intertextual forces occur on the semiotic level, I find her insistence on the displacement of intersubjectively linked positions of articulation and the fragmented polyphony of voices particularly compelling.[21] I propose that this conceptualization may help to articulate

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das Überleben für eine Dekade ermöglichte." Ehrhard Bahr, *Nelly Sachs* (Munich: C.H. Beck-edition text + kritik, 1980), 56-57, translation mine.

[18] Rosmarie Waldrop, *Dissonance (if you are interested)*, (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2005), 204. Michael Davidson's notion of the "palimtext," which Waldrop references, proves useful to theorizing the intertextual as a corporeal and spatial—even archaeological—form. See Davidson's *Ghostlier Demarcations: Modern Poetry and the Material Word* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997).

[19] In German: "[M]itunter kommt es mir so vor, als antworteten auch Texte aufeinander, ganz unabhängig davon, was ihre Autoren voneinander wußten oder hielten, ob nun der eine das Werk des anderen gekannt hat oder nicht. Ich habe dann beim Lesen den Eindruck, einem Gespräch zwischen den Arbeiten unterschiedlicher Herkunft zuzuhören." Beyer, "Das sowjetische Apartment," *Nonfiction*, (Köln: DuMont, 2003), 188, translation mine.

[20] Julia Kristeva, "Revolution and Poetic Language," *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), 111.

[21] I disagree, therefore, with Jürgen Lehmann's reluctance to consider Celan's intertextuality, a reluctance he bases upon the claim that the emphasis on subjective voice in Celan's poetry is fundamentally incompatible with the

the entanglement of body and writing—the precarious and persistent ways in which displaced, injured, and fragmented voices continue to circulate—in Celan and Sachs' intertextual poetics of survival.

If Kristeva is the critic generally credited with establishing the term "intertextuality," various others have offered astute accounts of the ways in which her use of it vacillates between claims about the intertextual as a pervasive, inescapable force and as a specific, changeable instance of dialogues between particular texts.[22] I agree with Jonathan Culler's conclusion that if the boundaries of what constitutes the intertextual realm may be hard to define, we nonetheless have much to gain from engaging the concept:

> Theories of intertextuality set before us perspectives of unmasterable series, lost origins, endless horizons; and, as I have been suggesting, in order to work with the concept we focus it—but that focusing may always, to some degree, undermine the general concept of intertextuality in whose name we are working. But this is no reason to abandon the project. It suggests, rather, the need for multiple strategies, for different focuses and restrictions, even though one cannot have any confidence that these could eventually contribute to a grand synthesis.[23]

I would argue, moreover, that we may *benefit* from recognizing that the intertextual is a necessarily contingent realm, which refuses the very project of a "grand synthesis," because it highlights the inherent, changing multiplicity of conversations—linguistic, textual, and discursive, but also historical, cultural, and (trans-)national—in which every work is engaged. To focus on one strand of these multiple conversations is not to ignore the importance of the others. It is to attend to a singular set of concerns, to voices that cross and re-cross corporeal and textual boundaries. I therefore seek to illuminate the ways in which the displaced, fractured, yet precariously enduring voices of Celan's and Sachs' writing traverse these various limit-spaces,

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elimination of the subject that Kristeva (and, in Lehmann's view, all of post-structuralism and deconstruction) avow: "The term [intertextual structure] is used here, because it has been introduced, for the phenomenon of appropriating and reworking foreign texts, in Celan scholarship as well. The post-structuralist and deconstructive approaches that determine it are not, however, applicable to Celan's poetry, since he emphasizes so strongly the aspect of creatureliness, the ways in which his poetry is bound to the experience of the I. Openness and movement as central categories for the understanding of the *Niemandsrose* are here in no way tied to an elimination of the subject." In German: "Der Begriff [intertextuelle Struktur] wird hier verwendet, weil er für das Phänomen der Aneignung und Verarbeitung fremder Texte auch in der Celan-Forschung eingeführt ist. Die ihn bedingenden poststrukturalistischen und dekonstruktivistischen Ansätze sind jedoch auf Celans Dichtung nicht anwendbar, dazu betont er zu sehr den Aspekt der Kreatürlichkeit, die Bindung seiner Lyrik an die Erfahrungen des Ich. Offenheit und Bewegtheit als für das Verständnis der *Niemandsrose* zentrale Kategorien sind hier keineswegs an eine Eliminierung des Subjekts gebunden." Jürgen Lehmann, "'Gegenwort' und 'Daseinsentwurf': Paul Celans *Die Niemandsrose*: Eine Einführung," *Kommentar zu Paul Celans "Die Niemandsrose,"* ed. Lehmann (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1997), 27n51, translation mine.

[22] See Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001 [1981]), 105-107, and Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996. If we consider an intertextual approach together with the politics of canon formation, it may appear that canonicity is an equally contingent (rather than fixed) structure. Thus, Robert Alter maintains, "A canon is above all a transhistorical textual community. Knowledge of the received texts and recourse to them constitute the community, but the texts do not have a single, authoritative meaning, however much the established spokesmen for the canon at any given moment may claim that is the case." Alter, *Canon and Creativity: Modern Writing and the Authority of Scripture* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2000), 5.

[23] Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 111.

both maintaining and bridging the distance between them, as I engage their intertextual conversations as well as the details of their individual poetics.

By questioning what is internal and what is external to form and framework and by negotiating the boundaries of the individual work and the defined genre, intertextual movement (that is, not only the voices layered *within* a text but also the arena of travel *between* them) foregrounds the importance of topography as a way of imagining the changing structures of lived and figured relation. Indeed, as Denise Riley points out, the pervasive spatial metaphoricity of our language also affects systems of evaluation. In our desire to align physical and critical depth perceptions, the nexus of literality and figurality appears, even as the two refuse to be collapsed:

> It is a curious convention that physical depth should be the measure for 'profundity' in its sense of sagacity and that a literal 'superficiality', that belonging to the surface, should be synonymous with shallowness of feeling or judgement. This convention fascinates, since it's the vanishing point of what is to count as metaphor; there is an enticing blur where the metaphorical slips, almost indistinguishably, into the literal, seeming to dissolve any distinction between them. Examples swarm. Some figurative term referring to the passage from inner to outer is often used to characterize self-identification.[24]

What are the stakes of such passages, which navigate the boundaries between internal and external world at the intersection of the literal and figurative, alluring and dangerous at once?

A poetics of survival dwells upon the passage of life into death, doubting the notion that this movement occurs unilaterally and signals irrevocable finality. In *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, George Lakoff and Mark Turner claim that as readers of poetry, we understand spatial metaphors of time automatically, because they are engrained in our conception of events, whose experience would otherwise exceed our cognitive grasp. Because "metaphor resides in thought, not just in words," we cannot imagine the development of life and death's arrival without thinking about time as a spatial unfolding and progress, for example through conceptual frameworks such as "life is a journey," "death is departure," and "death is going to a final destination."[25] However, Sachs and Celan both utilize and problematize the conventional metaphorical links that define our spatiotemporal understanding of life and death, since the experience of survival calls the structure of the relationship between existence and demise into question.[26]

Conventional metaphorical frames of reference seem to offer not only a way of imagining the development of life and death's finality but also an explanation and justification of this process as necessary and appropriate. Thus, Lakoff and Turner claim that "[o]ne of our major ways of conceiving of ethical behavior is an elaboration of the life-as-a-journey metaphor: there are paths of righteousness and evil ways."[27] For Sachs and Celan, the image of the path forges a

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[24] Denise Riley, *The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), 45.

[25] George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989), 2, 3, 14.

[26] As I discussed at length in the Introduction, survival troubles the spatiotemporal relation of life and death both experientially and linguistically, since the very term already marks the fact that the condition of survival is necessarily bound to life as a form of excess. In the context of living through catastrophe, this surplus is not interpreted as a triumphant return to life but as a hovering in the limit-space that conjoins life and death, implicating each in the other.

[27] Lakoff and Turner 10.

link between the condition of survival, which confounds the figured "journey" of life into death, and the need to articulate that condition through the traveling voice. Maintaining the entanglement of in- and exhalation as material and poetic reality, the poets refuse a conception of metaphor as the juxtaposition of separate domains. Instead, they insist that life and language must sustain each other's pressures, in order to bear the responsibilities of an existence and a poetics of survival. In their writing, such figures of encounter—especially the figures of "meridian" and "breath"—negotiate the perilous formation of the surviving subject *and* the crossing of its individual boundaries, as they explore the precarious temporality and topography that joins the material and the textual in the poem's movement. In so doing, these figures challenge the legitimacy of universalizing claims to authority, mastery, and knowledge, for they demonstrate the impossibility of constructing and containing voices within established bounds of life or writing.

Tracing the Figures of Correspondence

The literary kinship between Celan and Sachs provides sustenance but also engenders debate, as their exchange in letters about the demands and pressures of a poetics of survival indicates. Marking the blurring of the physical and the textual realm, letters extend their authors' bodies and voices. As genre, correspondence offers the possibility of an intersubjective space, which navigates various times and places to highlight both their continuity and their incommensurability. The letter's address and response differs from a face-to-face dialogue in the temporal delays occasioned by its travels. Furthermore, each writer may shape a response that engages some questions and keeps silent in the face of others, without the risk of an immediate demand to explain or justify reactions, and such openings can become avenues of circumvention or even escape from the pressures of intimate dialogue. The figures of author and reader both double and merge, since each person is at once writing letters and receiving those of the other. Therefore, the letter must navigate the positions of author and reader even within a single letter, blurring distinctions between activity and passivity, production and consumption.

In an early letter to Celan, Sachs presents a poetics of survival as the limit of transformation, positioning it at the potential intersection of birth and death, inspiration and expiration:

> Es gibt und gab und ist mit jedem Atemzug in mir der Glaube an die Durchschmerzung, an die Durchseelung des Staubes als an eine Tätigkeit wozu wir angetreten. Ich glaube an ein unsichtbares Universum darin wir unser dunkel Vollbrachtes einzeichnen. Ich spüre die Energie des Lichtes die den Stein in Musik aufbrechen läßt, und ich leide an der Pfeilspitze der Sehnsucht die uns von Anbeginn zu Tode trifft und die uns stößt, außerhalb zu suchen, dort wo die Unsicherheit zu spülen beginnt. Vom eignen Volk kam mir die chassidische Mystik zu Hilfe, die eng im Zusammenhang mit aller Mystik sich ihren Wohnort weit fort von allen Dogmen und Institutionen immer aufs neue in Geburtswehen schaffen muß.[28]
>
> [With every breath, there exists and was and is in me a belief in the through-paining, the through-spiriting of dust, as an activity which we have assumed. I believe in an invisible universe, in which we mark the trace of what we have darkly accomplished. I feel the

[28] Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Barbara Wiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 13.

> energy of the light that lets the stone burst open into music, and I suffer from the arrow's tip of longing, which scores us to death from the beginning, and which prods us to search outside, where insecurity begins to flow. I was aided by my own people's Hassidic mysticism, which, closely related to other mysticism, must create its living-place far from all dogmas and institutions, ever anew in labor pangs.][29]

At first glance, the rhetoric—in particular the repeated assertion of belief—indicates a stable authorial position, a commitment to the author's vocation. However, the passage belies this notion by affirming nothing more than the fluidity (and thus the constant imperilment) of authority. Propelled beyond certainty, poetry is, for Sachs, a necessity that navigates the boundaries of individual existence through in- and exhalation. The quasi-divine vocation to imbue dust with feeling collapses intertextually the Genesis stories of God creating the human by breathing life into dust and promising to integrate the dead in the perpetual cycle: "For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."[30] The neologisms *Durchschmerzung* and *Durchseelung* emphasize that poetry, like suffering, always remains a process, since the preposition "durch" as prefix evokes the transitory nature of passage as well as the finality of saturation. Indeed, the nouns themselves present the tension between action and condition. The linguistic root relation in Biblical Hebrew between *neshima* (breath) and *neshama* (soul) reinforces that language here is not metaphorically embodied. Indeed, this relation underwrites Sachs' Biblical and mystical allusions, which conjoin the lived and the written through the movement of breath. Thus, the tension between body and language exposes the limits of the expressible dimension of suffering at the same time as it promises dedication to this exploration as the poem's very task.

The temporal and spatial coordinates from which the poet speaks manifest this tension: The claim of constancy, of a continuous and unbroken past, present, and future is at the same time the vulnerable repetition of breath, life-affirming even while in danger of extinction. Linking poetry with an elemental corporeality, Sachs describes this vocation as ongoing but always in need of renewal. The synthesizing, impersonal depiction of a sequential temporality (*Es gibt und gab*) moves into an intimate manifestation of her belief in writing as a necessity that navigates the boundaries of her existence through in- and exhalation (*und ist mit jedem Atemzug in mir der Glaube*).

The difficulty of delineating a space for the poem suggests that the relation between the poet and the work is, similarly, not fixed. In Sachs' passage, the ambiguous "we" – referring to author and interlocutor, poets, survivors, humankind? – observes a quasi-divine vocation, to imbue dust with feeling. Yet the problem of agency extends beyond a consideration of the poet's rights and duties or the poet's relationship to the work, asking us also to appraise his or her bonds with the world. Certainly, Sachs' vacillation between the singular and the plural first-person voice takes on added significance in the context of her letter's address: What is Celan's role in the constitution of this voice, and how does she envision his reaction to her poetics? Does she attempt to construct a common poetics for them, a possibility for a shared vision and thus a

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[29] Translation mine; I chose not to cite this portion from the published English translation of the correspondence, which I use in later parts of this chapter, because I felt that in this instance, the translation diverted too strongly from the original and did not render several of the subtleties I discuss in my analysis. See also Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs, *Correspondence*, trans. Christopher Clark (Riverdale-on-Hudson, NY: The Sheep Meadow Press, 1995), 5-6.

[30] See Genesis 2:7, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*, trans. Robert Alter (New York: Norton, 2004): "[T]hen the LORD God fashioned the human, humus from the soil, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living creature."

bond that operates precisely through the isolation of the survivor's existence emerging from destruction? Celan engages this potential bond by echoing her terms in the empathetic and impassioned response he sends her: "Viel Herzraum ist verschüttet worden, ja, aber das Erbe der Einsamkeit, von dem Sie sprechen: es wird, weil es Ihre Worte gibt, angetreten, da und dort, im Nächtigen. Falsche Sterne überfliegen uns – gewiß; aber das Staubkorn, durchschmerzt von Ihrer Stimme, beschreibt die unendliche Bahn." ["Much heart-space has been spilled, yes, but the inheritance of loneliness, of which you speak: because your words exist, it will be assumed, here and there, in what is nightly. False stars fly over us – certainly; but the kernel of dust, pained through by your voice, traces the eternal route."][31]

The spilling of heart-space strikes us as so strange *and* so hauntingly familiar because it echoes an idiomatic phrase: "Herz*blut* verschütten" or "Herz*blut* vergießen" (to spill heartblood). In this idiom, absolute dedication to a task manifests itself not as effortless authority but as a bodily wound. Through the allusion to the idiom of spilled heart-*blood*, the image of spilled heart-*space* outlines the fragmented body as a potential void that nevertheless sustains hurt, establishing the absent or empty space as a lived (and tenuous) reality.[32] The contrast between spilled heart-space and the continuing travel of the *Staubkorn* highlights the tension between the amorphous absence of the dead and the insistence on individual commemoration. For the kernel of dust juxtaposes Biblical and Kabbalistic tales of creation with the Nazi genocide's obliteration of human lives. Origin and remains coincide, together becoming at once a material and a textual expression of memory, tracing a fragile yet perpetual route that extends beyond the limits of the living and, indeed, the livable.[33] Celan modifies Sachs' notion that it is their task to suffuse the dust of the Shoah's victims with pain—a notion that centers the poet as quasi-divine agent—suggesting instead that language itself is active and primary: "Das Staubkorn, durchschmerzt von Ihrer Stimme,beschreibt die unendliche Bahn" ["The kernel of dust, pained through by your voice, traces the eternal route."] Although the poet is an integral medium of the work's conception (in particular of its bodily sensitivity), language moves to speak beyond a creator. Celan's choice of the word *beschreiben* highlights this duality, by referring both to language's expressive capacity *and* to its journey.

For both Celan and Sachs, the difficulty of producing a substantive language of survival, from the position of having out- or indeed "overlived" pervasive annihilation, is bound up with the question of poetry's viability, in aesthetic as well as ethical terms.[34] Two of the ideas central to Sachs' poetic ethos—the notion of a poetry that suffuses pain into the remains of the dead, and the poet's commitment to a necessary vocation in accepting this painful task—recur in Celan's description. However, while he commends Sachs' ethical charge, he nevertheless distinguishes between her figure and her words, differentiating those words in turn from the task of commemoration: Although he portrays her speech (the speech of her poetry or of her poetic credo, or both?) as the causal agent for the possibility of accepting the charge of

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[31] Celan and Sachs, *Briefwechsel*, 14-15, translation mine.

[32] In an essay on Celan, Maurice Blanchot suggests a tension that resonates with the intertextual conversation I describe here: "It is as if the void were less a lack than a saturation, a void saturated with void." Blanchot, "The Last One to Speak," trans. Joseph Simas, *Translating Tradition: Paul Celan in France*, ed. Benjamin Hollander, (San Francisco: ACTS, 1988), 228.

[33] For an illuminating investigation of this relationship between source and remnant, see also Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999).

[34] My use of the term "overliving" refers also to Emily R. Wilson's analysis of overliving as the paradoxical experience of an existence that is both excessive and untimely. See Wilson, *Mocked by Death: Tragic Overliving from Sophocles to Milton* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004), 2.

commemoration, he also distinguishes individual will from that act of acceptance, whose occurrence he describes in passive, anonymous terms: "Das Erbe […] wird, weil es Ihre Worte gibt, angetreten, da und dort, im Nächtigen." ["The inheritance […]: because your words exist, it will be assumed, here and there, in what is nightly."] He further qualifies this passivity by claiming that the act of assuming responsibility for a task of commemoration is not total; in fact, it is a sporadic manifestation and, through the deictic terms "da" and "dort," localized and shifting at once. In this way, Celan marks an inevitable gap between the survivor and the poetics of survival: The poet must obey a creative charge, but the act of creating poetry that emerges from destruction also signals the text's accountability. Thus, the work exceeds the poet's grasp, taking on a life of its own.[35]

In its evocation of an endlessly traversable cosmic path, the dust kernel's journey anticipates the meridian, which figures the ethical urgency of communication as a navigation of temporal and topographic limits. In late October of 1959, Celan sends Sachs a copy of Günter Blöcker's review of the poetry-volume *Sprachgitter*, a review in which Blöcker claims, "Celan hat der deutschen Sprache gegenüber eine größere Freiheit als die meisten seiner dichtenden Kollegen. Das mag an seiner Herkunft liegen. Der Kommunikationscharakter der Sprache hemmt und belastet ihn weniger als andere. Freilich wird er gerade dadurch oftmals verführt, im Leeren zu agieren." ["Celan handles the German language with greater freedom than most of his fellow poets. That may be because of his background. The communicative character of the language limits and weighs him down less than it does others. Though it must be said that this means he often succumbs to the temptation to operate in a void."][36] Celan adds the following angry postscript: "Und niemand antwortet diesen Burschen! Auch das – das Antworten – bleibt dem Juden überlassen. Die anderen schreiben Bücher und Gedichte ‚darüber'..." ["And no one answers these fellows! Even that – answering – is left to the Jew. The others write books and poems 'about it'…"].[37] His reaction to Blöcker's review – his demand for responses rather than commentaries on such accusations – testifies to the particular hurt caused by the presumption that the German language's communicative nature does not "inhibit" or "bear upon" him. Blöcker's cynical reference to Celan's *Freiheit gegenüber der deutschen Sprache* suggests not

[35] Consider, for instance, the following lines, which Celan addresses to Hans Bender in response to the latter's request for a contribution to the poetry anthology *Mein Gedicht ist mein Messer* [*My Poem is my Knife*]: "Ich erinnere mich, daß ich Ihnen seinerzeit sagte, der Dichter werde, sobald das Gedicht wirklich *da* sei, aus seiner ursprünglichen Mitwisserschaft wieder entlassen. Ich würde diese Ansicht wohl heute anders formulieren bzw. sie zu differenzieren versuchen; aber grundsätzlich bin ich noch immer dieser – alten – Ansicht." Celan, *Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden: Dritter Band*, ed. Beda Allemann and Stefan Reichert (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 177. In English: "I remember telling you that once the poem is really *there*, the poet is dismissed, is no longer privy. Today, I suppose I would formulate it differently, with more nuances, but in principle I still hold this – old – view." The relevant subtlety, lost in translation, is the ambivalence of the phrase "ursprüngliche Mitwisserschaft," which Rosmarie Waldrop translates as "no longer privy," but which fails to convey in English the sense of the poet's culpability. A "Mitwisser," someone who shares in knowledge, may also be an "accomplice" or "accessory" to a crime. Thus, the notion of "Mitwisserschaft" evokes knowledge as a responsibility that takes the form of complicity, destabilizing the position and status of the poet. Once the poem has come into being, the poet is "released" from this position of knowledge, as the written now moves beyond or surpasses the individual figure's understanding. Celan, *Collected Prose*, trans. Rosmarie Waldrop (Riverdale-on-Hudson, NY: The Sheep Meadow Press, 1986), 25.

[36] Celan and Sachs, *Briefwechsel*, 119n18,1, and *Correspondence*, 79n43. Barbara Wiedemann and Bertrand Badiou note that despite the many letters Celan sent out about this hurtful review, he received very few immediate responses. See Paul Celan, *Mikrolithen sinds, Steinchen: Die Prosa aus dem Nachlaß*, ed. Wiedemann and Badiou (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), 363.

[37] See Celan and Sachs, *Briefwechsel*, 24, and Celan and Sachs, *Correspondence*, 14.

agency but a refusal of the bonds of accountability in and to language, which he claims exist only through a language's national grounding, and so he even positions Celan as linguistically opposed to the German language (*gegenüber*). Compounding this wound is Blöcker's insinuation that the pressures and promises of communication reside necessarily in a "national" German language, one which Celan cannot "possess" or even "access" due to his foreign roots or origins. He leaves open whether by *seine Herkunft* he wants to designate Celan's foreignness as a Jew, a poet from multilingual Bukowina, or a poet who writes in German in France. Celan's outrage that the impossible response to such claims is left to "the Jew" exposes Blöcker's linguistic erasure of singular existence, replaced with a stereotypically representative image. For Blöcker implies that the unnamed "Jew" inhabits only a language-void in German, as though already and still annihilated from the nation.[38] Such claims intensify the anguish of the survivor-poet, who is no longer able to speak in a grounded, "territorial" language or to take for granted the significance of localized writing.

Sachs' response to Celan's letter is immediate: she writes, „Ihr Brief traf mein Herz. [...] Lieber Paul Celan wir wollen uns weiter einander die Wahrheit hinüberreichen. Zwischen Paris und Stockholm läuft der Meridian des Schmerzes und des Trostes." ["Your letter struck my heart. Dear Paul Celan let us keep reaching across to each other with the truth. Between Paris and Stockholm runs the meridian of pain and comfort."][39] In the corporeal act of passing back and forth a truth shared in isolation across vast distances, the imagined geography of the meridian enacts the ways in which language is bound up with endurance: it tries to mediate the various, shifting subject-positions of suffering through the travel of voices, to question "rootedness" while insisting upon the materiality of speech.

In the Meridian Speech, Celan's talk on the occasion of receiving the Georg-Büchner Prize in 1960, the figure of the meridian obscures the division between path and destination, carrying communication beyond the parameters of a circumscribed realm:

> Meine Damen und Herren, ich finde etwas, das mich auch ein wenig darüber hinwegtröstet, in Ihrer Gegenwart diesen unmöglichen Weg, diesen Weg des Unmöglichen gegangen zu sein.
> Ich finde das Verbindende und wie das Gedicht zur Begegnung Führende.
> Ich finde etwas – wie die Sprache – Immaterielles, aber Irdisches, Terrestrisches, etwas Kreisförmiges, über die beiden Pole in sich selbst Zurückkehrendes und dabei – heitererweise – sogar die Tropen Durchkreuzendes –: ich finde ... einen *Meridian*.

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[38] Marcel Beyer identifies an inverse movement in contemporary German readers' reations to Celan's poetry, which leads, however, to the same outcome: "Es gibt unter nicht-jüdischen Deutschen eine merkwürdige Tendenz, sich in ihrem Deutschsein trösten zu lassen, indem sie zur Kenntnis nehmen, daß auch Juden Deutsch sprechen. Tröstlicher noch, wenn jemand wie Paul Celan Gedichte auf Deutsch schreibt. Dahinter steckt aber doch eine erschreckende Vorstellung von Sprachbesitz: Man habe, als deutscher Nicht-Jude, durch die Jahrhunderte gewissermaßen die deutschsprachigen Juden an der eigenen Sprache teilhaben lassen, man habe ihnen erlaubt, die Sprache der Deutschen zu sprechen" ["Among non-Jewish Germans, there exists a strange tendency to let oneself be comforted for being German by remarking that Jews, too, speak German. It's even more comforting when someone like Paul Celan writes poems in German. But this hides a frightening conception of language-possession: that as a German non-Jew, one has in a way let Jews partake of one's own language through the centuries, one has allowed them to speak the language of Germans."] Marcel Beyer, "Landkarten, Sprachigkeit, Paul Celan," *Nonfiction* (Köln: DuMont, 2003), 212-213, translation mine.

[39] Celan and Sachs, *Briefwechsel*, 25, and Celan and Sachs, *Correspondence*, 14, translation modified.

> Ladies and gentlemen, I find something that also consoles me a bit for having gone this impossible way, this way of impossibility, in your presence.
> I find that which connects and, like the poem, leads to encounter.
> I find something as immaterial as language, yet earthly, terrestrial, something circular, returning across the two poles to itself and so – blithely – even crossing through the tropics –: I find ... a *meridian*."[40]

Refusing any single mapping, the meridian's "circular line" transforms self- and otherness through encounter, but also returns each to itself. Celan's wordplay on *die Tropen* is once again lost in translation: for *die Tropen* are both the earthly tropics and the poetic tropes, the fusion, in other words, of material and textual figure and form. Moreover, the meridian—like the poem, like language—stands in uneasy relation to these tropics/tropes. It both passes through and rejects them, since the geographical trajectory of the meridian is also the line that crosses out writing no longer deemed necessary or appropriate. Indeed, if the meridian enacts this movement, then it upholds the ambiguity of such dual meaning—of language's transformative *and* obliterating journeys—as constitutive of any material and textual relation that might "lead to encounter."

Many critics, Marcel Beyer and Emmanuel Levinas among them, have offered powerful accounts of the conception of language in the Meridian-speech as a necessarily multi-lingual, multi-vocal, even contrapuntal search for expression.[41] I want to add the particularity of Celan's conversation with Sachs as indispensable to recognizing how their poetics of survival voices a tenuous kinship, desired and ephemeral at once. The figure of breath translates the meridian's cosmic route of potential relation into a corporeal navigation of the threshold between individual and world. Celan's and Sachs' preoccupation with breath responds once more both to mythical tales of creation and to the suffocation of victims murdered during the Shoah, fusing conception and destruction in a memorializing language that does not posit redemptive value in art. Answering Celan's request to send him unpublished poems for inclusion in a journal issue, Sachs comments, "Aufzeichnungen und Gedichte aus meiner Untergangszeit liegen da versteckt, nur Mittel den Atem vor dem Ersticken zu retten. So kamen Ihre lieben, zarten Worte und wurden Anlaß einiges hervorzusuchen, abzuschreiben und es hier anbei zu legen." ["There are notes and poems from my time of doom hidden there, only means of saving breath from suffocation. And then your dear, tender words came and became reason to seek things out, write them down and

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[40] Paul Celan, *Der Meridian: Endfassung, Vorstufen, Materialien (Tübinger Ausgabe)*, ed. Bernhard Böschenstein and Heino Schmull (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), 12, translation mine. (See also Celan, *Collected Prose*, 54-55, for Waldrop's translation.)

[41] On the basis of the multi-vocality in the Meridian Speech, Beyer describes what he terms Celan's "lingualism:" "Der Reim. Die verschiedenen Sprachen. Geschriebene und gesprochene Sprache. Der Ton, der Sprechgestus. Nicht als Substanzen, sondern als Wechselverhältnisse, zwischen Mündlich- und Schriftlichkeit, Fremd-, Eigen-, Ein-, Zwei- und Mehrsprachigkeit: Das nenne ich Sprachigkeit" ["The rhyme. The different languages. Written and spoken language. The tone, the speech-gesture. Not as substance, but as relations of exchange, between orality and literariness, other-, own-, one-, two- and multilingualism: This is what I call lingualism."] Beyer, "Landkarten," 199, translation mine. The contrapuntal quality of the Meridian Speech serves, in Levinas' estimation, to complicate the understanding of language as dialogic communication: "An elliptic, allusive text, constantly interrupting itself in order to let through, in the interruptions, his other voice, as if two or more discourses were on top of one other, with a strange coherence, not that of a dialogue, but woven in a counterpoint that constitutes—despite their immediate melodic unity—the texture of his poems." Emmanuel Levinas, "Paul Celan: From Being to the Other," *Proper Names*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996), 41.

enclose them with this letter."][42] This depiction of poetry's necessity inverts the usual perception of its origins: Rather than emerging from the poet's inspiration, it becomes the ground for and sole possibility of refusing the expiration of the body.[43]

Sachs' decision to make such writing public occurs only in the context of her correspondence with Celan, as the response to his demand. Poetry becomes subject to the very breath that makes it possible, navigating the threshold of lived and written existence on the verge of extinction. And so Sachs describes, in another letter, how Celan's poems sustain her: "Ihr Werk atme ich ein wenn ich mich abends zu Ruhe begebe. Es liegt neben mir auf dem Tisch und wenn die Nacht zu schwer ist um zu überstehn, wird die Lampe entzündet und ich lese wieder." ["I breathe in your work when I go to rest in the evening. It lies beside me on the table and when the night is too hard to bear, the lamp is lit and I read again."][44] Her use of the passive voice is striking, for in leaving ambiguous who lights the lamp, she suggests that its illumination occurs in the quasi-mystical space between the insomniac's need and poetry's force. As a form of breath, the poem crosses the boundaries of the individual's existence: passing the threshold between corporeal presence and extinction, it transforms both the desire for sleep and the threat of death.

At the limit of endurance, breath mutually maintains body and language. Its movement at these borders allows for the hope of encounter and exchange with another. In the Meridian-speech, Celan directs his listeners away from talk about art, positioning an inassimilable figure on the margin, as the co-creator of a different conversation, an interlocutor who effaces the audience:

> Aber es gibt, wenn von der Kunst die Rede ist, auch immer wieder jemand, der zugegen ist und … nicht richtig hinhört.
> Genauer: jemand, der hört und lauscht und schaut … und dann nicht weiß, wovon die Rede war. Der aber den Sprechenden hört, der ihn 'sprechen sieht', der Sprache wahrgenommen hat und Gestalt, und zugleich auch – wer vermöchte hier, im Bereich dieser Dichtung, daran zu zweifeln? –, und zugleich auch Atem, das heißt Richtung und Schicksal.
>
> But when there is talk of art, there is also often someone who is present and … does not really listen.
> More precisely: someone who hears and listens and watches … and then doesn't know what the talking was about. But who hears the speaker, who 'sees him speaking', who perceives language and shape, and at the same time also – who can doubt it, in the realm of this poetry? – and at the same time also breath, that is, direction and destiny.[45]

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[42] Celan and Sachs, *Briefwechsel*, 10-11, and Celan and Sachs, *Correspondence*, 4, translation modified.

[43] Resonating with Sachs' claim that writing serves as a means of preventing suffocation, Ruth Dinesen asserts that breath—as constant possibility of both inspiration and expiration—structures the topography of Sachs' life and work: "The biography of Nelly Sachs leads repeatedly to the boundary of death. As a poet she sought this border position and gleaned her poems each time from this closeness to death. These poems functioned for her simultaneously as breathing exercises at the threshold of destruction, and as the search for the possibility for life after the loss of identity." Dinesen, "The Search for Identity: Nelly Sachs's Jewishness," *Jewish Writers, German Literature: The Uneasy Examples of Nelly Sachs and Walter Benjamin*, ed. Timothy Bahti and Marilyn Fries (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1995), 24.

[44] Celan and Sachs, *Briefwechsel*, 26-27, and Celan and Sachs, *Correspondence*, 15, translation modified.

[45] Celan, *Der Meridian*, 3, and Celan, *Collected Prose*, 39, translation modified.

The movement of breath manifests an ethical form of speaking *and* of listening. *Wahrnehmung* – of both language (*Sprache*) and the confluence of poetic and bodily form (*Gestalt*) – implies an act of attention, commitment, even empathy.[46] Furthermore, in its components *wahr-nehmen*, truth seems a contingent possibility, subject to corporeal exchange, rather than a universally accessible reality. In this way, it reminds us of Sachs' intimation of the meridian as a route along which truth may be passed back and forth (*wir wollen uns weiter einander die Wahrheit hinüberreichen*).

Such exchanges reveal the tension between self and other by navigating rather than demarcating the borderline. Celan thus insists upon the moment of the breath-turn as the critical limit, a moveable position that opens the space of simultaneous correspondence and difference: "Dichtung: das kann eine Atemwende bedeuten. Wer weiß, vielleicht legt die Dichtung den Weg – auch den Weg der Kunst – um einer solchen Atemwende willen zurück? […] Vielleicht wird hier, mit dem Ich – mit dem *hier* und *solcherart* freigesetzten befremdeten Ich, – vielleicht wird hier noch ein anderes frei?" ["Poetry: that can mean a breath-turn. Who knows, perhaps poetry goes its way – also the way of art – for the sake of such a breath turn? […] Perhaps here, with the I – with the estranged I liberated *here* and *in this manner*, – perhaps here another is set free?"][47] The meaning and consequence of poetry are not, in this formulation, available to knowledge: the breath-turn, after all, is a speculative possibility. And so the encounter between self and other, which both entangles and releases them, remains a hope that arises from the poem's travels, its movement towards the breath-turn as the limit at which life and death perilously coincide and divide.

Here, I also find a crucial intertextual resonance, which operates in the limit-space between Celan's and Sachs' poetological and poetic conversations, in the arena that Benjamin calls "das Gedichtete"[48]: it is the relation between Celan's *Atemwende* and Sachs' *Atemwunde*. This relation between the breath-turn and the breath-wound occurs already on the oral level in the German, as the words' near-homophony is distinguished only by the single letter *e/u*. It is vital, I argue, to consider these two expressions in tandem, because they maintain the simultaneous fragility and tenacity of a poetics of survival, which must approach the limits of its own existence over and over, speaking from a wounded position. The *Atemwende* suggests that the limit between existence and extinction underlies the very possibility of life, for it is in the unwilled, unobserved shift between in- and exhalation that we endure. It is in the experience of imperiled life, when we feel ourselves struggling to breathe, to enable the breath-turn that would recall us to existence, as it were, that we become conscious of the necessary fragility of this existence as the condition of survival. A poetics that explores survival as an ongoing state thus

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[46] See the Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm Dictionary, under "wahrnehmen," in particular the meanings "acht haben, seine aufmerksamkeit schenken, sorge tragen, sich annehmen" ["to take care," "offer one's attention," "be careful," "to attend to" (translations mine)]. In all of these senses, the term offers the possibility of exchange and commitment. "Wahrnehmen," *Der Digitale Grimm*, ed. Kompetenzzentrum für elektronische Erschließungs- und Publikationsverfahren in den Geisteswissenschaften an der Universität Trier in Verbindung mit der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, CD-ROM (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 2004).

[47] Celan, *Der Meridian*, 7, and Celan, *Collected Prose*, 47, translation modified.

[48] See the Introduction for my discussion of Benjamin's conception of "das Gedichtete," as he develops it in "Zwei Gedichte von Friedrich Hölderlin," *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977). For the English, see Benjamin, "Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin: 'The Poet's Courage' and 'Timidity,'" *Selected Writings: Volume 1, 1913-1926* (Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard UP, 1996).

attends to this fleeting yet perpetually recurring moment, realizing it as the necessary basis of both corporeal and poetic endurance.

The *Atemwunde* reminds us that this endurance also constitutes an injurious condition, which both resists and impels articulation. Inasmuch as breath transports language, the *Atemwunde* straddles the boundary of the corporeal and the figurative. Sachs insists, "Meine Metaphern sind meine Wunden," thus claiming at once the equivalence and exchange of subjective modes of perceiving the world.[49] The seeming simplicity of this statement rebuffs facile interpretations of the relation between experience and expression. Ehrhard Bahr argues that we must not accept Sachs' claim, because its "poetological logic" does not hold, since the inversion of the sentence is untrue: "The wounds she identifies do not need to be elevated to metaphors; they are already metaphors for the psychic injuries that the experience [*Erfahrung*] of mass murder inflicted upon her."[50] However, it seems to me that the consequence of Sachs' assertion depends upon the fact that its inversion is not only possible but necessary, that if metaphors are wounds, wounds are also metaphors. Of course, this capacity to carry meaning from one domain into another is already the realm of metaphor, yet as the exchanges between Celan and Sachs demonstrate, the realm of metaphor is also already the arena of the material, the corporeal, and the cosmological. The wound crosses boundaries too, but it does so transgressively, penetrating and impinging upon the body through its painful presence. I do not mean to say, therefore, that wounds and metaphors are experienced in the same way. Indeed, the verb "to be," which establishes their necessary and substantive relation, also divides and distinguishes them. What Sachs' claim demonstrates instead is the mutuality of corporeal and poetic anguish, the way in which both physical and textual figure must sustain the injurious effects of catastrophe. Celan avows this entanglement as well, when he writes, in one of the preparatory notes for the Meridian-Speech, "Im Gedicht: Vergegenwärtigung einer Person als Sprache, Vergegenwärtigung der Sprache als Person –" ["In the poem: realization of a person as language, realization of language as a person – ."][51] The movement of relation does not occur unilaterally, and so, neither *Atemwende* nor *Atemwunde* can be interpreted as "pure" metaphor, as a translation of lived into imagined figure. Rather, together they mark the limit-space in which and through which body and language endure, transported by fragmented and faltering voices.

Poetic Manifestations: At the Limits of Breath

We associate the corporeal wound with the flesh rather than with breath. For breath does not belong to each of us alone: while it is the most intimate source of our continuing existence in the world, it is at the same time composed of the air we share with others. (In this way, too, our lives are bound up with others at the most fundamental level.) Thus, the *Atemwunde* is not

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[49] Bengt Holmqvist, "Die Sprache der Sehnsucht," *Das Buch der Nelly Sachs*, ed. Holmqvist (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968), 29.

[50] In German: "Die von ihr bezeichneten Wunden brauchen nicht zu Metaphern erhoben zu werden, sie sind bereits Metaphern für die seelischen Verletzungen, die ihr durch die Erfahrung des Massenmordes zugefügt wurden." Ehrhard Bahr, "'Noch Feiert Tod das Leben': Metapher und Metonymie in Nelly Sachs' Krankenhaus-Zyklus," *'Lichtersprache aus den Rissen': Nelly Sachs – Werk und Wirkung*, ed. Ariane Huml (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008), 95. See also Bahr, " 'Meine Metaphern sind meine Wunden': Nelly Sachs und die Grenzen der poetischen Metapher," *Nelly Sachs: Neue Interpretationen*, ed. Michael Kessler and Jürgen Wertheimer (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1994), 3-18.

[51] Celan, *Der Meridian*, 114.

simply a metaphorical image of hurt. It recognizes the painful presence of a wound—the extinguished breath of the dead—in the continued respiration of the survivors. Breath is not a motif, but an instantiation of the ethical dilemma the survivor – and particularly the survivor as poet – must face. In a poem about Daniel, from a cycle that portrays Biblical figures and their suffering in the 1949 volume *Sternverdunkelung* [*Star-Darkening*], Nelly Sachs emphasizes that the inability to extricate the dead and the survivors results in a mutual absorption, even constituting the danger of appropriation: *O die gräberlosen Seufzer in der Luft, / die sich in unseren Atem schleichen*, ["O the graveless sighs in the air, / which creep into our breath."][52] It is not simply that the sighs, synechdochic here for the bodies of those murdered and denied a grave, are able to find a posthumous voice, transported by the breath of the survivors. For the relation between the dead and the survivors is not only one of commemoration but also one of impingement: The sighs slip into breath unnoticed, so that the survivors cannot guard against this intrusion. The fusion of expired and continuing breath marks the dilemma between the survivors' vocation—painfully embodied—to testify to the experience of atrocity in the place of those who did not survive and their resistance to this appropriation of their being as ghostly ventriloquists.

Sara Guyer analyzes such double movement as characteristic of a poetry of survival, claiming that prosopopoeia expresses this particular anguish by binding the lyric to testimony, and vice versa: "[P]rosopopoeia might not only be a trope through which the dead are given voice and made to speak, but it might be one offered in a desperate attempt to take voices away," she writes. "This wish […] suggests that prosopopoeia is no less essential to testimonial writing than it is to the lyric, but that it is prosopopoeia's interruption rather than its fictional restoration that renders it essential."[53] Guyer argues that the simultaneous movement of inclusion and resistance characterizes the unique speaking position of the survivor, since the very desire to deny the murdered victims' claims upon the living couches an acknowledgment of their voice: "[T]hat refusal of responsibility remains within the structure of an address that nevertheless affirms the responsiveness it denies. When the survivor makes a claim for his freedom from the living-dead, emerging as an 'I', he only acknowledges that the faces continue to be heard, that between 'he' and 'I' there is a 'you.'" [54] Guyer's portrayal of the vexed triad of individuality expressed by the three first-person pronouns reminds us of Stewart's assertion that poetry "is the kind of thing one knows that others say when they are face-to-face."[55] But as Guyer maintains,

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[52] Nelly Sachs, *Fahrt ins Staublose: Gedichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1961), 96, translation mine. Of course, it is Celan who is most famously associated with the evocation of the grave in the air (especially in "Todesfuge," which includes the verse "wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften da liegt man nicht eng." See Celan, *Die Gedichte*, 40-41). In her essay "'The Grave in the Air': Unbound Metaphors in Post-Holocaust Poetry," Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi muses, "Is Celan's 'grave in the air' an open space with no boundaries? Are there Holocaust symbols or topoi so overdetermined that they cannot enter other existential universes without being either disruptive or presumptuous—violating an unspoken principle of incommensurability […] Or is that which takes 'Auschwitz' as its sign in fact so *under*determined, in Lyotard's terms so 'dissipated,' by the premise of extermination that it elides into a phraseless space? It may be not only the limits of representation that are being probed here but the limits of *metaphor*." Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, " 'The Grave in the Air': Unbound Metaphors in Post-Holocaust Poetry," *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution,"* ed. Saul Friedländer (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992), 260-261. I would add to this assessment that in my reading of Celan's and Sachs' poetics, the "limits" of metaphor refer not to its inadequacy but to the way in which the figurative borders upon the literal, so that we must always examine their mutual limit.

[53] Sara Guyer, *Romanticism After Auschwitz* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007), 8.

[54] Guyer 11.

[55] Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, 12-13.

the poetics of survival configures this triad differently: the demands of the dead transform the potential intimacy of speaker and addressee, of I and you, of any language spoken face-to-face. As the survivor seeks to circumvent the imposition of the dead, attempting to refashion and reclaim his singular voice, he finds himself always interrupted by this suppressed addressee, who now addresses him in turn through the survivor's own breath and voice.

For Sachs, life and death are also not consecutive states but mutually dependent conditions. Many of her poems question the pressures these conditions exert upon one another, investigating their bond as one that extends beyond a power relation of action and passivity. We find the following poem in her 1957 volume *Und Niemand Weiß Weiter*:

> Sind Gräber Atempause für die Sehnsucht?
> Leiseres Schaukeln an Sternenringen?
> Agonie im Nachtschatten,
> bevor die Trompeten blasen
> zur Auffahrt für alle,
> zum Leben verwesenden Samenkörner?
>
> Leise, leise,
> während die Würmer
> die Gestirne der Augäpfel verzehren?
>
> [Are graves breath-pauses for longing?
> Quieter swinging on star-rings?
> Agony in the night-shade,
> before the trumpets blow
> for the ascension of all
> seed-kernels decaying into life?
>
> Quietly, quietly,
> while the worms
> consume the stars of the eyeballs?][56]

Consisting of a series of questions, which refuse certainty and authority while demanding response, the poem addresses the impossibility of defining either the condition or the consequences of death. It begins with a striking verse that characterizes the grave not as a final resting place but as a temporal and spatial suspension. However, the meaning of this suspension is ambiguous: The term *Atempause* evokes both the solace of reprieve and the tension of bated breath.[57] Vitally, this image presents death not as a final and unalterable state but as a reversible condition, a caesura. However, while the Judeo-Christian understanding of death as the transition from an earthly to an otherworldly existence certainly informs Sachs' imagery, her portrayal exceeds an understanding of death as the cut between the mortality of the body and the immortality of the soul.

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[56] Nelly Sachs, *Werke: Kommentierte Ausgabe, Band 2 (Gedichte 1951-1970)*, ed. Ariane Huml and Andreas Weichelt (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), 25, translation mine.

[57] Read with the sexual connotation of the *Samenkorn* (the seed), the *Atempause* may even, in its evocation of a "small death," allude to the ecstatic moment of climax.

For the breath-pause bears out *Sehnsucht* (longing), which indicates a desire so strong for something elusive or absent that it causes its subject to fall ill.[58] As mobilizing yet unfulfillable drive, longing animates poetry. Celan, too, connects the *Atempause* to the longing that is hope, evoking it as the poem's desire. Describing the poem's difficult negotiations of the relation between what is own (*eigen*) and what is other (*dem anderen*), he muses, "Das Gedicht verweilt oder verhofft—ein auf die Kreatur zu beziehendes Wort—bei solchen Gedanken. Niemand kann sagen, wie lange die Atempause—das Verhoffen und der Gedanke—noch fortwährt." [The poem takes such thoughts for its home and hope – a word for living creatures. Nobody can tell how long the breath-pause—hope and thought—will last."][59] Foundational to Sachs' poetics, *Sehnsucht* manifests the painful tension between bodily and imagined experience, which constructs the space of an attempted articulation of suffering. The poem depicts various images of illness, in which disease and decay do not destroy life but are instead an intrinsic part of its being. The seeds, usually viewed as promise of birth and growth, are *zum Leben verwesend*, a phrase one might render as both "decaying towards life" and "decaying into life." The very process that seems to end life now constitutes and suffuses it. The choice of the word *verwesen* is itself vital, since it marks decay as an ongoing process: if *Wesen* manifests the character—indeed, the essence—of existence and the universal animate form, then the process of *Verwesung* not so much obliterates as transforms being. The entangled possibilities of life and death also emerge in the kernel, the individual shape of the seed, which unites it with the material remnant of the dead (through the resonance of *Samenkorn* and *Staubkorn*).

The interpenetration of life and death is far from a comforting image in this poem. The final stanza confronts the reader with a depiction of the body's disintegration that seems at once natural and horrific. The moment of quiet – *Leise, leise* – appears as description and command. Yet it is a quiet devoid of solace or calm; it does not honor the dead but attends to the violence perpetrated upon their fragmented corpses. Grammatically, it is impossible to determine whether the phrase *die Gestirne der Augäpfel* ("the stars of the eyeballs") likens the body to a universe or depicts a universe composed of dismembered body parts.[60] This ambiguity destabilizes the space of the gravesite and inverts the coordinates of the universe: we are confronted with a buried firmament or with bodies dispersed in the skies. Both images (and the impossibility of determining the prevalence of either) comment on the difficulty of demarcating a boundary between self and world, but beyond that, they portray the simultaneous omnipresence and obliteration of the victims' remains. These remains cannot be relegated to a circumscribed time (the past) or a specific space (the grave). Thus, the dual image of the worms eating eyeballs

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[58] The Brothers Grimm Dictionary cites the word as emerging from Middle High German, where it signifies an illness of painful desire ("krankheit des schmerzlichen verlangens"). See "Sehnsucht," *Der Digitale Grimm*, CD-ROM 2004.

[59] Celan, *Der Meridian*, 8, and Celan, *Collected Prose*, 48, translation modified. Celan's use of "verhoffen" is unexpected here: while "unverhofft" (unexpected, unanticipated) is a common term, "verhofft" is not. Indeed, "hoffen" rather than "verhoffen" would be the usual word for hope. By confronting us with the unexpected reversal of the "unexpected" (*das Unverhoffte*), Celan puns bleakly on the likely outcome of the poem's hoped-for encounter. Because the pun calls attention to the prefix "ver-," which distinguishes it from the usual "hoffen," it compounds the bleak prospects of its hope at the same time as it allows for its possibility: "ver-" designates, after all, both processes of transformation and transgression, in any event a movement beyond the already established.

[60] The reality of dismemberment gains its force from Sachs' choice of *Augäpfel* as well, a word that designates the eyeballs as anatomic feature. Yet while the word insists upon physicality, it also serves as a reminder of growth, fruitfulness, and the risks of knowledge, since the apple traditionally translates the fruit that Adam and Eve consume in the Genesis story. Idiomatically, the *Augapfel* refers to something one treasures and protects, but the image in this poem exposes the fragility of all such attempts.

buried in the stars and consuming the firmament of the eyeballs of the dead depicts a horrendously naturalized cycle. It is also a poetic charge that communicates the pervasive yet elusive nature of suffering, of atrocity that cannot be contained in the ritual processes that structure our cognitive understanding of others' pain.

According to Beda Allemann, the imagination and instantiation of an alternative space, which undoes our perception of the world's make-up through a rewriting of the terrestrial, characterizes Sachs' oeuvre as a whole: "The naming of the earthly, reduced to its appearance in the elements water, earth, fire, and air, itself reveals the cosmic, even transmundane, reference. Out of this paradox, a singular poetic space unfolds, the unmistakable space of this lyric, expanded from the elementary into the invisible."[61] Gisela Dischner, too, claims that Sachs' poetry seeks to move from the real to the transcendental in an eternal movement that manifests longing, "Longing, which is always a longing from the earthly and transient into the invisible and permanent, and which produces the transition into cosmic relations through the image of music and light, this longing is the impulse for the continuous transcendence of real things and people into the space of the trans-real."[62] The trajectories that Allemann and Dischner delineate are crucial to the poem at hand. But I would also add that this poem further complicates an implicit division into (and so the complementary nature of) the material and the metaphysical, the terrestrial and the cosmic. While I agree that Sachs' poems expand the minute to gargantuan proportions, depicting the transformation of the incidental into the transcendental, we also find the inverse movement: in fact, it is not always possible to tell if the singular becomes global or the other way around. After all, both of these movements occur at the same time, and it becomes impossible to claim which direction originates the other, whether we confront a shrinking or an expansion of perception. The destabilization of perspective expresses the condition of survival as well as its ethical consequences, that is, the necessary burden of the continuous and simultaneous forms of temporal and spatial existence.

The ethico-poetic charge results from the survivor's awareness of the omnipresent absence of the dead and from the interpenetration of life and death, as promise and as threat. These entanglements evoke the poet's conflicted response, as he or she submits to the poem even while seeking liberation from it. When Sachs recalls, in another poem, the *Asyl meiner Atemzüge*, / *dieser leisesten Selbstmörderschar* ["asylum of my breath-flows, those quietest of suicide-herds"], she raises the question of survival's claims from another angle.[63] Breath is at once security and illusion. Providing sustenance and continuity, it is nevertheless a movement towards self-obliteration. In relation to the absence of graves for the murdered, this double bind emerges also in a later poem, in which the act of forgetting – as purposeful an act as that of commemoration – becomes the foundation for survivors' continued breath: *Gräber / verstoßen in Vergessenheit / wenn auch Heilkraut für Atemwunden* – ["Graves / cast out into oblivion / even

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[61] In German: "Die Nennung des Irdischen in seiner auf die Elemente Wasser, Erde, Feuer und Luft reduzierten Erscheinung gibt von selbst den kosmischen, ja den transmundanen Bezug frei. Aus dieser Paradoxie entfaltet sich ein eigentümlicher Gedicht-Raum, der unverwechselbare, vom Elementaren ins Unsichtbare geweitete Raum dieser Lyrik." Beda Allemann, "Hinweis auf einen Gedicht-Raum," *Das Buch der Nelly Sachs*, ed. Bengt Holmqvist, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968), 293, translation mine.

[62] In German: "Die Sehnsucht, die immer Sehnsucht aus dem Irdisch-Vergänglichen ins Unsichtbare, Unvergängliche ist und die im Bilde der Musik und des Lichts den Übergang in kosmische Beziehungen herstellt, diese Sehnsucht ist der Impuls für das ständige Transzendieren realer Dinge und Personen ins Transreale." Gisela Dischner, "Zu den Gedichten von Nelly Sachs," *Das Buch der Nelly Sachs*, 312, translation mine.

[63] Sachs, *Werke: Band 2*, 11, translation mine.

if healing-herb for breath-wounds"].[64] The survivor's navigation of boundaries operates as a simultaneous shrinking and expansion of the world, as a dual movement of internalization and projection that shapes the demands of commemoration, in the entwined realms of ethics and language.

A desire for orientation structures the poem as a whole, yet at the same time, it appears unbounded both in temporal and in spatial terms. We might consider such a diversion of limits a hallmark of the lyric, as Timothy Bahti does. Perpetually traversable and transformable, the poem does not allow one to assume its beginning and end. Reflecting on a formulation about "utopian endings" by Marcel Duchamp, Bahti refers to the non-place of the lyric not as the impossibility of its conclusion but as the ultimate deflection of destination as such: "My understanding of the ends of the lyric in some of its poetry's most interesting and powerful instances is that they are utopian not in that they do not occur—for they do—but in that they direct us to a place of language and thought the promised consequences of which are still, and always, and rightly elsewhere."[65] Bahti's reflections run the risk of dehistoricizing the lyric, for his insistence on its "ends" and on lyric consequence as that which is "still, and always, and rightly elsewhere" appears to marginalize the genre, even while highlighting the crucial liminality of the poem's position. In fact, though, a poetics of survival bears out the ethical import of such displacement, querying its attendant consequences for memory and literary expression.

Here is Sachs' poem "Schon," from the 1959 volume *Flucht und Verwandlung*, in its entirety:

Schon
mit der Mähne des Haares
Fernen entzündend
schon
mit den ausgesetzten
den Fingerspitzen
den Zehen
im Offenen pirschenden
das Weite suchend –

Der Ozeane Salzruf
an der Uferlinie des Leibes

Gräber
verstoßen in Vergessenheit
wenn auch Heilkraut für Atemwunden –

An unseren Hautgrenzen
tastend die Toten
im Schauer der Geburten
Auferstehung feiernd

[64] Sachs, *Werke: Band 2*, 104-105, translation mine.

[65] Timothy Bahti, *The Ends of the Lyric: Direction and Consequence in Western Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996), 15.

Wortlos gerufen
schifft sich Göttliches ein –

[Already
with the mane of hair
inflaming distances
already
with the abandoned
the fingertips
the toes
prowling in the open
searching for the distance –

The ocean's salt-call
at the shoreline of the body

Graves
cast out into oblivion
even if healing herb for breath-wounds –

At our skin-borders
groping, the dead,
in the shudders of birth
celebrating ascension

Wordlessly called
the divine embarks –][66]

The adamant return of the dead demonstrates the confluence of creation and destruction and reveals the vexed time and space of survival. The poem begins with the single word *schon*, which marks both the timeliness and the untimeliness of what follows, since it signals the suddenness of a moment eagerly awaited yet always too early. The last verse undercuts any expectation of a temporally and spatially bounded poem, because it inaugurates a departure, whose destination and success remain unclear. The dash at the end of stanzas, refusing conclusion, also makes visual the extension of a route leading outward, beyond any temporal, spatial, or even imagined limit.

But despite its unboundedness, the poem nevertheless constructs a (conflicted) space, and it does so by exploring the body – and breath in particular – as source for, expression of, and return to an entanglement of the micro- and macrocosmic. Indeed, the poem leads one to question the usefulness of opposing the singular and the global, since each inheres in and is transformed into the other. The movement of transformation perpetually defers and displaces desire, need, and possibility, so that longing pervades language. Longing's constancy – Bengt Holmqvist, in his essay "Die Sprache der Sehnsucht," considers it seminal to Sachs' oeuvre[67] –

[66] Nelly Sachs, "Schon," *Werke: Band 2*, 104-105, translation mine.
[67] Bengt Holmqvist, "Die Sprache der Sehnsucht," 7-70.

illuminates the promise and frustration of travel towards an ever-elusive destination. Indeed, longing is bound up with memory, so that the present is constituted through what is imagined despite its palpable absence, through a simultaneous looking-back (memory) and looking-forward (wish). David Oren Stier goes so far as to employ this understanding of the dynamics of a "post"-Shoah temporality as a way of distinguishing memory from history, claiming that "history is what we need, memory is what we desire."[68] But in Sachs' poetics, need and desire appear together, in the search for an extremity that exceeds the boundaries of time and space. If we recall her poetic credo, which she formulates in the letter to Celan cited above, she maintains that longing is a suffering that leaves a wound and that makes of the survivor-poet one who must bear death as a responsibility in life: "ich leide an der Pfeilspitze der Sehnsucht die uns von Anbeginn zu Tode trifft und die uns stößt, außerhalb zu suchen, dort wo die Unsicherheit zu spülen beginnt" ["I suffer from the arrow's tip of longing, which scores us to death from the beginning, and which prods us to search outside, where insecurity begins to flow."][69] The "arrow of longing" subjects the survivor-poet to the wound's deadly mark but also to its animation of creativity. The creative impulse is necessarily excessive, prompting the search beyond an inhabitable space.

The poem exceeds its bounds by inviting navigation out of its open and expandable space and beyond its time. The unnamed subject cannot possess or master its actions in a concrete time or place, and so its movements are depicted through parallel gerunds rather than through temporally bounded verb tenses.[70] We encounter the subject in the process of "inflaming distances" (*Fernen entzündend*), tip-toeing in the open (*im Offenen pirschend*), and fleeing or, alternatively, searching for expanses (*das Weite suchend*). These three images emphasize a movement tense with desire and anguish, illuminating yearning as a simultaneous call and burden. The phrase *das Weite suchend*, for instance, plays with the affinity between longing and escape, for it mobilizes the idiom that means to flee, at the same time as it denotes the perpetual search for (unreachable) distances.

In this search, conception and injury coincide. The image of an inflammation of distances otherwise remote (*Fernen entzündend*) conjures the intertwined acts of creation and destruction, a repeated theme in Sachs' writing. Consider, for instance, the following first stanza from a late poem, included in the volume *Noch feiert Tod das Leben*: "Die gekrümmte Linie des Leidens / nachtastend die göttlich entzündete Geometrie / des Weltalls / immer auf der Leuchtspur zu dir / und verdunkelt wieder in der Fallsucht / dieser Ungeduld ans Ende zu kommen." ["The curved line of suffering / retracing the divinely inflamed geometry / of the universe / always on the light-path to you / and darkened again in the falling sickness / of this impatience to reach the end."][71] In these verses, the curvature of the "line of suffering" seeks to communicate pain in the moment of its experience, for it is a line not only curved but contorted. Its route imitates and frustrates a cosmic geometry, which it engages through sensory activities, attempting to orient its search for the addressee by "feeling," in the tactile and empathic sense,

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[68] David Oren Stier, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2003), 2.

[69] Celan and Sachs, *Briefwechsel*, 13, translation mine.

[70] Celan concludes his radio broadcast on "Die Dichtung Ossip Mandelstamms" by recalling Mandelstamm's favored use of the Latin gerund form: "Das Gerundiv – das ist das Mittelwort der Leideform der Zukunft" ["The gerund – that is the middle (or mediating) word of the form of suffering of the future."] See Paul Celan, *Der Meridian*, 221, translation mine.

[71] Sachs, *Werke: Band 2*, 149, translation mine.

along the routes mapped out by the surrounding universe. The divine relation to this cosmic geometry is two-fold, for the use of adjectives allows for a double reading: the image of a universe "divinely inflamed" (*göttlich entzündet*) suggests that the beginning of life (the divine spark) and its end (the divine wound) coincide. Thus, the following image of the *Leuchtspur*, the trace or trail of light, does not stand in opposition to its *Verdunkelung*, its darkening or eclipse. For precisely the desire to arrive at its destination obliterates the guiding light. The mutual resistance of illumination and obscurity is triangulated by the term *Fallsucht*. This word for epilepsy, referring to the epileptic's sudden fall to the ground when caught by a fit, also suggests a desire to let oneself fall. It resonates, therefore, with the dizzying longing of *Sehnsucht*, as both terms indicate a desire that, in its very limitlessness, is excessive and threatening. It is this desire – marking the impatience to arrive at a final destination (*diese Ungeduld ans Ende zu kommen*) – that bespeaks not only the death wish but also, strangely, the impossibility of its fulfillment.

In the previous poem, "Schon," inflammation – productive and injurious at once – does not originate in the divine but in an extended human effort, in a body stretched out and mapped upon the earth. Thus, the poem frames the question of the (un)attainability of longing's distances in yet another way, through the relation between the human body and the space it inhabits. In larger-than-life form, the body takes on terrestrial proportions. But the figure in this poem is not fully fashioned, appearing instead as an outline whose extremities – the mane of hair, the fingertips and toes – reach out to touch what remains elusive. This mapping of the body onto the world in order to determine and imagine scale is, according to Susan Stewart, our default mode of conceptualizing space.[72]

But Sachs' poem surpasses the task of grafting body onto landscape so as to imagine relational space, insisting upon the wounds of a fragmented corporeality as the basis for understanding mutual bonds. After all, it is impossible to determine whether internal perception affects external reality or vice versa, whether the body has expanded to fit global proportions or the world has shrunk to human size. In any event, the binary of inside and outside does not suffice to produce a congruent and complementary whole. The verses of the second stanza elaborate this uneasy link of microcosm and macrocosm. In the image of *der Ozeane Salzruf / an der Uferlinie des Leibes*, we understand the shoreline to designate the body as earth. The salty call of the oceans evokes not only the fluidity and vastness of what surrounds the solid form, but it also conjures tears, which become a language of communication, a wordless call soliciting response. The body as shoreline (becoming earthly matter as well as anthropomorphizing earth) has expanded to superhuman size at the same time that it returns to earth—through the grave, or deprived of it.

In the problem of the gravesite, the entwined ethical pressures of survival and commemoration manifest themselves. The dead do not only generate in the living fear, pity, or the commitment to honor their memory despite the lack of a concrete space dedicated to housing their remains and granting a place to mourn their loss. They also engender a sense of claustrophobia by impinging upon the survivors. The poem's single instance of direct voice

[72] Stewart writes, "Since we know our body only in parts, the image is what constitutes the self for us; it is what constitutes our subjectivity. By a process of projection and introjection of the image, the body comes to have the abstract 'form,' the abstract totality, by which we know it. Anthropomorphism, for example, tells us much more about the shape of the human body than it tells us about an animal other. We continually project the body into the world in order that its image might return to us: onto the other, the mirror, the animal, and the machine, and onto the artistic image." Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993), 125.

occurs in the first-person plural, which situates the speaker in a community whose parameters and constitution remain undefined.[73] While it seems that the plural voice belongs to the living, it is not a voice of agency. Instead, the possessive pronoun indicates the terror of the living confronted with the encroaching bodies of the dead. This intrusion is irresistible, in the dual sense of fascination and vulnerability: *An unseren Hautgrenzen / tastend die Toten / im Schauer der Geburten / Auferstehung feiernd*. The dead border upon life everywhere: the image of the murdered groping the skin of the living inverts our idea of the grave as the space of inescapable confinement, for here the living are demarcated by and must defend themselves against the claims of the dead at the limit of their own existence. The two share in a hyper-corporeality, which heightens the experience of the senses and magnifies the wounds of a fragmented body at the same time. The term *tasten* describes orientation as relying completely on the tactile, devoid of vision.[74] At the same time, this blindness hints at the darkness of the grave. Thus, the poem invokes the missing gravesite in subtle ways, a movement into the earth paradoxically bound up with the expansion of the world.

Indeed, the temporal and spatial interpenetration of life and death makes clear that neither can be defined separately but that each emerges through the other. The stanza that describes the dead feeling the bodies of the living – *An unseren Hautgrenzen / tastend die Toten / im Schauer der Geburten / Auferstehung feiernd* – illustrates this interpenetration in various ways, since it allows for several readings. The image of resurrection, of ascension from the dead, is not an assurance of salvation. In the claustrophobic context of the dead impinging upon the living, re-emergence signals a psychic pressure as much as a promise. The survivors submit to the involuntary nature of traumatic reliving, which blurs the temporal and spatial boundaries between experience and memory as well as the limits of reconstitution in both language and body. It becomes difficult – in authoring and in reading such words – to separate experience from its recollection. The bond between body and language thus also problematizes the relationship between lived and remembered reality, refusing the clear distinction of past, present, and future, as each invades the other.

The ambiguity of subjecthood, intertwining the risks of authority and vulnerability, complicates the effort to defend oneself against another's claims and to negotiate a habitable space. The attempt to shore up life by forgetting the dead and their claims occurs without agency, without specifying who bans the dead to oblivion: *Gräber / verstoßen in Vergessenheit*. This anonymity compounds the process of forgetting, since it diffuses responsibility. Despite the plural, communal voice of the third stanza, the threat of isolation infringes everywhere upon the position and perception of individual existence, which hovers on the threshold of an elusive beyond. The extroverted position of the self bespeaks responsibility but also fragility; the living and the dead alike are vulnerable to injury. Indeed, the term used to describe the graves'

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[73] Following the convention of assuming that the figure of the speaker corresponds with the figure of the poet, it is interesting to remark upon the fact that Sachs here positions herself as one who speaks on behalf of the surviving community. On the one hand, one might say that this subject-position situates her in the textual lineage of poetic lament (traditionally, one of the only genres available to women's voices), but on the other hand, we may also recognize in it a defiant exploration of the female prophetic voice, which, as we shall see, runs the risk of being received (and punished) as transgressive speech. In fact, it seems to me that Sachs' poetry maintains the uneasy bonds between lament's memorializing return to the past and prophecy's heralding of the future.

[74] The synaesthetic image of "feeling" darkness may also refer to the description of the Biblical plague: "And the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the heavens, that there be darkness upon the land of Egypt, *a darkness one can feel*.' And Moses stretched out his hand over the heavens and there was pitch dark in all the land of Egypt three days." Exodus 10:21-22, *The Five Books of Moses*, trans. Robert Alter.

banishment to oblivion – *verstoßen* – indicates a violence that incorporates both a physical and a psychic wounding and blurs the distinction between the two.

The term *ausgesetzt* (cast out) foreshadows the central act of the expulsion of graves in a sinister way. It echoes the term for the leprous—*aussetzig* or *aussätzig*—which in turn hails from the practice of banishing lepers to safeguard the health of the collective. In this light, we may revisit the image of the banished dead, who grope the "skin borders" (*Hautgrenzen*) of the living: this image confronts us with a fragmented synaesthesia, in which the translation of one sense into another marks not a doubled sensory pleasure but the crippling of all senses, so that the wound made visible (as on leprous skin) can no longer be interpreted with the eye. Moreover, if the skin of the living serves as the permeable boundary that separates the community of those who survive from those who died, then the question of what is internal and what is external becomes fraught with risk and consequence. Thus, we may consider the poem's evocation of leprosy also as an allusion to the Biblical story of Miriam and so as a contemplation of the position of the female poet, who seeks to speak as a public, prophetic figure. When Miriam and Aaron protest Moses' marriage and, implicitly, his chosen status, it is Miriam who takes the initiative to voice their complaint, and it is only Miriam who is punished for her transgressive speech.[75] Twice we are enjoined to "look," to witness the Lord's wrath manifested in her sudden leprosy, which brands her at the most visible and exposed level: "And the cloud moved off from over the tent, and, look, Miriam was blanched as snow, and Aaron turned to Miriam, and, look, she was struck with skin blanch" (Numbers 12:10).[76] As a sign of public shaming, "Miriam was shut up outside the camp seven days, and the people did not journey onward until Miriam was gathered back in" (Numbers 12:15). It seems that the expulsion from the borders that enclose the community—securing it both from within and without—serve as a ritual punishment, which teaches Miriam the dangers of transgressive speech by enacting its consequences upon her doubly, both as an individual (through leprosy) and as a member of the collective (through exile and pardon).

In fact, the communal fate is also bound up with that of the individual: during Miriam's banishment, the community must remain immobile, but this ritual act also heals their injuries. In Sachs' poem "Schon," however, the central image of hurt, the breath-wound, persists. It corporealizes the ethical dilemma that the survivor-poet must bear, the twinned pressures of communing with and driving away the dead: *Gräber / verstoßen in Vergessenheit / wenn auch Heilkraut für Atemwunden*. It seems at first that only the violent effort to enforce a temporal and spatial division constitutes an antidote to the pain of remembering the dead. The act of willed forgetting, the refusal to mark rest and commemoration—in the image of graves condemned to oblivion—seems also the source of healing, couched as a natural medicine (*Heilkraut*). But the idea that the survivors' restoration depends on a rejection of the claims of the dead disturbs the possibility of a "natural" or "organic" cycle of existence. The incongruity of injury and cure emerge in the figure of the breath-wound, because it renews constantly the tension between life's

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[75] Robert Alter explains that the verb that refers to Miriam's and Aaron's action occurs in the female singular form, remarking that "[t]his is one of the most striking instances of an expressive grammatical device in ancient Hebrew prose," in which the singular form of a verb emphasizes the first of the two subjects that it describes. He chooses, therefore, to translate: "And Miriam, and Aaron with her, spoke against Moses." Numbers 12:1, *The Five Books of Moses*, trans. Alter, 741n1.

[76] Aaron pleads with Moses to intervene on Miriam's behalf: " 'Let her not be, pray, like one dead who when he comes out of his mother's womb, half his flesh is eaten away.'" Numbers 12:12, Alter, *Five Books of Moses*. Just as Aaron likens Miriam's leprosy to the fate of a stillborn child, Nelly Sachs, as we have seen, characterizes the condition of survival through images that foreground such monstrous intertwining of life and death.

continuity and its ceasing. Moreover, since it is impossible once again to differentiate the subject and object of agency, breath is that which both inflicts and sustains the wound. The banished graves remain inescapable; their absence grips the living with a power that results precisely from their dislocation. Thus, the dead appear to take their place in the very language of exclusion, in the unboundedness of the poem.

The breath-wound, displaying the bonds between body and language, alters the possibilities of communication. In the final stanza, it becomes evident that the invocation of another's response does not depend upon speech: *Wortlos gerufen / schifft sich Göttliches ein*. Refusing form and figure, the divine enters as condition rather than as subject. Might we conceive of the call that solicits the divine as another form of breath, which sustains what is individual without circumscribing it and charts the borders of internal and external perception through its constant departure and return? In any event, these verses do not utilize the divine as a promise of redemption, for its arrival is also its leave-taking, as both the term *einschiffen* and the dash indicate. Indeed, we cannot equate the moments of encountering the divine with salvation or with the reconstitution of a whole and unharmed personhood. Thus, the poem straddles rupture and continuity, for the dash (which ends three of the poem's five stanzas) signals both the possibility of further existence—in body and in words—and the threat of extinction.

Let me consider briefly another poem by Sachs, "Hinter den Lippen," from the same collection, which also ends in the inconclusion of the dash and which articulates breath as the navigation of a corporeal space. As the title indicates, the mouth functions as an enclosure, uniting speech and the gravesite in a painful language of commemoration. "Hinter den Lippen" begins, in fact, with a meditation on the difficulty of speech:

Hinter den Lippen
Unsagbares wartet
reißt an den Nabelsträngen
der Worte

Märtyrersterben der Buchstaben
in der Urne des Mundes
geistige Himmelfahrt
aus schneidendem Schmerz –

Aber der Atem der inneren Rede
durch die Klagemauer der Luft
haucht geheimnisentbundene Beichte
sinkt ins Asyl
der Weltenwunde
noch im Untergang
Gott abgelauscht –

[Behind the lips
the unspeakable waits
tears at the umbilical chords
of words

Martyr-death of letters
in the urn of the mouth
spiritual ascension
of cutting pain –

But the breath of inner speech
through the wailing wall of the air
respires secret-delivered confession
sinks into the asylum
of the world-wound
in submersion still
overheard from God –][77]

Language's different incarnations demonstrate that it may be violent and vulnerable at the same time. In the context of the Shoah, *Unsagbares* evokes debates about the permissibility of representation, indicating not simply an impossible but also a transgressive language, which impinges upon the creation and delivery of words. The site of speech is thus claustrophobic and excessive at once, staging a struggle between the Kabbalistic vision of God's inexpressible name hidden in fragments that await their reunion and the cataclysmic suffering that threatens to erupt as traumatic memory.[78]

Hovering in a position of dynamic stasis, the poem cannot originate or conclude in any localizable point. The accumulation of texts—the unspeakable, words, letters—refuses the notion of a unilateral speech. Each stanza dramatizes the tension between speech's movement along several conflicting routes at once. The unspeakable, sealed behind the barrier of the lips, nevertheless tugs at words. The dying letters rest in the urn of the mouth, yet at the same time, they ascend to heaven. This movement upward, the ascension (a markedly Christian term, but also a reference to the Kabbalistic vision of letters flying up to the divine), is countered in the final stanza by the sinking and submersion of the breath of internal speech. Characteristic of Sachs' writing, particularly at the ends of stanzas and entire poems, the recurring use of the dash gestures towards a temporality and topography that extends beyond the space outlined by words. At the same time, we can read the dash as a sudden and unexpected interruption, a falling-silent *and* a promise of persistence. What are the consequences of this refusal of any certainty in the future?

The impossibility of destination is compounded by the entwined images of birth and death, which present the mouth as both womb and tomb, the locus of communication's renewal *and* demise. The mouth become urn conjures the ashes of the murdered victims, whose bodies were burned but never buried, at the same time as it inverts the Romantic metaphor of the well-

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[77] Sachs, *Werke: Band 2*, 106-107, translation mine. For another translation, see Nelly Sachs, *O the Chimneys: Selected Poems, Including the Verse Play, Eli*, trans. Michael Hamburger et al. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), 181.

[78] See Gershom Scholem's essay "Der Name Gottes und die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala," in which he writes, "Exactly this unpronounceability [especially after the destruction of the Temple], in which the name of God can be *addressed* [angesprochen] but not *pronounced* [ausgesprochen] has given it inexpressible depth for the feeling of the Jews." In German: "Gerade diese Unaussprechbarkeit [vor allem nach der Zerstörung des Tempels], in der der Name Gottes zwar *angesprochen*, aber nicht mehr *ausgesprochen* werden kann, hat ihn für das Gefühl der Juden mit jener unaussprechlichen Tiefe ausgestattet." Scholem, "Der Name Gottes und die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala," *Judaica III: Studien zur jüdischen Mystik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 15, translation mine.

wrought artwork. In contrast to one of the poem's few critics, Kathrin M. Bower, who insists on the presence of a "poetic persona," I note only the synecdoche for an absent speaker, as the surviving mouth exhibits the fragmentation of both body and language.[79] If the mouth becomes a ritual site of mourning and commemoration, which houses and seeks to articulate what remains of the dead, then we must attend to debates about the ethical implications of testimonial speech. A poetics of survival grapples necessarily with the issue of appropriating another's voice by claiming to speak for or on behalf of the dead. An acknowledgement of the survivor's mouth as the crypt of memory and mourning brings with it a burden, transforming and appropriating the body of the living as a medium and resting-place for the dead, who remain insistently present in their absence.

Because this poem links knowledge with confession, it raises the question both of what one *can* and what one *may* know. At its basis, the act of confession implies assuming responsibility for actions and their consequences.[80] In "Hinter den Lippen," confession moves from a private communication to an absolute publicity, embedded in the "world-wound" (*Weltenwunde*). Indeed, the phrase that signals this development—"geheimnisentbundene Beichte"—merges the physical and ethical, suggesting that the moment of birth (which recalls the umbilical chords in the first stanza) corresponds with the moment that grants responsibility by liberating from obligation. Such freedom does not indicate a moral vacuum, since it is precisely the possibility of choice which emphasizes the ethical foundation of responsibility.

Once more, it is breath that manifests the tension between accounts of creation and destruction and subsequent rituals of commemoration. The *Atem der inneren Rede* moves confession from a private to a public space, so that the notion of interiority does not ultimately confine language within the space of the body. Through the *Klagemauer der Luft*, which merges the substance and intangibility of loss and its commemoration, the internal breath of speech sinks into a wounded cosmos, without arriving at a final destination. Here, air composes the *Klagemauer*, the remnant of the Jews' Second Temple, and so the divine creative breath also forms the double residue of destruction (especially if we think again of the resonance between the Biblical terms *neshima* (breath), *neshama* (soul), and *ruakh* (wind, but also breath and spirit).

Celan, too, considers the movement of breath a source of sustenance for the poem as well as a sign of its fragility. In the Meridian Speech, he characterizes a poetics of the limit, which continuously hovers on the edge of production and extinction. Therefore, the poem becomes testament to its own survival: "[D]as Gedicht behauptet sich am Rande seiner Selbst; es ruft und holt sich, um bestehen zu können, unausgesetzt aus seinem Schon-nicht-mehr in sein Immer-noch zurück." [The poem holds its ground on its own margin. In order to endure, it constantly calls and pulls itself back from an 'already-no-more' into a 'still-here.'][81] Celan offers this formulation in meditating on the notion of the poem as *Atemwende*, or breath-turn. Indeed, through the movement of the breath-turn, the poem creates, exceeds, and reconstructs the space of communication, thus instantiating a time and space of survival.

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[79] See Kathrin M. Bower, *Ethics and Remembrance in the Poetry of Nelly Sachs and Rose Ausländer* (Rochester: Camden House, 2000), 163-4. Bower writes, "In 'Hinter den Lippen' Nelly Sachs offers a poetic figuration of her own religious view that the believer's relationship to God is characterized by suffering, and that it is through suffering that one achieves revelation and a state of grace" (164).

[80] Straddling religious traditions, the poem evokes both the unmediated communication with God in Judaism and Catholicism's ritual, mediated search for absolution.

[81] Celan, *Der Meridian*, 8, and Celan, *Collected Prose*, 49.

Reflecting on Celan's translation of a Shakespeare sonnet, Sara Guyer entertains this question of the breath-turn. She concludes that his understanding of the ethical dimension of the breath-turn entails that

> poetry would neither evade nor avoid, neither bury nor fill the catastrophic silence, but rather, that poetry would bear it. […] For poetry to *mean* a breathturn, for it to be directed toward this turn, suggests that it attends to and acknowledges the "terrifying silence" that language endures, but that it does not give this silence meaning, does not valorize or represent it, by undergoing it. Rather, poetry becomes the experience of silence. How does poetry do this? How does it become the experience of a breathturn? Does this mean that poetry is a turn to silence or rather a turn away from it? Is it an act of inspiration or expiration? Does poetry turn the insides out or take the outside in?[82]

Of course, to breathe means not only to insist upon survival as a continued physical existence but to cross and recross the body's boundaries, to test the limit that separates the body from its surroundings and life from its ending.

In a note included in the collection of Celan's posthumously published papers, there is a passage that engages this problem as well:

> Echte Dichtung ist antibiographisch. Die Heimat des Dichters ist sein Gedicht, sie wechselt von einem Gedicht zum andern. Die Entfernungen sind die alten, ewigen: unendlich wie der Weltenraum, in dem jedes Gedicht sich zu behaupten sucht als—winziges—Gestirn. Unendlich auch wie die Entfernung zwischen seinem Ich und seinem Du: von beiden Seiten, beiden Polen her wird die Brücke geschlagen: in der Mitte, auf halbem Wege, da, wo der tragende Pfeiler erwartet wird, von oben her oder von unten her, ist der Ort des Gedichts. Von oben her: unsichtbar und ungewiß. Von unten her: aus dem Abgrund der Hoffnung auf den fernen, den zukunftsfernen Nächsten.
>
> [Real poetry is antibiographical. The poet's home is his poem, it changes from one poem to another. The distances are the old, eternal ones: infinite like the universe, in which each poem seeks to assert itself as—tiny—star. Infinite also like the distance between his I and his You: from both sides, both poles, the bridge is built: in the middle, half-way, there, where one anticipates the supporting pillar, from above or from below, there is the poem's place. From above: invisible and uncertain. From below: from the abyss of hope for the distant, the future-distant near one.][83]

Celan's ongoing commentary – in letters, poetry, and personal notations – on the relationship between writing and individual experience is painfully bound up with the unfounded claims of plagiarism that Claire Goll, widow of the surrealist poet Yvan Goll, leveled against Celan after her husband's death.[84] The passage cited also confronts the question of "authenticity," which Celan grapples with over and over in response to these accusations. As we have seen, the

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[82] Guyer 183.

[83] Paul Celan, *Mikrolithen sinds, Steinchen,* 95, translation mine.

[84] While it exceeds the scope of the current analysis to discuss the Goll case in detail, see Barbara Wiedemann, ed., *Paul Celan – Die Goll-Affäre: Dokumente zu einer "Infamie"* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000) for further pertinent references.

problem of authenticity is one that a poetics of survival brings to the fore, since it engages the connection between experience, knowledge, and communication. Moreover, though, a poetics of survival questions the ethical tensions that inhere in the bond between experience and expression, that is, in the conventional valorization of authenticity as a form of testifying to a position of individual power and mastery. Instead, Celan suggests that in its individuality, the poem navigates an interactive and shifting space, destabilizing the very notion of belonging. If singularity is not grounded in belonging, how then does it arise?

The first sentence of the excerpt refuses to locate "real" or "true" poetry in the individual's life, avowing instead that poetry remains "antibiographical." The passage proposes that the relation between the experienced and the expressed is at the same time the recognition of its constant changeability and of such changeability's ethical implications. In particular, Celan's portrayal problematizes an understanding of being-at-home and of authenticity as "rooted" experiences, which might allow the individual to exert authority and to "appropriate" existence. Instead, the spaces of relation between being and writing, between self and interlocutor, shift in the moment of attempting to locate them. Indeed, the bond between the poet and the poem bears a vital resemblance to the bond of human encounter, as both manifest the longing for response and the demand for responsibility.

Characterizing the place of the poem as intimate and cosmic at once, the passage presents the poem's existence in terms that suggest desire rather than the certainty of authority; the poem "seeks" to "assert" itself (*zu behaupten suchen*) by playing on the tension between a localizable or inhabitable place and the distance between and across space(s). The passage moves in multiple directions, approaching the place of the poem from various angles: it speaks of sides, poles, of a middle, above, and below. Yet at the same time as it installs the poem as a bridge between beings and as the support that allows for encounter (*der tragende Pfeiler*), it displaces this possibility into an anticipated future, one that cannot be fully appropriated or inhabited due to the temporality of anticipation, which always exceeds need and further suspends desire (much like Sachs' *Sehnsucht*). Thus, we must seek the poem in the arena of expectation rather than fulfillment (*dort, wo der tragende Pfeiler erwartet wird*). The orienting approach from above and below bespeaks the necessary commitment to a hope that is constituted rather than dismantled by uncertainty and doubt. The relation to the other remains a desired encounter, which preserves a distance necessary to intimacy while also, through this movement, reinforcing the solitude of individual existence (*von unten her: aus dem Abgrund der Hoffnung auf den fernen, den zukunftsfernen Nächsten*).

This passage from Celan's notations resonates with a poem from his volume *Die Niemandsrose*, which in turn offers many correspondences with Sachs and continues their dialogue about the fragility and tenacity of a poetics of survival, navigating encounter through a language of breath:

> Soviel Gestirne, die
> man uns hinhält. Ich war,
> als ich dich ansah – wann? –,
> draußen bei
> den andern Welten.
>
> O diese Wege, galaktisch,
> o diese Stunde, die uns

die Nächte herüberwog in
die Last unsrer Namen. Es ist,
ich weiß es, nicht wahr,
daß wir lebten, es ging
blind nur ein Atem zwischen
Dort und Nicht-da und Zuweilen,
Kometenhaft schwirrte ein Aug
auf Erloschenes zu, in den Schluchten,
da, wo's verglühte, stand
zitzenprächtig die Zeit,
an der schon empor- und hinab-
und hinwegwuchs, was
ist oder war oder sein wird –,

ich weiß,
ich weiß und du weißt, wir wußten,
wir wußten nicht, wir
waren ja da und nicht dort,
und zuweilen, wenn
nur das Nichts zwischen uns stand, fanden
wir ganz zueinander.

[So many constellations that
are held out to us. I was,
when I looked at you – when? –
outside by
the other worlds.

O these ways, galactic,
O this hour, that weighed
nights over for us into
the burden of our names. It is,
I know, not true
that we lived, there moved,
blindly, no more than a breath between
there and not-there, and at times
our eyes whirred comet-like
toward things extinguished, in chasms,
and where they had burnt out,
splendid with teats, stood Time
on which already grew up
and down and away all that
is or was or will be –,

I know,
I know and you know, we knew,

we did not know, we
were there, after all, and not there
and at times when
only the void stood between us we got
all the way to each other.][85]

In its attempt to sustain the material, aesthetic, and ethical stakes of confronting an existence that bears the wounds of atrocity, a poetics of survival intertwines the demands of expression and the responsibilities of the creative act. Frequently, Celan's poetry links the (sexual) union of bodies and the exchange of speech, yet not in order to metaphorize one through the other but to present their mutual dependence and fragility. Entangling the material and the ephemeral, this inseparability of physical and verbal communication constitutes a vital aspect of their ethical charge. It thus becomes impossible to read or write about survival without depicting the ways in which the body, in all its vulnerability and tenacity, is involved in language and the ways in which words, in turn, display corporeality.

The interactive space that arises through a relation that neither rejects nor subsumes the other in identity remains in question in this poem. It is neither granted nor guaranteed, and therefore, the poem continuously (re)orients itself. It does so from the beginning, seeking to position the speaking subject vis-à-vis the addressee: *Ich war, / als ich dich ansah – wann? – / draußen bei / den andern Welten*. The time and place of encounter are transient, for the self does not inhabit a coherent site. Therefore, the speaker's search to locate the self is also the realization of its displacement. Indeed, space—both the space of the poem and the space it creates beyond its borders—seems surreal, bridging various universes while granting the subject's gaze across such infinite distances. Yet the gaze is not a sign of power: in part, the reluctance to establish a secure position of identity stems from a rejection of the knowledge of vision. The poem elaborates this rejection in the image of breath's blindness; breath offers an alternate form of understanding that does not rely on the movement of appropriation and mastery, which underlies so many conceptions of knowledge. Thus, breath journeys between various temporal and spatial markers, which signal existence as potential rather than as certainty, revealing the modality of survival. At once demanding affirmation of existence and denying its possibility, the poem's speaker traces breath's route as one that encompasses the insistently and localizably present (*dort*), the absent as negation of presence (*nicht-da*), and the occasional or contingent (*zuweilen*). The image of breath's blindness displays an inverted synaesthesia akin to the blind groping of the dead in Sachs' poem "Schon." The movement of blind breath testifies to a crippling and reduction that once more refuses the masterful conclusion of a quest.

Given the impossibility of arriving at a certain destination, the multiplicity that inheres in choice forms an alternative commitment, which is both promise and predicament. Above all, the notion of choice does not liberate one from attention to the ethical consequences of the bond between micro- and macrocosm, as even the first verse makes clear. At the poem's start, an anonymous agent offers speaker and addressee – united initially in a plural voice – the array of *soviel Gestirn* ("so many constellations"). The poem sustains this tension between the expansive and the restrictive moments that inhere in choice. Apostrophizing the multiple and cosmic routes of encounter (*o diese Wege; o diese Stunde*), the speaker does not valorize them as guarantors of transcendence or of the metaphysical. Instead, the seeming universality of the cosmic

[85] Paul Celan, *Die Gedichte*, 127-128, and Celan, *Poems of Paul Celan*, trans. Michael Hamburger (New York: Persea, 2002 [1972]), 137.

corresponds with the individual body, a correlation that emerges even in the poem's first stanza. For the self is both distinct from and embedded in a world that sustains its animal being, its "creatureliness."

The corporeal and the cosmic meld in the profusion of *Gestirn*, which refers to various body parts – the forehead, the brain, the eyes – as well as to a constellation of stars or planets. If we recall, in this context, Sachs' image of *die Gestirne der Augäpfel*, with its confusion of the spatial and cosmic orientation of the gravesite, we perceive the ambivalent echoes of hope and jeopardy in Celan's words with doubled force. We are reminded that this poetics of survival must remain cognizant of the omnipresent absence of the dead, which surrounds lived and poetic space. The dangerous fusion of the cosmic and the physical recurs in the image of the single eye, as larger-than-life fragment, which traverses time and space like a comet and alludes to the act of coitus. The irreducible relation between human and celestial bodies serves as a continual admonition to recognize the entanglement and mutual reliance of micro- and macrocosm. But the poem undercuts that division as well, since the relation between various subjects, times, and places, exercised grammatically, institutes each through the other.

Why does "Soviel Gestirn" perform its own refusal to establish a stable or categorical form of relations? This question arises from the poem's investigation of grammatical and lexical language relations, for instance in the neologistic *herüberwiegen*. Celan's creations frequently produce a new yet recognizable word through the addition of a prefix, thus offering a palimpsest of meanings, which stand in tension with one another to illuminate their respective limits and consequences. The word *herüberwiegen* describes the implications of an encounter between self and other, addressed from the position of momentary unity in the plural first-person voice: *O diese Wege, galaktisch / o diese Stunde, die uns / die Nächte herüberwog in / die Last unsrer Namen*. The prefixes of *herüberwiegen* trace the routes of physical and verbal communication. Included in the word are the notions of *wiegen* (to weigh) and *überwiegen* (to outweigh), of an appraisal and a comparison of substance and balance. The need to assess consequence inheres in such concepts, which portray comparison as a process of gauging – and, implicitly, judging – relation. The neologistic *herüberwiegen* curiously alters the conception of hierarchy (and thus of power), as it emphasizes the travel of language through the prefixes *her-* or *herüber-*, thus shifting beyond the symmetrical image of the scale (*wiegen*) and exposing the difficulty of confining relation and comparison within existent borders.

In addition to portraying the movable forms of linguistic relation, the word *herüberwiegen* and the verses in which it occurs also address a particular kind of familial kinship. After all, the word *wiegen* figures corporeal proximity through one of the closest physical contacts, the soothing action of rocking a child. This resonance underscores the fact that the poem displays the condition of survival through the nexus of the intimacy and distance involved in human encounter and particularly in the sexual act. The generative and the dissolving qualities of the erotic depict knowledge not as masterful but as a fragile exchange, occurring at (and beyond) the limit of individual existence. Thus, a drifting into silence, a redirection of the paths of life and language, constantly undoes coital excitement. At the poem's center, we discover this rupture of the climactic moment: *Kometenhaft schwirrte ein Aug / auf Erloschenes zu, in den Schluchten, / da, wo's verglühte, stand / zitzenprächtig die Zeit, / an der schon empor- und hinab- / und hinaufwuchs, was / ist oder war oder sein wird* ["our eyes whirred comet-like / toward things extinguished, in chasms, / and where they had burnt out, / splendid with teats, stood Time / on which already grew up / and down and away all that / is or

was or will be – "]. This sexual imagery does not envision coitus as an ultimate manifestation of physical or verbal potency.

On the one hand, the sexual act takes on cosmic proportions – the ejaculatory rush of the comet (itself transcribing the eye onto a recognizably phallic object) into the vaginal chasm, the mammalian maternity of time's teats. On the other hand, this cosmic expansion of two bodies' intimate encounter is a movement of restriction and annihilation as well. References to the extinguished and burnt-out collide with the grammatical rehearsal of proliferation, which is thus not simply an indication of rich and varied possibility but of futility as well. The inclusive portrayal of times past, present, and future undercuts the notion of the progression and development of existence by making these times exchangeable – what was *or* is *or* will be. Such a conception of time demonstrates that the condition of survival does not pass beyond but continues to bear the effects of suffering, refuting the opposition of life and death and depicting the ways in which memory, happening, and expectation interweave. Thus, the potentially generative act of coitus – the offspring evoked by the image of spatial and temporal growth – is also a confrontation with the limits and the nullity of existence, exposed through its very plurality and interchangeability.

The inescapable multiplicity of the possible challenges the conception of knowledge. If knowledge aspires to define the boundaries of identity and experience, it necessarily exposes its own limits. When the claims of knowledge are linked to the claims of truth, its risks and the attendant ethical charge become yet clearer. Celan exposes the danger of this link, positioning existence, knowledge, truth and its refusal in a relation that simultaneously affirms and denies their bond: *Es ist, / ich weiß es, nicht wahr, / daß wir lebten*. At the center of this assertion, the self's knowledge (*ich weiß es*) is followed by a phrase that signals the search for an interlocutor's assurance and reassurance (*nicht wahr*). At the same time, however, the verse offers only the certainty of non-truth as the realization of an irrefutable knowledge (*Es ist, / ich weiß es, nicht wahr*). The correspondence rather than the opposition of truth and denial arise through the enjambment of the verses, unfolding as we read. Through the simultaneous reassurance of continued existence and of futility, the poem struggles to negotiate competing perceptions of living, even as it manifests a desire to gauge this subjective search through an interlocutor's response.

Indeed, the poem withholds both the certainty of knowledge and of self-knowledge. The individual's responsibilities, which inhere in being, emerge in the weight of names (*die Last unserer Namen*). These names are not revealed and cannot enclose identity; in fact, the poem guards the privacy of the individual while at the same time opening it to appropriation through the insistence on the deictic "I" and "you." The constant recurrence of pronouns asks the reader to reflect on the boundaries of personhood, on the demarcation of individuality, and on the limits of unity. Thus, the repeated assertion – which is also a questioning – of knowledge (*ich weiß es, nicht wahr*) revolves around the biases that emerge from or relate to the self. As Celan states in the Meridian Speech, the poet speaks "unter dem Neigungswinkel seines, Daseins, dem Neigungswinkel seiner Kreatürlichkeit" ["from the inclination angle of his being-there, the inclination angle of his creatureliness"].[86] This formulation is, in one sense, a response to Claire Goll's plagiarism accusations; it locates the possibility of expression in the necessary desires (*Neigung*) and biases (*Winkel*), which stage encounter as both liberating and limiting. Therefore, knowledge's potential inheres in the palimpsest of the times and places of being: *ich weiß, / ich weiß und du weißt, wir wußten, / wir wußten nicht, wir / waren ja da und nicht dort*. To

[86] Paul Celan, *Der Meridian*, 9, translation mine.

recognize having been "here" and "not there" is an attempt at localization, but also an acknowledgement of the routes of evasion or escape. In this way, these verses also indict those who seek to evade the claims of personal responsibility by taking refuge in the (grammatical) possibilities of plurality and negation (by claiming, for instance, about the atrocities committed against fellow human beings, that "we knew nothing," that "we were here and not there").

The last stanza grapples with precisely this problem, considering the ethical implications of the differences between knowledge and perception: while the verb "to know" recurs five times in three verses, resembling a grammatical declination, it asks us to consider whether each instantiation of the word marks the same knowledge. Moving from the self to the separate unity of I and you to the fusion of these two in the first-person plural voice, knowledge finally gives way to its negation. The transition from "wir wußten" to "wir wußten nicht" occurs across a verse break, but the parallelism between the affirmation and negation also calls into question the viability of constructing categories of meaning and identity through the illusion of masterful comprehension. This refusal of categorization is yet more evident in the final verses, as the speaking voice concludes with a plural unity, which is nevertheless not cohesive. Actualized only through absence from another space (*wir / waren ja da und nicht dort*), encounter bears within it a necessary distance and exclusion. Rendering the I-you bond perilous and intimate, any initial illusion of a spatially or temporally cohesive encounter dissolves at the poem's end. The final verses' insistence on nothingness as the place of meeting – *und zuweilen, wenn / nur das Nichts zwischen uns stand, fanden / wir ganz zueinander* – conjures the absolute fusion of body and speech while simultaneously undercutting its potential to produce meaning.

The breath-turn, as we have seen, figures the space in which nothingness and unity correspond, undoing opposition without eliminating the tension of difference. Celan's "Ein Wurfholz," also from *Die Niemandsrose*, describes a universe in which breath, as moveable threshold between individual and world, constitutes the routes of potential communication and response. The poem travels along such breath-paths, seeking encounter:

> Ein Wurfholz, auf Atemwegen
> so wanderts, das Flügel-
> mächtige, das
> Wahre. Auf
> Sternen-
> bahnen, von Welten-
> splittern geküßt, von Zeit-
> körnern genarbt, von Zeitstaub, mit-
> verwaisend mit euch,
> Lapilli, ver-
> zwergt, verwinzigt, ver-
> nichtet,
> verbracht und verworfen,
> sich selber der Reim, –
> so kommt es
> geflogen, so kommts
> wieder und heim,
> einen Herzschlag, ein Tausendjahr lang
> innezuhalten als

einziger Zeiger im Rund,
das eine Seele,
das seine
Seele
beschrieb,
das eine
Seele
beziffert.

[A boomerang, on breath-paths,
so it wanders, the wing-
powered, the
true. On
star-
routes, by world-
shards kissed, by time-
kernels scarred, by time-dust, co-
orphaning with you,
Lapilli,
dwarfed, diminished, an-
nihilated,
deported and discarded,
unto itself the rhyme, –
thus it comes
flying, thus it comes
back and home,
a heart-beat, a thousand-year long
to pause as
only dial in the round,
which described
a soul,
his soul
described,
which numbered
a
soul.][87]

The poem stages the ethical ambivalence inherent in projects of mastery through colliding trajectories of expansion and reduction. In the first eight verses, the *Wurfholz*, as boomerang but also as weapon, moves outward, traversing the earth's history through its archaeological layers.[88] By contrast, the following five verses manifest fragmentation and a return to the momentary: Although the processes of destructive transformation proliferate, both the multiplicity of the list

[87] Celan, *Die Gedichte*, 148-149, and Werner Hamacher, "The Second of Inversion: Movements of a Figure through Celan's Poetry," trans. William Jewett, *Yale French Studies* 69 (1985): 304, translation modified.

[88] Barbara Wiedemann remarks in the poem's annotations that the "Wurfholz" is also a "Wurfwaffe" (that is, a weapon one utilizes by throwing it). See Paul Celan, *Die Gedichte*, 694n1.

and the promise of development are undercut by the verbs themselves, which signal diminishment and, ultimately, an obliterating violence: *ver- / zwergt, verwinzigt, ver / nichtet, / verbracht und verworfen*. These lines bring to the fore a question that haunts Celan's poetics of survival: the subject, whose agency is always entangled with its vulnerability, must recognize the charge of individual responsibility despite the anonymous diffusion of power and violence.

The passive, amorphous nature of power therefore precludes any assurance of purpose and direction. Foregrounding the vagaries of *wandern*, the poem's travels fuse the anticipation of exploration with the awareness of dislocation, so also resonating centrally with the topos of the "wandering Jew." The text does, however, introduce the idea of home, as it establishes the necessary bond between the corporeal, poetological, and ethical: *sich selber der Reim - / so kommt es / geflogen, so kommts / wieder und heim*. What does it mean to be *sich selber der Reim*? The reflexive notion of "being unto oneself" does not admit self-containment or self-sufficiency. Instead, the rhyme found in and for the self complicates identity, because it exposes the strange – that which defies appropriation – in the individual, thus marking both the creative potential and the provisionality that inheres in selfhood. The boomerang's movement is now reversed, its return both a climactic inevitability (*so kommt es*) and a recognition of individual responsibility, as the act returns to its author (*so kommts / wieder und heim*).[89] The poem's only rhyme, poised at the center as the boomerang's turning point, is the one between *Reim* and *heim*; it is thus only through the bonds of kinship that belonging becomes imaginable (if not attainable).

Nevertheless, the workings of kinship in the poem claim the familial as the insistent presence of deprivation. The haunting term *verwaisend* entwines life and death lastingly. Here, vitality gains its force from the perpetual movement towards and through death: recalling Sachs' formulation of *zum Leben verwesende Samenkörner* (seeds decaying towards or into life), I hear a striking near-homophonic resonance between her use of *verwesend* and Celan's use of *verwaisend*, a resonance compounded by the way in which both terms exemplify the entanglement of life and death through their continuous mutual transformation.[90] The ongoing process of "orphaning," compounded by the gerund form, suggests a paradoxical power: the subject's involvement in its bereavement becomes culpability. In considering the relationship between the poetic and the ethical, we remember, too, that Celan referred to the poet as the poem's *Mitwisser* – that is, the one who shares its knowledge but is also its accomplice.[91] The subject of "Ein Wurfholz" is *mit-/ verwaisend*, engaged in an act of collaboration that arises from the shared experience of solitude. The homophonic resonance with the word *verweisend* (to indicate a linguistic or metaphoric gesture towards meaning) suggests that to point to relation already signifies an irreduceable distance between source and target, as Werner Hamacher, one of the poem's most astute critics, observes. Yet I differ with Hamacher's claim that the process of "co-orphaning" "lacks any […] communicative reference."[92] I argue that it is precisely the

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[89] Annette von Droste-Hülshoff's introductory poem to *Die Judenbuche*, the book Celan sends Sachs on July 1st, 1960, is a part of the implicit conversation between them on this issue of responsibility as an acknowledgment of the ways in which actions return to act upon the subject. Droste-Hülshoff's poem ends with the verse, "Laß ruhn den Stein – er trifft dein eignes Haupt! – " [Let the stone rest – it strikes your own head! –]. Droste-Hülshoff, *Die Judenbuche: ein Sittengemälde aus dem gebirgigten Westphalen*, ed. Heinz Rölleke (Bad Homburg: Gehlen, 1970), 11.

[90] See my discussion of "Sind Gräber Atempause für die Sehnsucht?" on pp. 115-119.

[91] In Celan, *Gesammelte Werke: Dritter Band*, 177, and Celan, *Collected Prose*, 25.

[92] Hamacher writes, "The word refers (*verweist*) only in abandoning (*indem es verwaist*). It separates itself from its derivation and the intentions bound up with it, mortifies what is meant in it and what is addressed by it, and in this it

multiplication of isolation – the shared experience of reduction to a radical singularity – which, in a poetics of survival, opens the space of potential if precarious exchange.

Indeed, avowing a kinship that arises out of the solidarity of solitude, barely three months before writing "Ein Wurfholz," Celan copies out Sachs' poem "Chor der Waisen" ["Chorus of the Orphans"], in which we find the words, "Wir Waisen gleichen niemand mehr auf der Welt!" ["We orphans resemble no one in the world anymore!"].[93] This verse emphasizes the tension between an utter lack of correspondence (*niemandem gleichen*) and a shared community (through the deictic "we"). Celan sends her his hand-written copy with the words, "Nelly Sachs! Von diesem Gedicht her kenne ich Sie. […] Da fand ich Sie, Nelly Sachs." ["Nelly Sachs! Through this poem I know you. […] There I found you […], Nelly Sachs."][94] In the loss of familial ties, sustained together at the intersection of life and language, a relation of survival arises.

The poem's movement manifests these incommensurable bonds of endurance, taking shape as a pause, which links the ephemeral and the eternal: *so kommt es / geflogen, so kommts / wieder und heim, / einen Herzschlag, ein Tausendjahr lang / innezuhalten als / einziger Zeiger im Rund*. The correspondence between the instant of the heartbeat and the thousand-year duration refers obliquely to the condition of survival, which carries on in the suspension between a fragile and fragmented corporeality (the perpetually recurring moment of the heartbeat) and the Nazi perpetrators' threatening vision of a thousand-year empire. The breath-paths, which found and transform the poem, lead to the interdependence of body, time, and inscription, evoked by the endless circle of the clock-face. In its use of *Beschreibung* to refer to movement *and* expression, the language of the poem recalls the response Celan sends to Sachs' portrayal of the poet's vocation: "Falsche Sterne überfliegen uns, gewiß – aber das Staubkorn, durchschmerzt von Ihrer Stimme, beschreibt die unendliche Bahn." ["False stars fly over us – certainly; but the kernel of dust, pained through by your voice, traces the eternal route."][95] Stars, the dustkernel, and the endless path occur again in the poem in inverted form, both fragmented and multiplied in the enjambed verses "Auf / *Sternen*- / *bahnen*, von Welten- / splittern geküßt, von Zeit- / *körnern* genarbt, von Zeit*staub*."

Here, however, the fragmented and multiplied dust-kernel is no longer the agent of the poem's movement. While that agent appears, at first reading, to be the *Wurfholz*, the juxtaposition of subjectivities in the opening verses questions the possibility of a unified perception and of definitive knowledge: *Ein Wurfholz, auf Atemwegen / so wanderts, das Flügel- / mächtige, das / Wahre*. Possessed of the power of flight, *das Flügelmächtige* signifies the circumventive movement of escape, too, thus undercutting any suggestion of creative mastery. Truth – or rather *das Wahre* – cannot be fully grasped or appropriated. The poem constitutes a

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becomes the movement of infinite singularization." He continues, "The word, this poem, is, as self-orphaning, *the second* in which it separates from itself. As an orphaning that is itself orphaned, it lacks any semantic or communicative reference." Hamacher , "The Second of Inversion," 306, 307. In German: "Das Wort verweist nur, indem es verwaist. Es trennt sich von seiner Herkunft und den mit ihm verbundenen Intentionen, mortifiziert das von ihm Gemeinte und mit ihm Adressierte und ist so die Bewegung der unendlichen Singularisierung." And "Das Wort, verwaist, wird selber zu dem, wovon es verwaist wird. […] Als Verwaisung, die selber verwaist ist, fehlt ihr jeder semantische und kommunikative Bezug." Werner Hamacher, "Die Sekunde der Inversion: Bewegungen einer Figur durch Celans Gedichte," *Paul Celan*, eds. Hamacher and Winfried Menninghaus (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 115, 116.

[93] Sachs, *Fahrt ins Staublose*, 54-55, translation mine.

[94] Celan and Sachs, *Briefwechsel*, 34, and Celan and Sachs, *Correspondence*, 20.

[95] Celan and Sachs, *Briefwechsel*, 15, translation mine.

singular form of expression, but it remains accessible, exposed.[96] Note also this fragment from Celan's drafts for the Meridian-speech: "auf *Atemwegen* kommt es, das Gedicht, pneumatisch ist es *da*: für jeden." ["On *breathpaths* it comes, the poem, pneumatically it is *there*: for everyone."][97] Here, the breath-paths that recur in "Ein Wurfholz" already constitute the poem's emergence as communicative and corporeal movement, open to the promise (and the threat) of another's engagement with it.

In fact, as I have hoped to illuminate in my reflections on Celan's and Sachs' writings, the poetics of survival and the space of communication it engenders calls into question the division between authoring and receiving, uncovering their irreducible relation instead. On July 1st, 1960, two weeks after their second meeting (which was also to be their last) in Paris and almost exactly a year before writing "Ein Wurfholz," Celan writes to Sachs, mentioning that he has sent her a book,

> Ein Buch, Die Judenbuche, ist unterwegs zu Dir; es war vor ein paar Tagen auf einmal da, beim Buchhändler; ich hatte es, auf der Suche nach Anderem – das ja, hier bestätigt sich's wieder, das Selbe bleibt – herausgegriffen; die Flechtheims, die es haben drucken lassen, dürften Juden sein…
> Es ist still hier. Fast alle jene, die Deine Nähe wieder nah sein ließ, sind auf die ihnen so eigene, mir so unverständliche Weise in die Bereiche zurückgetreten, wo Deutlichkeit nicht als Gesetz gilt. Es gehört zum Schwersten dieser Zeit, daß so viele vom Wort abfallen – vom eigenen so leicht wie von dem ihnen zugesprochenen.
>
> [A book, *Die Judenbuche*, is on its way to you; it was suddenly there a few days ago at the booksellers; I had picked it up while searching for something different – something that, once again as always, remains the same – the Flechtheims who had it published are presumably Jews…
> It is quiet here. Almost all of those whom your closeness had brought close again have—in ways so much their own, so incomprehensible to me—stepped back into the domains where clarity doesn't count as a law. It is one of the most difficult things about our time that so many are falling away from the word—from their own as easily as from the one awarded them.][98]

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[96] As Celan maintains in his acceptance speech for the Bremen Literature Prize, the poem is "besetzbar" [inhabitable or able to be occupied]: "Das Gedicht kann, da es ja eine Erscheinungsform der Sprache und damit seinem Wesen nach dialogisch ist, eine Flaschenpost sein, aufgegeben in dem - gewiß nicht immer hoffnungsstarken - Glauben, sie könnte irgendwo und irgendwann an Land gespült werden, an Herzland vielleicht. Gedichte sind auch in dieser Weise unterwegs: sie halten auf etwas zu. Worauf? Auf etwas Offenstehendes, Besetzbares, auf ein ansprechbares Du vielleicht, auf eine ansprechbare Wirklichkeit. Um solche Wirklichkeiten geht es, denke ich, dem Gedicht." Celan, *Gesammelte Werke: Dritter Band*, 186. In English: "A poem, being an instance of language, hence essentially dialogue, may be a letter in a bottle thrown out to sea with the – surely not always strong – hope that it may somehow wash up somewhere, perhaps on a shoreline of the heart. In this way, too, poems are on their way: they are headed toward. Toward what? Toward something open, inhabitable, an approachable you, perhaps, an approachable reality." Celan, *Collected Prose*, 34-35, translation modified.

[97] Paul Celan, *Der Meridian*, 108, translation mine.

[98] Celan and Sachs, *Briefwechsel*, 48, and Celan and Sachs, *Correspondence*, 29-30, translation modified. The idea of the word as *zugesprochen* echoes the insistence on the poem's dialogic hope, which we find also in the Meridian speech: "Das Gedicht will zu einem Anderen, es braucht dieses Andere, es braucht ein Gegenüber. Es sucht es auf, es spricht sich ihm zu." ["The poem intends another, needs this other, needs an opposite. It goes toward it, bespeaks it."] Celan, *Der Meridian*, 9, and Celan, *Collected Prose*, 49.

This passage, too, addresses the relationship between sameness and difference from the perspective of language's ethical burden. The book traveling to Sachs is materialized language, tracing the path between self and interlocutor. Yet this travel is neither expressly willed nor direct, for it occurs only by detour, by way of Celan's search for a different writing, which turns out to be the same. In this way, the journey is dislocated and inevitable at the same time. The comment that the search for the other yields it as the same foregrounds the primacy of the journey. By equating same and other, the destination loses its privilege and unravels the polarity of origin and end, allowing for boundless (even evasive) movement and resisting the static positions of a speech that separates "I" and "you." Celan cites the abandonment of language – a "falling away" from it, which mingles activity and passivity – as a grave wrongdoing; the ease with which such abandonment occurs corresponds with the severity of its consequences. Referring to "the word" rather than to language as a whole, he emphasizes singularity, hinting at a religiosity that does not, however, ritualize the sacred. Instead, faith as such mandates attention to an ethics that impacts the self in and through the commitment to others. To abandon one's own speech means also to divest oneself of the ability to receive another's words (*vom eigenen so leicht wie von dem ihnen zugesprochenen*). This relational nature of expression underscores that language depends upon sustaining a space within which (and out of which, excessively) it can move. Indeed, Celan's poignant choice to characterize the word spoken to the other as one spoken towards them (*zugesprochen*) conjoins the direction of language with its ethical and juridical mandate, since the verb usually designates the act of awarding someone a right or assigning them an obligation.

But those who retreat to the domain where "clarity does not count as a law" (*wo Deutlichkeit nicht als Gesetz gilt*) elude such words, which bear with them the expectations of response and responsibility, and so the falling away from language remains a constant imperilment. Celan dwells on this danger in a poem written the same day as this letter. Intertwining the book's material substance with language, writing becomes a missive sent, in the first verse, *zu beiden Händen* ("to both hands"). I quote the second half of the poem, its third and fourth stanza:

> O diese wandernde leere
> gastliche Mitte. Getrennt,
> fall ich dir zu, fällst
> du mir zu, einander
> entfallen, sehn wir
> hindurch:
>
> Das
> Selbe
> hat uns
> verloren, das
> Selbe
> hat uns
> vergessen, das
> Selbe
> hat uns – –

[Oh this wandering empty
hospitable middle. Separate,
I fall towards you, you fall
towards me, dropped
from each other, we see
right through:

The
same
has lost
us, the
same
has forgotten
us, the
same
has us – –][99]

Again, the dash reminds us that the poem does not arrive at a final destination. Nevertheless, it asks us, as readers, to attend to its journey, its search for a hospitable space in which nullity and encounter coincide (*diese wandernde leere / gastliche Mitte*). Speaker and interlocutor correspond in the experience of bereavement and isolation as much as in the experience of enthrallment and subsumption. These correspondences both grant communication its ethical charge and expose the difficulties (and near impossibility) of such commitment. For the risk and vulnerability of mutual approach (*einander zufallen*) stand always in tension with the danger of forgetting (*einander entfallen*), recalling Celan's lament about living in a time in which so many "fall away" from the word (*vom Wort abfallen*). The threat of the simultaneous ubiquity and dispersion of memory impacts the possible space of expression for a poetics of survival, refusing it the power to enclose, totalize, or appropriate an ongoing past.

To recognize that the survivor exists, in life and in language, in several corresponding realms at once without inhabiting any fully thus calls for an ethical engagement that resists the desires of appropriation through a "masterful," "identifying," or "authoritative" knowledge. The isolation of the survivor is coextensive with his or her bonds, which bear the wounds of kinship and uphold distance at the same time. Refusing to valorize communication as a way of establishing hierarchical relations, the poetics of survival insists instead on the need for an interactive space, an irreducible separation. Celan alludes to the correspondence between singularity and dialogue, a conversation that allows for the rhyming of same and other, and that moves towards the non-destination of the question, which remains as both hope and doubt: "Das Gedicht ist einsam. Es ist einsam und unterwegs. Wer es schreibt, bleibt ihm mitgegeben. Aber steht das Gedicht nicht gerade dadurch, also schon hier, in der Begegnung – *im Geheimnis der Begegnung*?" [The poem is lonely. It is lonely and on its way. The one who writes it remains with it. But does this very fact not place the poem already here, at its inception, in the encounter – *in the mystery of encounter*?][100]

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[99] Celan, *Die Gedichte*, 129, and Celan, *Poems of Paul Celan*, trans. Hamburger, 141, translation significantly modified.

[100] Celan, *Der Meridian*, 9, and Celan, *Collected Prose*, 49, translation modified.

In conclusion, I would like to reflect on the implications of considering the poem as a shifting, non-localizable space of potential encounter. Exploring the tension between origin and remains – as a crossing and re-crossing of the boundaries of subjectivity, at the nexus of body and language – this space of encounter speaks to the value of a practice of intertextual reading, especially in the Jewish cultural context, since the process of rewriting and rereading and the commitment to ongoing commentary and dispute are vital to the tradition, as we saw already in Chapter One and will see again in the next chapter. Against claims of authority and knowledge, Celan and Sachs posit the poem as an exploration of the tenuous capacities for exchange. Inscribing the body's injuries and enduring language's wounds, the poem presents the opportunity for ethical engagement by conjoining response and responsibility. Thus, the ethical emerges *as* the intersection of the written and the lived, in the precarious structure of a relation that tests the limits between self and other, inside and outside, undoing opposition without eliminating difference.

Challenging categorical interdictions of "representing" suffering on the one hand and claims that seek to universalize or appropriate individual experience on the other, the poem's non-conclusive search thus bears the Shoah's atrocities as the ongoing anguish of survival. As Sara Guyer reminds us, "Survival is linked to a failure of ends."[101] I argue that this "failure of ends" involves a persistent search for a kinship that commingles the familiar and the foreign in a shared endurance of isolation and fragmentation at the limit of existence. By negotiating the foundation and direction of a corporeal language, the poem addresses the conflict between the urge to speak on behalf of the dead and to mark their absence through silence. Bringing together incongruous temporal and topographic spaces, it demands attention to the ever-changing relationship between *das, was geschah* ("that which happened," to cite Celan once more) and the present as the eternal transitory moment. [102] In this way, the poem speaks to the precarious position of memory, as it passes from the individual to the collective realm. It asks us to recognize that this movement is not comprehensive, that commemoration requires an acknowledgment of distance at the same time as it solicits commitment and accountability.

By exploring how the poem constructs and traverses the arena of potential encounter, Celan and Sachs ultimately both illuminate and argue with the ways in which space structures not only the imagination of being and relation but also attendant appraisals of agency, authenticity, and value. In analyses of the Shoah's impact, the experience of atrocity is often portrayed as "deep" and "central," at the core of all that comes afterwards, *or* as a "limit" or "extreme" occurrence, beyond comprehension. If theories of trauma and its consequences generally seek to explicate the ways in which these two seemingly irreconcilable positions of the central and the limit merge, then Celan's and Sachs' writings further problematize the very attempt to demarcate the spaces of experience and expression. Instead, their works highlight the importance of committing to the distance *and* the bonds imposed by the precarious realm of endurance, as they navigate the interstices that preserve the relation of life and language. Their poetics of survival displace rather than found claims to knowledge. In search of exchange rather than destined for certainty, the poem moves, and it remains.

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[101] Guyer 13-14.

[102] Celan, *Gesammelte Werke: Dritter Band*, 186, translation mine.

CHAPTER THREE
A Yiddish Poetics of Survival in America: Malka Heifetz Tussman and the Refusal of Lament

Virtual Territories: Stakes and Claims

After the Shoah, what are the particular historical, linguistic, aesthetic, and ethical pressures that Yiddish poetry in America faces? Following the murder of many of its native speakers and the attendant threat of linguicide, poets writing in Yiddish in America, at a great geographic remove from the European catastrophe, dwell upon the vexed relationship between corporeal wounds, which they did not themselves endure, and lingual injuries, which haunt them lastingly. While it would be reductive to read all American Yiddish poetry written after the Shoah only as a response to atrocity, it seems equally problematic to claim that the events in Europe could remain extrinsic to this oeuvre. For these poets, the near-eradication of Europe's Yiddish speakers affected not only the aims and demands of writing but also impelled their awareness of a radically diminished readership, which had already been scarce.

In 1923, a contributor to the Introspectivist journal *In Zikh*, contemplating the paucity of readers of Yiddish poetry, writes at once defiantly and hopefully: "The problem of the reader does not exist for us. We have long ago despaired of the possibility of having what is called a readers' circle for the new Yiddish poetry. In any case, not here in America. Perhaps such an animal does exist in Poland. Perhaps also in Russia. In America—nonexistent. Perhaps the reader of modern Yiddish literature will come later. Hope can never harm. Now he doesn't exist and perhaps cannot exist."[1] While one must be careful not to read this passage with a "backshadowing" eye, to borrow Michael André Bernstein's term for a practice of reading that assumes and imposes a privileged contemporary understanding of historical occurrence, it is nevertheless imperative to observe that the author's hope for a European readership of Yiddish literature, in lieu of the American audience of Yiddish readers already discounted, could not materialize.[2] Thus, an American Yiddish poetics struggles with the question of survival in a particular way: because it confronts the disjunction between the authors' geographic distance from the catastrophe on the one hand and the material injuries sustained by their shared, trans-geographic language on the other, these poetics explore the poem's space—both the space it inhabits and the space it constructs—as a utopian site of encounter, querying what forms a poetics may take after its readership has been brutally diminished. What poems survive, and what forms of corporeal and textual survival do they inscribe?

Various scholars have theorized the stakes of struggling with an atrocity one did not oneself experience. Among them, Marianne Hirsch, who postulates that a vital "postmemory" shapes the lives of the children and grandchildren of survivors, and Susan Gubar, who explicates the difficult necessity of "remembering what one never knew" for contemporary Anglophone poets, have offered powerful accounts.[3] But both critics foreground generational and linguistic

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[1] "Reflections," *In Zikh*, January 1923, quoted in *American Yiddish Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology*, eds. Barbara Harshav and Benjamin Harshav (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986), 793-794.

[2] See Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994).

[3] See, for instance, Marianne Hirsch's description of the way in which a simultaneously excessive and insufficient relation to a past one did not experience structures the phenomenon of "postmemory:" "Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. That is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that it is

as well as geographical distance from the events as characteristic of the particular difficulties of representation and commemoration they delineate. I ask how American Yiddish poetry, authored by contemporaries (and often by relatives) of those murdered in the genocide and written in a language intimately affected by its devastations, further complicates the relationship between experience and expression. As the notion of linguicide suggests, language can be – and was – both a target and a near-victim of extinction.[4] But the reality of threatened language also asks us to look closely at the ways in which the endurance of the body and the continuation of a literary tradition are bound up with one another. Does Yiddish writing in America post-1945 constitute a poetics of survival? Is it a Yiddish poetics of survival, or a poetics of the survival of Yiddish?

A nuanced appraisal of the various spaces in which a poetics of survival articulates itself (and which it in turn articulates) is particularly important given the shifting, non-territorial conditions that shape the Yiddish language from the beginning.[5] In the absence of a geographical territory that would "ground" and "encompass" a body of writing, critics have examined the impact and importance of the contingent, precarious positions of Yiddish. Thus, discourses of transnational, diasporic, nomadic, and exilic literature all maintain the crucial interrogation of assumed bonds between territory and language, and Yiddish offers a paradigmatic example of the problematic nature of such assumptions. Taking up the problem of "major" and "minor" literatures, Chana Kronfeld warns against the dangers of valorizing the minor as an exceptional position of critique, since literatures that are – like Yiddish – located on the margins must struggle to survive. Yiddish suffers from a doubly marginal existence, since it is both "a literary system poised on the edge of complete annihilation" and "a language without a land."[6] Yet as Kronfeld shows, Yiddish models the importance of a marginal literature for re-considering critical paradigms, because it urges us to question the primacy of national frameworks: "Modernist Yiddish poetry, in its unparalleled diversity and richness, is perhaps one of the strongest counterexamples to any geographical or chronological model of literary historiography."[7]

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more directly connected to the past. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can be neither fully understood nor re-created." Hirsch, "Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile," *Poetics Today* 17.4 (1996): 662. Susan Gubar claims that the value of poetry about the Shoah written by those who did not themselves experience it lies in the portrayal of this history's lasting impact on contemporary cultural concerns, since "the proliferation of Holocaust poems in English turns our attention not away from those events but toward their reverberations as they affect a series of generations searching for a means to keep alive the urgency of continuing to confront a past as it passes out of personal recollection. The 'warrant for imagination' consists, then, in a psychological, ethical, and historical need to remember what one never knew." Gubar, *Poetry After Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2003), 9.

[4] As Alvin Rosenfeld reminds us in the context of an analysis of Jacob Glatshteyn's poetry, linguicide entails not only the death of a language but of an entire cultural and discursive framework: "[F]or the Jewish writer genocide carried with it specific threats of linguicide, the extirpation of a distinctive code of expression as part of the total destruction of European Jewish life. This was particularly true for the Yiddish writers of the Holocaust." Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980), 115.

[5] See, for example, Benjamin Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990), and Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2008).

[6] Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996), 194, 195.

[7] Kronfeld 232.

Thus, it is imperative that critics recognize the marginality of Yiddish literature without either valorizing this position or circumscribing it as a static and restrictive space. Remaining cautious about and aware of the stakes of delineating the relations between Yiddish and other languages is especially vital when one compares it to the dominant, "major" languages of its geographical surroundings. As Anita Norich points out, interpretations of the status of Yiddish writing in America in the twentieth century often portray Yiddish as a linguistic space from which writers emerged and which they left behind in the transition to the more expansive, more widely comprehensible linguistic arena of English, in what was "usually considered a uni-directional move out of Yiddish, with writers moving into European and American culture."[8] It is therefore no coincidence that Cynthia Ozick notoriously called for English to become "the new Yiddish."[9] Further complicating this problem of (implicitly or explicitly) hierarchized inter-linguistic relations, the bond between the "Jewish languages," Yiddish and Hebrew, engenders its own historical, aesthetic, and ethical stakes, particularly in the context of a literature of mourning that follows a Biblical tradition. Especially relevant to my discussion of Malka Heifetz Tussman's poetry in this chapter is Naomi Seidman's observation that the linguistic, social, and cultural perceptions of a gendered relation between Yiddish and Hebrew endured well beyond the most severe manifestations of patriarchally structured communal life: "Since the Hebrew-Yiddish/male-female system resonated with other facets of social organization (class, educational level, ideology), the gendering of Hebrew and Yiddish could and did continue for long after the traditional, sexually segregated communities that gave rise to this system had ceased to be dominant in Ashkenazic culture."[10]

How does Yiddish poetry in America post-1945 seek to negotiate language as the constitution of a communal identity sustaining common injuries on the one hand and as the mode of individual representations of radical isolation and diminishment on the other? Writers frequently articulated an ethical imperative to write a poetry that manifests both grief and commemoration. As Anita Norich notes, the resulting work often abandoned modernist particularities in favor of an attempt to lend general expression to a collective fate. Referring to Avrom Golomb's distaste for a Yiddish writing that was becoming "*a yortsayt kultur*" (a memorial-day culture), Norich corroborates his appraisal by explicating that "[t]he history of Yiddish literature at this period must tell the story of modernist Yiddish poet after poet transforming his or her poetic form and content in response to the unfolding events, eschewing the modernist, individualist tones they had once heralded and expressing the need to write a

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[8] Anita Norich, "'*Harbe sugyes* / Puzzling Questions': Yiddish and English Culture in America during the Holocaust," *Jewish Social Studies*, *New Series* 5.1-2 (1998-1999): 95.

[9] Cynthia Ozick, "Towards a New Yiddish," *Art and Ardor: Essays* (New York: Knopf, 1983), 174-175. See also Bella Brodzki, *Can These Bones Live?: Translation, Survival, and Cultural Memory* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007), 24-25, for a critical discussion of Ozick's essay.

[10] Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997), 38-39. While an overview of the critical literature on Hebrew-Yiddish relations exceeds the scope of the current investigation, see, in addition to Seidman's study, Yael Chaver, *What Must Be Forgotten: The Survival of Yiddish in Zionist Palestine* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2004) for a sustained analysis of the ways in which Yiddish as a language and as a literary and cultural legacy was suppressed in favor of Hebrew, as well as for an examination of the forms in which it nonetheless endured.

poetry of consolation and mourning, and giving voice to the millions who could no longer speak, in a language they would themselves have used."[11]

Poets face the conflict between a sense of ethical urgency and the loss of poetic agency: in mourning communal devastations which they did not themselves experience, they risk becoming figures of substitution or ghostly ventriloquism. In 1945, three major Yiddish writers and critics, Jacob Glatshteyn, Shmuel Niger, and Harry Rogoff, appraise 75 years of Yiddish press in America and conclude that "*far di vos shraybn yidish iz yidish gevorn a festung un a heyligtum*" ["for those who write Yiddish, Yiddish has become a fortress and a sacred shrine"].[12] Presenting it as a language of survival for writers, they claim Yiddish as both stronghold and holy site, a juxtaposition that entwines the historical and religious. The formulation foregrounds the importance of constructing boundaries around a linguistic space, separating strictly what is internal and external (a distinction which is also traditionally central in Jewish religious practice). At the same time, the portrayal of language's dual function – to defend its embattled position but also to preserve and commemorate its existence as a mythical expression of community – imposes an ethical mandate. The intersecting images of the fortress and the shrine suggest that by 1945, the Yiddish poet is writing in a precarious present, hoping to ensure the survival of the language by responding both to the claims of the past and the threats of the future.

Obliquely, the imagery of the fortress and the shrine also engages a Biblical tradition of a gendered figure of mourning: as incarnation of the community, the mythical woman – the Daughter of Zion in the Book of Lamentations, for instance, and the allegorized reading of the Shulamite in the Song of Songs – is represented both as the figure of protective enclosure (the fortressed walls) and as the expression of ravaged and defiled vulnerability. As these three writers struggle with their geographic remove from the atrocity, they seek to construct a tightly bounded poetic space that would shield and honor an imperiled, injured language. They thus want to characterize ways in which a writing of (and for) survival allows the author to inhabit the Yiddish language, to be positioned within it and to speak from this internal position.

Furthermore, both images imply the need for a communal effort to sustain the language. In the 1947 essay "The Hard Road," from the collection *Sum and Substance*, Jacob Glatshteyn characterizes contemporary poetry as a chorus of lamenting voices, which together establish a new liturgy:

> I am talking of the collective stammer in the heat of the moment which is what Yiddish poetry of our time appears to be. The question is how many individual poems can be saved from this huddled mumbling, and how many will at least be rewarded with the holy anonymity of a poem in the prayerbook. […]
> Whether we want it or not, a collective prayerbook is emerging. And if the Jewish prayer ceremony is not to become stagnant water, it will have to open a little door for the poem of our time, which is much more topical than an 'appropriate' chapter of Psalms or an unearthed phrase from Isaiah. The Jewish prayerbook cannot live all the time with the past and remain alive. […]

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[11] Anita Norich, "'*Harbe sugyes* / Puzzling Questions,'" 97-98. Norich also notes that many of the Yiddish journal contributions and publications during the war years specified that while creative production must continue, historical realities were more important than artistic accomplishment (96).

[12] "*Finf un zibetsik yor yidishe prese in amerike, 1870-1945*," eds. J. Gladstone, S. Niger, and H. Rogoff (New York: Yiddish Writers Union, 1945). Digitalized by National Yiddish Book Center (Amherst): www.yiddishbookcenter.org. See also Anita Norich, "'*Harbe sugyes* / Puzzling Questions,'" 97.

> Only those poems of our time which are collective and pious and not insistently individual have good chances of remaining. If they do not remain as particular artistic achievements, together they will become the weeping of an epoch. And perhaps from the togetherness, the word will emerge which the separate poem was unable to attain. And only those poems that bow their proud heads and merge into the general crucible of our enormous calamity will achieve in the ensemble if not artistic at least national purpose. This is the sense of the whole, essentially senseless tangle.[13]

Glatshteyn claims that a poetics of survival – indeed, the only poetics that can survive – is one that renounces subjective voice and subordinates artistic achievements to the ethical task of mourning and commemoration.[14] Taking up Glatshteyn's avowal that the sole task of the Yiddish poet after the Shoah must be the anonymous contribution to a new Bible, I want to question the tensions between the private and public, individual and collective, internal and external, marked and unmarked in the poetry of Malka Heifetz Tussman, who rejects the viability of such oppositions and exposes the biases and exclusions that underwrite any attempt to mandate the form a poetics of survival should take.[15]

Tussman is the only female poet included in the anthology *American Yiddish Poetry*, compiled by Barbara and Benjamin Harshav. They introduce her work by remarking that although she began publishing individual poems in 1919 in various literary journals, she did not publish a full volume of poetry until 1949.[16] While this fact does not mandate interpreting her writing only (or even primarily) in the light of recent historical atrocity, the poems I examine here struggle with the relationship between experience and expression and the specific

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[13] Jacob Glatshteyn, "The Hard Road," *Sum and Substance: Essays, 1945-1947*, quoted in *American Yiddish Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology*, eds. Barbara Harshav and Benjamin Harshav (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986), 804. See also Jacob Glatshteyn, "*der shverer veg*," *In tokh genumen: eseyen 1945-1947* (New York: Matones, 1947), 424-428, digitalized by National Yiddish Book Center (Amherst): www.yiddishbookcenter.org.

[14] Susan Gubar characterizes this tension between the poetic individual voice and the ethical collective articulation as characteristic of all poetry that struggles with the Shoah: "poetry after Auschwitz displays the ironic friction between the lyric's traditional investment in voicing subjectivity and a history that assaulted not only innumerable sovereign subjects but indeed the very idea of sovereign selfhood." Gubar, *Poetry After Auschwitz*, 12.

[15] Interestingly enough, in "Towards a New Yiddish," Cynthia Ozick (whose novella *Envy; Or Yiddish in America* paints a malicious picture of Glatshteyn, thinly veiled as the character Edelstein and presented as the paradigmatic figure for the dismal prospects of Yiddish poetry in America) characterizes a re-orientation of Jewish literature after the Shoah as imperative, in terms that resonate with those Glatshteyn uses in the passage above. Ozick argues that Jewish writers must write Jewish literature, which she defines as follows: "By 'centrally Jewish' I mean, for literature, whatever touches on the liturgical. Obviously this does not refer only to prayer. It refers to a type of literature and to a type of perception. There is a critical difference between liturgy and a poem. Liturgy is in command of the reciprocal moral imagination rather than of the isolated lyrical imagination. A poem is a private flattery: it moves the private heart, but to no end other than being moved. A poem is a decoration of the heart, the art of the instant. It is what Yehudah Halevi called flowers without fruit. Liturgy is also a poem, but it is meant not to have only a private voice. Liturgy has a choral voice: the echo of the voice of the Lord of History. Poetry shuns judgment and memory and seizes the moment. In all of history the literature that has lasted for Jews has been liturgical. […] When a Jew in Diaspora leaves liturgy—I am speaking now of the possibilities of a Diaspora literature—literary history drops him and he does not last." Ozick, "Towards a New Yiddish," 169. Leaving aside what I consider Ozick's highly dubious distinctions between liturgy and poetry, between the "Jewish" and the "non-Jewish," between the promise of survival and the condemnation to oblivion, the resonances between the terms Glatshteyn uses to characterize the possibility of a continued production of Yiddish literature and those Ozick employs to argue that English must become the "new Yiddish" illuminate the knotted, overdetermined restrictive frames against which Tussman's poetry positions itself.

[16] Harshav and Harshav, eds., *American Yiddish Poetry*, 592.

difficulties it poses for the American Yiddish woman poet. The many adjectival attributes "describing" or "identifying" this poet and seeking to negotiate various competing claims already suggest that the very project of occupying a unified or cohesive space of articulation becomes increasingly problematic. As Berel Lang would have it, the ambiguity and complexity of such (descriptive or self-descriptive) declarations are symptomatic of the modern Jewish condition: "[I]n the world of nationalist and democratic modernity in which the worldwide Jewish community finds itself, Jewish identity has become intrinsically 'hyphenic.'"[17] This notion of hyphenation suggests, however, that one can accumulate an ordered list of attributes that together might illustrate the self, even as the process of ordering the list emphasizes certain claims to allegiance over others.[18] For the woman poet writing in Yiddish in America, matters are vastly more complicated, since she must negotiate various, conflicting positions that defy a coherent mapping and challenge the very possibility of creating and maintaining a unified space of articulation. In Kathryn Hellerstein's appraisal, the fractured speaking positions of the American Yiddish female poet respond to the various forms of marginalization she endures, to her compounded displacements, which rupture geographic, linguistic, and cultural ties: "[A] woman writing modern poetry in Yiddish had already been excluded from that mainstream of Judaism. She had to define her poetry against both the Yiddish devotional culture of women and the Hebraic culture of traditional Judaism. She was also chastised by her male colleagues to distance herself from so-called female literary patterns and conform to male poetic standards, at which she was doubly bound to fail. By choosing to write poetry in Yiddish, she placed herself in a web of exclusion that exiled her self in the world at large and her gender and language within Judaism."[19]

Women writers have addressed such compounded positions of marginalization and exclusion in various ways. As I have already investigated in relation to Rachel Blau duPlessis' poetry in the opening chapter of this study, one way involves postulating a space of conversation, in which the female poet insists on interlocution as a form of highlighting but also of moving beyond established boundaries that would seek to divide what is internal and what is external to the received corpus. This approach does not disregard marginality; rather, it mobilizes the marginal to draw attention to the fluidity and negotiability of boundaries. Such an interpretation problematizes Sheila Jelen's claim that "in becoming writers, Jewish women pay tribute to the texts they have read, entering into dialogue with the tradition that has facilitated, or blocked, their access to the literary worlds that influenced and enabled them." Jelen goes on to speak of women's "experience of being locked out of the texts of traditional Jewish culture and finding

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[17] Berel Lang, "Hyphenated-Jews and the Anxiety of Identity," *Jewish Social Studies*, *New Series* 12.1 (2005): 9.

[18] Lang remarks that "the order of priority implied by the hyphen" is especially interesting in the case of the Jewish community in America, which is one of the only groups that subordinates the "American" to the "other" ascription (generally calling themselves "American Jews" rather than "Jewish Americans"). The hyphen performs syntactically the psychic pressures of negotiating and categorizing competing ascriptions. Explaining his understanding of the "anxiety of identity" that this performance betrays, he writes, "[A]nxiety is a condition, not a feeling, and hyphenated identity dramatizes that condition through the divided self it represents between two (or more) vying traditions or allegiances." It seems to me that Lang's characterization of this condition of anxiety may also gesture towards its origin in a realization of the fragility of communal bonds, which must be asserted and negotiated by a self-conscious rhetoric of belonging. See Lang, "Hyphenated-Jews," 3-4.

[19] Kathryn Hellerstein, "In Exile in the Mother Tongue: Yiddish and the Woman Poet," *Borders, Boundaries, and Frames: Essays in Cultural Criticism and Cultural Studies*, ed. Mae Henderson (New York: Routledge, 1995), 67.

one's way in through the experience of interpretation and authorship."[20] Yet it is important to recognize that the act of "entering into dialogue" with a tradition does not always entail the compliant gesture of paying tribute, of seeking to "find one's way in." Rather, an alternative response to one's place outside the boundaries of an exclusive tradition—a response that links poets as disparate as Rachel Blau duPlessis and Malka Heifetz Tussman—is an insistence on dialogue as *argument*, disputing one's position in relation to a canon not in order to move from outside to inside but in order to question the implications of the boundary as such. Moreover, I am concerned here with how this dispute positions the woman poet in relation to a poetics of survival and of commemoration. What role does gender play in a poetics that queries the limits of endurance of a wounded linguistic existence and the possible space of its articulation and reception?

Indeed, Tussman departs from and refuses the avowal of an armored and secured space of Yiddish writing, as Glatshteyn, Niger, and Rogoff would have it, because she questions its inhabitability. Her poetics argue against "textualizing memory," to borrow Bella Brodzki's term, by calling into question Jewish poetic traditions of figuring and commemorating communal losses.[21] In so doing, she also stakes an ethical claim against those who would write the boundaries of community by figuring the female as a symbolic image rather than a voice that may speak to its own, private losses. For if certain bodies only serve to figure a collective fate, even while their subjective words are not heard, then these forms of attempting to safeguard the borders of the collective must exhibit their own fallibility as models of community. In interrogating the intersections of gender, genre, and tradition, Tussman's poetry insists on the ethical necessity of writing and reading by engaging in a poetics of negation and refusal. By questioning the relationship between the survival of the human being and the survival of language, the poems negotiate the bonds between experience and expression, examining and resisting the twinned dangers of figuring one through the other. Avowing the vulnerability of an imperiled language while demanding that one recognize the continued vitality that inheres in its fragility, Tussman's work asks its readers to consider what forms not only the writing but the reception of the Yiddish poem take after the Shoah.

This poetics of survival posits the freedom of refusal as an important objection to claims that would too quickly or unthinkingly appropriate the space of the poem as a place of commemoration and mourning, on behalf of others' suffering. Concomitantly, such refusal problematizes attempts to utilize others' suffering as the meaningful foundation for the constitution and preservation of community. Instead, survival – both lived and poetic – may emerge from attempts to resist the poetic creation of spectacles of loss and mourning, to rewrite a textual genealogy through a commitment to corporeal endurance, to poems that create speaking selves instead of figuring bodies. The continual avowal of negation, the rejection of expected traditions of commemorative practice, demonstrates that there can be no moral obligation to engage the Shoah simply because one writes in a language devastated by its atrocities. A poetics of survival is therefore also precisely this freedom to resist the directive to confront or represent the "topic," a directive that might too easily become a force and so an impingement in its own right.

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[20] Sheila Jelen, "Women and Jewish Literature," *NASHIM: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues* (2008): 158, 159.

[21] Brodzki 151.

Rewriting the Voice of Lament

We may read the title of Malka Heifetz Tussman's "*zolst nit*" ("You shall not"), a poem that characterizes not poetry of suffering but suffering poetry, as a warning against exploitative writing and reading practices. Certainly, the title evokes the divine commandments for ethical (that is, observant) life, an allusion that also marks the defiance of a female poet, to whom any quasi-divine speech-act has been categorically denied.[22] Here, the speaker enjoins an unnamed addressee not to commit violence against words:

tsap nit keyn blut	[Don't drain blood
fun lider	from poems
zey blutikn	they bleed
aleyn.	alone.][23]

In refusing the human intermediary, who seeks to create or interpret, the poem endures on its own terms, as a corporeal space. The devastating simplicity of the injunction not to bleed the poem stages a tension between the demands of the body and those of the text: by positing the crossing of the textual boundary as an invasion, it questions both the limits of authorial agency and the transgressive implications of reading. After all, the act of draining another's blood (*tsapn blut*), idiomatic in Yiddish, indicates a parasitic relationship. In a sinister way, the image literalizes romantic notions of human reliance on art as a life-giving force, which invert the assumed order of life and representation. Patricia Yaeger cautions against the dangers of a parasitic feeding on accounts of anguish, when she characterizes the threat of critical analysis that impinges upon its object of inquiry, since it becomes a way of "consuming trauma."[24] Indeed, the warning against a reading practice that would consist in "bleeding" the poem refutes both a more general problem of utilizing the text in the service of one's aims or desires and the particular abuse of doing so in order to partake vicariously (and at a safe distance) in a suffering not one's own. It thus also offers a critique of institutional or political abuses of histories and stories of pain.[25]

But the interpretation of the interdiction "you shall not" depends crucially upon its address as well. If the speaker addresses not only an external interlocutor but also an internal ear, interpreting the lyric voice as self-address would entail that the injunction refers reflexively to the figure of the poet and so prescribes not only the limits of reading but also those of writing. In this case, the poem's address undercuts a valorization of creative agency and authority,

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[22] As I have traced also in relation to the poetics of Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Nelly Sachs, the female poet thus contests the space of the poem as, among other things, a space akin to the empty universe as potential for divine creation in Genesis. Yet a poetics of survival presents the female poet, who wishes to take on and exhibit such creative power, with an ethical dilemma, since she is also confronted with the reality of others' suffering and destruction, which troubles the validity of appropriative claims to the agency and power of creative speech.

[23] Malka Heifetz Tussman, *Shotns fun gedenken [Shadows of Remembering]* (Tel-Aviv: *Hamenora*, 1965), 27, translation mine.

[24] Patricia Yaeger, "Consuming Trauma; or, The Pleasures of Merely Circulating," *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community*, ed. Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2002), 25-54.

[25] For discussions of the ethical problems that come to the fore in such cultural, political, and critical (ab)uses of others' pain, see for instance Yaeger, "Consuming Trauma;" Dominick LaCapra, *History and its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2009) and Gary Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004).

cautioning against poetry "about" suffering by refuting both its aesthetic and ethical viability. However, by invoking the archetypal speech-act of divine commandment, the injunction may also expose the intrusive impulse as one that inheres in *all* creative activity, so that the poem can do nothing but call into question its own legitimacy. This adoption of the divine voice disembodies the speaker, in stark contrast with the vulnerable poetic bodies described. According to Elaine Scarry's analysis of Biblical creation stories, this contrast marks the power differential between body and voice: "To insist that God be only verbally indicated is to ensure that the initial division between creator and created is maintained. That is, to have a body is to be describable, creatable, alterable, and woundable. To have no body, to have only a voice, is to be none of these things: it is to be the wounder but not oneself woundable, to be the creator or the one who alters but oneself neither creatable nor alterable."[26] If we return to the earlier observation that the female poet's choice to take on a quasi-divine voice represents an act of defiance, then we may now see how this act puts the critique of gendered traditions of assigning poetic voice and poetized figure into tension with the critique of their relative positions of security and exposure. That is to say, we may recognize in this portrayal an indictment of the doubled way in which poetic voice risks denying its own accountability, even as it examines the fragility of the figures and fates it appropriates.

In its brevity, "*zolst nit*" maintains the ambivalent, intertwined forces of the creative and destructive potential of writing and reading, so that vitality and vulnerability, neglect and appropriation co-exist. These tensions play out in the second stanza: its three words, read as an enjambment, avow that poems "bleed of their own accord."[27] As the manifestation of a wound, bleeding also assures us that the body still lives, and so words that bleed of their own volition possess a harrowing power, which expresses survival beyond the limits of the verbal. Yet we may also interpret the last stanza differently, recognizing that the pause between its two verses relegates the community of bleeding poems to a final solitude, as the last verse enacts its single word "aleyn" (alone). This unmediated and unmitigated isolation endures, apart from dialectical positions of subject and object, activity and passivity, speech and reception. What, then, are the consequences of this persistent poetics of negation, which points towards a final, if precarious, endurance? How does the primacy of interdiction – you shall not – seek to structure or undo the relations between the single figure of the poet, a population of readers, and a corporeal poetics?

Body and Meaning: The Site of Speech

The poem "*mit tseyn in erd*" ("With Teeth in Earth"), from Tussman's first, 1949 collection *Poems*, investigates these questions by exploring the relationship between the wounded body and imperiled speech. It struggles with the juxtaposition of a series of wanton acts of violence and the attempt to capture them in words. The speaker maintains that the experience of violence engenders an understanding of the impossibility of universalizing grief, so that the poem laments, meta-poetically, the limits of a literature of mourning:

mayn bak af der erd	[My cheek on the earth
un ikh veys far vos gnod.	and I know why mercy.

[26] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985), 206.

[27] Indeed, the assertion that the corporeal poem "bleeds alone" links it with the menstruating female body, thus offering a material claim for the female poet's position.

mit lipn tsu der erd	With lips to the earth
un ikh veys far vos libe.	and I know why love.
mitn noz in erd	With the nose in earth
veys ikh far vos geneyve.	I know why theft.
mit tseyn in erd	With teeth in earth
veys ikh far vos	I know why
mord.	murder.
vos zshe zaynen verter	What then are words
in farglaykh	in comparison
mit tseyn in erd?	with teeth in earth?
vos iz geshray	What is screaming
in farglaykh	in comparison
mit tseyn in erd?	with teeth in earth?
un gornit iz genug,	And nothing is enough
un gornit iz shoyn	and nothing is already
un keyn mol iz gornit azoy	and nothing is ever like
ot azoy.	this.
iz klor mir genoy,	I know exactly,
veys ikh far vos	I know why
der mentsh	the human
vos grobt mit tseyn di erd	who digs with teeth the earth
un der	and the one
vos rayst zikh fun der erd	who tears himself from the earth
vet ale mol,	will always,
oy ale mol	oy always
darfn veynen iber zikh.	have to weep for himself.][28]

The poem's central stanza, a series of unanswered questions, suggests the incommensurable difference between experiencing violence and responding to it poetically. By asking what words "are" in comparison "with teeth in the earth," the poem confronts not only the limits of words' meanings but their very constitution. In this way, it implicitly doubts the existence of its own

[28] Translation modified from Kathryn Hellerstein's rendition in *American Yiddish Poetry*, eds. Harshav and Harshav, 594-595. See also Tussman, *Lider* (Los Angeles: Malka Heifetz Tussman, 1949), 12-13, digitalized by the National Yiddish Book Center (Amherst): www.yiddishbookcenter.org. A problem that I could not resolve was the need to choose, in English, between a gender for the self-reflexive "*zikh*," which refers in Yiddish to both genders (just as "*der mentsh*" should encompass both the male and the female). Since the convention in English is to gender the universal as masculine, I maintained Hellerstein's choice to speak of "himself." It seems to me that Hellerstein's decision testifies to the force of poetic and linguistic convention, particularly given that she herself analyzes the implications of the move "From '*Ikh*' to '*Zikh*'" in women's poetry in an essay of the same name, in which she also includes Tussman. See Hellerstein, "From '*Ikh*' to '*Zikh*': A Journey from 'I' to 'Self' in Yiddish Poems by Women," *Gender and Text in Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature*, eds. Naomi B. Sokoloff, Anne Lapidus Lerner, and Anita Norich (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992).

medium. As the second half of the stanza makes clear, screaming (*geshray*), which both pre- and post-dates verbal expression, thus signifying the primal and involuntary response to pain but also willed protest, cannot withstand the comparison with suffering either. Indeed, how may one articulate grief poetically when the physical site of articulation has been violated, when the mouth cannot shape words because its teeth dig in the earth? The poem does not simply claim that expression is rendered impossible, silenced by the reality of the many murdered. Because it is titled "with teeth in earth," the poem suggests that it not only explores this space but also attempts to speak from this impossible site. While it cannot evade the physical violation of the site of articulation, it ultimately refuses to occupy it: it will not appropriate the wound as a cipher for the silencing of speech, nor will it render it a spectacle of horror and mourning.

The poem does not answer the repeated question of how language compares to suffering, but this evasion is itself a response: the break that follows the stanza spatializes the silence of a mouth filled with earth rather than with words. Yet it also refuses to figure it as a space that can be occupied or appropriated, since the gap on the white page inscribed with black letters "negates" (like the photograph's negative, which both is and is not the picture) the image of white teeth embedded in dark soil. In this way, the recurring reference to "teeth in the earth" inverts figuration in order to literalize the limit of the expressible, the point where speech negates itself. The phrase "with teeth in earth" insists upon the corporeal silencing of language through the fragmentation and destruction of the human body, the vehicle of expression. Any attempt to compare enunciation – either in words or in screams – with this ravaging of the human form highlights the painfully paradoxical nature of such an act, impossible to sustain within the claustrophobic, suffocated site of the poem/mouth.[29] While the image of teeth in the earth serves as the visual negative of letters upon the page (and vice versa), the poem also explores this space as the one which merges the corporeal and the verbal, since it is the locus of speech. The many silenced mouths of the murdered victims fragment and diminish the corpus of the Yiddish poem and make of a poetics of survival an insistent return to the space of this violation, which conjoins the atrocities of genocide and linguicide.

Although the poem is titled "with teeth in earth," it does not begin by speaking from this position. Rather, a subtle rupture at the middle of the poem's first four stanzas, in tension with their parallel construction, transforms an initial posture of humility and gratitude into one of desecrated fragmentation:

mayn bak af der erd	My cheek on the earth
un ikh veys far vos gnod.	and I know why mercy.
mit lipn tsu der erd	With lips to the earth
un ikh veys far vos libe.	and I know why love.
mitn noz in erd	With the nose in earth
veys ikh far vos geneyve.	I know why theft.
mit tseyn in erd	With teeth in earth
veys ikh far vos	I know why

[29] I use the slash here to indicate the poem's resistance to an interpretation of its existence "*as* mouth" or "*like* mouth." Rather, it struggles with the oblique, slanted relation that ties language and corporeal suffering to one another, without using the former to figure the latter.

mord. murder.

The drastic shift in meaning (as well as the formal continuity) of the human figure lying upon the earth protests images of prostration as penance, humility, or reverence for the divine. In the poem's first two stanzas, this posture allows for comprehension of the self's relation to the world and to the transcendent, as the speaker realizes an empathy channeled through proximity to the ground. The body's adjacency to the earth materializes the metonymic act of making meaning, as understanding arises from contact. (This metonymic association takes poetic form through the ellipsis of the relational verb of being: "why mercy," "why love," etc., rather than "why *there is* mercy" or "why love *exists*.")

In these first two stanzas, placing a cheek on the earth and kissing the soil seem to be symbolic acts of gratitude and reverence. Although the lines do not explicitly invoke divine mercy and love, they resonate with such tales, implying a humility that we find also, for instance, in Moses' avowal that he has prostrated himself before the Lord to atone for communal transgressions and guard against divine wrath, "And I threw myself before the LORD as at first, forty days and forty nights—no bread did I eat nor water did I drink—for all your offense which you committed, as you had offended, to do what was evil in the eyes of the LORD, to anger Him. For I was terrified of the blazing wrath which which the LORD was furious enough with you to destroy you, and the LORD listened to me that time as well."[30]

Yet in other Biblical stories, God enforces this posture as one of punishment. In a chapter from Isaiah, the Lord promises the Israelites that other nations will fall down before them to demonstrate their submission, an act that must then be interpreted as proof of the rightful singularity of the divine: "They shall bow to you, face to the ground, / and lick the dust of your feet. / And you shall know that I am the LORD —."[31] As proof of divine protection, the demolition of the human face of the communal enemy does not constitute a desecration, as we may see in the following verses from the Psalmist: "Rise, LORD! Rescue me, my God, / for You strike all my foes on the cheek, / the teeth of the wicked You smash."[32] In the Biblical context, such violence, leveled against others outside the community, preserves rather than unravels meaning, for it shields the Israelites from the threat of their enemies. The poem, however, describes such violence from the internal first-person perspective, as the understanding of mercy and love gained through physical contact with the soil becomes the horrific interpenetration of body and earth: *mitn noz in erd / veys ikh far vos geneyve. // mit tseyn in erd / veys ikh far vos / mord*. With nose and teeth "in" rather than "against" the earth, there is no room to breathe; the space of the poem remains to inscribe the asphyxiation of the body parts that once figured individual creation and communal preservation in Biblical tales.

The remnants of the human face belong to an individual who cannot speak on behalf of a community and who recognizes only that each person must mourn their own injuries. No longer a form of divine judgment, which constitutes a chosen community by punishing those who imperil it, violence is now diffuse and pervasive, unable to grant meaning. Thus, the first four stanzas move inevitably towards the solitude of *mord*, isolated even poetically as its own verse. The ravaging of the human face undoes its reflection or representation of the divine image (or

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[30] *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*, trans. Robert Alter (New York: Norton, 2004), Deuteronomy 9:18-19.

[31] *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures, The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), Isaiah 49:23.

[32] Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2007), Psalms 3:8.

alternatively, depicts the ways in which the divine is no longer imaginable in disfigured and fragmented form). And so the poem resists the figuration of the human not only in visual but also in verbal images. This resistance is not an expression of devout obedience: it is a rejection of the causal logic that might portray violence as a significant way of reinforcing communal boundaries.

Rather than representing the divine image, the human body expresses only its own violated creatureliness. In the animalistic rendering of *der mentsh / vos grobt mit tseyn di erd*, this digging in the earth perverts human participation in the organic life cycle, evoking as it does the planting of seeds and the excavation of graves. The anonymous perpetration of a violence that reduces the human to a wounded animal, which burrows its own grave with its teeth as though to find a place of comfort and protection, undoes the natural life span.[33] This depiction disturbs both the Genesis story, in which God creates the human from dust, and the divine promise that after death, each person will be given back to the earth and return to the dust.[34] For as dismembered body parts, the teeth that enclose the space of the mouth have taken in the earth, an unnatural and horrific act of consumption that demonstrates a violation of the natural order, which becomes untenable.

The parallelism between the person who digs the earth with his teeth and the one who tears himself from the earth (*der mentsh / vos grobt mit tseyn di erd / un der / vos rayst zikh fun der erd*) struggles once more with the problem of relating between the formation and destruction of the human and, concomitantly, with the position of the survivor. We realize that the person who digs in the earth with their teeth may already be a corpse, so that the animation of death – far from being a poetic conceit – dwells upon the destruction of the human body as the final injury one must endure. A poem that speaks from this limit, where life and death encroach upon one another, gives ambiguous voice to an animated corpse or a living body reduced to the inhuman, thus refuting the "rightful" sequence of life and death.

In the face of meaningless brutality, the poem can only reaffirm its inadequacy; the text survives by denying the possibility of meaning or signification. As we have seen, it negates the very practice of attempting an "appropriate" representation of the experience of violence, thus nullifying the power of words: *un gornit iz genug, / un gornit iz shoyn, / un keyn mol iz gornit azoy / ot azoy*. The proliferation of "nothing" becomes the sole expression of existence, of "what is," just as its incantatory repetition equates it with the circumscribed, local, and specific (*genug*, *shoyn*, *azoy*). In the culmination of the simultaneous particularity and universality of the deictic (*azoy*), the stanza gestures towards a utopian site, in which a doubled, universal negation (*keyn mol*, *gornit*) becomes the repeated specificity of an individual point (*azoy / ot azoy*). In this way, deixis serves as an alternative to figuration or comparison, since it insists upon pointing towards suffering, while refusing to give it descriptive shape and so delivering it as spectacle. At the same time, the capacity of the deictic to circulate meanings—to encompass the universal within the designation of the individual and vice versa—implicates the subjective voice and its specific position in the voices and stances of others. In doing so, the deictic moves past the defined boundaries of community while nevertheless marking the impossibility of speaking for another.

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[33] The image of teeth digging the earth, when read in conjunction with its inversion, the act of digging a grave in the air (as we encounter it most famously in Paul Celan's poem "Todesfuge"), also reminds us of the ways in which the unburied bodies demarcate and encroach upon the space of a poetics of survival.

[34] In this preoccupation, Tussman's poetics resonates with the constant return to the injured, imperiled movement of breath—and the ways in which it rewrites Biblical tales of creation and destruction—in the exchanges between Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs, as I relate them in Chapter Two.

But if the poem does not want to use language to make meaning of suffering, it nevertheless concludes with a realization, which retracts the expression of mourning from the public into the private realm: "*iz klor mir genoy, / veys ikh far vos / der mentsh / vos grobt mit tseyn di erd / un der / vos rayst zikh fun der erd / vet ale mol, / oy ale mol / darfn veynen iber zikh.*" The inescapable understanding of isolation (*iz klor mir genoy*) and the expression of lament conjoin in the repetition of the archetypal, mournful sound *oy* (*azoy*, *genoy … oy ale mol*). Although the speaker seems to refuse grief and its poetic expression, the poem nevertheless offers a meta-poetic lament of its own inadequacy, as it interrupts and reaffirms its assertion that each suffering being must mourn itself (*ale mol / oy ale mol*). Moreover, the critical space between the existence of the I and its self-reflexive perception immediately re-opens the question posed by the simultaneous specificity and circulation of the deictic. What distance both separates and binds together "I" and "self," and in what ways does this distance perform in language the tension that we cannot evade between our own lives and those of others?

Kathryn Hellerstein formulates the distance between *ikh* and *zikh* as a journey that female Yiddish poets undertake self-consciously and with the aim to negotiate between their private and public personas: "The term '*ikh*,' the 'I,' raises questions of poetics: How does a poet present his or her voice as a speaker or persona in a poem? How does that presentation affect the poem's dynamics? In contrast, the problem of '*zikh*' or 'self' relates to the intersection of psychology and autobiography: How is the self constructed in a poem? How does the self, as a presence, represent aspects of its author's life?"[35] While I am hesitant to assign the *ikh* so definitively to the poetic and the *zikh* to the psychological and autobiographical realm, I appreciate Hellerstein's appraisal of the way in which these two terms engage the tensions between life and literature. If we consider her argument in relation to Tussman's poem, it would seem that poetic understanding (*veys ikh far vos*) does not mandate a depiction of others' suffering, since mourning loss withdraws into a personal realm (*veynen iber zikh*). Paul Ricoeur reflects upon the way in which articulations of selfhood—in their inevitable reflexivity—are bound up ethically with others' being. He writes,

> A kind of otherness that is not (or not merely) the result of comparison is suggested by our title, otherness of a kind that can be constitutive of selfhood as such. *Oneself as Another* suggests from the outset that the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other, as we might say in Hegelian terms. To 'as' I should like to attach a strong meaning, not only that of a comparison (oneself similar to another) but indeed that of an implication (oneself inasmuch as being other).[36]

So the speaker's assertion that every injured being must "cry for himself" traces a double movement, rejecting the textual appropriation of others' suffering while also discovering the ineluctable relation between the self's wounds and others' existence. Finally, though—and in tension with the poem's questioning of "what words are in comparison with teeth in earth"—we may also read the poem's last stanza as a response to this question: Having imagined herself in the physical position of the victims of violence, the speaker realizes why it is necessary to figure this pain in a singular language of personal commemoration, one that both preserves and questions the boundary between corporeal and imagined figure.

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[35] Kathryn Hellerstein, "From '*Ikh*' to '*Zikh,*'" 113.

[36] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992), 3.

The claim that every injured being shall mourn for him- or herself thus asks us to consider the stakes both of collective (institutional) practices of commemoration and of an engagement with others' suffering. Indeed, the ethical bind that emerges in this conclusion takes shape in the word *darfn*, which indicates both that each sufferer must mourn their own anguish *and* that they are obliged to do so, because no one else will grieve for them or in their place. Moreover, the act of *veynen* fuses the body's tears, the sound of the wail, and the textual forms of poetic lament in an articulation of the surviving voice. For the survivor, does the ethical bind of mourning one's own devastations offer a provisional opportunity for expression or an injunction to articulate anguish? And who will mourn the dead? If the position from which the poem speaks does not distinguish whether the surviving voice belongs to the living or the dead, then what are the implications of the fact that it speaks in Yiddish, in a language whose readership has been decimated and which hovers at the limit of extinction? Ultimately, the poem resists answering these questions: the speaker posits a source of knowledge (*iz klor mir genoy / veys ikh far vos*) but withholds it, so that the reader does not become privy to understanding.[37]

Framing the Poetic Self: "*Tselokhes*" and the Space of Defiance

While "*mit tseyn in erd*" refers obliquely rather than explicitly to the Shoah, the poem "*tselokhes*" ("In Spite") from Tussman's final, 1977 collection *haynt is eybik* (*Now is Ever*), takes up the problem of representing this atrocity not only in explicit but in argumentative form. It doubts not the permissibility or viability of representation but its solicitation, as it protests the belief that the Jewish poet who writes in Yiddish must thematize the Shoah. Through the sustained refusal to submit to this expectation, the poem struggles with the catastrophe precisely by denying lament, inscribing again and again what it ostensibly will not say:

tselokhes

du zogst:
"du bist yid un bist dikhter
un shraybst nit keyn lider
fun khurbn.
vi ken dos a yidisher dikhter
ven groys
azoy groys iz der khurbn?"

poshet:
af tselokhes di farvister.

[37] Reflecting on Jacob Glatshteyn's poem "Smoke," Alvin Rosenfeld describes the ways in which poetry after the Shoah inevitably sustains a tension between knowledge and its withholding or impoverishment, a depiction that resonates with the conclusion of Tussman's "*mit tseyn in erd*": "The only knowledge we are left with, then, is this: in our own day, annihilation overleapt the bounds of metaphor and was enacted on earth. Is it possible to make poetry out of that? Insofar as it is a poem that has led us to the question, the answer, clearly, must be yes. Poetry—in this instance, a something about nothing, an assertion about a negation—survives to remind us of all that has been destroyed. And also to remind us of what has not been destroyed, for while it is true that Holocaust literature is nothing if not language in a condition of severe diminishment and decline, it is still capable of articulating powerful truths—if none other, then those that reflect life in its diminishment and decline. We have lost so much, but not yet the power to register what it is that has been taken from us." Rosenfeld 27.

af tselokhes vel ikh nit veynen bifresye.
af tselokhes
af papir nit ufshraybn
mayn troyer.
(a bushe uftsushraybn
"troyer" af papir)
af tselokhes
vel ikh arumgeyn in der velt vi
zi geven volt mayne.
avade mayne!
vemens den?
vet men mir shtern,
fartsoymen mir di vegn
vet zi nokh alts zayn mayne,
voden – nit mayne?

af tselokhes vel ikh nit yomern
ven afile
di erd fun mayn velt zol kholile
mir vern di greys
vi mayn zoyl vos shteyt af ir
vet zi nokh alts zayn
mayne!
oy
nokh vi mayne.

af tselokhes
vel ikh khasene makhn kinder
az zey zoln oykh hobn kinder.

af tselokhes di reshoyim vos plodyen zikh
in mayn velt
un makhn zi mir
eng.

[In Spite

You say:
"You are Jew and poet
and you write no poems
about the destruction.
How can a Yiddish poet not
When the destruction is enormous
So enormous?"

Simple:

To spite the destroyers,
To spite them I will not cry in public,
To spite
Not write down on paper
My grief.
(Shameful to write
"grief"
on paper.)
To spite them
I will walk the world
As if the world were mine.
Of course it's mine!
Whose then?
If they hinder me,
Fence me in on my paths,
The world would still be mine,
What else? – not mine?

To spite them I will not wail
Even if
The earth of my world becomes, God forbid,
The size
Of my sole that stands on it –
The world will still be
Mine!
Woe,
Still like mine.

To spite
I will marry off children
So that they shall have children.

To spite the villains who breed
In my world
And make it, for me,
Narrow.][38]

The poem begins as the response to another's demand, thus complicating from the outset the ways in which individual authorial agency is bound up with communal demands. In Judith Butler's examination of the ethical implications of narrative accounts of the self, another's request to put into words the relationship between one's existence and one's actions precedes any attempt to do so: "I begin my story of myself only in the face of a 'you' who asks me to give an

[38] Translation with reference to Kathryn Hellerstein, but strongly amended. See *American Yiddish Poetry*, eds. Barbara and Benjamin Harshav, 616-619. See also Malka Heifetz Tussman, *Haynt iz eybik: lider [Now is Ever: Poems]* (Tel-Aviv: *Yisroel-Bukh*, 1977), 12-13, digitalized by National Yiddish Book Center (Amherst): www.yiddishbookcenter.org.

account. Only in the face of such a query or attribution from an other—'Was it you?'—do any of us start to narrate ourselves, or find that, for urgent reasons, we must become self-narrating beings."[39] This analysis of narrative accounts of the self proves useful in considering the origins of the poetic in "*tselokhes*," which constructs its space of argument by citing and responding to the address of an anonymous person: *du zogst: / "du bist yid un bist dikhter / un shraybst nit keyn lider / fun khurbn. / vi ken dos a yidisher dikhter / ven groys / azoy groys iz der khurbn?"* Unlike the questioner who demands to know whether "it was you," the one who elicits the poetic account of the self alleges that the speaker's potential transgression consists in neglecting to obey an implicit ethical imperative. This ethical imperative manifests itself in the inference that as a member of a community devastated by loss, it is the poet's obligation to express this loss. Thus, the catastrophe is supposed both to ground the existence of the poetic self and to find its expression in it.

As Butler explains, the tension between individual authorship and external imposition inheres in any attempt to give an account of one's being and doing:

> An account of oneself is always given to another, whether conjured or existing, and this other establishes the scene of address as a more primary ethical relation than a reflexive effort to give an account of oneself. Moreover, the very terms by which we give an account, by which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves and to others, are not of our making. They are social in character, and they establish social norms, a domain of unfreedom and substitutability within which our 'singular' stories unfold.[40]

The poem thus struggles to reconcile the desire to define the limits of its individual expressive power and the need to recognize its implication in a particular communal framework, which regulates and codifies the "appropriate" forms of mourning collective losses. In this context, the initial citation of another's address destabilizes the positions of these competing forces, demonstrating that communal pressures are neither fully internal nor fully external to the self. For the act of citation demonstrates the impossibility of lastingly appropriating or inhabiting assertions about the self, since the deictic movement of the pronouns—in tension with the punctuated marking of quotation—enables the speaker to resist another's ascription, re-directing and deferring it, even while submitting to its demand for response.

The address of the unnamed other, who remonstrates the speaker for the "unwritten" poem, establishes the framework of a description of poetic identity and seems to direct a particular form of expression: Does being *a yidisher dikhter* (that is, a Jew and/or a Yiddish speaker as well as poet) necessarily entail writing about the Shoah? And does being a Jew and a Yiddish poet mean that the catastrophe one mourns must be this catastrophe? The poem further complicates the question of the parameters of such potential responsibility by maintaining a crucial ambiguity, common to all Yiddish texts, and often utilized by modern poets. *Yidish* signifies both "Yiddish" and "Jewish," so that language and identity are synonymous.[41] But an English translation must make the choice between the two, and Kathryn Hellerstein's rendition of the poem in the Harshavs' anthology opts for "Yiddish." This choice thus does not perform a

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[39] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham UP, 2005), 11.

[40] Butler 21.

[41] In part, of course, this fusion arises from the fact that the speakers of the language are generally Jews (it suggests, indeed, that by virtue of speaking the language, one is also Jewish, although it begs the question whether one might also argue the inverse).

felicitous speech-act in English, since it distances the speaker from the articulation, highlighting (rather than attempting to obscure) the act of translation. Thus, this decision emphasizes the translated poem's necessary exclusion from any assertion of monolingualism and asks us to consider whether the Yiddish poet possesses a distinct obligation by virtue of writing in a language itself threatened by the Shoah.

Yiddish, as a non-territorial language, always exists in more or less intimate relation to other languages. And so it does not make sense to speak of a strictly monolingual Yiddish poem, since this poem arises from a context of the relations (and frictions) of Yiddish with the other languages of its speaker's environment, of the various communities to which that speaker belongs. The particularly intimate "sexual-linguistic" relation between Yiddish and Hebrew is one that Naomi Seidman investigates as a reflection of lived communal reality:

> the bilingualism of a community (the phenomenon sociolinguists call diglossia) typically involves relations of complementarity, symbiosis, and hierarchy; the two languages divide one linguistic terrain between themselves, as it were, so that one set of concepts derives from Hebrew and another from Yiddish. […] The lines along which Hebrew and Yiddish split the field of language functions correspond to other social and cultural structures that organize the Ashkenazic community. In what I call the sexual-linguistic system of this community, Hebrew and Yiddish are the linguistic components of a much larger cultural framework.[42]

In addition to this complicated relation between the "Jewish languages" Yiddish and Hebrew, in the case of Malka Heifetz Tussman, we may add the "national languages" Russian (of the country she left) and English (of the country in which she spent the rest of her life). At the nexus of various communal affiliations, of languages that both claim and exclude her on the basis of her being as a woman, as a Jew, as another other, it becomes evident that poetic speech cannot assume either a unified voice or a single language. Thus, the simultaneity of the two meanings of *yidish* – both "Yiddish" and "Jewish" – is vital to the poem's construction of its particular, conflicted position, which calls into question the relation between language, identity, and community.

The poem's first lines already set up a tension between speech and identity that remains irresolvable, in the parallel assertion *du zogst* and *du bist*: how can one mark self-knowledge linguistically, and what can one know about the other, in order to make a claim about the other's identity? Indeed, the assertions about being in the poem's first stanza – which the speaker cites as another's attributions – complicate the nature of the bonds between the various facets that allegedly define the self, listed initially without causal relation: "*du bist yid* ***un*** *bist dikhter /* ***un*** *shraybst nit keyn lider / fun khurbn*" (emphasis mine). The poem asks how to locate and attribute speech, since the opening lines already place the speaker in the position of addressee and vice versa, through the perpetually cyclical exchange of the intimate form of the deictic "you," which, in citation, is transformed implicitly into the "I" even while the citing/speaking self retains some critical distance.[43]

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[42] Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven*, 1.

[43] As Jonathan Culler remarks, the questions a poem asks highlight its necessary intertextuality, since they point us towards conversations that occur across the poem's textual boundaries: "[P]oems containing questions explicitly assert their intertextual nature, not just because they seem to request an answer and hence designate themselves as

In the following verses, however, the inventory of assertions about the self gives way to a logic that imposes a causal order: "***vi ken dos*** *a yidisher dikhter /* ***ven groys*** */* ***azoy groys*** */ iz der khurbn?*" (emphasis mine). This logic assumes that a Jewish poet – and a poet who writes in Yiddish – can claim these facets of being "rightfully" only if he or she expresses them from within the context of a communal response to catastrophe, positing the Shoah as the source of meaning for the collective identity from which the poetic identity may (or must) then arise. (The idea that the Shoah positions and originates every speech-act is underscored further by the directional prepositions, since the challenge "*un shraybst nit keyn lider* ***fun*** *khurbn?*" questions how it is possible not to write "from" as well as "about" the destruction.) The insistence on the enormity of the cataclysm – *groys / azoy groys* – overshadows any individual existence in its aftermath. The poem recognizes the impingement of this address but distances itself from it by marking it as cited speech and vigorously disputing its claims. In this way, it seeks to counteract the implicit assumption that all Jewish/Yiddish poetry after the Shoah must define and express itself as a form of communal survival, through ritualized genres of commemoration and mourning.

Furthermore, the poem not only complicates the position of the Jewish/Yiddish poet but also challenges traditional understandings of the relationship between gender and genre. In the context of a poetry that struggles with catastrophe and mourns communal losses (or seeks to resist doing so), what is the place of the female body, and what is the position from which the woman's voice speaks? The poem's use of grammatical gender confronts us with these questions: its opening verses cite an address that posits the addressed speaker as a *dikhter*, a male poet. Yet we know, of course, that the poem's "actual" author is a woman. Once again, Hellerstein's translation (necessarily) elides and naturalizes this ambiguity. In English, the term "poet" serves as a general designation; "poetess" is perceived as antiquated and pejorative and is rarely used.[44] This universality already implies the masculine, inscribed in language as the powerful unmarked, as critics like Rosi Braidotti and Monique Wittig have convincingly argued.[45] However, Yiddish is much more grammatically gendered than English, with every noun—animate or inanimate—having masculine or feminine gender or a neuter version. Therefore, the male and female versions of the word for poet (*dikhter* and *dikhterin*) are not as evaluatively marked, and so the poem's use of the male form is striking, given the interpretive convention of assuming that the lyrical voice is identical with its author. Does this choice suggest that we question the correspondence between the poem's author and speaker? Does it expose and criticize the implicit universality of the masculine voice, or does it, conversely, wish

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incomplete, but because the presuppositions carried by their questions imply a prior discourse." Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001 [1981]), 113-114.

[44] Svetlana Boym points out that "[t]he word 'poetess' is derived from 'poet': poet plus a feminine suffix, an excess, a mark of 'bad taste,' a sign of cultural inferiority. In our culture the texts written by a 'poet' are read differently from those written by a 'poetess.' In the mind of the reader, the word 'poet'—grammatically masculine—is often perceived as culturally neutral, unmarked, while the word 'poetess' is embarrassingly gendered." Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks: Cultural Myths of the Modern Poet* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991), 192.

[45] "The second sex is in a dichotomous opposition to the male as referent of the universal," Rosi Braidotti writes in "Embodiment, Sexual Difference, and the Poetic Subject," *Hypatia* 8.1 (1993): 8. And Monique Wittig avows, "The abstract form, the general, the universal, this is what the so-called masculine gender means, for the class of men have appropriated the universal for themselves." Wittig, "The Mark of Gender," *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), 66. See also Dennis Baron, who argues that this inequality in language has been perpetuated not only by authors but also by critics and scholars: "Grammarians have treated the masculine gender as primary in order of creation and in importance, both in the natural world and in the sentence." Baron, *Grammar and Gender* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1986), 97.

to adopt this universality, perpetuating the correlation between masculinity and representative speech? Does the fact that the incongruous use of *dikhter* occurs in the intimate cited speech of another, who seeks to frame and regulate the "proper" space and subject of the poem, highlight the ways in which women have already been excluded from the domain of poetic production?[46]

Finally, we may read this adopted use of *dikhter* in a poem by a *dikhterin* as the tacit rejection of another's desire to determine the facets of one's identity. As Kathryn Hellerstein notes, the tension in Yiddish women's poetry between a first-person voice and an authorial persona resists simplistic interpretations of women's poetic utterances as transparent reflections of the poet's own lives.[47] Rachel Blau DuPlessis corroborates this notion, when she posits that women poets may be inverting the "confessional" voice which is so often attributed to them: "[W]omen writers speaking in a female, or a neutral-yet-gendered voice are not necessarily confessional of their lives, though they still may be 'confessing' their throwing themselves wildly against, careening into conventions of representation."[48]

However, even if (and as) we recognize the poem's use of the male-gendered *dikhter* as a resistance to expectation or convention, we must bear in mind that this choice also inscribes an absence, the missing suffix indicating a silenced female voice. Svetlana Boym reminds us that it is imperative

> not to marginalize further the poetess, secluding her within an exclusive, restrictive frame, but rather to disclose the presence of this frame around every literary figure. The portrait of the poetess will help to lay bare the very device of framing, even when a cultural effort is made to hide it with various illusionistic devices, including the mask of universality. In other words, the '-ess' of poetess will ultimately make visible a conspicuous absence of suffix (or suffix zero, as linguists would call it) in the word poet.[49]

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[46] In relation to this question, it is interesting to note Tussman's marginal affiliation with the Introspectivist movement. I have already cited at length one of its most representative male figures, Jacob Glatshteyn, who not only propagated the poet's moral obligation to express the communal devastations of the Shoah but also assumed that this poet is male. Thus, in the essay on Yiddish poetry after and in response to the Shoah quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Glatshteyn, evoking and re-writing Coleridge, enjoins Yiddish poetry to be mindful of preserving its childlike sorrow in its poetic "manliness:" "m'darf zukhn dos yidishe kind in dem yidishn dervaksenem dikhter. koleridzh fartaytsht ergetz genialitet, vi dos kind vos hert nit uf tsu kukn mit vunder, oykh in rayfer kreftiker menlikhkayt." ["One has to search for the Jewish/Yiddish child in the Jewish/Yiddish adult poet. Coleridge somewhere interprets genius as the child that does not stop gazing with wonder, even once it has reached mature and powerful manliness."] See Jacob Glatshteyn, "*der shverer veg*," *In tokh genumen*, 427. While one must take into account that this is the mature rather than the young, Introspectivist Glatshteyn speaking, his understanding of Coleridge's interpretation—the transparent, wondrous realization of the child in the man—seems much less complicated than the partial, fractured negotiation of the pressures of various languages, communities, and traditions on the female Yiddish poet.

[47] Hellerstein argues, "In these poems, the voices fluctuate between the *ikh* and the *zikh*, between the establishment of a poetic 'I' and the revelation of an autobiographical 'self.' From this fluctuation results, not ambivalence, but resistance to self-revelation." Hellerstein, "From '*ikh*' to '*zikh*,'" 115-116. In this essay, Hellerstein also offers a brief appraisal of several of Malka Heifetz Tussman's poem's in light of this tension between the "I" and the "self."

[48] Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "Otherhow (and permission to continue)," *Dwelling in Possibility: Women Poets and Critics on Poetry*, eds. Yopie Prins and Maeera Shreiber (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997), 328.

[49] Svetlana Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks*, 197.

Similarly, then, we may read the absence of the -*in* in *dikhter*(-*in*) as a willed *and* an enforced absence, since the body of the female poet has already been excluded from the frameworks of possible expression. Thus, Tussman's poem emphasizes that the imperatives that posit the Shoah as the necessary central concern of Yiddish poetry may erase the existence of other silenced voices. As Maeera Y. Shreiber tells us, "To speak of silence in Yiddish literature usually means to invoke the devastating consequences of the Holocaust; the particular compromises suffered by its women writers have been largely obscured by this more general catastrophe."[50]

Yet the development of argument and refusal in the poem is neither definitive nor unilateral, since it displays repeated moments of self-doubt. These moments are emblematic of what Benjamin Harshav calls "the semiotics of Yiddish," performing an internal dialogue that merges the poetic and the conversational, counter to "proper" (that is, Western) conventions of the lyric.[51] The importance of these semiotics emerge when we consider once more Kathryn Hellerstein's translation, which leaves out the very verses that enact this talkative self-interrogation, through questions that straddle the boundary between a rhetorical demand and a desperate request for response: "*af tselokhes / vel ikh arumgeyn in der velt vi / zi geven volt mayne. / avade mayne! / **vemes den?** / vet men mir shtern, / fartsoymen mir di vegn / vet zi nokh alts zayn mayne. / **voden – nit mayne?** // af tselokhes vel ikh nit yomern / ven afile / di erd fun mayn velt zol kholile / mir vern di greys / vi mayn zoyl vos shteyt af ir / vet zi nokh alts zayn / mayne! / **oy** / **nokh vi mayne***" (emphasis mine).

Hellerstein translates, "To spite them / I'll walk the world / As if the world were mine. / Of course it's mine! / If they hindered me, / Fenced in my roads, / The world would still be mine. // To spite them I will not wail / Even if (God forbid) my world becomes / As big as where my sole stands— / The world will still be mine!" This rendition of the stanza, which culminates in the triumphant exclamation "The world will still be mine!" and elides the recurring questions and comparisons that signal hesitation, might lead one to believe that the poem declares unequivocally the speaker's ability to inhabit the world in defiance of those who would seek to constrict it. But in fact, these questions (as chatty demand for re-assurance or as gnawing doubt) are vital to the poem's articulation of a space of argument, which does not maintain a conclusive position of victory or defeat but rather sustains ambiguity and allows for difference. Similarly, the tenuous movement of comparison and approximation modifies the claim to belonging, by emphasizing the distance between actual and desired ownership: "vet zi (di erd) nokh alts zayn / mayne! / oy / nokh *vi* mayne" (emphasis mine). The declaration of possession gives way to the archetypal sound of Jewish lament, the *oy*; to the tenuous temporality of the *nokh* and to the uncertain relationship of resemblance or possibility (*vi*), which refuses a grounded identity through the destabilizing movement of comparison and so reveals the inassimilable gap between actuality and appearance.

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[50] Maeera Y. Shreiber, "The End of Exile: Jewish Identity and Its Diasporic Poetics," *PMLA* 113.2 (1998): 280.

[51] According to Harshav, such "chattiness" is characteristic of modernist Yiddish poetry, an approach of literary to spoken language: "Yiddish poetry avoided, at first, this rambling, 'unstructured' and 'undisciplined' dialogue-oriented discourse [of Yiddish prose]. However, poets like Jacob Glatshteyn, whose work was closer to the 'dramatic monologue' from the beginning, and Moyshe-Leyb Halpern in his later poetry, broke the symbolist poetic conventions of 'conciseness' and symmetry and discovered the possibilities inherent in Yiddish communication, in what Glatshteyn called 'the wise prosaic smile of Yiddish.' They used Yiddish as an unusual tool of *talk-verse*, which may be as fresh, effective, and surprising as the language of metaphorical imagery in Western verse." Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish*, 101.

Hellerstein's translation obscures the nuances of Tussman's poetics (and of a semiotics of Yiddish discourse, as Harshav postulates it) by foregrounding the speaker's agency and authority. In a critical piece about the difficulties of feminist translation, Hellerstein herself describes the necessary risks of subjective bias, which inform each of our positions as readers, critics, and translators. She argues that becoming aware of these biases may prove instructive for the multiple investments that collide in the production and reception of literature. In an exchange with Lawrence Rosenwald, she compares their independent translations of a poem by Yiddish poet Anna Margolin, in which the speaker envisions herself as Mary, in order to see what differences emerge between his reading and her own. She concludes that her feminist perspective, like any other, allows for both insights and obfuscations. By way of example, she analyzes her translation of a line, in which she amplifies the female agency that is, in the Yiddish original, much more ambiguous: "I must have mistranslated these lines because, being a feminist, I rebelled against my intuitive reading of the poem as an expression of Mary's passivity," she writes.

> I am most surprised, in retrospect, at my own assumption that a feminist translation distorts the poem. I seemed to be asking, "Shouldn't I, as a feminist, have the clarity of vision to allow the female speaker her words, even if I personally find them distasteful?" Apparently, in the dialogue that grew from rereading our two translations, I caught myself in the act of misreading and mistranslating as a feminist. In fact, though, I caught myself voicing my unexamined doubts about my own frame of reference as a translator.[52]

Reading Hellerstein's translation of the Tussman poem, I wonder about her choice not to render the three moments of poetic self-doubt and self-dispute, preferring instead to end in each case with the assertion of certainty, although the Yiddish text consistently calls the speaker's assurance into question. How do the poem's borders shift through the various instances (and in the palimpsest) of its readings?

Indeed, since the poem follows each avowal of possession with an expression that doubts or qualifies the viability of laying claim to lived and discursive spaces, it asks us to investigate further the framework of its articulation. The poem's foregrounding of its cumulative questions and disputes may already be understood as a critical insertion into a Talmudic mode of discourse traditionally reserved for men. As Harshav points out, this feature is characteristic of the semiotics of Yiddish: "in its popular forms, Yiddish internalized and schematized some essential characteristics of 'Talmudic' dialectical argument and questioning, combined with typical communicative patterns evolved in the precarious, marginal, Diaspora existence."[53] The poem's adoption of a mode of authorship and reception traditionally denied women manifests its engagement with the spaces available to the female poet on a discursive rather than a thematic level. Indeed, Tussman remained wary of categorizing her poetry as "women's writing." Hellerstein notes Tussman's absence from Ezra Korman's 1928 anthology of Yiddish women poets: "She told me that she had refused to send Korman poems, disliking the idea of being grouped with only women poets."[54] The act of withholding her writing from this publication altogether, although arguably a self-silencing, also defies the kind of interpretive framework that would restrict women to a particular space of expression.

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[52] Hellerstein, "Translating as a Feminist: Reconceiving Anna Margolin," *Prooftexts* 20.1-2 (2000): 203.

[53] Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish*, 91.

[54] Hellerstein, "Translating as a Feminist," 194.

Rewriting the Voice of Mourning: Gender, Genealogy, Survival

I will turn in conclusion, then, to the ways in which "*tselokhes*" addresses the implications of writing the suffering female body. The poem investigates the stakes of transforming body into figure and genealogy into tradition, as it examines the role of the woman in the Biblical tradition of lamenting (and so commemorating) communal losses. The speaker redefines the relationship between territory, community, and physical self, as she asserts that her contact with and imprint upon the earth fashions the boundaries of her world, which she thus characterizes as transformable and nomadic at once.[55] Given that Yiddish, as a deterritorialized language, always co-exists with other languages, the inter-linguistic, near homophony of the Yiddish *zoyl* and the English "soil" dramatizes the tension between the wandering footstep and the appropriative, territorial claim, a tension that exposes the precarious possibility of belonging and identity.

Susan Stewart asserts that we map the world through the measurement of our own bodies, for the body shapes our understanding of size and dimension, because it is our most intimate and familiar tool. Yet it cannot establish objective claims:

> The body is our mode of perceiving scale and, as the body of the other, becomes our antithetical mode of stating conventions of symmetry and balance on the one hand, and the grotesque and the disproportionate on the other. We can see the body as taking the place of origin for exaggeration and, more significantly, as taking the place of origin for our understanding of metonymy (the incorporated bodies of self and lover) and metaphor (the body of the other). It is this very desire of part for whole which both animates narrative and, in fact, creates the illusion of the real.[56]

In the poem, the speaker's body realizes the poetic justification of metonymy – textualized physical adjacency – by offering individual, corporeal existence as the alternative to a poetics that would allow her to be nothing but a voice. For such a voice only stands in for the dead, occupying their place in mourning their loss: *af tselokhes vel ikh nit yomern / ven afile / di erd fun mayn velt zol kholile / mir vern di greys / vi mayn zoyl vos shteyt af ir / vet zi nokh alts zayn mayne! / oy / nokh vi mayne.* ["To spite them I will not wail / Even if / The earth of my world becomes, God forbid, / The size / Of my sole that stands on it – / The world will still be / Mine! / Woe, / Still like mine."][57]

In this way, the speaker insists on remaining a body rather than becoming a figure. She asserts a world gauged in relation to her physical presence, refusing diminishment beyond this

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[55] We may also interpret this assertion as an oblique gesture to the Introspectivist claim that the world exists only through the lens of individual, internal perception. As already noted, the Introspectivist movement claimed a kind of "masculinist" poetics.

[56] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993), xii.

[57] This reading would seem, effectively, to oppose the earlier interpretation of the ways in which Tussman's poetics claims vocal positions and speech-acts traditionally denied women (such as the quasi-divine commandment). Yet in fact it seems to me that the simultaneous desires to claim one's body, one's voice, and one's allegiances are—if not realizable—at least not mutually exclusive. As we have seen, in refusing to remain in assigned or restricted positions, Tussman does not demand an omnipotent, encompassing space of poetic agency but one that articulates on its own terms the co-existence of its multiple, fragmented parts at the intersection of voice and figure, body and poem.

measure. Claiming this space seems, on the one hand, a contingent and restricted position, allowing assurance of nothing beyond its boundaries. On the other hand, though, the moveable step, the changing footprint—which we may read here as a kind of corporeally expressed deixis—suggests that the body's movement in the world continuously remakes its inhabitable space. This promise, in turn, stands in tension with the historical ways in which the Nazis forcibly constricted European Jews' living spaces, leading from ghettoization to deportation to murder, the destruction of the body as the final enclosure of individual life. This movement of increasing compression, with the aim to obliterate lives entirely, stands in horrific contrast to the project of expanding German "*Lebensraum*" ("living space") and multiplying German lives (in such places as the infamous "*Lebensborn*"). In this way, the stanza comments both bleakly and defiantly upon the fragile survival of a Jewish/Yiddish existence, in the place "where one's sole stands," inscribing in the poem the space of physical endurance by means of the footprint and so refusing imagined figures of loss.

That is not to say, however, that the poem rejects figuration wholesale. Rather, it challenges the idea that particular bodies must produce particular poetic figures. The poem's defiance of expected forms of figuration calls into question the tradition of a poetics of mourning that follows in a Biblical tradition (or, as Glatshteyn maintains, even seeks to create a new liturgy). "*Tselokhes*" criticizes not only the demand that the Jewish/Yiddish poet must commemorate the devastations of the Shoah but that, moreover, the woman's voice should lament communal losses by figuring her own compromised being. I propose that we read the poem's insistent demarcation of its bodily space as the refusal of a tradition of mourning in which the woman is not the poet but the hyper-embodied spectacle of communal wounds. In the Book of Lamentations, the Daughter of Zion, personifying the city of Jerusalem and metonymically representing the nation, chronicles the devastations endured as a warfare that constricts and impoverishes the space of her being:

> Let it not come unto you, all ye that pass by!
> Behold, and see
> If there be any pain like unto my pain,
> Which is done unto me,
> Wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me
> In the day of His fierce anger.
> From on high hath He sent fire
> Into my bones, and it prevaileth against them;
> He hath spread a net for my feet,
> He hath turned me back;
> He hath made me desolate and faint all the day.
> The yoke of my transgressions is impressed by His hand;
> They are knit together,
> They are come up upon my neck;
> He hath made my strength to fail;
> The Lord hath delivered me into their hands,
> Against whom I am not able to stand.[58]

[58] *The Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955 [1917]), Lamentations 1:12-14.

The woman's invitation to "behold, and see / if there be any pain like unto my pain" suggests both the dangers of a voyeuristic engagement with others' suffering and the difficulty of comparing individual experiences of anguish. Naomi Seidman formulates these dangers in a poignant way:

> [I]f the poet's identification with the stricken city is sometimes stretched thin, his relation to her marked by revulsion and horror, maybe it's because catastrophe not only brings us back to what we most fundamentally are, but also shows us ourselves as alien. The body in disease and hunger pits us against ourselves, and the vision of extreme suffering can never seem other than inescapably foreign. For the poet, the unreality of horror created a monstrous woman; how different would it be for any of us, inhabitants of female or male bodies that can become, given the right or wrong circumstances, the most nightmarish of enemies.[59]

Countering such visions of a claustrophobic impingement upon the female figure, "*tselokhes*" maintains the desire to expand its space of expression, even when – or especially because – it fills this space with the refusal of figuration, promising instead to assure physical endurance. In this way, the speaker refuses also to allow others to define the limits of her being or the space of signification she is meant to represent, as figure of communal loss. For, as Seidman writes, this space of signification is always excessive and reductive at once: "The sin written large catches too much, and too little, in its broad outlines. We are like and unlike the myths of national destiny, we are given voice and betrayed by the poets and prophets and leaders who share our fate; we are determined but not explained by these terms: Jew, survivor, woman."[60]

In the second chapter of the Book of Lamentations, the community entreats the Daughter of Zion to perform the rituals of mourning, so that the spectacle of her grief, manifested in the physical outpouring of tears, might display their collective devastations to God:

> Their heart cried unto the Lord:
> "O wall of the daughter of Zion,
> Let tears run down like a river
> Day and night;
> Give thyself no respite;
> Let not the apple of thine eye cease.
> Arise, cry out in the night,
> At the beginning of the watches;
> Pour out thy heart like water
> Before the face of the Lord;
> Lift up thy hands toward Him
> For the life of thy young children,
> That faint for hunger
> At the head of every street."
> See, O Lord, and consider,

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[59] Naomi Seidman, "Burning the Book of Lamentations," *Tikkun 8* (4), (1993): 59. http://www.tikkun.org/article.php/jul1993_seidman/.

[60] Seidman, "Burning," 59.

To whom Thou hast done thus![61]

Inasmuch as the woman's ravaged body makes visual the destruction wrought upon the community, her voice is not one of agency but of ventriloquistic supplication on behalf of those whom she represents. Maeera Shreiber notes,

> [I]n this poem [Lamentations], catastrophe is extravagantly gendered. Not only is the feminine subject to appropriation, she *is* the object of exploitation, as the poet represents the feminine body as the site of social disrepair. […] This double marking of gender suggests that women are cast as the ideal speakers of loss and rupture, for that is the condition which they embody—a proposition that potentially troubles the status of lament (as a feminine genre) as evidence of women's public authority, since that authority is undermined by a pre-scribed condition of essentialized brokenness.[62]

The speaker in "*tselokhes*," however, refuses to make her lament visible: she will neither show nor inscribe it.

What remains is the physical shape of the poem on the page, but the avowal of its framework yields a negative space, which exists through constriction, through articulating refusal and resistance: *Poshet: / af tselokhes di farvister. / af tselokhes vel ikh nit veynen bifresye. / af tselokhes / af papir nit ufshraybn / mayn troyer. / (a bushe uftsushraybn / 'troyer' af papir)*. ["Simple: / To spite the destroyers, / To spite them I will not cry in public, / To spite / Not write down on paper / My grief. / (Shameful to write / 'grief" / on paper."] Evoking her reaction to the *farvister*, the destroyers, the speaker occupies a position antithetical to that of the Daughter of Zion, who, in Yehoesh's Bible translation into Yiddish, uses the same term to mourn the solitude of her devastation rather than acting against it: "*mayn oyg, mayn oyg rint vaser; / vorum vayt iz a treyster fun mir, / vos zol derkvikn mayn zel; / mayne kinder zaynen* ***farvist****, / vorum der soyne hot ibergeshtarkt*." ["'Mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water; / Because the comforter is far from me, / Even he that should refresh my soul; / My children are desolate, / Because the enemy hath prevailed.'"][63]

Does the perceived "shame" of public lamentation articulate doubts about the appropriateness of commemorative practices? And moreover, does the "simple" solution offered here comment obliquely and with dark irony on the lack of readership for a "public" Yiddish woman poet's voice, indicating that the straightforward refusal to mourn one's losses correlates with the evident deficiency of a readership, which was nearly obliterated by the very catastrophe the poem will not lament? In refusing to inscribe grief on paper, of course, the poem already performs the breaking of its vow. Further, though, it asks us to consider the difference between the word and its citation: what happens to the term in this transformation? The double enclosure of the second reference to "troyer" (*grief*), secured in quotation marks and parentheses, visualizes the ways in which a desire not to allow mourning to become excessive is itself a

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[61] *The Holy Scriptures*, Lamentations 2:18-20.

[62] Maeera Shreiber, " 'Where Are We Moored?': Adrienne Rich, Women's Mourning, and the Limits of Lament," *Dwelling in Possibility: Women Poets and Critics on Poetry*, eds. Yopie Prins and Maeera Shreiber (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997), 306.

[63] *The Tanakh in Yiddish*, trans. Yehoesh, *The World of Yiddish*, ed. Leonard Prager, http://yiddish.haifa.ac.il/texts/yehoyesh/tanList.htm: "Eykhe" (eikha.pdf), Eykhe (Lamentations) 1:16. English translation from *The Holy Scriptures*, 1955 [1917], Lamentations 1:16.

restrictive and thus potentially silencing force. At the same time, this double shielding explodes its own limits, by calling attention to itself through repetition and the visual emphasis of punctuation. These verses suggest an ethical transgression, inherent in an expression of grief allowed to circulate freely, to be adopted and invoked publicly rather than restricted to an intimate setting. But again, the poem's very existence, its writing and its reading, also undercuts this position of refusing verbal expression, questioning once more the paradoxical possibility of its own being.

Within and beyond the poem's space, the speaker avows not a disembodied voice of mourning but the origins of a new genealogy. Refusing to write poems that lament the communal catastrophe, the speaker commits to perpetuating her family's lineage instead, imagining weddings and births. This vow to sustain familial existence responds to – and defies – the enemies who invade her world in order to constrain it. The seeming movement of poetic restraint – the adamant refusal to engage the Shoah as "theme" or "topic" – allows for an alternative poetics, one that insists on the possibility of survival by re-imagining its form, seeking to produce living bodies rather than textual figures. Indeed, the speaker's insistence on positing herself as central source of a new lineage claims female agency, as it resists a Jewish tradition of mourning that privileges a collective from which women's bodies and voices are excluded. Discussing Hebrew fiction, Amalia Kahana-Carmon describes this exclusion in spatial terms, asking us to visualize the gender divide in the synagogue, which attempts to hide women's bodies, to restrict them to a small and confined area, and to distance and muffle their voices:

> To be a Jew means to relate to the collective, as part of a community. […] [T]o stand in public prayer for Israel means to act on behalf of all. Whereas to pray privately, by oneself, in the name of the self for the self, means to act in the name of a partiality—that is, subordinate to the whole. Which is to say: the supplications of the individual are preordained as trivial or inferior, compared to the central act, collective prayer. And this central activity—where does it take place? In the synagogue, a forum out of bounds for women. By being a woman, her one place in this arena is in the *'ezrat nashim* (the women's gallery). As a passive observer, she does not contribute anything. Someone else, acting in the name of all Israel, speaks also on her behalf. And so, anything that is likely to happen to the woman seated in the women's gallery will be defined ahead of time as peripheral, a hindrance, and a deviant incident. Likewise, it will not be a regular part of the shared course of events; it will be subordinate to the main events conducted in the central arena.[64]

Through the description of the spatial division of bodies in the synagogue, Kahana-Carmon traces the paradoxical relations between the claims to collective identity and the gendered politics of exclusion.

In "*tselokhes*," the speaker claims the poem's space as one she may inhabit and which she may fashion from within. Negotiating the boundaries of what is to be included in and excluded from this space, she confronts the Biblical figure of Mother Rachel. In lamenting the collective, historical losses of the Jewish people across time and place, the voice of Mother Rachel does so

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[64] Amalia Kahana-Carmon, "The Song of the Bats in Flight," trans. Naomi Sokoloff and Sonia Grober, *Gender and Text in Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature*, eds. Naomi B. Sokoloff, Anne Lapidus Lerner, and Anita Norich (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 237.

from the marginal site of her roadside grave. The poem re-imagines and re-positions Mother Rachel, whose body, in the Bible, moves from the historical to the mythical realm by becoming in Jeremiah the eternal voice of mourning for the dispersed children of Israel. The Genesis chapters introduce Rachel as the nation's matriarch, who produces the male offspring that perpetuates the Jewish people. After Rachel's death and her burial on the road to Efra, Jacob erects a memorial stone (Genesis 35:20), remaking her grave as a timeless site of memory: it is from the position of this border, this pathway, that her voice arises in its allegorical rearticulation as the nation-as-woman in the Prophets. The verse describing Rachel's burial therefore marks the transition from a tale about the beginnings of a people—where Rachel is an individual subject—to the story in Jeremiah, in which Mother Rachel becomes the personified voice of the nation-in-mourning and thus a lasting symbol of a community bound together by its losses.

As the figure of a community grieving its losses, Rachel's tears flow in an eternal present, invoking a timeless genre of female lament: "Thus said the LORD: A cry is heard in Ramah, wailing, bitter weeping—Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children, who are gone."[65] In the Biblical tale, the Lord prophesies an end to her children's exile and a reunion, which would render her lament no longer necessary: "Thus said the LORD: Restrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from shedding tears; for there is a reward for your labor—declares the LORD. They shall return from the enemy's land. / And there is hope for your future—declares the LORD. Your children shall return to their country."[66] The Lord's promise that Rachel's children "shall return to their country" anticipates an end to a diasporic existence, but for the American Yiddish woman poet writing after the Shoah, this promise cannot offer consolation.[67]

As already noted, we need not automatically assume that the identity of speaker and author are one and the same, particularly given the poem's provocative use of the word *dikhter* rather than *dikhterin*. Obliquely, however, the poem plays with the tension between the Biblical promise of communal fruitfulness and the image of the speaker as the stereotypical "Jewish mother," intent on arranging her children's marriages so that they may have children in their turn. In discussing what she terms a "diasporic poetics," Maeera Shreiber analyzes how Alain Finkielkraut links Mother Rachel with the stereotype of the Jewish mother: "A perverse incarnation of the matriarch Rachel, who, according to prophetic tradition, weeps with her children in exile, the Jewish mother […] serves as an emblem of loss out of which contemporary Jewish identity is born."[68] Shreiber highlights the importance of this confluence for a revised understanding of Jewish diaspora:

> In diagnosing Diaspora as a condition of lack, embodied in the ever-mournful mother, Finkielkraut identifies a crucial gendered opposition long implicit in the dominant reconstructions of Jewish identity – constructions that set an idealized vision of home as

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[65] *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures, The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), Jeremiah 31:15.

[66] *Tanakh*, Jeremiah 31:16-17.

[67] For a discussion of Paul Celan's reenvisioning of Mother Rachel as a gendered figure of mourning, see also Naomi Shulman, "Poetik der Verantwortung: Eine Analyse von Paul Celans Gedicht 'Nah, im Aortenbogen," *Scham und Schuld: Geschlechter(sub)texte der Shoah*, eds. Maja Figge, Konstanze Hanitzsch, and Nadine Teuber (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010), 223-236.

[68] Maeera Y. Shreiber, "The End of Exile: Jewish Identity and Its Diasporic Poetics," *PMLA* 113.2 (1998), 276. See also Alain Finkielkraut, *The Imaginary Jew*, trans. Kevin O'Neill and David Suchoff (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1994).

> whole against a view of exile-as-diaspora as perpetually broken, the feminine body figuring prominently in both cases. This binary is in dire need of dismantling, and indeed once it is thus diagnosed, remedies are not far behind. One way to reconceive Diaspora entails rethinking the status of the mother in Jewish discourse.[69]

Indeed, as the discourse that pines for a lost Yiddish world makes clear, an "idealized vision of home" may also link the image of the "Jewish mother" to the gendered construction of Yiddish as the feminine in the "family" of Jewish languages. As Naomi Seidman points out,

> one of Yiddish's many names, *mame-loshn* (or 'mama-language,' in Harshav's translation), expresses the feminine associations of Yiddish by linking the language with a certain kind of woman, a literalized 'figure of speech.' While the term 'mother tongue' (or *mutershprakh*, its modern sociological Yiddish equivalent) is a 'dead' metaphorical abstraction used with equal ease for whatever one's first language happens to be, 'mame-loshn' evokes the specific set of cultural characteristics and stereotypes associated with the Eastern European Jewish mother. Implicit in this identification is the generational dimension: Yiddish is not only the language of women, it is also the language of older rather than younger women. Thus, while many languages are figured as feminine in various contexts, this figuration is more specific, less abstract, more dense in the case of Yiddish.[70]

Here, then, we may read a nexus between the mother's body figured as a voice of mourning for communal loss and the language embodied as an individual mother. For the Yiddish woman poet writing in America, the archetypal and stereotypical figures of maternal bereavement and female sorrow do not offer an inhabitable space from which to speak.

In fact, Tussman's poem refuses this archetypal figure of female lamentation and the hope for the divine as the agent of communal regeneration:

> *af tselokhes vel ikh nit yomern*
> *ven afile*
> *di erd fun mayn velt zol kholile*
> *mir vern di greys*
> *vi mayn zoyl vos shteyt af ir*
> *vet zi nokh alts zayn*
> *mayne!*
> *oy*
> *nokh vi mayne.*
>
> *af tselokhes*
> *vel ikh khasene makhn kinder*
> *az zey zoln oykh hobn kinder.*
>
> *af tselokhes di reshoyim vos plodyen zikh*
> *af mayn velt*

[69] Shreiber, "The End of Exile," 277.
[70] Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven*, 31.

un makhn zi mir
eng.

[To spite them I will not wail
Even if
The earth of my world becomes, God forbid,
The size
Of my sole that stands on it –
The world will still be
Mine!
Woe,
Still like mine.

To spite
I will marry off children
So that they shall have children.

To spite the villains who breed
In my world
And make it, for me,
Narrow.]

The poem negotiates individual will and external expectations, as it argues against the traditional genre of mourning and its attendant implication of the appropriate form for a woman's public manifestation of grief. In this way, it not only disputes genres of lamenting loss and commemorating communal trials but also challenges archetypal female figures, which are both the disembodied voices of this genre and the hyper-embodied spectacles of devastation, substitutes for loss rather than agents of regeneration.

The speaker of Tussman's poem protests against this tradition of the female cry, which confines the woman's body to serve as an image and expression of mourning: *af tselokhes vel ikh nit yomern*. This act of defiance is directed not only against the perpetrators but also against communal expectations, which position the woman as the voice of lamentation, emblematized by the Daughter of Zion and Mother Rachel. The speaker, however, refuses to inhabit this position: she associates it with a liminality and passivity that she underscores by the term *yomern*, which connotes whininess and a powerless discourse of complaint for its own sake, at the same time as it designates the tradition of women's lament. (Finkielkraut's analysis of Mother Rachel and the "Jewish mother" as corresponding figures thus resonates in this term, as well.)

In revising both the figure and the voice of the emblematic, mythical mother, Tussman's poem expresses reservations about the responsibilities this role assumes in the collective cultural imagination. In a comparative anthropological study of female saints, Susan Sered maintains that Rachel is the most important Jewish female saint.[71] Sered argues that in patriarchal traditions, the power of female saints as figures in the collective imagination resides in their negotiation of discursive differences:

[71] Sered writes, "[F]or Jews living today, particularly in Israel, Rachel is the only female figure who is truly potent. Significantly, there are no other shrines in Israel dedicated to female Jewish saints." Susan Sered, "Rachel, Mary, and Fatima," *Cultural Anthropology* 6.2 (1991): 132.

> The role of intermediary/intercessor is multifaceted and the female saint is far more than a messenger-girl: she in fact mediates between two realms of discourse. In all three religious cultures God is conceived as infinite, while human needs naturally remain immediate. The critical expertise of the female saint is that she translates personal matters into universal symbols, at the same time that she transforms cosmology and theology and mythology and rules and rites into personal matters. The female saint is both expert at conveying human needs in a form that is consistent with divine discourse, and expert at conveying cosmic messages in a form that speaks to human needs.[72]

Yet the poetic speaker of "*tselokhes*" does not construct the maternal voice to mediate between human and divine expectations or between individual and collective needs. Instead, she insists upon perpetuating motherhood as her individual plan and wish (*vel ikh khasene makhn kinder*). If she recalls the figure of Mother Rachel, she does not do so in order to emulate Rachel's lament: on the contrary, her explicit refusal of lament (*vel ikh nit yomern*) strengthen's the poem's position of defiance and foregrounds her genealogical project as an active commitment to the family body.

The speaker's resolution to establish a genealogy of children, so that they might have children in turn, offers a physical response to the impoverishment of a community of those who would understand the Yiddish poem. She voices the desire to become a new matriarch – one whose motherhood is grounded in defiance rather than lamentation, in the affirmation of the continuity of lineage rather than in the mourning of dispersion and loss. She does not speak of bearing children but assumes their existence in order to envision their continuation of the family in turn, initiating the process of rebuilding the collective. After the devastation of European Jewry by the Nazis, the speaker seeks a position of agency from which herself to establish such genealogy, one that will counter the proliferation of the enemies, who, inverting the Lord's promise, are the ones who breed and multiply (*plodyen zikh*). Yet the speaker's resolve to counter the villains' multiplication with a genealogy of her own also offers an alternative to the lamentation of the Daughter of Zion in the Book of Lamentations: "'Behold, O Lord, my affliction, for the enemy hath magnified himself.'"[73] Nevertheless, in "*tselokhes*," opposing forces continue to encroach on the speaker's desire to expand her world: the multiplication of her enemies constricts the space of her existence as well as of her writing, narrowing both to the brevity of the last word *eng* itself. It is this position, finally, that exhibits the losses sustained not only by the Jewish people and by the speakers of Yiddish, but by the Yiddish poem, which must endure in this narrow space of ultimate defiance.

This final restriction also illuminates the critical space of difference between the speaker and the figure of Mother Rachel. For if Mother Rachel speaks, in Jeremiah's recounting, from the marginality of her road-side grave, her lament nevertheless transcends historical, temporal, and geographic boundaries. No longer an individual woman, she has become an allegory for the nation. As a mythic figure inscribed in a foundational textual tradition, her voice continues to be heard, regardless of the agency of her speaking position. But what of the speaker of "*tselokhes*"? She does not name the community whose losses she mourns; indeed, she rejects the challenge addressed to her that would establish a causal link between the poet's individual identity, collective belonging, and the charge to mourn communal losses. At the same time, she invokes

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[72] Sered 139.

[73] *The Holy Scriptures*, Lamentations 1:9.

the diction and figures of a specific cultural, textual and religious tradition, in relation to which she must adopt her stance, negotiating its claims upon her voice. If she avows her determination to preserve the borders of her poem and her body in order to engage in expanding community (rather than mourning its losses), her desire to marry off her children in order that they may do the same manifests the tension between the intimacy of the familial and the divine promise of nation-building. In this way, the speaker unsettles the definition of the borders of the collective. Even in refusing the instrumentalization of her voice and in asserting her claims to inhabit the poem's space as a body, the speaker acknowledges, from her ultimate, narrow position, both the imperiled articulation and reception of her Yiddish voice.

A Postscript on the Yiddish Poem in America: Movements of the Transnational and Translational

Malka Heifetz Tussman's poetics of defiance suggests that the threat to Yiddish language and literature may reside in the anticipation of its oblivion, while it endures in a beleaguered, constricted, and liminal space. But in addition to the loss of active speakers, the development of Yiddish into a primarily textual language is compounded by the various forces that consign it to what Chana Kronfeld calls a "sentimentalizing, nostalgic *Yiddishkayt*."[74] This powerful force erases linguistic specificity as well as cultural conflicts by appropriating a static, rigidly defined image of Yiddish as a source of ongoing communal ties to a lost – and indeed, never-known – past. In fact, one of the ways in which Yiddish has served to constitute and define American Jewish community in particular is through its relegation to an imagined territory of the "elsewhere." Lacking successors, the community of active Yiddish speakers in America has dwindled, so that the language moves increasingly from the "lived" to the "figured" realm, as Jeffrey Shandler reminds us. Citing the work of scholars like David Lowenthal and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Shandler characterizes post-World War II Yiddish culture as a "heritage mode," which focuses on cultural legacies to establish an imagined continuity, in order to combat the anguish of fundamental geographical and historical ruptures.[75] But, he notes, American Jewish claims to Yiddish as a defining aspect of communal culture increase in proportion with decreasing linguistic capacities in Yiddish.[76]

At the same time, the desire to envision the Yiddish language as a vital, inhabitable space leads to a host of imagined, linguistic geographies of "Yiddishland."[77] "[T]he term," he continues, "infers a highly contingent tenacity, inherent in a spatial entity defined by the use of a vernacular."[78] Indeed,

> [A]fter the Holocaust conjuring Yiddishland has become an exercise in memory culture,

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[74] Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism*, 195.

[75] Jeffrey Shandler, "Beyond the Mother Tongue: Learning the Meaning of Yiddish in America," *Jewish Social Studies*, *New Series* 6.3 (2000): 98.

[76] Shandler writes, "[A]s fewer American Jews speak or read Yiddish, its symbolic value here has escalated. […] How, and to what extent, can a vernacular continue to be part of a community that abandons its use? What changes in its value, linguistically and culturally, take place as it becomes an object of heritage?" ("Beyond the Mother Tongue," 98-99).

[77] See Shandler, "Imagining Yiddishland: Language, Place, and Memory," *History and Memory* 15.1 (2003): 123-149.

[78] Shandler, "Imagining Yiddishland," 125.

> one that entails imagining a speech community in situ (however it is configured) in the absence of its centuries-old East European center and, sometimes, in the absence of Yiddish speakers as well. Postwar examples of Yiddishland therefore constitute a new order of cultural endeavor; they chart the range and dynamics of what Yiddish has come to signify in post-Holocaust Jewish life, as they demonstrate the strengths and limitations of this construct of the cultural imaginary.[79]

Jonathan Boyarin, who opposes "the ironic or nostalgic discourse of a lost or dreamed Yiddishland" and reminds us that "[i]t's better to keep in mind the Yiddish-nowhere-land," maintains: "Now, when Yiddish is no longer a street-language for us, no longer a kitchen-language, the problem arises of how to take up the inheritance of a living language."[80]

One way to do so is to read Yiddish literature in translation. The problem of translation – in its broadest sense, a negotiation of the commensurability of languages – thus implicates the survival of Yiddish poetry and a poetics of survival with one another. Jahan Ramazani's *A Transnational Poetics*, which demonstrates the crucial role transnational strains play in shaping poetry often considered to be grounded in the tradition of a particular nation-state, argues that it is nevertheless nearly impossible to read such poetry in translation: "[I]n poetry, more than perhaps in any other literary genre, the specificities of language matter. […] [A]lthough poetic influences continually cross linguistic lines, the language specificity of poetry often grants the inheritances in a poet's working language(s) special weight. Usually, the language field out of which a poem is carved and upon which it exerts the greatest pressure, is the language in which it is written."[81] But I contend that a rhetoric of the material constitution of poetry (portraying it as "carved out of" language) counteracts the description of the intangible boundary-crossings that transnational movements perform.

Discussing her ambivalence about the consequences of her work as a translator of Yiddish women's poetry, Kathryn Hellerstein offers an image of the poem that embodies it in yet more explicit terms:

> [E]ven here, among literary scholars in America, these poems can be read almost exclusively as they are translated into English. In this way, we might say that we, too, collaborate in placing the poems into a state of exile from the very material of which they were made, the poet's mother tongue. My translations are intended to bring you closer to a Yiddish poet's exile in her native language, but they inevitably remove the poems further from their source. From another perspective, though, we might say that we are helping the poems immigrate into the present. Without our efforts, the poems would simply turn to dust. In this conflicted way, we perpetuate their exile in our mother tongue.[82]

Describing the poems' "material" constitution and cautioning that we must not let them "turn to dust," Hellerstein presents them as bodies, for whose survival we are responsible, implying an ethical dimension inherent in the reception (or refusal) of these texts. Her analysis conflates the geographical, the physical, and the textual, by pointing out the danger of "placing the poems into

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[79] Shandler, "Imagining Yiddishland," 135.

[80] Jonathan Boyarin, *Thinking in Jewish* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996), 199.

[81] Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009), 19-20.

[82] Hellerstein, "In Exile in the Mother Tongue," 82-83.

a state of exile from the very *material* of which they were made, the poet's *mother tongue*" (emphasis mine). By examining critically the frames and figures that structure traditional poetic expressions of mourning and commemoration, Malka Heifetz Tussman's poems – both in Yiddish and in translation, and in the tension between the two – urge us to question the stakes that inhere in the relations between territorial, corporeal, and verbal claims. Ultimately, her poetics of survival, aware of its vulnerable position and precarious existence, endures by postulating refusal and negation as the final, private realm of poetic agency.

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