Jerome Rothenberg’s *Gematrias*
the hybrid poems of irreversibility

Hélène Aji
(Université Paris Nanterre)
THE SEVENTH STATION: DACHAU

heart
dim
& sore

his hands
slow
& heavy

& so he looked,
his glory
weeping

(Jerome Rothenberg, *Gematria Complete* 152)
“a particular sort of nomadic, migratory, and anti-narrative energy”

(Edward W. Said, Culture and Imperialism, 279)

“this movement resists the already charted and controlled narrative lanes, and skirts the systems of theory, doctrine, and orthodoxy”

(Edward W. Said, Culture and Imperialism, 281)
While numerical gematria and coded temura come easily in a language like Hebrew which is written without vowels, the possibility of similar workings in English shouldn’t be discounted. Gematria-generated poems can also be composed by translation from Hebrew [...]. The fact of translation may, in fact, add to the apparent “distance & power” of the combinations, a direct relationship that twentieth-century poets like Reverdy saw as the basis of the poetic image.

(Jerome Rothenberg, "Gematria" Pre-Faces 159)
For myself the numbers have been a presence beneath speech, but I have known them also, being Jewish, in the letters of the alphabet I work with. My father drew them with his finger on the kitchen table. And I have lain awake like him & counted numbers in sequences that play on mind & body until the rhythm of numbers, letters, shapes, & forms is inescapable—as still another source of naming.

(Jerome Rothenberg, "The Poetry of Numbers " Pre-Faces 157)
THE VOICE (1)  THE VOICE (2)
will answer     A voice.

(Jerome Rothenberg, *Gematria* 43)
THE FIRST GEMATRIA

ENOUGH
or too much

(Jerome Rothenberg, *Gematria Complete 15*)
THE THIRD STATION: BUCHENWALD

deliver me
from them

your cattle
rising

your assembly
lords of fat

deliver me
from color

(Jerome Rothenberg, *Seedings* 103)
This irreducible work of the trace not only produces an unrestricted economy of same and other, rather than a relatively restricted dialectic of negation and sublation, in all philosophical oppositions. It also places our selfhood (ipseity) in a relationship of différance with what can only be “named” radical alterity (and thus necessarily effaced).

(Gayatri Shakravorti Spivak, *Postcolonial*, 424)