

• Joshua Weiner •

A Tree Outside Gdańsk

A naked Jew tied to a rope
suspended from a tree
is lowered into a pit
—he's still alive, you see—
where some pigs will take a bite of him
until he's raised back up
so he can be lowered down
where the pigs will take their bigger portion
until he's raised back up again
so (again) he can be lowered down.
And through the trees, above his screams,
the wind will *rauschen*, that most Romantic sound.
That's the sound you'll hear at Stutthof
when you go there to walk the grounds.
The stillness in the summer heat
trembles in the breeze; a terrible feeling
of peace surrounds, vaguely hot
in your knowledge of the nearby strand,
the muscled middle-aged man you'll soon greet
randomly on the beach, his black speedo
pinching (to me) a little painfully, bronzed walrus tummy
mapped with voracious swirling tattoos.
But now you're with the Germans, the pigs, the Poles, the Jews—
there's nothing going on, thank god (thank god?)
the bricks are cold and crumbling
(you can feel the heat on your palms)
next to bunches of alert flowers set down
so gently by those who come, seriously or casually,
for an hour or two or three;
they'll walk through barracks of texts,
losing their way in their freedom to move
as anxiety meets a kind of delay,
the signals snapping

the synapse back from waters rising inside them:
shoes, drawings, voices, ashes, faces—faces
peering from camp photographs into our now, our next
with all they can convey; and how can we
look back at them, into those
eyes that shout? We look down
through dusty glass at the replica
made to scale with painstaking care
by someone who was there
(why can't I remember the name? didn't I write it down?)
who somehow took the measurements
(that he would never escape)
and somehow was given glue; but nothing holds together here—
the mind scatters like stars, like phosphorescence
stirred by a hand in an open sea
as waves advance after waves retreat
and make another trench to serve,
a readymade grave as forces close in
that no one had to dig for themselves
(the Baltic does it for free).
With your feet in the surf on a day like today
the world's like a puppy licking your toes,
circling you as you circle around
squeezing inside the difficult difficulty.
Stutthof costs nothing to enter now
though some may feel themselves pay;
and the only thing that can find its way out
is that wind rushing through that tree.

for Tadeusz Dabrowski