

# Introduction

## Testimonies of Resistance

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As the late director Claude Lanzmann and his editor Ziva Postec began to put some shape on the hundreds of hours of footage that he had filmed for *Shoah* (dir. Claude Lanzmann, France, 1985), it became clear to them that the central space around which their film should circle was the gas chamber.<sup>1</sup> It was also clear that they could not, and should not, represent this space pictorially. Instead, it had to be evoked by testimony, that of the people who had worked around and in the chambers: the Sonderkommando (SK), or their equivalents, in Auschwitz, Chełmno and Treblinka. Lanzmann was therefore making the claim that these survivors in particular were central to an understanding of the entire period of persecution and mass murder of the Jewish people in Europe. Lanzmann's approach placed itself in opposition to what had gone before: accounts of survival and life in the concentration camps, the use of archive footage taken by perpetrators and liberators. His new approach was to concentrate on what the witnesses of the gas chambers said, paying them closer attention than they had been paid before.<sup>2</sup>

The SK had indeed been a group that had been given less consideration than might be expected. They were forced to labour at the heart of one of the killing centres of the Holocaust. At Auschwitz in particular, they witnessed, as they worked, hundreds of thousands of fellow Jews from all over Europe being brought into the crematorium buildings of Birkenau, tricked or forced into undressing and entering the gas chambers. The SK then had to handle their bodies once they had been murdered, clearing

them from the gas chambers and burning them in specially installed ovens or, when the ovens were not enough, in pits. They were thus eyewitnesses to genocide. They managed to record some of what they saw, and what they felt, in photographs smuggled outside the camp and writings that they buried in the grounds of the crematoria. But these vital, contemporaneous efforts to document the Final Solution long met with a puzzling degree of neglect. Their witness was often seen as compromised by the role that they had been forced to fulfil, and from those who survived, many were reluctant to talk of their experiences because of their supposed 'collaboration'. The main way that they were remembered was for their act of rising up in October 1944, attacking guards and burning a crematorium, before most of them were killed.<sup>3</sup>

In turning to their testimony, therefore, Lanzmann acknowledges their importance as eyewitnesses of a key aspect of the Holocaust: industrialized extermination by gassing. But even he chooses to use them in a particular manner, not acknowledging all the ways that they bore witness or other important parts of their history. Lanzmann ignores both their writings and their photographs in order to focus solely on the SK's retrospective words and the re-enactments that bring moments of incarnation, the past coming into the present. Adam Brown suggests that asking survivors to undergo this painful process might indicate Lanzmann's own sense that they bear some guilt for being compelled to work servicing the machinery of extermination.<sup>4</sup> And although *Shoah* does show how forced labourers in the gas chambers came to the conclusion that violent resistance was the only possible response to the universe of extermination, nothing of any of their uprisings is detailed in the film.

These aspects were at least touched upon by a number of texts that were almost exactly contemporaneous with *Shoah*. Raul Hilberg revised his 1963 account of the *Destruction of the European Jews* (1985) to include Filip Müller and Zalman Lewental's descriptions of the Auschwitz SK uprising of 7 October 1944, although with little effect on his account and none on his interpretive framework.<sup>5</sup> Martin Gilbert's chronicle of the Holocaust of 1986, an attempt to stitch together the testimony of the victims into a coherent, chronological whole, made extensive use of documents probably written by Leyb Langfus.<sup>6</sup> Đorđe Lebović's radio play *Traganje po pepelu* (*Searching the Ashes*) (1985) based on the Scrolls of Auschwitz was translated and broadcast by many European radio stations.<sup>7</sup> And, of course, Primo Levi's essay 'La zona grigia' also appeared in 1986, placing the SK at the heart of his troubled enquiry into the damage inflicted on the moral integrity of victims and survivors of the Shoah. Hilberg aside, all of these texts could be said to make the SK more central to ideas of the Holocaust than they had been before,

although what that centrality consisted of took different forms in each of the texts.

More than thirty years later, we can see that the mid 1980s did not mark a definitive point at which discussion of the SK entered the mainstream of Holocaust consciousness. The changes in study of the Holocaust during the 1990s wrought by the collapse of East European communism and the reunification of Germany, the accelerating surge in public and state interest in the Holocaust, and perhaps even the academic theories of testimony prompted in part by Lanzmann's film did not produce a version of the Holocaust in which the SK would play a central part. Newly accessible archives shifted attention more to the east of Europe, while public debates and controversies focused more on German responsibility for the crime.<sup>8</sup> Influential theories of testimony saw it as inherently retrospective.<sup>9</sup> And although the public was prepared to view, and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts was eager to reward, stories of rescue and maintaining hope such as *Schindler's List* and *Life is Beautiful*, predictions of success for an American film on the SK fell flat.<sup>10</sup>

The mid 1980s can nonetheless be seen as one moment at which it became possible to consider the SK's significance. It might be said that now is another such moment. Once more, thinking about and finding ways to represent the SK have come to be central to the ways in which the Holocaust is currently figured. Most notable perhaps is the Academy Award given to *Son of Saul* (2015), but we can add to that the set of paintings by Gerhard Richter made in response to their photographs (*Birkenau*, 2014), and the new editions of and interpretations of their writings that have recently been published.<sup>11</sup>

At this point, then, addressing the question of how at some points the SK have been central to understanding the Holocaust and at others have been excluded from that understanding is one of the major motivations for putting together this collection. The volume explores the kinds of insights a focus on the SK, on their personal testimonies and on testimonies inspired by them can provide for histories of the Holocaust. Although Lanzmann rightly treats the death camps as operating on a continuum in terms of embodying Nazi genocidal policies, each of the death camps also possessed unique characteristics and this extended to their use of slave labour. In this volume we have restricted ourselves to a consideration of the Auschwitz-Birkenau SK. There is often cross-over between the SK at Auschwitz and those working at camps such as Treblinka and Sobibór in terms of their duties and outlook, but there are also important differences. A major feature of the Auschwitz SK, for instance, was the sheer quantity of testimony they produced from within the extermination camp. Another distinction is the quantity of

retrospective testimonies and portrayals of the Auschwitz SK. These factors have informed our decision to build the volume around this group in particular. Lanzmann's reliance on incarnation to bypass the vagaries of memory bespeaks a distrust of mediation. Similarly the cover image for this volume, in which someone has crossed out the man filming the crematorium, indexes a desire to redact content that draws attention to the visual testimony's mediatedness. We, however, are interested in the ways that the SK and their forced labour in the crematoria have been mediated and represented in works of cultural memory. Such representations raise crucial questions about the ethics of representation and the responsibility of the present to past victims.

Different definitions and interpretations of the Holocaust as a whole necessarily give the SK different places within their arguments. An Auschwitz- and gas chamber-centric approach will see them as absolutely central, whereas other interpretations will place less importance on them. Accounts that rely mainly on perpetrator documents will pay them less attention than those which insist that the victims' voices are heard. Different approaches to how victims can bear witness will also frame the SK's position differently. Ones that conceptualize testimony as retrospective will give the SK's contemporary accounts less weight or will struggle to accommodate them. A narrative of the Holocaust explaining how it was administered or improvised by the perpetrators will be less focused on the SK than one that takes an interest in what happened to the victims. Questions of how victims reacted, what level of agency they had, under what circumstances they were able to resist and when they could be made to comply, or what meaning they gave to the events, are all ones that the SK can speak to, but to what extent they can be included depends on how the relationship between them and the rest of the victims is conceptualized. Were they part of an exterminatory universe cut off completely from the worlds of the concentration camp and ghettos? Or are there commonalities between these different spaces that can be explored? Can the concentration camp system of Kapos and prisoner-administered hierarchies help to make sense of the way the SK were co-opted into the exterminatory process or of the privilege from which they (in some sense) benefited? Does the grey zone in which they are often placed have clear boundaries or does it blur into the lives of all victims? Looking at the place of the SK within different conceptions of the Holocaust therefore helps to illuminate how these conceptions operate.

## Matters of Resistance

The SK of Auschwitz-Birkenau are well known for the uprising they planned and in which many of them participated on 7 October 1944. This event is the focus of much retrospective testimony and also of one major document produced from within the Birkenau death factory. The preparations for armed resistance are discussed at length by the SK member Zalman Lewental in a manuscript he composed in the immediate aftermath of the revolt. Many postliberation representations of the SK discussed in the chapters in this volume also make reference to the uprising. The film *Son of Saul*, for example, culminates with the revolt and the efforts of some members of the SK to flee Birkenau.<sup>12</sup> The history and identity of the SK is now bound up with an act of violent resistance that occurred towards the end of their existence. The revolt, however, was not the only form of resistance engaged in by members of the SK. Many of their activities can be conceived of as kinds of rebellion against Nazi oppression.

Resistance as it manifested in the SK and by Jewish communities and individuals in the Shoah more broadly is complex, taking multiple guises through the history of persecution. The revolt for which the SK has become celebrated, for example, has been viewed by some as inspired by the Warsaw ghetto uprising of 1943. For Ber Mark, the Warsaw ghetto uprising reverberated through all the places in which Jews were being oppressed and murdered. He writes that subsequently in Auschwitz, as well as other camps, ‘the heroic fight of the Warsaw ghetto resounded in a powerful echo’.<sup>13</sup> In his Foreword to *Armed Resistance of the Jews in Poland*, Joseph Tenenbaum also suggests that ‘the revolt of the ghetto was to be the beginning of a general resurrection in Poland – or so some believed it to be’.<sup>14</sup> Yet, Melech Neustadt suggests that prior to, and at the same time as, the uprising in Warsaw, there were other efforts at self-defence in Poland (he lists Kraków, Mińsk Mazowiecki, Lwów, Będzin, Białystok and Częstochowa).<sup>15</sup> These efforts never attained the symbolic status of the Warsaw uprising, yet they should not be overlooked.

Warsaw came to embody proof of a capacity for Jewish resistance and was particularly rousing. Yisrael Gutman writes: ‘I can remember how the eyes of the Jews flamed with pride and fervour when I arrived in Auschwitz, and told them the story of the revolt and the fight against the enemy in the Warsaw ghetto’.<sup>16</sup> Lewental also refers to the heroism of the defenders of the ghetto in his addendum to a diary written in the Łódź ghetto.<sup>17</sup> Gutman goes on to relate that the SK uprising at Auschwitz had a similarly inspirational effect on other prisoners at the camp complex: ‘the day of the revolt was a symbol of vengeance and encouragement for the prisoners’.<sup>18</sup> It is clear that the day was memorable, although some

prisoners in video-testimony have also denied that the uprising greatly changed their feelings of desperation and hopelessness.<sup>19</sup>

Aside from armed struggle, many other forms of resistance were enacted by Jews across Europe. Neustadt also recognizes the existence of what he refers to as ‘passive heroism’ which manifested itself through clandestine schools, illegal workshops and soup kitchens.<sup>20</sup> Neustadt admits of this ‘passive heroism’ that: ‘We did not appreciate it as it was deserved. We did not regard it as the miracle it was’.<sup>21</sup> As Yehuda Bauer observes in his Foreword to Shmuel Krakowski’s exploration of Jewish resistance in Poland, *The War of the Doomed*, ‘examples of active resistance, although without arms, are many and their importance is vast’.<sup>22</sup> Unarmed resistance is explored by Bauer in *Rethinking the Holocaust* where he considers *amidah*, which he describes as encompassing activities such as organizing education, engaging in clandestine political life and embarking on social welfare efforts.<sup>23</sup>

The term *amidah*, which means steadfastness or standing firm, was employed very early on in the history of Holocaust historiography by Meir Dworzecki to describe acts of resistance without arms.<sup>24</sup> Many of the forms of resistance Dworzecki discusses in his book *Histoire de la résistance anti-nazie juive, 1933–45*, which offers an extended and nuanced consideration of resistance, can be understood as forms of *amidah*. He refers, for example, to spiritual resistance, youth activism, illegal border crossings, sabotage, testimonies of Nazi crimes and clandestine assertions of Jewish culture (such as ghetto schools). In relation to youth activism, Dworzecki provides his own eyewitness testimony of nonconformity in the Vilna ghetto that included children putting up signs with slogans and, on one occasion, dressing in rags of diverse colours and smearing their faces in an effort to embody different ‘races’ while singing these (misremembered or improvised) words of I.L. Peretz: ‘Alle menschen zenen brider / Weiss, gelbe, schwarze / Rasen – an eusgetracht majsse’ (All men are brothers, white, yellow, or black, race is just a simple invention).<sup>25</sup> Dworzecki was himself part of the Jewish resistance movement in the ghetto.<sup>26</sup> He knew of resistance in practical terms before he came to study it historically.

Dworzecki’s conception of *amidah* is contentious in its seeking to extend the idea of revolt beyond violent uprising. As Or Rogovin recounts, there was criticism of a 1968 Yad Vashem Conference on Manifestations of Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust at which Dworzecki outlined his idea of *amidah* in a paper entitled ‘The Day to Day Stand of the Jews’.<sup>27</sup> Some, such as Lucy Dawidowicz, felt that the term ‘resistance’ was becoming too broad to be useful. Dworzecki, however, was motivated by a desire to ensure that inconspicuous acts of rebellion, less spectacular modes of resistance, were accorded their due. For him, any effort to resist

Nazi efforts at dehumanization should be recognized and affirmed. Irene Weiss observes of her time at Auschwitz: ‘If you could maintain your sense of humanity – it was a sense of defiance’.<sup>28</sup> In this context, small gestures, gestures that are now mostly unknown or remain overlooked, were of immense importance. If Dworzecki’s perspective is embraced, such small gestures, when recorded, can be recognized for their oppositional character. It then becomes possible to detect resistance manifesting in unlikely situations in the concentration camp experience. Defiance, for instance, was already apparent at the moment of tattooing, a key event in the process of dehumanization in many survivor testimonies.

Henryk Mandelbaum, a survivor of the SK, recounts in oral testimony that sometimes during tattooing, people asked for small numbers – although he did not and clearly feels that he missed a trick – explaining of his arrival at Auschwitz in relation to the tattooist that some said: “Make small numbers for me!” And he made the small numbers. He was French the man who made the number’.<sup>29</sup> Shlomo Venezia also notes, while showing his ‘fairly big’ (*abbastanza grande*) tattoo to the cameraperson during video-testimony, that such requests were possible and successful.<sup>30</sup> Women would similarly sometimes resist during this assault upon identity. Erna Low writes:

‘Make mine small!’ I implored the woman who was working on my arm, ‘So that I can get rid of it some day’. In the light of what was to come, how ridiculous was my attitude! She gave me a look that puzzled me and obliged.<sup>31</sup>

Lucia Franco recalls women rubbing their tattoos immediately after receiving them in an effort to remove as much ink as possible.<sup>32</sup> An account of resistance that only accords significance to armed struggle or its preparation will neglect instances such as these that might be referred to as quotidian, yet far from insignificant rebellion. There are numerous examples of such acts among inmates in the concentration camps.

For a period of time, workers in Kanada (known by the Nazis as the *Effektenlager*), the part of the camp where the possessions of prisoners and of those murdered in the gas chambers were sorted, were barracked in the main camp of Birkenau at night, travelling to and from the warehouses each day. This gave them considerable opportunity for smuggling clothing and other items back to their barracks. In her memoir, Erika Myriam Kounio Amariglio recounts:

I remember that one of the ‘Canada’ girls brought me a pink blouse to wear under my striped dress. It was such a luxury! I even let a bit of pink show above the neckline of my uniform. Naturally I considered myself very elegant. I wore the blouse constantly until we left Auschwitz.<sup>33</sup>

Here the girl flouts the rule against taking items from among the possessions deposited in Kanada and Amariglio, in her turn, rebels against the uniform dress code of the inmates. She sticks her neck out through permitting the (likely thin) patch of pink to be visible above the neckline. This scrap of pink as symbolic resistance both individualizes her and affirms her femininity, two qualities the Nazis had sought to deprive her of.<sup>34</sup>

One of the most celebrated examples of armed resistance at Birkenau prior to the SK revolt was carried out by a woman, possibly the professional ballerina Francesca Mann, who shot and killed the SS officer Josef Schillinger (and injured another member of the SS) in the undressing room of Crematorium 1 (II).<sup>35</sup> Hermann Langbein, favouring Rudolf Höss' (the Commandant of Auschwitz at the time) account of the event, in which the role of a woman in this act of resistance is suppressed, dismisses Mann's purported actions as legendary.<sup>36</sup> Zalman Lewental, however, makes reference to the woman's rebelliousness in his 'Addendum to the Łódź Manuscript'.<sup>37</sup> It is clear the attack on the SS, an attack that fits easily into definitions of active resistance, was performed by a woman. Efforts to downplay this reality reflect fears of emasculation among perpetrators and some male resistance members.

For Roger Gottlieb, resistance is bound up with contesting oppression. He states that 'to seek to resist oppression means to seek to thwart, limit, or end the actions of the oppressor'.<sup>38</sup> Henryk Tauber recalls resistance that could be categorized as of this kind occurring on occasion inside the gas chamber itself. The metallic grille that protected the peephole in the interior of Crematorium 1 (II) was installed in response to those being gassed repeatedly breaking the small window the Nazis used to observe the progress of a gassing.<sup>39</sup> Even the addition of the grille did not prevent this from happening, so the window had to be recessed through the addition of planks or metal plates. Those being murdered also sometimes damaged the ventilation system and electrical cables.<sup>40</sup> These efforts were, of course, borne of desperation, yet they attest to people fighting by whatever means available to them to prevent the gassing being successful. That their efforts failed does not negate their intent. The damage they caused likely also led to delays in the killing process as repairs had to be carried out. When the crematoria were being dismantled, Morris K. also recounts that the SK found valuables concealed in the ventilation ducts of the gas chambers: 'jewellery hidden away in the openings'.<sup>41</sup> These acts of concealment carried out in the most appalling circumstances also index a defiance that should not pass unremarked.

The activities of the SK themselves fit into many of the categories identified by Dworzecki, including spiritual resistance, attestation to Nazi crimes, and the use of humour and satire (which Dworzecki acknowledges requires

further research). The letter signed ‘Herman’, composed in November 1944, which was discovered shortly after the liberation of Auschwitz and is published in a new translation in this volume, alludes to ongoing religious life in the SK. Its author writes in French, but was originally from Poland. For Dworzecki, there was a particular propensity toward spiritual resistance in Eastern European Jewish communities. Heroism had become interlocked (*enchevêtrée*) with spiritual heroism and martyrdom.<sup>42</sup>

In a recent important book, Amos Goldberg criticizes the concepts of resistance and *amidah* for presenting the Shoah as a crisis instead of a trauma. Such thinking, he claims, misrepresents the Shoah as a difficult process with the possibility of redemption at the end, rather than the destructive and incapacitating event that it really was. Placing emphasis on the ways victims resisted, or interpreting all of their actions as resistance, fails to acknowledge that destruction, which can be identified in the writings he considers. As an ‘extreme case’, Goldberg cites Zalman Lewental, one of the chroniclers of the SK, who describes his ‘very own death’: ‘We were like dead men, like robots’.<sup>43</sup> Here, Goldberg simply ignores the word ‘like’ (*vi*), a small but significant indication that Lewental is *figuring* what happened to him when he was first recruited into the SK: he is using a simile, comparing their state to things that they are not, and thus allowing him to make more than one comparison, to robots as well as dead men. This doubling fits into Lewental’s use of repetitive parallel structures, which run throughout the passage Goldberg cites.<sup>44</sup> Such repetitions serve to figure the state of being an automaton, but also to manage feelings arising from contemplating it and even to communicate them to a reader. They do not (at least not straightforwardly) index it in the way that Goldberg seems to believe. While Goldberg may be right to say that the experience of psychic damage and collapse of meaning is scanted by some accounts of resistance, his sense of trauma (heavily reliant on the classic definitions provided by Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman and Cathy Caruth) places far too simple a boundary between it and accounts of agency, self-understanding and, indeed, resistance.<sup>45</sup> It is quite clear that one of Lewental’s chief motivations in writing was to document the resistance attempts and plans by the SK that led up to the revolt of 7 October 1944.

Writing as a mode of resistance arises in many contexts in the Shoah. In Chełmno, for instance, notes were written and concealed by Jewish prisoners. A sheet of squared paper annotated with the names of twelve Jewish male prisoners and inscribed with a short message is now held in the archives of Yad Vashem.<sup>46</sup> It was discovered in the ruins of the extermination camp. The current condition of the sheet, its multiple creases, attests to the need to hide it. Judging from the creases and staining, it was seemingly repeatedly folded in half (five times in total), with the paper

becoming more resistant each time, to produce a small, squat rectangle that was easily concealable. The names are on the inner face of the folded paper. They have been documented in a conscious effort to accord the men, who knew they were going to die, a nominal afterlife. Through the list, they managed to leave a record of their fate. The short message explains that the roll has been prepared in the hope that friends or relatives of the men will one day be able to read it and learn of their fate. It concludes: 'if you survive you must take revenge'.<sup>47</sup> This command, for that is what it is, manifests something important about how the anonymous author (perhaps Josef Herskowitz, the first name on the list) conceived of their writing. They expected the message to function as a prompt to action, to exercise a kind of agency.

Here, Alfred Gell's conception of agency as he develops it in the context of art is enlightening. For Gell, agents (of which works of art form an example) are things which intend events to happen and perform social actions. In Gell's terms, the author who penned the demand for vengeance was the 'primary' intentional agent and the note as artefact functions as a 'secondary' intentional agent, an agent that indexes but acts independently of the primary agent.<sup>48</sup> Gell provides a framework for conceptualizing how documents such as the one from Chelmno and also the Scrolls of Auschwitz (the manuscripts written and then concealed by members of the SK) function not simply to register acts of resistance but also potentially to engender such acts. Taking one of the Scrolls as an example, Zalman Gradowski's account of a transport from the Kiełbasin camp to Auschwitz, the reader is invited by the narrator to bear witness. The narrator, who leads the reader on a journey through the destruction wrought on Europe's Jews, can be read as incarnating the text's own 'secondary' agency. Documents such as Gradowski's should be understood as active rather than passive artefacts.<sup>49</sup> One of the issues with understandings of textuality such as Goldberg's is that this agential capacity is downplayed. For him, writing either serves its author, enabling them to work through their (traumatic) experiences, or provides a means by which those experiences are imprinted. It is afforded no will of its own. Many of the authors writing during the Shoah, however, display an open or implicit belief in writing's inherent agency.

The Scrolls usually involve a conscious effort to bear witness to Nazi atrocity so that the Nazis can subsequently be held to account for their actions. They were conceived as agents to bear witness against the Nazis. Marcel Nadjary's letter, again likely written in November 1944 and also published in a new translation for this volume, provides one such agential example. There are clear efforts to specify numbers of those murdered and detail the method of killing in the letter. These sit uneasily beside heartfelt messages from Nadjary to those closest to him who he believes are still

alive. The four photographs taken by a member of the SK to record the extermination process which were smuggled out of Birkenau in August 1944 would also comprise artefacts embodying resistance of this kind.<sup>50</sup> The Scrolls of Auschwitz as examples of resistance, particularly those written in Yiddish, can also be understood to thwart Nazi efforts at cultural genocide.

## The Grey Zone

Dworzecki's efforts to advance a broader definition of *amidah* are motivated by an ethical concern that anonymous efforts to preserve humanity are not forgotten. Acts of the kind Dworzecki has in mind, minimal yet momentous actions such as the sharing of a piece of bread, often feature in retrospective testimonies provided by members of the SK. In the context of these men, however, slave-labourers in an extermination camp rather than inmates in a concentration camp, such stories might be interpreted as efforts to expiate because of their crucial, if unwilling, role in the perpetration of mass murder. The SK as a group have prompted intense ethical debate from the beginning, even as the special squad was still in operation in Birkenau. Among the writings of SK members buried in the grounds of the crematoria, Zalman Lewental provided both an analysis of how the SS forced men to perform this role and a lacerating self-examination of the will to live that kept them at it. In his letter, which was written to friends in Greece, Marcel Nadjary imagined them wondering how he could have carried out his tasks. Both Lewental and 'Herman' believed that something would be known of the SK and in different ways wanted to put some of that record straight. Indeed, knowledge of this group was passed on in moments where they did manage to breach the barrier kept between them and other prisoners, but it also circulated the camp in the form of rumour, by prisoners shocked and horrified by what the SK were forced, or were allowing themselves, to do. In conversation with Claude Lanzmann, Filip Müller described these rumours as 'myths' and 'figments of the imagination'.<sup>51</sup>

Müller also acknowledged that some of the crematoria were very close to the women's camp, and early testimony from women survivors of Auschwitz, such as that of Seweryna Szmaglewska (*Smoke over Birkenau*, 1945, English trans. 1947) and Krystyna Żywulska (*I Survived Auschwitz* 1946, English trans. 1951) found the position of the SK hard to accept and described them in harsh terms, although they acknowledged some complexity in what they had witnessed in the words and deeds of the men themselves. Not everyone brought moral questions to the fore, however.

In David Boder's interviews with survivors in 1946, a number mentioned the Sonderkommando, including one who stated that her brother was in the SK.<sup>52</sup> They cited them usually to help explain what they knew of the mass murder, as informed or shown by members of the SK. People who had managed to escape the camps could also be fascinated by this group from early on. Günther Anders wrote a poem inspired by newspaper reports of prisoners forced to burn bodies, asking simply 'What would you have done?' (1948).<sup>53</sup> The speaker and their addressee are haunted by the image of a member of the SK, unable to imagine what he was thinking, but compelled to try to place themselves in his position.

Early discussions of what was seen as the morally compromised position of the SK need to be seen in a wider context of suspicion of survivors. Initial attempts to consider the wrongs inflicted upon the victims and survivors of the Shoah often focused on the logic of forcing people to participate in their own victimization. In many cases, this took the form of asking at what cost to their own moral integrity people had survived. The SK provided a ready example – indeed, in some of the earliest novels in English that touch on the Holocaust, principal characters are survivors of the SK.<sup>54</sup>

By the early 1960s, criticisms of Jewish victims had shifted to focus on their passivity. The SK were often (albeit not in depth) referenced in such texts, not as a unique group, but simply as an extreme case of what was true in general. Bruno Bettelheim applied his characterization of prisoners straightforwardly to the behaviour of the SK. In his preface to Miklós Nyiszli's testimony, alongside the harsh criticisms of Nyiszli himself, the SK played a dual role. Thirteen of the supposed fourteen squads of SK simply accepted their lot, and so, for Bettelheim, took up the same position as all other Jews who marched unresisting to their deaths. The so-called twelfth SK who resisted served as a rebuke to the others. Bettelheim fitted them into his general schema of those who wished to 'protect the body' and those who wished to 'survive as men'.<sup>55</sup> In this the differences within the SK were the same as those within the Jewish people in Europe: the majority accepted their fate and did not resist; a small minority did not. Raul Hilberg used the uprisings of the SK and their equivalent in Treblinka to show that the only point at which Jews were prepared to fight back was when they 'were aware of everything'. It was only at this point, Hilberg argued, that 'long-forgotten and long-repressed powers of combat may be recalled'; the slightest degree of ignorance or uncertainty allowed 'Jewish submissiveness' to prevail.<sup>56</sup>

For Hannah Arendt, however, the extremity of the situation of the SK seems to have led her simply to refuse to consider whether ordinary men might have been forced to do this work. While she wanted to consider the

difficult moral question of how much one should acknowledge complicity by Jewish elites, for her, the ‘death commandos’ must have been drawn from ‘criminal elements’ and ‘the worst’. Their existence for her, therefore, ‘was only horrible, it was no moral problem’.<sup>57</sup> While this position seems to show little interest in the SK, it does actually share commonalities with Arendt’s description in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) of ‘the murder of the moral person in man’ in the camps. Arendt places this particular ‘murder’ into a system of destroying the humanity of human beings (as Griselda Pollock discusses in her chapter in this book). One of the steps in this process is making prisoners complicit in the crime against them, with the result that ‘the distinguishing line between the persecutor and persecuted, the murderer and his victim is constantly blurred’. But for Arendt, while it is important to document this process, there is no moral insight to be gained from the experience of being in the camps, which ‘can communicate no more than nihilistic banalities’. Arendt’s point is that the experience of the concentration camp (and here she means extermination as well as concentration camps) was morally meaningless, precisely because the camps expunged people’s moral being as part of a scheme of nullifying their lives.<sup>58</sup>

In a number of these cases, therefore, the extremity of the position of the SK does provoke some consideration, but it is mostly to confirm the writer’s overall thesis. For Bettelheim, it simply demonstrates how his argument applies to everyone. For Hilberg, the SK confirm the extremes to which Jews had to be pushed to change their passive behaviour. In Arendt’s case, they are unworthy of consideration, but do seem to fit into a general sense that there are no moral lessons to learn from the camps.

Compared to these cases, Primo Levi’s consideration of the SK shows itself to be far more open to the possibility of different experiences of prisoners. He might also be said to return to an early form of response, by people such as Żywulska and Anders, who were puzzled and unable (or unwilling) to answer the questions ‘what would you have done?’ and ‘why don’t you resist?’ As Dominic Williams’ chapter in this volume notes, Levi’s idea of the grey zone has prompted much consideration of ethical questions and the Shoah, but not everyone has engaged with the SK as one of the zone’s key groups. Tzvetan Todorov’s insistence that there was such a thing as moral life in the camps, criticized so virulently by Lawrence Langer, does draw upon their testimony, particularly that of Zalman Gradowski and Filip Müller. But while some of his concepts, such as ‘fragmentation’, might seem particularly useful for considering the grey zone, he gives little space to addressing their specific situation. In Judith Butler’s recent essay on ethics of fiction and testimony, the ‘grey zone’ once more becomes a concept applicable to all survivors. In this

essay, she suggests that the zone ‘offers a way of thinking about witnessing as something other than expiating guilt’ – a position that she sees as applying to Levi just as much as any of the figures that he discusses (the specifics of which she does not engage with).<sup>59</sup>

Langer’s term ‘choiceless choices’ might seem to apply most aptly to the SK. However, his only direct reference to the SK in *Holocaust Testimony* is to Filip Müller’s book *Sonderbehandlung* and its translation into English. He dismisses this written text as ‘drawing on the temptations of teleology or the appeal of representative patterns’. Langer’s point seems to be that if even someone who worked in the SK succumbs to the temptation of morally framing his written testimony, then writing in general might be unworthy of trust.<sup>60</sup> Langer’s famous characterization of the Holocaust victims as living in a world without morality incorporates Levi’s idea of the grey zone quite unproblematically. He writes that the zone ‘represents those moments when staying alive could not be practiced as a common pursuit’.<sup>61</sup> For Langer, actions to save oneself made at someone else’s expense have little difference from the questions of collaboration and privilege that Levi considers himself to be examining. While acknowledging the extreme position of the SK to a degree, Langer essentially sees them as of a piece with the rest of the victims and survivors.

Other discussions of the ‘grey zone’ sometimes do recognize the particular position of the SK, but find it hard to work out their place within it. For Claudia Card, the SK might be called the most extreme example of the grey zone. She cites Primo Levi’s descriptions of them at a number of points when she wishes to emphasize the evil (what she calls diabolical evil) of the zone, which forces others to corrupt themselves and lose their potential for goodness.<sup>62</sup> This is, as she puts it, ‘as diabolical an evil as I can imagine’, which she matches to Primo Levi’s description of the creation of the SK as ‘National Socialism’s most demonic crime’.<sup>63</sup> However, she also acknowledges that the SK are not typical of the zone, not clearly bearers of any guilt and having minimal choice in comparison with others.<sup>64</sup> If the ultimate evil of the grey zone is that it corrupts others, then the SK may not be the best example to choose. And yet its ultimate evil seems to be summed up in their figures, as its limit case, perhaps.

Giorgio Agamben’s thinking about ethics is one of the best known responses to Levi, although he focuses on a different figure discussed by Levi: the Muselmann, an inmate who has reached an extreme state of emaciation and fatigue, who is barely alive.<sup>65</sup> He describes the Muselmann as ‘the guard on the threshold of a new ethics’.<sup>66</sup> For Agamben, ethics needs to be rethought without the irredeemably legal terms of judgement and responsibility. This argument, however, also makes reference to the SK. They are important because Agamben perceives the grey zone to

be a space before law and the SK are the extreme figure of this zone.<sup>67</sup> Agamben's engagement with the grey zone and with the SK more broadly has been severely critiqued by Philippe Mesnard and Claudine Kahan. For them, Agamben divides the grey zone too neatly in dualisms and therefore obscures the shades of grey that characterize Levi's essay.<sup>68</sup> They suggest that Agamben skirts the nuances that Levi emphasizes.<sup>69</sup> Mesnard and Kahan explore Agamben's interpretation of Levi's analysis of the football match between the SK and the SS, which he extracts from the testimony of Miklós Nyiszli and cites during his discussion of the grey zone. For Levi, this match represents a clear expression of the blurring of bounds between victim and persecutor. Mesnard and Kahan question whether Levi fully appreciated the intense pressure that members of the SK would be under to participate in such a match. If they refused to join in, they would be signing their death warrants. They also foreground Nyiszli's status difference from the SK, a difference that Agamben, in contrast to Levi, fails to recognize.<sup>70</sup>

For Agamben, the football match is 'never over; it continues as if uninterrupted'.<sup>71</sup> As Debarati Sanyal explains as part of her reading of *Remnants of Auschwitz*: 'Agamben's claim for the continuing relevance of Levi's gray zone transforms the aberrant event of a soccer match played in Auschwitz – and the complex web of complicity between victims and executioners that such a game reveals – into an emblem for a recurrent, unlocatable, and transhistorical violence, one contaminating the civilian world of even a liberal democracy and its daily rituals and spectacles'.<sup>72</sup> Sanyal is troubled by Agamben's turning of the football match into 'the figure for a historical violence that is completely unleashed from its spatiotemporal moorings'.<sup>73</sup> His rhetorical manoeuvres, Sanyal observes, also render us 'analogous to the SS and the SK'.<sup>74</sup> For her, this convertibility that informs Agamben's understanding of the football match as it features in his project to reconceptualize ethics is viewable as ethically suspect. Both Sanyal, and Mesnard and Kahan foreground Agamben's failure to attend to the historical specificities of the grey zone.

This difficulty of assigning a place to be given to the SK is not surprising. Any attempt to conceptualize one group of prisoners will find it difficult to acknowledge both their particularity and their place in the wider 'society' of prisoners in the camp. But some of these difficulties seem to be particularly brought to the fore by the SK: their (seeming) centrality to the killing process (central both to the camp regime, who thought them particularly useful, and to the prisoners, who found them particularly guilty of collaboration, although members of the SK themselves disputed it); their centrality therefore to witnessing extermination; the extreme psychological suffering that this caused them and thus the extreme reactions that it

might have provoked, at the same time as the fairly high level of privilege that they were granted. The chapters collected in this volume are not assembled to answer this problem, but to think through its implications.

### **From Within to Without**

The first part of this volume includes chapters by Griselda Pollock and Dominic Williams that explore historical and ethical questions regarding representation through the prism of a consideration of the SK. Pollock considers the particular assault on the moral integrity that the Nazis had devised. Through her use of Arendt's theorization of the destruction of prisoners' moral worlds (based in large part on ideas from David Rousset) to think through the specific way in which members of the SK were morally assaulted, she demonstrates that (with care and a clear sense of the differences) some conceptual links can be drawn between concentration camps and extermination sites. Williams argues that the difficult ethical status of the grey zone is bound up with anxieties over cognizing this space. Taking off from a reading of Primo Levi's essay, he shows how ascertaining facts about the SK and their environment is always bound up with ethical questions. Indeed, even the way in which the SK gained knowledge of the machinery of destruction, by working within it, is often seen to contaminate them in a way that obscures the possibility for moral action against it that this knowledge sometimes gave them.

The volume then moves on to consider representations of the SK produced from within Birkenau. Two letters by members of the SK that were discovered buried in the grounds of the crematoria are published (in new translations) together here for the first time. The letters, written by a Polish Jewish émigré who was deported from France, and a Greek Jew, were found in 1945 and 1980 respectively. The majority of manuscripts discovered in the grounds of the crematoria were composed in Yiddish, while these two letters were written in French and Greek. This section is able to draw on new discoveries for both of them. The original of the letter in French, attributed to Chaim Herman, was considered lost. New research into its authorship has established that the actual author was Herman Strasfogel. His family held the original manuscript, which they then donated to the archives of the *Mémorial de la Shoah* in Paris. Andreas Kilian's chapter explains how this discovery was made. We have been able to incorporate corrections to the transcription of the letter into the new translation. For a long time, Marcel Nadjary's letter in Greek was largely unreadable, but in 2017, Pavel Polian and Aleksandr Nikityaev revealed that through multispectral analysis of a scan of the letter, they had been

able to render visible much of the hitherto illegible text. The technique they used is detailed in a short initial chapter.

In Chapter 5, K.E. Fleming provides a sensitive analysis of the emotional tenor of Nadjary's letter and also what it reveals about his relationship to his Greek heritage. As Fleming foregrounds, Nadjary formed part of the first generation of truly 'Greek Jews', navigating his identity through both his religion and a fierce sense of nationalism. The next chapter, by Nicholas Chare, Ersy Contogouris and Dominic Williams, provides context and some interpretation of the two letters, tracing similarities and differences between them. The letters themselves then follow. The new translations both seek to replicate something of the original, at times confused, syntax of the letters. This syntax registers the horrific conditions under which the missives were both composed. The fact that so much more of Nadjary's text has recently been deciphered causes us to accord it considerable importance in this part. Doing so also serves to foreground the presence of Greek prisoners in the SK at Birkenau. The role of Greek SK members in acts of resistance has been somewhat overlooked, a theme also taken up by Steven Bowman in the third part. The part ends with a thoughtful meditation by Gideon Greif on the religious life of the SK in the crematoria.

The third part of the book considers various forms of retrospective representations of the SK. Chapter 10 by Dan Stone explores what material relating to the SK exists in the archives of the International Tracing Service (ITS). Drawing on his extensive work on this archive and previous theorizations of its nature, Stone shows how even the most minimal registration of SK experience can provide telling insights into the ways the SK have been remembered, and the ways archives operate to make certain memories possible. In the next chapter, Carol Zemel provides a sensitive and sophisticated engagement with the difficult corpus of works that were produced by the artist David Olère, a survivor of the Sonderkommando, to record what he had witnessed in the camps (he was liberated from Ebensee like many other former members of the SK). Prior to his deportation, Olère worked as a film poster designer in Paris. His works relating to his Holocaust experiences take varied forms. In the immediate postwar years, for instance, he produced a series of drawings in pen and ink, sometimes supplemented with wash, which detailed his experiences in the SK and in Auschwitz more generally. Later he would incorporate elements from these drawings into a number of paintings. Zemel traces how the effects of trauma are registered across his different practices and approaches. Her reading also examines gender issues in relation to Olère's corpus, particularly the voyeurism that manifests in some of his compositions. There has been a reluctance to engage in depth with Olère's works,

but Zemel demonstrates that they form important testimony and offer valuable historical insights.

Dominic Williams and Isabel Wollaston consider the part played by the SK in the range of exhibitions and sites curated by the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, both in the physical locations of Auschwitz-Birkenau and in a broader network of publications and online and social media activity. The inconsistent picture that emerges of the SK both speaks to the complexities and inconsistencies of the museum's organization and appears as a solution to the problems that the SK present for an institution. In Chapter 13, Gideon Greif then discusses reports and oral testimonies provided by survivors who were members of the SK. Through examining both early postwar testimonies and more recent accounts, he is able to foreground how our understanding of the SK and their experiences has shifted over time. In the next chapter, Sue Vice considers what might be called a doubly fictional version of the SK – that presented by Sebastian Faulks in his novel *A Possible Life*, drawing on the fake elements of Donald Watt's memoir *Stoker*. Vice shows how an Anglocentric version of the Second World War, adhered to by Faulks in his choice of intertexts and his English protagonist, produces an impossible version of the SK, one that subordinates the specific history of this group to the experience of British prisoners of war (POWs).

This part also includes a letter by Georges Didi-Huberman that is published here for the first time in English translation. It is the final one of four letters addressed to the German artist Gerhard Richter by Didi-Huberman. The communications began following a visit to Richter's studio at the artist's invitation in December 2013. It is necessary to give some sense of the letters as a whole in order to fully appreciate the fourth letter. The first letter in the quartet is dated 19 February 2014 and the last 8 July 2016. Each of Didi-Huberman's letters had to be translated into German for Richter before he was able to fully read them. The four letters were published as two pairs under the title 'Sortir du plan' in issues 135 and 137 of *Les Cahiers du Musée national de l'art moderne*, one of France's most prestigious art history journals. 'Sortir du plan' is a title with multiple connotations in French.<sup>75</sup> As well as meaning blueprint or outline, 'plan' can also refer to the picture plane and to a cinematic shot (*gros plan*, for example, translates as close-up). Throughout the letters, Didi-Huberman particularly exploits the first two meanings of the word. The second pairing of letters also received a subtitle, *L'écorcement*, a term that translates as peeling, stripping or debarking. All these connotations are important to Didi-Huberman at different times. The four letters, written over two years, span the preparation, creation and subsequent exhibition of what came to be known as the *Birkenau* series of artworks.

The *Birkenau* series was inspired by Richter's encounters at various times and in differing contexts with the four photographs taken by a member of the SK at Birkenau to bear witness to mass murder.<sup>76</sup> Richter initially copied the photographs in outline onto four canvases. He then overpainted these figurative works to produce four abstract paintings. The *Birkenau* series also features four photographic works of the paintings. The four photographs upon which Richter's series is based form the subject of Didi-Huberman's 2003 work *Images malgré tout* (translated into German in 2006).<sup>77</sup> Richter was familiar with Didi-Huberman's analyses of the images when he invited the art historian to visit his studio. For both the artist and the art historian, the photographs hold a longstanding interest. Richter explains to Didi-Huberman at one point after 'finishing' the series that he is still engaged (*impliqué*) with their subject. Didi-Huberman, similarly, has continued to think about these photographs subsequent to the publication of *Images malgré tout*. They form part of the discussion of his 2011 book *Écorces* and, as these letters attest, continue to inspire reflection in him.<sup>78</sup> The correspondence between Didi-Huberman and Richter seems to provide a medium for both men to work towards an understanding of how to approach and think through these troubling images, two of which depict the burning of corpses and two of which seek to record a group of naked women in woodland near to Crematorium 4 (V) who will shortly be gassed.<sup>79</sup>

Each of Didi-Huberman's letters can be read as a particular foray in understanding, offering distinct ways to find words to illuminate the seen in the face of the initial quietude of the images. There are, however, continuities across the quartet. A major aim, for instance, appears to be to offer a corrective to the interpretive template Benjamin Buchloh, perhaps Richter's most significant interlocutor, has provided for the works.<sup>80</sup> Didi-Huberman perceives Buchloh as striving to situate Richter's works either in relation to Clement Greenberg's formalist criticism or Theodor Adorno's ideas about the value of autonomous art. In his second letter to Richter, he pointedly describes the painter not as someone who moves from the culture industry to the avant-garde, but rather as being far more subtle and dialectical, working across such divides rather than occupying a polarising position with regard to them.

In the letter we have translated here, Didi-Huberman moves on to a consideration of Richter's works in relation to Aristotelean ideas about subject and form and then in terms of their archaeological qualities. As a means to make sense of this aspect, Didi-Huberman turns to the psychoanalytic thinking of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, specifically to their idea of the shell (*l'écorce*) and the kernel (*le noyau*).<sup>81</sup> Abraham and Torok were primarily interested in speech (such as that of the analysand),

but Didi-Huberman wants to tease out the implications of their thinking for the visual. He describes painting as becoming the shell of the subject. The abstract overlays of the paintings, their shells, covering the kernels of the four photographs. These kernels *survive* their overpainting, continuing to resonate from within their abstract shells. This description of Richter's practice through the tropes of the shell and the kernel builds on ideas advanced in *Ecorces* in particular. The choice of the trope of the kernel as survivor also unwittingly echoes language used by Zvi Radlitzky (also Radlitzki) in a diary of his experiences in the Lwów ghetto. Radlitzky describes those in the ghetto as being like kernels of grain (גרעיני התבואה), some of which briefly escape the action of the millstone.<sup>82</sup> For Radlitzky, any survival is only temporary; yet, in spite of this, his prose provides the ghetto inhabitants with a posthumous phantom presence. The writer's imagery also induces a kind of survival in the face of annihilation, his text avoiding the millstone.

In the last chapter of this part, Steven Bowman offers a valuable overview of extant sources relating to the experiences of Greek members of the SK. He draws on both testimony produced from within Birkenau and postwar accounts to assemble a compelling picture of the sometimes singularity of experience of Greek members of the SK in contrast with their Eastern European counterparts.

The next part engages with depictions of the SK in film. The first chapter in this part is by Barry Langford. Langford considers the two best-known filmic portrayals of the SK: *The Grey Zone* (dir. Tim Blake-Nelson, United States, 2001) and *Son of Saul* (dir. László Nemes, Hungary, 2015). Exploring the ways in which resistance is seen primarily in cinematic terms as violence, Langford argues that this fails to acknowledge the fact that the SK had a life and that their attempts to preserve it also need to be seen as a form of resistance. This argument speaks to some of what Williams argues in Chapter 2 about the need to credit the SK with a daily life that enabled as well as stymieing action on their part.

Adam Brown also surveys a range of films and television representations of the SK, situating a discussion of *The Grey Zone* and *Son of Saul* within this context. Unlike the other attempts to figure the SK, which Brown characterizes as appropriating them for other political purposes, these two films show the potential of fiction to prompt engagement with the ethical issues that Levi outlined in his essay on the grey zone.

In Chapter 19, Philippe Mesnard provides a detailed overview of varied approaches to the portrayal of the SK across narrative cinema and documentary. Mesnard argues persuasively that sometimes fictional devices – such as the crafted *mise-en-scène* in *Shoah* of a barber shop in which Abraham Bomba, a former slave labourer from Treblinka, gives

his testimony – provide invaluable truths about Holocaust experiences. Films such as *Shoah*, involving stagings, fictional elements conceived to enhance the emotional impact of the testimony, form hinge cases existing somewhere between narrative cinema and straightforward documentary. Finally, in a coda to the volume, Victor Seidler offers a personal reflection on the insufficiency of paradigms of silence and postmemory, weaving it together with his response to the reading we provide of Zalman Gradowski in *Matters of Testimony*, and the possible intertwining of Gradowski's and his family histories.

All the chapters in this volume seek in some way to broaden or develop thinking regarding how representations of the SK as forms of testimony intersect with ethical questions and/or address issues concerning resistance. They speak to the need to engage thoughtfully with some of the difficult questions posed by the actions of SK and how they have been portrayed retrospectively, if we are to continue to enhance our understanding of the Holocaust. Too often, the SK have been viewed as peripheral or as a taboo topic. This is a tendency that *Testimonies of Resistance* seeks to stand against. The SK need to be accorded due importance in histories of the Holocaust more broadly. The chapters here form a small contribution to the ongoing, immense, and immensely important research, which seeks to deepen our knowledge of the Holocaust. In this, they contribute to a vital kind of struggle. For Dworzecki, as Boaz Cohen implies, scholarship itself comprises a form of resistance, albeit a belated one. Among other things, documentation of the Holocaust provides a means to 'foil the murderers' attempts to conceal the crime'.<sup>83</sup>

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*Interpreting the Scrolls of Auschwitz* (Berghahn Books, 2016) and *The Auschwitz Sonderkommando: Testimonies, Histories, Representations* (2019).

## Notes

1. For a recent filmic exploration of Postec's role in the creation of *Shoah* see *Ziva Postec: La monteuse derrière le film Shoah* (dir. Catherine Hébert, Canada, 2018). For an extended examination of how the Sonderkommando are represented in *Shoah*, see Nicholas Chare and Dominic Williams, *The Auschwitz Sonderkommando: Testimonies, Histories, Representations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), Chapter 7.
2. Rémy Besson, *Shoah: Une double référence? Des faits au film, du film aux faits* (Paris: M&F, 2017); Ziva Postec, 'As Editor: *Shoah* Paris 1979–1985', <http://www.postec-ziva.com/Shoah.php> (retrieved 28 March 2019).
3. Nicholas Chare and Dominic Williams, *Matters of Testimony: Interpreting the Scrolls of Auschwitz* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016).
4. Adam Brown, *Judging 'Privileged' Jews: Holocaust Ethics, Representation, and the 'Grey Zone'* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 124–30.
5. Compare the accounts of the SK revolt and sources used in Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961), 624–25 and Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), revised edn, vol 3, 1047–48.
6. Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy* (London: HarperCollins, 1986), esp. 649–53, but also 518, 633, 636–37, 667–68 and 749–50. Following the Auschwitz Museum, Gilbert attributes these passages to an anonymous author or Zalman Lewental. Far less extensive references are made to Lewental's account of the SK resistance (515–16, 744–46, 820), and one reference to Zalman Gradowski occurs (730).
7. Val Arnold-Forster, 'Weekend Arts: Taste of Ashes/Radio Review', *The Guardian*, 20 December 1986, p. 12.
8. Hannes Heer, 'The Difficulty of Ending a War: Reactions to the Exhibition "War of Extermination: Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941 to 1944"', trans. Jane Caplan, *History Workshop Journal* 46 (Autumn 1998), 187–203; Andrew I. Port, 'Holocaust Scholarship and Politics in the Public Sphere: Reexamining the Causes, Consequences, and Controversy of the Historikerstreit and the Goldhagen Debate: A Forum with Gerit Dworok, Richard J. Evans, Mary Fulbrook, Wendy Lower, A. Dirk Moses, Jeffrey K. Olick, and Timothy D. Snyder', *Central European History* 50(3) (2017), 375–403.
9. Most notably Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
10. *Schindler's List* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1993) and *Life is Beautiful* (dir. Roberto Benigni, 1997) won seven and three Oscars respectively. *The Guardian* predicted that with *The Grey Zone* (2001), its director Tim Blake Nelson was 'set to flower' and would 'show himself a heavyweight'. Andrew Pulver et al., 'New Year Special: Just Watch Us Go', *The Guardian*, 29 December 2000, p. 10. The film received a limited release in the United States and went straight to DVD in most countries, including

- the United Kingdom. See [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0252480/?ref\\_=ttrel\\_rel\\_tt](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0252480/?ref_=ttrel_rel_tt) (retrieved 28 March 2019).
11. The chapters in this collection by Griselda Pollock, Barry Langford, Adam Brown and Philippe Mesnard include at least some discussion of *Son of Saul*. We also include a translation of one open letter from Georges Didi-Huberman to Richter about his *Birkenau* series. On the Scrolls of Auschwitz, see Chare and Williams, *Matters of Testimony* and Nicholas Chare and Dominic Williams, *The Auschwitz Sonderkommando*, Chapter 2. New translations include Zalmen Gradowski, *From the Heart of Hell: Manuscripts of a Sonderkommando Member in Auschwitz*, trans. Barry Smerin and Janina Wurbs (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2017); and Salmen Gradowski, *Die Zertrennung*, ed. Aurélia Kalisky, trans. Almut Seiffert and Miriam Trinh (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, forthcoming).
  12. For a discussion of *Son of Saul* in relation to writings by members of the SK, see our article 'Questions of Filiation: From the Scrolls of Auschwitz to *Son of Saul*, *Mémoires en jeu* 2 (2016), 63–72. For a recent, powerful reading of *Son of Saul*, one which draws on the writings of Zalman Gradowski for context, see Isabel Wollaston, '(Re-) Visualizing the "Heart of Hell"? Representations of the Auschwitz Sonderkommando in the Art of David Olère and *Son of Saul* (László Nemes, 2015),' *Holocaust Studies* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2019.1625119>.
  13. Ber Mark, *The Extermination and the Resistance of the Polish Jews during the Period 1939–1945*, trans. Adam Rutkowski (Warsaw: Jewish Historical Institute, 1955), 15.
  14. Joseph Tenenbaum, 'Foreword', in Jacob Apenszlak and Moshe Polakiewicz, *Armed Resistance of the Jews in Poland* (New York: American Federation for Polish Jews, 1944), 7.
  15. Melech Neustadt, 'The Year of Extermination', in *The Last Stand: Jewish Resistance in Nazi Europe and the Role of the Labour Zionist Movement* (New York: Poale Zion Organization of America, 1944), 7.
  16. Israel Gutman, 'The Jewish Underground in Auschwitz', trans. Israel Meir Lask, in Zvi Szner (ed.), *Extermination and Resistance: Historical Records and Source Material, Volume I* (Lohamei Haghettaot: Ghetto Fighters House, 1958), 157.
  17. Lewental probably found this diary in the effects of a person murdered in the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Ber Mark, *The Scrolls of Auschwitz* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Press, 1985), 237.
  18. Gutman, 'The Jewish Underground in Auschwitz', 160.
  19. See, for instance, the testimony of Murray Kenig. When questioned about the revolt, Kenig states that: 'It had no significance'. When pressed, he says: 'Let me explain the hopelessness of the situation to you in real terms, not imaginatively or otherwise. Auschwitz was impregnable both ways. You couldn't get in and you couldn't get out'. He then observes that if there were any feelings following the revolt, they were not of hope, but of fear of retaliation. Murray Kenig interviewed by Josh Freed, 13 January 1982. USC Shoah Foundation. Interview Code 53607.
  20. Neustadt is keen to link resistance activities with the Labor Zionist Movement and, without underplaying the role of the Movement, his approach demonstrates how efforts at rebellion can be retrospectively co-opted to serve political and other agendas.
  21. Neustadt, 'The Year of Extermination', 9.
  22. Yehuda Bauer, 'Foreword', in Shmuel Krakowski, *The War of the Doomed: Jewish Armed Resistance in Poland, 1942–1944*, trans. Orah Blaustein (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1984), vii.

23. Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 163.
24. Boaz Cohen, 'Dr Meir (Mark) Dworzecki: The Historical Mission of a Survivor Historian', *Holocaust Studies* 21(1–2) (2015), 24–37, at 28.
25. The original is: 'All men are brothers / Brown, yellow, black, white / Peoples lands and climates / Are a made up tale'. Dworzecki, *Histoire de la résistance anti-nazie juive (1933–1945) : Problèmes et méthodologie* (Tel Aviv: n.p., 1965), 27.
26. For a short biography of Dworzecki, see Cohen, 'Dr Meir (Mark) Dworzecki', 24–25.
27. See Or Rogovin, 'Between Meir Dworzecki and Yehiel Dimur: *Amidah* in the Writing of Ka-Tzetnik 135633', *Holocaust Studies* 24(2) (2018), 203–17, at 203–4.
28. Irene Weiss interviewed by Ileana Kenney, 26 July 1996. Shoah Foundation Number 17212.
29. Henryk Mandelbaum interviewed by Elliot Perlman in the spring of 2006. USHMM Accession Number: 2006.201. RG Number: RG-50.634.0001.
30. Shlomo Venezia interviewed by Manuela Consonni on 13 December 1997. USC Shoah Foundation Interview Code 36179.
31. Erna Low, 'I was in Oswiecim'. Unpublished memoir, 2. USHMM Accession Number: 2017.466.1.
32. Lucia Franco, *Et un jour, la joie de vivre s'arreta à . . . Auschwitz* (Owings Mills: Marla Stein Associates, 1994), 62.
33. Erika Myriam Kounio Amariglio, *From Thessaloniki to Auschwitz and Back: Memories of a Survivor from Thessaloniki*, trans. Theresa Sundt (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2000), 90.
34. For a discussion of symbolic resistance, see Michael R. Marrus, 'Jewish Resistance in the Holocaust', *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 (1995), 83–110, at 94–95.
35. For further discussion of this event, see Chare and Williams, *The Auschwitz Sonderkommando*, Chapter 2. Our numbering of the crematoria in this chapter, like some of the other chapters in the volume, follows that used by the majority of survivors of the SK in their retrospective testimonies and also by the authors of the Scrolls of Auschwitz (see, for example, the anonymous list of transports written in Polish discovered buried alongside manuscripts by Leyb Langfus and Zalman Lewental). In their lived experience, for the SK at Birkenau there were only four crematoria (although a very few had also worked at the crematorium at Auschwitz I). We have provided the Nazi numbering of the crematoria (which included the crematoria at both Auschwitz I and II) as roman numerals in parentheses. In this volume, some chapters follow the numbering system used by the camp regime and subsequently by many historians (who mostly relied on perpetrator documents). This system counts the crematorium at Auschwitz I as Crematorium I and the four at Birkenau as Crematoria II–V. In all cases, the numbers in Roman numerals are consistent, so Crematorium 1 (II) is the same as Crematorium II.
36. Hermann Langbein, *Against All Hope: Resistance in the Nazi Concentration Camps 1938–1945*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Paragon, 1994), 280.
37. Zalman Lewental, 'Addendum to the Łódź Manuscript', in Ber Mark, *The Scrolls of Auschwitz*, trans. Sharon Neemani (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1985), 236–40, at 238.
38. Roger S. Gottlieb, 'The Concept of Resistance: Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust', *Social Theory and Practice* 9(1), 31–49, at 41.
39. 'Protokół [Official Record] – Henryk Tauber', Proces Rudolfa Hoessa, Sygn. GK 196/93, NTN 93, Volume 11, 1946–47. USHMM Accession Number: 1998.A.0243 RG Number: RG-15.167M, 122–49; 129 (1–28; 8).

40. Ibid.
41. Morris K. interviewed by Lawrence Langer on 29 June 1989 (currently mistakenly listed in the Yale catalogue as 28 June). Fortunoff Collection HVT-1431.
42. Meir Dworzecki, *Histoire de la résistance anti-nazie juive (1933–1945) : Problèmes et méthodologie* (Tel Aviv: n.p., 1965), 26.
43. Amos Goldberg, *Trauma in First Person: Diary Writing during the Holocaust* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2017), 56–57, 40–41.
44. E.g. ‘vos er tut, ven er tut, vos mit im tut zikh bikhlal’; ‘kh’veys genoy, az keyner hot demolt fun undz nisht gelebt, nisht gedenkt, nisht getrakht’. Goldberg also ceases his quotation immediately before the words: ‘That’s how they treated us until we [*1 word illegible*] we began to regain our senses’. And a few lines later: ‘Afterwards, coming to oneself in the block, when each man lay down to rest, then the tragedy began’.
45. Indeed, these theorizations of trauma as inherently retrospective fit uneasily with discussing diarists writing during the event. In fact, attempts to theorize an ‘everyday’ as opposed to a ‘catastrophic’ trauma might speak better to some of the aspects of what diarists and contemporaneous writers were doing. See especially Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
46. ‘Will written by 12 Jewish inmates who were labourers in Chełmno camp before they were murdered (undated)’, Letters and Postcards Collection, Yad Vashem, Item ID 3539746.
47. ‘Will written by 12 Jewish inmates who were labourers in Chełmno camp before they were murdered (undated)’, Reuven Dafni and Yehudit Kleiman (eds), *Final Letters from Victims of the Holocaust* (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 120.
48. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 21.
49. For a discussion of Gradowski’s own notion of agency in relation to artefacts, see Nicholas Chare, ‘Material Witness: Conservation Ethics and the Scrolls of Auschwitz’, *symplokē* 24(1–2) (2016), 81–97.
50. For a recent analysis of these photographs see Chare and Williams, *The Auschwitz Sonderkommando*, Chapter 3.
51. Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection, Interview with Filip Müller, Accession Number 1996:166; RG-60.5012. English translation of transcript of interview with Lanzmann, trans. Uta Allers, 89–90.
52. Jola Gross, 3 August 1946, Paris; Helen Tichauer, 23 September 1946, Feldafing, Germany. Retrieved 28 March 2019 from [http://voices.iit.edu/david\\_boder](http://voices.iit.edu/david_boder).
53. Gideon Greif and Adam Brown have both cited this poem, but dated it by its appearance in the German-Jewish New York newspaper *Aufbau* in 1961. Brown, *Judging ‘Privileged’ Jews*, 202; Gideon Greif, *We Wept without Tears: Testimonies of the Jewish Sonderkommando from Auschwitz*, trans. Naftali Greenwood (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 1–2. See Günther Anders, *Tagebücher und Gedichte* (Munich: Beck, 1985), 331–32.
54. E.g. Mordecai Richler, *A Choice of Enemies* (1957), Leon Uris, *Exodus* (1958), Edward Lewis Wallant, *The Pawnbroker* (1961) and Daniel Stern, *Who Shall Live, Who Shall Die* (1963).
55. Bruno Bettelheim, ‘Afterword’, in Miklós Nyiszli, *Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Eyewitness Report* (London: Penguin, 2013) 173. Bettelheim’s criticism of Nyiszli also appeared in *The Informed Heart* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 261–62.

56. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1st ed., 1961), 625n23; see also 624–25 and 631.
57. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 123–25.
58. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Penguin, 2017), 451, 591. For the earliest version of this argument, see Hannah Arendt, ‘The Concentration Camps (Review)’, *Partisan Review* 15(7) (July 1948). Retrieved 28 March 2019 from <http://www.bu.edu/partisanreview/books/PR1948V15N7/HTML/files/assets/basic-html/index.html#743>.
59. Judith Butler, ‘Fiction and Solicitude: Ethics and the Conditions for Survival’, in Claudio Fogu, Wulf Kansteiner and Todd Presner (eds), *Probing the Ethics of Holocaust Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 335–36.
60. Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimony: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 57–58. Langer’s position is that the authenticity of Müller’s written text is more questionable than that of the testimony provided for Claude Lanzmann in *Shoah*, on the basis that written testimony can be ‘openly or silently edited’, whereas in oral testimony ‘every word spoken falls directly from the survivor’s lips’ (at 210n18). However, Müller’s words are in fact heavily edited in *Shoah*. See Chare and Williams, *The Auschwitz Sonderkommando*, Chapter 7. For a general discussion of the complex role of editing in *Shoah*, see Rémy Besson, *Shoah une double référence: Des faits au film, du film aux faits* (Paris: MkF éditions, 2017). Recent work on Müller’s book indicates that Helmut Freitag played a rather more complicated role than Langer believes him to have done and that Müller was responsible for some of the writing in German. See Peter Davies, *Witness between Languages: The Translation of Holocaust Testimonies in Context* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2018), 191–192.
61. Langer, *Holocaust Testimony*, 139.
62. Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 212, 234.
63. *Ibid.*, 217, 234.
64. *Ibid.*, 222, 230.
65. For a recent discussion of the figure of the Muselmann, see Paul Bernard-Nourad, *Figurer l’autre: Essai sur la figure du ‘musulman’ dans les camps de concentration nazis* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2013).
66. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 69. For further discussion of Agamben’s ethical framework in relation to the Sonderkommando, see Nicholas Chare, ‘The Gap in Context: Giorgio Agamben’s *Remnants of Auschwitz*’, *Cultural Critique* 64 (Fall 2006), 40–68. We are grateful to Justin Clemens for sharing his insights about Agamben’s philosophy.
67. *Ibid.*, 24.
68. Philippe Mesnard and Claudine Kahan, *Giorgio Agamben à l’épreuve d’Auschwitz* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2001) 33.
69. *Ibid.*, 36.
70. *Ibid.*, 39.
71. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 26.
72. Debarati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 32.
73. *Ibid.*
74. *Ibid.*, 33.

75. We are grateful to Georges Didi-Huberman for his suggestion as to how best to translate the title.
76. These photographs are additionally discussed by Steven Bowman in his chapter in this volume.
77. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images malgré tout* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2004).
78. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Écorces* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2011).
79. For further discussion of Didi-Huberman's engagement with these images, see Chare & Williams, *Matters of Testimony*, Chapter 6.
80. For Buchloh's own reading of Richter's *Birkenau* series, see Benjamin Buchloh, *Gerhard Richter's Birkenau Paintings* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2016).
81. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis, Volume 1*, trans. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
82. Zvi Radlitzky, 'Reshimot miyemei hakibush haGermani BeLvov', *Yalqut moreshet* 21 (1976), 7–34, at 7.
83. Cohen, 'Dr Meir (Mark) Dworzecki', 26.

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