

Representing Auschwitz

The Holocaust and Its Contexts

Series Editors: **Olaf Jensen**, University of Leicester, UK and **Claus-Christian W.Szejnmann**, Loughborough University, UK

Series Editorial Board: Wolfgang Benz, Robert G. Moeller and Mirjam Wenzel

More than 60 years on, the Holocaust remains a subject of intense debate with ever-widening ramifications. This series aims to demonstrate the continuing relevance of the Holocaust and related issues in contemporary society, politics and culture; studying the Holocaust and its history broadens our understanding not only of the events themselves but also of their present-day significance. The series acknowledges and responds to the continuing gaps in our knowledge about the events that constituted the Holocaust, the various forms in which the Holocaust has been remembered, interpreted and discussed, and the increasing importance of the Holocaust today to many individuals and communities.

Titles include:

Nicholas Chare and Dominic Williams (*editors*)

REPRESENTING AUSCHWITZ

At the Margins of Testimony

Olaf Jensen and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann (*editors*)

ORDINARY PEOPLE AS MASS MURDERERS

Perpetrators in Comparative Perspectives

Karolin Machtans and Martin A. Ruehl (*editors*)

HITLER – FILMS FROM GERMANY

History, Cinema and Politics since 1945

Simo Muir and Hana Worthen (*editors*)

FINLAND'S HOLOCAUST

Silences of History

Tanja Schult

A HERO'S MANY FACES

Raoul Wallenberg in Contemporary Monuments

Forthcoming titles:

Olaf Jensen (*editor*)

HISTORY AND MEMORY AFTER THE HOLOCAUST IN GERMANY,
POLAND, RUSSIA AND BRITAIN

The Holocaust and Its Contexts Series

Series Standing Order ISBN 978-0-230-22386-8 Hardback

978-0-230-22387-5 Paperback

(outside North America only)

You can receive future titles in this series as they are published by placing a standing order. Please contact your bookseller or, in case of difficulty, write to us at the address below with your name and address, the title of the series and the ISBN quoted above.

Customer Services Department, Macmillan Distribution Ltd, Houndmills,
Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS, England

Representing Auschwitz

At the Margins of Testimony

Edited by

Nicholas Chare

Lecturer in Gender Studies, University of Melbourne

and

Dominic Williams

Montague Burton Fellow in Jewish Studies, University of Leeds

palgrave
macmillan



Editorial matter, selection and introduction © Nicholas Chare and
Dominic Williams 2013

Individual chapters © Respective authors 2013

Foreword © Eva Hoffman 2013

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2013 978-1-137-29768-6

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this
publication may be made without written permission.

No portion of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted
save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence
permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency,
Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS.

Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication
may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The authors have asserted their rights to be identified as the authors of this
work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 2013 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited,
registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke,
Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies
and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States,
the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-45217-0 ISBN 978-1-137-29769-3 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9781137297693

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully
managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing
processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the
country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	vii
<i>Foreword</i> Eva Hoffman	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	xii
Introduction: Representing Auschwitz – At the Margins of Testimony <i>Nicholas Chare and Dominic Williams</i>	1
1 The Harmony of Barbarism: Locating the Scrolls of Auschwitz in Holocaust Historiography <i>Dan Stone</i>	11
2 On the Problem of Empathy: Attending to Gaps in the Scrolls of Auschwitz <i>Nicholas Chare</i>	33
3 ‘The Dead Are My Teachers’: The Scrolls of Auschwitz in Jerome Rothenberg’s <i>Khurbn</i> <i>Dominic Williams</i>	58
4 Chain of Testimony: The Holocaust Researcher as Surrogate Witness <i>Anne Karpf</i>	85
5 What Remains – Genocide and Things <i>Ulrike Kistner</i>	104
6 Representing the Einsatzgruppen: The Outtakes of Claude Lanzmann’s <i>Shoah</i> <i>Sue Vice</i>	130
7 Reconciling History in Alain Resnais’s <i>L’Année dernière à Marienbad</i> (1961) <i>Hannah Mowat with Emma Wilson</i>	151

8	Gender and Sexuality in Women Survivors' Personal Narratives <i>Cathy S. Gelbin</i>	174
9	Art as Transport-Station of Trauma? Haunting Objects in the Works of Bracha Ettinger, Sarah Kofman and Chantal Akerman <i>Griselda Pollock</i>	194
10	Coda: Reading Witness Discourse <i>Hayden White</i>	222
	<i>Index</i>	227

Illustrations

5.1–5.17	Photographs of material remains at Auschwitz-Birkenau taken by Ulrike Kistner	105–113
7.1	Stills from <i>L'Année dernière à Marienbad/Last Year in Marienbad</i> , Dir. A. Resnais (Optimum Home Entertainment, 2005 [1961]) [on DVD]	161
7.2	Still from <i>L'Année dernière à Marienbad/Last Year in Marienbad</i> , Dir. A. Resnais (Optimum Home Entertainment, 2005 [1961]) [on DVD]	165
7.3	Stills from <i>L'Année dernière à Marienbad/Last Year in Marienbad</i> , Dir. A. Resnais (Optimum Home Entertainment, 2005 [1961]) [on DVD]	168
8.1	Still from interview with Irmgard K. for the <i>Archive of Memory</i> , Moses Mendelssohn Zentrum für europäisch-jüdische Studien (Universität Potsdam). Courtesy of the interviewee's family	190
9.1	Freud's desk with the diary of Uziel Lichtenberg and the notebooks of Bracha (Lichtenberg) Ettinger. Bracha L. Ettinger, <i>Father you see?</i> (series n° 2), installation view at <i>Resonance/Overlay/Interweave</i> , Sigmund Freud study room, Freud Museum, London, 2 June–29 July 2009, curated by Griselda Pollock. Photograph © Bracha L Ettinger 2009. Courtesy of the artist	195
9.2	Freud's table with mother's spoon. Bracha L. Ettinger, <i>Father you see?</i> (series n° 2), installation view at <i>Resonance/Overlay/Interweave</i> , Sigmund Freud study room, Freud Museum, London, 2 June–29 July 2009, curated by Griselda Pollock. Photograph © Bracha L Ettinger 2009. Courtesy of the artist	197

Foreword

Eva Hoffman

Nearly 70 years after the Holocaust, and as we contemplate the enormous amounts of study and response dedicated to that event since its occurrence, we can see that catastrophes of these dimensions and complexity demand, and generate, not one but many kinds of investigation and genres of testimony. There was, immediately after the event, the legal documentation of the Nuremberg Trials; there were, in the years following the war (and before the coming down of the Iron Curtain), systematic attempts undertaken by relevant institutions in Eastern Europe – for example, the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw – to collect survivors' and witnesses' oral narratives and written accounts. There were early memoirs, many of them still pulsating with the horror and moral uncertainties of the event, and great numbers of later chronicles, written from a more remote distance and sometimes marked by certain formulaic notions of how the Holocaust should be remembered. There have been visual documentaries and massive later projects of documentation, such as the Spielberg Archives. Perhaps one should also count among genres of response the many works of the imagination, some of them deeply illuminating, with their transformations of personal and collective experience into forms of literature and art.

And there has been, throughout, the invaluable work of historical research and interpretation. This important and affecting collection of scholarly essays reaches back, from our temporal perspective, to the dark root of the event, and examines documents which have emerged from the very centre of the inferno. The fragments of text under scrutiny, produced by the Sonderkommando who worked in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, seem to represent, especially in their half-destroyed form, not so much acts of written recollection, as enactments of direct, almost physical witnessing; emanations from the underworld, driven by a compelling need to reach the world above, to record and tell. Primo Levi has famously said that the true witnesses of the annihilation did not speak. The Scrolls of Auschwitz are as close as we can come to hearing voices from the site of death.

What is the historical status of such documents? As some of the essays included here suggest, there has been a long-standing controversy in

Holocaust studies (indeed, in historiographical debates altogether) about the veridical value of personal testimony. At the same time, it is clear that our knowledge of the Holocaust – and of other historical atrocities – would be immeasurably impoverished without the evidence of personal memory and witness. Various genres of documentation and testimony provide different kinds of insight and call for different kinds of recognition. It is perhaps only from the multiple strata of knowledge and interpretation that a fuller comprehension of the overwhelming events can emerge. Factual and statistical information, and the understanding of chronology, topography and overall structure of events are clearly crucial to our grasp of the Holocaust; but insight into the victims' experiences, as these were lived within particular situations, and from within particular perceptions and subjectivities, is also essential to comprehend the human meanings of atrocity.

It is the merit and interest of this thought-provoking collection that it addresses various kinds of sources and registers of response. Included here are analyses of historical methodology, but also reflections on film and poetry, and the pressures on artistic form exerted by traumatic knowledge. There are considerations, among others, of post-Holocaust memory and its passage across the generations, the impact of fragmentary objects retrieved from catastrophe – as well as the kinds of empathy or detached understanding which such memories and artefacts demand and evoke.

What kind of response is called for – or possible – to the evidence inscribed, or implicit, in the Auschwitz Scrolls? It is hard, when confronted with these shards of darkness, to avoid moral ambivalence or confusion. The Sonderkommando, whose written traces we have here, functioned in the blackest part of what Primo Levi called 'the grey zone', and they performed terrifying tasks. The extreme ambiguities of the circumstances in which the Scrolls were written may account for the long delay in scholarly response to them; but those ambiguities are part of the difficult knowledge brought to us by the Shoah's extremity.

But perhaps the most powerful aspect of the Scrolls' significance is the very fact of their existence. In the closest proximity to the horrifying processes of annihilation, and facing their own almost certain death, the scribes of Auschwitz were determined that what happened there should not be deleted from human memory or knowledge; against all odds, they maintained their 'ability to think', necessary for the act of writing, and the desire to understand their surely nearly incomprehensible situation. Perhaps the only comparable documents to emerge from the Holocaust are the Ringelblum Archives, discovered on the grounds

of the Warsaw Ghetto and containing meticulously gathered information about daily life within its confines before the extinction. In both cases, the documents testify, over and above the specific facts recorded in them, that the need to register the evidence of suffering and terrible injustice – to give expression to one’s own existence, so that it is not entirely lost – is a fundamental and profound part of being human. In turn, the desire to respond to those voices – to preserve that evidence and to restore justice even in memory – is what makes history a reparative as well as an analytical enterprise. ‘If none of us survives, at least let that remain,’ Emmanuel Ringelblum wrote as he confronted his own certain death. The essays in this collection augment our knowledge and capacity to understand part of that which has remained.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the British Academy and the Elisabeth Barker bequest for their help in making the research behind much of this volume possible. We are also obliged to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and, in particular, to Wojciech Płosa for help during our visits to archives there.

For their intellectual and, often, practical support, we are grateful to Suzannah Biernoff, Bryan Cheyette, Maria-Luisa Coelho, Vanessa Corby, D. Ferrett, Benjamin Hannavy-Cousen, Peter Kilroy, Milena Marinkova, Maria Mileeva, Angela Mortimer and Roy Wolfe. A specific debt is also owed to Jacqueline Rose for encouraging further research into the Scrolls of Auschwitz.

We are also thankful to the commissioning and production teams at Palgrave, particularly Clare Mence and Devasena Vedamurthi, who were a pleasure to work with throughout, and to our series editors, Olaf Jensen and Claus-Christian Szejnmann.

Contributors

Nicholas Chare is Lecturer in Gender Studies at the School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne. His publications include the books *Auschwitz and Afterimages* (2011) and *After Francis Bacon* (2012). He is working on a book (with Dominic Williams) on the Scrolls of Auschwitz, to be called *Matters of Testimony*.

Cathy S. Gelbin is Senior Lecturer in German at the University of Manchester. She specializes in German-Jewish culture, Holocaust studies, gender and film studies. From 1995 to 1998, she was coordinator of the Archiv der Erinnerung (Archive of Memory). Her publications include *An Indelible Seal: Race, Hybridity and Identity in Elisabeth Langgässer's Writings* (2001) and *The Golem Returns: From German Romantic Literature to Global Jewish Culture 1808–2008* (2011).

Eva Hoffman is an internationally renowned writer and Senior Researcher in Creative Writing at Kingston University. Her most important publications include *Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language* (1989), *Exit into History: A Journey Through the New Eastern Europe* (1993), *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (1997), *The Secret* (2002), *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (2004) and *Time* (2009).

Anne Karpf is a writer and sociologist, contributing regularly to *The Guardian* and other publications, and broadcasting on BBC Radios 3 and 4. Her books include a family memoir, *The War After: Living with the Holocaust* (1997). A recipient of the British Academy Thank-Offering to Britain Fellowship, she is Reader in Professional Writing and Cultural Inquiry at London Metropolitan University.

Ulrike Kistner teaches in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. Her interests lie at the interface between aesthetic theory and political philosophy. Her recent publications include articles on theorizations of totalitarianism, on conceptualizations of the political and on the sense of the common.

Hannah Mowat is a PhD candidate in the Department of French at the University of Cambridge. Her thesis focuses on the role of gesture in the works of contemporary Francophone visual artists.

Griselda Pollock is Professor of Social and Critical Histories of Art and Director of the transdisciplinary Centre for Cultural Analysis, Theory and History at the University of Leeds. She is co-editor with Max Silverman of *Concentrationary Cinema: Aesthetics and Political Resistance in Night and Fog by Alain Resnais (1955)* (2012). She has just completed *After-Images/After-Effects: Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum* (2013) and is completing a monograph on Charlotte Salomon, *The Nameless Artist*.

Dan Stone is Professor of Modern History at Royal Holloway, University of London. He is the author or editor of 14 books, including *Histories of the Holocaust* (2010), *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History* (ed., 2012), *The Holocaust, Fascism and Memory: Essays in the History of Ideas* (2013) and *Saving Europe: The Rise and Fall of the Postwar Consensus* (2014).

Sue Vice is Professor of English Literature at the University of Sheffield. Her most recent books are *Shoah* (2011) and *Representing Perpetrators in Holocaust Literature and Film* (2013), co-edited with Jenni Adams. She is working on a study of literary hoaxes and false memoirs, to be called *Textual Deceptions*.

Hayden White is Professor Emeritus in the History of Consciousness Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz. His most recent books include *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (2000) and *The Fiction of Narrative* (2010).

Dominic Williams is Montague Burton Fellow in Jewish Studies, University of Leeds. He is co-editor of *Modernist Group Dynamics: The Politics and Poetics of Friendship* (2008). He is working on a book (with Nicholas Chare) on the Scrolls of Auschwitz, to be called *Matters of Testimony*.

Emma Wilson is Professor of French Literature and the Visual Arts at the University of Cambridge, Course Director of the MPhil in Screen Media and Cultures and a Fellow of Corpus Christi College. Her recent publications include *Alain Resnais* (2006) and *Love, Mortality and the Moving Image* (2012).