

The Auschwitz Sonderkommando (special squad) were forced labourers in the gas chambers of Birkenau, compelled to handle and dispose of the bodies of those who were murdered. Often branded as collaborators by other prisoners, the Sonderkommando were central eyewitnesses to the process of mass killing, even able to record what they witnessed and to represent their experience in photographs, documents and writings that they smuggled outside the camp or buried in the grounds of the crematoria.

The experience and history of the Sonderkommando have been central to a number of crucial topics in post-war debates about the Shoah. Their proximity to the extermination process conferred a singular status to their testimonies. They are also key figures referred to in discussions of both collaboration and resistance, especially the conceptualization of what Primo Levi called the 'grey zone'.

Yet the Sonderkommando have mostly met with a reluctance to think through their significance. Apart from the ground-breaking earlier work of a handful of historians, it is only in the last few years that scholars have begun to engage with their writings in any depth. A number of significant works of art on them have also been made recently, including the film *Son of Saul* (2015).

In this context of rising interest, this conference aims at:

- fostering discussions of the Sonderkommando manuscripts and the ways they have been edited, exhibited, translated and interpreted;
- responding to the Sonderkommando's challenge to conceptions of Holocaust testimony in history, philosophy and arts;
- considering the larger corpus of testimonies, historical studies and works of art on the Sonderkommando.



12 + 13/04/2018

# Telling, Describing, Representing Extermination

## THE AUSCHWITZ SONDERKOMMANDO, THEIR TESTIMONY AND THEIR LEGACY

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## THURSDAY, 12/04/2018

**Venue: Centre Marc Bloch** (Friedrichstraße 191, 10117 Berlin, Conference Room Germaine Tillion)

**9:00**

MARKUS MESSLING: Welcoming words

**9:10–9:30**

AURÉLIA KALISKY and DOMINIC WILLIAMS:  
Introduction

**9:30–10:30**

**I. Juridical Testimony from the Sonderkommando: Morality, History, Agency** (Chair: Guillaume Mouralis)

PETER DAVIES: What Can We Learn from Trial Testimony? Filip Müller's Sonderkommando Testimony to the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial  
ANDREA RUDORFF: Early Testimony from Feinsilber, Dragon and Tauber. Moral Dimensions

**11:00–12:30**

**II. Questioning Paradigms** (Chair: Sonja Knopp)

MICHAL AHARONY: Resisting Dehumanization in Auschwitz – the Case of the Sonderkommando  
DAWN SKORCZEWSKI: Sonderkommando Testimonies in the Intersubjective Field  
FLORINE MARMIGÈRE: From a Post-war Memorialization to a Later Memorability: the Rehabilitative Turning Point of the 1990s

**13:30–15:00**

**III. The Histories of the Sonderkommando: New Approaches** (Chair: Katrin Stoll)

GIDEON GREIF: Cases of Solidarity and Noble Deeds Within the Sonderkommando Inner Life  
IGOR BARTOSIK: New Perspectives from SS Documents  
TOM LAWSON: The Sonderkommando and Cultural History

**15:15–16:45**

**IV. Responding to the Sonderkommando's Writings** (Chair: Christin Zühlke)

ORietta Ombrosi: Silence of the witnesses. For a Philosophy of Testimony  
AVICHAÏ ZUR: Zalmen Gradowski's Diary: A Literary-Theological Analysis  
PHILIPPE MESNARD: Reading the Sonderkommando: Writing beyond Oneself

**17:15–18:15**

**V. Microhistories of the Sonderkommando** (Chair: Dagi Knellessen)

BART NAUTA: A Microhistory of Dutch Men in the Sonderkommando and the Waffen-SS at the Crematoria of Auschwitz  
ANDREAS KILIAN: Individual and Member of the Resistance in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Sonderkommando: Marcel Nadjary in the Testimony of his Contemporaries

**18:30–19:45**

**Roundtable 1: Editing the Sonderkommando**  
Anchor: DOMINIC WILLIAMS, with participants to include PAVEL POLIAN, ZSOMBOR HUNYADI, AVICHAÏ ZUR

## FRIDAY, 13/04/2018

**Venue: Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung** (Schützenstr. 18, 10117 Berlin, Trajekte Conference Room)

**9:00–10:30**

**VI. Reading Traces. Materialities of Things Past** (Chair: Katrin Stoll)

NOAH BENNINGA: The Materiality of Writing in Auschwitz: the Sonderkommando Scrolls as Inscriptions of Life and Death  
MARTA ZAWODNA-STEPHAN: Scrolls hidden under the ashes. Thoughts about the relationship between material witnesses

PAVEL POLIAN and ALEXANDER NIKITYAEV:  
To Read the Unreadable: Techniques of Multi-Spectral Imaging and the Manuscripts of the Sonderkommando

**10:45–12:45**

**Roundtable 2: Translating Zalmen Gradowski**  
Anchor: JANINA WURBS, with ALEKSANDRA POLIAN, ALMUT SEIFFERT, MIRIAM TRINH, ZSOMBOR HUNYADI. Some remarks of BATIA BAUM, MAGDALENA RUTA and AVICHAÏ ZUR will be read.

**14:30–15:30**

**VII. Representing Extermination** (Chair: Dominic Williams)

DAVID DICKSON: The Fictional Representation of the Sonderkommando Beyond the Third Wave of Holocaust Commemoration  
SAMANTHA MITSCHKE: Do we weep with them? Empathy and the Sonderkommando onstage

**15:45–17:15**

**VIII. *Son of Saul*** (Chair: Aurélia Kalisky)

CATALINA BOTEZ: Collateral Perpetration, Agency, and Suspended Ethics in *Son of Saul* (2015) and *Jud Süß. Film ohne Gewissen* (2010)  
ISABEL WOLLASTON: ›Half-victim, half-hangman? Representing the Auschwitz Sonderkommando in *The Grey Zone* (2001) and *Son of Saul* (2015)  
JEFF WALLEN: Facing the Sonderkommando: *Son of Saul* and the Dynamics of Witnessing

**18:15–21:30**

**IX. Screening of *Son of Saul*** (2015) followed by its discussion with LUDGER SCHWARTE and CLARA ROYER  
(registration is required for the screening and the following discussion until 9th of April: [kreuzpaintner@zfl-berlin.org](mailto:kreuzpaintner@zfl-berlin.org))