

Call for Papers of Special Section/Issue for *Holocaust Studies*

In the Void – (Non-)Representations of the Gas Chambers

Guest edited by Dominic Williams and Christin Zühlke

This Call for Papers is for an interdisciplinary special issue interrogating representations of murder by gassing in the Holocaust. We define this topic widely to include gas chambers in concentration camps and the T4 projects, as well as gas vans. The call is intentionally broad to capture different perspectives and scholarly approaches, and we aim to include examinations of a variety of media such as art, space, film, and sound. We also invite submissions that consider literary, sociological, historical, and cultural topics during and after the Holocaust.

Under the influence of Claude Lanzmann, many scholars and artists have acquiesced in the assertion that the gas chambers are unrepresentable and that any kind of representation of them does not even have the right to exist. There is evidence that this approach to imagining the gas chambers has changed in recent times, with examples not only of such problematic pieces as the TV movie *The Devil's Arithmetic* (1999) or Uwe Boll's *Auschwitz* (2011), but also of serious attempts to think through what this space means and how it might be represented, such as David Albahari's *Götz and Meyer* (English translation, 2004), the BBC documentary *Auschwitz: The Nazis and the Final Solution* (2005), *Son of Saul* (2015), and the Evidence Room project (2016).

At the same time, a wider set of shifts in scholarly debate need to be acknowledged. Paradigms of the Holocaust, in general, as traumatic and unrepresentable have been challenged in academic discourse and artistic practice for some time now (e.g. Saxton 2008). And the problems that stem from the centrality of Auschwitz and its gas chambers in conceptions of the Holocaust have been noted with some concern (e.g. Stone 2023). This is a good point in time, therefore, to assess cultural understandings of the gas chambers and murder by gassing in particular.

What, now, does the gas chamber signify? And how might it be represented? How can representations of it deepen our understanding or lead it astray? Is it the paradigm of an apparatus of industrialized murder? Or one method of killing among many others? What does it mean to imagine it as a space that might be survived, even if only briefly (as in *Son of Saul*)? How can new approaches, such as forensic architecture and digital reconstructions, help us to approach an understanding of what this space is? And how do we now respond to the arguments against trying to imagine it in the first place?

Rather than seeing recent developments as simply the lifting of a taboo, we are interested in considering how they contribute to, and not simply supersede, the ethical questions of representation and appropriate degrees of proximity to, or distance, from the gas chamber. Traumatic experiences are often described as “simultaneously impossible to forget and impossible to tell,”¹ which applies to the murder by gas. Only a few eyewitness accounts, e.g., by the Sonderkommando prisoners in Auschwitz-Birkenau, try to describe, represent, or circle

¹ Gerson, “When the Third Is Dead,” 351.

this experience. Thus, one of the key questions for this special issue will be: How close can we get to what happened and how the victims experienced the murder by gas?

The deadline for proposals is 30 April 2024. Please send proposals and direct any questions to Dominic Williams (dominic2.williams@northumbria.ac.uk) and Christin Zühlke (christinzuehlke@gmx.de). Proposals should be written in English, and include the name of the author, academic affiliation, an abstract of the proposed article (up to 300 words), and a brief biographical statement (50 words). **Applicants will be notified by the end of May, and papers will be due on 28 February 2025.** We would appreciate receiving the articles in advance. The volume will be peer-reviewed. Each contribution should be between 8,000 and 10,000 words, including bibliography, footnotes, abstracts, and captions. *We are especially interested in submissions from early career scholars.*

Dominic Williams is an Assistant Professor at Northumbria University, UK. He is the co-author (with Nicholas Chare) of *Matters of Testimony: Interpreting the Scrolls of Auschwitz* (2016) and *The Auschwitz Sonderkommando* (2019). He is currently co-editing (with Sarah Cushman and Joanne Pettitt) *The Routledge Handbook to Auschwitz-Birkenau*.

Christin Zühlke is a Postdoc at Washington University in St. Louis, USA. She is an Associate Co-Editor of the *Cambridge History of Holocaust Literature* (with Erin McGlothlin, Stuart Taberner, McKenna Marko, and Diane Otosaka.) Also, she co-edits *New Microhistorical Approaches to an Integrated History of the Holocaust* (2023, with Frédéric Bonnesoeur and Hannah Wilson), *New Approaches to Teaching Holocaust Literature* (with Erin McGlothlin and McKenna Marko), the *Elie Wiesel Research Series*, and the *Elie Wiesel Werke (Works of Elie Wiesel)*.