

# The Holocaust in post-1945 European Culture

Fall 2010

2:30 PM - 3:45 PM , Tu & Th

Instructor: Ofer Ashkenazi



The Holocaust has been often described by scholars (and survivors) as an event that defies representation. Despite the recurring demands to avoid the “pretension,” or the “barbarity,” which allegedly dominate every attempt to articulate it, references to Holocaust experiences have had a fundamental role in European culture after 1945. This class discusses the social, political and psychological functions of Holocaust representations in post-WWII Western and Eastern Europe. In analyzing a variety of texts – from testimonies and poetry to popular music, film, television shows and theater plays – the different sessions will explore the endeavor of European artists and critics to confront the assumed inability to represent. Finding 'adequate' language and 'appropriate' aesthetics for the representation of the unimaginable horrors has set an unparalleled challenge for survivors, artists, writers and film-makers; the different responses to this challenge correspond with the institutions, sentiments and ideas that dominated the historical trajectory of Europe since the end of the war. Through the study of Holocaust imagery we will therefore explore often overlooked facets of the worldviews and the forces that shaped European societies since 1945.

## Office Hours:

Tuesday/Thursday 11am-12pm, 943 Heller Hall. I strongly encourage you to come and speak to me during office hours. If you cannot see me at the posted time, please let me know by email and we can arrange another time for an appointment

## Course Assignments

### 1. Two short take-home essays (20% each):

Students will submit two essays (each essay should be 2-3 typed pages, double-spaced, font 12). The essays will be based on required readings and class discussions; I will provide the topics for the essays two weeks in advance. **Essays should be submitted electronically on October 12 and November 11, by 2pm.** See the appended grading criteria.

**2. Final (45%):** a 5-6 double spaced typed page take-home essay. The essay is based on required readings and class discussion. See the appended grading criteria. **The final should be submitted electronically on December 18 by 2pm.**

**3. Participation in Class Discussion (15%).** This is a discussion-based class. You should read the assigned readings and contribute to the discussion and analysis in the classroom.

## Preparing for Class:

**Readings:** You should read *at least one* item assigned for each session (unless specified otherwise)

The readings for the class include:

1. Online reader (includes both the mandatory and the optional readings)
2. Two full length books:
  - Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*
  - Imre Kertesz, *Fateless*

**The books can be purchased in the UMN University Bookstore.**

**Films:** You should watch the assigned films before class. Films can be watched at the SMART Learning Common of Walter Library (level 1). I strongly recommend not waiting until the last minute to watch them!

**Note:** items assigned as “Recommended films” and “Additional Readings” are not mandatory. If you are interested in additional recommendations for reading/viewing, please let me know.

The films on the “recommended” list can also be found in the library, except for films marked with ‘\*’, which have been ordered and hopefully will be available during the semester.



## **Class Program**

### **Sept. 7: Course Introduction**

### **Sept. 9: No Class**

## **Holocaust History and Historiography**

### **Sept. 14: The Holocaust: Events and Images**

- Friedlaender, *The Years of Extermination*, 221-227, 404-418
- Kershaw, "Hitler Decides to Kill the Jews," *Fateful Choices*, 431-470

Recommended Films: *Der Ewige Jude (The Eternal Jew, 1940)*; *Jud Suess (Jew Suess, 1940)*, *Triumph des Willens (Triumph of the Will, 1934)*, *The Führer Gives the Jews a City\* (Theresienstadt, 1944)*

### **Sept. 16: "Reasons" and "Meanings" of the Holocaust: Historians' Debates**

#### **Read both:**

- Browning, *Ordinary Men*, (from *Art from the Ashes*, 95-105)
- Goldhagen, Interview with Maurice Wohlgeleit on *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, *Society*, 34:2, January 1997

#### Additional Reading:

- Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing executioners*, 239-262
- Diner, "On Rationalization," *Beyond the Conceivable*, 138-159

### **Sept. 21: Trauma, Culture and Trauma-Culture**

- Theodor Adorno, "What is the Meaning of *Working Through* Trauma," 89-103
- Roger Luckhurst, "Traumaculture." *New formations* 50: 28-47

Watch one of the following: *Schindler's List* (Spielberg, 1993); *Downfall* (Hirschbiegel, 2004)

#### Additional Reading:

- LaCapra, "Resisting Apocalypse and Rethinking History," *Manifestos for History*, 160-178

## **The Limits of Representation (and the Representation of "Limits")**

### **Sept. 23: *Night and Fog*: Holocaust and Narrative**

- Joshua Hirsch, *After Image: Film, Trauma and the Holocaust*, 1-27

Recommended Film: *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959); *Respite\** (H. Farocki, 2009)

### **Sept. 28: The Language of "Post-Traumatic" Representation**

- W.G. Sebald, "Dr. Henry Selwyn," *The Emigrants*, 1-25

Additional Reading:

- Y. Yavtushenko, "Babi Yar," *Yavtushenko's Poems*, 105-109
- Paul Celan, "Fugue of Death"

**Sept. 30: The Limits of Visual Representation**

- Anton Kaes, "Holocaust and the End of History," Friedlander, *Probing the Limits of Representation*, 206-222

Recommended Film: *Shoah* (Lanzmann, 1985 – first cd)

**Witnesses: On Holocaust, Representation and 'Authenticity'**

**Oct. 5: The "Era of Testimony": another look at *Shoah***

- S. Felman, "In an Era of Testimony," *Yale French Studies*, 97 (2000): 103-150

Additional Reading:

- Jean Amery, "Toture," *Art from the Ashes*, 21-38
- L. Langer, "The Way it was," *Art from the Ashes*, 11-15

**Oct. 7: Who is "The Witness"?**

**Read both:**

- Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 15-39
- Wilkomirski, *Fragments*, 77-88, 106-112

**Oct. 12: Making Sense of Survival: Primo Levi**

- *Survival in Auschwitz*

Additional Reading:

- Jean Amery, "At the Mind's Limit"

**\*\*\*First Essay Due\*\*\***

**Oct. 14: The *Other* Witness? Interpreting and Imagining the Perpetrator's View**

- Jonathan Littell, *The Kindly Ones* (excerpts)

Recommended Films: *Lacombe, Lucien* (Louis Malle, 1974), *Mephisto* (István Szabó, 1981)

Additional Reading:

- Christopher Browning, *Collected Memories*, 3-36

## **Year Zero: Addressing Victimhood and Loss in the post-War Era**

### **Oct. 19: The German Case: Inability to Mourn?**

- W. Hitchcock, *The Struggle for Europe*, 247-268
- M. and A. Mitscherlich, "Introduction," *The Inability to Mourn*

Watch: *The Murderers are Among Us* (Wolfgang Staudte, 1946)

Recommended Film: *Germany Year Zero* (Roberto Rosellini, 1948)

Additional Reading:

- Van der Knaap, "Nacht und Nebel in Germany," *Uncovering the Holocaust*, 46-85

### **Oct. 21: "Syndrome Vichy" and the Myth of Resistance**

- Henry Rousso, *the Vichy Syndrome*, 15-60

Recommended Film: *La Bataille du Rail (The Battle of the Rails)*, René Clément, 1946)

### **Oct. 26: Neighbors: The non-Jewish Eastern Europeans and the Holocaust**

**Read both:**

- Borowski, *This way to the Gas Chamber, Ladies and Gentlemen*, 9-30
- Jan T. Gross, "Jews and their Polish Neighbors," *Contested Memories* (Joshua D. Zimmermann, ed.), 69-82

Recommended Film: *Closely watched Trains* (Jiri Menzel, 1966)

Additional Reading:

- Polanski & Michlic, *The Neighbors' Response*, 1-43

## **1968: The role of Holocaust Imagery in the 'Revolution'**

### **Nov. 2: *The Sorrow and the Pity*: Vichy Revisited**

- Henry Rousso, *the Vichy Syndrom*, 98-131

Watch: *The Sorrow and the Pity* (Marcel Ophüls, 1969)

### **Nov. 4: *The Damned*: The Politicization of Memory**

- W. Hitchcock, *The Struggle for Europe*, 247-268

Watch: *The Damned* (Lucino Visconti, 1971)

### **Nov. 9: Kitsch, Pornography and Death: *The Night Porter***

- Friedlander, *Reflections of Nazism*, 25-53

Recommended Film: *The Night Porter* (Lilliana Cavani, 1974)

## **"Divided Memory" in Cold-War Germany**

### **Nov. 11: The Holocaust in East German Memory**

- Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory* (eBook), 162-200

Watch one of the following: *Naked among Wolves* (Frank Beyer, 1963); *Jakob the Liar* (Frank Beyer, 1976)

Recommended Films: *Stars* (Konrad Wolf, 1959)\*, *I was Nineteen* (Konrad Wolf, 1968)

### **\*\*\*Second Paper Due\*\*\***

### **Nov. 16: Germany in Autumn: the West German Struggle with Nazi Past**

- Hans Kundnani, *Utopia or Auschwitz*, 7-28
- Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory*, 334-372 ([eBook](#), available on the UMN library website)

Recommended Films: *Deutschland im Herbst (Germany in the Autumn)*, Fassbinder et al., 1977), *Marianne and Julianne* (Margarethe von Trotta, 1981)

### **Nov. 18: The Historians' Debate and Popular Culture**

- Anton Kaes, "Germany as Memory," *From Hitler to Heimat*, 161-192
- LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, 43-68 ([eBook](#), available on the UMN library website)

#### Additional reading:

- A. Huyssen, "Holocaust and West German drama," *New German Critique*, 19:1 (Winter 1980), 117-136
- J. Herf, "Holocaust Reception in west Germany," *New German Critique*, 19:1 (Winter 1980), 30-52

Recommended Films: *Heimat* (Edgar Reiz, 1984, relevant episodes); *Tin Drum* (Volker Schlöndorff, 1979), *Holocaust\** (1978 – relevant episodes).

## **Holocaust Memory and Identities in the post-Cold War Era**

### **Nov. 23: Trauma and Anxiety in the European Memory of the Holocaust**

Watch: *Europa* (aka *Zentropa*, von Trier, 1991)

#### Optional Reading:

- Rosalind Galt, "Back Projection," *Cinema Journal*, 45:1, Fall 2005, 3-21
- Udi Greenberg, "The Holocaust Repressed: Memory and the Subconscious in Lars von Trier's *Europa*," *Film and History*, 38:1 (Spring 2008), 45-52

### **Nov. 25: Thanksgiving**

### **Nov. 30: *Is Life Beautiful?* –Kitsch, Death, and Laughter**

- Sander Gilman, "Is Life Beautiful? Can the Shoah Be Funny?" *Critical Inquiry*, 26:2 (Winter 2000), 279-308

Watch one of the following: *Life is Beautiful* (Roberto Benigni, 1997), *Train de Vie* (aka *Train of Life*, Radu Mihaileanu, 1998)

## **Dec. 2: Ridiculous Trauma: The Image of Nazism in Current European Popular Culture**

- Sidra Ezrahi, "After such Knowledge, What Laughter?," *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 2001, 287-313

Watch: *Der Bonker* (*The Bunker*, Walter Moers, on **YouTube**:  
<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=7396749560736465617#>)

Recommended Film: *Mein Fuehrer* (Dani Levy, 2007)

Additional Reading:

- George Tabori, *The Cannibals: A Dinner Party in Starving Auschwitz*

## **Dec. 7: Who gets the Last Laugh? Irony, Parody, and the Representation of the Holocaust**

- Imre Kertezs, *Fateless*

## **Dec. 9: Nostalgia in Post-Unification Germany**

- H. Weltzer, *Grandpa Wasn't a Nazi*, 7-42
- L. Koepnick, "Heritage Cinema and the Holocaust," *New German Critique* 87, (Autumn 2002), 47-82

Recommended Films: *The Harmonists* (Josef Vilsmaier, 1997), *Aimee and Jaguar* (Max Färberböck, 1999)

## **Dec. 14: Holocaust Tourism in the European Union:**

Watch: *Along Come Tourists* (Robert Thalheim, 2007)

Optional Reading:

- Tim Cole, "Auschwitz," *Selling the Holocaust*, 97-120

## **Dec. 18: \*\*\*Final Paper Due\*\*\* (Submit via email to: [oashkena@umn.edu](mailto:oashkena@umn.edu))**

### **Addendum: Grading criteria for essays**

A: clear and comprehensive treatment of the question written in excellent expository style; work demonstrates that the student is thinking in a creative way and is making an original argument; excellent use of written sources and class discussions

B: good summary of the essential points, written in a satisfactory style; arguments reflect readings and class discussions

C: only some essential points, but significant gaps; unclear writing; very partial use of readings and class discussions

D: lacking in central issues; incomprehensible writing; little evidence of familiarity with readings and class discussions