

AS.214.340
HOLOCAUST AND FILM
PROF. BERNADETTE WEGENSTEIN
<http://bernadettewegenstein.com/>

COURSE SYLLABUS

SPRING 2009

Tuesday and Thursday 9-10:15am

Hodson 303

Office hours: Tue 1-2pm Dell House 503A

berna@jhu.edu

Course organization:

During every session all students will engage in class-discussions of readings and screenings; throughout the semester students will submit four 3 page long critical response paper on the weekly topics (questions will be distributed one week before each due date). The papers will be prepared outside of the classroom and submitted by email. At the end of the semester (May 14) students will submit a 5-10 page paper on a topic of their choice that relates to class content. On March 1 and 2 the symposium *The Holocaust: Children of the Perpetrators Confront Their Parents' Nazi Past through Documentary Film* will be held at the Smokler Center for Jewish Life. Students are expected to partake in this conference and they may volunteer to assist in the hosting of all speakers and filmmakers (take them from one place to the other, have coffee with them, etc.). In addition to films viewed in class there will be many more films available at the library's A/V center for students to analyze. Grading policy: 50 % class participation and 50% writing assignments. Papers can be rewritten for an improved grade.

WEEK 1 POST-TRAUMATIC DOCUMENTARY

TUE JAN 27: Course introduction; discussion and distribution of materials;

Reading assignment for Thur Feb 19: *Leap into Darkness. Seven Years on the Run in Wartime Europe*, Leo Bretholz and Michael Olesker, 1999. Available at the JHU Barnes & Noble bookstore.

THUR JAN 29: Screening and Discussion of: *Nuit et bruillard (Night and Fog)*, Alain Resnais, 1955, 30 minutes and parts of *Who shall live and who shall die?* by Laurence Jarvik, 1981, 90 min.

Readings: “*Night and Fog and the Origins of Posttraumatic Cinema*,” from Joshua Hirsch, *After-Image*, 28-63; “*Shaping Reality. 12. The Personal Documentary*,” from Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows*, 199-221.

WEEK 2 POST-TRAUMATIC DOCUMENTARY

TUE FEB 3: Readings: “Shaping Reality. 13. From Judgment to Illumination,” from Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows*, 221-245; “Shoah and the posttraumatic Documentary after Cinéma Vérité,” from Joshua Hirsch, *After-Image* 63-85.

THUR FEB 5: Screening: *Shoah* (in parts), Claude Lanzmann, 1985; 503 min; *Sobibor, 14 octobre 1943, 16 heures* (*Sobibor, October 14, 4pm*), (in parts), Claude Lanzmann, 95 min. Discussion of film.

WEEK 3 HISTORY AND MEMORY

TUE FEB 10: Readings: Shoshana Felman, “In an Era of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah;” *Yale French Studies*, No. 79, Literature and the Ethical Question (1991), 39-81; Janet Walker: *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust*, “The Last Days Is Not Shoah—Experiments in Holocaust Representation,” 125-156; Cathy Caruth, “The Obscenity of Understanding: An Evening with Claude Lanzmann,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 1995, 200-221.

THUR FEB 12: Screening: *Survivors Among Us*, produced by Deborah Wiener, WBAL-TV 2005, 60 min: includes a feature of Leo Bretholz, Austrian Jew and Holocaust survivor, who lives in Baltimore.

**FIRST RESPONSE PAPER DUE
(QUESTIONS WILL BE ANNOUNCED ON FEB 5)**

WEEK 4 PERSONAL TESTIMONY

TUE FEB 17 Discussion of *Leap into Darkness*.

Additional Readings: “The Psychological Profile of Survivors,” in Aron Hass, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust. The Second Generation*, 7-25.

THUR FEB 19: Guests Leo and Flo Bretholz will talk about memory and authorship on the basis of Leo’s personal memory as a Holocaust survivor, and his autobiography *Leap into Darkness*.

WEEK 5 FILM AS WITNESS

TUE FEB 24 Readings: Dominick LaCapra, “History and Memory: In the Shadow of the Holocaust” in *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, 8-43; “Film as Witness: Screening

Nazi Concentration Camps Before the Nuremberg Trial,” from Lawrence Douglas, *The Memory of Judgment*, 11-38.

THUR FEB 26: Screening: parts of *Nazi Concentration Camps*, George Stevens, 1945, 59 min.; parts of *Hôtel Terminus* (in parts), Marcel Ophüls, 1988, 267 min.

WEEK 6 THE TRAUMA OF PERPETRATORS

SUN MAR 1 - MAR 2: SYMPOSIUM: VIEW ALL SCREENINGS AND ATTEND ALL PANELS

NO CLASS TUE MAR 3

THUR MAR 5: Readings: Regine Mihal “All About My Mother: On Malte Ludin’s Film: 2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiss;” Bernhard Giesen, “The Trauma of Perpetrators: the Holocaust as the Traumatic Reference of German National Identity,” in: *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 112-155.

**SECOND RESPONSE PAPER DUE
(QUESTIONS WILL BE ANNOUNCED ON FEB 24)**

WEEK 7 THE TRAUMA OF PERPETRATORS

TUE MAR 10:

Readings: “Duties of a Law-Abiding Citizen” from *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hanna Arendt, 135-151; Dori Daub, “Truth and Testimony. The Process and the Struggle,” in Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 61-76.

THUR MAR 12: Screening: *Im Toten Winkel: Hitlers Sekretärin*, (*Blind Spot: Hitler’s Secretary*), André Heller/ Othmar Schmiderer, 2002, 90 min.

WEEK 8 SPRING BREAK

WEEK 9 VIDEO CONFESSIONS: A DISCUSSION OF GENRE

TUE MAR 24: Readings: “The Man Who Was Raised by a Movie Camera,” *The New York Times*, Dec 26, 2004; Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, part III: Modes of Subjectivity, 2004.

Screening: parts of *Tarnation*, Jonathan Caouette, 2004.

THUR MAR 26: Screening: parts of *Das wirst du nie verstehen (You Will Never Understand This)*, Anja Salomonowitz, 2003, 53 min; *Nobody's Business* by Alan Berliner, 1996.

WEEK 10 HOLOCAUST REALISMS: FROM LITERATURE TO FILM

TUE MAR 31: Discussion of third response paper week 3 “Memories of the ‘other’ survivors.”

Reading: Primo Levi, “The Memory of the Offense,” “The Grey Zone,” “Shame” from *The Drowned and Saved*, 1-88; “Realist moments. Representation and Reality,” in: Julia Hallam with Margaret Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema*, 24-62;

THUR APR 2: Screening: parts of *The Grey Zone*, Tim Blake Nelson, 2002, 108 min.

**THIRD RESPONSE PAPER DUE
(QUESTIONS WILL BE ANNOUNCED ON MAR 26)**

WEEK 8 SPRING BREAK

WEEK 11 HOLOCAUST REALISMS: FROM LITERATURE TO FILM

TUE APR 7: Reading: excerpts from *At the Heart of the White Rose. Letters and diaries of Hans and Sophie Scholl*, 1943, 201-281.

THUR APR 9: Screening: *Sophie Scholl-The Final Days*, Mark Rothmund, 2005, 117 min.

WEEK 12 THE HOLOCAUST MUSEUM IN WASHINGTON, DC

TUE APR 14: screenings of the German television show based on the historical meeting of senior Nazi officials on January 20, 1940 in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee that resulted in the “final solution to the Jewish question:” *Die Wannsee Konferenz, (The Wannsee Conference)*, Willi Lindwer, 1992, 50 min. and the US remake for television *Conspiracy*, Frank Pierson, 2001, 96 min. A comparison of genres.

THUR APR 16: field trip to Spielberg film and video archives at the Holocaust Museum, Washington DC. More information to follow.

WEEK 13 HOLOCAUST DRAMA AND THE ETHICS OF ENTERTAINMENT

TUE APR 21: Discussion of fourth response paper.

Readings: The Hollywood Version of the Holocaust,” from Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows*, 3-27; Barbie Zelitzer, “Every Once in a While: Schindler’s List and the Shaping of History,” in Yosefa Loshitzky, ed. *Spielberg’s Holocaust, Critical Perspectives*, 1-18; Yosefa Loshitzky, “Holocaust Others: Spielberg’s Schindler’s List vs. Lanzmann’s Shoah,” *ibid.*, 104-119; Miriam Hansen, “Schindler’s List is not Shoah,” *Critical Inquiry*, Winter 1996 vol. 22/number 2, 292-312; A.O. Scott “Never Forget. You’re Reminded,” *The New York Times*, November 21, 2008.

THUR APR 23: Screening: *Schindler’s List*, (in parts), Steven Spielberg, 1993, 195 min.

**FOURTH RESPONSE PAPER DUE
(QUESTIONS WILL BE ANNOUNCED ON APR 16)**

WEEK 14 AFTER AUSCHWITZ

TUE APR 28: Readings: Theodor Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society; 280-282, and Theodor Adorno, “Meditations on Metaphysics: After Auschwitz,” 282-288; Gertrud Koch, “The Aesthetic Transformation of the Image of the Unimaginable,” 389-396, from *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings*, ed. Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg; “Representing the Body,” in Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 229-266.

INSTEAD: student presentations!

THUR APR 30: Screening: *Der Untergang (Downfall)*, Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2004, 156 min.

MAY 14 FINAL PAPER DUE

1st Response Paper:

1, *Night and Fog*: Joshua Hirsch says, “[Night and Fog] engages the techniques of the compilation film, and then uses a series of other techniques—reflexive, modernist, poetic—to effect a radical break with the traditional documentary discourse of atrocity.”

(41) Comment on that quote. What does Hirsch mean? How is this film “reflexive, modernist and poetic?” How does it differ from the compilation film, and other “authoritative” forms of documentary?

2, Why is it important that the poet and camp survivor Jean Cayrol wrote the voice-over narration for *Night and Fog*? How does his personal memory affect the film?

3, *Shoah*: Comment on the opening sequence: how is Simon Srebnik introduced, narratively, cinematically? What do we see, hear, experience with the screen-subject?

4, Why can *Shoah* be called a “cinéma vérité” film? How do we access the “truth” of the survivors?

5, Why, do you think, does Claude Lanzmann stay away from the use of archival footage of the camps?

5, What are the two technical inventions necessary to enhance the “truth” within the diegetic realm of the characters in cinéma vérité?

6, Describe the film *Sobibór, 14 octobre 1943, 16 heures* (2001) and the way Yehuda Lerner’s experience is recounted. If you can, compare this film to Edward Zwick’s *Defiance* (2008).

2dn Response Paper:

1, Describe the filmic structure of *The Last Days* in regard to the similarity of characters and the description of the prewar and postwar periods in Hungary. Compare the film to *Shoah*.

2, What can you say about the psychological profile of the Holocaust survivor Leo Bretholz: what are his survival strategies? [you can use the article “The Psychological Profile of Holocaust Survivors” and your own impressions from Leo’s appearance in class]

3, Sum up the chapters “Drancy” and “Deportation Train” from *Leap into Darkness*. How can you relate this personal memory to the voices heard in *Shoah* and *Sobibor*?

4, Give a definition of the “traumatic event” LaCapra talks about in *History and Memory*; explain the concepts of “latency” and “secondary witness.” Relate these concepts to the “ethics of watching.”

5, Compare the scene of 12,000 Weimar civilians taking a forced tour of the neighboring Buchenwald from *Nazi Concentration Camps* with Lanzmann’s scene of the villagers of Chelmno in *Shoah* [we will watch the scene on Thursday].

6, Describe the use of documentary as evidence in the Nuremberg trials.

3rd Response Paper:

1, Describe the documentary, *Hôtel Terminus* by Marcel Ophüls. Describe the filmmaker's position in the film. Is he interrogator, prosecutor, judge, or all of these at the same time? Who is he after? How does he present the bystanders he encounters on the filmic journey? Try to compare the film to other documentaries we watched.

2, What does Bernhard Giesen mean by the "trauma of perpetrators," in general and by the "postwar coalition of silence in Austria and Germany" in particular? How was this silence broken through documentary film, in which the children of perpetrators speak up?

3, Describe the three films from the symposium as "rituals of confessions." Pick one of the films, *The End of the Neubacher Project*, *Fatherland*, or *Two or Three things I Know About Him*, and describe the film in depth and in regard to its subject-positioning, its contract with the audience, and the overall questions of confession-forgiveness-absolution-guilt within the format of the documentary-confession. You may, if you want, interview the filmmakers (their emails can be forwarded upon request).

4, In "Duties of a Law-Abiding Citizen" Hannah Arendt talks about Adolf Eichmann's trial and his "excuse" to not have been "master of his own deeds." Discuss this statement critically in regard to the travesty of a Kantian definition of duty given by Eichmann. Relate this to our class discussion about why Eichmann was replacing the voice of his own conscience with the voice of Hitler.

5, Traudl Junge in *Blindspot: Hitler's Secretary* also talks about the fact that her conscience was "blinded," while Hitler — and the functionaries of the regime — were "taking responsibility." How is this critical issue presented in the documentary about Traudl Junge, Hitler's secretary? What kind of voice is given to the interview subject? To what extent does this film differ from the cinéma vérité technique employed by Lanzmann?

6, Talk about the construction of self through generations in such documentaries as *Tarnation*, *Nobody's Business*, and *You Will Never Understand This*. To which extent does the camera function as self-examiner? What does Michael mean by "domestic ethnography"?

4th Response Paper:

Choose 5 out of 6.

- 1, What "realist moments" from the history of film can you think of? Bring a film example from either the Italian New Realist Movement (*Neorealismo*), or from *Black Urban Cinema*.
- 2, Discuss the three chapters from Primo Levi's *Drowned and the Saved*. What does he mean by the "memory of the offense," by "shame," and by "the grey zone"?
- 3, Analyze the film, *The Grey Zone*, in relation to Levi's concept of the *zona grigia*. What is the film's realist attempt, and what is your evaluation of it?
- 4, Compare the two films of the White Rose Resistance Movement (*Sophie Scholl: The Final Days*, and *The White Rose* by Verhoeven), or just analyze one of them. What is their narrative focus, how are the characters developed, what is their use of historical materials? How do you see the diaries and letters by Hans and Sophie Scholl translated in the film *The Last Days*?
- 5, Compare the two Wannsee Conference feature films from Germany and the US (*Conspiracy*): how do they reenact the conference and the idea of the final solution? what are both films foci? Or, simply describe one of these films in more detail.
- 6, Why is *Schindler's List* not *Shoah*? Discuss our readings in relation to both films, or just to *Schindler's List*.