

The Holocaust and Its Representation

Anglo-American College in Prague

“The wish of all in the camps, the last wish: know what has happened, do not forget, and at the same time never will you know.”—Maurice Blanchot

Course Description: The Holocaust, *Shoah*, or genocide of Jewish people (and others deemed undesirable) by the Nazi regime was an event of such immensity that the mind falters before it, retreating into a blur of numerical statistics and over-generalizations, or recoiling in the face of radical evil. There is no settled position to be attained within the realm of Holocaust studies or representations—a point that attests to the trauma of the event at the core of these representations, which may never simply take its place among other historical events. This seminar will explore the Holocaust through the controversies and discussions surrounding its representation—in modes of representation that are historical, documentary, theoretical, cinematic, narrative, musical, poetic, and artistic. *Students should note that the films viewed are included in the total classroom hours, which are 45 minutes longer than a standard class.*

Assessment: Assessment will be based on the following criteria: 1) **attendance:** given this is a seminar with a large component devoted to film, attendance is crucial: students are allowed 4 absences without affecting their grade—thereafter each absence will lower student’s grade by a half letter grade (roughly 5%), so that, for example, a student receiving a B will receive a B-. **Note:** *additionally, students will be expected to attend the full 3 hour, 30 minute session, and students more than 10 minutes late (from seminar beginning or from the break), or not attending the whole session, will be counted absent for the day;* 2) **mid-term take-home exam:** compare the documentary methods of Rees and Lanzmann, informed by lecture content and readings (especially LaCapra); 3) **summary/response:** students will be asked to provide 2-3 page word-processed **summary/responses** for *three* of the narrative films: these summary/responses should show me that you have viewed the films thoughtfully, paid attention during the seminars to my lectures and our discussions, and have integrated the seminar reading materials enough to apply them to the films viewed; 4) **final short paper:** students will be asked to read and report on one book from the list given, and write a 5-6 page paper.

Rules and Procedures: Each session will begin promptly at 14:45 and end at approximately 18:15. There will be a 10 minute break at approximately 16:15—enough time for students to use the restrooms, smoke a cigarette, eat an apple, or whatever else they need to do. *Please do not bring any food into the classroom!* Telephones must be turned off (students breaking this rule will receive an absence for the day).

Texts: 1) **A course readings text;** 2) **A book from the list provided** (*note: I ask students obtain whatever text they choose on their own in libraries or bookstores, but in the last resort I will lend a book—if I have not already done so—for a deposit of 1,000czk to be returned upon the receipt of the undamaged book*); **Schindler’s List**, Stephen Spielberg (U.S.A., 1993): if you have not seen this film, I would ask you to do so (I can make available a DVD copy).

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to Seminar.

Topics: Why study the Holocaust? The Problematic of Representation—Kant, Saussure, Lacan. Trauma & the Sublime—Writing the Disaster; Trauma & Psycho-Social History—Repression, Acting Out & Working Through.

Film: *Conspiracy* (2001), directed by Frank Pierson (95 minutes).

Week 2: The History of the Holocaust & the ‘Objective’ Documentary (I).

Topics: Holocaust—History and Statistics. Representation & the Anglo-American ‘Objective’ Tradition. **Texts:** “Prelude to the Holocaust,” “The Holocaust: First Act,” “The Final Solution,” “Why was Auschwitz not Bombed?” “Liberation,” “The Survivors” from *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People*, edited by Eli Barnavi.

Film: *Auschwitz: The Nazis and the Final Solution* (2004), directed by Laurence Rees, script written by Ian Kershaw (Parts I-III).

Week 3: The History of the Holocaust & the ‘Objective’ Documentary (II).

Topics: The ‘Objective’ Documentary’ and its Limits.

Texts: “From Anti-Semitism to Extermination: A Historiographical Study of Nazi Policies towards the Jews and an Essay on Interpretation,” Saul Friedländer.

Film: *Auschwitz: The Nazis and the Final Solution* (2004), directed by Laurence Rees, script written by Ian Kershaw (Parts IV-VI).

Week 4: Writing the Disaster: Representation, Trauma & the Continental Tradition.

Topics: Representation and the Continental Tradition. Maurice Blanchot—The Writing of the Disaster. Representation of the Holocaust on Film: First Efforts—Alain Resnais’ *Night and Fog*.

Texts: “The Madness of the Day,” “The Instant of My Death,” and selections from *The Writing of the Disaster* & “After the Fact” (see hand-out), by Maurice Blanchot.

Film: “*Nuit et Brouillard/Night and Fog*” (France, 1955), Alain Resnais (30 minutes).

Week 5: Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah (I).

Topics: Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* & the Limits of Representation. Dominick LaCapra: History as a Psycho-Social Phenomenon.

Texts: “Reflections on the Historian’s Debate,” Dominick LaCapra, from *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*.

Film: *Shoah* (France, 1984), Claude Lanzmann (first 135 minutes).

Week 6: Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah (II).

Topics: Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* & the Limits of Representation. Dominick LaCapra: History and Trauma.

Texts: “The Return of the Historically Repressed,” Dominick LaCapra, from *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*.

Film: *Shoah* (France, 1984), Claude Lanzmann *Shoah* (second 135 minutes).

Week 7: Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah (III).

Topics: Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* & the Limits of Representation. Dominick LaCapra: Acting Out and Working Through.

Texts: “Acting-Out and Working Through,” Dominick LaCapra, from *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*.

Film: *Shoah* (France, 1984), Claude Lanzmann (third 135 minutes).

Week 8: Mid-Term Break

Week 9: Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah (IV).

Topics: Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* & the Limits of Representation. Dominick LaCapra on Lanzmann’s *Shoah*.

Texts: “Lanzmann’s *Shoah*: ‘Here There Is No Why,’” Dominick LaCapra, from *History and Memory After the Holocaust*.

Film: *Shoah* (France, 1984), Claude Lanzmann (last 145 minutes).

Week 10: Narrative Film & the Debate about Representation.

Topics: Dangers and Limits of Narrative Representation: Melodramatization, “Hollywood-ization,” Harmonization, Displacement.

Scenes from Films: *Holocaust* (U.S.A., 1978), Marvin J. Chomsky; *Sophie’s Choice* (U.S.A., 1982), Alan Pakula; *Schindler’s List* (U.S.A., 1993), Stephen Spielberg; *Out of the Ashes* (U.S.A., 2003), Joseph Sargent.

Film: *Au Revoir les Enfants* (France, 1987), Louis Malle (104 minutes).

Week 11: Narrative Film & the Question of Verisimilitude.

Topics: Dangers and Limits of Narrative Representation: the Question of Verisimilitude.

Scenes from Films: *Au nom de tous les miens/In the Name of those I Loved* (Canada, 1985), Robert Enrico; *The Grey Zone* (U.S.A., 2001), Tim Blake Nelson; *The Pianist* (Poland, U.S.A., 2003), Roman Polanski; *Der Neunte Tag/The Ninth Day* (Germany, 2004), Volker Schlöndorff.

Film: *Sorstalanság/Fateless* (Hungary, 2005), Lajos Koltai (140 minutes).

Week 12: Narrative Film & the Issues of Humor, Lightness, and Trivialization.

Topics: Dangers and Limits of Narrative Representation: Issues of Humor, Lightness, and Trivialization.

Scenes from Films: *Enemies: a Love Story* (U.S.A., 1989), Paul Mazursky; *La Vita è Bella/Life is Beautiful* (Italy, 1997), Roberto Benigni; *Musíme si pomáhat/Divided We Fall* (Czech Republic, 2000), Jan Hřebejk.

Film: *Das Schreckliche Mädchen/The Nasty Girl* (Germany, 1990), Michael Verhoeven (92 minutes).

Week 13: Narrative Film: Perversity, Obsession & Fetishization.

Topics: Dangers and Limits of Narrative Representation: Perversity, Obsession & Fetishization.

Scenes from Films: *La Caduta degli dei/The Damned* (Italy, 1969), Luchino Visconti; *Lacombe Lucien* (France, 1974), Louis Malle; *Pasqualino Settabellezze/Seven Beauties* (Italy, 1975), Lina Wertmüller; *Apt Pupil* (U.S.A., 1998), Bryan Singer.

Film: *The Night Porter* (Italy, 1974), Leliana Cavani (118 minutes).

Week 14: Narrative Film: Identity & Identification.

Topics: Narrative Film & the Ambiguity of Identity & Identification: Perpetrators, Victims, Viewers.

Scenes from Films: *The Music Box* (Greece, U.S.A., 1989) Constantin Costa-Gavras; *Europa Europa* (Germany, France, Poland, 1990), Agnieszka Holland; *Europa* (Denmark, Sweden, France, Germany, Switzerland, 1991), Lars von Trier; *Amen* (Greece, France Germany, Romania, U.S.A., 2002), Constantin Costa-Gavras; *La Finestra di fronte/Facing Windows* (Turkey, Italy, 2003), Ferzan Ozpetek.

Film: *Mr. Klein* (France, 1982) Joseph Losey (124 minutes).

Week 15: Denying the Holocaust; Representations of the Holocaust: Poetry, Music, Art.

Topics: Holocaust Denial and Its Sources; “There can be no poetry After Auschwitz”: Theodor Adorno and Paul Celan; Art and the Holocaust; Music and the Holocaust.

Texts: Selected Poems of Paul Celan: “Death Fugue,” “Tenebrae,” “In Prague,” “Todtnauberg,” “You Were My Death,” “I can still see you,” “Illegibility,” “Aspen Tree”; “Anselm Kiefer: The Terror of History, the Temptation of Myth,” Andreas Huyssen.

Art: David Olère (1902-1985), Anselm Kiefer (1945-).

Music: *Quartet for the End of Time* (1940), Olivier Messiaen (France, 1908-1992); *Memorial to Lidice* (1943), Bohuslav Martinů (Czechoslovakia, (1890-1959); *A Survivor from Warsaw* (1947), Arnold Schoenberg (Austria, 1874, 1951); *Symphony 3 (Babi Yar)* (1962), Dmitri Shostakovich (Russia, 1906-1975); *Symphony 3—Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* (1976), Henry Górecki (Poland, 1933-); *Different Trains* (2000), Steve Reich (U.S.A., 1936-); *After Celan* (2000), Ketil Bjørnstad, David Darling.

Film: *Mr. Death: The Rise and Fall of Fred A. Leuchter, Jr.* (1999), Erroll, Morris.