Visual Culture and the Holocaust
Dr. Rachel E. Perry

Course Number: 127.8044
Office Hours: By Appointment
Class Time: TBD
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Course Description:

More than half a century later, the Holocaust remains one of the most traumatic events of modern Western experience. Drawing from a wide variety of media and genres, from high and low culture, directed at private and public spaces of reception, we will examine some of the many drawings, paintings, multimedia installations, graphic novels, video performances, sculptural monuments and conceptual counter-monuments, photography, and architecture used to represent the Holocaust.

The first half of the semester surveys the art created during the period of the Holocaust by individuals in exile or in hiding, in the camps and ghettos. We will explore how victims used artistic expression as both a means of documentation and as a form of “creative resistance” to communicate their protest, despair or hope. One class will be devoted to Nazi aesthetics and the campaign against “degenerate art.” The second half of the semester will cover artistic representations “after Auschwitz.” Despite Theodor Adorno’s injunction that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,” artists have struggled over the past 70 years with the paradox of trying to represent the unrepresentable. We will analyze how artistic representations vary geographically and across generational lines, between the victims and survivors and the second and third Post-Holocaust generations for whom the Holocaust constitutes a mediated, “vicarious past.”

In addition to developing visual, analytical skills, we will encounter and debate ethical, pedagogical, theological and philosophical dilemmas such as: What is the relationship between the historical event and representations of it, between what happened and how it is passed down to us? How has memory and awareness of the Holocaust been produced and transmitted through representational practices and cultural forms? What is—or should be—the primary role of art about the Holocaust: didactic, redemptive, cathartic? Are some media or genres more, or less, suitable to the task? What strategies have been and are being used to represent the Holocaust in the visual arts? What place does comedy or parody have? When does representation fall prey to sentimentality or melodrama, and at what costs? Can a representation of the Holocaust be beautiful, sublime or enjoyable or does aesthetic pleasure trivialize and exploit the pain of others?
Course Requirements:
This course is designed as a seminar. In addition to frontal lectures with powerpoint presentations, this course requires active participation in class and on museum visits. It is imperative that you come to class prepared to discuss and respond to course readings. It is strongly suggested that you print copies and bring these texts to class with you as we will devote a portion of each class to close textual and visual analysis.

Film Screenings: Film screenings are scheduled throughout the semester both in class and as homework assignments. If you cannot make a screening, you must inform me in advance.

Museum Visits: We will be visiting Yad Vashem. The museum visit offers hands-on access to the materials of the course. It is an integral part of the course and attendance is absolutely mandatory. In addition to the class meetings held in museums, you may be required to visit museums on your own to complete assignments. For classes meeting in museums, only pencil may be used due to conservation concerns.

Required readings: There is no course packet to purchase. PDF files of assigned articles and other documents may be downloaded or printed directly from the Moodle website under Course Library. Because this class only meets once a week, it is critical that you leave yourself enough time to read the material each week so that you will be able to discuss new concepts and arguments in class discussions.

Grade Distribution:
Mid-Term Exam 30%
Short Papers (3) 30%
Final Term Paper and Oral Presentation 40%

The Mid-Term will cover theoretical and historical material presented in the first half of the course in lectures and readings.

Three Short Response Papers – 3-5 pages. Each paper assignment asks you to consider the representational strategies found in media treatments of the Holocaust in the light of the theories and modes of analysis explored in class. No late submissions.

Final Research Paper and Oral Presentation: During the semester, you will work independently on an original research project. In addition to preparing a 12 page paper, you will present your research in a powerpoint presentation to the class. Please begin thinking about topics early in the semester!
Submit preliminary list of sources, annotated bibliography of at least 5 key sources and thesis statement by midterm period.

Powerpoint presentations in class the last two weeks of the semester.

Final papers due in hard copy the last day of class.

Office Hours: By appointment. I can be reached at 054-772-1169. Email: perryrub@bezeqint.net

Course Schedule:


Film Screening: Through These Eyes, 2007.

Week 2: The Nazi Campaign against Degenerate Art

Film Screening: The Architecture of Doom, Degenerate Art, The Eternal Jew, Good Morning Mr. Hitler

Reading:

- Peter Adam, “The Great German Art Exhibit” in Art of the Third Reich, 1992, ch 6.

Web sites:

- http://www.greatesttheft.com/
- http://therapeofeuropa.com/

Week 3: Art in the Ghettos and Camps

Film Screening: The Führer Gives the Jews a City (Theresienstadt, 1944); Theresienstadt: Deception and Reality. Dir. Irmgard von zur Muhlen

Reading:


Week 4 **Artists in Exile** (Charlotte Salomon, Felix Nussbaum)

**Short paper due – visual analysis**

**Film Screening:** Franz Weisz, *Charlotte Salmon*, 2012

**Reading:**

- **Web sites:** [http://www.jhm.nl/collection/themes/charlotte-salomon](http://www.jhm.nl/collection/themes/charlotte-salomon)  

Week 5 (November 5): **Cinematic Representations: Fact or Fiction?**

**Film Screening:** Alain Resnais, *Night and Fog*, Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah*, Steven Spielberg, *Schindler’s List*

**Reading:**

- Imre Kertesz, “Who Owns Auschwitz”
- Lawrence Langer, Preempting the Holocaust, Yale University Press, 1998
- Claude Lanzmann, Seminar at Yale 1990; Excerpts (Lanzmann #1-10)

Week 6 (November 12): **Is the Shoah Comic? MAUS and the Graphic Novel in Popular Culture** (Kiscka’s *Deuxieme Generation*, Anne Frank House’s *The Search*, Pascal Croci, Auschwitz Museum’s *Episodes from Auschwitz* and *Dina Babbitt: Snow White in Auschwitz*)

**Reading:**
Week 7: Photography's Dilemma: Is Seeing Believing? Icons, Iconoclasm and the work of Postmemory

Response Paper: Film Critique

Reading:
- James Young, "Sites Unseen: Shimon Attie" in At Memory's Edge, ch. 3.
- Catherine Gong, George's Kaddish for Kovno and the Six Million, 2009

Week 8: Memorialization and Monuments

Reading:
- James Young, “Memory, Countermemory and the End of the Monument” in At Memory's Edge, ch. 4.
- ---------------, “Memory Against itself in Germany Today: Jochen Gerz,” in At Memory's Edge, ch. 5.
- Nathan Rapoport, “Memoir of the Warsaw Ghetto Monument”
- Hans Haacke, “Und ihr habt doch gesiegt”
- Matthew Baigell, “George Segal’s Holocaust Monument“
Susan Hiller, *J Street Project*, Michela Melian, *Memory Loops*

Week 9: **Institutional Memory and the Museum**

**Response Paper Memorials**

**Reading:**

Week 10 **No class**

Week 11: **Yad Vashem Museum Visit**

Week 12: **Mirroring Evil** (Libera, Levinthal, Schechner) and **Israeli Responses: Bezem, Bergner, Bak to Gershuni, Maor, Rosen, Katzir, Arad, Nuchi**

**Reading:**
- Roee Rosen on Gershuni
- James Young, “David Levinthal,” *At Memory’s Edge*, ch. 2.
- Stephen Feinstein: “Zbigniew Libera’s Lego Concentration Camp”
- Alan Schechter, [www.dottiecommies.com](http://www.dottiecommies.com)

Week 13: **Final Presentations, Final Papers DUE**
References

Web sites:
http://lastexpression.northwestern.edu/
http://fcit.usf.edu/HOLOCAUST/arts/art.htm
http://art.holocaust-education.net/
http://chgs.umn.edu/museum/
http://www.iwm.org.uk/upload/package/99/
http://www.gfh.org.il/Eng/
http://www.bterezin.org.il/

Select Bibliography:


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“Zbigniew Libera’s Lego Concentration Camp: Iconoclasm in Conceptual Art About the Shoah” in Other Voices 2, no. 1 (2000)


Langer, Lawrence. “Preempting the Holocaust,” in Preempting the Holocaust. Yale University Press, 1998. (Judy Chicago – see Alvin Rosenfeld)


Art under the Nazi Regime


