ARTS 310 HONORS: The Holocaust and the Arts
Spring 2015

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Office Hours: M and W 1:30 – 2:45, F 2:15 – 3:15, and by appointment

Required Texts:

Night, Elie Wiesel
Survival in Auschwitz, Primo Levi
Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered, Ruth Kluger
Maus I and II, Art Spiegelman
Katschen & The Book of Joseph, Yoel Hoffmann
Yosl Rakover Talks to God, Zvi Kolitz
War & Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust, Doris Bergen

Course Introduction/Overview:

Is there a Holocaust story? Is the Holocaust story still, 70 years after the end of the war, being told? Is it one story or many stories, and, if many, are they really just slight variations on the same story?

Given the thousands of poems, novels, films, plays, works of visual art, and musical compositions that have been created in response to the Holocaust, it’s inevitable that certain conventions for representing the Holocaust would have been established by now. What are some of those conventions? How do these conventions work? What do they enable an artist to express? Might these working with these conventions result in an artist’s overlooking or unintentionally concealing some aspect of the Holocaust experience? Might our reading, listening, viewing, and response to Holocaust material change if we were aware of the conventions of the Holocaust story?

Let’s consider another implication of the question about artistic conventions. If an artist’s goal is to create something original, what does a contemporary artist (writer, visual artist, composer, etc.) do with what might by now be well established conventions of representing the Holocaust? Must she break those conventions in order to create something new? Even if breaking conventions necessitates partially misrepresenting history? And what about if breaking conventions alienates an audience who expects that a Holocaust story will be told in particular way and evoke predictable moral,
psychological, and emotional responses? These are some of the questions we’ll consider this semester.

Another area of inquiry this semester is suggested by this question: is the story of the Holocaust our story, whether we have any personal connection to the Holocaust or not? What are the emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical experiences of the Holocaust? What about its social, economic, political, cultural, and aesthetic experiences? Are these unlike anything we experience in our mundane, daily lives? These, too, are questions we will consider, if for no other reason than that the art associated with the Holocaust demands that we do so.

The Work Itself

Reading, Viewing, Listening

Part of our work will be practicing attentive reading, viewing, and listening. In an age of distraction, it’s challenging to sustain one’s attention on anything—entertaining, stimulating, or challenging—for an extended period of time. We’ll work on developing our skills of concentration. We’ll pay special attention to what happens when we try to sustain our attention on difficult (emotionally, intellectually, aesthetically) material.

Reflecting and Responding

Writing: Notebook

Writing is one of the methods we will use to respond to and reflect on what comes up in the class.

I would like you to keep a notebook in which you will explore the course materials and your responses to them. For some entries, you may look closely at the construction of a text—non-fiction, fiction, or poem, documentary or feature film, painting, etc.—to see how its formal properties are used to express a range of feelings and ideas. For other entries, you may consider and reflect on a topic or theme (social structure of camp life, power and limits of language, faith or doubt, etc.) presented in the text. Of when you find yourself having strong reaction (emotional, spiritual, physical, intellectual) to a passage in a text, you might want to inquire into why you had such a strong reaction to one moment, one scene, one image in particular. In some entries, you might want to explore one of your own experiences of, say, being an outsider, or of speaking out (or not) in opposition to some public policy or behavior that you think is immoral. Other entries might be imaginative and inventive: you might write a scene from a character’s life that isn’t included in the original story; you might take a character from a text and place her or him in an entirely new situation and see how, given his or her experiences as represented in the original text, he or she might perceive or act in this new situation; you might write a poem.
You also might include other things in your notebook—photos, works of visual art, video clips, news articles, advertisements, political speeches, op-ed pieces—that have something to do with the Holocaust or that may be read in relation to the Holocaust.

The goal is to be thinking about and reflecting on the course material and its implications both in and outside of class. I’d like you to practice becoming aware of the behavioral, intellectual, artistic, spiritual, and other implications of the Holocaust and the arts as you go through your daily life. Keeping up with this notebook regularly is one way to remind yourself to keep this course in mind throughout the days and weeks of this semester.

We will write in these notebooks in class, and I’d like you to write at least **two entries a week outside of class**. We will draw on these notebooks in our class discussions.

From time to time (more at the beginning of the semester than the end), I will offer you some prompts as options for your journals. I also invite you to share possible prompts with each other as the course unfolds.

You may keep these notebooks in whatever form—electronic, handwritten, other—is most effective for you

**Writing: Analytical Essay**

This notebook should provide you with the raw materials and the origins of ideas that can be developed in two essays, the first of which I’ll discuss here. For the **analytical essay**, I’d like you to use one or more of the course texts as the lens through which you look at something going on in the world today. The “something” you choose to look at through the lens of one or more of the course texts can be very close to home: something you see or encounter in your daily life (what’s hidden and what’s exposed? what encourages and perpetuates discrimination and/or what tries to expose and eliminate discrimination? how are historical events or important persons from the past memorialized or commemorated? etc.). You can also examine a topic that you encounter indirectly—by means of the news or other sources of information. This essay will reflect your deep understanding of at least one of the assigned Holocaust texts (your choice doesn’t need to be limited to one of the literary texts)—not only its surface content but also its other expressive elements—and your ability to apply the text’s insights and methods to a close look at some contemporary situation. You can consider the following question as one of those underlying this particular essay: is knowledge of the Holocaust and the arts of any use to us today?

**Writing: Collage Essay**

The second text you’ll produce will be a collage essay. This piece will be a condensed version of the notebook you keep throughout the semester. (You might also add some new material to it, and/or develop and revise entries already included in the notebook.) For this piece, you’ll choose the strongest and most meaningful sections from your notebook and, using collage as a means of construction, organize and present them in
such a way that they will hold together though not necessarily by means of a single, linear argumentative thread. This piece can include visual imagery and reflections on that imagery, if you choose. You can also draw on the works of visual art (including Maus) for ideas on how to organize and design this piece. I’ll explain this piece at greater length in class.

**The Classroom Experience**

In class, we’ll have an opportunity to explore the assigned texts (some of which we’ll view together). We’ll use a number of approaches to engage with the texts: writing, discussion, and contemplative exercises. Some of the informal writing and the contemplative exercises will give us an opportunity to explore possible connections between the course material and our own daily lives. Because of the material with which we’ll be engaging, we might spend time working with practices that can help cultivate compassion.

**Self-Assessment**

In addition to receiving grades for your notebook, analytical essay, collage-essay, and participation in class discussion and experiences, you will have a chance to do a self-assessment. In this self-assessment, you will describe and reflect on the quality of your engagement with all aspects of the class. Based on your narrative self-assessment, you will assign yourself a grade. This grade will be worth 20% of your final grade for the course. If there is a significant difference between the grade you assign yourself in this assessment and the grade I would assign to you, we will meet and discuss the grade.

**Grading Weights and Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Notebook</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analytical Essay</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collage-Essay</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Assessment</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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95 and above = A  
92 – 94.5 = A-  
87.5 – 91.5 = B+
85 – 87 = B
82 – 84.5 = B-
77.5 – 81.5 = C+
75 – 77 = C
72 – 74.5 = C-
67.5 – 71.5 = D+
65 – 67 = D
62 – 64.5 = D-

**ARTS and IDEAS: Mission and Student Learning Outcomes**

**Mission**

The Arts & Ideas Program, as an integral component of the Liberal Arts Core (LAC) Curriculum, provides students with an intellectual engagement with the arts while also fostering opportunities for creative and aesthetic interactions. ILS Arts courses examine the significance of the arts in the human experience, the cultural framework of creative composition and performance, the foundations of aesthetic values, and the communicative function of the arts.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

A student who completes 3.0 credits of ILSA will be able to do the following:

1. Articulate the value of the arts studied and their impact on the self and others
2. Recognize cultural, historical, spiritual, and/or political aspects of the arts studied
3. Define and articulate the concepts, methods, and organizing principles of the arts studied

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

“UNC Asheville is committed to making courses accessible to persons with documented disabilities. Students requiring reasonable accommodations must register with the Office of Academic Accessibility by providing supporting documentation. All information provided will remain confidential. For more information, please contact the Office of Academic Accessibility: [https://disabilityservices.unca.edu/](https://disabilityservices.unca.edu/).”

**Academic Honesty**

As a community of scholars dedicated to learning and the pursuit of knowledge, UNC Asheville relies on the honesty and academic integrity of all the members of its community. Any act of plagiarism or cheating is academic dishonesty. A person who knowingly assists another in cheating is likewise guilty of cheating. According to the instructor’s view of the gravity of the offense, a student may be punished by a failing grade or a grade of zero for the assignment or test, or a failing grade in the course. If it
seems warranted, the instructor may also recommend to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs dismissal or other serious university sanction.

A student accused of academic dishonesty should talk with his or her instructor. In all situations where a student has been disciplined for plagiarism or cheating, the instructor is to submit to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs a brief statement of the case; the student is to receive a copy of this document. Depending upon the severity and/or repetition of the offense, the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs may choose to impose a penalty of cancellation of graduation with honors; cancellation of scholarships; dismissal from the university; or any other penalty which he or she deems logical and deserved. A student has 10 class days to respond to this document in writing; this response is to be sent to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for attachment to the document submitted by the instructor.

The student may choose to contact the Faculty Conciliator, who will advise the student of his or her rights, and attempt to mediate between the student and the instructor before proceeding to bring the case before the Academic Appeals Board. If the student is satisfied with the results of this mediation, then the formal hearing before the Board will not take place. The student must make the request for this formal hearing within 10 class days of receiving the copy of the instructor’s statement to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

The Holocaust and the Arts Schedule of Assignments

Schedule

Week 1

Jan 12  Choosing to Visit a Death Camp

“The Unseen,” Robert Pinsky

Jan 14  Film: Night and Fog

Week 2

Jan 19  Martin Luther King Holiday: No Class

Jan 21  Is Politics the New Art?

Degenerate Art

Week 3
Jan 26  Film: *Max*
Notebook Check #1

Jan 28  Finish watching *Max*

**Week 4**

Feb 2  **I Was There**

*Night*, Wiesel

Feb 4

**Week 5**

Feb 9  *Survival in Auschwitz*, Primo Levi, Chapters 1 - 9

Feb 11

**Week 6**

Feb 16  *Survival in Auschwitz*, Primo Levi, Chapters 10 - 17

Feb 18  No Class: Chess teaching at Hebrew Union College in New York

**Week 7**

Feb 23  **Whose Story Is It?**

*Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (through page 131)

Feb 25  Notebook Check #2

**Week 8**

March 2  *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (finish the text)

March 4

**Week 9**

March 9  Spring Break
March 11  Spring Break

**Week 10**

March 16  **More Music! More Light!**

Film: *We Want the Light*

March 18  **Different Trains**

*Different Trains*, Steve Reich

Draft of Analytical Essay Due

**Week 11**

March 23  *Maus I*, Art Spiegelman

March 25  *Maus II*, Art Spiegelman

**Week 12**

March 30  *The Book of Joseph*, Yoel Hoffmann

April 1  Analytical Essay Due

**Week 13**

April 6  **It’s the Real Thing**

Post-Modern Holocaust Art

April 8  *Yosl Rakover Talks to God*, Zvi Kolitz

Draft of Collage Essay Due

**Week 14**

April 13

April 15  Film: *Life is Beautiful*
**Week 15**

April 20  Finish watching *Life is Beautiful*

Collage Essay Due

April 22  Undergraduate Research Symposium: No Class

**Week 16**

April 27  Self-Assessment Due

Notebook Due

Last Day of Classes

**Week 17**

May 4, 8:00 – 10:30 a.m.: Final Experience