

HUSL 6310: Theories of Testimony

Shari Goldberg
sgoldberg@utdallas.edu
972-883-4930

Office JO 5.110
Office hours T 12:00-1:00
R 3:00-4:00

Spring 2010
R 4:00-6:45
JO 4.312

Course description

This course will focus on understanding recent critical theory on testimony, much of which has responded to the crisis of witnessing precipitated by the Holocaust. What we find in this body of writing questions the model of testimony that consists of a speaking subject who can recuperate in language experiences of the past. At stake for each of these thinkers—and for us in class—is how to forge such a post-structuralist critique without evacuating testimony's primary meaning, its reference to (and establishment of) an event that really happened.

Student learning objectives

Students will learn: 1. why and how testimony has evolved as a pivotal point of concern in contemporary critical theory; 2. how and why the texts we study position testimony as a literary, as well as a historical, psychological, juridical, or religious concern; 3. to read difficult texts with sufficient rigor to be able to discuss them clearly and accurately.

Required texts

Available at Stanza Books on Campbell Road (972) 231-2665:

Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* (Zone)
Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (Hopkins)
Shoshana Felman & Dori Laub, *Testimony* (Routledge)
Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (Vintage)
Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Indiana)
W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Modern Library)
Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Cornell)

Readings from other texts (marked as such on the schedule below) will be available via UTD e-reserves or made available in class.

Course requirements

Students must:

- ◇ Act respectfully towards the viewpoints of others—those present in class and those whom we will read.
- ◇ Be prepared and present in all class sessions. More than two absences may result in failure of the course. Using a phone for a dictionary is okay; using a phone to send text messages is not.
- ◇ Complete all assignments on their own and on time. *Reading is the primary assignment and must be taken seriously.* Students are also responsible for participating in class discussions and completing all writing assignments—in addition to other work announced in the course of the term.

Please see me in the event that these requirements become difficult to meet.

Evaluation

Student performance will be evaluated on an A through C- grading scale, with components weighed as follows:

Weekly analytic posts	25%
Contribution to class	20%
Midterm exam	20%
Final paper	35%

Assignments

Each Wednesday by 9:00 am: Pointed, substantive analytic introduction of a key concept or question derived from the week's reading. These brief (500 word) essays will serve as a basis for our discussion in class. Post them (no hard copy necessary) at: <<http://goldberggradcourse.edublogs.org>> Feel free to comment on your peers' ideas, but be sure to identify and include your own perspective. These writings are an opportunity for questioning and even critique, but not for griping or criticism.

2/25: Midterm exam due. One week prior, questions about the readings and discussions thus far will be handed out in class. The task is to answer with a combination of argument, quotation, and analysis in approximately four pages.

11/5: Final paper prospecti due. M.A. students may choose two texts we have studied (at least one must be a contemporary critical text) and explain how they relate, modify each other, or differ in their conceptions of testimony. These papers may focus either on one particular question (i.e, What is the relationship between bearing witness and testifying? or Is testimony produced by a conscious self?) or an idea such as the lacuna or prophecy or trauma. Ph.D. students may either complete the same assignment or may use the texts we have studied to examine a work of literature (or non-fiction) in their field that bears a relation to the course topic. These papers should be 15 pages. For the prospectus, please produce at least three pages identifying and justifying chosen texts and explaining intentions for using them—the more specificity, the better. Any and all pages submitted at this point will be returned with comments.

12/5: Final papers due. See instructions above.

Schedule of readings and assignments, DUE ON THE DATE LISTED

1/21 Descartes, *Meditations on the First Philosophy*. Available at: <http://www.classicallibrary.org/descartes/meditations/>

1/28 Felman & Laub, *Testimony*, chapters 2-5

2/4 Felman & Laub, *Testimony*, chapters 6-7

2/11 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*

2/18 Sebald, *Austerlitz*

2/25 Michael Bernard-Donals, "Beyond the Question of Authenticity: Witness and Testimony in the Fragments Controversy" [in *PMLA* Oct 2001, pp. 1302-1315 (available on JSTOR)] and "History and Disaster: Witness, Trauma, and the Problem of Writing the Holocaust" (to be made available)

Midterm due

3/4 Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, chapters 1,2 & 9

3/11 Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, chapters 5-8

3/18 Spring break

3/25 Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*

4/1 Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, chapters 1-2

4/8 Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, chapters 3-4

4/15 Videos from the Fortunoff collection [<http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/education/index.html>] and the Eichmann trial

Prospecti due

4/22 Celan, "The Meridian" and Derrida, "Poetics & Politics of Witnessing" in *Sovereignties in Question* (to be made available)

Prospecti returned

4/29 Wieviorka, *Era of the Witness*

5/3 **Finals due**