Syllabus

WITNESSING, MEMORY, MEDIA

HU Credits:

Degree/Cycle: 2nd degree (Master)

Responsible Department: communication & journalism

Academic year:

Semester:

Teaching Languages: Hebrew

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Amit Pinchevski

Coordinator Email: amitpi@mscc.huji.ac.il

Coordinator Office Hours: Tue 4-5

Teaching Staff:
Dr. Amit Pinchevski
Course Description:

What does it mean to be a witness? What are the ethical stakes in witnessing? How can witnessing enhance ethical relation? Do media turn us into witnesses, and if so what might this mean? What are the social, political and cultural consequences of witnessing in our time? These are some of the questions to be taken up in this seminar. Witnessing is a term laden with historical legacies in religion, law and science—but also with recent relevance in philosophy, history and literature. The last century has seen the rise of the witness in the wake of unprecedented devastation, particularly that of the Holocaust, but also the development of technological media that redefine the scope and pertinence of what it means to be a witness. The seminar will locate the contemporary significance of witnessing between these two poles, bringing it to bear on key questions in communication and media studies. Witnessing is an act that involves a witness who bears witness to an event for the benefit of an audience that was absent from the event but nevertheless has to pass some judgment about it, be it legal, historical or moral. Thus witnessing constitutes a fundamental problem of communication, its hopes and perils. Through witnessing the past becomes approachable and addressable; and wrongdoing might acquire words and listeners. To bear witness will be presented as an act of responding and of responsibility. Especially in the wake of catastrophes and traumas, witnessing can be seen as a way of enhancing life fatally damaged by past events. The first part of the seminar will be devoted to foundational texts, followed by a series of cases and issues at the conjunction of media, memory and witnessing. Among them: Levinas’s ethics as horizon of witnessing; testimony and the failure of language; the trauma testimony discourse; media and trauma: the case of the Eichmann trial; testimony and new archival formations; technologies of memory; witnessing through the media: the media witnessing discourse; distant suffering and moral action. Readings will include texts in communication and media studies, philosophy, literary critique, sociology, psychoanalysis, and history.

Attendance requirements (%):
80

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction:
reading; class discussion; reading reports; final paper

Course/Module Content:

1. Introduction


2. The Ethics of Witnessing


3. Testimony and the Failures of Language


4. Testimony and Trauma


5. The Eichmann Trial I


6. The Eichmann Trial II


7. Archive and Testimony


8. Prosthetic Witnessing


9. Media Witnessing I


10. Media Witnessing II


Anna Reading, “Globital Witnessing: Mobile Memories of Atrocity and Terror from London and Iran,” in *Constructions of Conflict: Transmitting Memory of the Past in European*
Historiography, Literature and Culture, eds. K. N Jones and K. Hall (forthcoming Peter Lang)

Gunter Thomas, “Witness as a Cultural Form of Communication: Historical Roots, Structural Dynamics, and Current Appearances,” in Media Witnessing, pp. 89-111.

11. Distant Suffering


12. Conclusion

Students’ presentations