Joshua Bucheister, jbucheis@haverford.edu, Class of 2014, English Aaron Madow, amadow@haverford.edu, Class of 2014, History Seminar Title: *How We Talk About The Holocaust* Advisor: Kimberly Benston, Professor of English

“Those who were not there will never know what really happened. And those who were there somehow don’t speak.  Even those of us who try to speak do not speak.” -Elie Wiesel, from *The Algemeiner Journal*

For decades, thinkers have struggled to explain that which, according to Wiesel, cannot be explained. Leaving behind a corpus of texts that has historicized, fictionalized, and theorized the Holocaust, scholars, novelists, and artists alike have challenged, complicated, and reified Wiesel’s assertion. In popular discourse, the phrases “The Six Million” and “Never Again,” have been so canonized as to obfuscate the ambiguous ground on which they stand; “six million” no longer provides an estimation, but rather, an emotionally charged incomparability. And yet, what would it mean to contextualize the Holocaust? What might be at stake in critically approaching its rhetorical afterlife? Though critical theory suggests that language can do no more than translate, displace and, in some way, mediate *the real*, how does one critically approach the textual representations of an event whose death toll exceeds knowledge – whose name evokes an unmediated reality? Can one speak critically, yet sensitively on a topic that – for some – collapses the boundary between critical and emotional investment; collapsing disciplinary boundaries, can *we* approach a topic that neither criticism nor emotion alone can diagnose? Moving between history, literature, film, and critical theory, this seminar will bring together an interdisciplinary group of students, all of whom will collectively establish the critical vocabulary with which to approach the Holocaust in its varied representations. To begin, history majors will help us work through questions of causality, comparability, and temporality. Analyzing historical writings that contextualize the Holocaust within narratives of anti-Semitism, modernity, and Empire, we will query the ways in which history, though committed to truth, collapses time and produces meaning. Students of visual and literary culture, then, will guide us through prose and visual art that both exposes and complicates contemporary debates over authorial intent and canonicity: who has authority over the Holocaust and its meaning; how do the conventions of narrative form both delimit and enable representation; if writing is tied to the social context from which it has emerged (a point that social scientists will help us with), how can a text that represents the Holocaust be anything other than “of its time?” As we analyze film, the more quantitatively oriented students will lay bare the coding that makes new media representation possible – and, in turn, the “users” into which we transform. What would it mean to think about the techno-determined practices that code our everyday life alongside those of the Holocaust? Indeed, this seminar will pivot not only on the texts themselves, but also the technologies through which they are given to us – the technologies that inform our rereading of the Holocaust itself Simultaneously de-familiarizing and expanding participants’ sense of *their* academic terrain, this project will approach the Holocaust as that which can only be understood by dissolving the boundaries between the personal and the academic. As our critical lines of inquiry intertwine, diverge, and at points vanish, we will find ourselves in a liminal space of academic *and* affective intensity. Though the Holocaust will indeed serve as *our* line of entry, we will, at times, ponder whether any text can be approached in a way that insulates the personal from the academic, the past from the present, the theoretical from the practical.

**Tentative Course Materials**

**The Historical Imagination**

*Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hannah Arendt *The Lives of Animals*, J.M. Coetzee *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, Marianne Hirsch *Barbed Wire: An Ecology of Modernity*, Rival Netz *The Texture of Memory, Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, James Young *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, Idith Zertal

**The Holocaust in Fiction and Memoir**

*Time’s Arrow*, Martin Amis *The Diary of Anne Frank* (selections), Anne Frank *Sea Under Love*, David Grossman *Maus*, Art Spiegelman *The Town Beyond the Wall*, Elie Wiesel

**Theoretical Approaches**

*Trauma: Explorations in Memory,* Cathy Caruth“Trauma, Absence, and Loss;” *Representing The Holocaust* (selections), Dominick LaCapra *The Political Unconscious* (selections), *Frederic Jameson The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (selections), Frank Kermode **The Holocaust in New Media**

*Remediation: Understanding New Media* (selections), Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin *Call of Duty*, a first-person shooter video-game created by Ben Chichoski *The Interface Effect* (selections), Alexander R. Galloway *Online Transcript from Eichmann Trial*, Nizkor Project “Publicity and Indifference: Sarajevo on Television,” Thomas Keenan *Schindler’s List*, Steven Spielberg “Why We Fight,” Episode 9 of HBO’s *Band of Brothers*, Steven Spielberg “Within the Context of No-Context,” George W.S. Trow

**Potential Speakers**

Marianne Hirsch, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University James Young, Professor of English and Judaic Studies at University of Massachusetts at Amherst