Out of Ground Zero: Catastrophe and Memory

Description
Within twenty-four hours of the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 politicians, artists, and cultural critics had begun to ask how to memorialize the deaths of thousands of people. This question persists today, but it can also be countered with another: is building a monument the best way to commemorate that moment in history? What might other discourses, media, and art forms offer in such a project of collective memory? How can these cultural formations help us to assess the immediate reaction to the attack? To approach these issues, “Out of Ground Zero” looks back to earlier sites of catastrophe in Germany and Japan.

This course begins with a one-day field trip to New York on 11 September. Students will meet with architects and photojournalists, and view the clearing in Lower Manhattan. Following the excursion, reading assignments will expand to form a cross-cultural, trans-historical base. The curriculum engages signal texts on the notion of “ground zero” in urban culture. Works of literature, cinema, and art, as well as architecture and choreography will be considered. The course draws from these works to develop a provisional scope through which to analyze the diverse responses to the World Trade Center attacks.

A central text for this course is Collective Memory. Here French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs offers critical insights on the impact of urban destruction on social groups. Does Halbwachs’ argument-- that collective identity actually deepens in the wake of demolition-- still hold today? His thesis about the non-architectural means of community building render more salient the question of how to analyze the media and culture produced in the wake of September 11.

Among the topics of discussion are:
-- Should there be a World Trade Center memorial? If so, when and how should it be planned? Who would be the audience? Besides a built memorial, what are other adequate cultural responses to the events of September 11?
-- What are the specific literary and iconographic dimensions of the ruin of Dresden, Hiroshima, and Lower Manhattan? Can they be compared to literary representations of the death camps in Auschwitz?
-- What are the points of convergence and divergence among these four sites? How do they register in memory?
-- What are the application limits of European social thought on the cases of American and Japanese culture and history?

Purpose
The course will introduce certain main currents of social thought and will expose you to a range of issues of public significance. You will be expected to construct arguments of your own, both in speech and writing, about the issues raised.

Readings
Readings will be drawn from the following texts.
Reader: Out of Ground Zero
Kurt Vonnegut, Slaughterhouse Five (Dell)
Noam Chomsky, 9.11 (Seven Stories)

For background on the principles of literature and cinema studies, please consult: Sylvan Barnet, Writing about Literature and James Monaco How to Read a Film.

Schedule
Week 1 Overview: What is ground zero?
Maurice Halbwachs, “Individual and Collective Memory” (Reader)
Andreas Huyssen, “Twin Memories: After-Images of 9/11” (Reader)
Maurice Halbwachs, “Space and the Collective Memory” (Reader)
Laura Kurgan, “Around Ground Zero” (Reader)
Eric Hobsbawm, “The Age of Total War” (Reader)
Reinhold Martin, “One or More” (Reader)
Week 2  Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse Five*
Paul Celan, “Sand from the Urns,” “Count the Almonds,” “Huhediblu,” “Eastersmoke,” “Well-Graves in the Wind,” “In the Air,” “Death Fugue,” and “Nearness of Graves” (Reader)
Amy Colin, “Innovation and Repetition” (Reader)

Week 3  Roberto Rossellini, *Germany in Year Zero*, film, in-class screening
Stephen Brockmann, “German Literature, Year Zero: Writers and Politics, 1945-53” (Reader)

Week 4  Lisa Yoneyama, “Introduction,” “Phantasmatic Innocence,” “Tropes of the Nation, Peace, and Humanity,” and “On the Politics of Historical Memory” (Reader)
Saburo Ienaga, ed. *Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Atomic Bombings as Seen through Photography*, photography, in-class viewing

Week 5  Toge Sankichi, “Give Me Back My Father,” “August 6, 1950,” “At a First Aid Post,” “To Miss…,” “The Night,” and “The Vision” (Reader)
John Whittier Treat, “Poetry against Itself,” from *Writing Ground Zero* (Reader)

Week 6  Tatsumi Hijikata, Taka Iimura, and Eiko Hosoe, *Navel and Atomic Bomb*, performance, in-class screening
Alexandra Munroe, “Revolt of the Flesh: Ankoku Butoh and Obsessional Art” (Reader)
Judith Viala, Foreword and Introduction, “The Return of Hijikata” (Reader)
Shoda Shinoe, selected *tanka* (Reader)
Kurihara Sadako, “Reconstruction,” “I Bear Witness for Hiroshima,” “I Saw Hiroshima,” and “Hiroshima, Auschwitz: We Must Not Forget” (Reader)
Lisa Yoneyama, “Taming the Memoryscape” (Reader)
Lisa Yoneyama, “Memories in Ruins” (Reader)
Vera Zolberg, “Museums as Contested Sites of Remembrance: The Enola Gay Affair” (Reader)

Week 7  James Young, “Germany’s Holocaust Memorial Problem-- And Mine” (Reader)
Alain Resnais, *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, film, in-class screening
Cathy Caruth, “Literature and the Enactment of Memory: Duras, Resnais, Hiroshima, Mon amour” (Reader)

Week 8  Primo Levi, “Argon,” “Carbon,” and “Hydrogen” (Reader)
Giorgio Agamben, Preface and “The Witness” (Reader)

Week 9  Giorgio Agamben, “On Security and Terror” (Handout)
Einstürzende Neubauten, *Strategies against Architecture*, recording, in-class play
Roni Sarig, “The Postindustrial Wasteland” and “Einstürzende Neubauten” (Reader)

Week 10  Jean Baudrillard, “The Spirit of Terrorism” (Handout)

Week 11  Review

**Requirements**

1. Class participation is essential to this course. In order to make a valuable contribution students should come prepared to each class. Assigned readings must be completed before each class meeting. A guiding question shall accompany each assignment. Students who are unable to attend a class must inform the instructor in advance, either in person or by telephone. Students with more than four unexcused absences shall be dropped from the class.
On most days students shall submit **brief written responses** (100-150 words each) to the question on the reading assignment. Although these responses will not be graded, such individual preparation will enhance class discussions. Further, regular writing practice will prepare students for longer papers, both in this course and beyond. Of the 22 questions distributed over the course of the semester students may select 15 to which they would like to respond. Students shall account for their progress with this series by consecutively marking each text (i.e. 1/15, 2/15…). No extensions shall be granted for these writing assignments. Courtesy toward others in discussions is expected.

**Grading:** Participation in class discussion and submission of 15 brief written responses-- 25%.

2. One of the primary goals of this course is the development and refinement of critical analysis and argument. To this end students will write **two essays**. About two weeks before a given due date students must submit a brief outline of the essay they plan to write. In finished essays any and all references must be cited. Essays must conform to MLA standards.

   **Essays are due at noon on the dates indicated.** Essays submitted late without prior permission from the instructor will be penalized by one full letter grade. Essays submitted more than one week late will be penalized by two full letter grades. Always keep a printed copy of your essay.

**Grading:** first essay-- 15%, second essay-- 20%.

3. In addition to the writing assignments, students will also be expected to deliver an **oral presentation**. Students shall prepare and present a one-page handout on the day's reading. In these twenty-minute presentations students should provide a summary of the author’s main points, describe the historical context in which the text was produced, and open up a few questions for discussion. Presentations will be evaluated according to the following criteria: insight, clarity, and, importantly, the degree to which presenters stimulate the thoughtful participation of their classmates.

**Grading:** One oral presentation-- 15%.

4. A cumulative **final examination** shall be given
The examination shall consist of an identification section and a selection of essay questions from a list distributed one week prior to the test date.

**Grading:** Final examination-- 25%.

*To receive a passing grade for this course students must meet all course requirements.*