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Since 1994, I have taught "The Holocaust: Its Meanings and Implications" in the religious studies department at Vanderbilt University. The class consists of a mix of about thirty undergraduate, graduate, and divinity students in two tiers about a seminar table. While I shape my course around the theme of Vanderbilt's annual Holocaust Lecture Series, my teaching is, in general, guided by problems of identification and representation, with particular focus on trauma and memory, history and witness, and, perhaps above all, on a question that is fundamental to all teachers (and scholars) of the Holocaust: "Who can speak about it?"

The complementary question I ask is, "How is it spoken about?" To address that question in class, I have been exploring, in particular, the use of film. As a consequence, I require students to attend at least ten of twelve screenings of films, which are correlated to both the readings and the theme for a particular week. In addition, they are required to come to the lectures/discussions — two 75-minute-classes/week — as well as complete the reading assignments. The films are shown every Monday evening in a university media classroom; if students are unable to attend — which is often the case for graduate and divinity students who have job responsibilities — they must view the video before the second class of the week. At the end of the class preceding the screening, I offer, either orally or in the form of handouts, some pertinent information about the production of the film, including cultural and historical references where necessary, and some general guidance on what to attend to in the film. This past year, students have had the opportunity to view *Jud Süß*, *Triumph of the Will*, *The Wannsee*

Conference

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Is Full

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ight and Fog

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Au Revoir les Enfants

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A Letter without Words

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The Last Days

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Nasty Girl

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Europa, Europa

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The Quarrel

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Weapons of the Spirit

,
Shoah

, and

Life is Beautiful

. Other years I have shown such diverse films as
Anne Frank Remembered

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The Damned

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The Diary of Anne Frank

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Der ewige Jude

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The Garden of the Finzi-Continis

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Girl Friends

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Korczak

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The Last Metro

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Mephisto

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The Partisans of Vilna

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Schindler

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Schindler's List

, and

The Trial of Adolph Eichmann

. And I look forward to including such films as
Selling Murder

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Image before My Eyes

, and

Mr. Death

, and possibly even

Inga-She-Devil of the SS

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Most students are comfortable viewing films and readily talk with their classmates about films they have seen. I try to take advantage of these comfort and volubility factors. Students write response papers in which they endeavor to tie the film to weekly readings and themes. More significantly, I utilize subsequent class discussion of the films in order to discomfort the students. Film is a useful tool, especially if preceded and followed with student discussion. That discussion should focus not just on the content of the film and its agendas, but also on how the film conveyed that content and tried to manipulate its audience (e.g., by drawing upon familiar

genres, by camera position, by selection of detail). Students need to recognize that such films, especially documentaries, are not transparent windows into the past.

Viewing films has an additional benefit: students need to learn not just who the perpetrators/bystanders were, but they need to realize that under certain conditions most of them would act like perpetrators or bystanders, or at least share their attitudes and values. For the Holocaust to be situated merely "there" and "then" substitutes aesthetic appreciation for a pedagogy of ethics. The Holocaust as past event becomes either an awe-ful object of fascination or so much useless knowledge. The latter is not to be confused with Charlotte Delbo's understanding of the Holocaust as "useless knowledge." The nonutilitarian violence of the Holocaust offers no lessons; rather its sheer facticity rips a hole in the naturalness of the world that calls each individual to be here now and attend to what is happening, to whom, by whom, what, and how. Some films transcend the abstract question, "How would I act back then?" by positioning the students to assume these roles, compelling the students to confront Delbo's "useless knowledge."

Otherwise put, I do not employ the film so much to tell the story. Documents, witness accounts, and historical reconstructions and analyses bear the bulk of that responsibility. Rather I seek to turn the students' attention to the different ways — and whys — the story is told. And in attending to the whys, we examine the contemporary interests and concerns that condition both depictions and analyses of the Holocaust, and their reception. Three exemplary instances will suggest the range of pedagogical possibilities film provides: Veit Harlan's 1940 German docudrama *Jud Süß*, Alain Resnais's 1955 French documentary *Night and Fog (Nuit et Brouillard)*, and Claude Lanzmann's 1985 French (according to Lanzmann, non-) documentary *Shoah*.

Jud Süß is the first film that the students see. I inform them that it was one of three films (the others were *Der ewige Jude* and *Die Rothschilds*) commissioned by Goebbels and his propaganda ministry to mobilize the population, especially the Wehrmacht, behind the regimes view of the Jewish Question and the necessity to solve it. Unlike its now more famous contemporary, the documentary *Der ewige Jude*, audiences did not begrudgingly obey the order to see the film. Rather, *Jud Süß* proved to be one of the most popular films throughout occupied Europe. Beyond its entertainment value and the purported historical import of its subject, another drawing card, I add, was the audience's dim recollections of the like-titled, 1924 best-selling novel by (the Jewish) Lion Feuchtwanger, from which the film derived much of its melodrama - albeit with the

requisite distortions and inversions. The students have also been reading selections from Hitler's

Mein Kampf

, specifically the chapter "Nation and Race" which provides his chronology of the different roles and their alleged underlying rationales that Jews assumed throughout European history, as well as George Mosse on anti-Jewish images and stereotypes.

I direct them to attend to how the Jewish characters are represented in the film. The film narrates the "true story" of Joseph Süß Oppenheimer, who served as the financial minister for Karl Alexander, Duke of Württemberg, from 1734 to the Duke's death in 1737, and who was executed for embezzlement, among other charges, in 1738. The film pits the lascivious, absolutist autocrat Duke, and his devious, manipulating, and obsequious advisor/creditor Süß Oppenheimer, (as well as Süß Oppenheimer's conspiratorial secretary Levi, and the animal-like Jews who have invaded Stuttgart), against the Duchy's Council of State led by the righteous Sturm, the council secretary and eventual husband of Sturm's virtuous and virginal daughter Dorothea, the noble Faber, and the good people of Württemberg. The efforts of Süß Oppenheimer to impoverish and unman Württemberg climaxes with the rape and suicide of Dorothea, who had allowed Süß Oppenheimer to seduce her in order to stave off the torture of her husband. The Council rises up against the Duke, who dies of a heart attack during the confrontation, and his advisor. Süß Oppenheimer is arrested, tried for various charges — extortion, usury, fornication, profiteering, procuring, high treason, and above all miscegenation (*Rassenschande*) — and executed. Sturm has the final word, admonishing his audiences in the film and in the theater to learn from this experience.

The film is itself a remarkable compendium of anti-Semitic stereotypes: the culture-destroying Jew's materialism and usuriousness, egotism, legalism, dishonesty, mendacity, slyness, nonvirility, rootless cosmopolitanism, nomadism, parasitism, syncophantism, moral criminality, power hunger, shamelessness, the Jewish stench (*foetor Judaicus*), the Jew as masquerader, as worshipper of a god of revenge, and, above all, as a sexual criminal — a pimp if a man, a whore if a woman, and a miscegenator. All of these traits are contrasted with the culture-creating German's self-controlled manliness or feminine virtuosity and innocence, beauty, family and community orientation, idealism, spirituality, rootedness, justness, heart, harmony, etc. Moreover, the film almost literally enacts Hitler's history of the Jews from insinuating themselves into the princes' good graces by a mixture of flattery and loans, to the eventual ruination of the princes by coming between them and the people in whose name they rule.

Rarely are these characterizations didactic; rather they are integrated into the *mis-en-scene*. For example, not only does the audience witness the superficial transformation of the bearded, forelocked, and Yiddish-accented Süß Oppenheimer into the simulacrum of a German

nobleman and his ultimate return to his true self. But, more subtly, Veit brilliantly casts Werner Kraus (famous for playing such devious, dissembling, and diabolical villains as Dr. Caligari and Dr. Mabuse) as not only Levi but, with the exception of Süss Oppenheimer, as every other Jewish speaking role including a seductress. In other words, no matter how different Jews may appear underneath, they are all the same. Yet the value of this film lies in more than graphically presenting students with the machinations of prejudice. Usually several students come to the class subsequent to viewing the film appearing rather unnerved. Upon further inquiry, they explain that while viewing the film they became aware that they had begun to desire for the evil "Jud Süss" to get his just deserts. They wonder if this means that they are anti-Semites and thus potential bystanders, if not future perpetrators. Through this experience the students are both thrown off their moral high horses and given a lesson in the working of ideology. A good melodramatic genre film shares a common form with ideology: both offer seamless narratives and coherent imaginary worlds. Unless viewers maintain a critical vigilance, which would certainly spoil the entertainment value they seek when viewing a genre film, they, unless bored, usually go on automatic and respond to the appropriate cues and codes. By way of comparison, I ask them to consider a film like

Independence Day

and the codes it is transmitting; e.g., the bad Vietnam War versus the good Gulf War; the sexually charged African-American body and the nonvirile Jewish brain.

As I then explain, for a 1940s German audience, *Jud Süss* resonated even more than your everyday entertaining melodrama. Not only did the film follow Hitler's text, but it reproduced the structure of the epitome of German high culture, German classic tragedy: the immoral power of the authoritarian ruler and his foreign advisor are opposed by bourgeois (or *völkisch*) morality, which is embodied in the virtuous female victim. While the ruler enjoys his mistresses, the bourgeois enjoy familial bliss — until that immoral power, asserting its hierarchical prerogative, invades that familial bliss and disrupts social harmony. There is one crucial difference between the dramas of Lessing and Schiller, on the one hand, and Veit's film, on the other, but it too resonates generically. In classic tragedy, the upright bourgeoisie endeavor — unsuccessfully — to overcome the differential hierarchies of the authoritarian absolutist state. In

Jud Süss

, the enemy is the alien outsider and the people endeavor — successfully — to maintain the difference between the homogeneous inside and the external monster. The epitome of bourgeois

Bildung

has been replaced by the popular horror film. Now, the audience did not pick up torches on the way out of theater in order to find and destroy the monster; i.e., actively participate in the final solution. However, whatever tacit acceptance they had of the racial nature of the world and the un-Germanness of the Jews was reconfirmed and perhaps strengthened.

Resnais's *Night and Fog (Nuit et Brouillard)* has other lessons to teach. Since its production in 1955, this documentary has been employed in American schools, churches, and synagogues to

speaking the unspeakable.

Night and Fog details a

chronology as it follows the "Nazi machine" from its assumption of power to its building of concentration camps, from the rounding up, deportation, and gassing of the victims to the liberation of the survivors. It then concludes with the Nuremberg trials and the perpetrators' cries of "I am not responsible." Yet, by the time the students view Resnais's film they have already learned the historical details about the Holocaust, including that the term "Holocaust" with its purported referent had not yet come into general use in 1955. Why, then, subject them to that unspeakable horror which defiles not only the uninitiated, but even those who have already seen films or stills of the dead and living dead, and the piles of shoes, bowls, hair, and bones that the Americans, British, and Soviets encountered when liberating concentration and death camps? Those piles leave their impressions. Often students will fail to register — or, more properly, forget that they had registered — what I had asked them to attend to when viewing the films: the juxtaposition of the documentary black-and-white footage with scenes of present-day (1955) camp ruins filmed in color ("They were in color?" admittedly the original print was somewhat faded); and the other, often discordant, juxtapositions: between, on the one hand, the words of Cayrol's text and the images, and, on the other hand, between Hanns Eisler's soundtrack and the words and texts. I alert the students to Resnais's engagement with Brechtian distancing, which provokes the audience to reflect upon what is being presented: what is juxtaposed, what is contrasted, what is mentioned, and what is not. And yet what usually remains is, "The horror. The horror." And what they already thought they knew. I ask my students what the film is about. I had already informed them that the tide derives from the decree of General Kittel to round up political prisoners in the foggy dead of night and cause them to disappear. The students almost unanimously respond: the murder of the six million Jews, of course. Then I ask them whom the narrative describes as the victims. Thanks to access to a translation of the screenplay they can check again and search mightily and futilely for mention of the Jews. Only Stern, "a Jewish student from Amsterdam," is described as Jewish, and in the original English-subtitled print even this mention is left out. The only nationality of the dead mentioned is Spanish, specifically the 3,000 Spanish prisoners at Mauthausen quarry, where Cayrol was imprisoned. The triangular insignia of the various concentration camp prisoners are discussed: the political prisoners' red and the criminals' green, but not the Jews' yellow stars. Students point out that many of the stills show deportees wearing stars being loaded on trains. Indeed, this disconnection between narrative and image generates a moment to think: why the silence about the Jews? Is that proper? I also ask them who the perpetrators are, and they realize that neither the Germans nor the French, but only the Nazis are mentioned. The film also provokes many other questions: about memory; about the responsibility of the audience; about the responsibility of the filmmakers; about what the filmmakers consider to be characteristic of the Holocaust. Is it the concentration camp universe or the values, attitudes, and institutions which are still in effect? Or, after I ask them what events were taking place in 1955, is the film, as Resnais himself said, about Algeria?

The final exercise the students undertake is an all-day affair. Roughly half of the class spends all or part of the last Saturday or Sunday before finals at the university media classroom viewing the nine-and-a-half hour film by Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah*. The other half reads at their leisure — or discomfort — the 185-page transcript of the film. Individual students' schedules dictate

which alternative they adopt. Students who are part of the viewing group do not have the option of viewing *Shoah* on videotape either prior to or after the scheduled showing. Also, those who have already seen all or part of the film become de facto members of the viewing group and are requested, schedule permitting to attend the all-day event. I tell those who have been selected to attend the screening that if two o'clock comes around and all they can think about is the paper due on Monday and are beginning to be consumed by guilt, then they should pick themselves up and go work on the paper. There is no penalty for leaving early or coming late; all I ask is that they self-consciously realize that they have the choice to get up and leave. Unlike the victims Lanzmann would resurrect on the screen, the students are free to exercise their volition. I suggest that they bring with them whatever would make them comfortable, and if they fall asleep during part of the film, so be it. I reassure them that I have fallen asleep at some point almost every time I've viewed the film. I warn them that at times they may feel bored or restless; their minds will wander. This is as much a part of my intention as is the comparison of the questions and imaginings generated by reading the transcript alongside the cinematic experience.

While Lanzmann divided his film into two parts, or "eras" that are to be seen a day or a week apart, I subject the students to this marathon session in order to have them experience these very banal feelings and thoughts. The Holocaust was not a sudden one-time event; for those who were in the ghettos and the camps the Holocaust was the everyday. It was the ordinary. It was their world. Conversely, by late afternoon, in this windowless room, students often lose their sense of time. The circular structure of the film combined with its sheer length impedes the closure and intentionality that the anticipation of an end, if not a resolution, provides. Add the frequent panning of landscape and train tracks as well as the extended sequences of question-translation-response-translation and all that is Shoah.

And there are the riveting moments: Simon Srebnik, described in the opening of the film as the sole survivor of the second or Church period of the Chelmno death camp, surrounded by the aged Polish bystanders to his ordeal, in front of the same church, on the celebration of Mary's birthday, still spouting the anti-Semitic myth-dreams that kept them standing by; in a barber shop in Israel, cutting a man's hair, Abraham Bomba breaks down and briefly walks away while (re)telling of the days he and his comrades would cut the hair of friends' wives and sisters before they were to enter the gas chamber at Treblinka; the passionate interchanges between Raul Hilberg and Lanzmann over Reichsbahn train schedules to and from Treblinka or Adam Czerniakow's diary; the surreptitious interviews with former SS guards and Reichsbahn officials; Jan Karski's (re)incarnation of his visit to the Warsaw Ghetto, etc. There is the shock, the shame, the audacity, the delusion, the mendacity, the pain, the ironic indignation, the gallows humor, the haunted eyes, nervous smiles, self-satisfied countenances, the tears — both real and crocodile — the downcast face, the throat-cutting gesture, etc. And always, the trains.

In class, I first ask the students who read the transcript what struck them, what was most important, what do they wish they saw. Some speak of tossing the transcript at the wall. Most speak of losing track of who was who as the voices blended into a cast of four: Lanzmann, victim, bystander, perpetrator. Unaware that several of the interviews were done surreptitiously, the readers could not understand why the perpetrators were willing to speak to Lanzmann. All were curious how this film could have lasted nine-and-a-half hours. Then come the responses of the video audience, as they, in part, relive their experience by filling in the blanks, noting the visual cues and contrasts, and providing the dramas for their classmates. And both search for some rationale behind the work's structure, behind the selection of these nine-and-a-half hours from the over 350 hours that were shot. We discuss knowledge, ignorance, deceit, and self-delusion; action, reaction, and inaction; perspective and witness; speaking for the dead, letting the dead speak, and naming names; the role of memory and the role of representation, especially when the students learn that some of the scenes had been staged. The semester ends for the students, I hope, with more questions than they began. Perhaps they have become active decipherers of the messages with which they are daily inundated, attentive to what is happening to them and others. Perhaps they have gained the ability to utilize this useless knowledge and thereby speak about "it" — their world.