Precarity, Vulnerability, Sovereignty: Worldliness and the Work of Hannah Arendt

MCM 2010J

**“[Scholem] is so preoccupied that he has no eyes (and not only that: no ears). Basically, he believes: The midpoint of the world is Israel; the midpoint of Israel is Jerusalem; the midpoint of Jerusalem is the university and the midpoint of the university is Scholem. And the worst of it is that he really believes the world has a central point.”** —Hannah Arendt to Kurt Blumenfeld, January 9, 1957

**“I knew Hannah Arendt when she was a socialist or half-communist and I knew her when she was a Zionist. I am astounded by her ability to pronounce upon movements in which she was once so deeply engaged, in terms of a distance measured in light years and from such sovereign heights.”**   —Gershom Scholem to Hans Paeschke, March 24, 1968

Mondays 3-5:20

Screenings (not every week) – Sundays 7-11 PM OR Thursdays 7-11 PM

Ariella Azoulay/Bonnie Honig

On the 50th anniversary of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, this seminar asks: How did Hannah Arendt's experience as a Jewish refugee from Hitler's Germany shape her democratic theory? Do her democratic theory and suggestive category worldliness provide a distinctive way to look at post-Holocaust diasporic conditions? We consider these questions while reviewing main categories of political philosophy such as state, sovereignty, nation, violence, vulnerability and power, also using supporting texts from Judith Butler, Franz Kafka and others.

In the last 10 years or more, critical and social theorists have turned their attention to vulnerability and precariousness, many of them proceeding out of a critique of sovereignty. These terms -- vulnerability and precariousness -- are sometimes connected to an interest in the body and its fragility and finitude. But they are also sometimes seen as traits of the world. World precariousness may point us to the politics of ecology, environmentalism and sustainability. Thus the terms precarity, vulnerability, and sovereignty relate to forms of subjectivity, processes of subjectivation, and the condition of worldly belonging.

In this class, we will read works by various thinkers engaged with these topics and concerns, focusing on Arendt most centrally, but informed also by engagement with Kafka, Butler, Sivan and others, in order to inquire into the following questions: What are the conditions of resilience or vulnerability and how do they shape different experiences of the human? And the world? Is sovereignty as such opposed to vulnerability or might there be varieties of sovereignty? Might the quest for some forms of sovereignty be not only a response to felt vulnerability but also a cause or condition of it? How might these theoretical questions be connected in some way to the experience of diaspora?

**Books to Purchase:**

Hannah Arendt,[1951]. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

Hannah Arendt, [1958]. *The Human Condition*

Hannah Arendt, [1963]. *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

Judith Butler, [2006]. *Precarious Life*

Franz Kafka, [1926]. *The Castle*, trans. Mark Harmon (Schocken)

**Syllabus:**

**1. Jan 27th (read in class)**

“Sonning Prize acceptance speech” at http://miscellaneousmaterial.blogspot.com/2011/08/hannah-arendt-sonning-prize-acceptance.html

Screening:

Jan 27: *Hannah Arendt*, 2012, director: Margarethe von Trotta, Cogut Center (the film will be screened again on the last week of March)

Recommended:

Jan 28th, 12-1:30, panel on the movie with the participation of Margarethe von Trotta (director), Pam Katz, Michael Steinberg, Bonnie Honig, Adi Ophir, Ariella Azoulay, Cogut Center

**2. Feb 3**

“The Jew As Pariah – A Hidden Tradition”, *Jewish Social Studies, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Apr., 1944), pp. 99-122.*

Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*

RECOMMENDED: Series of exchanges with, and excerpts from, Arendt responses to participants in the conference on her work in Toronto Society for the Study of Social and Political Thought, 1971 (in *Hannah Arendt – The Recovery of The Public World* (Ed. Melvyn A. Hill)

Screening:

*What Remains? The Language Remains*, a conversation between Hannah Arendt and Gunter Gaus, 1964

**3. Feb 10th**

*The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Vol 1 [preface to part one (pp. XI-XVI, ch. 1: Antisemitism as an outrage to common sense” (pp. 3-10), ch. 2: “the Jews, the nation-state and he birth of anti-Semitism” (pp. 11-35), ch. 3: “The Jews and society” (pp. 54-68)

Feb 17th

NO CLASS

**4. Feb 24th**

*The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Vol II , “Preface to part two” (pp. XVII-XXII), pp. 175-190; 222-249; 267-302

Ariella Azoulay, 2013. “*Tour in The Museum Of Dark Regime”, Humanity////*

Screening*:*

*The last of the Unjust*, director: Claude Lanzmann, 2013

The film will be shown at the French Film Festival:

SUNDAY, 02/23, 2:15 PM & THURSDAY, 02/27, 6:30 PM.

Recommended: Mark Lilla, “The defense of a Jewish collaborator” [*The New York Review of Books,* December 5th 2013) <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2013/dec/05/defense-jewish-collaborator/>

**5. March 3rd**

*The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Vol III “Preface to part three” (pp. XXIII- XL), pp. 323-340; 348-354; 387f; 411-459; 474-479

Screening:

**The Trial of Adolf Eichmann**(2013), director: Michaël Prazan (90 min)

**6. March 10th**, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* [chs: 1, 2, 3, 8, pp 190-194, chs: 14, 15, Epilogue and postscript]

Hannah Arendt, 2013 [1964], “Eichmann was outrageously stupid”, Interview by Joachim Fest, *Das Thema*, SWR TV, Germany [translated by Andrew Brown] + “The Last Interview” (**excerpt),** Interview by Roger Errera, October 1973, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations – Hannah Arendt*, Melville House.

Shoshana Felman, 2007. “A Ghost In The House of Justice: Death and the Language of the Law”, *The Claims of Litterature - Shoshana Felman Reader*, Fordham University.

Eichmann in Jerusalem: An Exchange of Letters between Gershom Scholem and Hannah Arendt." *Encounter* 22, no. 1 (1964):

Recommended:

<http://undertheoculartree.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/arendt-ezra-the-eichmann-polemics-hannah-arendt-and-her-critics-democratiya-issue-9-summer-2007.pdf>

Screening:

Mar 9th, 13th, 7-11 PM, *The Specialist,* director: Eyal Sivan

**7. March 17th  Monday – CLASS IS AT 7 PM**

*Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and *The Specialist*, discussion with the director: Eyal Sivan

March 24th

NO CLASS

**8. March 31st**

Judith Butler, “Hannah Arendt’s Death Sentences” in *Comparative Literature Studies* athttp://muse.jhu.edu/journals/comparative\_literature\_studies/v048/48.3.butler.pdf

Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* Butler, *Precarious Life*, chs. 1 ,2, 3, 5.

 (selections)

Frantz Kafka, *The Castle* (selections)

Recommended:

Judith Butler: PERFORMATIVITY, PRECARITY AND SEXUAL POLITICS, (AIBR) Lecture at Madrid, 2009 -- <http://www.aibr.org/antropologia/04v03/criticos/040301b.pdf>

Screening:

*Hannah Arendt*, 2013. Director: Margarethe von Trotta,

**9. April 7th**

*The Human Condition* (intro and last chapter)

**10. April 14th**

*The Human Condition* (chs. “Labor” and “Work”)

Bonnie Honig, “Hannah Arendt’s Object Relations”

(BH is AWAY)

**11. April 21th**,

*The Human Condition*, (“Action”)

“Introduction *Into* Politics”, 2005. *The Promise of Politics*, Schocken Books.

(AA is away)

END