

# Aftermath of the Holocaust

# The trauma of modernity (Z.Baumann)

- Without modern civilization and its more central essential achievements there would be no Holocaust
- Modern rationality (efficiency, planning, R+D, management, coordination, cost-effective production, division of labor)
- Nation state (bureaucracy, centralized transport system, obedience and trust in state authorities)
- Propaganda, deception, mass-communication

# Myths of Modernity

- Overambitious Claims  
Disenchantment, Enlightenment, Rationality,  
Knowledge, Science, Freedom, Truth, Progress
- Rationality of means, Irrationality of Goals
- Escape from freedom, loneliness, anxiety, fallibility,  
striving for a New Community, prejudice, superstition,

# Coping with the Holocaust

Initially the Holocaust was not the Holocaust

Gradual evolvement from the progressive narrative into the tragical one

- The mass killings came to be seen as not being typical of anything at all
- The Trauma-Drama of Eternal Return

Questions: Was the Holocaust unique?

Was it inevitable?

Can it be repeated?

Is the Holocaust Western?

# Jeffrey Alexander

- after the Allied triumph and the physical discovery of the concentration camps that nature of what was seen had to be coded, weighted and narrated
- postponement of the recognition of the Jewish trauma
- to understand how and why the initial interpretation was radically changed into the interpretation of „radical evil”

# Night and Fog

The term used by the Nazis to describe the policy of secrecy and concealment surrounding the death camps.

- Silence of Survivors
- Silence of Perpetrators
- Silence of God

# Language of the perpetrators

- Language of genocide (denial of being evil)
- No remorse
- Crime with a „good cause”
- Justification (blaming the victims, exploitation, intrusion, parasitism)
- No proper words (bureaucratic language)

# New Order (perpetrators)

- Perfect, clean society, order, harmony, conflict-free, control
- The victims did not fit in the scheme of perfect society
- Their killing was not seen as the work of destruction but creation



# Silence of victims

- Sources: DEGOB testimonies, witness testimonies at trials, diaries, letters, memoires, documentary films, fiction
- Lack of total perspective, fragmentation, incomplete knowledge, accidentality, selectivity, involvement, partisanship, self-presentation, self-justification
- Eyewitness accounts of events may at times be less credible than studies made after the fact and by people at some distance from it
- Suicide as communication (Celan, Borowski, Levi)

- „The Germans even forbade us to use the words ‘corpse’ or ‘victim’. The dead were blocks of wood, shit, with absolutely no importance. Anyone who uttered the word ‘corpse’ or ‘victim’ was beaten. The Germans made us refer to the bodies as *Figuren*, that is, as puppets, as dolls, or *Schmattes*, which means ‘rags’.

# Silence of perpetrators

- Himmler in 1943: „In our history this is an unwritten and never-to-be written page of glory”
- „Sept.2. 1942. Was present for the first time at a special action at 3pm. By comparison Dante’s Inferno seems almost a comedy. Auschwitz is justly called an extermination camp.” (J. Kremer)
- „good cause”
- Blaming the victims
- Moral indignation („excesses”)
- „confession”

# Shock

- „My first impression of Treblinka, and that of some of the other men, was catastrophic. For we had not been told how and what...that people were being killed there. They hadn't told us.”

# Silence of God

- Return to chaos
- Damage done to our traditional concepts of God and Man
- Most serious, most alarming

# Search for a word

- „a crime without a name” (W.Churchill)
- Die Endlösung
- Holocaust: a great or complete devastation or destruction, especially by fire (burnt whole)
- Sacrifice, an offering made by fire into the Lord
- Shoah (catastrophe and heroism)
- The war against the Jews (L.Dawidowicz)
- The Destruction of European Jews (R.Hilberg)

# Search for the meaning

„be“= „mean“

Meaning: which fits into a framework (previous knowledge)but, there was no such a framework

Beyond imagination

Holocaust defies reference, analogy

Incredibility, disbelief

Uselessness of words (can words help to know what happened? Words, which have limitations, which reflect previous knowledge that some things are impossible?)

In fact: Everything is possible (normal men do not know, they think that some is possible, some is impossible. This is not true. )

„Kein warum“ (P.Levi)

A universe apart (totally cut off)

The weird kingdom of an unlikely fatality

The concentratory universe

# „the progressive narrative

- dejudaization
- „atrocities”
- „man’s inhumanity to man”
- „crimes against humanity”



# War story

- The protagonists:  
German Nazis and American GIs
- the plot: liberation
- „freed slave laborers”
- „These were inmates of prison camps set free in the allied advance: for many we came too late” (May 5, 1945, Picture Post)

# Universalisation

- „genocide”
- Nuremberg Trial
- „incredible events”
- the representation of Nazism as an absolute evil
- coded name for Jews (defenseless and innocent people)
- what was a trauma for the victims was not trauma for the audience
- Israel as redemption
- the mass killings came to be seen as not being typical of anything at all

# The tragic narrative

- „Tragedy is the representation of a complete, i.e. whole action without magnitude. A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle and a conclusion. A beginning is that which itself does not of necessity follow something else, but after which there naturally is, or comes into being, something else. A conclusion, conversely, is that which itself naturally follows something else, either of necessity or for the most part, but has nothing else after it. A middle is that which itself naturally follows something else, and has something else after it. Well-constructed plots, then, should neither begin from a random point nor conclude at a random point, but should use the elements we have mentioned (Aristotle, 1987).

# Dramatization

## Personalization

- Anne Frank's Diary (book, Broadway)
- Holocaust television series

## Enlarging the Circle of Perpetrators

- Eichmann's trial
- Schindler's list





# Lanzman's Shoah (1985)

- The horrible realities hidden beneath camouflage
- Telling and retelling the same things, the trains arrived, the wagons being opened and corpses tumbling out, the thirst, the unawareness riddled with fear, the stripping and 'disinfection' procedures, the gas chambers being opened



# SHOAH

Un film de Claude Lanzmann



# Becoming symbol

- the Holocaust Museums
- databases
- Institutionalization
- goal: to arouse strong emotions, and particular immersion of the visitor into the past
- high tech
- interactive exhibits
- to protect against future evil
- personal involvement
- witness testimonies
- Yad Vasem

# Berlin Holocaust Memorial

