World War II: The Cultural Production of its Historical Memory
Organizers: Phyllis Lassner and Ravenel Richardson

As current cultural production demonstrates - including the recent film Dunkirk, the French TV series A French Village, Alan Furst’s ongoing spy thrillers, and various portrayals of Winston Churchill’s wartime leadership - World War II remains imprinted on artists’ creative memory and retains broad popular and scholarly appeal. From the wartime period onwards, film, fiction, and other media have continued to represent, interpret, and revise cultural representations and ethical frameworks to fathom the complex political motivations, military practices, and individual and collective ethical and psychological responses throughout the global war, including the Holocaust, and the war’s aftermath. Wartime examples of the breadth of representation include filmmakers such as George Stevens and journalists Martha Gellhorn, Lee Miller, and Dorothy Thompson who reported the horrific sights they witnessed on the way from the D-Day Normandy landings to Berlin. In the aftermath, knowledge of the Holocaust transformed perceptions of total victory into recognition of the war’s totalizing tragedy with the publication of The Diary of Anne Frank and Elie Wiesel’s Night. Such writers as Marguerite Duras (Hiroshima Mon Amour and The War) and W.G. Sebald (The Emigrants and Austerlitz) portrayed the instability of memory in the face of trauma.

Today, debates about comparative genocides are founded on questions that reverberate from World War II and the Holocaust, such as who is historically, culturally, politically, and ethically authorized to speak of their war experiences, who is silenced, and what stories are told and left untold.

This seminar invites participants to share studies of past and present cultural representations of World War II in different media and genres such as literary, popular, and middlebrow fiction, life writing, oral and video testimony, written and photo journalism, film, TV, and the plastic arts. Our objective is to study the interplay of cultural and ethical representations of World War II in a comparative framework. Encouraged categories of analysis include traumatic and contested history and memory, victimization, complicity, collaboration, resistance, and gendered, racial, and religious implications. Our method will compare various iterations and artistic productions spanning the past 72 years to shed critical light on the persistent yet changing memory and memorialization of the war. Our interdisciplinary and transnational approach will illuminate how historical memory of World War II was created in political and aesthetic terms in various media during the war. In turn, we will interrogate the ways in which post-war interpretations and reinterpretations have conjoined aesthetic and ethical concerns that continue to resonate in today’s representations of global conflicts.
How to submit an abstract:

ACLA follows a distinctive format, where papers are grouped into seminars that meet for two hours a day for 2-3 consecutive days of the conference. This CFP will result in our selection of 8 papers to comprise a proposed seminar. **You can submit a paper proposal via the acla.org website between 12:00 noon August 30, 2018 and 9:00 AM September 20, 2018.** Once we have selected the 8 seminar papers by October 4, 2018, the proposed seminar is reviewed by the ACLA. Seminar acceptance will be finalized and participants notified by November 1, 2018.

We encourage you to email us if you are interested in proposing a paper, or if you have any questions.

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