“Civil Resistance in Central and Eastern Europe Reflected in: Literature, Art and Film”

Syllabus Spring 2011

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Office hours by appointment -Wed. or Thurs. Afternoon.

Course description: The course will examine the nature and significance of civil resistance in Central and Eastern Europe in the 20th century in a transversal, multi-disciplinary way. By studying literature, art and film we will operate in a space between modern history, political science, literature and film studies and psychology.

Civil resistance is not the same as just opting out of society or having views which go against the grain. It is far more fundamental than that and anybody raised in a democratic society where freedom of expression – both civil and artistic – is guaranteed, faces a challenge in trying to understand the circumstances in which people lived in this region in the past hundred years. It is about taking a decision – not to conform, not to go quietly along, with repressive regimes like communism and Nazism. It is also about choosing the mode of action – political i.e. non-violent or military, especially in the times of war. Until recently, study as tended to emphasize the role of physical force in dealing with totalitarian regimes. Since 1989 there has been growing recognition that civil, artistic and educational activities can be equally important.

You can not understand civil resistance without understanding what the resistance is against – so this course requires us to get a foundation of understanding in how totalitarian regimes act, why people actively conform with them and why free expression and access to information from the outside world is considered as the biggest threat. We are looking to see a combination of both theory and practice. To truly understand the powerful stories we will see in literature, art and film, we have to understand both the theoretical and factual backgrounds.

In Central and Eastern Europe, the questions activists and artists never stopped asking were why authoritarian societies developed from ideals that seemed fair and peaceful?; what the purpose and limits of free creation were and whether ideas still mattered? People involved in civil resistance took powerfully practical steps which led to real consequences for them and finally undermined the regimes. All this is marvelously reflected in literature, art and film production that is today fully available.

In order to reinforce the point that the issues we are examining have meaning across regions and times, we will work thematically rather than chronologically. In this course we will be mixing approaches to how we explore the issues. In addition to traditional lecturing, there will be reading, videos and films. We will invite people who can talk personally about some of the issues and we will do field trips within Prague – the city that experienced liberal democracy, Nazism and Communism in only one century. Where necessary will take a flexible approach in order to be able to take advantage of persons and events who might enrich the course being available in the semester.

Grading policy:
Class participation/attendance: 20%  
Mid-term: 30 %
Final: 30%  
Papers or other assignments: 20%
Schedule of classes:

Week 1

1. 26 January
   Overview of the course, its structure, papers to be prepared, reading required and recommended. Showing of Sergej Ejzenstejn’s “The Battleship Potemkin” (1925).

2. 27 January

Week 2

3. February 2
   The notion of absurdity of any given totalitarian regime, the exploration of the situation of an innocent individual being treated as a potential criminal or enemy of the state, being Jewish in Central Europe. Pls read Franz Kafka: “Letters to Milena” (1925).
   Showing of “The Rhythm in My Heels” by Josef Škvorecký and Andrea Sedláčková (2010)

4. February 3
   Intelligent individuals trusting and serving a dictatorship e.g. in the communist Soviet Russia under Stalin and realizing too late what the real foundations of such a regime are.
   Showing of Nikita Mikhalkov: “Burnt by the Sun”.

Week 3

5. February 9
   Another option for an intelligent, honest person in the Soviet Russia – trying to stay out of the historical events, an impossible attempt to live without either compromising with the regime or fighting it.
   Pls read Boris Pasternak: “Doktor Zhivago”.
   Showing of the film.

6. February 10
   The general analysis of a non-democratic, oppressive system, whether it is Communism or Nazism and the striving of individuals for love, freedom and truth.
   Pls read George Orwell: “1984”.
   Showing of the film.

Week 4

7. February 16
   The appeal of totalitarian ideology to some artists and intellectuals – by opportunism, by conviction?
   Leni Riefenstahl and Albert Speer serving the Nazi regime and their different perception of guilt later on.
   Showing of “The Triumph of the Will”.
   Pls read Gita Sereny’s biography of Albert Speer.

8. February 17
An opposite reaction of students fighting the oppressive regime and believing in democracy as a fair social environment.  
Pls read Karel Čapek. “The Talks with T.G. Masaryk”.  

Week 5

9. February 23  
How totalitarian ideology deals with its real or imagined opponents. Mass human rights abuses in the Soviet Russia and witnesses who had difficulties to be trusted in Western liberal democracies.  
Pls read Alexander Solzhenitsyn:“The Gulag Archipelago”.

10. February 24  
Another example of an abusive regime dealing not only with its opponents, but other groups as well – Jews, Slaves, Romas, handicapped mentally or physically. Individual versus collective guilt.  
Showing of “The Nazis: A Warning from History”documentary (Chaos and Consent).

Week 6

11. March 2  
Surviving inhuman conditions of war, occupation, ghetto and concentration camp. The notion of human solidarity, believing in good as a realistic concept after all, as well as friendship and love.  
The notion of guilt.  
Showing of “The Diamonds of the Night”.

12. March 3  
A more skeptical vision of people conforming with the occupation and rules of the dictatorship. Collaboration versus heroism.  

Week 7

13. March 9  
Jews as a persecuted group, the psychology of victimization and marginalization of a given social group by the majoritarian society.  
Pls read Imre Kertész: “Fatelessness”.  
Showing of the film.

14. March 10  
The loneliness of those who came back – from the front, from a prison, from a camp. Original beliefs confronted with today’s reality.  
Showing of Reiner W. Fassbinder: “The Marriage of Maria Braun”.

Week 8

15. March 16  
Mid-term paper written in class

16. March 17
Methods generally used by any totalitarian ideology whether it is Communism or Nazism or any current extremist movement. Brain washing, psychological humiliation, physical torture, attacks on one’s beliefs and moral, isolation from the outside world. 

Week 9 SPRING BREAK NO Class

Week 10

17. March 30
An attempt to catalogue and analyze the crimes of Communism over seventy years. 
Revelation of the actual, practical impacts of the ideology around the world – terror, torture, famine, mass deportations, massacres. 
Pls read Karel Bartošek’s chapter in Stéphane Courtois and coll.: “The Black Book of Communism”.

18. March 31
What is it like to live in a society that is essentially not free and how do people react towards power. Conformity versus protest. 

Week 11

19. April 6

20. April 7
A very different look at the social reality of the 80’s – although the abuse of power is omnipresent, a revolt is possible. Background of the Gdansk events just before the declaration of the martial law. Showing of Andrzej Wajda and Agnieszka Holland: “The Man of Iron” (1977)

Week 12

21. April 13
Another perspective on the every day existence in Poland in the 80’s – the alternative community of dissidents versus the ‘realistic’ approach of the majority of people under the repressive regime. Showing of Krzysztof Kieslowski: “No End”.

22. April 14
Dissent and civil resistance as a phenomenon of the 20th century in Central and Eastern Europe. Life in truth as a response to the totalitarian regime, possibilities of help from the outside world. Pls read Jeri Laber: “The Courage of Strangers”.

Week 13

23. April 20
Secret police and its collaborators as an omnipresent control of people’s lives. 
24. April 21

Week 14

25. April 27

26. April 28
Samizdat as a specific way of communication. Visit of the Libri Prohibiti Library in Prague.

Week 15

27. May 4
Another perspective of the secret service activities – showing of “Lives of the Others”.

28. May 5 Back to where we started – the fall of the Berlin Wall in “Goodbye Lenin” - showing of the film.

Week 16 Exam week – May 11 - Final Paper written in class.
Required readings and films:

Sergej Ejzenštejn: The Battleship Potěmkin, 1925
Franz Kafka: Letters to Milena, 1925,
Boris Pasternak: Doctor Zhivago, 1958
Nikita Michalkov: Burnt by the Sun, 1994
George Orwell: 1984, publ. 1949
Alexander Solzhenitzyn: Gulag Archipelago, 1963
Nazis :The Warning from History
Leni Riefenstahl: The Triumph of Will, Albert Speer – Gita Sereny biography
Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí, René Magritte, Max Ernst, Josef and Karel Čapek
Arnošt Lustig: Lovely Green Eyes, 2002
Josef Škvorecký: The Cowards, 1958
Imre Kertész: Fatelessness, 1975
Reiner W. Fassbinder: The Marriage of Maria Braun, 1978
Artur London: The Confession, 1970
Jan Němec: The Party and the Guests, 1966
Jaroslav Seifert: City in Tears
Czeslaw Milosz: Verses, My Native Europe
Krysztof Kieslowski: No End, 1981
Jeri Laber: The Courage of Strangers, 2002
Bohumil Hrabal: Too Loud A Solitude, 1976
Vladimir Vysockij, Wolf Biermann, Karel Kryl, Jaroslav Hutka, Svatopluk Karásek and other song-writers
Milan Kundera: The Unbearable Lightness of Being, 1982
Ivan Klíma: Love and Garbage, 1986
Václav Havel: Power of the Powerless, 1978
Adam Michnik: Letters from Prison and Other Essays, 1986

**Recommended readings and films:**

Claudio Magris: Danube, 1986
Josette Baer, ed.: Preparing Liberty in Central Europe, 2006
Franz Kafka: The Castle 1926, America (The Missing), 1927
Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: The Communist Manifesto
P. Čornej-J. Pokorný: A Brief history of the Czech lands
Philippe Herzog: Travelling hopefully, 2006
George Orwell: The Animal Farm, 1945, A Homage to Catalonia, 1938
Alexander Solzhenitsyn: One Day in Life of Ivan Denisovič, 1963
Adolf Hitler: Mein Kampf
Pablo Picasso: Guernica, 1937
Leni Riefenstahl: The Triumph of Will, 1934
Albert Speer’s architecture of the Third Reich
Ernest Hemingway: Goodbye, Army, 1929, For Whom the Bell Tolls, 1940
Karel Čapek: Talks with Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, 1935
Edward B. Hitchcock: Edvard Beneš – Built a Temple for Peace,
Primo Levi: If this is a Man, 1947, The Drowned and the Saved, 1987, When if Not Now?, 1982
Robert Jay Lifton: Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism
Hannah Arendt: Eichmann in Jerusalem, Viking Press, 1963
Andrzej Wajda: Ashes and Diamonds, Promised Land, The Man of Marble
Roman Polanski: The Pianist, 2002
Josef Korbel: The Communist Subversion of Czechoslovakia, 1959
Jaroslav Seifert: The Plague Column, All the Beauties of the World, 1986
Krysztof Zanussi: The Structure of Crystal
Krysztof Kieslowski: The Decalogue, The Trilogy – Blue, White, Red
Erich Fromm: The Heart of Man, To Have or To Be, The Art of Loving, The Art of Listening
Karen Horney: Neurosis and Human Growth
Ivan Klíma: Waiting for the Dark, Waiting for the Light, The Judge By Mercy
Jan Patočka, Jiří Hájek, Václav Havel: The Charter 77 Declaration
Michail Gorbachev: Glasnost and Perestrojka in the USSR
Ludvík Vaculík: The Czech Dreambook, 1980