Class code: IDSEM-UG-9204-001

Instructor Details
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Office hours before and after the class and arranged by mail

Class Details
Central European Film: Search for Identity (Comparison between Nazism and Stalinism)
Wed 15:00-17:45
Location to be confirmed.

Prerequisites
None – the class can be useful for students of history, film, media, sociology, psychology etc.

Class Description
This unique interdisciplinary course is designed to discuss and question the identity of specific nations in European space, which have always been a fascinating crossroad of ideas and ideologies as well as the birthplace of wars and totalitarian systems. The course will cover masterpieces of Russian, Hungarian, German, French, Georgian, Polish and Czech cinematography, focusing on several crucial periods of history, in particular WWII. and its aftermath as well as revealing the bitter truth and brutality of the Stalinist years. Students will be exposed to brilliant and often controversial works of film art focusing on moral dilemmas of individuals under the stressful times of history. Participants of this course will thus map the European space through the means of film trying to analyze the individual approach to historical events while getting a general picture of Europe in its crucial periods of history - and last but not least learn to appreciate European film art.

Lectures, film screening, discussion sessions

Desired Outcomes
1. Learn about the historical and geo-political context within the European space.
2. Investigate the best of the European film art.
3. Learn about the specifics of various film-makers’ means of expression.
4. Learn to analyze the screened films.

Assessment Components
Class participation/attendance: 25%
Response papers after each screening (2-3 pages) 15%
Mid-term paper - in class work (5-6 pages) 20%
20% Final paper – out of class (10 pages) 40%

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class.

**Assessment Expectations**

- **Grade A:** Excellent work demonstrating a critical and observant approach to the subject, sound research and an ability to express thoughts cogently and persuasively.
- **Grade B:** Very good work.
- **Grade C:** Satisfactory work.
- **Grade D:** Passable work.
- **Grade F:** Failure to achieve a passable standard.

**Grade conversion**

- A=94-100
- A-=90-93
- B+=87-89
- B=84-86
- B-=80-83
- C+=77-79
- C=74-76
- C-=70-73
- D+=67-69
- D=65-66
- F=below 65

**Grading Policy**

Each unexcused absences will result in your final grade being reduced by 3%. Absences only for medical reasons will be excused. To obtain an excused absence, you are obliged to supply either a doctor’s note or corroboration of your illness by a member of the housing staff (either an RA or a Building Manager). Absences due to travel will not be excused.

**Late Submission of Work**

Late submission of written works is not allowed.

**Plagiarism Policy**

According to the Liberal Studies Program Student Handbook, plagiarism is defined as follows:
Plagiarism is presenting someone else’s work as though it were one’s own. More specifically plagiarism is to present as one’s own a sequence of words quoted without quotation marks from another writer, a paraphrased passage from another writer’s work; facts or ideas gathered, organized and reported by someone else, orally and/or in writing. Since plagiarism is a matter of fact, not of the student’s intention, it is crucial that acknowledgment of the sources be accurate and complete. Even where there is no conscious intention to deceive, the failure to make appropriate acknowledgment constitutes plagiarism.

The College of Arts and Science’s Academic Handbook defines plagiarism similarly and also specifies the following:

“presenting an oral report drawn without attribution from other sources (oral or written), writing a paragraph which, despite being in different words, expresses someone else’s idea without a reference to the source of the idea, or submitting essentially the same paper in two different courses (unless both teachers have given their permission in advance).

Receiving help on a take-home examination or quiz is also cheating – and so is giving that help – unless expressly permitted by the teacher (as in collaborative projects). While all this looks like a lot to remember, all you need to do is give credit where it is due, take credit only for original ideas, and ask your teacher or advisor when in doubt.”

“Penalties for plagiarism range from failure for a paper, failure for the course or dismissal from the university.” (Liberal Studies Program Student Handbook)

### Required Text(s)
All required texts are included in the Course Reader available in the library.

### Supplemental Text(s) (not required to purchase as copies are in NYUP Library)
- Imre, Arniko: East European Cinema, new York, Routledge 2005
- Amis, Martin: Koba, the Dread, Vintage, London 2005
- Peukert, Detlev J.K.: Inside Nazi Germany, Yale University Press, 1987

Selected handouts and texts from New Perspective on European Film

### Internet Research Guidelines
Be cautious; rely on institutional and accredited sites.

### Additional
none
Screening: The Shop on Main Street, directors Jan Kadar, Elmar Klos
Non-heroic “ordinary” man in the midst of the turmoil caused by the necessity of making crucial life-and-death decisions. Tragedy in the lives of human beings facing moral disintegration in the Slovak “puppet” Nazi state in the course of WWII. Oscar winner.

Discussion: the moral dilemma of the main protagonist, Slovak collaboration with the Nazis and its consequences on Slovak psyche today, the role of the Catholic Church in the “independent” Slovak State, similarities and differences of the Nazi ideology in both Czech Lands and Slovakia, Czechoslovakia under communist rule.

Reading: Brief History of the Czech Lands to 2004, Petr Cornej, Coronet Books – in the NYU library.

Screening: Closely Watched Trains, director Jiri Menzel
Tragicomic private problems of a young man working as an apprentice at a small Central Bohemian railway station in the course of WWII. Individual lives in the omnipresent war situation. Humor, love, sex and death in a film based on a novel by the renowned Czech writer Bohumil Hrabal.
Oscar winner.
Discussion: searching for ones’ identity versus public affairs-WWII., private opposed to public, the roots of the so-called passive resistance of the Czechs, the role of women in the film – passive objects versus active human beings, male stereotypes, the importance of a uniform and stamps in society, new look on the Germans in the war, Hrabalesque poetics transformed into the film.
Reading: Brief History of Czech Lands, Hitler’s Popular Image and the ‘Jewish Question’ chapter(The Hitler’s Myth).

Screening: Diamonds of the Night, director Jan Nemec
Man under both internal and external pressure: lack of freedom, people on the run. Jan Nemec as a specific phenomenon of the Czech New Wave in Cinema of the 60’s. Absurd, surrealistic Bunuelian experiment of almost a silent movie of fear, hunger, friendship and despair. Based on a realistic A.Lustig’s story of two boys escaping the concentration camp transport.
Discussion: Czech New Wave in Cinema at its experimental peak, comparison of the book and the film, inspiration of Russian silent cinema, how no music, hardly any dialogue but lots of diegetic sound influences the atmosphere of the film.
Reading: Miracle of the Czech New Wave, A.J. Liehm /Reader: Darkness Has No Shadow, story by Lustig.

Screening: Mephisto, director Szabo Istvan
Based on a famous novel by Klaus Mann, a deeply disturbing film about the complicity of an exceptionally ambitious actor who starts his career in early 1930s Germany when he takes a dangerous path. Best Foreign Film 1982.
Discussion: how can an artist survive under any authoritarian regime without losing both his calling and self-esteem? How far can one go in collaborating with the system? In which way is the artist’ life and work different from the lives of so-called ordinary man – both living under a dictatorship?
Reading: The History of Everyday Life—a different perspective, chapter from Inside Nazi Germany, Detlev JK Peukert, Order and Terror, chapter from Inside Nazi Germany Nazi Germany and the pathologies and dislocations of modernity: thirteen theses, chapter from Inside Nazi Germany.
Session 5
March 6

Screening: Europa, Europa, director Agnieszka Holland
A picturesque story of lost and found identity of both main protagonist and Europe shows the impossibility to impose labels. The drama of recognition and misrecognition emphasizes the epistemological impotency of hearing and vision in determining supposedly biologically-based identities. Based on a true story of Solomon Perel, the film points out that under certain circumstance of survival human being is able to do anything to save oneself physically though cannot always succeed in saving one’s integrity and identity. Tragedy and humor, grotesque situations, man in the midst of historical events.

Discussion: The influence of Polish School and Cinema of Moral Anxiety on this mainstream film, A.Holland and her more internationally acclaimed film Europa, Europa in the view of her early Polish films. Non/importance of one’s integrity and thus identity.

Reading: A.Holland – Course Reader, article on Europa,Europa, Course Reader

Session 6
March 13

Screening: The Tin Drum, director Volker Schlondorff
Oscar winning adaptation of Nobel Prize winner Gunter Grass’ allegorical novel depicting Oscar, the son of a German family living in Gdansk /Danzig/, a city where German, Poles and a Kashubian minority live together until the outbreak of the WWII. Oscar decides one day that he never grows up… Controversial work - at some point banned in several states of the US for its very open sexual context and rather bizarre quality. Visionary work of art full of surreal imagery, eroticism and fierce satire.

Discussion: Magic realism in the film, absurd and realistic and combination of both, grotesque identity of an outsider with power, situation of the Poles and Germans before and in WWII.

Reading: The history of everyday life – a different perspective, Detlev J.K. Peukert
The Tin Drum, Course Reader,
Volker Schlondorff, Course Reader

Session 7
March 15

Make-up day

Screening: Conformist, director Bernardo Bertolucci
Based on a novel by an infamous Italian writer Alberto Moravia. An individual under Mussolini's Italy who gets involved with fascist system and works for it. In order to be as ‘normal’ as possible he becomes rather monstrous puppet of the system compromising with his conscious. Combination of repressed sexual desires and fascist policy seems to be quite an explosive. The role of the Catholic Church once again questioned as much as a typical ‘petit bourgeois’ behavior.

Discussion: how far can one go in conforming to the system? Focus on the artistic expression of the inner feelings of the main protagonist. Film artistry of Bernardo Bertolucci.

Reading: Bernardo Bertolucci, Course Reader

Mid-term

Session 8
March 20

Screening: Ashes and Diamonds, director Andrzej Wajda
Part of a WWII. trilogy ( A Generation, Kanal) of a renowed Polish director focuses on a small Polish town celebrating the end of the war while new animosities are arising. Passion and anger, visual dynamism that includes the heavy use of symbols reminiscent of so-called cinema noir. The beautifully gloomy performance of Polish author-icon Zbigniew Cybulski as a young assassin remains unforgettable. The metaphorical message of the film suggests that Polish identity was seriously harmed not only by the fascist period, but also by the import of communism from the Soviet Union, a daring statement in the 50’s when the film was made.

Discussion: Polish school, Cinema of Moral Anxiety/Cinema of Moral Disent, personal courage and cowardice in the war and post war times, individual longings in contradiction with public task. Can one ever fully recover from being shaped by the war?

Reading: Wasted Journey into the Greener Grass, Course Reader

Session 9

Screening: Burnt by the Sun, director Nikita Mikhalkov
March 22

Make-up day

Russia in 1936 heading into Stalinist terror purges. Dedicated to ‘everyone who was burnt by the sun of the Revolution’, the film is an attack on the brutal policies and paranoia of Stalin. The Chekhovian atmosphere at a typical Russian dacha with few representatives of ‘good old days’ and colonel Kotov, ‘the face of the Revolution’ at one spot. The first anti-Stalinist film to come out of the post-communist Russia, Oscar winner 1995.

Discussion: cruel intentions of Stalinist Russia, the faithfulness to the homeland as a blind naiveté? Private lives under enormous stress of the system, sheer brutality of Stalinism.

Reading: Stalin in the mirror of the others, Moshe Lewin in Stalinism and Nazism by I.Kershaw, Moshe Lewin, Course reader

Session 10

Screening: Repentance, director Tengiz Abuladze

Georgian director made this melodramatic satire in 1984 - the times of so-called glasnost in the Soviet Union. Political parable about evils of totalitarianism in a surrealistic way attacks the malevolence of dictators who are only power-greedy while profess to serve the will of the people. Celebrating of ethical values of religion and culture values as alternatives to any tyranny. Very specific cinematography applying Georgian tradition as well as modern means of film language. Very expressive acting adds up to a really unique experience.

Discussion: how does art stand up to totalitarian tyranny? Can art change politics? Is any fight against evil system hopeless? Can ethics win over evil power?

Reading: Course Reader

Spring break

April 1-5

Mid-term

Session 11

Screening: The Double Life of Veronique, director Krzysztof Kieslowski

The first major internationally acclaimed film by a Polish director who moved to live in France explores human emotion and identity in a very delicate way. The mysteriously simultaneous lives of two girls, Polish and French, who are each other’s doubles and who both feel a strange link to each other’s lives. Very sensitive film exploring the human spirit, moral and ethics.

Discussion: Cinema of Moral Anxiety as a background for this film? Is there any general nation’s identity? The role of coincidence and magic in our lives. Reality and subconscious mind.

Reading: On Kieslowski, Course Reader

Session 12

Screening: Stalker, director Andrei Tarkovsky

A mystery by the ingenious Russian director, based on a sci-fi story Roadside Picnic by Arcade and Boris Strugatsky takes you to the Zone, a guarded realm with a mystical Room in which dreams come true. The Stalker, a leader, hunter and guide, escorts Writer and Scientist through the foreboding territory, facing many a challenge. This is a ride into human soul, a philosophical journey as well as visually truly outstanding film known for its use of very long takes. This film is the peak of the whole semester.

Discussion: Who is Stalker? An insane genius, God, misfit? What is the Zone? How to deal with it? Reality and surreality in the film, warning prophecy or imaginative philosophical film-essay?

Reading: Course Reader

Session 13

Screening: The Return, director Andrei Zvyagintsev The winner of the 2003 Grand Prize at Venice Film Festival is a stunning debut of a forty years old Russian director who renewes the great tradition of Russian cinematic mysticism epitomized by the works of Andrei Tarkovsky. The realistic story of a father returning to his two sons transforms into a mythological journey, both naturalistic and dream-like. Can be also understood from both Freudian and biblical point of view.

Discussion: Identity of the ‘Father’ from a religious, political and Freudian point of view, inspiration by Tarkovsky’s work, the role of women in the film.

Reading: Return to the Prodigal Father by Andrei Zvyagintsev, Course Reader
Last day of classes, topics for the finals – distributing 7 different topics to choose from, home-written essay /10 pages/

Handing in essays

Eating is not permitted in the classroom. No cell phones. Internet can be used only for educational purposes – allowed by the professor. Coming later than 20 minutes after the class started without an excuse will be regarded as an absence.

None

None