Class code: SASEM-UG9402001

Instructor Details
Dr. Monika MacDonagh-Pajerová
monika.pajerova@seznam.cz
Monday and Wednesday 15.00-16.00 or by appointment

Class Details
Civil Resistance in Central & Eastern Europe Reflected in Literature, Art and Film
SPRING 2015

Monday and Wednesday 13.30-14.50

Prerequisites
None

Class 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. 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 we 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.

Desired Outcomes
Drawing on a significant engagement with the core films, literature and art experienced during the semester, students will develop a significant understanding and critical engagement with different aspects of civil resistance in the region during the last century. In particular, students will have a broad knowledge of the origins and experience of totalitarianism, the origins and experience of civil resistance to totalitarianism and the role of artists in civil resistance and reflecting it as part of a common memory.

Assessment Components
A. 20% Class Participation/Attendance (this is a highly participatory course)
B. 20% Mid-term examination
C. 30% Final examination
D. 30% Individual Assignment. Each student will choose one film, book or artist and either write a short essay (1500-2000 words) on a relevant title to be agreed with me in advance or will present an excerpt from the work and discuss it with the class (total time 30 minutes including minimum 15 minutes exposition). Submission of essay by Session 26. Presentation dates to be agreed with each student.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class.
The specific workload attached to each session is low, which is intended to allow the student to follow their own specific interests in the very large amount of materials/experiences available in the library and throughout Prague.

Assessment Expectations
Grade A: Exceptional level of engagement with the topic including going beyond the texts and films explored in class.
Grade B: Very good level of understanding and presentation of arguments but falling short of the highest level
Grade C: Satisfactory and accurate understanding of the core themes
Grade D: Adequate level but weakly analytical
Grade F: Poor understanding of the themes or materials.
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

Attendance Policy
Absences only for medical reasons and for religious observance 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). To be excused for religious observance, you must contact the instructor and the Associate Director via e-mail one week in advance of the holiday. Your absence is excused for the holiday only and does not include days of travel associated with the holiday. Unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from your final course grade for every week of classes missed.

Late Submission of Work
Work should be submitted during class time. A penalty of up to 10 points will be imposed for late submission without advance agreement.

Plagiarism Policy
When drawing on specific ideas and words of others they must be properly acknowledged in the notes attached to the essay.

Required Text(s)
Required texts are contained in the special course reader and referenced in the relevant class session in this syllabus below.

Further suggested works

Internet Research Guidelines
Many of the topics and individuals dealt with in this course are political and controversial. When using the internet to aid research bear this in mind and seek corroboration from non crowd-sourced resources.

Additional Required Equipment
none

Session 1
February 2nd
Overview of the course, its structure, papers to be prepared, reading and viewing required and recommended.
Sergej Ejzenstejn’s “The Battleship Potemkin” (1925) as first propaganda film.

Session 2
February 4th

Session 3
February 9th
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 young in Central Europe.
“The Rhythm in My Heels” by Josef Škvorecký and Andrea Sedláčková
Session 4  February 11th
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. Nikita Mikhalkov: “Burnt by the Sun” (1994).

Session 5  February 16th
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.

Session 6  February 18th
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.
George Orwell: “1984”.

Session 7  February 23th
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.
“The Triumph of the Will” and Gita Sereny’s biography of Albert Speer.

Session 8  February 25th
An opposite reaction of students fighting the same oppressive regime and believing in democracy as a fair social environment.

Session 9  March 2nd
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.

Session 10  March 4th
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.

Session 11  March 9th
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 and shame.

Session 12  March 11th
A more skeptical vision of people conforming with occupation and rules of the dictatorship.

Session 13  March 16th
Jews as a persecuted group, the psychology of victimization and marginalization of a given social group by the majoritarian society.

Session 14  March 18th
The loneliness of those who came back – from the front, from a prison, from a camp.
Original beliefs confronted with today’s reality.

Session 15  March 23rd
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.

Session 16  March 25th
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.
Karel Bartošek’s chapter in Stéphane Courtois and coll.:“The Black Book of Communism” (1999).

Session 17  March 30th
Mid Term Paper

Session 18  April 1st
What is it like to live in a society that is essentially not free and how do people react towards power. Conformity versus protest.

Spring Break  April 6-10
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