



CIEE Prague, Czech Republic

Course title:	History through Film: Search for Identity: Europe between Hitler and Stalin
Course code:	CINE 3006 PRAG
Programs offering course:	Business, Arts and Sciences, Central European Studies, Communication, New Media, and Journalism
Language of instruction:	English
U.S. semester credits:	3.00
Contact hours:	45.00
Term:	Fall 2023

Course Description

This unique interdisciplinary course is designed to discuss and question the identity of specific nations in the European space, which has always been a fascinating crossroads of interesting ideas and ideologies, as well as the birthplace of wars and totalitarian regimes. The course covers masterpieces of Russian, Hungarian, German, Georgian, Polish, and Czech cinematography, focusing on several crucial periods of history, in particular WWII and its aftermath, and reveal the bitter truth and brutality of Stalinist years. Students are exposed to brilliant and often controversial works of film art, reflecting on the moral dilemmas of individuals during stressful times in history. Course participants thus map the European space through the medium of film, analyzing the individual approach to historical events, while at the same time gaining a general picture of Europe during its crucial periods.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- critically discuss the historical and geo-political context within the European space;
- analyze and assess the role of the individual in history;
- critically reflect on specific topics presented in the screened films;
- outline the specifics of different prominent film-makers' means of expression;
- analyze screened films and defend their arguments.

Course Prerequisites

The course is open for anyone who is interested in history and film as well as psychology, sociology, and political science and has an open mind to absorb new ideas.

Methods of Instruction

Discussion sessions are a very important part of the class, as are the written responses after each of the screened films. Students will have a great opportunity to watch each film together on a large screen in class, not just parts of it, which enables them to gain a complex experience as viewers.

There will be an introduction to the particular film with the professor's questions and suggested elements of the film to focus on, followed by the film screening. After each film, the student will write a response to the film, three pages double-spaced, and send it to the professor. The responses serve as a starting point for the next class discussion session when students will be engaged in asking questions, discussing the screened films and the historical events which inspired them.

Assessment and Final Grade

1.	Response Paper	15%
2.	Presentations	15%
3.	Mid-Term Paper	20%
4.	Final Essay	30%
5.	Participation	20%
	TOTAL	100%

Course Requirements

Response Paper

The students are required to write a 750-word double-spaced response after each film screening which will not only answer the professor's questions, but also include questions of their own. These will be discussed at length during the seminar. The student must try to find answers to the topics, moral dilemmas and the way each director deals with their depiction, but is welcome to add his or her own thoughts and ideas.

Presentations

Based on response papers, each student will be invited to present their film responses in class at least twice throughout the course. Students will then lead class discussion based on their presentation.

Mid-Term Paper

Students will write a mid-term essay on a topic chosen from the four options given by the professor. If a student wishes to modify the topic and come up with his/her own ideas, this can be approved after consulting the professor. The essay should be approximately 1,500 words long, double spaced. All additionally used sources (including those from the internet) should be properly cited, plagiarism is unacceptable and will result in a failing grade for the essay as well as the course.

Final Essay

The final essay on specific topics will be an out-of-class task. The topics will be discussed in class beforehand. The essay should be will approximately 3,000 words long, double-spaced.

Participation

Assessment of students' participation in class is an inherent component of the course grade. Students are required to actively, meaningfully and thoughtfully contribute to class discussions and all types of in-class activities throughout the duration of the class.

Students are responsible for following the course content and are expected to ask clarification questions if they cannot follow the instructor's or other students' line of thought or argumentation.

The use of electronic devices is only allowed for computer-based in-class tests, assignments and other tasks specifically assigned by the course instructor. Students are expected to take notes by hand unless the student is entitled to the use of computer due to his/her academic accommodations. In such cases the student is required to submit an official letter issued by his/her home institution specifying the extent of academic accommodations.

Class participation also includes students' active participation in Canvas discussions and other additional tasks related to the course content as specified by the instructor. If missing a class, the student is expected to catch up on the class content and to submit well-reflected and in-depth contributions to Canvas discussions on the particular topic or reflections to the instructor to ensure that his/her absence from the class will not significantly affect his/her participation grade.

Students will receive a partial participation grade every three weeks.

Attendance

To encourage engaged learning, regular class attendance is required throughout the program. This includes any required co-curricular class excursion or event, as well as internship, service-learning, or other required field placement.

An excused absence in a CIEE course will only be considered if approved by a CIEE Center Director/Academic Director (not the Instructor), and:

- it is a self-certified absence for illness (only once per course, requires formal request before or within 24 hours, cannot miss assessment worth more than 5% of final course grade)
- a doctor's note from a local medical professional is provided
- evidence of a family emergency is provided
- it is a pre-approved observance of religious holiday

Unexcused absences include personal travel and/or travel delays, as well as missing more than 25% of a single class period (including tardiness and early departure). Assessments missed due to unexcused absences will be marked as zero. Students with over 10% unexcused absences will be contacted by CIEE staff. Students with over

20% unexcused absences will be contacted by CIEE staff, receive a formal warning letter (shared with their home institution) and lose 10% of the final course point total (e.g., a final A grade of 93% will be lowered to a B grade of 83%).

For more detail, please consult your CIEE Academic Manual.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is essential to a positive and inclusive teaching and learning environment. All students are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness, respect, and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in grade penalties or disciplinary action. See the CIEE Student Academic Manual for further information on academic integrity.

N.B. Course schedule and co-curriculars are subject to change. The final duration and distribution of content and assignments will be determined and presented to students at the onset of the course.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

Class: 1.1 Czech New Wave in cinema I.

Introduction to the course: political and cultural reasons for the blossoming of the film art in the 60s, inspirations and aspirations of the Czech New Wave, specific spheres of interest for the filmmakers.

Screening: *The Shop on Main Street*, Jan Kadar, Elmar Klos, 1965

A non-heroic 'ordinary man' in the midst of the turmoil caused by the necessity to make crucial life-or-death decisions. Tragedy in the lives of human beings facing moral disintegration in the Slovak Nazi puppet state in the course of WWII. Oscar winner.

Class: 1.2 Discussion session

Discuss the moral dilemma of the main protagonist; focus also on Slovak collaboration with the Nazis and the consequences on the 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 after 1948 and its impact in the film art and industry.

Reading: 'Just Who Owns the Shop', Identity and Nationality in *Obchod na korze*, A Horton,

Hitler's popular image and the "Jewish question" chapter from *The Hitler's Myth*,

Ian Kershaw, Course reader

Week 2

Class: 2.1 Czech New Wave in cinema II.

Screening: *Closely Watched Trains*, Jiri Menzel, 1966

A tragicomedy about the private problems of a young railway station apprentice at a small station in Central Bohemia during WWII. Individual lives in the omnipresent war situation. Humor, love, sex, and death in a film based on a novel by an internationally recognized Czech writer Bohumil Hrabal. Oscar winner.

Class: 2.2 Discussion session

Searching for one's identity versus public affairs, private opposed to public? The roots of the so-called passive resistance of the Czechs as opposed to heroism.

Gender issues: the role of women in the film, are they just passive objects or active human beings? Male stereotypes and the importance of a uniform and stamps in society. Interesting view of the Germans, first shown in the 60s, reasons for this new approach. Hrabalesque poetics transformed into the film art.

Week 3

Class: 3.1 Czech New Wave in cinema III.

Based on a story by Arnost Lustig *Darkness Casts no Shadow*, a realistic depiction of two boys escaping the transport to the concentration camp, changed into an experimental, absurd, surreal visual study of the two men on the run, experiencing hunger, fear, despair but also solidarity. It deals with a human being under both external and internal pressure caused by external forces. The film pays a tribute to Luis Bunuel, infamous Spanish director who used to be a guru of surrealism.

Class: 3.2 Discussion session

This film is the experimental peak of the Czech New Wave. We shall discuss both the influence of Russian silent cinema and Luis Bunuel on the film. The experiment covers the fact that there is hardly anything spoken, no music, and only diegetic sound used plus a hand-held camera. How do these means of expression influence the film?

And: how does our identity change in the times of struggling for survival?

Reading: *Miracle of the Czech New Wave*, A.J.Liehm, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about My Heart*, an interview with Jan Nemeč, Course reader

Week 4

Class: 4.1 The role of the artist in totalitarian systems

Screening: *Mephisto*, Szabo Istvan, 1981

The film is based on a famous novel of Klaus Mann, a deeply disturbing piece of art about the complicity of an exceptionally ambitious actor in early 1930s Germany. Oscar winner.

Class: 4.2 Discussion session

How can any artist survive under an authoritarian regime without losing both his calling and self-esteem? How far can one go in collaborating with the system?

In which way, if at all, is the artist's life and work different from lives of so-called ordinary citizens – both living under a dictatorship? We shall explore similarities and differences of the two most powerful dictatorships of the 20th century, Nazism and Stalinism.

Reading: *The History of Everyday Life - A different perspective*, chapter from *Inside Nazi Germany*, Detlev JK Peukert, *Order and Terror*, *Istvan Szabo and Mephisto*, Course reader

Week 5

Class: 5.1 Threats to our identity and integrity

Screening: *Europa, Europa /Hitlerjunge Solomon*, Agnieszka Holland, 1990

A picturesque story of lost and later found identity of both the main protagonist and maybe Europe shows the impossibility of imposing labels. The drama of recognition and misrecognition emphasizes the epistemological impotency of hearing and vision in determining supposedly biologically-based identities. The tragedy and humor of many a grotesque situation is based on a true story of Solomon Perel.

Class: 5.2 Discussion session

We shall talk about the influence of Polish cinema and Cinema of Moral Anxiety on this mainstream film since A. Holland was once an integral part of the Polish film scene. Moral issues: is it justified that we 'change coats' when it comes to our survival? Can one ever return to one's original belief when formed by completely opposite ideologies?

How do Stalinism and Nazism differ in the film? Who are we if not keeping our integrity?

Reading: *Europa, Europa*, article and interview with A. Holland, Course reader

Week 6

Class: 6.1 The bizarre, grotesque, political and magical in film

Midterm Exam Period

Screening: *The Tin Drum*, Volker Schlöndorff, 1979

This is an Oscar winning adaptation of a Nobel Prize winner Gunter Grass' novel taking place in Gdansk/Danzig. Germans, Poles and a Kashubian minority used to live there peacefully until the outbreak of WWII. A grotesque story of a boy called Oskar who decides never to grow up and whose adventures before, in and after the war are truly bizarre. Before it was awarded Oscar for Best Foreign film, it was banned in several states in the US for its open sexual content. A complicated, controversial, yet fascinating film.

Class: 6.2 Discussion session

Magic realism and allegory in the film, inspiration by German Expressionism and surreal imagery, eroticism and a fierce farce altogether. We shall try to detect everything mentioned above in various scenes. We shall also discuss whether the open brutality, sexuality and grotesqueness are adequate to the theme it shows. Do we understand a certain blasphemy towards the Catholic Church in the film? Who does Oskar represent? Is he a genuine creature who despises the ugly world of adults, which is why he does not want to be like them or is he an incarnation of the surrounding world?

Reading: *The Tin Drum* by Barry Meyer, *The History of Everyday Life-different perspective*, Detlev JK Peukert, Course reader

Mid-term topics will be given to students this week.

Week 7

Class: 7.1 From Nazism to Stalinism

-- Differences and similarities of the two totalitarian systems

Screening: *The Soviet Story - Red Evil*, Edvins Snore, 2008

A documentary unveiling the truth about The Great Famine in Ukraine ordered by Stalin in 1932-3 as well as the Soviet participation in the Nazi Holocaust. It mentions the Katyn massacre in Poland 1940 and many other events connected not only with the Great Terror period of Stalinism, but also with the contemporary Russia.

Class: 7.2 Discussion session

Historical background of Stalinism, the roots of Marxism and Leninism,

Focus on the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia.

Reading: *Communism*, excerpts, Richard Pipes, 2003

Week 8

Class: 8.1 The Aftermath of WWII in Europe

Screening: *Ashes and Diamonds*, Andrzej Wajda, 1958

This is one part of WWII trilogy by an internationally acclaimed Polish director which focuses on a small Polish town celebrating the end of the war while new animosities are arising. There is passion and anger, a visual dynamism that includes use of symbols and light reminiscent of so-called cinema noir. The viewer is overwhelmed by a beautiful performance of an icon of Polish cinema, actor Zbigniew Cybulski, sometimes called the Polish James Dean. 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 Soviet communism. This was a daring statement in the late 50s, when the film was shot.

Class: 8.2 Discussion session

Polish School films, as well as Cinema of Moral Anxiety/Moral Dissent will be discussed. Personal courage and cowardice in the war and post war times, individual longings in contradiction to the public tasks are to be focused on. Can one ever fully recover after actively participating in the war at a young age? How does history shape our lives? What is the difference, if any, between the two main protagonists of the film, fighting 'on the other side of the barricade'? We shall also talk about the close-ups, light and darkness used in this black-and-white film.

Reading: *Popiol I diament/Ashes and Diamonds*, reviews by Rahul Hamid, Course reader

Week 9

Class: 9.1 In the grip of Stalin

Screening: *Burnt by the Sun*, Nikita Mikhalkov, 1994

The Soviet Union in 1936, heading into Stalinist purges. The film is dedicated to 'everyone who was burnt by the sun of the Revolution'. We shall witness a Chekhovian atmosphere at a typical Russian dacha inhabited by few representatives of 'good old days' and a hero of the Revolution, Colonel Kotov and his family. But even the heroes of the Revolution are not spared Stalin's paranoia and brutality. The film was the first one in a post-communist Russia which clearly attacked Stalin's cult. All of this could happen only due to glasnost and perestroika after the split of the Soviet Union. The movie won an Oscar in 1995.

Class: 9.2 Discussion session

Is faithfulness to the homeland at any cost heroism or blind naiveté?

Discuss private stand versus duty to the motherland.

Who is a hero and who is a coward in the film; think of the clash between the main characters, Colonel Kotov and Mitia, who is not a communist follower. How about an ordinary man in a totalitarian society? Can he survive untouched or be harmed as well?

Reading: *Stalin in the Mirror of the Others*, Moshe Lewin in *Stalinism and Nazism*, *No Soul* by A .A. Stone, *Burnt by the Sun*, 2 reviews

Week 10

Class: 10.1 Allegory and metaphor in 'political films'

Screening: *Repentance*, Tengiz Abuladze, 1987

A well-known Georgian director had already made this melodramatic satire in 1984, but the film was not shown to the public until 1987 when reformist 'glasnost' and 'perestroika' took place in the Soviet Union. A political parable about the evils of totalitarianism dressed in a surrealistic costume attacks the malevolence of dictators who are power-greedy and mean while professing to serve the will of the people. The film celebrates ethical values of religion as well as culture itself as alternatives to tyranny. We can experience the specifics of Georgian tradition as well as modern elements of film language.

Class: 10.2 Discussion session

How does art stand up to totalitarian tyranny? Can art change politics?

Is a fight for the inner integrity of a person a must if it can crush one's life? Is it possible that ethics will ever win over power? And can one fully understand a different culture?

Reading: *Stalinism and Nazism/Dictatorships in Comparison*, Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin, *Stalin in the Mirror of the Other*, *Repentance* by H. Hinson, Course reader

Week 11

Class: 11.1 In the grip of Nazism and Stalinism

A mesmerizing story of a young novice in 1960s Poland who discovers family secrets just when she is about to take her vows. The excruciating journey into her past unveils the truth about her roots and true identity. A very unsentimental, yet moving and powerful story of a painful search for one's self. This artistic jewel in black-and-white using the classical format with the aspect ratio 4:3 is the Oscar winner from 2014.

Class: 11.2 Discussion session

Relations between Poles and Jews in the course of WWII and afterwards, the Stalinist 50s and its later impact on the believers in communism, personal responsibility for the crimes of communism, religion and faith in question.

Reading: handouts given by the professor

Week 12

Class: 12.1 Philosophical mysterious sci-fi

Screening: *Stalker*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1979

A mystery by an ingenious Russian director, based on the sci-fi story 'Roadside picnic' by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, takes us to the 'Zone', a guarded realm with a mystical 'Room', in which dreams come true.

The 'Stalker', the leader and guide, escorts the 'Writer' and 'Professor' through the foreboding territory, facing all kinds of challenges, obstacles and traps. This is a ride into the human soul, a philosophical journey as well as a visually truly outstanding film known for its very long takes. The film is the intellectual peak of the semester.

Class: 12.2 Discussion session

Who in fact is the 'Stalker'? An insane genius, God or a misfit?

Why does he take people to the 'Zone'? What is the 'Zone' and how to deal with it? Reality and surreality in the film: is it a warning prophecy or imaginative philosophical film-essay?

What about the 'Monkey', child of the 'Stalker', the product of the 'Zone'?

Week 13

Class: 13.1 Final Essay Due

Discussion session: Semester summary, question and answer session, discussion of topics for the final essay.

Course Materials

Readings

Required:

Course Reader on Canvas

1. Peukert, Detlev J.K.: Inside Nazi Germany, Yale University Press. 1987, excerpts
2. Kershaw, Ian: The Hitler's Myth, Image and Reality in the Third Reich, Oxford University Press, 2001, excerpts
3. Kershaw Ian, Lewin Moshe: Stalinism and Nazism, Dictatorships in Comparison, Philadelphia Press, 1997, excerpts
4. Pipes, Richard: Communism, Random House 2003, excerpts
5. Primo Levi: If This Is a Man, Orion Press, 1959, entire book
6. Amis, Martin: Koba the Dread, Vintage, London 2005, entire book

Recommended:

1. Imre, Arniko: East European Cinema, NY, Routledge 2005
2. Iordanova, Dina: Cinema of the Other Europe, London & New York, Wallflower Press, 2003