Defining Themes and Personalities of Central European Cinema

Lecturer: Tereza Brdečková
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OUTLINE OF THE COURSE:

To view a good film does not mean only to enjoy or to analyze a piece of art. Any film – fiction or documentary – is an instrument of knowledge. It represents the witness of its times, of the mind of society, of its values and of the perception of these values by individuals. By actively viewing a film as a product of another culture, we open the window to otherness in general. It makes us understand other worlds, their inhabitants and their reasoning.

European postwar cinematography had a strictly individualistic character – it is always the personality of the director that plays the leading role. The eastern and central European concept of the state-owned film industry represented an interesting paradox: it was mostly ideological and related to censorship, but at the same time, the state monopoly often enabled the creation of original, individualistic styles and even new technologies. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, the system collapsed, but cinema in central Eastern Europe survived. It is deeply marked by a traumatic past, but it is also open to the effervescent present and future. Therefore, this unique course is not targeted at students of film departments, but at everyone who searches to understand the mental, political and economical transformation of post-communist society.

For much of the 20th century, the concept of Central Europe was in crisis. With the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the rise and fall of Germany’s Nazi regime and other fascist regimes, and the spread of the Soviet sphere of influence deep into Europe, the national identities of the region were put into question.

Even in the West, what was formerly known as Central Europe was considered Eastern, or at best, East-Central Europe -- conceding to the Soviet viewpoint not just the political but the cultural status of the region. Considered “the most important art” in the words of Lenin, cinema as well became an instrument designed to subjugate the cultural status of Central Europe. Through prescriptive modes of propaganda and by the state-run monopolies that operated centralized studio production systems, the ultimate intent was to employ cinema as tool to transform regional thought and expression to conform to the dictates of the East.

Ironically, however, some of Central Europe’s most creative and relevant cultural voices
emerged despite these conditions to create distinct cinemas that not only impacted world film, but also contributed to the rehabilitation of their respective national identities. In this class, we will explore on one side the diversity and clarity of these individual cinematic voices, born of contradictions of their societies, and often encompassing their own; and on the other side, the changement and the present of the Central European cinema of today. All of the filmmakers we will examine have found ways to fully express their individual creative visions, while struggling with and reconciling the contradictory forces that helped shape them.

**Themes and personalities**

**Week 1**

**State in the role of producer – the nationalization of film industry in central and eastern Europe after world war II.**

Examples (showreels) – Imperor´s Baker by Marin Fric

Lemonade Joe . by Oldrich Lipsky

Czech new wave – roots

**Competition, or Black Peter** by Milos Forman or

**Intimate lighting** – by Ivan Passer

**Reading:** Peter Hames, - Czech and Slovak Cinema: Theme and Tradition

Peter Hames – Cechoslovak new wave

**Week 2**

**USA, the Dream Land - role of the private archives and memories**

Film: „See you in Denver“ and „Low Fly“ (Sejdeme se v Denveru, Nízký let) 2005, by Jan Sikl. From the - project „Private centuries“
Week 3

Victory or lost? - Remembering Germans - lost homelands

„Adelheid,“ by František Vláčil, 1969,

Related films: „King of Velichovky“ and „Dad and Lilli Marlen“ by Jan Šikl, 2005, from the project Private century

Haberman’s Mill by Juraj Herz, 2009

Marketa Lazarova and Valley of the Beas by František Vláčil

Reading: Peter Hames: The cinema of Eastern Europe

Week 4

Krzystof Kieszlowski,: Mediating East and West in Beautiful Nineties in polish film

„Double life of Veronique“ by Krzystof Kieszlowski (1991)

Related films: Red, Blu by Andrzej Wajda

Red, Blue, White – Kieszlowski

Man of Marble by Andrzej Wajda

Promissed land by Andrzej Wajda


Week 5

Family and gender roles in postcommunist Europe

Matrimomonal Pieces (Manželské etudy) by Helena Třeštíková, 2005
Related films: Panel Story by Vera Chytilova, 1978,

Pupendo by Jan Hrebejk, CZ 2003


Week 6

Animation - spiritual rescue, handcraft and play

„Midsummernight dream by Jiri Trnka 1966, Where the wild things are by Gene Deitch (1970)

The Hand, by Jiri Trnka, 1969

Something from Alice by Jan Švankmajer

Related films: Film by Jan Švankmajer and Jiri Trnka

Reading. Giannalberto Bendazzi – The History of animation

Week 7

Dilema of an artist in totalitarian system:

„Diamonds of the Night“ (1964) by Jan Nemec, 1965

Firemen’s ball by Milos Forman, 1964

Related films: Isztván Szabó, Mefisto, 1981
Week 8

Outsiders and Loosers in the role of Heroes

Larks on the string (Skřivánci na niti) – Jiri Menzel, 1969

Reading: Bohumil Hrabal TBD, Jaroslav Hasek: Good Soldier Shweik (or related literature)

Week 9

So-called Gypsy question – postwar tragedy of Roma people as a symbol of dictatorship

„Marian“ by Petr Václav (1995)

Related films: Brats (Smradi) by Zdenek Tyc, 2005

Gypsy (Cigán) by Martin Sulik (2010)

Week 10

Paradoxes of the prewar Jewish assimilation –

„Shop on the Main Street“ by Kadar and Klos, 1965

Or „Distant Journey“ by Alfred Radok, 1949

Reading: Jacob Edelstein by Ruth Bondy
Week 12

To have and not to have: Born of postcommunist consuming society:


Related films:

Starci na chmelu Zdeněk Podskalsky 1963

Optional themes

Entertaining in communist society

Lemonade Joe by Odrich Lipsky (1966)

Related films. Světáci, Zdeněk Podskalský 1969

Reading. Works by Antonin and Mira Liehm

Reading TBD

Undergraduate Program in Central European Studies (UPCES)

CERGE-EI and the School of Humanities at Charles University

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And on the other side, the changement and the present of central European cinema of today.

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*Promised land* by Andrzej Wajda


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Reading: *The Traditional Sprit of the Age.” Superwoman and the Double*


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Reading Peter Hames: The cinema of Eastern Europe

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Reserve:

1. New Romanian inspirations
„When I want to whistle I whistle „ by Florin Serban, 2009

Related films 4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days

California Dreaming

The Autobiography of ceausescu – Andrei Ujica 2010

Reading – Prince. Romanian New wave, final paper UPCES fall 2010

2. **Home, Land and Roots**

“All my good Countrymen” by Vojtech Jasny (1969)

*Wild Beas*, by Bohdan Slama

*A Thousand Year-Old Bee* by Juraj Jakubisko

3. **The legacy of political police and confidency in postcommunist society**

Film: *Kawasaki´s Rose* by Jan Hřebejk, 2010 (*Kawasakio růže*)

Related films: *Ties* (Radim Spacek CZ, 2010), *Life of he Others* (Florian Donnesmarck, Germany 2006)