

Lines of Light: Central European Cinema

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Course Description:

Throughout Central Europe leading-edge filmmaking erupted in the 1920s. This course studies a select band of Central European directors (along with a special bonus, the Soviet bloc film-artist, director Andrei Tarkovsky) and their collective attempt to deal with and to follow their search for a medium to describe, the cultural and political region, the complexity of individual and collective political life and historical experience. In this way, the truth peeks through some of the aesthetic units of the cinematic image in our chosen films as so many lines of light. Particular attention will be paid to the Czech New Wave movement of the late 1960s. Screenings include pictures or clips from ten notable film-directors and auteurs: Věra Chytilová (Czech Republic, 1929–2014), Rainer Werner Fassbinder (Germany, 1946–82), Miloš Forman (Czech Republic, 1932–2018), Juraj Herz (Slovakia, 1934–2018), Jan Hřebejk (Czech Republic, 1967– present), Fritz Lang (Germany, 1890–1976), Jiří Menzel (Czech Republic, 1938–present), F. W. Murnau, (Germany, 1888–1931), Jan Němec (Czech Republic, 1936–2016), and Andrei Tarkovsky (1932–86). No background in the study of cinema is required. All films have English inter-titles or sub-titles.

Course Objectives/Learning Outcomes:

Special emphasis will be given to the relation of these director's strategies of presentation to questions of aesthetics (of beauty), of epistemology (of knowledge and of the production of truth), of ethics, of microlevel and macrolevel political implications, of ontology (of subjectivity and of individual selfhood or identity), and of the role and function of spectatorship. Above all, we shall accordingly locate those cinematic moments that might teach the spectator non-sadistic (i.e., non-appropriating) and revolutionary modes of creative viewing circulation and mobility, and novel ways of engaging with the cultural form of film, so as to forge new modes of interpretive movement and new spatial, which is

also to say, temporal values and figures of temporality that would mediate experience in highly original ways in our audiovisual societies.

Course Requirements:

- **Reading:** there is not an over-abundance of matter to be read for the class; therefore, that which is assigned deserves your careful attention.
- **Two essays a midterm of 2500 words and a final essay of 3000 words;** topics will be given two weeks in advance, but you can also make your own creative choice of topic area that must have the professor's approval in advance; regrettably, late papers will not be accepted.
- **Attendance** at the weekly sessions to discuss the guided readings (one absence allowed, beyond that your grade will be lowered a full letter grade for each additional excused or unexcused absence). Your mental participation and over-all effect on the quality of the class inform this grade as much as how much you contribute to seminar discussions; arriving more than ten minutes late for class or leaving for more than ten minutes for any part of the class session will result in an absence for that day. There will be two ten-minute breaks during each week's session.
- **Oral presentations** by the students in the class, which may be seen as work in progress toward one of the two writing assignments.

Grading Policy:

- Participation/attendance in the class sessions: 30%
- Midterm essay: 25%
- Final essay: 35%
- In-class presentation: 10%

Mandatory Completion Policy

Note that all mandatory assignments and exams must be completed to the best of your ability in order for your final grade to be issued. Failure to complete a mandatory assignment or exam may result in a failing grade.

Letter Grade	Percentage	Description
A+	97-100	Excellent Work
A	93-97	Outstanding Work
A-	90-92	
B+	87-89	Good work
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	Acceptable Work
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	
D+	67-69	Work that is significantly below average
D	63-66	
D-	60-62	
F	0-59	Work that does not meet the minimum standards for passing the course

AEP Academic Integrity Policy

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are not tolerated. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for the development of knowledge and learning is encouraged at many stages of the learning process. While we value technology for educational purposes, we also value originality and the retainment of knowledge, and thus using AI for assignments and examinations, even if rephrased, is strictly prohibited and considered an academic integrity violation, unless the instructor explicitly allows for it in the context of evaluated work

AEP Non-Discrimination/Harassment Policy

The AEP program in Prague promotes a diverse learning environment where the dignity, worth, and differences of each individual are valued and respected. Discrimination and harassment, whether based on a person's race, gender, sexual orientation, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, or other legally protected characteristics, are repugnant and completely inconsistent with our objectives. Retaliation against individuals for raising good faith claims of harassment and/or discrimination is prohibited.

AEP Diversity Policy

AEP is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming community that values diversity in all its forms. We believe that one of the most meaningful lessons of studying abroad is learning to navigate and appreciate differences with curiosity and an open mind. While engaging across differences can sometimes be challenging or uncomfortable, these moments are essential for growth and learning. We recognize that every member of our community, even with the best intentions, may occasionally make missteps. Our commitment is to provide a supportive environment where respectful and honest dialogue helps us learn from these experiences, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive and broaden their perspective.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

CEE Introductory Lecture Series

AEP Introductory Lecture Series

Week 2

Part I: Introduction

Introduction to a survey view of historical and cultural matters of Central European cinematic culture and history and of the strategies the course will employ to achieve new perspectives on the filmic history of the region.

Part II: Moving across German Expressionism and the Socioeconomic for New Spatial Values I: Murnau

Pre-film talk and screening: Der letzte Mann (The Last Laugh, 1924, dir. F.W. Murnau).

Week 3

Part I: Post-film lecture/discussion on The Last Laugh w/student presentations

Readings:

- L. Bersani and U. Dutoit: Arts of Impoverishment, pp. 1–9.
- D. Cook: A History of Narrative Film, Fourth Edition, pp. 87–111.
- G. Deleuze: Cinema 1, pp. 40–55.
- L.H. Eisner: The Haunted Screen, pp. 207–21.
- S. Kracauer: From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of German Film, pp. 99–106.
- E. Roraback: “The Social Negativity of Capitalism & the Noumenal Negative of Culture: F.W. Murnau’s Der letzte Mann (The Last Laugh, 1924) & W. Benjamin’s ‘Angelus Novus’”; revised version of a talk given at an international conference in Prague, 25 October 2007 and later published in a volume from the conference. Now it constitutes one chapter in the author’s abovementioned cinema book.

Part II: Moving across German Expressionism, the Political and the Heroizing Epic for New Spatial Values II: Lang

Pre-film talk and screening: brief clips of Die Nibelungen: Siegfried (1924, dir. Fritz Lang); Die Nibelungen: Kriemhild’s Revenge (1924, dir. Fritz Lang).

Week 4

Part I: Post-film discussion + student presentations

Readings:

- D. Cook: A History of Narrative Film, pp. 87–111
- G. Deleuze: Cinema 1, pp. 40–55.
- L.H. Eisner: The Haunted Screen, pp. 151–70.
- G. Flaxman, ed.: “The Brain is the Screen: An Interview with Gilles Deleuze” in The Brain is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema, pp. 365–73.
- S. Kracauer: The German Film, pp. 91–97.
- E. Roraback: “The Mediatization of German Expressionism and the Politics of Filmic Adaptation: Lang’s Die Nibelungen (1924)”. Revised version of a presentation given at the 30th Annual Conference of the International Association of Philosophy and Literature, Freiburg, Germany, 4-9 June 2006. Now part of a book project.

Part II: The Czech New Wave and Femininity

Pre-film talk and screening: Daisies (1966, dir. Věra Chytilová).

Post-film discussion + student presentations

Readings:

- D. Cook: A History of Narrative Film, pp. 621–36
- P. Hames: The Czechoslovak New Wave: Second Edition, pp. 183–200
- + a general sense of reference that includes Bersani, Deleuze, and Dutoit.

Week 5

Part I: An Unsung Slovak Contribution to the Czech New Wave

Pre-film talk and screening: Spalovač Mrtvol (The Cremator, 1968, dir. Juraj Herz)

Part II: Post-film discussion + student talks

Readings:

- D. Cook: A History of Narrative Film, pp. 621–36
- P. Hames: The Czechoslovak New Wave, pp. 223–30
- + for general reference Bersani / Deleuze / Dutoit.

Week 6

Part I: Cultural Repression and Czechoslovakia

Pre-film talk and screening: The Party and the Guests/A Report on the Party and the Guests (O slavnosti a hostech, 1966, dir. Jan Němec)

Part II: Post-film discussion + student talks

Readings:

- D. Cook: A History of Narrative Film, pp. 621–36
- P. Hames: The Czechoslovak New Wave, pp. 223–30
- + for general reference Bersani / Deleuze / Dutoit.

Week 7

MID-TERM ESSAY DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS

Part I: The Self and the Social System

Pre-film talk and screening: Ostře sledované vlaky (Closely Watched Trains, dir. Jiří Menzel).

Part II: Post-film talk plus student presentations

Readings:

- D. Cook: A History of Narrative Film, pp. 621–36
- P. Hames: The Czechoslovak New Wave, pp. 151–6
- + general reference to Bersani-Deleuze-Dutoit.

Week 8

Part I: The Czech New Wave as Macrolevel Political Satire

Pre-film talk and screening: Hoří, má panenko (The Firemen's Ball, 1967, dir. Miloš Forman).

Part II: Post-film discussion plus student presentations

Readings:

- D. Cook: A History of Narrative Film, pp. 621–36
- P. Hames: The Czechoslovak New Wave, pp. 106–26
- + general sense of reference with Bersani, Deleuze and Dutoit

Week 9

Parts I and II: A Special Foray: Former Soviet-Bloc Cinema, Art and Medievalness

Pre-film lecture and screening: Andrei Rublev (1966, dir. Andrei Tarkovsky).

Week 10

Part I: Screening contd. w/post-film lecture/discussion on Andrei Rublev & w/ student presentations

Readings:

- R. Bird: Andrei Rublev, pp. 37–64 and pp. 73–83
- D. Cook: A History of Narrative Film, pp. 696–98.
- E. Roraback: “Medieval Immobilizings in Tarkovsky’s Andrei Rublev (1966)”.

Part II: Das Neue Kino: Fassbinder (New German Cinema)

- Pre-film lecture and screening:
- The Merchant of Four Seasons (Der Händler der vier Jahreszeiten, 1971, dir. Rainer Werner Fassbinder).

Week 11

Part I: Post-film lecture/discussion on Fassbinder + student talks

Readings:

- D. Cook: A History of Narrative Film, pp. 582–604.
- E. Roraback: “Keep To Your Dreams: Fassbinder and Cinematic Intensity”.
- C. B. Thomsen: “The Double Man”, “Bavaria and Hollywood” and “Querelle” in Fassbinder: The Life and Work of a Provocative Genius, trans. Martin Chalmers (Faber and Faber, 1997) pp. 1–44, 101–10 and 302–11.

Part II: The Problem of the Soviet Occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1967–68 and the Period of Normalization After from June 1968–October 1989

Pre-film lecture and screening: Pelíšky (Cozy Dens, 1999, dir. Jan Hřebejk).

Week 12

Parts I and II: Continue post-film lecture/discussion of Fassbinder and conduct post-film lecture/discussion of Pelíšky w/student presentations + Conclusions

Readings:

- W. Benjamin, Thesis 9 from On the Concept of History
- D. Cook: A History of Narrative Film, pp. 582–604.

- I. Penman: Fassbinder: Thousands of Mirrors (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2023) book to be discussed by Erik Roraback.
- E. Roraback: “Keep To Your Dreams: Fassbinder and Cinematic Intensity”.
- C. B. Thomsen: “The Double Man”, “Bavaria and Hollywood” and “Querelle” in Fassbinder: The Life and Work of a Provocative Genius, trans. Martin Chalmers (Faber and Faber, 1997) pp. 1–44, 101–10, and 302-11

Week 13

FINAL ESSAY DUE (The final essay takes the place of a final exam.)

Readings:

Extracts from the following critical and theoretical texts will be available in a course reader and/or discussed by the instructor in the class:

- Benjamin, Walter: On the Concept of History from Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938–1940 (Harvard Univ. Press, 2003).
- Bersani, Leo and Ulysse Dutoit: Arts of Impoverishment (Harvard Univ. Press, 1993). Bird, Robert: Andrei Rublev (BFI, 2004).
- Cook, David A.: A History of Narrative Film, Fourth Edition (Norton, 2004).
- Deleuze, Gilles: Cinema 1: The Movement-Image, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986).
- Eisner, Lotte H.: The Haunted Screen, trans. Roger Greaves (Univ. of California Press, 1973).
- Hames, Peter: The Czechoslovak New Wave (Wallflower Press, 2nd edition, 2005).
- Kracauer, Siegfried: From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of The German Film, Revised and Expanded Edition, ed. Leonardo Quaresima (Princeton Univ. Press, 1947/2004).
- Flaxman, Gregory, ed.: “The Brain is the Screen: An Interview with Gilles Deleuze” in The Brain is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2000).
- Penman, Ian: Fassbinder: Thousands of Mirrors (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2023).
- Roraback, Erik S.: a select band of essays on individual films from a work in progress.
- Thomsen, Christian Braad: “The Double Man”, “Bavaria and Hollywood” and “Querelle” in Fassbinder: The Life and Work of a Provocative Genius, trans. Martin Chalmers (Faber and Faber, 1997).

Movies:

Věra Chytilová:	<i>Daisies</i> (1966, Czech with English subtitles, 75 minutes).
R. W. Fassbinder:	<i>Händler der vier Jahreszeiten</i> (The Merchant of Four Seasons, 1971, German with English subtitles, 88 minutes).
Miloš Forman:	<i>Hoří, má panenko</i> (The Fireman's Ball, 1967, Czech with English subtitles, 73 minutes).
Juraj Herz:	<i>Spalovač Mrtvol</i> (The Cremator, 1968, Czech with English subtitles, 96 minutes).
Jan Hřebejk:	<i>Pelíšky</i> (Cozy Dens, 1999. Czech with English subtitles, 116 minutes).
Fritz Lang:	Clips only. <i>Die Nibelungen: Siegfried</i> (1924, German with English intertitles, 143 minutes).
Jiří Menzel:	<i>Die Nibelungen: Kriemhild's Revenge</i> (1924, German with English intertitles)
	<i>Ostře sledované vlaky</i> (Closely Watched Trains, 1966, Czech with English subtitles, 93 minutes).
F. W. Murnau:	<i>Der Letzte Mann</i> (The Last Laugh, 1924, silent with English intertitles, 91 minutes).
Jan Němec:	<i>The Party and the Guests/A Report on the Party and the Guests</i> (O slavnosti a hostech, 1966, Czech with English subtitles, 71 minutes).
Andrei Tarkovsky	<i>Andrei Rublev</i> (1966, Russian with English subtitles, 205 minutes).