CIEE Prague, Czech Republic

Course title: Hollywood and Europe
Course code: FILM 3003 PRAG
Programs offering course: Central European Studies, Communication, New Media, and Journalism
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3.00
Contact hours: 45.00
Term: Fall 2020

Course Description

This course offers insights into the relationships between Hollywood and Europe. The course adopts a revisionist perspective in so much as it seeks to challenge five ideas structuring understandings of the relations between the two. It begins by questioning the notion that Hollywood is strictly American, and therefore separate from Europe. Students then ask if Hollywood and European cinema are really the binary oppositions they tend to be imagined as being. From there, we consider whether Hollywood's engagement with Eastern Europe in the twentieth century supports its reputation as a staunchly anti-Communist institution. The course then focuses on whether Americanization is the most useful explanatory framework for understanding Hollywood's engagement with the continent: first by considering the concessions Hollywood has needed to make to this powerful profit center, then the extent to which Hollywood has used European subject matter to provoke introspection among American audiences. Students work through these topics by employing historical analysis and examining representative films such as Ninotchka (1939), Roman Holiday (1953), Rocky IV (1984), Taken (2008), and The Grand Budapest Hotel (2014).

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- analyze the dynamic and complex relationships that have existed, and which continue to exist, between Hollywood and Europe;
- discuss how the interaction of Hollywood and Europe can be conceptualized or theorized;
- critically discuss the ways in which deep-rooted contrasts between Hollywood and European Cinema have elided complex exchanges between the two;
- discuss ways in which European-based companies and European-based individuals have contributed to Hollywood and its output;
- illustrate the ambivalent relationships that characterized Hollywood’s engagement with Communist Eastern Europe as both a partner and subject matter;
- analyze of the historically specific content-tailoring strategies that Hollywood has employed to make some of its output marketable and attractive to key European audiences, and to market its films to those audiences;
- critically discuss and illustrate how Hollywood has used images of Europe and Europeans to invite Americans to think about themselves and their nation.

Course Prerequisites

None

Methods of Instruction

This course is built around extended sessions usually comprising a film screening, structured discussions, micro-lectures, and sometimes exercises. Students will consider the screened films in relation to specific series of questions and using specific analytical methods (see below). The films will provide concrete reference points intended to facilitate their understanding of the topics introduced in the readings and developed by the instructor. Discussions will be accompanied by detailed PowerPoint slides, which will be emailed to students after the session.

Notes on Film Analysis: It should be stressed that this course is NOT a film appreciation seminar, nor is it – strictly speaking – a film interpretation seminar. Thematic analysis is a fundamental part of this course, but these
analyses are structured around specific approaches and questions in an effort to marshal the ways these audiovisual texts are examined; i.e. to encourage students to treat them as examples, embodiments or iterations of the topics discussed. Broadly speaking, students are encouraged to employ an industrially and culturally sensitive approach, one geared to understanding how commercial enterprise and creative engagement with public-sphere discourse shapes film production and content.

Note on Readings: Students new to Film Studies are sometimes surprised that writings on this well-loved entertainment form can often be quite dry and intellectually challenging. It should be stressed that film scholarship is a very different genre of writing to film journalism. The Film Studies writings used on this course – penned by some of the most influential figures in the field – are valuable for the same reasons that any other academic texts are valuable: because they contribute to knowledge. Accordingly, students should be prepared to study these writings rather than skim through them. A mandatory home screening is set to provide students with a concrete reference point intended to facilitate their understanding of the readings.

Note on Screenings: One of the bigger challenges faced by students new to the academic study of cinema is to resist efforts on the parts of the filmmakers to “lose oneself in the film”. This course treats the films as cultural artifacts, which should be analyzed with a high degree of critical distance. Accordingly, questions about the home screenings and in-class screenings will be provided to students in advance, in order to help focus and structure the analysis of these audiovisual texts. Notes should also be made during screenings.

Note on electronics in class: Except during breaks or unless otherwise stated, electronic devices may NOT be used at any time during this class. It needs to be stressed that there is no valid reason to have phones, tablets, or laptops either turned on or on display in this class, as all slides are made available to students after each session. Any notes that do need to be taken can be made with pen and paper.

Guidelines on each prompt will be issued when students are expected to turn their attention to the assessment in question. Students are also advised to reach out to the instructor to discuss issues related thereto. A twenty-four-hour emailed response is guaranteed, although usually responses will be much swifter than this. Face-to-face meetings can also be arranged upon request.

NB: Films screened on this course may not be used for any of the prompts; students must use different films for each prompt; students may not use the same film another student is using for any given prompt.

Assessment and Final Grade

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper 1</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Presentation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>Paper 2</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Presentation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100%</td>
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Course Requirements

Paper 1

Students are to submit a circa 1500-1700-word essay in response to a prompt derived from sessions 2-4.

Prompt

Hollywood is typically assumed to be American. However, the work of Higson and Behlil, and Meers, show how transatlantic flows of people, capital, ideas, and products complicate the notion that Hollywood is in fact an American institution, and thus distinct from Europe. With these points in mind, consider the production, content, and circulation of a Hollywood film to support where you stand on this issue.

Areas of Assessment

An understanding of the ways culture has been conceptualized in national terms.

An understanding of how cross-border movements complicate such approaches.

An understanding of how the aforementioned notions relate to Hollywood.

A demonstration of how the example film evinces transatlantic flows, and their implications vis-à-vis the prompt.

Midterm Presentation

Students are to deliver a circa 10-to-15-minute presentation in response to a prompt derived from sessions 5
**Prompt**

Hollywood cinema and European cinema are often considered to be binarily opposed, based on oppositions related to escapist entertainment and cerebral art. However, this notion is complicated by European-based producers supplying Hollywood with examples of “Mid-Atlantic Cinema” and “Imperso-Nation”, and Hollywood’s handling of films using the art cinema model typically associated with Europe. With this point in mind, use an example of one of these approaches to support where you stand on this issue.

**Areas of Assessment**

Understanding of how Hollywood cinema and European cinema tend to be imagined.

Understanding of the general phenomena that complicate this notion.

A demonstration of how an example Hollywood film relates to one of the general phenomena.

**Paper 2**

Students are to submit a circa 1500-1700-word essay in response to a prompt derived from sessions 8-9.

**Prompt**

Discussion of Hollywood and its relations to Eastern Europe in the twentieth century has tended to spotlight Hollywood’s Anti-Communism. However, some scholars have suggested that in terms of its conduct and output Hollywood has at times been more ambivalent about – even supportive of – aspects of state socialism. With this point in mind, use one of Hollywood’s communist-themed films to explain where you stand on this issue.

**Final Presentation**

Students are to submit a circa 10-to-15-minute presentation in response to a prompt derived from sessions 10 to 12.

**Delivery Date:** Week 13

**Prompt A**

Hollywood’s relationships to Europe as a market and as subject matter have usually been understood in terms of Americanization – as a powerful overseas US institution imposing an outside culture onto a sovereign territory. However, some scholars have suggested that the voluntary nature of movie-going and the reliance on international revenue has demanded Hollywood make concessions to the perceived tastes of audiences in Europe. With this point in mind, use a Euro-tailored Hollywood film to support where you stand on this issue.

**Areas of Assessment**

Understanding of how Americanization has been used to understand Hollywood’s relationships to European audiences and subject matter.

Understanding of how (and why) Hollywood has needed to secure major European markets.

Demonstration of how an example film bares the traces of being made with Europeans in mind.

Or

**Prompt B**

Central to the discussion of Americanization has been the notion that Hollywood promotes "American values" to international audiences such as those in Europe. However, some scholars have shown that Hollywood sometimes uses images of Europe and Europeans primarily to invite Americans to think critically about themselves and their nation. Use a European-centered Hollywood tourist film to support where you stand on this issue.

**Areas of Assessment**

Understanding of how using Europe to speak to Americans complicates the Americanization thesis.

Understanding of the ways Euro-centered tourist films have been seen to address Americans.
Understanding of how an example Hollywood tourist film uses Europe to invite Americans to think about themselves and their country.

**Class Participation**

Participation contributes a total of 20 percent towards the final grade. This 20 percent is in turn broken down into 4 blocks corresponding respectively to student participation in sessions 2-3 (22% of participation grade/4.4% of overall grade), 4-6 (33% of participation grade/6.6% of overall grade), 8-10 (33% of participation grade/6.6% of overall grade), and 11-12 (22% of participation grade/4.4% of overall grade).

Students will receive feedback on each block once the block in question has concluded. The overall participation will be the sum of the four scores. Each student’s participation overall grade will be determined by the way s/he has contributed across the course to seminar discussions.

Students will be graded on a) the depth and b) the regularity of their insights, as well as their general level of engagement. In this respect, students will be evaluated on their engagement with a) the general topics, b) the set readings, and c) the screened example films.

Attempts to grapple with complex ideas, critical thinking, original ideas, and efforts to facilitate the learning of other students are areas graded particularly highly.

Students deemed to be struggling or falling short in terms of their general participation - unwillingness or inability to contribute, distracted or distracting conduct - will be given opportunities to contribute productively and will, in extreme cases, be contacted individually to draw their attention to their need to improve in this area.

**Attendance**

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program.

If you will miss a class for any reason, notify the Program Coordinator and your instructor beforehand via Canvas. You are responsible for any materials covered in class during your absence, and except in the specific cases listed below, credit will not be granted for missed assessments.

Excessive absences will result in a notification letter, and finally a warning letter, sent to you and your home school, based on the following:

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<tr>
<th>% of course hours missed</th>
<th>Number of CIEE classes</th>
<th>Minimum penalty</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 10%</td>
<td>One to Three 90-min. classes; or One 180-min. class</td>
<td>No penalty</td>
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<tr>
<td>10% - 20%</td>
<td>Four 90-min. classes</td>
<td>Written notification* to the student, followed by a warning letter to the student and home school; 3% reduction in the final grade</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Five 90-min. classes</td>
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<td>Two 180-min classes</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than 20%</td>
<td>Six 90-min. classes; or Three 180-min. classes</td>
<td>Automatic course failure, and possible expulsion with notification to the home school</td>
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* The notification letters are intended to ensure that you are well advised in advance of any potential for failure or dismissal, so that you can take steps to avoid this.

As the table shows, **missing more than 20% of any class (e.g., due to undocumented illness, travel delays, flight cancellations, over-sleeping, etc.) results in automatic failure of the course.**

If you miss an assessment in class due to an absence, you will be able to make it up in the following instances:

- You provide a relevant doctor's note from a local medical professional to your Program Coordinator within 24 hours of your absence (a scan or photograph sent via e-mail are acceptable)
- A CIEE staff member verifies that you were too ill to attend class.
- You provide evidence of a family emergency to your Program Coordinator.
- You have an approved absence related to the observance of a religious holiday from the Academic Director based on a request submitted before you arrived onsite.
**Please note:** Absences incurred due to documented illness, documented family emergency or the observance of a religious holiday approved before arrival onsite do not count towards the total of absences. Students may self-certify one absence due to illness without providing a doctor’s note as long as they notify the Program Coordinator within 24 hours of their absence by e-mail or a text message.

**Other attendance-related policies**

If you transfer from one CIEE class to another during the Add/Drop period, you will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of the new class provided you were marked present for the first session(s) of the original class.

If you are over 15 minutes late for a class, the instructor is required to mark you absent.

In case of class conflicts (irregularities in the class schedule, including field trips and make-up classes), always contact the Academic Department to decide the appropriate course of action.

Please remember to track your attendance on the Canvas Course Sites and report any errors in the record to the Academic Department within one week of the discrepancy date, as later claims may not be considered.

These attendance rules also apply to any required co-curricular excursion, activity, or event, and to for-credit internships.

CIEE staff does not manage absences at partner institutions providing direct enrolment classes (FAMU, ECES and FSV), but they have similar attendance policies and attendance is monitored there. Grade penalties may result from excessive absences.

*N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.*

**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1**

Class: Introduction

This session offers an outline of the course, its methods, and its modes of assessment. We will also begin to consider – from the perspective of the regular moviegoer – the topic examined fully in session two: why we think of Hollywood as American. Helping us to complement this crucial consumer standpoint with a more theoretically informed one will be the film The Artist (2011), which will provide a principal reference point in the following session when we think more systematically about how members of audiovisual cultures tend to assign national status to cultural products like films.

Screening: *The Artist* (2011)

**Week 2**

Class: Part 1: Hollywood ≠ Europe (?)

Sessions 2, 3, and 4 challenge the notion that Hollywood is a solely American institution, and is thus distinct from Europe.

**Hollywood ≠ Europe (?) I: The Logics of Nation & Culture – or why Hollywood is seen as an American Institution**

This session starts to lay a foundation for the remainder of the course, by considering how people have assigned national status to cultural artifacts like films. In so doing, students will begin to think about the types of logic that have led Hollywood – somewhat reductively – to be considered a supremely American institution, and thus as separate from Europe.

Required readings:


Home Screening: The most American film you can imagine (be prepared to justify your choice)
Week 3
Class: Hollywood ≠ Europe (?) II:

**Why Hollywood is more than an American Institution – Production and Content**

Because the study of Hollywood and Europe involves consideration of cross-border flows, it requires an appreciation of the concept of transnational cinema - a multifaceted notion that relates to who makes movies, what those movies are about, who they address, where they circulate, who actually watches them, and how they are watched. Accordingly, this session and the next session probe how transatlantic border-crossings bring into question the very Americanness of Hollywood, suggesting instead this institution might be better approached as international. This session will place an accent on this issue in terms of production and content.

Required readings:


In-Class Screening: *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) [Second half of the Film in the first part of the class]

Week 4
Class: Hollywood ≠ Europe (?) III:

**Why Hollywood is more than an American Institution – Distribution and Reception**

Because the transatlantic dimensions of most of Hollywood films – and thus of Hollywood itself – are so multifaceted and sometimes obscured, our examination of this topic is spread across two sessions. Speaking broadly, this session will shift focus from considerations of production and content toward issues of dissemination and circulation. In this sense, we will think about how Hollywood films are intended to speak to Europeans, the extent to which they are part of European film culture, and the memories and perceptions European citizens hold about Hollywood.

Required Reading:


Homework:

Conduct a short interview with a European citizen on his or her memories and perceptions of Hollywood, bringing a transcript of the interview to the next session.

Home Screening: *Mamma Mia!* (2008)

In-Class Screening: N/A

Week 5
Class: Part 2: Hollywood Cinema vs. European Cinema

Sessions 5 and 6 challenge the notion that Hollywood's output and that associated with European nations is profoundly different; a notion that rests on the invocation on the one hand of mindless entertainment, and on the other enlightening art.


Thus, where Hollywood tends to be characterized as a money-grabbing purveyor of formulaic, stupefying trash, European cinema is usually elevated as an authentic, autonomous, alternative to Hollywood: in short as art. This session, challenges this problematic distinction by considering the institutionalization within Hollywood of Art(y) cinema. By this is meant output heavily indebted to celebrated European productions that came to be seen in American film culture as “European Art Cinema”.

Required readings:

Week 6


Midterm Exam Period

This session tackles the Hollywood vs. European cinema problem from a different angle than taken in the previous session. It considers those European-based companies that have specialized in the production of commercially viable transatlantic fare that is intended as much for Hollywood distributors and US theaters as for European eyes. The session focuses on two European firms that are behind some of the most talismanic Hollywood fare of the last twenty years: the UK-based Working Title Films and France’s EuropaCorp.

Required readings:
- Home Screening: Taken (2008)
- Screening: Paul (2011)

Week 7

Class: Part 3: Anti-Communist Hollywood (?)

In sessions 7 and 8, students challenge a structuring assumption of twentieth-century Hollywood’s European relations: that Hollywood was a staunchly anti-Communist institution. This notion will be examined critically, with reference to the two period in which Hollywood’s relations to Eastern Europe were most pronounced: the 1940s and 1950s, and the 1980s.

Anti-Communist Hollywood (?) I: Tinsel Town and the Eastern Bloc.

In this session, students will consider the ways Hollywood demonized and reached out to Eastern Europe during the tumultuous period of the late 1930s to the early 1950s. In so doing, they will develop a more nuanced picture of Hollywood’s relationships to this part of the world, than the relevant albeit limiting notion that Hollywood went to the ends of the earth to promote itself as anti-communist.

Required readings:
- Blahova 2010, 345–357.
- Home Screening: Mission to Moscow (1943)
- In-Class Screening: Ninotchka (1939)

Week 8

Class: Anti-Communist Hollywood (?) II: New Cold War Cinema

Hollywood’s engagement with important geopolitical issues is perhaps nowhere more apparent in the last thirty years than in a high-profile strand of mid-to-late 1980s output known as New Cold War Cinema. This production trend is typically seen as jingoistic and hawkish on the grounds that it supposedly showcased American patriotism and military might in the face of dangerous, in-human enemy from the Eastern Bloc. In this session, we will consider whether these films were really quite as reactionary as they are suggested to have been or whether some of them used depictions of Eastern Europe (and) to deliver quite forceful critiques of American political, economic, and social
systems, and the very act of politicizing entertainment.

Required Reading:


In-Class Screening: *Rocky IV* (1985)

**Week 9**

**Class:** Part 4 Americanization (?): Concession-Making

Histories of Hollywood’s European relations are often explained with reference to charges of Americanization, cultural imperialism, and globalization. However, the notion of imposing “American” values for cultural and economic reasons, only goes so far in accounting for the dynamics of this relationship. Accordingly, Sessions 9 and 10 start to develop our understanding of this topic, in this case by shifting attention towards the concessions Hollywood has made to the Europeans’ whose voluntary consumption it has needed to survive.

**Concession-Making I: Hollywood’s Postwar Tour of Europe**

At specific historical junctures, Hollywood has tailored the content of many of its movies to make them specifically marketable and appealing to certain European audiences upon whom it has relied to remain solvent. Although one might be forgiven for thinking that Hollywood’s aggressive courting of major European markets is a new thing – as a product of a recent acceleration in globalizing tendencies – nothing could be further from the truth. This session considers a spate of postwar pictures that courted much-needed European audiences with a timely combination of transatlantic romance and cultural (tact and) diplomacy.

Required reading:


Home Screening: *Roman Holiday* (1953)

In-Class Screening: *It Started in Naples* (1960)

**Week 10**

**Class:** Concession-Making II: Recent Euro-Friendly Blockbusters

The strategies with which Hollywood courted European audiences in the postwar years also underwrite the production of almost all of the flagship products of today’s Conglomerate Hollywood: the cross-media, international, mass-audience phenomenon known simply as the blockbuster. In this session, students will consider the extraordinary lengths to which Hollywood has been going to make its high-end animated, fantasy-adventure, and superhero films as Euro-friendly as possible during a period of popular Anti-Americanization on the continent. This strategy has seen these films first target key western European markets and appeared poised once again to reach out to Russia.

Required Readings:

Maltby 2003, 212–217.


Home Screening: *Muppets Most Wanted* (2014)


**Week 11**

**Class:** Americanization (?) 2: US Introspection

In sessions 11 and 12, students will reconsider Hollywood’s use of European subject matter from a different perspective. In these sessions, the tourist film will be used to consider the degree to
which Hollywood has used this material less for exportation than primarily to address American audiences about their lives, nation, and views.

**US Introspection I: Women’s Tourist Films**

Hollywood has often commodified the idea of Europe as a fantasy space capable of enriching or liberating Americans. This tendency is centralized in the Tourist Film, and especially in a production trend that unfolded in the second half of the 1990s and continued albeit with some important revisions in the twenty first century. This session will look closely at this type of film, and consider whether its images of a pastoral Europe were always used to offer American women fantasies of community, rootedness, and romance, or whether this format was also used to think critically about these very ideas and Hollywood’s role in disseminating them.

Required Readings:


**Home Screening:** *Under the Tuscan Sun* (2003)

**Screening:** *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (2008)

**Week 12**

**Class:** Introspection II: Youth-Oriented Tourist Films

As a means of using Europe to provoke introspection among Americans, the traditional woman-oriented tourist films existed alongside variants recalibrated for different audiences or radically reworked. In this session, we approach two such films – a unique fairly horror movie and an example of a more prolific sub-genre of the 2000s. Here we consider how these European-centered films invite young people to reflect on some of the most pressing issues of American society of the day.

Required Readings:


**Home Screening:** *Hostel* (2005) – you can skip the gory bits if you like.

**Screening:** *Eurotrip!* (2004)

**Week 13**

**Class:** Final Exam Week

Final Paper Consultations

Final Presentations due

This time is set aside for one-on-one meetings with students who would like to discuss the final papers.

**Course Materials**

**Readings**

Required Readings (see above for pages of chapters of single-authored books):


