



ANTH 310 | Eastern European Society and Culture (1.0 Unit*)

Instructor: Dr. Ksenia Shmydkaya

Time: TBD

Location: Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia

Number of hours: 75 (5 academic hours per week, over the course of 15 weeks)

**One Bryn Mawr unit is equal to four undergraduate semester credits*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Examines the major intellectual and artistic movements shaping Eastern Europe in the 20th and 21st centuries with particular attention to film, art, and music. How have the region's artists and thinkers responded to the violence and upheaval that has so often defined Eastern Europe over the past century? How have these responses shaped the views and beliefs of the population? How have they responded most recently to immigration, the rise of rightwing parties, and the War in Ukraine? How have Eastern Europe's artists and intellectuals influenced western thought and global culture more broadly? The course is structured not regionally or chronologically, but rather around specific topics studied from trans-national and interdisciplinary perspectives in application to Eastern Europe and with a strong focus on case studies. Priority is given to the personas and movements, important for regional cultures but less known outside of them, to extend students' understanding of various Eastern European cultures and their mutual influences and interconnectedness.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Examine major intellectual and artistic movements in Eastern Europe during the 20th and 21st centuries, with a focus on film, art, and music;
- Apply transnational and interdisciplinary perspectives to case studies that highlight lesser-known figures and movements, demonstrating the interconnectedness of Eastern European societies and cultures;
- Evaluate the role of Eastern European artists and intellectuals in influencing Western thought and contributing to global culture;
- Analyze how artists and thinkers have responded to political and social turmoils they were witnessing, and how these responses shaped cultural beliefs and public opinion.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Students interested or specializing in humanities, arts, and especially in Russian and Eastern Europe area studies.

FLAGS

Global Cultures

This course is flagged as a Global Cultures course. Global Cultures courses are designated to increase student awareness towards cultural groups outside of the United States. Therefore it should be expected



that a larger portion of the course readings and assignments will cover specifics, techniques and ideologies related to at least one non-US cultural and social group.

ATTENDANCE

Regular attendance in this class is required. Make-up work will be allowed in exceptional cases, such as during documented medical leave, religious holidays, military service or family emergencies. It is required to notify the responsible instructor in writing, as soon as possible, in order to arrange for the make-up work. You are allowed to miss up to two undocumented absences without attendance repercussions. Each further undocumented absence will lower your course grade by two points (after the second absence 100-2.0 = maximum grade of 98, etc.). Students who arrive over 15 minutes late without a valid excuse will not receive credit for attending. Religious holidays will be respected but absences due to religious holidays must be notified in advance.

DISCUSSION RULES

As this class has a discussion component and group work covering potentially sensitive topics, including gender, ethnic identity, social inequality, and political views, please observe the following rules during the discussions and working in groups: (1) listen carefully and be respectful to the other participants in the discussion or group, (2) be sure that you understand the positions and opinions stated and ask for clarification, if necessary and (3) offer your viewpoint in respectful and non-confrontational manner, in order to achieve constructive dialogue with the instructor and your colleagues.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should notify the program coordinator who will pass the information to the responsible instructor to make appropriate arrangements. You are also advised to contact Tallinn University Student Support Centre:

<https://www.tlu.ee/en/student-support-centre>

OFFICE HOURS

Students in this course are encouraged to take advantage of instructor's weekly office hours for material clarification and guidance for midterm papers and presentations. Meetings must be arranged in advance.

GRADING AND ASSESSMENT

Grading will consist of:

Category	% Points
In-class participation and group work	15%
In-class presentations	50% (5 presentations x 10% each)
Final in-class exam	25%
TOTAL	100%

Grade Scale

Grade	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	F
4.0 Scale	4	3.7	3.3	3.0	2.7	2.3	2.0	1.7	1.0	0.0
% Points	94–100	90–94	87–90	84–87	80–84	77–80	74–77	70–74	60–70	0–60

READING LOAD

Participants in the course are expected to read from around 25 to 50 pages per week. Students are expected to budget their time accordingly, as complete all required reading selections prior to a particular class for which they have been assigned. In addition to reading the assigned texts, students are responsible for independently finding, reading and analyzing necessary sources for their individual and group presentations.

IN-CLASS PARTICIPATION

The class combines lectures, seminars and group-work sessions. During lectures, students are expected to participate answering the instructors' questions and giving feedback multiple times during each session. During seminars, students present their group home assignments and also are expected to take part in discussing other students' presentations. Group-work sessions are conducted in small groups, and then the results are reported to the instructor and fellow students who provide feedback. Thus active participation, rather than just voicing the correct answer, is very important for our progress. Simple passive attendance will not count as in-class participation. Participation will be graded on a one time basis at the end of the semester with an overall weight of 15%. Please, see the rules regarding the discussion participation.

IN-CLASS PRESENTATIONS

The presentations will be done individually or in groups of 2-3 people. The presentations will be based on the topic selected from the list of topics provided by the instructor in Moodle one week before each presentation is due. The assignment instructions will be distributed via Moodle.

FINAL IN-CLASS EXAM

The exam will be conducted in written format and will consist of two parts: quiz with 20 closed and open-ended questions and a written assignment (comparative analysis of two cultural sources, one textual and one visual or aural). The exam should be taken within four academic hours.

REQUIRED TEXTS

These are the texts that contain the required reading for this course:

- Wolff, Larry. *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford University Press, 1994.
- Hock, Beata & Anu Allas (eds.) *Globalizing East European Art Histories: Past and Present*. Routledge, 2018.
- Heller, Wendy. Lidia. *The Life of Lidia Zamenhof, Daughter of Esperanto*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1985.
- Bradby, David & David Williams. *Directors' Theatre*, second, extended edition. Macmillan Education, 2019.
- Special Issue on Canons in Eastern European Cinemas in *Eastern European Screen Studies* 16, no.1. 2025.
- Imre, Anikó. *East European Cinemas*. Routledge, 2005.
- Brüggemann, Karsten. 'Doing It the "Baltic Way": Internationalism and the Soviet Roots of the Singing Revolution. In: Woodworth, Bradley, Violeta Davoliute & Darius Staliunas (eds.). *Ethnic Relations in the Baltic Reconsidered*. CEU Press, 2025.
- Koobak, Redi. *Whirling Stories: Postsocialist Feminist Imaginaries and the Visual Arts*. Linköping University Press, 2013.

- Dima, Ramona. *Queer culture in Romania, 1920 – 2018*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2023

Additional and optional reading, when necessary, will be uploaded to Moodle to corresponding lecture units.

COURSE CONTENT

Class	Topic	Required Reading	Assignment
1	Introduction to the course and syllabus distribution. Eastern European cultures in the global context. Definitions of Eastern Europe. Approaches to the history of the region. From methodological nationalism to transnational perspective.	Wolff L. <i>Inventing Eastern Europe</i> (Introduction and Ch.1, pp. 1-49).	
2	“Provincializing the centres”. Question of languages. Varieties of democracy and authoritarianism and their effect on culture. A brief historical overview of the key artistic movements of the 20 th -21 st centuries.	Hock B. Managing trans/nationality. Cultural actors within imperial structures (from <i>Globalizing East European</i> , pp. 39-52).	
3	Creating national cultures across media. From fin de siècle to the early 20 th century. Decadence, symbolism, etc. From “art for art’s sake” to national revivals under the empires. Interconnectedness of artistic forms. Arts and crafts.	Grusiecki, Tomasz. Uprooting origins: Polish–Lithuanian art and the challenge of pluralism; Guile, Carolyn. Reflections on the politics of portraiture in early modern Poland (from <i>Globalizing East European</i> , pp.25-38; 83-97).	
4	Case study: Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis		Group presentations
5	Case study: Lesya Ukrainka and Olha Kobylianska		Group presentations
6	Case study: Mei sisters		Group presentations
7	“Other” art in Eastern Europe. “Foreigners” and “ <i>inorodtsy</i> ” are regional cultural actors. Interconnectedness and separations. Right-wing nationalism and repressions. Contested belongings.	Heller W. <i>Lidia</i> (pp. xi-33)	
8	Case studies: Papusza & Musa Czachorowski		
9	Political theater. Varieties of theatrical expressions in the region. Avant-garde, absurdism, monumentalism; theatre as propaganda.	Trencsényi K. “Director’s theatre in Eastern Europe, 1945 – 2018: A survey of some trajectories (from <i>Directors’ Theater</i>)	

10	Case study: Václav Havel		
11-12	Group presentations. Comparative analysis of different productions of the same play.		Group presentations
13	Historical film / filming history. Importance of film media for local historiographies. Different sub-genres of historical film. Preserving memory and bypassing censorship.	Special Issue on Canons in <i>Eastern European Cinemas</i> (pp. 1-12); <i>East European Cinemas</i> (Introduction)	
14	Case study: Andrzej Wajda		
15-16	Individual presentations. Presentation of an article or a chapter and students' own analysis of one of the films.		Individual presentations
17	Music for comfort and music for resistance. Soviet ethnic pop music.		
18	Emphasis on the Baltics. "Singing Revolution".	Brüggemann K. <i>Doing It the "Baltic Way"</i>	
19-20	Case study. Arvo Pärt (the class is conducted at Arvo Pärt's Center)		
21	Architecture and monuments and traumatic memories and beyond. Strategies of dealing with them across the region. Stalinism-inspired monumentalism and the uniform apartment buildings of the 1960-80s.		
22	Individual presentations. Presentation of the renovation projects of the socialist architecture from different countries.		Individual presentations.
23	Queer art. "Pre-history" of queer self-expression (beginning of the century, interwar, under socialism). Post-1989 developments. Conservative pushbacks and queer resistance. Fluid borders between art and criticism.	Dima R. <i>Queer culture in Romania</i> (pp. 7-53).	
24	Case studies: Anna-Stina Treumund; publications Fioletowy Puls and Furia Pierwsza	Koobak R. <i>Whirling Stories</i> (pp. 25-70)	
25	Artistic reaction to wars. Comparative look at the responses to the wars in the region. WWI, WWII, Yugoslavia, Ukraine. Destruction and preservation of heritage. Immediate artistic reactions.		
26	Group presentations. Presentation of the found examples.		Group presentations

27-28	Futures of Eastern European cultures. Impact of the digital media. Questions of regional identity. Europeanness. Does the concept of “Eastern European cultures” have any meaning today?		
	Final in-class exam		