**HSTEU 274**

**Autumn 2019**

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

**\*\*\*Remember to bring your readings to class with you!!!\*\*\***

**WEEK 1 (September 27th discussion)**

**King Leopold II, “The Sacred Mission of Civilization” (1898)**

**Edmund D. Morel, “Property and Trade versus Forced Labor” (1905)**

What argument do you think Leopold is making in this essay? What is the “sacred mission of civilization,” as he sees it? What does Leopold see as the main difference between Europeans and Africans? What do the Europeans have to offer, in his view?

What is Morel’s main objection to Leopold’s ventures in the Congo? What, specifically, is wrong with Leopold’s form of imperialism from Morel’s point of view? What does he think makes Leopold’s kind of imperialism different (from, say, the Portuguese slave trade)? What’s the problem with forced labor, according to Morel?

Does Morel have a better system to propose? Would you characterize Morel as an anti-imperialist? How does his view of Africans in the Congo compare to Leopold’s? What do you think Morel is trying to accomplish as a British reformer of a Belgian imperialist system? What does he have to say about French and British imperialist projects?

**WEEK 2 (October 4th discussion)**

**Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (1929)**

**Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel* (1919 – English edition, 1929)**

**Jean Renoir, *Grand Illusion* (1937)**

According to these three texts, how does the war seem to be changing European society, and the individuals within it? What are some of the differences between the prewar and wartime (or postwar) worlds?

How do the soldiers in the film and the texts characterize the enemy? How do they understand the purpose of the war – what motivates them to fight? What does it mean to them to be a good soldier? A good civilian? How do Graves and Jünger characterize life in the trenches? Why do you think that Renoir chooses to avoid the trenches altogether? How do the texts and the film depict the relationship between the home front and the battle front? What role, if any, do women seem to play in the war?

How would you characterize the tone of Jünger’s text? According to Jünger, what is the positive value of war? Why do you think he writes this text in the first place – what is he trying to accomplish? How might you explain the stark contrast between Jünger’s narrative and the accounts of the war we see in Renoir and Graves?

How important is national identity to Graves, Jünger, and Renoir? What does it mean to them to be British, French, or German? Are other forms of identity (such as class or religion) more important? What do you make of the figure of Rosenthal in *Grand Illusion*, for example?

Graves, Jünger, and Renoir all crafted their accounts of the Great War retrospectively, after the war ended in 1918. Why do you think these memories of the war became so important in the 1920s and 1930s, and what message was the audience supposed to take away from them?

**WEEK 3 (October 11th discussion)**

**Anna Litveiko, “In 1917” (1957)**

**Alexandra Kollantai, “Communism and the Family” (1920)**

**Sergei Eisenstein, *Ten Days that Shook the World* (1927)**

Like Graves and Jünger, both Litveiko and Eisenstein are looking back at the revolution retrospectively (Eisenstein from 1927 and Litveiko from 1957). What kind of memory or mythology of the revolution are they trying to create? What are some of the important moments of revolution in their accounts?

What argument is Eisenstein making about the origins of the revolution? How does his view of the revolution compare to Litveiko’s or Kollantai’s? According to all of these authors, what makes a good revolutionary? What qualities should a revolutionary have? Why do Litveiko and her peers become revolutionaries in the first place?

In Litveiko’s text, what are the mechanics of revolution – that is, how do revolutions actually work? Why, in her view, do the Bolsheviks win out? How does Litveiko think the revolution has changed over the course of 1917 (i.e. from February to October)?

According to Litveiko and Kollantai, who are the winners and the losers of the revolution? Who benefits from the changes brought about by 1917? Why, in Kollantai’s view, should women be interested in the revolution? Why do Soviet leaders care so much about prostitution and the status of women?

Are you persuaded by Kollantai’s critique of the bourgeois family? What does she think the communist family has to offer instead? How does Kollantai thinks the family works as an economic institution? As an ideology?

**WEEK 4 (October 18th discussion)**

**Joseph Stalin, “Policy of Eliminating the Kulaks as a Class” (1930)**

**Joseph Stalin, “Results of the First Five-Year Plan” (1933)**

**Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will* (1935)**

How would you describe the genre of Stalin’s writing? Who is his intended audience? Who is his “ideal” citizen – what traits would this citizen possess? Conversely, who does he see as the enemy?

Does Stalin seem to be breaking with the aims of 1917, or extending them? How would you compare these writings to those of the earlier revolutionaries (such as Litveiko and Kollantai)? How does Stalin characterize his relationship to Western Europe, to the United States, and to the Revolution itself? Why do you think he uses sources such as the Western press? How does the West seem to be making sense of communism?

How does he justify the high costs of Stalinism, and why do you think his followers were convinced? How does he define “success”? What is the appeal of Stalinism? Of fascism? What, if anything, do Stalin and Riefenstahl have in common?

Judging from the Riefenstahl film, how might you characterize some of the key traits of fascism? What argument does the film make about the Great War? About Hitler? About the German nation? What might have been appealing about these arguments in the 1930s?

What kinds of visual techniques does Riefenstahl use to make her arguments? Is this art? Propaganda? How can we tell the difference?

**WEEK 5 (October 25th discussion)**

**Art Spiegelman, *Maus II* (1986)**

**Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah* (1985)**

Why do you think Spiegelman chooses to tell the story of his father’s experience (and the history of the Holocaust) in the format of a graphic novel? Is this offensive? Trivializing? What are your associations with the genre of the comic book? What does Spiegelman gain by using this format?

How would you describe Vladek’s experiences in the camps? How would you characterize him as a person? What do you think of the relationship between Vladek and Art? How has the Holocaust affected Art? How does Vladek’s account of the Holocaust differ from Art’s, and how do you think the reader is supposed to interpret the disparities?

How do you respond to Spiegelman’s choice to represent Jews as mice, the French as frogs, and so on? Why does he use animals at all? Why are the animals drawn with the same physical traits that make them almost indistinguishable from one another? Why are all the Germans depicted as cats, instead of just Nazi soldiers? Why are some characters wearing masks, but only sometimes (as in the “Time Flies” panel on p. 41)?

Spiegelman and Lanzmann are both profoundly concerned with the question of what it really means to be a “survivor” of the Holocaust. For Spiegelman, who are the survivors?

Are Lanzmann and Spiegelman telling the same kind of history? How would you characterize their different goals?

**WEEK 6 (November 1st discussion)**

**Heda Kovaly, *Under a Cruel Star* (1973)**

**Michael Verhoeven, *The Nasty Girl* (1990)**

What does post-war Europe look like, according to Kovaly? What are the chief obstacles to her return “home” to Czechoslovakia, and what does she find when she gets there?

How might you compare Kovaly’s account of the Second World War to the Great War texts? In what ways does the Second World War seem fundamentally different from the First? How does Kovaly’s account of the Holocaust compare to Spiegelman’s?

Who does Kovaly hold responsible for the crimes of the war – and later, for the crimes of the communist state? How do her fellow Czechs respond to her after the war? How does Kovaly explain the appeal of communism in Czechoslovakia? Why does Rudolf become a communist? How do his reasons compare to Heda’s?

In Kovaly’s account of Stalinism, who gets persecuted and why? What is the logic of Stalinism, according to Kovaly? How does denunciation work, exactly? What does it mean to denounce someone? What effect do the Stalinist purges have on human relationships? What does Kovaly see as the long-term effect of Stalinism in Czechoslovakia? How do people there deal with the past?

Verhoeven is also deeply concerned with issues of moral responsibility in post-war Europe. What does Sonya initially hope to find about the history of her town? Who is morally responsible, both for the initial crimes of war and for the larger “cover-up”? What role does the state play (both for Kovaly and Verhoeven) in the cover-up of the events of the war?

How would you describe the relationship between the past and the present in this film? Why do you think Verhoeven ends the film the way he does? Is it a satisfying ending? Are there any heroes in the postwar world? If so, do Kovaly and Sonia seem like heroes?

**WEEK 7 (November 8th discussion)**

**Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French* (1993)**

**Uta Poiger, “Rock ‘n roll” (1996)**

**Billy Wilder, *One, Two, Three* (1961)**

In Wilder’s film, what do you see as the target of his satire? Where do you think his sympathies lie? What political argument do you think he is making in his depiction of the Soviets, the Germans (East and West), and the Americans themselves? Is this ultimately a film about the *appeal* of Americanization or the *rejection* of it?

What *is* Americanization, anyway? How do its opponents and supporters define it? Who seems to oppose or support Americanization, and why?Based on the readings, how would you compare the French and German responses to Americanization? How might you account for these different responses?

More specifically, how does Charles de Gaulle respond to American influence? What is at stake for him in embracing or rejecting Americanization? Is de Gaulle’s response different from that of the French public at large?

In the German case, how is “rock ‘n roll” defined in the two Germanies? How might you explain the different reactions to American music in these two regions? How does the reaction to American music change over time?

**WEEK 8 (November 15th discussion)**

**Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (1959)**

**Gillo Pontecorvo, *Battle of Algiers* (1966)**

How would you categorize the different kinds of violence that were involved in the Algerian War, and what do you think Pontecorvo is arguing about these various forms of violence? Where do you think Pontecorvo’s sympathies lie?

Who are the enemies of the FLN, and what are their goals? What kind of community does the FLN want to establish? Both for Fanon and for the FLN members depicted in Pontecorvo’s film, what is Algeria supposed to look like AFTER independence? How do they imagine that Algeria and Algerians will be transformed?

According to Fanon, what *specifically* is wrong with colonialism? Does he offer a solution? How does Fanon think the Algerians have been changed by French occupation – have they become French? What role does European technology (such as the radio) play in the Algerian independence movement?

What is the significance of the veil for Fanon? How do the French and the Algerians interpret the veil differently? How do Fanon and Pontecorvo characterize the role of women in the Algerian War? The role of marriage and the family?

**WEEK 9 (November 22nd discussions)**

**Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern* (1990)**

According to Garton Ash, how do the revolutions of 1989 take place? What causes them in the first place, and how do these work? Who leads these revolutions, and what are the leaders like?

How does revolution change from place to place – that is, how does it look different in the various sites that Garton Ash describes? Of the various events described here, which ones seem the most “revolutionary”? Would you necessarily describe all of these events as “revolutions”? Why does Garton Ash construct them in this way?

How do these revolutions compare to earlier revolutions that we’ve seen in this class? What would Litveiko and Kollantai think of the revolutions of 1989?

**WEEK 10 (December 6th discussions)**

**Hanif Kureishi, “London and Karachi” (1989)**

**Matthieu Kassovitz, *La Haine/Hate* (1996)**

How does Kureishi characterize the two key spaces of his essay – London and Karachi – and what is the relationship between them? What kinds of experiences does he have (and what kinds of people does he encounter) in these different settings? Does he belong to a different social class in England versus Pakistan?

In what sense, if any, is Kureishi “Pakistani” or “English”? Given his account of English racism, why do you think he decides to go back to England?

In Kassovitz’s film, would you describe the three young protagonists as French? If they’re not French, then what are they? Why do you think American popular culture plays such a significant role for them? Are they “Americanized” in the same way as the German teens described by Poiger?

Why do you think there’s so much violence in this film? What purpose does it serve? How is this kind of violence different from that we saw in Pontecorvo’s *Battle of Algiers*?