

FINAL REPORT OF THE PROJECT

FACES OF MEMORY – CULTURES OF REMEMBRANCE AND DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

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The new course syllabus *Faces of Memory – Cultures of Remembrance and Documentary Filmmaking in East-Central Europe* explores the cinematographic narratives of the contested issues in the recent past of East-Central Europe. Drawing from the rich holdings of OSA Archivum, Verzio Film Festival (Budapest) and One World Film Festival (Prague), the syllabus includes themes ranging from analysis of the ideological uses of documentary under socialism to the examination of post-socialist cultures of remembrance. The course focuses on the modalities of presenting and editing the textual and visual “evidence” in (re)creating the image of the past, and on the variety of ways to construct historical “authenticity”; it also addresses the limitations, as well as specific strengths of the representations advanced by documentary films. Topics for discussion include relationship of documentary with truth, the problem of interpretation, the appropriation and redefinition of visual imagery in different historical narratives, and further dilemmas of representation related to collective memory and practices of remembrance.

When I applied for the Visegrad scholarship at the OSA I had a preliminary structure of the planned course syllabus both in terms of selected films and readings. I wished to explore the OSA audiovisual collection, mainly the film library, in order to organize the preselected films and to look for additional, and hopefully even more suitable, ones. I also hoped to make account of the CEU library in order to specify literature for each planned session. My expectations were fully met.

Furthermore, within the course of my research at the OSA I also understood that my original concept of the course syllabus was not at all coherent; it was mixing the chronological concept with topical issues. As a consequence, I had to reorganize it substantially and look for additional films and literature. It was thanks to my stay at the OSA and to my supervisor Oksana Sarkisova that I was able to detect those shortcomings and to improve the course syllabus in a very short time.

The course syllabus as it was presented at the end of my stay at OSA Archivum is organized around topics. The first two sessions function as introductory sessions and are focused on methodological approaches to documentary cinema. Selected audiovisual works challenge participating students/viewers with important issues such as relationship of documentary with truth, variety of ways to construct “historical authenticity” and manipulation.

Furthermore, the second introductory session aims to introduce relationship of documentary with realism, authenticity and poses questions of ideological uses. It also questions documentary representation as such and draws attention to the mechanisms behind the filming process.

The following sessions are already organized around topics; starting with conflicting memories of WW II, through the issues of retroactive justice in Post-Communism, lustration screening process, state security files’ access and memories of surveillance. One entire session focuses on the use of private film archives as an alternative historical source. For another session filmmakers were selected who have made the process of coming to terms with the past their personal agenda.

The last two sessions are interconnected by the topic of migration. Both present films about new migration waves which followed after the collapse of the East-West economic model. First session focuses on reordering spaces and relocation of ethnic minorities, while the second documents the phenomenon of labor migration to the West.

Each session makes up of max. 3 film excerpts and is complemented with approx. 60-70 pages of readings for each class. The readings were carefully selected to match the topics of the films and to provide additional framework for discussing particular issues as well. It is evident that I wouldn’t have been able to prepare all those materials so carefully without taking the advantage of the OSA fellowship and the CEU library.

My stay at the OSA also provided me with the opportunity to run a three-day workshop “Visual Lab” during the Verzio Film Festival together with Oksana Sarkisova (November 3-5, 2010, <http://www.verzio.org/vlab/index.html>). We selected three topics from the planned course syllabus and prepared a three-day workshop with film clips and subsequent discussions. The program was well attended (approx. 20-30 people for each class) and well received. While it enriched the program of the Verzio Film Festival it also proved to be a good testing ground for the course syllabus. Most of the participants stressed the importance

(and the lack thereof) of analyzing and discussing audiovisual works, documentary films in particular.

I am very much indebted to the International Visegrad Fund and the OSA for providing me with the grant. It allowed me a luxury – the possibility to fully concentrate on my research and to devote most of my time to watching films and reading books. Such an intense period is never possible within a normal working process, even an academic one. Furthermore, OSA is a welcoming place with excellent facilities and helpful staff. In particular, I would like to thank Oksana Sarkisova. We have developed the course syllabus jointly and the course is now ready to be taught.

During my stay at OSA and CEU I came to understand better how the institutions function and what kind of projects they house. Now I am certain that I will be able to return there on my own in the future.

Helena Zajicova

Helena Zajicova graduated in Russian and East European Studies from Charles University in Prague. From 2000 till 2009 she worked for the One World International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival in Prague, one of the leading film festivals in the world dealing with human rights. For four years she was the Program Director of the festival. In 2009 she spent 8 months in the South Caucasus running the South Caucasus Documentary Film Festival "Nationality: Human". Helena works as a consultant for festivals and film institutions in East-Central Europe as well as in the South Caucasus region. Since April 2010 she has been employed at the Prague Film Academy FAMU.