Siege Mentality in National Cinemas

Seminar 4 ש"ס תש"ג

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Shiurim: Prof. Yossi Shaul

The course is taught in Hebrew.

The course topic: Siege mentality in national cinemas.

The course syllabus includes:

1. The concept of siege mentality and its various manifestations in national cinemas.
2. Theoretical background: An introduction to the concept of siege mentality.

The assessment criteria for the course include:

- Written assignment: 20% of the grade (in Hebrew).
- Oral presentation: 30% of the grade (in Hebrew).
- Group project: 50% of the grade (in Hebrew).

The course readings are:

Readings: Bar-Tal, Daniel (2000), "Societal Beliefs About Siege", in Shared Beliefs in a Society, London: Sage, 2000 (pp. 101-121); Readings: Bar-Tal,

Screenings: Hill 24 Doesn’t Answer (Thorold Dickenson, Israel, 1956); Siege (Gilberto Toffano, Israel, 1968); Kippur (Amos Gitai, Israel, 2000).

Readings: Kracauer, Siegfried (1947), From Caligary to Hitler. Princeton: Princeton U. P.

Screenings: The Cabinet of Dr. Caligary (Robert Wiene, Germany, 1920); Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler (Fritz Lang, Germany, 1922).


Screenings: The Lady from Shanghai (Orson Welles, US, 1948); The Manchurian Candidate (John Frankenheimer, US, 1962)

Siege mentality refers to a conception whereby individuals or groups perceive themselves as living in a besieged state facing a hostile world. This self-conception, originating for many nations in tradition, past and present experiences, and inculcated through state ideology, may turn under certain circumstances into a central conception, biasing the approach of individuals or groups within society to different problems faced by the nation. Siege mentality, arousing under certain geo-political and socio-political circumstances can be seen to inhere particularly in films dealing with issues perceived by many within the nation as threatening their state’s existence, namely: films about war, or films addressing issues perceived as threatening or debilitating the nations’ internal stability in face of a perceived threatening world, such as acute inter ethnic, class, or gender tensions. The course will follow the formal and thematic embedment of siege mentality in films of different nations focusing upon 5 case studies: German Expressionist films between the World Wards, American Film Noir and McCarthyism, Cuban films after the revolution, Hungarian films after the 1956 aborted revolution and consequent Soviet invasion, and Israeli films on war.