This seminar focuses on the connections between authoritarian regimes and art. The class deals with both popular culture forms and “high art,” with an emphasis on comparing practices in the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union with autocracies in the Middle East. Reading works by theorists such as Althusser, Arendt, Berlant, Bourdieu, Kant, Williams, and Zizek, and putting studies of authoritarianism in conversation with discussions of the market, the class asks a variety of questions: How does compliance operate under autocratic conditions? What distinguishes autocracy from democracy? How might concepts such as ideology, hegemony, and legitimacy help or hinder our efforts to understand political life? Why might artistic practices be an especially important form of evidence in understanding how political power works, and what role do specific genres play in producing aesthetic expectations? In what ways does censorship constrain and/or enable art? How are authoritarian institutions of censorship different from market-oriented ones and how do pressures to conform operate in each? How does transgressive art “work the weaknesses” (Butler) of the system and how might it reproduce or underwrite conventional forms of political power? How does state sponsorship or private sector endorsement affect artistic value? What counts as artistic value anyway?

The class is for advanced undergraduate students and will cover methodological issues related to interpretation, genre, reception, and form. Students will also be exposed to films, comedy skits, a novel, and short stories.
• **Requirements**

You are expected to attend every class, to complete all of the assignments on time, and to participate avidly in class discussions (10%). The films specified on the syllabus as homework should be viewed prior to class. Students will write a midterm take-home essay exam (40%) and a final essay exam (50%). Required books can be purchased at the Seminary Cooperative Bookstore. They are the following:


All written assignments are to be handed in hard copy in 12-pt Times New Roman font, double-spaced. If you wish to dispute an exam grade, you must submit a formal appeal in writing, addressed to the professors.

• **Academic Honesty**

As a member of The University of Chicago community you will not participate in or tolerate academic dishonesty. We will hold you to the University’s standards for academic responsibility. If you are not adequately familiar with the University’s policy on academic honesty, please consult page 31 of the Student Manual: (http://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/sites/studentmanual.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/Student_Manual_2014-15.pdf).

• **Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities are urged to contact us early in the quarter so that per guidelines from student disability services (http://disabilities.uchicago.edu/), we can make special accommodations for exam taking.

• **Film Showings**

The movies we do not show in class are available on Netflix or YouTube. For those who do not have Netflix subscriptions, we shall organize evening showings before the class for which the film is assigned. Please contact the instructor if you are interested in participating in these viewings.
- **Schedule**

**Week 1 (September 30): Introduction**

“A Pervert’s Guide to Ideology,” film by Sophie Fiennes with Slavoj Zizek (to be shown in class)

Readings: NOTE THESE FIRST WEEK’S READINGS SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY THE THIRD WEEK (in addition to those assigned for weeks two and three). We shall begin to discuss them in relation to the film on the first day of class and they will continue to inform our discussions throughout the quarter.

- Zizek, Slavoj “Denial: The Liberal Utopia,”
- Recommended: Bourdieu’s *Distinction*, Chapters 1 and 3.

**Week 2 (October 7): Performing Under Autocracy---Fascism**

“Mephisto,” film by Istvan Szabo (144 minute film shown in class)

Readings:
- Continue to read from Week 1:

**Week 3 (October 14): Fascism as Spectacle and as Ordinariness**

“Triumph of the Will,” film by Leni Riefenstahl

Readings:
- Borowski, Tadeusz. *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*. Penguin, 1976 (short story by the same title)
Week 4 (October 21): Why compliance?

Readings:

Week 5 (October 28): Performing under Autocracy—Communism

“The Lives of Others” film by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck

Readings:


Midterm Essay Due

Week 6 (November 4): Performing under Autocracy—Syrian Ambiguities

*Stars in Broad Daylight*, film by Ossama Mohammed

Readings:

Week 7 (November 11): Soviet Paradoxes

Readings:

Week 8 (November 18): Youth

*Beats of Freedom*, film by Jacek Wozniak (excerpts)

Readings:

Week 9 (November 25): Thanksgiving, no class

Week 10 (November 30): *Neoliberal Autocracy and its Art Forms: Reproduction and Change under the Market*

Note the different date, location TBA

Television episode clips from *A Forgotten Village* (and others—all to be shown in class)

Readings:
Wedeen, Lisa, *Neoliberal Autocracy and its Unmaking: Reflections on Syria* (chapter 1, excerpts from chapter 2 and chapter 4)

Week 11 (December 11): Final essays due