

# HOLLYWOOD/EUROPE: A TRANSNATIONAL FILM CULTURE

Part 3: Americanization II:

Promoting American Superiority (?):

The Case of Recent Tourist Films

Department of Film and Audiovisual Culture

Dr. Richard Nowell

# Agenda

12:40-14:15

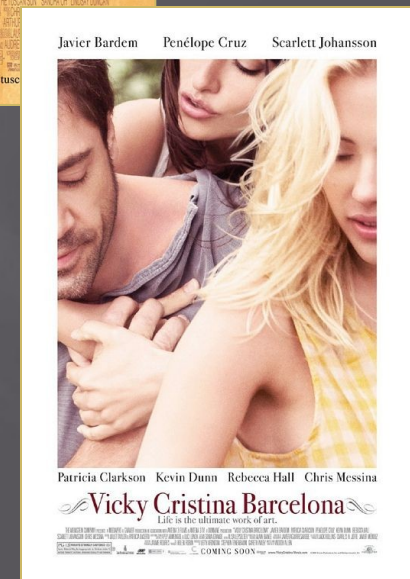
Screening: *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*  
(2008)

14:15-14:30

Break

14:30-15:45

The Recent Tourist Film

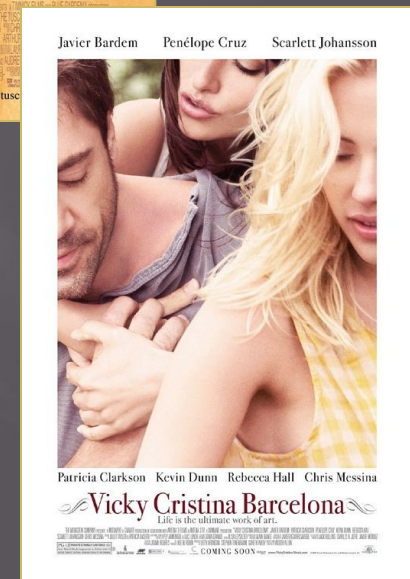


# Agenda

Images of Europe and Europeans  
and addressing American audiences  
as Americans

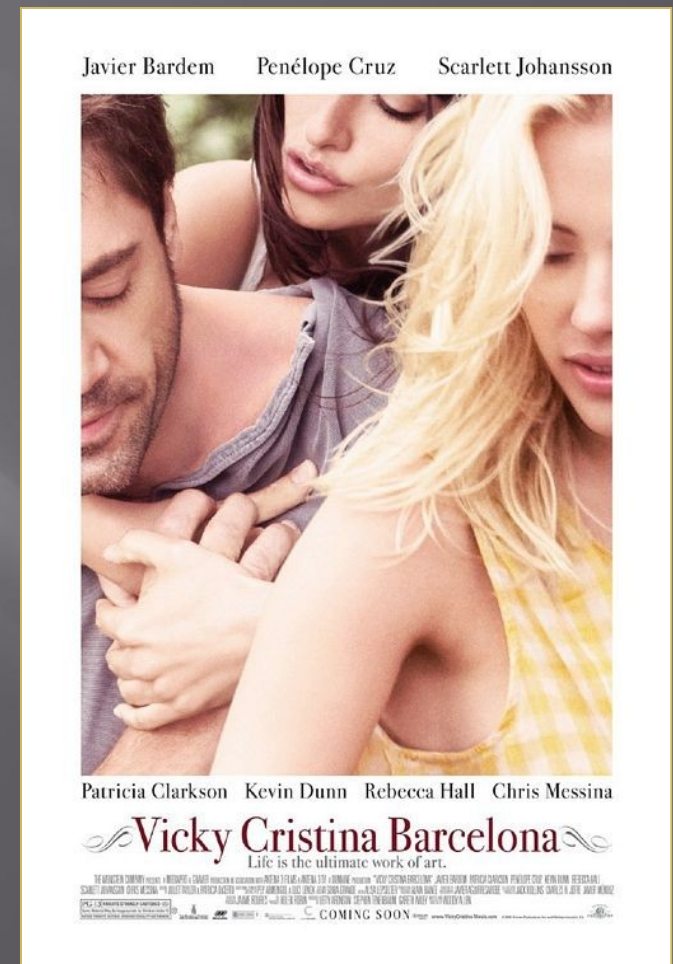
Variants of the US-European  
“intercultural” approach

The tourist film of the 1990s (and  
beyond) ... reconsidered



# Screening Questions: *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (2008)

1. In what ways does *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*'s mobilize the conventions of the tourist film?
2. Does the film use, what Negra identifies as, the central topics of the tourist films to articulate a different message to earlier entries (including *Under the Tuscan Sun*)?
3. What does this film have to say about “American” assumptions of Europe?



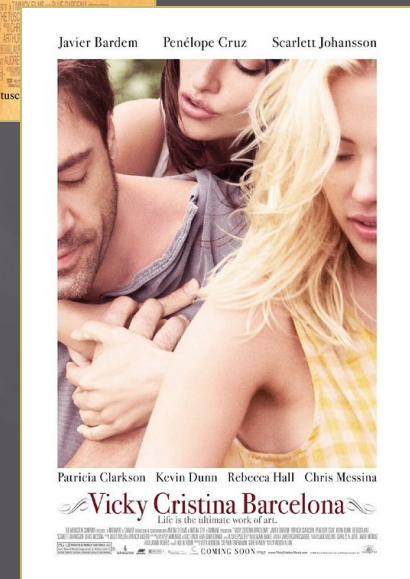


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# Americanization or/and Self-reflection(?)

Discussions of Hollywood and Europe are often couched in terms of Americanization, cultural imperialism, or globalization

These typically posit the notion of an American Hollywood imposing a distinctly American culture onto a distinct and separate space

This situation is usually lamented because Hollywood is said to replace virtuous “European” art with “American” trash

It is often claimed Hollywood employs onscreen surrogates to promote “American” culture and values over those of European nations

But films about transatlantic relations are often more nuanced than this; images of Europe are often used to provoke American introspection ...

# The Case of New Cold War Cinema: “This movie is pro-Russian” – Sylvester Stallone

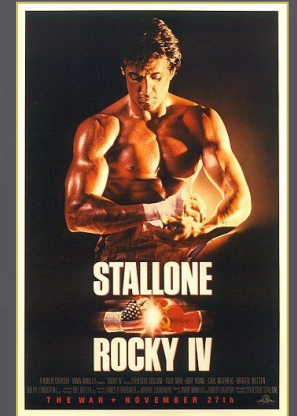
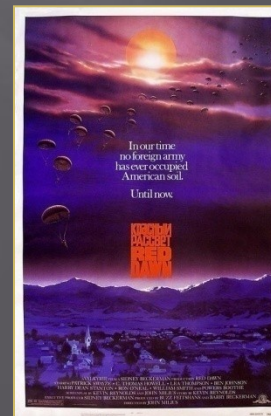
A 1980s production trend focused on US-USSR relations during the Reagan years

Hollywood was focused on domestic market, Eastern Europe was of negligible importance

These films are typically understood as pro-Reagan agit-prop vilifying Eastern Europe

However, some were clearly reconciliatory in tone, and often critical of American life

*Rocky IV* critiques US xenophobia, bellicosity, consumerism, technology, corporate media





# The Case of Post-9/11 Fantasy Cinema

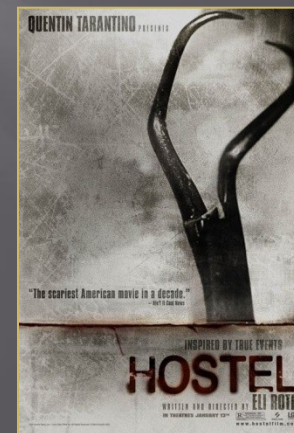
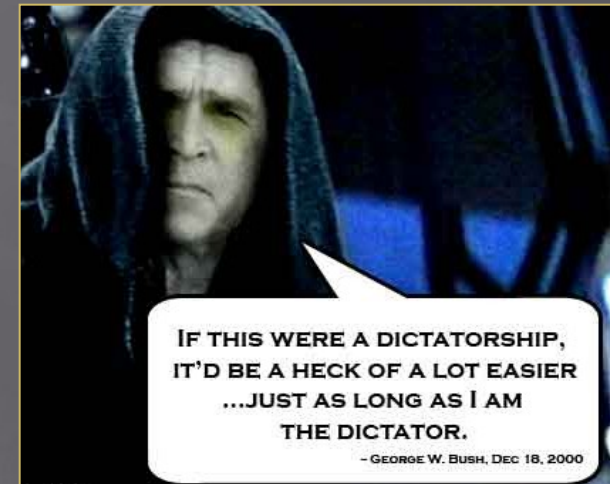
Popularization of political discourse incentivizes production of political movies in the mid-2000s

Focus on foreign and domestic policy; questions of democracy; vulnerability and bellicosity

Polarizing nature of Bush-Cheney era makes this material potentially alienating to many viewers

Relocation to Europe tempers this possibility

Some allegorize interventionism; some offered thinly veiled critique of Bush-Cheney US





# The Tourist Film

The Tourist Film represents one of Hollywood's most persistent and developed uses of what Hjort dubbed the intercultural approach

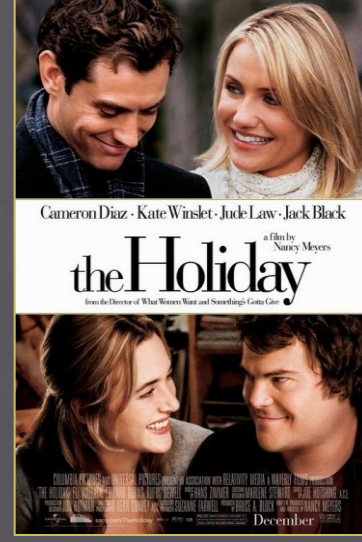
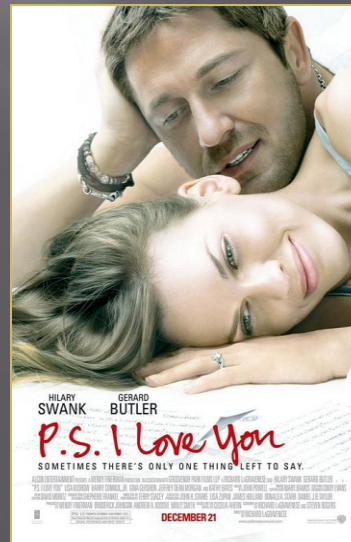
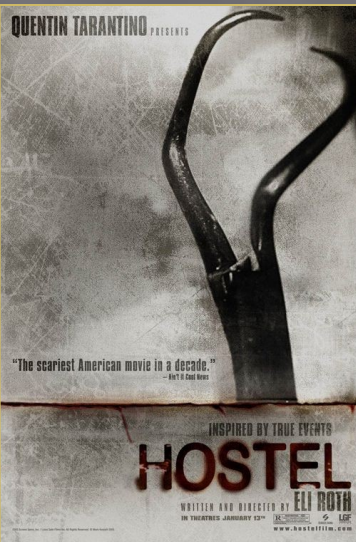
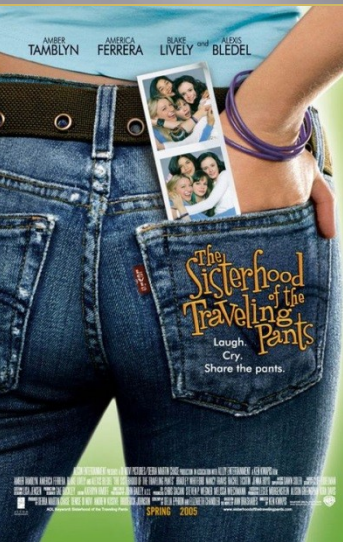
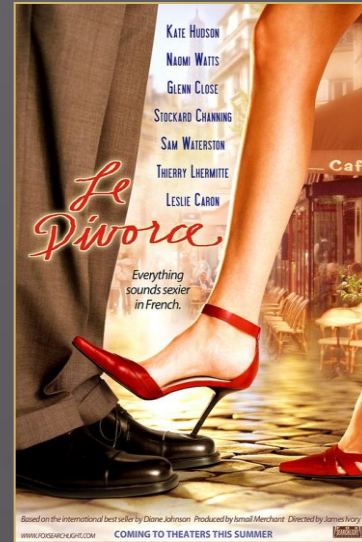
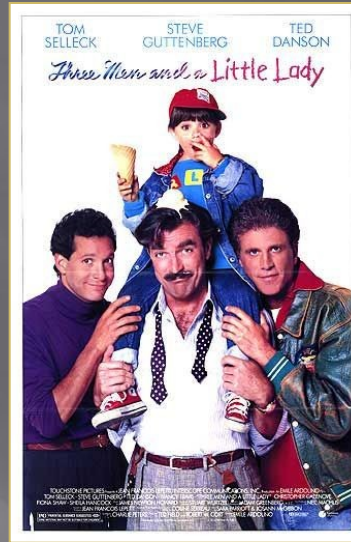
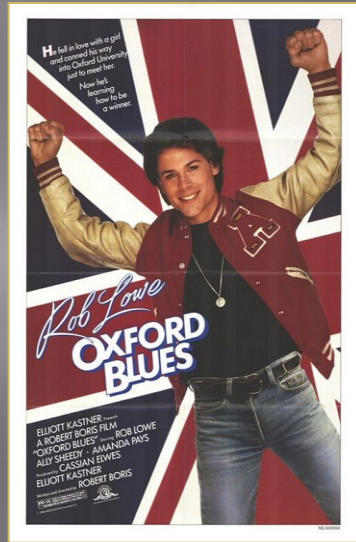
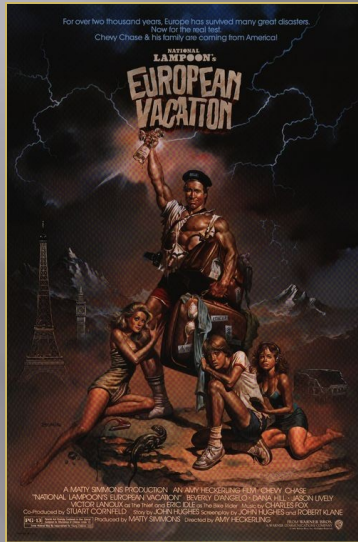
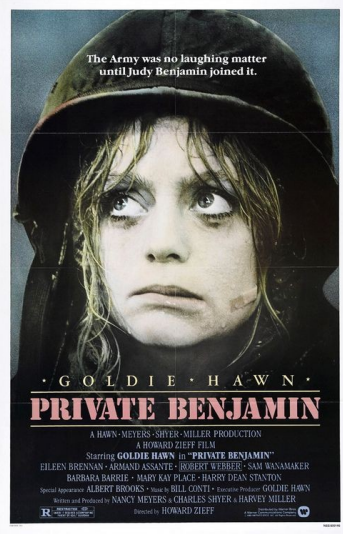
This filmic model is characterized by an invitation to viewers to consider the dynamics of "home" against those of other places

Hollywood has consistently used the tourist film model as both a structuring device and as a generic strand in "hybrid" texts

Such films have explored the home/away relationship differently, addressing different viewers and advancing different positions thereon

Oftentimes, the films picture US citizens reflecting on the relative merits and shortcomings of what life might be like in a European nation

# The Tourist Film



What does Negra suggest were the major concerns in the lives of (some) American women being addressed in and by the tourist films of the 1990s?

In what ways does she suggest that ideas about Europe enabled these films to posit solutions to these concerns?



# Negra on the Themes, Positions, and Address of the 1990s Films

Argues films thematized four concerns central to middle-class white American women's lives

- 1a. Rootlessness due to economic migration
- 1b. Loss of community (see above + competition)
2. Pressure to choose between career and family
3. Body issues related to food

Romanticized pastoral Europe offers solutions

1. Presented as rooted and community-centered
2. Slower pace makes family and career possible
3. "Nature boy" re-harmonizes American woman with food, making her happy in her own skin





What reasons does *Negra* offer for Hollywood's employment of this material?

# The Limits of Negra's Socio-Symptomatic Approach

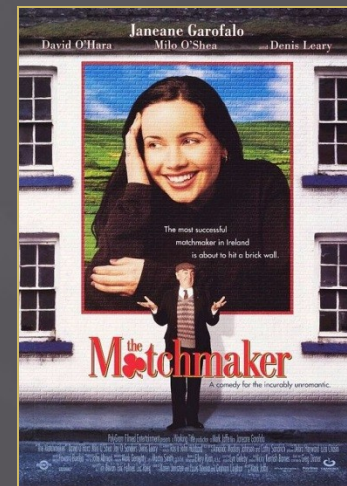
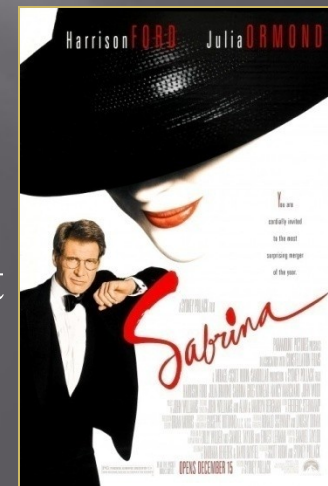
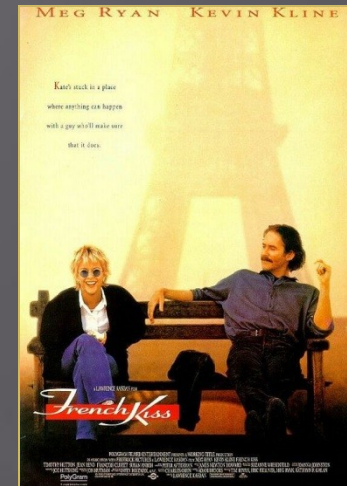
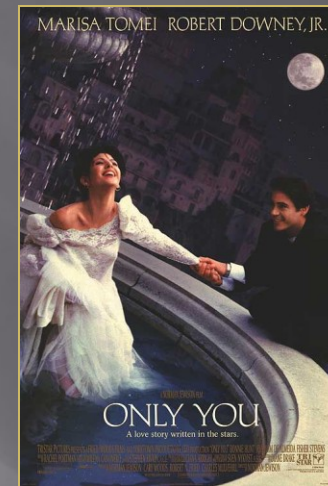
Negra posits these films as merely signs of the times, yet the picture is more complex

Negra's case requires she homogenize the positions the films took up ... in reality ...

They used combinations of the themes she posits, but took different positions thereon

Many only offered attractive backdrops, and nice background characters, for US-US love

Her account explains the films' topicality, but not why they were made in the first place ...



# Priming the US Audience for a radical change in “American” Cinema

The 1990s films all sought to overcome potential US negativity towards Europe(ans)

They were therefore partly preparing Americans for the imminent Europeanization of much Hollywood output

After all, they were made when Hollywood knew that its future hinged on its optimizing European sales

Hollywood was evidently concerned that a sudden shift in content risked alienate its core US audience

Consequently, it only gradually re-internationalized the content and address of its films across the 1990s



# Twenty-first Century Tourist Films

Negra's homogenization of the tourist films represents something of a "hyper-text", and as such a reputation which later films worked with

More so than many of the older tourist films, newer entries have sought to balance address to Americans with an appeal to Europeans

They were made when America's reputation plummeted, due largely to the unpopular conduct, rhetoric, and policies of the Bush White House

Cries of imperialism leveled at Bush dovetailed with a resurgence of similar charges aimed at international culture industries like Hollywood

Under these industrial and discursive conditions, newer films were often strategically critical of "Americans" views of life overseas ...



# The Case of *Under the Tuscan Sun*

1. How does writer-director Audrey Wells use ideas related to *Under the Tuscan Sun*'s (2003) European setting and supporting characters to speak to an American – and, we can probably assume, mainly older, upper middle-class, and female – audience?
2. In what ways does she seek to subvert or problematize the themes Diana Negra posits as the defining characteristic of late-90s tourist films such as *Notting Hill* (1999)?



# Self-reflexive Critique of tourist film fantasy and American entitlement

This film revises tourist film formula, critiquing it for its naivety and its unfulfilled potential

Begins conventionally, by framing Europe as a solution to alienating, lonely, American city life

Protagonist sees Tuscany as offering community, roots, love, harmony with nature and food

But reveals this to be a desperate, oftentimes unattainable dream, fuelled by cinematic fantasy

Pathologizes tourist film heroine; parodies happy ending of love, community, harmony with nature

A fulfilling life overseas must be self-determined



# Woody Allen: From *Manhattan* to the Major Markets of Europe

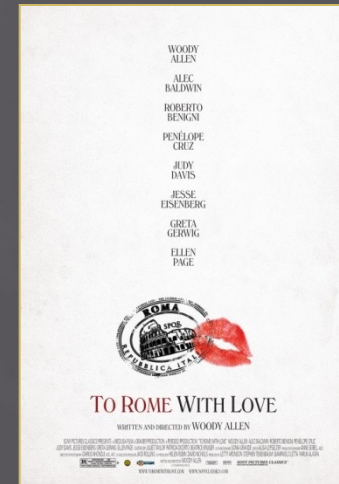
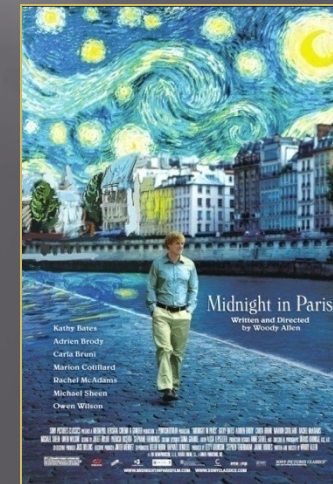
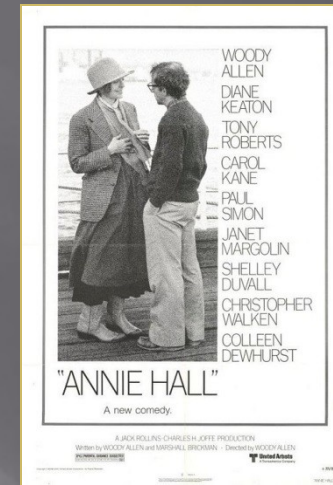
Remains one of leading Americans in the international art house cinema market

Earlier films US-centered, often focusing on the New York City cultural bourgeoisie

Recently helmed a spate of US-Euro co-productions, set in major European markets

Films are made for “more discerning” – read left-liberal – US and European audiences

They thematize transatlantic exchange, and are in dialogue with tourist films’ reputation

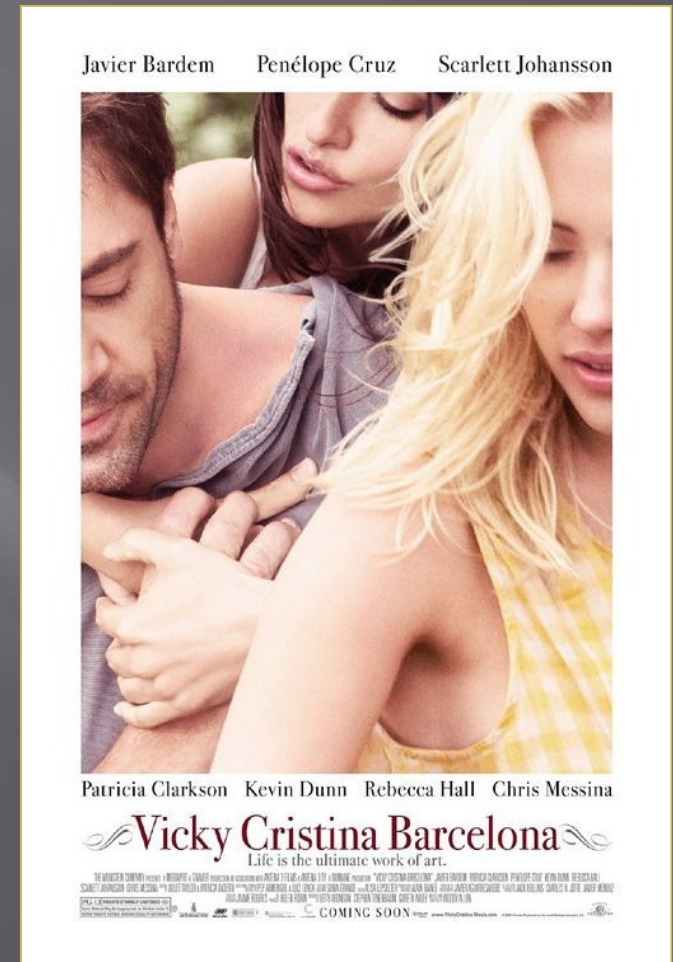




# Screening Questions:

## *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (2008)

1. How does *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*'s mobilize the conventions of the tourist film?
2. Does the film use, what Negra identifies as, the central topics of the tourist films to articulate a quite different message to that of earlier entries (including *Under the Tuscan Sun*)?
3. What does this film have to say about "American" assumptions of Europe?





# The case of *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*: or the *Eurortrip*-ification of the tourist film

Allen subverts the tourist film's conventions,  
mocking central conceit as bourgeois delusion

Romanticization is exposed as a vehicle for  
American self-indulgence and image-making

Romanticized stereotypes of Europe(ans) are  
pictured as mental illness and sociopathology

Self-betterment is exposed as self-delusion for  
bored, pampered, self-absorbed neurotics

Lays bare a tourist film thematic underpinning:  
as an alibi for ethnically fetishized casual sex!!!



## In Sum

The preeminence of discourses of Americanization has led to claims that Hollywood films spotlight the superiority of US culture over others

However, Hollywood has oftentimes used images of Europe and Europeans as a means of addressing American audiences

What is more, many of these films are actually critical of what are framed as aspects of American life and American ways of thinking

This feature characterizes tourist films, which often picture Europe as offering fantastical solutions to some Americans' problems

Some of these films are even critical of this “romantic” filmic approach, mocking it as a patronizing, romanticizing “American” tendency

# Course Summary: Objectives and Arguments

This course set out to offer alternative perspectives on the three preeminent discourses pertaining to Hollywood and Europe ...

## 1. That Hollywood is a US institution and thus separate from Europe

By positing multinational ownership, the use of the international labor market, transatlantic and perennial content, and transatlantic circulation

## 2. That Hollywood output and European output are binarily opposed

By positing Hollywood's uses of the art cinema model associated with Europe, and European companies' presence in Hollywood's structures

## 3. That Hollywood imposes inherently American culture on Europeans

By positing the concessions Hollywood makes to secure European viewers, and its use of images of Europe(ans) to address US audiences