Since the early days of the twentieth century, debates have proliferated in the Nordic countries about film’s nature and function, whether as popular entertainment, high art, or a dynamic cultural artifact important in defining national and regional identities. In this course, we will survey discrete moments in Nordic film history (viewing films from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) and contextualize them within broader developments in global cinema. Particularly important in this regard will be Nordic Cinema’s love-hate relationship with Hollywood and its complicated status as European Cinema. We discuss examples of Scandinavia’s often-underestimated role as an international, artistic, and popular culture powerhouse in the silent era up through WWII.

We’ll explore Nordic film productions intended for domestic audiences and juxtapose these with the emergence of a compelling modernist, art-house cinema tradition revolving around the international figure of the auteur director, including Ingmar Bergman and Aki Kaurismäki. We’ll consider 60s and 70s political, avant-garde cinema (reverberations of the French Nouvelle Vague); the unique development of state-funded structures for film production in these small countries; and end with a survey of recent Nordic films and movements such as Dogme 95 that illustrates ways in which small national cinemas continue to grapple with new iterations of globalization.

In short: a vital and vibrant case study with which to consider a broad range of issues involving the aesthetics and politics of cinema in the world.