CIEE Prague, Czech Republic

Course title: Contemporary Czech Culture: Alternative Literature, Music, and Lifestyles
Course code: CEAS 3002 PRAG
Programs offering course: Central European Studies, Communication, New Media, and Journalism
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3
Contact hours: 45
Term: Fall 2020

Course Description

The course provides critical insights into the various elements of Czech non-mainstream culture, such as graffiti and street-art, political art collectives, the underground, new social movements, psychedelia, D.I.Y. music scenes, LGBTA, social theatre, etc. The instructor, an anthropologist with hands-on experience in local subcultures, assists in the application of critical theory to discuss the practices of ‘alternative’ urban lives in postindustrial society and certain trends of artistic production. The focus is on the political interpretation of youth subversion and disclosures of power mechanisms. Visuals and field trips to graffiti and other subcultural sites are a part of this course.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- interpret and assess the streets and other public spaces of the city and describe the styles of five local writers
- classify the topics and styles in contemporary Czech art
- compare poetics of five Czech bands/venues
- assess the influence of the history of the Czech underground on Charter 77
- explain the connection between culture and politics
- conceptualize and contextualize expressions of new social movements
- apply critical imagination in decoding of subversive artifacts

Course Prerequisites
None. The course is suitable for a background in culture anthropology, culture studies, visual studies, sociology of music, semiotics, and creative fields.

Methods of Instruction

- seminar with mini-lectures
- discussions of readings and artifacts on the basis of lectures, readings, and presentations
- three field trips (legal graffiti site, festival, contemporary art museum)

N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.

Assessment and Final Grade

1. Reading Check and Reaction Papers 20%
2. Reading Presentation and Debate Leader 10%
3. Midterm Test 20%
4. Final Project on the topics covered in class 30%
5. Class Participation 20%
   TOTAL 100%

Course Requirements

Reading Check and Reaction Papers

For each class (except midterm and final week), upload a write-up for one of the required or recommended readings.

Reading Presentation and Debate Leader

Grading takes into account the accuracy in delivering main issues to the class and success in stimulating discussion. Extra images are a plus.

Midterm Test

an essay of 3 pages (750 words) on topics covered during the first half of the semester; questions are included after each week’s description.
+ a paragraph final project description with two sources, (the pitch can be brought into class).

Final Project on the topics covered in class

Final Project on the topics covered in class (graffiti and street art, music, etc.) 8 pages/2400 words. MLA format. Research papers are evaluated according to the quality of research and ability to use the concepts from lectures and readings. A short presentation of each project is required. You can select e.g. one of the Czech graffiti and other artists, bands, venues, political art collective, etc. Research, photo, interpret, comment, compare, etc. Creative project is a possible alternative after approval (film, songs, poetry, etc.). In that situation a two page (500 words) explanation (technical, creative ideas descriptions, concepts from class material, the journey of how the project developed) is required.

Class Participation

CIEE Prague Class Participation Policy

Assessment of students’ participation in class is an inherent component of the course grade. Participation is valued as meaningful contribution in the digital and tangible classroom, utilizing the resources and materials presented to students as part of the course. Students are required to actively, meaningfully and thoughtfully contribute to class discussions and all types of in-class activities throughout the duration of the class. Meaningful contribution requires students to be prepared, as directed, in advance of each class session. This includes valued or informed engagement in, for example, small group discussions, online discussion boards, peer-to-peer feedback (after presentations), interaction with guest speakers, and attentiveness on co-curricular and outside-of-classroom activities.

Students are responsible for following the course content and are expected to ask clarification questions if they cannot follow the instructor’s or other students’ line of thought or argumentation.

The use of electronic devices is only allowed for computer-based in-class tests, assignments and other tasks specifically assigned by the course instructor. Students are expected to take notes by hand unless the student is entitled to the use of
computer due to his/her academic accommodations. In such cases the student is required to submit an official letter issued by his/her home institution specifying the extent of academic accommodations.

Class participation also includes students' active participation in Canvas discussions and other additional tasks related to the course content as specified by the instructor.

Students will receive a partial participation grade every three weeks.

**CIEE Prague Attendance Policy**

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program, and all absences are treated equally regardless of reason for any affected CIEE course. Attendance policies also apply to any required co-curricular class excursions or events, as well as Internship.

Students who transfer from one CIEE class to another during the add/drop period will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of their new class, provided they were marked present for the first session(s) of their original class. Otherwise, the absence(s) from the original class carry over to the new class and count against the grade in that class.

Missing classes will lead to the following penalties:

**90-minute semester classes:**

**180-minute semester classes:**
Persistent absenteeism (students approaching 20% of the total course hours missed, or violating the attendance policy in more than one class) will result in a written warning, a notification to the student’s home school, and possibly a dismissal from the program.

Missing more than 20% of the total class hours will lead to a course failure, and potential program dismissal. This is a CIEE rule that applies to all CIEE courses and is in line with the Participant Contract that each CIEE student signs before arriving on-site.

Late arrival to class will be considered a partial (up to 15 minutes late) or full (15 or more minutes late) absence. Three partial absences due to late arrivals will be regarded as one full class absence.

Students must notify their professor and Program Coordinators (PC) beforehand if they are going to miss class for any reason and are responsible for any material covered in class in their absence.

If missing a class during which a test, exam, the student’s presentation or other graded class assignments are administered, make-up assignment will only be allowed in approved circumstances, such as serious medical issues. In this case, the student must submit a local doctor’s note within 24 hours of his/her absence to the PC, who will decide whether the student qualifies for a make-up assignment. Doctor's notes may be submitted via e-mail or phone (a scan or a photograph are acceptable), however the student must ensure that the note is delivered to the PC.

Should a truly extraordinary situation arise, the student must contact the PC immediately concerning permission for a make-up assignment. Make-up assignments are not granted automatically! The PC decides the course of action for all absence cases that are not straightforward. Always contact the PC with any inquiry about potential absence(s) and the nature thereof.

Personal travel (including flight delays and cancelled flights), handling passport and other document replacements, interviews, volunteering and other similar situations are not considered justifiable reasons for missing class or getting permission for make-up assignments.
For class conflicts (irregularities in the class schedule, including field trips, make-up classes and other instances), always contact the Academic Assistant to decide the appropriate course of action.

Course attendance is recorded on individual Canvas Course Sites. Students are responsible for checking their attendance regularly to ensure the correctness of the records. In case of discrepancies, students are required to contact the Academic Assistant within one week of the discrepancy date to have it corrected. Later claims will not be considered.

CIEE staff does not directly manage absences at FAMU and ECES, but they have similar attendance policies and attendance is monitored there. Grade penalties may result from excessive absences.

**CIEE Academic Honesty Policy**

CIEE subscribes to standard U.S. norms requiring that students exhibit the highest standards regarding academic honesty. Cheating and plagiarism in any course assignment or exam will not be tolerated and may result in a student failing the course or being expelled from the program. Standards of honesty and norms governing originality of work differ significantly from country to country. We expect students to adhere to both the American norms and the local norms, and in the case of conflict between the two, the more stringent of the two will preside. Three important principles are considered when defining and demanding academic honesty. These are related to the fundamental tenet that one should not present the work of another person as one’s own.

The first principle is that final examinations, quizzes and other tests must be done without assistance from another person, without looking at or otherwise consulting the work of another person, and without access to notes, books, or other pertinent information (unless the professor has explicitly announced that a particular test is to be taken on an “open book” basis).

The second principle applies specifically to course work: the same written paper may not be submitted in two classes. Nor may a paper for which you have already received credit at your home institution be submitted to satisfy a paper requirement while studying overseas.
The third principle is that any use of the work of another person must be documented in any written papers, oral presentations, or other assignments carried out in connection with a course. This usually is done when quoting directly from another’s work or including information told to you by another person. The general rule is that if you have to look something up, or if you learned it recently either by reading or hearing something, you have to document it.

The penalty ranges from an F grade on the assignment, failure in the course to dismissal from the program. The Academic Director is consulted and involved in decision making in every case of a possible violation of academic honesty.

**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1**

**Class 1.1** Introductions

- Course requirements – tasks with models, week-by-week schedule, questions.

- Lecture: Course terminology: avant-garde, counterculture, underground, alternative, subcultures, new social movements, etc. Theorizing culture – Critical Theory: Frankfurt, Birmingham School, and beyond.

- Study guide: Name three branches of the avant-gardes pertinent to contemporary culture, their manifestos and their authors. Define counter-culture, name its theorist and his book. Define new social movement. Name schools theorizing culture, their timeframe, three representatives and main ideas. What points does Lyotard see that take us to postmodern paradigm?

**Class 1.2** Vyšehrad field trip: five Czech greats

- Required reading:
  - Jonssonova

- Recommended reading:
Kellner (2003)  
Rojek (2003)  

Week 2  
Class 2.1 CZECH ALTERNATIVE MUSIC AND MUSIC VIDEO  

Required reading:  
Ramet (1994).  

Recommended reading:  
Czech Rock Lyrics. FPB and UJD. Webpages of Už jsme doma,  
showing: Metrofilm, UJD  

Recommended Listening:  
Czech bands: Radůza, Gipsy.cz, Gaia Mesiah, Vypsaná Fixa, Oldřich Janota, UJD, Čechomor, Yellow Sisters, BBP, New Kids Underground, Birds Build Underground, Priesnitz, Jablkoň, Rudovous, DG 307, Budoár stare dámy, Ještě jsme se nedohodli, Chadima, Richter, Jasná páka, Psí vojáci, Tata boys, Traband, etc.  

Study guide: Name five Czech bands and their genre. What is the first album in Czech rock history? What is the best album in Czech rock history? What is the name of the Czechoslovak guitar George Harrison played in his early career?  

What was the pre and post 89 situation for Czech bands? What are the specific poetics compared to US bands? What types of names were typical for pre and post-89 period? How can East block bands reach audiences in the West? Who has made it?  

Assignment: R1 Czech Rock
Class 2.2  Field Trip Concert

TBA

Week 3
Class 3.1  UNDERGROUND, THE PLASTIC PEOPLE OF THE UNIVERSE

Required reading:

Views from the Inside – manifesto by Martin Jirous


Pavel (1999, 1-42.

Study guide: Who was the main organizer of the Czech Underground? How does he describe the goals in his manifesto? What is the influence of the PPU on Charter 77? What forced them underground? Were they Christians or left wing activists? Name main bands and personalities? What strategies did these leaders propose to keep the culture alive in the midst of persecutions? What is the band’s current situation? How did the band solve the tragic situation after the death of Mejla Hlavsa? What is the name of the best album of the PPU?

What kind of lyrics have the PPU had over their existence?

Who is Pavel Z and Jachym Topol? What is The Game Park about?

Assignment: R2 Underground

Class 3.2  Underground Poetry: Topol, Pavel Z, Magor

Week 4
Class 4.1  PSYCHEDELIC RESEARCH.
Addiction and Anxiety. In Pot We Trust: legalization of medicinal marihuana in the Czech Republic

Required reading:

Keller (2006)
Garber (2013)

Recommended reading:

Zábranský (2007)

Study guide: What does psychedelic mean? Who are the five main psychedelic researchers? What is the specific contribution of the Czech researcher Stanislav Grof?

Assignment: R3 Psychedelic Research

Class 4.2 Excerpts: Katka, One Way Ticket, The Substance

Week 5
Class 5.1 HUMAN RIGHTS

Jan Palach, Václav Havel, new social movements

Film excerpts: Burning Bush, Citizen Václav Havel

Required reading:

Zizek (2013)
Williams (2011)

Recommended reading:

Andriolo (2006)
Study guide: What is the history of One World film festival? What is its agenda? Name three works written by Vaclav Havel. What are Havel’s dates? What does the word samizdat mean? Define dissidents. What are the new social movements Williams talk about in Related Fields? What protest movements does Zizek talk about in The Impossible Happens? What does he mean by saying the impossible happens – which philosopher does he have the term from? What is the legacy of Jan Palach? What is the name of the director and what did she want to say by Burning Bush?

Assignment: R4 Human Rights

Class 5.2 Field Trip to One World Film Festival

Week 6
Class 6.1 HIPSTERS OLD AND NEW. RECYCLING.

Midterm Exam Period

Required reading:

Erbacher (2012)

Schiermer (2014)

Assignment: R5 Hipsters

Study guide: Why are contemporary subcultures lacking in authenticity? Can there be a real subculture in postmodern situation? What is the origin of the current hipster subculture? What are some of the characteristic of hipsters – how do they differ from earlier subcultures? What do hipsters wear? What do they listen to? What do they eat? Where are the main centers of hipster post-subculture in Prague? Name five vintage technical items hipsters are fascinated by.

Film excerpts Prague Krymska street

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HuhJBEPzUE
Berlin, Germany: Trendy PrenzlauerBerg

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8u_o0xp4OT0

Vice Hipsters?

Class 6.2 Guest Speaker

Week 7
Class 7.1 Midterm Test

Midterm Exam Period

Class 7.2 The Can graffiti film

Week 8
Class 8.1 GRAFFITI: URBAN DECOR OR POLITICS

Lecture: Artcrime

Required reading

Magid (2007)


Study guide: What does Magid claim about graffiti? Why is he interested in CAP crew? What is CAP crew style? What is the difference between graffiti and street art? Name five Czech graffiti artists (crews) and describe their style.

Assignment: R6 Graffiti

Class 8.2 films excerpts: Czech Republic, Exit through the Gift Shop, Style Wars.

Week 9
Class 9.1 STREET ART

Required reading:


Recommended:

Streetfonts on facebook


Study guide: When was the legal site Tesnov started and by whom? What is Banksy’s take on the “broken window” theory? Describe Banksy’s style. What are different approaches to graffiti in Europe? What was Namesfest

Assignment: R7 Street Art

Class 9.2 Site Visit: Tesnov Legal Graffiti Site Visit

Thu Site visit: Tesnov legal graffiti site visit

Meeting place: Florenc McDonald’s under the freeway half hour after class start

Week 10

Class 10.1 ART AND POLITICS

Political Art Collectives: Ztohoven, Podebal, Guma Guar, Rafani.
Culture Jamming

Field trip Parallel Polis http://www.paralelnipolis.cz/en/:

1. Cryptocurrencies, free market and parallel economies
2. Cryptoanarchy and other concepts for developing free society
3. Political art
4. Open source, 3D print, copyright

Required reading:

Klein (2001)

Harris (2009)

Film: Czech Dream by Vit Klusak and Filip Remunda

Assignment: R8 Art and Politics

Class 10.2 EASTER BREAK, NO CLASSES

Week 11
Class 11.1 HAPPENING, ACTION ART, SOCIAL ART CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSE

Required reading:

Morganová (2013)

chapter of your choice from: Klienhamplova & Stejskalova (2015)

Study guide: What is Action Art? Give examples and three names. Who is an artist, what is their role? What is the role of a curator?

DVD After Velvet

Assignment: R9 action art

Class 11.2 Field Trip DOX

Week 12
Class 12.1 EXPATS IN PRAGUE

Expat communities: writings, publishing, activism, cafes.
Required reading:

New Orleans Review. Ten Years After Velvet Revolution. Voices from the Czech Republic

Recommended:

Kimberly (2013)

film: Rexpatriots

Assignment: R10 Expats

Class 12.2 St. Agnes Sculpture Garden Field Trip

Week 13
Class 13.1 Final Exam Week

Presentation of Final Projects

Class 13.2 Final Exam Week

End-of-course discussion

Course Materials
Readings

• Harris, Stephen: “What is Cheaper than Nothing at All?” Bright Lights Film Journal (January 31, 2009).
• Jonssonova, Pavla. Introductory Notes to the Reader of Alternative Culture.
  22-30.
Recommended reading