CxEE Prague, Czech Republic

Course title: Contemporary Czech Culture: Alternative Literature, Music, and Lifestyles
Course code: CEAS 3002 PRAG
Programs offering course: Summer Central European Studies
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3.00
Contact hours: 45.00
Term: Summer Session III 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, LGBTQ+, social theatre, and others. It examines 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 an inherent 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;
- Critically discuss 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 anyone interested in cultural anthropology, cultural 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)

Assessment and Final Grade

1. Reading Checks 20%
2. Reading Presentation and Debate Leader 10%
3. Midterm Test 20%
4. Final Project 30%
5. Participation 20%
TOTAL 100%

Course Requirements

Reading Checks

For each class upload a write-up (250-500 words) for one of the required readings. Format: First page – check: Author’s name, title, place, publishing house, year published. Key learnings (use language of the reading). One
Reading Presentation and Debate Leader

Sign in for your reading during the first class; the schedule for presentations will be spread over the duration of the course. This task includes a PowerPoint presentation with one slide containing information about the author of the reading, four slides with content summary, including images. Last slide with questions and polemic points for a class debate. Grading takes into account the accuracy in delivering the main issues to the class and a successfully led class debate. Extra images are a plus. Remember that you are presenting the content of the reading, your comments should be voiced in the discussion part. Note: debate leaders are not allowed to present on one of the readings that are included in the reading check list.

Midterm Test

The Midterm Test is based on the material covered during the first half of the course. It includes multiple choice questions as well as open-ended questions. Sample questions are included in the Weekly Schedule as part of each week’s description. 5% of the grade is for a one-paragraph description of the final project, including two sources.

Final Project

Final Project on the topics covered in class (graffiti and street art, music, etc.). 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 and is worth 5% of the grade. You can select one of the Czech graffiti and other artists, bands, venues, political art collectives, etc. Research, photo, interpret, comment, compare, etc. A creative project is a possible alternative with a prior approval from the professor (film, songs, poetry, etc.). In such situations a 500 word explanation (technical, creative ideas descriptions, concepts from class material, the journey of how the project developed) is required.

Participation

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 at the end of the second week of the semester.

Attendance

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program.

If you will miss a class for any reason, notify the Program Coordinator and your instructor beforehand via Canvas. You are responsible for any materials covered in class during your absence, and except in the specific cases listed below, credit will not be granted for missed assessments.

Excessive absences will result in a notification letter, and finally a warning letter, sent to you and your home school, based on the following:
The notification letters are intended to ensure that you are well advised in advance of any potential for failure or dismissal, so that you can take steps to avoid this.

As the table shows, missing more than 20% of any class (e.g., due to undocumented illness, travel delays, flight cancellations, oversleeping, etc.) results in automatic failure of the course.

If you miss an assessment in class due to an absence, you will be able to make it up in the following instances:

- You provide a relevant doctor's note from a local medical professional to your Program Coordinator within 24 hours of your absence (a scan or photograph sent via e-mail are acceptable).
- A CIEE staff member verifies that you were too ill to attend class.
- You provide evidence of a family emergency to your Program Coordinator.
- You have an approved absence related to the observance of a religious holiday from the Academic Director based on a request submitted before you arrived onsite.

Please note: Absences incurred due to documented illness, documented family emergency or the observance of a religious holiday approved before arrival onsite do not count towards the total of absences. Students may self-certify one absence due to illness without providing a doctor's note as long as they notify the Program Coordinator within 24 hours of their absence by e-mail or a text message.

Other attendance-related policies:

If you transfer from one CIEE class to another during the Add/Drop period, you will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of the new class provided you were marked present for the first session(s) of the original class.

If you are over 15 minutes late for a class, the instructor is required to mark you absent.

In case of class conflicts (irregularities in the class schedule, including field trips and make-up classes), always contact the Academic Department to decide the appropriate course of action.

Please remember to track your attendance on the Canvas Course Sites and report any errors in the record to the Academic Department within one week of the discrepancy date, as later claims may not be considered.

These attendance rules also apply to any required co-curricular excursion, activity, or event, and to for-credit internships.

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.

**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1**

**Class: 1.1 Introductions**


*After the Velvet DVD*

Study guide: definitions, similarities and differences of the avant-garde, subculture, underground, alternative – name three branches of the avant-gardes pertinent to contemporary subcultures. Name schools theorizing everyday culture, their representatives and main thoughts.
Class:  1.2  Czech Rock History


Study guide: Name five Czech bands and explain their specifics. What was the pre-1989 and post-1989 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?

Required reading:
Maderová (2013): “Intro&Rock”
Maderová (2013): “Folk”
Czech Rock Lyrics. FPB and UJD

Recommended reading:
Cz Punk MMR

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

Assignments due:
Reading Check 1: Czech Rock

Class:  1.3  Graffiti and Street Art: Urban Décor or Politics? Part 1

A field trip to the Těšnov lega graffiti, including practice of writing

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

Required reading:
Magid (2007)
Pospiszyl, Lékô (2007)

Film excerpts: Czech RAPublic, Exit through the Gift Shop, Style Wars

Assignments due:
Reading Check 2: Graffiti

Week 2
Class:  2.1  Graffiti and Street Art: Urban Décor or Politics? Part 2


Study guide: 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?

Required reading:
Banksy (2005)
Kaláb (2008)
Assignments due:

Reading Check 3: Street Art

Class: 2.2 Underground: Plastic People of the Universe

An overview of the Czech music underground movement. The history of Plastic People of the Universe band, their poetics and principles

Study guide: What was the history of the PPU? What is the influence of the PPU on Charter 77? What forced them underground? How did they feel about their situation? Were they Christians or left wing activists? Who were the leading 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 kind of lyrics have the PPU had over their existence?

Required reading:

Riedel (1997)

Assignments due:

Reading Check 4: Plastic People of the Universe

Class: 2.3 Music and Politics

Music as a political tool explored on examples of Czech underground bands.

Study guide: Who are the four writers discussed in the Views from the Inside? What do these manifestos express?

Required reading:

Machovec (2006)

Assignments due:

Reading Check 5: Music and Politics

Week 3

Class: 3.1 Underground Poetry

Exploration of main topics and figures of the Czech underground poetry.

Study guide: Who is Jáchym Topol and what is Game Park about? Which band does Pavel Z play in? What type of poetry does Pavel Z write?

Assignments due:

Reading Check 6: Underground poetry

Class: 3.2 Midterm Exam

In-class Midterm Exam followed by a commented viewing of parts of The Can (Gympl) by Tomáš Vorel

Class: 3.3 Political Art Collectives

A general discussion and examples of Ztohoven, Rafani, Guma Guar. Social art: Kateřina Šedá and Vendula Chalánková

Required reading:

Klein (2001)

Harris (2009)
Required viewing:
*Czech Dream* by Vít Klusák and Filip Remunda

Assignments due:
Reading Check 7: Art Collectives

Class: 3.4 Art as a Social Project

A field trip to DOX.

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?

Required reading:
Klienhamplová, Stejskalová (2015)

Assignments due:
Reading Check 8: Action Art

**Week 4**

Class: 4.1 Psychedelic Research

Addiction and anxiety. In Pot We Trusts: legalization of medical marihuana in the Czech Republic

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

Required reading:
Zábranský (2007)
The Atlantic: Pervitin

Assignments due:
Reading Check 9: Psychedelic Research

Class: 4.2 Expats in Prague

Expat communities: writings, publishing, activism, cafés

Required reading:
New Orleans Review: *Ten Years After the Velvet Revolution. Voices from the Czech Republic.*

Recommended reading:
Kimberly (2013)

Assignments due:
Reading Check 10: Expats

Class: 4.3 Presentation of Final Projects

Presentation of final projects and final discussion.

**Course Materials**

**Readings**


Jonssonova, Pavla. *Introductory Notes to the Reader of Alternative Culture*.


**Recommended:**


**Media Resources**

**Films:**

- Czech Dream. Directed by Vít Klusák and Filip Remunda. 2004
- Czech RAPublic. Directed by Pavel Abrahám. 2008
- Exit through the Gift Shop. Directed by Banksy. 2010
- Karlštejn. Directed by Tomáš Vorel. 1988
- Style Wars. Directed by Tony Silver. 1983
- The Can. Directed by Tomáš Vorel. 2007