

**Charles University, Faculty of Arts
East and Central European Studies**

Summer 2016

**Contemporary Czech Art, Culture, Music and Literature: Urban
Semiotics**

CUFA LIT 345

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Office hours: by appointment
Classes: Mon 12.00 – 2.45, Wed, Thu 9.00 – 11.45, J1 (Jindřišská 27, Prague 1)

Course Description

The course will acquaint students with the contemporary Czech art scene, its “roots” and transformations from three different perspectives. First, the course will pursue how Czech art and music are connected with activism, minority groups and mainstream culture. Second, focus will be placed on how to “read” contemporary urban performances, literature and works of art. How and why do performances address and fascinate their readers? What value-hierarchies and culture-changing signs do they produce? Third, the course will familiarize students with the notions of performance art, digital media, counterculture, mass culture and show their impact on Czech individuals and society.

The course will elucidate the transitions in the Czech art scene after 1989, together with their socio-historical context. It will explore different understandings of post-communist movements as represented in the performances by Czech artists. Czech art perspectives will be confronted with

Western literary and cultural criticism.

Course Goals and Student Learning Objectives

Students will acquire both theoretical tools and practical experience to approach texts and performances and develop awareness about how art and performance affect the contemporary Czech society. Moreover, students will be provided with an insight into the concepts of “mainstream” and “alternative” culture, technologies in arts, urban semiotics (including all cultural codes, such as in slang, fashion, advertising etc.) and cultural identity as represented in selected performances, concerts and exhibitions, coming from the Czech context.

Lecturer: Blanka Maderová, PhD

Guests: Toybox, Pavla Jonnsonova, Darina Alster

Required Readings

Readings for each class are specified in the course outline. All required texts will be available in the course READER (R) and distributed to the students.

Recommended Readings

Further optional readings:

Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972. Nicolas Bourriaud – excerpts from *Postproduction*. Lucas and Strenberg. 2005.

Marshall McLuhan – *Understanding Media*. The MIT Press. 1994.

Zygmunt Bauman – *Postmodern Ethics*. Wiley-Blackwell. 1993.

Whiteley, Sheila. *Women and Popular Music, Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Classroom Procedures

(Insert your expectations for participation, attendance, arrival times, behavior, safety, cell phone use, etc. here.)

Assignments and Grading Policy

Grades based on letters A through F will be given.

Evaluation:

15% One presentation (Each student shall give a short presentation, 10-15min., once during the course)

15% response papers

30% - Mid-term paper (3-5 pages) MLA format. Recommendation: When you quote (from primary and/ or secondary literature), provide full bibliographical details at the end of your paper in the Works Cited section. You can find page numbers and publishers of the book online (for example in www.books.google.com).

Description: This is a research paper on a topic of your choice. The project is evaluated according to the following criteria: knowledge of the subject proven by quoting authors covering the topic before you. Internet sources are often problematic, print them out and attach them. Involvement with Czech surroundings is crucial: address institutions or individuals connected with your topic, use public libraries etc. The best grade is given only to original papers, providing student's own commentary. The work should have resonance with materials covered in class: apply the terminology offered.

40% - Final test (a multiple choice test plus a reflection on your Prague experience using the terminology you learnt in class)

NOTE: ALL PAPERS MUST BE SUBMITTED IN PRINTED FORM. EMAILS CANNOT BE CONSIDERED.

Attendance

Regular and punctual class attendance is mandatory for all students. Absence of 180 minutes is allowed. Three or more absences (90 minutes each) lower the grade automatically (A to A-, A to B+ in case of 4 absences etc.). Students must attend at least 70 % of the course. If a student attends less than 70 % of the class meetings, he or she will receive the final grade 'F' on their transcript.

Presentation Policy: Missing the presentation will result in an F (when applicable). If the student wants to switch the date, he/she must find someone to do it and both students must confirm the change in e-mails to the professor at least 10 days in advance. If the student is sick and has a medical note, then the professor must agree with the student on how the work will be made up for.

Final Test or Paper Policy: Completing the final test or paper is required. Failure to submit the final test or paper according to the deadline will result in a letter grade F for the entire course.

For further details, please see the Attendance Policy at the ECES website under “Academic Policies and Procedures”: <http://eces.ff.cuni.cz/>.

Student Responsibility and Code of Conduct

Standards of study and conduct in the ECES Program are set and maintained. You are subject to the general standards and requirements of Charles University in regard to attendance, examinations, and conduct, as well as to specific requirements of the program. The student is expected to assume the initiative in completing all requirements at the time specified.

It is the responsibility of the student to be informed concerning all regulations and procedures required. In no case will a regulation be waived or an exception granted because a student pleads ignorance of the regulation or asserts that he/she was not informed by an advisor or other authority.

Charles University expects all students to adhere to the highest standards of ethics and academic integrity. Students certify that all work (whether an examination, research paper, research project, form of creative expression, or any other academic undertaking) submitted for evaluation, presentation, or publication meets these standards.

All forms of academic fraud are strictly prohibited. An automatic grade of F will result for the entire course if a student is found guilty of academic misconduct. These include, but are not limited to:

- Plagiarism
- Cheating
- Falsification
- Violation of professional ethics
- Misrepresentation or research data

Weekly Schedule

Session 1: Introductory lecture: Urban culture, politics and semiotics: Contemporary Czech art scene with regards to activism

Field Trip

Required reading:

Barthes, Roland - excerpt from Mythologies read in class

Optional: "Myth Today," in Mythologies

Session 2: Urban Signs Semiotics and Czech Music - signs, social and other "codes", languages of art (slang, fashion, ideologies)

Required Reading:

Ramet, Sabrina Petra, "Rock Music in Czechoslovakia," in Rocking the State videos by Plastic People of the Universe, Navarová, Radůza, Iva Bittová, Psí Vojáci, Prago Union, WWW, PSH, Gypsy.cz Tatabojs, Visací zamek

Session 3: Urban Space and its Transformations in Music and Literature

Required reading:

Barthes, Roland, "Grain of the Voice," in Image-Music-Text. Hill and Wang, 1978.

Session 4: Contemporary Urban Literature

Required reading:

Jachym Topol - "City" (from City, Sister, Silver. Catbird Press, 2000). Lyrics for Czech singer Načeva

Session 5: Voices from the Periphery vs. Mainstream Media

Required reading:

Marshall McLuhan, excerpts from Understanding Media

Session 6: guest: TOYBOX. Contemporary Czech Political Art/ Street Art/ Art in Action

Required reading:

Magid, Vaclav, "CAP" Pospiszyl, Tomas, "Street Art" Researched names: David Černý, Milan Knížák, Toybox, Rafani, Ztohoven.

Field Trip: Meet Factory, Bubec, NoD, Karlin studios... Live performative workshops: Encounters with Czech Artists, documentation

This part of the course will map Prague and Czech cultural scene from the position of contemporary art focusing on web and media scene and visual live performance. Emphasis will be put on the relations between performance, music, political activism and social criticism. We will explore the roots of performance, political art and the use of comics in the Czech republic – Kovanda, Toybox, Labuda, Knížák, Guma Guar, David Černý, Mark Ther, Ondřej Brody, Rafani - and look into the artists' creative spaces to document/interpret them.

Session 7: guest: ALSTER Gender and Eroticism in Contemporary Art Large field of subtle psychological studies represented by video-art, impulsive paintings and sculpturing of one's own body. Art is a Medium which connects various different forms that define subtle forms of energies. Mental lines of thoughts, theorems of wanting, love, attraction, excitation, mysticism, impression.

Required reading:

Věra Sokolová: : Representation and the Politics of. Sexuality in the Czech Republic: Don't get pricked!

Zygmunt Bauman: What it means 'To be Excluded'

Czech Artists: Veronika Bromová, Lenka Klodová, Filip Turek, Michal Šiml, Radim Labuda, Aneta Mona Chisa

MIDTERM DUE!

Session 8: New media art, sound art, art and science fusions Issues of Reproduction, Multiplication, Authenticity

Required reading:

Benjamin, Walter. The work of Art in the Age of Mechanical reproduction. Illuminations. Schocken, 2008.

Czech Artists: Stanley Robotman Povoda, Jakub Nepraš, Milan Grygar, Viktor Takáč, Michael Bielický

Session 9: Czech Urban Culture (after 1989) Socio-theoretical background: Signs, semiotics and mythologies (U. Eco vs. V. Bělohradský)

Required reading:

Bělohradský, Václav. Polylogy: On Postmodern Public Space.

Technology in Arts or Art vs. Technology?

The concept of "technicity" in the arts. Web art, performance on the internet public space: Selfexpression and irony of the virtual world.

Session 10: Urban Consciousness - Reading the City

Required reading: Kafka, Franz. Metamorphosis. Hodrova, Daniela. I see a great city. In Prague: Literary Companion

Session 11: Czech Literature – Indistinctness: Questions of the real, the hallucinatory and the surreal

Required reading: Ajvaz, Michal. The Other City. Dalkey Archive Pr., 2009. Post-communist transformations in Czech literature: literature and politics Cultural images; myths and archetypes in the Czech context

Session 12: FINAL TEST (multiple choice, 20 questions + 1 open-ended question – a short reflection on your Prague experience in connection with the course topics)