

Art, Architecture, and Propaganda under Socialism

Lecturer: Blanka Nyklová, Ph.D.; Vanda Černohorská, Ph.D.

Course Description:

The course explores how and what ideologies have informed visual aspects of art and architecture produced before and after the Velvet Revolution (1989) in what is now the Czech Republic. We look at individual pieces of art, architecture and material culture, propaganda posters and excerpts from movies, and search for ways in which they are in/formed by different ideologies. To achieve this, you are first introduced to a set of epistemological building blocks, i.e., themes and modes of thinking that have influenced the form of arts and visual culture, such as modernity, modernism, and the concept of ideology as such. This will provide you with a strong theoretical base. We will then proceed with methods available for researching the visual material that we explore throughout the course. You can add to this material as you travel around the CEE region because art and architecture created under the various socialist regimes between the late 1940s and 1980s has repercussions for what the CEE region looks like today. Moreover, as the Cold War rhetoric and politics currently undergoes a revival, the study material and its historical context also prove relevant for your understanding of the present geopolitical situation as it is reflected in different forms of art and visual culture.

The focal point of the course is Czechia but since its history is closely interrelated with the surrounding countries and is globally embedded, there will be many geographical excursions (metaphorically speaking). Similarly, and because the course is concerned with art, architecture and pieces of propaganda produced during the state socialist regime, it has strong ties with the local present that we touch upon on our field trips.

The course covers key theoretical and methodological texts as well as texts that outline the limits of applying seemingly universal theories to local settings. The visual representations investigated include pieces of art, architecture and propaganda, and span historical material, fiction and non-fiction movies, posters, photographs, and TV production.

The topics to be covered include but are not limited to socialist realism and Stalinism (1950s), the Thaw (1960s), normalization (1970s and 1980s), progress and the vision of the future, everyday life, gender order under socialism, Vítkov (where Klement Gottwald's mummy used to be on display), and many more. Classes comprise of lectures, class discussions, in-class hands-on analyses and walks around Prague.

Course Requirements:

The grade is composed as follows:

- Active class participation: 25%
- Midterm test: 15%
- Reading diary: 20%
- Reading presentation: 15%
- Final in-class writing assignment: 25%

Class attendance is strictly monitored and failing to attend courses affects grades.

Every student is allowed two 90-minute excused absences during the semester. For each unexcused absence, the participation portion of the grade will be lowered on an individual basis.

Active Class Participation

The class functions partly as a seminar. This means that both class participation and completing the required readings before class to enable informed participation are essential. Active participation means contributing to discussions (ideally in every seminar), sharing your ideas, interpretations, and analyses of the visual materials or texts under discussion, and engaging in dialogue not only with the lecturers but, perhaps more importantly, with your fellow students.. Students cannot use their laptops or any other electronic device during the discussions, as the screens tend to fragment the space and isolate those behind them and thus hinder their participation in discussions. Please note that you may print the texts out at AEP. If you anticipate that participating in discussions will be challenging for you, please contact the professors at the beginning of the semester.

Midterm test

The midterm test is used to test your knowledge of terms and notions introduced in the first part of the semester, i.e., the mostly theoretical and methodological ones, but it may also include questions related to the already conducted analyses of visual material. You will be given a notion/term and will be asked to define what the indicated author understands by the term, how they use the term or alternatively what the possible approaches to the term are. There will be 6 - 10 questions. You are expected to provide a concise short answer based strictly on the reading, i.e. you will need to reserve some time to revise for the test. The test is worth 15% of the final grade. There will be time for your questions regarding the test during a revision session.

Reading diary

From week to week, you are required to record details of your reading and research into the theories presented. Independent research into other theories is encouraged as it will positively impact on the final grade. You are thus offered an opportunity to engage with the theories and formulate your own ideas before defining the topic for your literature review and final presentation.

Every assigned reading should be reacted to at the latest before the lecture when the reading is due. You should write **about 1 page (1,800 characters/250 words) per reading/event/analysis**.

Every entry should be your own response to the particular reading, movie, or field trip. The diary gives you space to experiment with the theory in a freer way than the other parts of the grading. It is mostly used to check your understanding of the theories and your analytical skills, which should in turn lead to improved grades. Make sure you always argue how you have reached your conclusions. Drawing links between past readings and the current one is highly recommended. Keep the diary in an **electronic form as a single Word document** and upload it via Moodle before each class.

Submissions will be graded twice a semester. **In the case of an independent study course, be prepared to discuss your reading diary entries with the professors and any fellow students as part of some of the classes.**

Reading presentation

Each student will choose a topic from the syllabus that interests them. In week 3, students will share their choices and receive a reading to present from a list of recommended readings. They will prepare a short presentation based on their assigned reading. The presentation will take place during the week that matches their topic.

Final in-class writing assignment

The final in-class writing assignment takes place at the end of the course. Students will respond to two questions or prompts in short essay form (about half a page each). Their answers should connect clearly to specific readings from the course. The questions will focus on major themes and topics discussed throughout the class.

Classroom Decorum

Laptops and the use of any other electronic device are banned in discussions, screenings, etc. Before you enter the classroom make sure your cell phone is in plane mode.

Be sure you are aware of the AEP Academic Integrity Policy and the Code of Conduct that you signed prior to your arrival. If you want to read the policies again, stop by the AEP office.

Grading Policy:

Mandatory Completion Policy

Note that all mandatory assignments and exams must be completed to the best of your ability in order for your final grade to be issued. Failure to complete a mandatory assignment or exam may result in a failing grade.

Letter Grade	Percentage	Description
A+	97-100	Excellent Work
A	93-97	Outstanding Work
A-	90-92	
B+	87-89	Good work
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	Acceptable Work
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	
D+	67-69	Work that is significantly below average
D	63-66	
D-	60-62	
F	0-59	Work that does not meet the minimum standards for passing the course

AEP Academic Integrity Policy

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are not tolerated. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for the development of knowledge and learning is encouraged at many stages of the learning process. While we value technology for educational purposes, we also value originality and the retainment of knowledge, and thus using AI for assignments and examinations, even if rephrased, is strictly prohibited and considered an academic integrity violation, unless the instructor explicitly allows for it in the context of evaluated work

AEP Non-Discrimination/Harassment Policy

The AEP program in Prague promotes a diverse learning environment where the dignity, worth, and differences of each individual are valued and respected. Discrimination and harassment, whether based on a person's race, gender, sexual orientation, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, or other legally protected characteristics, are repugnant and completely inconsistent with our objectives. Retaliation against individuals for raising good faith claims of harassment and/or discrimination is prohibited.

AEP Diversity Policy

AEP is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming community that values diversity in all its forms. We believe that one of the most meaningful lessons of studying abroad is learning to navigate and appreciate differences with curiosity and an open mind. While engaging across differences can sometimes be challenging or uncomfortable, these moments are essential for growth and learning. We recognize that every member of our community, even with the best intentions, may occasionally make missteps. Our commitment is to provide a supportive environment where respectful and honest dialogue helps us learn from these experiences, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive and broaden their perspective.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

CEE Introductory Lecture Series

AEP CEE Introductory Lecture Series

Week 2 - Introduction, Course outline, short field trip

- Mutual introduction of the students and lecturers – outline of the course; discussion of students' expectations, grading system, and feedback provision; in-class analysis of visual material, short field trip to AEP surroundings.

Week 3 - Visual Culture & Methodologies, Socialist Timeline

- What is visual material and what makes it different from other sources of data? What are the approaches and methods used in analyzing it? Why and how do we need to study visual culture?
- Make sure you have filled out what and when you want to present!

Required reading:

- G. Rose. 2016. Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials. London: Sage, pp. 1-46 (ch. 1, Researching with visual materials: a brief survey & ch. 2, Towards a critical visual methodology).
- Holmes, L. 1997. Post-communism: An introduction. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 72-77(ch. "Czechoslovakia").
- The Cool and the Cold. Painting in the USA and the USSR 1960 – 1990. Timeline. Pp. 2 – 9. Berlin: The Ludwig Collection, Gropius Bau, exhibition catalogue.

Optional reading:

- Skrodzka, A. (2020). Introduction: The Communist Vision Today. In A. Skrodzka, X. Lu, & K. Marciniak (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Communist Visual Cultures* (pp. 1–15)

Week 4 - Modernity, Modernization & Modernism

- What is modernity? What is the relation between modernity, modernism(s) and modernization? What is the relation of modernity to socialism, and to capitalism?

Required reading:

- Berman, M. 1988. "Introduction: Modernity – Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow. " In *All that is solid melts into air. The experience of modernity*, 15-36. London: Penguin.
- Marx, K. 1888 [1848]. *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 14-21.

Optional reading:

- Zarecor, K. E. 2011. *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011, pp. 1-13 (Introduction).
- Phillips, A. 2018. Gender and Modernity. *Political Theory* 46(6): 837-860.

Week 5 - Socialist Realism & Stalinism – field trip to Vítkov

- Understanding of the historical context of Stalinism and socialist realism in former Czechoslovakia.
- What is the relation between socialist realism and ideology? Is socialist realism an expression of modernity (is it modernist) or a movement against modernity? What is the relation of socialist realism to the contemporary avant-garde?

Required reading:

- Clark, K. "Socialist realism and the sacralizing of space." In *The landscape of Stalinism: The art and ideology of Soviet space*, edited by E. Naiman and E. Dobrenko, 3-18. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.
- Petišková, T. 2012. "Socialist realism in Czechoslovakia." In *Realismo socialista Cecoslovacchia 1948-1989 = Socialist realism Czechoslovakia 1948-1989 = Socialistický realismus Československo 1948-1989*, edited by F. A. Razetto and O. M. Razetto, 1-5. Praha: Fondazione Eleutheria.
- "Socialist Realism Proclaimed. August 1934." In *Russian Life* 2009, 52, 4: 21-23
- "Socialist realism." In *Modern and contemporary Czech art*, K. Dolanská et al., 40-44. Prague: National Gallery.

Optional reading:

- Levine, Lucie. 2020. Was Modern Art Really a CIA Psy-Op? JSTOR Daily. Accessed June 20, 2025 at <https://daily.jstor.org/was-modern-art-really-a-cia-psy-op/>
- Moc obrazů, obrazy moci: politický plakát a propaganda: Galerie U Křižovníků 26.1.30.3.2005 = Power of images, images of power: political poster and propaganda: Gallery U křižovníků 26.1.-30.3.2005 (Catalogue)

Week 6 - Ideology – Field trip to the Museum of Communism

- What is ideology? What is the connection between ideology and propaganda? Is ideology specific for totalitarian regimes? What is the role of ideology in a democracy?
- A brief revision session based on questions regarding the midterm test you pose will be held at the end of the session: have your questions ready!

Required reading:

- Eagleton, T. 1991. Ideology: An Introduction. London: Verso, pp. 1-31 (ch. 1, What is ideology?).

Optional reading:

- Shibusawa, N. (2016). Ideology, Culture, and the Cold War. In R. H. Immerman & P. Goedde (Eds.), The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War (pp. 32–49). Oxford University Press.
- Roubal, P. (2019). *Spartakiads: the politics of physical culture in communist Czechoslovakia*. Karolinum Press. /select a chapter/

Week 7 - Midterm test

Week 8 - The Thaw & 1960s

- What was the Thaw and what made it possible? What was the visual impact and expression of the Thaw? What is the relation between the Thaw, socialism and consumerism? What was the role of consumerism under state socialism?

Required reading:

- Hyder Patterson, P. "Just Rewards." In *The Socialist Good Life*, edited by C. Scarborough, D. Mincyté, Z. Gille
- "Brussels 1958." In *Modern and contemporary Czech art*, K. Dolanská et al., 44-52. Prague: National Gallery.
- Kramarová, D. 2008. *Bruxelles 1958: Exposition Universelle et Internationale*. Prague: Arbor Vitae, pp. 13-59.

Optional reading

- Reid, S. E. (2005). The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40(2), 289–316.

Week 9 - Normalization

- What is normalization? In what sense does normalization represent a restoration of order? What is the visual expression of normalization? What impact did normalization have on socialist everyday life?

Required reading:

- Šimečka, M. 1984. *The restoration of order*. London: Verso, pp. 13-27 (Introduction & ch. 1, Disorder).
- Bren, P. 1999. "Envisioning a socialist way of life: Ideology and Contradiction in Czechoslovakia, 1969-1989." In *A Decade of Transformation*, IWM Junior Visiting Fellow Conferences, Vol. 8. Vienna.

Optional reading:

- *The CIA and Strategic Warning: The 1968 Soviet-led Invasion of Czechoslovakia*. (2009).
- Husák, G. 1986. *Speeches and writings*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, pp. 19-34 (ch. 2, Report on the activities of the Party).

Week 10 - Progress & Socialist Visions of the Future – Field trip – underground/movie screening

- What is the connection between the idea of modernity, socialism, and progress? How is progress embedded in socialism? How is progress (visually) represented in socialism? What are the potential consequences of transposing visual ideology into the real social world? What are the contemporary remnants of past progress?

Required reading:

- Gibas, P. 2012. "Uncanny underground: Absences, ghosts and the rhythmized everyday of the Prague metro," *cultural geographies* 20, 4: 485-500.

Optional reading:

- Hodgins, N. (2020). Kosmonauts, the GDR, and the retrospective impulse. In A. Skrodzka, K. Marciniak, & X. Lu (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of communist visual cultures* (pp. 629–648). Oxford University Press.

Week 11 - Socialism in the making

- What are the visual building blocks of socialism? How is socialism represented as a successful project, and as a whole? What is the role of activity in socialism – how is socialism imagined to be built, defended, cherished and cared for? What makes socialism alive? How is it gendered?

Required reading:

- Gottwald, K. 1948. Long-Term planning in Czechoslovakia. Prague: Czechoslovak Ministry of Information.
- Crowley, D. and S. E. Reid. 2002. "Socialist spaces: Sites of everyday life in the Eastern bloc." In *Socialist spaces: sites of everyday life in the Eastern bloc*, edited by D. Crowley and S. E. Reid, str. Oxford: Berg.
- Oates-Indruchová, L. (2016). Unraveling a Tradition , or Spinning a Myth? Gender Critique in Czech Society and Culture. *Slavic Review*, 75(4), 919–943.

Optional reading:

- Fowkes, R. (2017). Visualizing the socialist public sphere. In *The Cambridge History of Communism. Endgames? Global Perspective, 1968 to the Present: Vol. Volume III* (pp. 333–353). Cambridge University Press.

- Lišková, K., & Holubec, S. (2021). Women between the public and private spheres. In W. Borodziej, F. Laczó, & J. von Puttkamer (Eds.), *The Routledge history handbook of Central and Eastern Europe in the twentieth century. Volume 3, Intellectual horizons* (Vol. 3, pp. 183–234). Routledge.
- Lišková, K. (2016). Sex under socialism: From emancipation of women to normalized families in Czechoslovakia. *Sexualities*, 19(1–2), 211–235.

Week 12 - Socialism and After – Field trip to Jižní město

- How did socialism impact on the present of the Czech Republic? Is there any connection between neoliberal post-social capitalism and socialism? And what is the relation of socialism to capitalism seen after the fall of the former?

Required reading:

- Hann, C., C. Humprey, and K. Verdery. 2002. "Introduction: Postsocialism as a topic of anthropological investigation." In *Postsocialism: Ideals, ideologies and practices in Eurasia*, edited by C. M. Hann, 1–11. London: Routledge.

Optional reading:

- Berdhal, D. 1999. "(N)Ostalgie" for the present: Memory, longing, and East German things." *Ethnos*, 64, 2, 192-211.
- Becker, W. 2003. *Good Bye, Lenin!* (movie)
- Krivy, M. (2015). Greyness and colour desires: The chromatic politics of the panelak in late-socialist and post-socialist Czechoslovakia. *Journal of Architecture* 20(5): 765–802.
- Lahusen, T. 2006. "Decay or Endurance? The Ruins of Socialism." *Slavic Review*, 65, 4: 736-746.

Week 13 – Finals

Final in-class writing assignment