

Art, Architecture, and Propaganda under Socialism

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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.

Classes comprise of lectures, class discussions, in-class hands-on analyses and walks around Prague. 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.

Course Requirements:

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. Hence, it will be very difficult to receive 100% in the class when you have any unexcused absences.

Please keep this in mind. If you miss class twice without a valid excuse (a note from a physician in the event of an illness), then the professors will automatically lower the final grade by 5 points (on a 100-point scale) for each class missed thereafter. Students with 6 or more unexcused absences will automatically fail the course. In case of absence due to illness, students are required to cover the material they missed.

Tardiness of more than 20 minutes without a reasonable excuse will be regarded as an absence. Similarly, not taking an active part in sessions (e.g., because of using electronic devices during screenings, napping, etc.) is viewed as an unexcused absence.

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. This is why it comprises a significant portion of your course grade: 30%. Active participation means that you take part in the discussions – possibly every seminar, put forward your ideas on, interpretations, and analysis of the visual material/text under discussion, and engage in discussion not only with the lecturers but perhaps even more importantly also with fellow students. Participation is assessed continually throughout the whole course. 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.

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. The test is modeled on typical Czech university tests. Unlike most US tests, it is not essay based, you are asked 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. It will take place on the 2025. There will be time for your questions regarding the test (a revision session) on 2025.

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 then 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 have it ready before every class. It will be collected and marked at least twice during the semester. You may gain a maximum of **15%**. **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.**

Literature review

Each student will hand in a **literature review by 2025** upon which his/her final presentation will be based. To ensure high quality of the literature review and final presentations, you are required to hand in a one-page outline of your topic and at least four of the sources you intend to review by **2025**. The topic and research question based on the literature review have to a. concern visual material, and b. focus on the Central and Eastern European region. As the choice of topic is up to you, it is highly recommended to consult your choice with the lecturers.

You can get the maximum of 25% for the literature review. A literature review is an objective and thorough summary and critical analysis of the relevant, available research and non-research literature on the topic being studied (Hart, 1998). A good literature review gathers information about a particular subject from many sources and offers a critical reading of the sources. A good literature review is the essential first step for forming a sound and innovative research question. You are assigned to conduct a literature review in order to get the skills necessary for any type of college work.

Structure – your literature review will consist of three key parts with headings and subheadings:

- **a) A brief discussion of the topic of your choice**, i.e. the type of visual material you would like to study and the reason why it should be studied. This section should be brief but it needs to set up the thesis and literature that follow.
- **b) A critical discussion** of the literature you were able to gather. This section is the core one. You need to very briefly describe how you accessed the literature and demonstrate you have used multiple sources to find relevant academic articles and books. You should discuss the sources critically; **include at least two texts from the course reader plus at least four more texts**. A critical discussion means you focus on the perspectives and methods employed in the texts of your choice. You should group the texts that share a common stance, method or any other feature so that your literature review has a logical structure. **DO NOT** discuss individual texts in isolation. You should identify any competing perspectives, gaps and inconsistencies in how your topic has thus far been discussed. This will enable you to formulate a meaningful, sound research question. Note that the research question is the conclusion of the literature review.

- c) **A research question that follows from a summary** of the literature review. Note that you can only formulate the question and present the summary AFTER you have conducted the literature review.

The literature review will be assessed as follows:

Topic and material selected (10pts), Research question and summary (20pts), Literature review (60pts: a. multiple sources are used: 5pts, b. at least six sources are discussed, out of which at least two are from the course reader: 5pts, c. critical, logically and clearly structured discussion of the texts identified as key; make sure you use subheadings: 50pts), Structure and presentation (5pts), Consistency of references: APA citation style (5pts).

The literature review should be 5 pages long maximum, excluding references (i.e. 9,000 characters/1250 words).

Literature review discussion

The last session of the course on **2025** will be dedicated to a group discussion of literature reviews done by the students. Within independent study program, each student will read other students' literature reviews taking notes. In class, we will then discuss each literature review in detail. Be prepared to ask specific questions and relate to the literature and material we covered in class. You can get the maximum of **15%** for the literature review discussion.

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:

Assessment specification

- Class participation: 30%
- Midterm test: 15%
- Reading diary: 15%
- Literature review: 25%
- Literature review discussion: 15%

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

February 18, 2025

- 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

February 25, 2025

- 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?

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").

Week 4 - Modernity, Modernization & Modernism

March 4, 2025

- 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.](#)

Recommended reading:

- [Zarecor, K. E. 2011. Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011. pp. 1-13 \(Introduction\).](#)

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

March 11, 2025

- 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.](#)

Recommended reading:

- [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

March 18, 2025

- 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?

Required reading:

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

Week 7 - Midterm test

March 25, 2025

Midterm break

April 1, 2025

Week 8 - The Thaw & 1960s

April 8, 2025

- 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?
- A brief revision session based on questions regarding the midterm test you pose will be held at the beginning of the session: have your questions ready!

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.
- Kramerová, D. 2008. Bruxelles 1958: Exposition Universelle et Internationale. Prague: Arbor Vitae, pp. 13-59.

Week 9 - Normalization

April 15, 2025

- 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 live: Ideology and Contradiction in Czechoslovakia, 1969-1989." In A Decade of Transformation, IWM Junior Visiting Fellow Conferences, Vol. 8. Vienna.

Recommended reading:

- 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

April 22, 2025

- 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.

Week 11 - Socialism in the making

April 29, 2025

- 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?

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.](#)

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

May 6, 2025

- 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.](#)
- [Berdhal, D. 1999. "\(N\)Ostalgie" for the present: Memory, longing, and East German things." Ethnos, 64, 2, 192-211.](#)

Recommended reading:

- [Good Bye Lenin! \(movie\)](#)
- [Lahusen, T. 2006. "Decay or Endurance? The Ruins of Socialism." Slavic Review, 65, 4: 736-746.](#)
- [Oates-Indruchová, L. 2000. "Male bodies resisting the west and the past. Body and Masculinity in advertising in the Czech Republic." East Central Europe, 27, 2: 21-36.](#)
- [Weiner, E. 2007. Market Dreams. Gender, Class, and Capitalism in the Czech Republic. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press](#)

Week 13 – Finals

May 13, 2025

Final presentations of literature reviews; deadline for sending literature reviews via email.