Art, Architecture, and Propaganda under Socialism

Fall 2017

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Class time: To be specified
Language of Instruction: English

Course Description

The course explores how ideologies informed and keep informing 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 informed by different ideologies. To achieve this, you will be first introduced to a set of epistemological building blocks, i.e. themes and modes of thinking that have influenced the form of art and visual culture, e.g. modernity, modernism, ideology. This will provide you with a strong theoretical base. We will then proceed to the methods available for researching the visual material that will explore throughout the course and that you can even add to as you travel around the CEE region. This is so because art and architecture created under the totalitarian regime between the late 1940s and 1980s has repercussions for what the CEE region looks like today. Moreover, as the Cold War rhetoric currently undergoes a revival, the study material and its historical context will 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 the Czech lands but since their history is closely interrelated with the surrounding and even rather distant countries, 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 totalitarian regime, it has strong ties with the local present so that our excursions will also concern time.

The course reader includes key theoretical and methodological texts as well as texts that outline the limits of applying certain theories of foreign origin to the local setting. The visual representations, art and pieces of architecture and propaganda span historical material, fiction and non-fiction movies, posters, photographs, and TV production.

The classes will 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.

Assessment and Final Grade

- Class participation: 30%
- Midterm test: 15%
- Reading diary: 15%
- Literature review: 20%
- Final presentation: 20%

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 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.

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 discussion. Please note that you may print the reader out at UPCES.

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 s/he uses 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 (and 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 7 November 2017. There will be time for your questions regarding the test (a revision session) on 31 October 2017.

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

Literature review

Each student will hand in a literature review by 12 December 2017 upon which his/her final presentation will be based. In order 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 14 November 2017. 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 20% 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).

Final Presentation

The last session of the course on 12 December 2017 will be dedicated to final presentations by the students. These will be based on the literature review (extra registration of the topic is therefore not needed). Each student will prepare a presentation including visuals (ppt, prezi, pdf, etc.) and a hand-out (1 copy is enough).

The time allocated to the presentation will be announced on 5 December 2017 as it depends on the number of students enrolled. The presentation should start by presenting the reason for doing the literature review and saying what your topic is; you should present examples of the material to be studied, and present the main topics that emerged from your literature review, you should end with presenting your research question, which should logically follow from the literature review.

The hand-out should include an executive summary of the research conducted for the presentation, and bullet points of the main arguments, and the research question. It should be one page maximum long (1,800 characters/250 words).

You can get the maximum of 20% for the final presentation. The following will be assessed: Structure of the presentation (relevance and logical sequence of slides: 25%), Quality of the hand-out (25%), Presentation (how well you carry out the presentation, speed, clarity, visual contact: 25%), and Response to questions (25%). Each presenter will be assigned one student to ensure questions are posed.

Classroom Decorum

Laptops and the use of any other electronic device are banned. Before you enter the classroom make sure your cell phone is switched off.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1 – CEE Introductory Lecture Series and Prague Tours
18 – 21 September 2017

Week 2 – Introduction, course outline, short field trip
26 September 2017

- 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 UPCES surroundings.

Week 3 – Visual culture & methodologies, socialist timeline
3 October 2017

- 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:

Week 4 – Modernity, modernization & modernism
10 October 2017

- 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:

Recommended reading:

Week 5 – Ideology – field trip
17 October 2017

- 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:

**Week 6 – Socialist realism & Stalinism**

24 October 2017

- Understanding of 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:

- “Socialist Realism Proclaimed. August 1934.” In Russian Life 2009, 52, 4: 21-23

Recommended reading:


**Week 7 – The Thaw & 1960s**

31 October 2017

- 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:


**Week 8 – Midterm test**

7 November 2017

**Week 9 – Normalization**

14 November 2017

- 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:

Recommended reading:

**Week 10 – Progress & socialist visions of the future – field trip**

21 November 2017

- 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:

**Week 11 – Socialism in the making**

28 November 2017

- 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:


**Week 12 – Socialism and after – field trip**

5 December 2017

- 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:

- 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)

**Week 13 – Finals**

12 December 2017

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