



## **Czech History, Arts, and Civil Society I**

EURO 3000 (3 credits / 45 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:  
Czech Republic: Arts and Social Change

### **Course Description**

The Czech History, Arts, and Civil Society course is a required interdisciplinary seminar designed to provide first hand academic and experiential knowledge about Czech society and national identity in the historical and contemporary contexts through visual and performing arts, film, and literature. The seminar is built around the rich and well-known intersection of arts, politics, and social change in Czech post-war history; and the legacy of communism as it plays out in cultural expression and institutions today. The seminar includes required readings and lectures, as well as discussions, film screenings, music and dance performances, and site visits to artists' studios, theaters, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and community centers.

### **Course Objectives**

- To provide students with a survey of history, politics and society from the creation of Czechoslovakia through the communist period.
- To provide students with the historical context necessary for understanding the complexity of the communist period with particular relation to the role of the arts and artists.
- To provide students with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks for understanding the official and unofficial cultures in a totalitarian society and the social and cultural legacy of the communist period today.
- To deepen students' understanding of the Czech post-war and communist society through analysis of manifestos, literature, drama, art, and other primary sources.

### **Expected Outcomes**

Upon completion of the seminar students are expected to have:

- Gained a solid knowledge of the intersection of Czech arts, politics and society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Cultivated analytical skills and critical thinking around the social and political context of art.
- Increased awareness of the social and political complexity of the communist past and its relation to contemporary society.

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## Course Text

All texts and readings are provided at the start of the course and additional readings may be assigned throughout the semester. Students are expected to complete readings in advance of designated lectures as background, and prepared in the case of primary documents, literature and plays, for critical response and analysis in class. In addition to the **readings listed on the following pages**, students are expected to have read the books listed below in advance of arrival, which may be utilized by lecturers throughout the semester.

- Holý, Ladislav. *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post-Communist Social Transformation*. Cambridge: Cambridge, 1996.
- Havel, Vaclav. *Open Letters: Selected Writings, 1965-1990*. Selected and Edited by Paul Wilson }Vintage Books, New York, 1992. "The Power of the Powerless" and "Six Asides about Culture"

## Program Calendar

The Thematic Seminar is structured along a general chronological format, emphasizing three key themes: The Social Role of the Arts and Artists; Art as a Mirror of History; and The Dichotomy of Art and Politics. Site visits to NGOs, artist studios, institutes, and exhibitions devoted to the social and cultural legacy of communism complement round tables and lectures. The calendar also includes regional stays to explore arts in contemporary social context of the Czech regions outside Prague such as the Sudetenland (week 4); and a Central European Trip to Poland, Slovakia, and one other Central European city such as Berlin or Vienna (week 6-7).

## WEEK II AND III: CZECH LANDS AND THE ARTS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### Readings

- Holý, Ladislav. *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post-Communist Social Transformation*. *Introduction and Chapter I, Nation Against State*. Cambridge: Cambridge, 1996.
- Anthony Head, *The Tragedy of Lidice*, from magazine, *History Today*, June 2002.
- Lawrence L. Langer. "The Art of Atrocity" from magazine, *Tikkun*. July / August, 2002.
- Mira and Antonín J. Liehms *The Most Important Art: Soviet and Eastern European Film After 1945* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1977) *The Miracle and the Young Wave: Czechoslovakia after 1963*
- Jaroslav Anděl, "A Wanderer between Chaos and Order", from *Painting the Universe: František Kupka, Pioneer in Abstraction (1997)*.
- Goetz-Stankiewicz, Marketa "The Czech 'Dissident Writer' as Dramatic Character High Points of Theatre in the First Czechoslovak Republic." *Modern Drama* XXVII.1 (1984): 112-23. Jarka M. Burian, *High Points in Theatre of the First Czechoslovak Republic*
- Trensky, Pavel. *Czech Drama Since World War II*. With an Introduction by William E. Harkins. White Plains, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1978.

### Literature, Plays and Songs, and Films

- *Franz Kafka, America*
- Bohumil Hrabal, *Too Loud a Solitude*
- George Orwell, *Animal Farm*
- Karel and Josef Čapek, *The Insect Play*
- Jiří Suchý, Jiří Šlitr, *I bought myself a Candlewick*
- Voskovec and Weirich, *Songs from Golem & The Hangman and the Fool*
- *Shop on Main Street (Obchod na korze)*, Film, *Ján Kadár* and Elmar Klos 1969
- *Ear. (Ucho)* Film, Karel Kachyňa, 1970

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#### **WEEK IV: ARTS TODAY IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT (REGIONAL STAYS)**

Students visit regional art center and NGOs where contemporary arts confront social and political legacies of the past in the former Sudetenland and other Czech regions.

#### **WEEK V and VI: BACK TO THE FUTURE: LIBERALIZATION & NORMALIZATION**

##### **Readings**

- Harry Schwartz, Prague's 200 Days. Selections from a Speech in chapter I, *The Roots of the Crises, The Gathering Storm*.
- Ladislav Vaculík. *A Day in August* (August 1968)
- Ladislav Vaculík, *2000 Words*, reprinted in. Navratil, Jaromir. The Prague Spring 1968. (Central European Press, 1998) pp. 177-181.)
- Four Myths about 1968 (question set)
- Vaclav Havel, ---. "Letter to Dr. Gustáv Husák, General Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party." Trans. Paul Wilson. *Václav Havel or Living in Truth*. Ed. Jan Vladislav. London: Faber and Faber, 1986. 3-35.
- *Declaration of Charter 77* (1977)
- Jiřina Šiklová. "The 'Grey Zone' and the Future of Dissent in Czechoslovakia in Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz, ed. Good-bye, Samizdat. Twenty Years of Czechoslovak Underground Writing, pp. 153-9.
- *The Impossibility of Doing Things Differently*, interview with Ivan Kafka by Kazi Stasna (Central European Review, October 25, 1999)
- 'Memory of the Nation' Interview with the director of the Library of Prohibited Literature, from The Heart of Europe, Vol. 12, No 2/2005
- *Barbara Day, Czech Plays, Modern Czech Drama*
- Barbara Day, The Pit & the Snare.
- Havel, Vaclav. *Six Asides about Culture* in Open Letters: Selected Writings, 1965-1990.
- Selections from Forbidden Art I and II *Výtvarné Umění*: magazine for contemporary art. (no. 3-4/ 1995 and 1-2/ 1996.) including Jiří Šetlík, Introductory article in Forbidden Art I: The Artistic and Civic Responsibility of the Post-War Generation, and summary article in volume II.
- Jindřich Chaloupecký, *The Lessons of Prague*. Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture. Volume 4 (1985), pp. 323 – 334.

##### **Literature, Plays and Songs, and Films**

- Vaclav Havel, Garden Party (1963), & *The Power of the Powerless*.
- *Daisies (Sedmikrásky)* Film, Věra Chytilová, 1966
- *The Joke (Zert)* Jaromir Jires, 1969
- *The Power of the Powerless*, Documentary Film: Cory Taylor, 2009

#### **WEEK VI-VII: DECADE OF DISSENT AND THE QUESTION OF CENTRAL EUROPE (1980s and the Fall of Communism in Central/Eastern Europe)**

##### **Readings**

- Aleksandar Smolar, "History and Memory: the revolutions of 1989-1991" *Journal of Democracy*, vol.12, no.3, (July, 2001)
- Milan Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe", *The New York Review*, April 26 1984. (*A Kidnapped West or Culture Bows Out?*)

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- Milan Kundera, "Die Weltliteratur: How we read one another" *The New Yorker*, January 8, 2007
- Timothy Garton Ash, The Puzzle of Central Europe. *The New York Review of Books*, Volume 46, number 5. March 18, 1999.
- Timothy Garton Ash, The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague.
- Emil Višňovský, Rethinking Central-European Cultural Identity: Restoration, Transition, or Reconstruction? In *Human Affairs* (2-2005), pp. 166-185
- Tyrus Miller, "Rethinking Central Europe: The Symbolic Geography of the Avant-Garde."

### Literature, Plays and Songs, and Films

- Vaclav Havel, The Audience (*Audience*) 1975 and Unveiling (*Vernisáž*), 1975 and Largo Desolato (1984)
- The Kind Revolution, Documentary Directed by Petr Slavík, Jiří Střecha, 1989.
- Citizen Havel (Občan Havel), Documentary Film: Pavel Koutecký, Miroslav Janek, 2008
- The Lives of Others. Directed by Florian Henkel Von Donnersmarck (2006)

## WEEK VIII-IX: POST-SOCIALIST ARTS, POLITICS, AND CIVIL SOCIETY

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### Readings

- Sibelan Forrester, Magdalena J. Zaborowska and Elena Gapova, eds. *Over the Wall/After the Fall: Post-Communist Cultures Through the East-West Gaze*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004.
- *Behind the Iron Curtain* – English Language Review of the establishment, framework and research methods of the *Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes*
- Muriel Blaive. "The Czechs and their Communism, Past and Present:" In Inquiries into Past and Present, ed. D. Gard, I. Main, M. Oliver and J. Wood, Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conferences, Vol. 17. (2005)
- Herbert Kitschelt et al., *Historical Legacies and Strategies of Democratization: Pathways Toward Post-Communist Politics* in *Post-Communist Party Systems: competition, representation, and inter-party cooperation* (Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 19 – 40).
- Ulc, Otto. "Czechoslovakia's Velvet Divorce" in *East European Quarterly* (Fall 1996, 30-3) pg 331 – 352.
- Jiří Šefčík and Jana Šefčíková, "Post-Totalitarian Blues with a Happy Ending" from Beyond Belief: Contemporary Art from East Central Europe Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (September 1995).

### Literature, Plays, Songs, and Films

- Petra Húlová All This Belongs to Me (2002)
- Emil Hakl. Of Kids and Parents (2008)
- Citizen Havel (Občan Havel), Directed by, Pavel Koutecký, Miroslav Janek, 2008
- The Karamazovs (Karamazovi), Directed by Petr Zelenka, 2008.
- Something Like Happiness (Stěšť) Directed by Bohdan Slá

### Student Evaluation and Grading Criteria

Students are required to be on time to all lectures and excursion departure points; to attend all lectures and to participate actively in classroom discussions, group assignments and

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presentations. All assignments are to be handed in on the designated due date or up to 3 days later with a penalty of one letter-grade.

Final grades are based upon performances over the course of the semester and take into consideration active participation, punctuality, as well as initiative for creative and critical thinking. Seminar assignments are designed to allow students to elaborate selected themes relevant to the seminar topics and to develop analytical and creative reflection skills required for the ISP. They are evaluated on clarity and depth of analysis and reflection; elaboration and synthesis of key concepts from primary and secondary sources ; overall structure, organization and presentation.

Arts Essays (40% ) – Two short visual or performing arts analyses in which students review a current exhibit or performance with specific relevance to topics discussed in the seminar.

Cultural Studies essay (30%) exploring one theme in depth such as unofficial and official cultures under communism or the social role of literature, film, or drama at a particular moment in Czech history through selective analysis of primary documents or creative works of the period.

Final Exam (30%) The final exam includes identification of key terms, short-answer questions related to key historical moments and essay questions that require more contextualized answers with critical analysis of Czech arts and society.

### **Grading Scales and Criteria**

Grades are given both fairly and rigorously and in accordance with the system below. They will reflect a combination of absolute quality of performance, progress made, the ability to take into account and assimilate the Academic Director's and the teachers' advice in assessing the work done. An "A" letter grade reflects exceptional work, perfect combination of academic competences and personal research and analysis. It shows great ability to integrate field-based investigation and personal reflection into a structured and well argued paper. A "B" letter grade reflects serious and methodical work as well as a substantial effort at analyzing and understanding cross-cultural issues. A "C" letter grade shows the work meets the requirements but needs more in-depth reflection and personal involvement. A "D" letter grade is insufficient and clearly reflects lack of work or serious deficiencies.

The grading scale for all classes is as follows:

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+
84-86%	B
80-83%	B-
77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-
67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
below 64	F

**Please note, the syllabus, course content, lecturers, and readings may modified by the Academic Director in order to better suit the needs of the course and its participants.**

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Should any change of class topics or lecturers may be necessary, student will be promptly notified.

**Academic Policies:** SIT prides itself on providing students with an experientially based program; we hold ourselves, and our students, to the highest of academic standards. Students are asked to refer to the **SIT Study Abroad Handbook** for policies on academic integrity, ethics, academic warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and the academic appeals process.

**Disability Services:** Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services at [disabilityservices@sit.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@sit.edu) for information and support in facilitating an accessible educational experience. Additional information regarding SIT Disability Services, including a link to the online request form, can be found on the Disability Services website at <http://studyabroad.sit.edu/disabilityservices>.

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