

## Popular Culture in Central and Eastern Europe between Socialism and Postsocialism

Mgr. Karel Šima, Ph.D.

Thursday PM 2:10-3:40 room C335  
Department of Ethnology, Faculty of Arts, Celetna 20, Prague 1



The course provides an introduction to the phenomena of popular culture in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) with special emphasis on the Czech social and cultural context.

Firstly, we introduce a range of theoretical approaches to studying popular culture, exploring the intersection between everyday life, mass media, and broader political and historical contexts within the CEE. We will discuss key theoretical readings in the study of popular culture in CEE, including ideology and hegemony, (post)subculture, Marxism, (post)socialism and nationalism.

Secondly, building on the knowledge of these conceptual approaches, we will examine a range of themes in popular culture in CEE such as consumerism in socialist society, re-nationalization and re-traditionalization, subcultures and fanzines, DIY, and mushroom foraging. These issues will be presented in the empirical case studies not only from contemporary Czech culture but also in Czech-Slovak comparison within the CEE context. The course will include a field trip on

May 1 to study the festivals of May Day in Prague and a final colloquium with students' presentations.

### Course schedule

1. Introduction: Central and Eastern European (CEE) popular culture between East and West (February 22)
2. What is popular culture? (Reading: John Storey) (February 22)
3. Marxism and popular culture (Reading: Antonio Gramsci, film: Guy Debord) (March 7)
4. From subcultures to postsubcultures (Reading: Andy Bennett, Keith Kahn-Harris) (March 14)
5. State socialism vs. postsocialism and East vs. West (Reading: Boris Buden) (March 21)
6. Reading week (March 28)
7. Consumerism in state socialism (Reading: Paulina Bren) (April 4)
8. Re-traditionalization and nationalism in CEE (Reading: Ladislav Holy) (April 18)
8. Fanzines and subcultures in CEE (Reading: Zines archives) (April 25)
9. Tour de May Day festivals in Prague (May 1)
10. DIY and constructing at home (Reading: Andrew Jackson) (May 9)
11. Mushroom foraging in Czech culture (Reading: Anna Tsing) (May 16)
11. Colloquium with students' presentations (May 30)

### Reading:

- John Storey: What is Popular Culture, in: John Storey: Cultural Theory and Popular Culture.
- Antonio Gramsci: Hegemony, Intellectuals and the State

- Andy Bennett, Keith Kahn-Harris: Introduction, In: Andy Bennet, Keith Kahn-Harris (ed.): After Subculture. Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture
- Boris Buden: Children of Postcommunism
- Paulina Bren: Tuzex and the Hustler. Living It Up in Czechoslovakia, In: Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger (ed.): Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe
- Ladislav Holy: The little Czech and the great Czech Nation
- Andrew Jackson: Constructing at Home: Understanding the Experience of the Amateur Maker
- Anna Tsing: Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species

## **Assignments**

### **Assignment 1: In-class participation**

Students are expected to actively engage in class discussions to demonstrate reading and comprehension. The reading will comprise key texts of the study of popular culture and are available in university information system.

### **Assignment 2: Field trip**

There will be a practical class to learn to analyze the visual material and to get acquainted with methods of fieldwork. Active participation in this trip will be required.

### **Assignment 3: Oral presentation within a colloquium**

Students will prepare a presentation (app. 10 minutes with at least that much discussion afterwards) of their analysis of popular culture issues. This presentation will be part of the final colloquium within the class. Students can choose from three types of presentations.

- A. Analysis of a specific issue from their experience with Czech and/or Central European popular culture
- B. Review of a book on popular culture or contemporary folklore that will be consulted with teacher
- C. Opinion statements on theoretical questions based on the content of the course.

## **Grading**

The student's grade for the course will be based on the following:

	<b>Points</b>
<b>In-class participation</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Field trip</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Oral presentation within a colloquium</b>	<b>30</b>

### Further reading:

- Bauman, Richard: Folklore. In: Bauman, Richard (ed.): *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments. A Communications-Centered Handbook*. New York 1992, pp. 29-40.
- Bennett, Anthony The post-subcultural turn: some reflections 10 years on, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2011, Vol. 14(5), pp. 493-506.
- Bren, Paulina *The greengrocer and his TV. The culture of communism after the 1968 Prague Spring*. Cornell University Press, 2010.
- Brubaker, Roger *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. New York : Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Buden, Boris Children of Postcommunism. 2010, *Radical Philosophy* 159 (January/February), pp. 18–25.
- Czaszi, Lajos: World Trade Center Jokes and Their Hungarian Reception. *Journal of Folklore Research* 40, 2, 2003, pp. 175-220.
- Daniel, Ondřej, Kavka Tomáš, Machek Jakub a kol. *Populární kultura v českém prostoru*. Praha: Karolinum 2013
- Daniel, Ondřej, Kavka Tomáš, Machek Jakub *Popular Culture and Subcultures of Czech Post-Socialism: Listening to the Wind of Change* Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017.
- Davies, Christie: Jokes as the Truth about Soviet Socialism. In: *Folklore. An Electronical Journal of Folklore* 46, 2010, pp. 10-32.
- Debord, Guy 'Chapter 1' *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zed Books, 1994.
- Gramsci, Antonio Hegemony, Intellectuals and the State. Storey, John, ed. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*. NY: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994, pp. 215-21.
- Heimo, Anne – Kooski, Kaarina: Internet Memes as Statements and Entertainment. In: *Folklore Fellows' Network* 44, 2014, pp. 4-12.
- Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger: Introduction: Inventing Traditions. In: Hobsbawm, Eric, - Terence Ranger (eds.): *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge, 1983, pp. 1-14.
- Holý, Ladislav *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation. National Identity and the Post-Communist Social Transformation*, Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Janeček, Petr: Bloody Mary or Krvavá Máří? Globalization and Czech Children's Folklore. *Slovak Ethnology* 62,2, 2014, pp. 221-243.
- Laineste, Liisi: Post – Socialist Joke Lore: Preliminary Findings and Further Research Suggestions. *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 54, 2009, pp. 31 – 45.
- Media Studies Journal. Special Issue on Popular Culture and Post-socialist societies in East-Central and Southern Europe. Vol. 2/2015, on line  
<https://medialnistudia.cz/archiv-cisel/medialni-studia-022015-special-issue-2/>
- Muggleton, David *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style*. Oxford: Berg, 2000.
- Storey, John *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, Pearson Longman, 2009.