**Class code**
Civil Resistance in Central & Eastern Europe Reflected in Literature, Art and Film
(IDSEM-UG 9203-001)

**Instructor Details**
Dr Monika MacDonagh-Pajerová
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Wednesday and Thursday 2-3pm or by appointment

**Class Details**
Wednesday and Thursday 12.00 – 1.30
Richterův dům.

**Prerequisites**
None

**Class Description**
The course will examine the nature and significance of civil resistance in Central and Eastern Europe in the 20th century in a transversal, multi-disciplinary way. By studying literature, art and film we will operate in a space between modern history, political science, literature and film studies and psychology. In Central and Eastern Europe, the questions activists and artists never stopped asking were why authoritarian societies developed from ideals that seemed fair and peaceful?; what the purpose and limits of free creation were and whether ideas still mattered? People involved in civil resistance took powerfully practical steps which led to real consequences for them and finally undermined the regimes. All this is marvelously reflected in literature, art and film production that is today fully available.

In order to reinforce the point that the issues we are examining have meaning across regions and times, we will work thematically rather than chronologically. In this course we will be mixing approaches to how we explore the issues. In addition to traditional lecturing, there will be reading, videos and films. We will invite people who can talk personally about some of the issues and we will do field trips within Prague – the city that experienced liberal democracy, Nazism and Communism in only one century. Where necessary we will take a flexible approach in order to be able to take advantage of persons and events who might enrich the course being available in the semester.

**Desired Outcomes**
Drawing on a significant engagement with the core films, literature and art experienced during the semester, students will develop a significant understanding and critical engagement with different aspects of civil resistance in the region during the last century. In particular, students will have a broad knowledge of the origins and experience of totalitarianism, the origins and experience of civil resistance to totalitarianism and the role of artists in civil resistance and reflecting it as part of a common memory.
A. 20% Class Participation/Attendance (this is a highly participatory course)

B. 20% Mid-term examination

C. 30% Final examination

D. 30% Individual Assignment. Each student will choose one film, book or artist and either write a short essay (1500-2000 words) on a relevant title to be agreed with me in advance or will present an excerpt from the work and discuss it with the class (total time 30 minutes including minimum 15 minutes exposition). Submission of essay by Session 26. Presentation dates to be agreed with each student.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class.

The specific workload attached to each session is low, which is intended to allow the student to follow their own specific interests in the very large amount of materials/experiences available in the library and throughout Prague.

Assessment Expectations

Grade A: Exceptional level of engagement with the topic including going beyond the texts and films explored in class.

Grade B: Very good level of understanding and presentation of arguments but falling short of the highest level

Grade C: Satisfactory and accurate understanding of the core themes

Grade D: Adequate level but weakly analytical

Grade F: Poor understanding of the themes or materials.

Grade conversion

A=94-100
A-=90-93
B+=87-89
B=84-86
B-=80-83
C+=77-79
C=74-76
C-=70-73
D+=67-69
D=65-66
F=below 65
Grading Policy

NYU Prague aims to have grading standards and results similar to those that prevail at Washington Square. At the College of Arts and Sciences, roughly 39% of all final grades are in the B+ to B- range, and 50% in the A/A- range. We have therefore adopted the following grading guideline: in any non-Stern course, class teachers should try to ensure that no more than 50% of the class receives an A or A-. A guideline is not a curve. A guideline is just that—it gives an ideal benchmark for the distribution of grades towards which we work.

Attendance Policy

Each unexcused absences will result in your final grade being reduced by 3%. Absences only for medical reasons will be excused. To obtain an excused absence, you are obliged to supply either a doctor’s note or corroboration of your illness by a member of the housing staff (either an RA or a Building Manager). Absences due to travel will not be excused.

Late Submission of Work

Due work should be submitted during class time. A penalty of up to 10 points will be imposed for late submission without advance agreement.

Plagiarism Policy

When drawing on specific ideas and words of others they must be properly acknowledged in the notes attached to the essay.

Required Text(s)

Required texts are contained in the special course reader and referenced in the relevant class session in this syllabus below.

Further suggested works

Internet Research Guidelines

Many of the topics and individuals dealt with in this course are political and controversial. When using the internet to research bear this in mind and seek corroboration from non crowd-sourced resources.

Additional Required Equipment

none

Session 1

February 13th

Sergej Ejzenstein’s “The Battleship Potemkin” (1925) as first propaganda film.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>References</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>February 20th</td>
<td>The notion of absurdity of any given totalitarian regime, the exploration of the situation of an innocent individual being treated as a potential criminal or enemy of the state, being Jewish in Central Europe.</td>
<td>“The Rhythm in My Heels” by Josef Škvorecký and Andrea Sedláčková</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>February 21st</td>
<td>Intelligent individuals trusting and serving a dictatorship e.g. in the communist Soviet Russia under Stalin and realizing too late what the real foundations of such a regime are.</td>
<td>Nikita Mikhalkov: “Burnt by the Sun” (1994).</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>February 27th</td>
<td>Another option for an intelligent, honest person in the Soviet Russia – trying to stay out of the historical events, an impossible attempt to live without either compromising with the regime or fighting it.</td>
<td>Boris Pasternak: “Doctor Zhivago” (1958).</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>February 28th</td>
<td>The general analysis of a non-democratic, oppressive system, whether it is Communism or Nazism and the striving of individuals for love, freedom and truth.</td>
<td>George Orwell: “1984”.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>March 1st</td>
<td>The appeal of totalitarian ideology to some artists and intellectuals – by opportunism, by conviction? Leni Riefenstahl and Albert Speer serving the Nazi regime and their different perception of guilt later on.</td>
<td>“The Triumph of the Will” and Gita Sereny’s biography of Albert Speer.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>March 6th</td>
<td>An opposite reaction of students fighting the same oppressive regime and believing in democracy as a fair social environment.</td>
<td>“The Last Days of Sophie Scholl” and the White Rose Movement in Munich, 2009.</td>
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Session 10  March 13th

Another example of an abusive regime dealing not only with its opponents, but other groups as well – Jews, Slaves, Romas, handicapped mentally or physically. Individual versus collective guilt.


Session 11  March 14th

Surviving inhuman conditions of war, occupation, ghetto and concentration camp. The notion of human solidarity, believing in good as a realistic concept after all, as well as friendship and love. The notion of guilt and shame.


Session 12  March 15th

A more skeptical vision of people conforming with occupation and rules of the dictatorship.


Session 13  March 20th

Jews as a persecuted group, the psychology of victimization and marginalization of a given social group by the majoritarian society.


Session 14  March 21st

The loneliness of those who came back – from the front, from a prison, from a camp. Original beliefs confronted with today’s reality.


Session 15  March 22nd

Methods generally used by any totalitarian ideology whether it is Communism or Nazism or any current extremist movement.

Brain washing, psychological humiliation, physical torture, attacks on one’s beliefs and moral, isolation from the outside world.


Session 16  March 27th

An attempt to catalogue and analyze the crimes of Communism over seventy years.

Revelation of the actual, practical impacts of the ideology around the world – terror, torture, famine, mass deportations, massacres.

Karel Bartošek’s chapter in Stéphane Courtois and coll.:“The Black Book of Communism” (1999).

Session 17  March 28th

Mid Term Paper

Session 18
April 10th  
What is it like to live in a society that is essentially not free and how do people react towards power. Conformity versus protest.


Session 19
The nature of 20th century human existence – behind the Iron Wall in the East or in a liberal democracy.

April 11th  
Between comedy and tragedy. Exile as a human condition.

Milan Kundera :“The Unbearable Lightness of Being”. (1984)

Session 20
A very different look at the social reality of the 80’s – although the abuse of power is omnipresent, a revolt is possible. Background of the Gdansk events just before the declaration of the martial law.

Andrzej Wajda and Agnieszka Holland:“The Man of Iron” (1977)

Session 21
Walking visit of the key central Prague sites of the November 1989 revolution and discussion of the dynamic of the sparking of a revolution.

April 18th
Dissent and civil resistance as a phenomenon of the 20th century in Central and Eastern Europe. Life in truth as a response to the totalitarian regime, possibilities of help from the outside world.

Jeri Laber :“The Courage of Strangers”(2002).

Session 22
Secret police and its collaborators as an omnipresent control of people´s lives. Personal files and their critical evaluation.

April 25th
Visit to the Institute for Studying Totalitarian regimes (www.ustrcr.cz) which controls the files of the communist regime’s secret police and published extensive studies on both the Communist and Nazi periods.

Session 23
Meditation on the possibilities of being an honest person in a dishonest regime. Every day life confronted with a moment of moral choice.

May 2nd
Ivan Klíma :“Love and Garbage” (1986)

(Ivan Klíma is a survivor of the Nazi camps and was a dissident in the 1970s and 1980s. He has attended the class in person on a number of occasions in recent years. If he is available, his talk will replace this class).
May 9th

Dissent as a strategy, parallel community of like-minded people as a shelter.

Václav Havel: “The Power of the Powerless”

and Adam Michnik: “Letters from Prison and other Essays“.

Session 26

Samizdat (hand produced versions of banned work) as a specific way of communication.

Visit to the Libri Prohibiti Library (www.libriprohibiti.cz) which is the largest collection of Samizdat books and journals in Central Europe.

May 15th

Session 26

Revision class

May 16th

Session 27

Final Exam in class

May 22th

Classroom Etiquette

No eating.

Required Co-curricular Activities

None

Suggested Co-curricular Activities

The city of Prague has a constant source of material for this course in its museums, libraries, galleries, monuments and, most of all, its people. The required reading for class is relatively limited in order to provide time for exploring texts, movies and institutions relevant to the major themes.