Code: FLM-403:19
FLMD-312:35

Course title: Fate and History: István Szabó’s cinema
(in English / angol nyelvű kurzus)

Course convenors: Tibor Hirsch

Class time and place: 14 00-15 30 Monday, Room -137

Course type: Lecture and practical work

Course content: István Szabó in his whole career was focusing on the unprepared individual being forced to meet with the always hostile East-European history.

In the films made from the early 60’s Szabó depicts different sorts of surviving strategies of the average civilian when this XX. Century’s history - unpredictable fate embodied by the series of well-known severe political events – “is arriving”. These strategies here in this geographical region are always desperate, always deniable - and sometimes they are adopted just too late.

What were the most important provoking inputs of modern history which Szabó’s “urban civilian heroes” in the whole region had to face with?

1. New states – new borders, migration after WW I.
2. Revolutions, national hostilities, leftist and rightist extremes, increasing anti-Semitism
3. WW II. – the beginning: wartime restrictions of everyday life, poverty and terror, refugees, German occupation
4. WW II. – the end: bombing, moving frontlines, cities under siege, Holocaust, Soviet invasion and occupation
5. New piece-time doctrines: forced migrations and deportations
7. Revolutions: Fights, virulent political terror, rage of hatred.

In Szabo’s films we can understand and reconstruct the typical world view of people living in the region (especially in the urban Hungary) who tried to defend themselves against the threats above. This very civilian attitude had different psychologically motivated components: all of them used for survival.

As we can see from the films, these survival techniques could be different depending on the period (listed above) when they were adopted, and on the people who actually used them. They are different and still - in the examinable films - there are one common world-view and attitude as a basic frame, which helps Szabó to describe ordinary city folk, young Hungarian intellectuals and German artists as well.

To prove all these we will analyse Szabo’s unique urban visual poetry and his very special psychological realism.

Requirements: To complete the course successfully students should prove the basic knowledge of István Szabó’s films, and the social-historical view of the time and the region these films are reflecting on.

First classes are rather lectures – and the basic points of the “East-European survival attitude” are explained and shown in the films.

Classes later are rather seminars – and students are expected to analyse films in independent presentations, using the common social-historical approach.

Films to watch:
Indicative Reading: Some books on Hungarian Cinema in connection with the topic of the seminar:

- Hungarian cinema: from coffee house to multiplex
  John Cunningham
  Wallflower, 2004
- Word and image: history of the Hungarian cinema
  István Nemeskürtý
  Corvina Press, 1968
- History must answer to man: the contemporary Hungarian cinema
  Graham Petrie
  Corvina Kiadó, 1981

Plot-summaries in English:


Books on Istvan Szabó in English and in Italian:

- The spectral body : aspects of the cinematic oeuvre of István Szabó / Zoltán Dragon,

Some reviews on Szabo’s films, selected studies, articles, interviews in English and French:

- Scott, Jay: Szabo’s films „a record” of his life. The Globe and Mail (29 October...
1988)

Sublett, Scott: Hungarian makes films to support people. The Washington Times (10 September 1982)

Christensen, P. G.: Collaboration in István Szabó’s Mephisto. Film Criticism (Spring 1988) no. 3. pp. 20–32.

Martin, Marcel: Mephisto. Image et Son (Jan 1982) no. 368. pp. 29–33. (French)


Roth-Bettoni, Didier – Sauvaget, Daniel: Chère Emma. – Istvan Szabo, cinéaste européen.


Suggestions for online-reading about Istvan Szabo:

Art, Politics, and ‘Taking Sides’: An Interview with Istvan Szabo by Marty Fairbairn -Film Philosophy. http://zakka.dk/euroscreenwriters/interviews/istvan_szabo.htm

theartsdesk Q&A: Director István Szabó | Film reviews http://www.theartsdesk.com/film/theartsdesk-qa-director-istv%C3%A1n-szab%C3%B3


Kinoeye | Hungarian film: Istvan Szabo interviewed http://www.kinoeye.org/03/02/sonmez02.php

Books on Hungarian History and Social-History in connection with the topic of the seminar:


