

# Hungary through Hungarian Cinema

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## Instructor(s):

Anna Gács

The **Budapest Through Cinema, People and Streets course** provides an overview of Hungarian history and culture through watching films, walking in the city and discussing literary, art and cinematic heritage. It is a 4-credit course that has two components:

1. The Budapest Studies component for 2 credits (detailed syllabus [can be found here](#)) and
2. The Hungarian Cinema component for 2 credits.

## Syllabus of the Hungarian Cinema component

### Short Description of the course

The *Hungarian Cinema* component gives an overview of modern Hungarian history through watching and discussing some of the most influential old and recent Hungarian movies. (All movies have either English subtitles or an English speaking version.) During the classes, historical and cultural background will be given for each film, and students will be encouraged to discuss aesthetic, social, moral, political and psychological issues raised in the films and to compare these to their own social-cultural experience and films they are familiar with. Screenings will follow the order of the period depicted in the films (and not the timeline of their production). Films to be discussed include the banned satire, *The Witness* (1969), the cult drama about the 1956 uprising and the following disillusionment, *Time Stands Still* (1981), the beautiful, lyrical account on history from a female perspective, *My Twentieth Century* (1989), the international animation hit, *Ruben Brandt, Collector* (2018) and the understated hyperrealist drama, *One Day* (2018), that tackles complex social issues through depicting the quotidian.

### Aim of the course

Students will learn about 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century Hungarian social and cultural history and the history of Hungarian film. Through discussing the films, they will be introduced into basic aesthetic notions and different ways of appreciating films, such as functions and patterns of storytelling, types and principles of adaptation, types of montage, the cultural functions of audience and professional reviews, popular and art cinema, different notions of success in the film industry, etc. By submitting two creative assignments (e.g. reviews, video essays, spin-off stories) they will have a chance to try themselves not only as members of the audience, but also as creators of original works.

### Detailed Program and Class Schedule

1. Introduction: A rough timeline of Hungarian history in the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century; Introduction to patterns and functions of storytelling;
2. Film: *My Twentieth Century* by Ildikó Enyedi; Topics discussed: Hungary at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century; local stories and the grand narrative of history; gendered perspective on history in Hungarian film;
3. Film: *Son of Saul* by László Nemes; Topics discussed: The Holocaust in Europe and Hungary; Depicting heroism in Holocaust narratives
4. Film: *The Witness* by Péter Bacsó; Topics discussed: State communism in Hungary; The satire genre; The importance of historical context in understanding films
5. Film: *Love* by Károly Makk; Topics discussed: Types of adaptation (the original short story will be available in English translation); Types of montage and their narrative-aesthetic function

6. Film: *Time Stands Still* by Péter Gothár; Topics discussed: The 1956 Uprising; Coming-of-age stories; The role of music in the film
7. Film: *Bolshe Vita* by Ibolya Fekete; Topics discussed: The collapse of the Soviet Block; Multilingualism in film; Documentary style
8. Discussion of 1<sup>st</sup> Creative Assignments
9. Film: *Home Guards* by Krisztina Goda; Topics discussed: Extremism in Hungary in the past decades; Depicting extremism in popular cinema; The significance of perspective in storytelling
10. Film: *Ruben Brandt, Collector* by Milorad Krstic; Topics discussed: Short history of Hungarian animation; International co-productions and national film production; English and Hungarian speaking versions of the film;
11. Film: *One Day* by Zsófia Szilágyi; Topics discussed: Women in Hungarian society under State Socialism and today; The “second” and “third shifts” of women in Eastern Europe and the United States; hyperrealism in East-European film; examples of a one-day plot in film history
12. Film: *Pieces of a Woman* by Kornél Mundruczó; Topics discussed: Debates about home birth in Hungary and elsewhere; the significance of a Hungarian backstory in a plot set in the United States
13. Revision, Discussion of 2<sup>nd</sup> Creative Assignments

### **Method of Instruction**

This course is a combination of lectures and class discussions, debates. Every week, students will watch a movie shared with them online before class. Before watching the film, they will be informed about the historical, cultural background of the story told in the film and will be given questions, topics to think about. In the class they will participate in debates and discussions of certain aspects of the movie. In some of the classes excerpts from other significant Hungarian movies and short movies will be screened. Students are required to submit two creative works in the semester for which they will be given detailed instructions. These works can be published in AIT’s cultural blog: <https://aitbpst.school.blog/>. (Examples of previous creative assignments can be found in the blog.)

### **Recommended Reading**

Cunningham, J.: *Hungarian Cinema: From Coffee House to Multiplex*. Wallflower Press, 2004

Déry, Tibor: *Two Women* (a short story that was adapted into the film, *Love*)

selected English language reviews of the films (e.g. [Janet Maslin](#), “Time Stands Still”, *New York Times*, Oct. 7, 1982; Richard Brody, A Tale of Grief Gets Lost in the Details - “Pieces of a Woman”, *The New Yorker*, January 12, 2021)

### **Grading**

Final grades are based on three components: 10% for participation, 40% for in-class activity: coming to classes prepared, taking part in discussions and debates, presenting students’ own creative works, and 50% for the two creative assignments.

### **Instructors' bio:**

**Anna Gács** is a critic and translator. She studied literature and art theory. Her research interests include contemporary literature, digitalisation and literary culture, literary and media theory, and contemporary autobiographic culture. She is an associate professor at the Department for Sociology and Communication, Budapest University of Technology and Economics. In 1999-2000 she was the Hungarian lector at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College of London. From 2015 to 2018 she was the president of Szépírók Társasága (Hungarian Society of Writers, Critics and Literary Translators). In 2015 she won the Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.