

World Cinemas: RUSSIAN AND SOVIET FILM

Fall 2012
Mondays 7-10 PM +
Tues and (some Thurs) 9:30-10:45 AM

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Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein hard at work

From the early years of the Soviet avant-garde to the post-Stalinist era of covert critique, Russian film offers an intriguing perspective on Soviet life and the art of film. We will explore the pioneering cinema of Eisenstein and Vertov; the Hollywood-modeled propaganda films of the 1930s; the representation of World War II in Soviet film; the aesthetic and moral quests of post-Stalinist filmmakers like Tarkovsky and Muratova; and new directions in post-Soviet cinema. English subtitles.

COURSE MATERIALS:

Films: About half of all films will be screened in class on Mondays so you don't need to watch these before class; other films are available online and should be streamed at home before class. Copies of all films in DVD format are on reserve in Skillman.

Readings: All readings listed on the syllabus will be available in .pdf format on the course website on Moodle. You need to make these readings available to yourself in whatever format will allow you to mark up what you're reading and take notes on the readings. While I highly recommend printing these out on paper, I understand that some of you may be routinely using tablet devices to read. Whatever it is that you're using to read the texts, make sure to bring these texts with you to class.

FILMS TO BE SCREENED:

Note: about half of these films will be screened during the “lab” on Monday evenings; you will need to watch the other films on your own before their corresponding class sessions (links to the films that can be viewed online will be provided; copies of all films on DVD are on reserve at Skillman). Note that Monday night classes are 3 hours long: we will spend the first half of a usual Monday class discussing whatever film you will have seen on your own before Monday; we’ll watch another film together during the second half of the class. There will be a few exceptions: when we watch longer films on Mondays that take up an entire class period; when we watch a film on Monday and discuss it on Monday as well; or when we have a special event – screening and discussion with a film director – on Monday, November 19. Tuesday classes (and Thursday classes, when those are held) are 75 minutes long and will usually center on the discussion of the films we watch together on Monday nights. The list of films that we’ll study:

Silent Cinema and Revolutionary Aesthetics

The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks (dir. Lev Kuleshev, 1924)

The Battleship Potemkin (dir. Sergei Eisenstein, 1925)

Aelita, the Queen of Mars (dir. Yakov Protazanov, 1924)

Man With a Movie Camera (dir. Dziga Vertov, 1929)

Bed and Sofa (dir. Abram Room, 1927)

Earth (dir. Oleksandr Dovzhenko, 1930)

Stalinism: From Musicals to the Personality Cult

Circus (dir. Grigory Alexandrov, 1936)

The Radiant Path (dir. Grigory Alexandrov, 1940)

Ivan the Terrible (dir. Sergei Eisenstein, Part One - 1944 and Part Two - 1946/released 1958)

Post-War Cinema and the Thaw

The Cranes are Flying (dir. Mikhail Kolotozov, 1957)

I am Twenty (dir. Marlen Khutsiev, 1959)

Mirror (dir. Andrei Tarkovsky, 1975)

The Stagnation Era: The Comic and the Everyday

Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears (dir. Vladimir Menshov, 1979; Oscars for Best Foreign Film, 1980)

The White Sun of the Desert (dir. Vladimir Motyl, 1969)

The Diamond Arm (dir. Leonid Gaidai, 1973)

Perestroika: History, Trauma, Sex (or the purported lack thereof)

Repentance (dir. Tengiz Abuladze, 1983/1986)

Little Vera (dir. Vasily Pichul, 1988)

My Perestroika (dir. Robin Hessman, 2008) * this is a special event: director present

A House on the Arbat Street (dir. Marina Goldovskaia, 1993)

Russia after the Future

Brother (dir. Alexei Balabanov, 1997)

Cargo-200 (dir. Alexei Balabanov, 2007)

Hipsters (dir. Todorovsky, 2008)

RECOMMENDED TEXTS:

- Timothy Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing About Film* (7th edition)
- Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art* (any edition)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- 1) Viewing all assigned films: before class if it is stated so on the syllabus or during class if we're screening the film in class. This is a course about cinema so watching films is central to our collective undertaking.
- 2) Three papers (1,000 words each). Paper #1 on either Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* or Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (due September 20). Your aim in this paper will be to identify and pick a single sequence from either of the films and analyze it both in terms of film language and any other aspect of the sequence you deem relevant (political, cultural, etc.). Your essay should contain an argument – whether about a role of a particular element in the sequence itself, or about the role of the sequence in the film as a whole. Paper #2 on either Khutsiev's *I am Twenty* or Tarkovsky's *Mirror* (due October 29); and Paper #3 on any film studied after October 29 (due on December 6 or at any point after October 29). In papers #2 and #3 you may choose to write about style, technique, politics, culture, or any other issues as long as you rely on close reading of one or two film sequences and your essay makes an argument that is interesting to you and to me.
- 4) A midterm exam, which will *most likely* (electronic access to necessary film sequences permitting) be a take-home open-book exam consisting of a number of brief essay questions. These will range from asking you to analyze specific sequences to commenting on larger themes and issues spanning several films that we've studied and texts that we've read. Midterm questions will be handed out in class on October 2; the completed exam will be due either on October 5 (by email, at 5 PM) or on October 11 (in class). The choice of the due date is up to you: before the fall break, or after the fall break.
- 5) A final exam, which will *most likely* (electronic access to necessary film sequences permitting) be a take-home open-book exam consisting of a number of brief essay questions. These will range from asking you to analyze specific sequences to commenting on larger themes and issues spanning several films that we've studied and texts that we've read. Final exam questions will be handed out at the last class meeting on December 4; completed exams are due by email on December 15, at 5 PM.
- 6) Regular class attendance, timely completion of required readings and screenings, and engaged participation in class discussion.

GRADING:

The final grade in the course will be based on three papers (45% total); class participation (15%); the take-home midterm exam (20%); and the take-home final exam (20%)

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- Understand the cultural and aesthetic roots of Soviet/Russian cinema;
- Become familiar with works of several seminal Soviet film directors;
- Acquire important elements of a cinematic vocabulary and improve the ability to view films actively and critically;
- Use screenings, discussions, case studies and writing assignments to explore how films are products of their historical, social, political, and economic contexts – in particular, in connection to the upheavals of 20th century Russian and Soviet history.

GRADING POLICY:

A = Excellent work - shows detailed in-depth knowledge of the material and an ability to think critically about it.

B = Good work - shows basic mastery of the material but has minor weak spots in knowledge or critical analysis.

C = Satisfactory work - shows fundamental grasp of material but with major omissions or misunderstandings.

D = Not satisfactory work - minimal understanding, barely passing

F = Unacceptable work - does not show sufficient knowledge of the material to allow me to certify that the student has understood the material and basic issues at stake.

PRIVACY STATEMENT:

Moodle contains student information that is protected by the Family Educational Right to Privacy Act (FERPA). Disclosure to unauthorized parties violated federal privacy laws. Courses using Moodle will make student information visible to other students in this class. Please remember that the information is protected by these federal privacy laws and must not be shared with anyone outside class. Questions can be referred to the Registrar's Office.

DISABILITY STATEMENT:

In compliance with Lafayette College policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that you may require as a student with a disability. Requests for academic accommodation need to be made during the first two weeks of the semester, except for unusual circumstances, so arrangements can be made. Students must register with the Office of the Dean of the College for disability verification and for determination of reasonable academic accommodations.

ACADEMIC HONESTY:

Appended below are the College's "Principles of Intellectual Honesty." Please be familiar with them. Students who violate these principles can expect to receive an F for the course and to be referred to the Dean of the College for possible further sanctions.

Principles of Intellectual Honesty To maintain the intellectual and scholarly standards of the College and, equally important, the personal ethical standards of our students, it is essential that written assignments be a student's own work, just as is expected in examinations and class participation. The following generally recognized principles are designed to guide students in writing essays, papers, and reports, and to forestall acts of plagiarism, misrepresentation, and collusion, and the consequent disciplinary action.

Use of other persons' writings: The appropriation of the ideas or phrases of others, without proper acknowledgment, is plagiarism. This is an act of academic dishonesty.

Use of reference material: A student must often read extensively before being in a position to do any writing. A student may find passages in books, articles, and computerized sources such as websites that will be helpful in illustrating ideas. There is no objection to quoting such passages, provided the material is put within quotation marks and the source is indicated by footnotes or other means of showing authorship. If a paper or essay consists largely of quotations, normally it will not be regarded as an original piece of work. Paraphrasing, the appropriation of ideas with changed wording, is a form of plagiarism unless the source paraphrased is cited.

Use of other students' work: Submission of another student's work as one's own, with or without revision, is dishonest and subjects one to severe disciplinary action. The use of another person's notes or rough draft of a similar subject is considered equally dishonest.

Working together: Occasionally two or more students will consider it desirable and proper or will be assigned to engage in a joint investigation with individual or collaborative essays or reports as the finished products. Such a procedure is acceptable only when the instructor has consented to and approved the details of the collaboration. Collaboration beyond the limits established by the instructor is academic dishonesty.

Re-use of paper: Submission of the same work in more than one course is a violation of the intellectual standards of the College and is considered to be academic dishonesty. A student who commits academic dishonesty is subject to a range of penalties, including suspension or expulsion. Finally, the underlying principle is one of intellectual honesty. If a person is to have self-respect and the respect of others, all work must be her/his own.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES:

Mon Aug 27, 7 PM THE RUSSIANS IMAGINE AMERICA

☞ Screening: *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (dir. Lev Kuleshev, 1924)

- Read/discuss in class: Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image" (excerpt); quotes from Lev Kuleshov and Walter Benjamin on cinema

Tues Aug 28 CINEMA AND PROPAGANDA

- Richard Taylor, "Russia: the Historical Background" and "Propaganda and Film" in *Film Propaganda*
- Lev Kuleshov, "Americanism" (72-73) and "Mr. West" (108) in *The Film Factory*
- "Relation of Shot to Shot" and "What Editing Is" in *Film Art* (270-272)

Mon Sept 3, 7 PM REVOLUTION EVERYWHERE

- Watch before class: *Aelita, the Queen of Mars* (dir. Protazanov, 1924)
 - Anatoli Lunacharsky, "Revolutionary Ideology and Cinema – Theses" in *The Film Factory* (109-110)
 - Richard Stites, "Revolutionary Reassortment, 1917-1927" (37-63) in *Russian Popular Culture*
 - "The Concept of Form in Film" (65-78) and "Angle, Level, Height and Distance of Framing" (236-243) in *Film Art*
 - Recommended: Karl Marx, "The Communist Manifesto" (1848)
- ☞ Screening: *Battleship Potemkin* (dir. Sergei Eisenstein, 1925)

Tues Sept 4 INTELLECTUAL MONTAGE

- Discussion of Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*
- S. Eisenstein, "Montage of Film Attractions" in *The Film Factory* (87-89)
- S. Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form" in *Film Form* (45-63)
- "Dimensions of Film Editing" in *Film Art* (273-284)
- Recommended: S. Eisenstein, "The Cinematic Principle and the Ideogram" in *Film Form* (28-44)

- Mon Sept 10, 7 PM REALITY AND THE NEW DOCUMENTARY AESTHETIC**
- Watch in advance: *Man With a Movie Camera* (dir. Dziga Vertov, 1929)
 - Dziga Vertov, “The Cine-Eyes: A Resolution” (89-94) and “Fiction Film Drama and the Cine-Eye: A Speech” (115-116) in *The Film Factory*
 - Dziga Vertov, “We: Variant of a Manifesto” in *Kino-Eye* (5-9)
 - “Speed of Motion” (214-215) and “Man with a Movie Camera” (415-420) in *Film Art*
- ☞ Screening: *Bed and Sofa* (dir. Abram Room, 1927)

- Tues Sept 11 MENAGE Á TROIS, SOVIET STYLE**
- Discussion of *Bed and Sofa*
 - Adrian Piotrovsky, “‘Ideology’ and ‘Commerce’” (188-190) in *The Film Factory*
 - Walter Benjamin, “Moscow”
 - “Mise-en-scene” (169-172); “Lighting” (178-183); “Continuity Editing” (284-300) in *Film art*
 - Recommended: Denise Youngblood, “The Fiction Film as a Source for Soviet Social History” in *Film and History*, September 1989.

Mon Sept 17 Rosh Hashana, no class

Tues Sept 18 Rosh Hashana, no class

- Th Sept 20 THE SOVIET VILLAGE**
- Watch before class: *Earth* (dir. Oleksandar Dovzhenko, 1930)
 - Richard Taylor, “Themes and Variations” in *Film Propaganda*
 - “What Does ‘Proletarian Cinema’ Mean?” in *The Film Factory* (318-320)
 - “Perspective Relations: The Lens-Focal Length” (216-220) in *Film Art*
 - Richard Stites, “Stalin by Starlight, 1928-1941” (64-97) in *Russian Popular Culture*

- Mon Sept 24, 7 PM MUSICAL COMEDIES AS STALINIST ENTERTAINMENT**
- ☞ Screening and discussion: *Circus* (dir. Grigory Alexandrov, 1936)
- Taylor, “Russia: The Needs of a Revolution,” *Film Propaganda* (pp. 40-49)
 - Eisenstein et al., “Statement on Sound” in *The Film Factory* (234-235)
 - Boris Shumiatsky, “A Cinema for Millions,” in *The Film Factory* (358-369)
 - Andrei Zhdanov, from *Speech at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers*
http://www.marxists.org/subject/art/lit_crit/sovietwritercongress/zhdanov.htm

- Tues Sept 25 STALINISM AS A FAIRYTALE**
- Watch before class: *The Radiant Path* (dir. Alexandrov, 1940)

- Mon Oct 1, 7 PM ALLEGORIES OF TERROR**
- Watch in advance: *Ivan the Terrible* (dir. Eisenstein, Part I)
 - Kristin Thompson, “Expressionistic Mise-en-scene” (173-202)
 - Joan Neuberger, “The Politics of Bewilderment. *Ivan the Terrible* in 1945”
- ☞ Screening: *Ivan the Terrible* (Part II)

- Tues Oct 2 THE TOTALITARIAN GAZE**
- Discuss: *Ivan the Terrible*, Part II
 - Anne Nesbet, “Inanimations: Snow White and Ivan the Terrible” (20-31)
 - “Stalin, Molotov, and Zhdanov on *Ivan the Terrible*, Part II,” *Eisenstein Reader* (160-166)

Mon Oct 8 Fall break, no class

Tues Oct 9 Fall break, no class

Th Oct 11 REPRESENTING THE WAR

- Watch in advance: *Cranes are Flying* (dir. Kolotozov, 1957)
- Richard Taylor, “*The Fall of Berlin*” in *Film Propaganda* (99-122)
- “The Mobile Frame” (243-258) in *Film Art*
- Richard Stites, “Holy War and the Cold War, 1941-1953” in *Russian Popular Culture* (98-116)

Mon Oct 15, 7 PM POST-WAR CINEMA AND THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

- ☞ Screening: *I am Twenty* (dir. Marlen Khutsiev, 1959)
- Richard Stites, “Springtime for Khrushchev, 1953-1964” in *Russian Popular Culture* (123-147)
- “Duration of the Image: The Long Take” (258-263) in *Film Art*
- Ian Christie, “Back in the USSR,” in *Film Comment* vol 36, #6, 2000 (39-42)

Tues Oct 16 WAR, MEMORY, AND REPRESENTATION

- Discuss: *I am Twenty* and Thaw-era cinema

Mon Oct 22, 7 PM HISTORY, MEMORY, AND CINEMATIC AUTOBIOGRAPHY

- ☞ Screening and discussion: *Mirror* (dir. Andrei Tarkovsky, 1975)
- Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema* (excerpt)

Tues Oct 23 SCULPTING IN TIME

- Discuss: *Mirror*

Mon Oct 29, 7 PM COMMUNAL LIVING: DOCUMENTING THE EVERYDAY

- ☞ Screening: *A House on the Arbat Street* (Marina Goldovskaia, 1993)
- Read: Stephen Bittner, “History as Metaphor” and “History and Myth of the Arbat,” in *Experience and Memory in Moscow’s Arbat* (1-39)

Tues Oct 30 THE DOUBLE BURDEN

- Watch before class: *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (dir. Vladimir Menshov, 1979; Oscar for Best Foreign Film, 1980)
- Francoise Navailh, “The Image of Women in Contemporary Soviet Cinema,” in *The Red Screen: Politics, Society, Art in Soviet Cinema* (211-230)

Mon Nov 5, 7 PM WEST EASTERNS, SOVIET STYLE

- Watch before class: *The White Sun of the Desert* (dir. Vlarimir Motyl, 1969)
- Richard Stites, “The Brezhnev Culture Wars, 1964-1984,” in *Russian Popular Culture* (148-177)
- ☞ Screening: *The Diamond Arm* (dir. Leonid Gaidai, 1973)

Tues Nov 6 PERILS OF THE GOOD LIFE

- Discuss: *The Diamond Arm*
- Wrap up discussion of Stagnation-era cinema

Mon Nov 12, 7 PM THE PAST UNBURIED

- ☞ Screening: *Repentance* (dir. Tengiz Abuladze, 1983/1986)
- Richard Stites, “Perestroika and the People’s Taste” in *Russian Popular Culture*, 178-203)

Tues Nov 13 THE PAST UNBURIED

- Discuss: *Repentance*
- Tatyana Khloplyakina, “On the Road that Leads to the Truth” (51-53) and Igor Aleinikov “Between the Circus and the Zoo” (54-57) in *Russian Critics on the Cinema of Glasnost*

Mon Nov 19, 7 PM Special Event: MY PERESTROIKA (dir. Robin Hessman, 2008)

Screening followed by discussion with director Robin Hessman

Tues Nov 20 “THERE IS NO SEX IN THE SOVIET UNION”

- Watch before class: *Little Vera* (dir. Vasily Pichul, 1988)
- Tatyana Moskvina, “Forward, Singing,” in *Russian Critics on the Cinema of Glasnost* (103-107)

Mon Nov 26, 7 PM THE NEW RUSSIA

- Watch in advance: *Brother* (dir. Alexei Balabanov, 1997)
- Recommended: Birgit Beumers, “To Moscow! To Moscow! The Russian Hero and the Loss of the Centre,” in *Russia on Reel*
- ☞ Screening: *Cargo-200* (dir. Alexei Balabanov, 2007)

Tues Nov 27 BACK TO THE FUTURE

- Discuss: *Cargo-200*

Mon Dec 2, 7 PM THE RUSSIANS (STILL) IMAGINE AMERICA

- ☞ Screening and discussion: *Hipsters* (dir. Todorovsky, 2008)

Tues Dec 4 CONCLUSIONS: RUSSIAN CINEMA IN THE PUTIN ERA

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS:

Sept 20 (in class) Paper #1 on *Battleship Potemkin* or *Man With a Movie Camera* (1,000 words)

Oct 5 (by email by 5 PM) or **Oct 11** (in class) Take-home mid-term exam

Oct 29 (in class) Paper #2 on either *I am Twenty* or *Mirror* (1,000 words)

Dec 6 (or at any point in the semester after Oct 29) Paper #3 on a film of your choice (1,000 words)

Dec 15 (by email) take-home final exam due