FILM 503: National Cinemas
Postwar Soviet Cinema
Spring 2014

Class sessions: Wednesdays, 1 - 4pm, Rich 103
Weekly screenings: Tuesdays, 7:30-10pm, White Hall 102

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The postwar Soviet film industry offers a rich and particularly interesting case study in national cinemas, insofar as it was organized under an alternative political and economic system (state socialism) and functioned as an explicitly multinational entity. The historical scope of the course spans from the immediate postwar years (the late Stalin era) to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and, to a lesser extent, the post-Soviet Russian film industry. This span of time witnessed developments such as the ideological strictures of Zhdanovism and the “film famine”; the post-Stalin thaw and return of Soviet cinema to international prominence; substantial growth of film production in the non-Russian republics; emergence of Soviet blockbuster filmmaking; the complex and fraught political landscape of the stagnation era under Brezhnev; and structural reforms and new boundaries of representation in the era of perestroika and glasnost.

Through this seminar, students will become familiar with English-language scholarship on Soviet cinema adopting a variety of methodological and thematic approaches, including: industrial organization and practices, genres (both popular genres and art cinema), content regulation (censorship), and ideology and representation. We will also look at a broad sample of different genres of scholarly production: journal articles, historical surveys, thematically-based monographs, and studies of individual films and filmmakers. Course assignments are geared toward strengthening skills in the practice of film history and preparing for future graduate work. Proficiency in Russian is not required for this course.

REQUIRED READINGS

The main textbooks for the course are:


Additional book chapters and essays are available on Reserves Direct: [https://ereserves.library.emory.edu/](https://ereserves.library.emory.edu/), the Woodruff Library’s course reserves. Physical copies of books and DVDs are located at the Music and Media Library circulation counter.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

All written work for the class (except the weekly questions/comments) should be submitted double-spaced, 1-inch margins on all sides, with a 12-point standard font. The citation style for this course is Chicago Manual of Style (Humanities). Email as a [Microsoft Word document](mailto:jsteffe@emory.edu) to jsteffe@emory.edu. I will use the “Track Changes” function to insert comments.

**Attendance and Participation: 15%**

Consistent attendance and participation is required in graduate seminars. You may miss up to one regular seminar session without penalty. Further absences may have a negative impact on your attendance and participation grade, and will likely affect your overall performance.

Assigned films are considered required readings; if you cannot attend a particular screening, make plans well in advance to see the film, since the library’s copy may be checked out that night. Be advised that some weekly screenings are *not* available in subtitled versions on DVD, although there may be alternative methods for accessing the films such as the official Mosfilm channel on YouTube.

Factors to be considered in grading include regularity and quality of participation, level of preparedness, and quality of peer feedback.

• For each class session, prepare **one question or brief comment** on one or more of the readings or screenings to spur discussion. Please email them to the instructor by 10 a.m. Wednesday, in advance of that day’s class session. Also bring a hard copy to class. This assignment is not required on the weeks that response papers #1 and #2 are due.

• In the first half of the semester, students will submit **2 brief, informal response papers** (2-3 pages) addressing ideas that arise from the readings and screenings. Part of class discussion on those days will involve sharing and discussing the implications of your responses.

**Midterm Essay (Close reading): 30%**

For the midterm essay, students will write a 5-7 page close reading a single film of your choice (*not* one of the weekly screenings), to be approved by the instructor in advance. The main focus
will be on textual analysis, with appropriate attention to style and themes. At the same time, your analysis should be informed by relevant aspects such as the conditions of production and the cultural/historical context as it informs the text. Please include footnotes for all works cited.

**Oral Presentations: 15%**

In the second half of the semester, each student will give a 15-20-minute (maximum) oral presentation on a historical topic of your choice, accompanied by a bibliographic handout distributed in class. Sample topics include Soviet film distribution and exhibition, the “Eastern” genre; Georgian cinema; Soviet literary adaptations (Shakespeare, Tolstoy or Dostoevsky); Vasily Shukshin as a writer, actor and filmmaker; women filmmakers in the Soviet Union; Vladimir Vysotsky as an actor and songwriter; Soviet science fiction films; representations of the Afghan war in post-Soviet cinema; blockbuster films in the post-Soviet Russian film industry; Nikita Mikhalkov as a figure in contemporary Russian film and politics. You may include brief film clips.

**Take Home Final Exam Essay: 40%**

Students will write one take home exam essay (10-15 pages maximum, double-spaced) on the historiography of Soviet cinema, based on a selection of questions that will be distributed two weeks in advance. In addition to assessing your mastery of the body of knowledge covered in the course, this exam is designed to prepare students for future comprehensive exam essays.

**INTRODUCTION**

**Week 1**

Tues. 1/14 – No screening the first week of class.

Wed. 1/15 – Introduction

Readings due by first day of class:


**UNIT 1: THE LATE STALIN ERA**

**Week 2**


Wed. 1/22 – Readings:


- Beumers, Birgit. History of Russian Cinema, Ch. 3 (pp.75-111)

**UNIT 2: THE THAW**

**Week 3**

Tues. 1/28 – Screening 2, The Cranes are Flying (Mikhail Kalatozov, Mosfilm, 1957)

Wed. 1/29 – Readings:

- Beumers, History of Russian Cinema, Chapter 4 (pp.112-145)

**Week 4**

Tues. 2/4 – Screening 3, I am Twenty (Marlen Khutsiev, Mosfilm 1962-1965)

Wed. 2/5 – Readings:

- Josephine Woll, Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw, Chapter 11 (online)

***RESPONSE #1 PAPER DUE WED. 2/5, START OF CLASS.***

**UNIT 3: SOVIET ART FILMS / THE POETIC SCHOOL**

**Week 5**

Tues. 2/11 – Screening 4, The Mirror (Andrei Tarkovsky, Mosfil’m, 1975)

Wed. 2/12 – Readings:

- Beumers, History of Russian Cinema, Ch. 5 (146-183)

**Week 6**

Tues. 2/18 – Screening 5, Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors (Sergei Parajanov, Dovzhenko Studio, 1964), Kyiv Frescoes (short film, 1965-66)

Wed. 2/19 – Readings:
• Steffen, *The Cinema of Sergei Parajanov*, pp. 3-113 (Introduction – Chap. 3)

***RESPONSE PAPER #2 DUE WED. 2/19, START OF CLASS.***

**Week 7**


Wed. 2/26 – Readings:

• Steffen, *The Cinema of Sergei Parajanov*, pp.114 – 156 (Chap. 4)
• Karla Oeler, “*The Color of Pomegranates,*” *24 Frames*, 139-148.

**UNIT 4: POPULAR GENRES**

**Week 8**

Tues. 3/4 = Screening 7, *Amphibian Man* (Vladimir Chebotaryov & Gennady Kazanky, Lenfilm, 1962)

Wed. 3/5 – Readings:


***MIDTERM ESSAY (CLOSE READING) DUE FRIDAY 3/7 BY 5 P.M.***

**Week 9 – NO CLASSES – SPRING BREAK** (March 10-14)

**Week 10**


3/19 – Readings:


**UNIT 5: BANNED AND SHELVED FILMS**

**Week 11**
3/25 – Screening 9, *Brief Encounters* (Kira Muratova, Odessa Film Studio, 1984)
Also watch on your own: *Chekhovian Motifs* (Kira Muratova, Odessa Film Studio, 2002), on reserve in the Music and Media Library.
3/26 – Readings:

• Susan Larsen, “*Brief Encounters*” in *24 Frames*, pp.119-128.

**Week 12**
4/2 – Readings:

• Faraday, *The Revolt of the Filmmakers*, Introduction – Chapter 3, (pp. 1-120)

**UNIT 6: GLASNOST AND PERESTROIKA**

**Week 13**
4/8 Screening 11, *Repentance* (Tengiz Abuladze, Georgian Film, 1984)
4/9: Readings:

• Beumers, Ch. 6 (184-213)
• Faraday, *The Revolt of the Filmmakers*, Chapter 4 (121-158)

***FINAL EXAM ESSAY TOPICS DISTRIBUTED WED., 4/9***

**Week 14**
4/16: Readings:

• Birgit Beumers, “*The Needle,”* 24 Frames, pp.213-222.
• Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers*, Chapter 5 – Conclusion (159-201)
UNIT 7: AFTER THE FALL

Week 15

4/22 Screening 13, *Brother* (Balabanov) / **ALTERNATIVE:** *The Russian Ark* (Sokurov)

4/23 Reading:

- Beumers, *History of Russian Cinema*, Chapter 7 (214-240)
- Nancy Condee, *The Imperial Trace*, Chapter 8 (online)

FINAL EXAM ESSAY DUE FRIDAY 4/25, 5 P.M. VIA EMAIL.