

FALL 2022  
SOVIET AVANT-GARDE CINEMA  
RUSS 395

Daniel Schwartz (daniel.schwartz2@mcgill.ca)  
Office hours: Monday 13:00-15:00, SH 688, Rm 483

M/W 10:05-11:25  
SH 688, Rm 295

Soviet cinema was born out of the intense artistic experimentation of the fin-de-siècle avant-garde and developed in a climate of dramatic political and cultural change in the twenties and thirties. While subject to draconian censorship, it nonetheless engaged in active dialogue with the film industries of Western Europe and America and had a lasting impact on world cinema. This course examines the extraordinary flourishing of avant-garde cinema in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 30s including films by Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Oleksandr Dovzhenko, their theoretical writings, and their far-reaching influence on film and film theory. Topics include: propaganda; the birth of cinema in the context of avant-garde art; the silent era and techniques of montage; the representation of reality in documentary vs. narrative film; the advent of sound cinema; and the treatment of the body and sexuality. All readings in English, films subtitled in English.

#### Screenings

There are no screenings for this class. All films are available on Kanopy or YouTube (see course schedule for links). Students are responsible for watching films prior to each week's courses. For example, if we're discussing Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* the week of October 12<sup>th</sup>, then you are expected to have already watched it *before* October 12<sup>th</sup>.

#### Required Readings:

- Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, eds. *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988, 1994). At McGill Bookstore.
- Timothy Corrigan, *Short Guide to Writing About Film* (Pearson: 2014). On My Courses.
- Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). On My Courses.
- Other articles and book chapters available on My Courses.

#### Recommended Reading and Media:

- Mike Duncan, *Revolutions Podcast*, Chapter 10, Episodes 60-103.  
[https://thehistoryofrome.typepad.com/revolutions\\_podcast/page/6/](https://thehistoryofrome.typepad.com/revolutions_podcast/page/6/) or anywhere you listen to podcasts.
- David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001.
- Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, Bloomsbury, 2009.
- Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film*, Princeton University Press, 1960
- Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, eds. *Inside the Film Factory: New Approaches to Russian and Soviet Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991, 1994).

- Ringalia Salys, ed. *The Russian Cinema Reader Vol. 1: 1908 to the Stalin Era* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013)

### Requirements:

Participation 10%

- Class Attendance
  - Up to three unexcused absences
  - Notes regarding absences after the fact will not be accepted

Scene Analysis 20%

- Based on Yale Film Analysis Guide
- Due Date: Submit on My Courses on Wednesday, September 28<sup>th</sup>.
- Grading: I do not give comments on scene analyses unless there are serious problems. The assignment is Pass/Fail. Exceptionally poor work will receive half credit.

Midterm Paper (3-4 pgs) 30%

- Topic: Pick **one** film that we've watched for class thus far. Explain how it uses **one** of the formal cinematic devices – e.g. montage, close-ups, editing speed, camera movements, rhythm, etc. – discussed in the Yale Film Analysis Guide or in Corrigan.
- At least two sources from readings in the class. (Please note that Corrigan and Yale Film Analysis Guide **do not count** as sources). These sources can be two different books/articles by the same author, or two books/articles from different authors. Two sources can come from the same book – e.g. *The Film Factory*. More sources are fine but won't necessarily get you a better grade. Independent sources are fine too but must be in addition to sources from class readings. Grades evaluated according to rubric posted on My Courses.
- Due Date: Friday, October 14 by 11:59 pm.
- 12-point font, Times New Roman, double spaced.
- Save your document using the following format: "Last Name, First Name, Paper Title"
  - E.g. "Smith, John, Eisenstein's Montage"
- Submit on My Courses as a Word Document!
- For grading, see the grading rubric posted on My Courses.

Final Paper (4-6 pages) 40%

- Topic: Pick **two** or more films that we watched in class thus far. **At least one of the films must be from a post-midterm class.** Compare how these films use **one** of the formal cinematic devices – e.g. montage, close-ups, editing speed, camera movements, rhythm, etc. – discussed in the Yale Film Analysis Guide or Corrigan. Make sure to justify your comparison, ideally as part of your thesis.
- At least three sources from readings in class. (Please note that Corrigan and Yale Film Analysis Guide **do not count** as sources). These sources can be three different books/articles by the same author, or three books/articles from different authors. At least two sources must be from readings after the midterm. More sources are fine but won't necessarily get you a better grade. Independent sources are fine too but must be in addition to sources from class readings. Grades evaluated according to rubric posted on My Courses.

- Due Date: Monday, December 5 by 11:59 pm
- 12-point font, Times New Roman, double spaced
- Save your document using the following format: “Last Name, First Name, Paper Title”
  - E.g. “Smith, John, Eisenstein’s Montage”
- Submit on My Courses as a Word Document!
- For Grading, see the grading rubric posted on My Courses.

Extra Credit: 1/3 letter grade.

- Maximum three-minute short film based on the style of a director of your choice (from this class, obviously).
- Students can work alone or in groups of up to four people.
- Each student must submit a one-page written assessment of their film explaining its style and its relationship to the director that inspired it.
- Due Date: November 28<sup>th</sup> (email, Dropbox, Google Drive, or WeTransfer).
- In class screenings on Monday, December 5<sup>th</sup>.

### Late Work

- All late work will receive an automatic deduction of a 1/3<sup>rd</sup> letter grade unless you have a certified reason for an extension.
- You must contact me in advance if you think you need an extension regardless of whether you have a certifiable reason – e.g. if you’re just feeling overwhelmed by work, etc.
- If you need a further extension, you will be penalized another 1/3<sup>rd</sup> letter grade. You must contact me in advance about extending your extension.
- If you turn in late work without an extension, you will be penalized one full-letter grade. In this case, it is your responsibility to contact me if you turned your paper in late. Do not wait for me to contact you. If you submit a paper late without an extension, make sure I acknowledge that I received it.
- Students who wait until the end of the semester to turn in all of their work will be penalized two full-letter grades for each assignment they turn in. This means the highest grade you can receive on each assignment is a C. You can only receive half credit for the scene analysis.

### Grades

- Please note that I do not revise grades unless there has been a calculation error – e.g. I did not add right. Grades are not negotiable based on extenuating circumstances.

### Language of Submission

“In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.”

« Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue). »

### Academic Integrity:

“McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures” (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information). (Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)

« L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/)). »

### Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodation please email me or speak with me after class or during office hours.

### Trigger Warnings

I do not give trigger warnings for specific films or content since what people find triggering varies greatly from person to person. In general, films in this class may include violent episodes and scenes of animal suffering. Please consult each film's IMDB page for more information. If you think a film will trigger you, I will do my best to find an alternative film for you to watch. That said, if you think a significant portion of the films in this class will be triggering, I suggest you take a different course.

### Power Points

To ensure class attendance, I do not share my Power Points or lectures. The main exception is if a student has a certifiable reason – e.g. extended absence due to medical issues (not one or two absences). Feel free to photograph my lecture slides.

## **Course Schedule**

### Week One

August 31

- No readings
- Introductory Lecture
- Screenings of a selection of clips in class

### Week Two: Eccentric Actors and the Kuleshov Effect

Film: *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (Lev Kuleshov, 1924): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rqz53CnWZJA>

Monday, September 5: No class, Labor Day.

Wednesday, September 7

- *Film Factory* documents #10, 12-18, 20-25, 33, and 38.
- Timothy Corrigan, “Beginning to Think, Preparing to Watch, and Starting to Write,” pages 18-36 in *Short Guide to Writing about Film*. My Courses.

Week Three: Dialectics of Montage

Film: *Battleship Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925):

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/mcgill/video/113763>

Monday, September 12

- *Film Factory*, document numbers 30, 51, 52, 54, and 55
- Sergei Eisenstein, “Methods of Montage,” *Film Form*, pps 72-83. My Courses.

Wednesday, September 14

- Timothy Corrigan, “Film Terms and Topics for Film Analysis and Writing,” in *Short Guide to Writing about Film*, 36-71.
- *The Promise of Cinema* documents #159-161. Available online through McGill’s Library:  
[https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/search/detail/938890898?datasource=library\\_web&searchfield=all\\_fields&search=true&database=all&scope=wz%3A12129&format=&clusterRes ults=on&func=find-b&q=&topLod=0&queryString=The%20Promise%20of%20Cinema&find=Go](https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/search/detail/938890898?datasource=library_web&searchfield=all_fields&search=true&database=all&scope=wz%3A12129&format=&clusterRes ults=on&func=find-b&q=&topLod=0&queryString=The%20Promise%20of%20Cinema&find=Go)

Week Four: The Everyday and the Avant-Garde

Film: *Bed and Sofa* (Abram Room, 1927): <https://www.kanopy.com/en/mcgill/video/161440> OR [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INipP\\_F4MxI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INipP_F4MxI)

Monday, September 19

- Svetlana Boym, “Byt: Daily Grind and Domestic Trash,” *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994), 29-41. My Courses.
- Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship and Beyond* (Princeton, 1992), Chapter One, pps. 14-32. My Courses

Wednesday, September 21

- Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, “NEP and the Future of the Revolution,” 93-119.

Week Five: Cinema vs. Theater

Film: *Aelita, Queen of Mars* (Yakov Protazanov, 1924):

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/mcgill/video/120748>

Monday, September 26: Class Cancelled, Rosh Hashanah

Wednesday, September 28

- *Film Factory* Documents #34, 44, 47-50, 63-66, 70-72.
- Timothy Corrigan, “Six Approaches to Writing About Film,” focus on “Kinds of Formalism and “Ideology” sections (91-96)

Thursday, September 29: Optional Make Up Class on Zoom. 10:05 am. Register via Email.

### Week Six: Trials and Show Trials

Film: *By the Law* (Lev Kuleshov, 1926): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7LNcTI7MPM>

Monday, October 3

- Elizabeth A. Wood, *Performing Justice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 1-14. My Courses.
- Timothy Corrigan, "Style and Structure in Writing," 108-126.

Wednesday, October 5: Class Cancelled, Yom Kippur

Thursday, October 6: Optional Make Up Class on Zoom. 10:05 am. Register via Email.

### Week Seven: *Mother and Continuity Editing*

Film: *Mother* (Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1926): <https://www.kanopy.com/en/mcgill/video/11791915>

Monday, October 10: Canadian Thanksgiving

Wednesday, October 12: Reading Break

Thursday, October 13: Mandatory Make Up Class, Monday Schedule

- *Film Factory* documents #79, 82.
- Pudovkin, "From *Film Technique*: On Editing" in Braudy and Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism* (Fifth Edition), pps. 9-14. (My Courses)

### Week Eight: October, Ten Years Later

Film: *October, Ten Days that Shook the World* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1927):

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/mcgill/video/120957> OR

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVuf3T3k-W0>

Monday, October 17

- *Film Factory* Doc #83; pps. 207-215
- Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form*, 28-45

Wednesday, October 19

- Fitzpatrick, "The Civil War," *The Russian Revolution*, 68-93.

### Week Nine: The Kino Eye

Film: *Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929):

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/mcgill/video/153200>

Monday, October 24

- Vertov's manifestos of 1926-8 in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, Michelson and O'Brien, eds., pps. 58-85

Wednesday, October 26

- Emma Widdis, *Visions of a New Land* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pps. 63-75. My Courses

### Week Ten: Ukraine, Time and Space

Film: *Earth* (Oleksandr Dovzhenko, 1930): <https://www.kanopy.com/en/mcgill/video/113957>

Monday, October 31

- Vance Kepley Jr., "Dovzhenko and Montage: Issues of Style and Narration in the Silent Films," in *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, 1994, Summer 19 (1): 29-44. My Courses

Wednesday, November 2

- Fitzpatrick, “Stalin’s Revolution,” *The Russian Revolution*, 120-148.

#### Week Eleven: Affirmative Action Empire

Film: *Storm Over Asia* (Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1928):

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/mcgill/video/11791917>

Monday, November 7

- V.I. Lenin, “The Rights of Nations to Self-Determination,” sections one and two, 395-404: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/self-det/>
- Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment.” My Courses. (Read as much as you can)

Wednesday, November 9

- Finish Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment.” My Courses. (Read as much as you can)

#### Week Twelve: The Coming of Sound

Film: *Enthusiasm, Symphony of the Donbass* (Dziga Vertov, 1931):

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/mcgill/video/153584> OR

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNMpLfCC6M4>

Monday, November 14

- *Film Factory* documents #48, 92-3, 105

Wednesday, November 16

- *Film Factory* documents #108, 118-119, 129

#### Week Thirteen: Stalin’s Favorite Film

Film: *Chapaev* (Giorgi and Sergei Vasilyev, 1934):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6KDKMgALps>

Monday, November 21

- *Film Factory* documents # 124, 127, 128, 132, 133, 137, and 140

Wednesday, November 23

- Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, “Ending the Revolution,” 149-172

#### Week Fourteen: Images of Dictatorship

Film: *Ivan the Terrible, Part I* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1944):

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/mcgill/video/113221>

Monday, November 28

- *Film Factory* documents #154

Wednesday, November 30

- No Reading; Write your papers.

#### Week Fifteen: Student Films

Film: *In Class Screening of Student Films*

Monday, December 5