SOVIET CINEMA: ART AND POLITICS
FROM THE AVANT-GARDE TO THE RETURN OF THE STALINIST REPRESSED

PROF. DANIEL SCHWARTZ
RUSS 395
WINTER 2021

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The history of Soviet cinema traces the conflicting ideologies and social anxieties of the USSR. This course aims to acquaint students with these ideologies and anxieties through the films of major and minor Soviet directors. It offers a broad survey of the pivotal transformations of Soviet cinema from the pre-Soviet silent era through the Russian avant-garde (1920s), Socialist Realism (1930s and 40s), New Wave (1950s and 60s), Stagnation (1970s), Perestroika and the fall of communism (1980s). Special attention will be given to women and minority filmmakers including Larissa Shepitko, Kira Muratova, and Sergei Parajanov. Key questions we will ask include: How does film function as propaganda or entertainment? How does it foster a multi-ethnic Soviet community? What are the political implications of a film’s stylistic choices? By the end of the course, students will be able to situate Soviet films in their cultural, historical, and theoretical contexts.

BASIC INFORMATION

Professor: Daniel Schwartz (daniel.scwhartz2@mcgill.ca)
Office Hours: Thursday, 17:30 – 19:30, or by appointment.
**REQUIRED READING**

All Readings will be made available on My Courses. Students must have read the readings before class meets / as necessary to complete assignments.

**REQUIRED FILMS**

Film for this class are available on various streaming platforms including Kanopy, YouTube, and Amazon. McGill has a subscription to Kanopy that is available to all students. Login at [https://mcgill.kanopy.com](https://mcgill.kanopy.com).

Unfortunately, McGill does not have online access to every film I wish to show for this course. It is thus likely that you will have to pay to stream some of them. The cost to stream these films, however, should be less than buying books for other courses – around $5 per film.

Links to films will be provided in the course schedule below.

**OTHER RESOURCES**

Cinema Cartography:
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCL5kBmBUVFLYBDiSiK1VDw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCL5kBmBUVFLYBDiSiK1VDw)

Cinema Cartography is a YouTube channel specializing in film essays. These essays are delivered over a selection of clips that illustrate the writer’s point. Some of the films for this class have been covered by Cinema Cartography. I encourage you to watch them. I also suggest watching these film essays as examples for how you might structure your own paper.

**REMOTE DELIVERY**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, classes for this course will be delivered remotely. Below you will find a description of the course structure and schedule. I also encourage you all to consult McGill’s remote learning resources: [https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/remote-learning-resources](https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/remote-learning-resources). If you have any question, please don’t hesitate to email me.

**COURSE STRUCTURE**

Instead of a traditional bi-weekly lecture, this class will consist of one individual or group assignment per week and one recorded Zoom session per week. The individual or group assignment will always be due on Tuesday at 17:00 EST. Our Zoom meeting will take place every Thursday at 11:35 AM – 12:55 PM EST. A link will be posted on My Courses.

**ZOOM**

*Zoom video and audio discussions will be recorded. By participating you consent to being recorded. Zoom sessions are mandatory and attendance will*
be taken. That said, I understand that not all students may be able to participate in Zoom discussions due to limitations on bandwidth or the fact that they may live in distant time zones. For this reason, students can arrange an alternative mode of participation. This can be done at any time during the course. The alternative mode of participation will take the form of a weekly discussion entry. The student will have to summarize a scene from the week’s film and explain how it relates to the reading. Please email me if you feel this mode of participation better suits your needs. Keep in mind, however, that I have the right to reject requests for alternative modes of participation if I feel the student is capable of participating on Zoom. I will not grant requests after the fact – e.g. after the student has already missed multiple Zoom sessions.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS
Zoom discussion session require an Internet connection and a microphone (the one built into your computer is fine). Students are not obliged to turn their cameras on; they may respond to the instructor’s question in chat.

For those new to Zoom, please read this article on getting started. If the link does not work, go to: https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362033-Getting-Started-on-Windows-and-Mac

NOTE ON TECHNICAL SUPPORT / LEARNING ONLINE
I will do what I can to help you with your technical issues. However, please try to resolve your issues by asking Google or McGill’s technical support staff before asking me.

ZOOM ETIQUETTE (FROM DANIEL PRATT’S RUSS 223 SYLLABUS)
- Only use your official Zoom name
- All Zoom sessions are recorded. Individual breakout room sessions, however, will not be recorded.
- You are not required to use your camera, but this is helpful for getting to know people.
- Please turn your microphone off when you are not speaking.
- Please use the wave hand signal or the chat to alert me that you have a question or want to make a comment. I will call on you.
- If you do not have a microphone, feel free to use the chat function to engage with the Zoom conversation. I will happily include chats into the broader discussion.

LATE WORK
I do not accept excuses for late work after the deadline has already passed. It is your responsibility to inform me if you think your work will be late.

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/integrity for more information). The professor reserves the right to use software to examine any case of suspected plagiarism.

**Submission in French**

*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.*

**Grading**

**Participation** 10%

- Active Zoom class attendance (speaking, posing questions)
- Students that choose not to attend Zoom classes will have the option of completing alternative, written assignments for classes missed.
- Students may have two unexcused absences.

**Virtual Round Table** 10%

- Each week a pre-selected group of students will be chosen for a round-table style discussion with the professor.
- The discussion will take place during our Zoom course and last approximately 20 minutes.
- Discussants must prepare their questions in advance.
- They may also be required to lead breakout room discussions.
- Students will be evaluated on the basis of their preparation and ability to lead class discussion.
- Students who cannot lead discussions due to connectivity issues will be given an alternative, written assignment.

**Individual or Group Assignments** 50%

- Assignments are evenly distributed throughout the semester (see course schedule)
- Assignments include (but are not limited to) shot-by-shot analyses, scene summaries, alternative scripts, reading reflections, etc.
- Length of each assignment is specified in the course schedule.
- Assignments are due on the day for which they are assigned in the course schedule unless otherwise noted.
- We will experiment with group assignments, but if this does not work, we will switch entirely to individual assignments.
- Assignments are always due Tuesday by 17:00.
Your final paper should be about one and only one film. No comparison papers. This does not mean that you cannot draw comparisons with other films; only that the main focus of your paper should be a single film.

4-6 Pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman font. Word document or PDF only. Do not submit using Pages.

You should quote from at least two readings we did for class. The readings do not have to come from the same week as the film.

Your paper must have a thesis.

The thesis and your paper should strive to answer two questions: what is the film trying to say/express and how does the film say/express it?

You should answer these questions through a discussion of the film’s use of camera angles, camera movement, lighting, color, editing rhythm, sound, etc.

You do not have to focus on all these elements, just the ones that you think are working together to construct whatever the film is trying express.

Do not focus solely on characters or plot, and do not write a paper where you simply pass judgment on the characters. Be charitable.

More details and a grading rubric will be provided in course lectures and discussions.

Guides and sample papers will also be provided in Timothy Corrigan’s *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*.

Students have the option of making an independent film in the style of one of the directors covered in this class.

Maximum group size: 3 people

Maximum film length: 5 minutes (hard maximum, including credits!)

If enough students select this option, we will have a film festival on the last day of class.

Student can use material they filmed themselves or found footage from online sources. If materials are found, their creators must be cited in the films credits.

As always, students have the option of taking this class pass/fail. That said, please consult me before making this decision. Many students have mistakenly taken my classes P/F even when they would have received a perfectly reasonable grade.

**Class Schedule**

**Week One: Introduction**

- Plan of the Course
- Student Introductions
- Introduction to Soviet film history and directors
Clips from pre-Soviet and early Soviet films (Evgenii Bauer and Lev Kuleshov)

Week Two: The Avant-Garde, Montage
- Film: Eisenstein, *Battleship Potemkin* (1926)
  - Watch at home on YouTube or Kanopy
- Readings
  - Sergei Eisenstein, “The Montage of Attractions” (My Courses)
    - Eisenstein in his own words on one of his most fundamental ideas.
    - The text references Proletkult, the Proletarian Cultural Organization, a movement that attempted to develop uniquely proletarian forms of culture and art.
  - Sergei Eisenstein, “Methods of Montage” (My Courses)
    - Eisenstein in his own words on montage just as the sound era is about to begin.
  - *The Russian Cinema Reader*. Vol. 1, “Battleship Potemkin” (Entire Section)
    - Analysis of Eisenstein’s film, lots of good details here.

Week Three: The Avant-Garde, Documentary
- Film: Dziga Vertov, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929)
- Assignment One: Reflection: What is propaganda? What methods or modes of propaganda do Eisenstein and Vertov’s films employ? Consider the films in terms of Auerbach and Castronovo or Baudry’s articles. Maximum 500 words.
- Required Reading
    - Article considers the theoretical and historical origins of the term “propaganda.” Does not directly engage Eisenstein’s film.
  - Dziga Vertov, “We. A Version of a Manifesto” (My Courses)
    - Vertov in his own words on the purpose of filmmaking.
  - Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematic Apparatus” (My Courses)
    - Considers how film’s structure audience identification and influence their beliefs. Essential for future classes as we get deeper into the question of the relationship between film and ideology. Read slow.

Non-Required Reading (may be interesting for those writing a paper on this film)
- Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (My Courses)
  - Foundational text in the study of how institutions set the limits of thought and belief. Heavily theoretical and difficult to read, do not get discouraged.
  - Look out for the terms “hailing” and “interpolating”
  - Engagement of the propaganda functions of Socialist Realism
Considers one of Vertov’s later films, *Three Songs of Lenin*, but is also applicable to aspects of *Man with a Movie Camera*

- Reading: Jeremy Hicks, *The Russian Cinema Reader*. Vol. 1, “Man with a Movie Camera”
  - Breakdown of the film.

### Week Four: Socialist Realism, the Arrival of Sound
- **Film:** Vsevolod Pudovkin, *Deserter* (1933)
- **Assignment Two:** Create a shot-by-shot analysis of a scene from *Deserter* (1933) using the Yale Film Analysis guide. Pick what you think is the most relevant scene in the film with respect to the arrival of sound in Soviet cinema.
- **Required Reading**
  - [https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/](https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/)
  - Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Alexandrov, “Statement on Sound” (My Courses)
    - Eisenstein and Pudovkin on how sound ought to be used in film.
  - Walter Benjamin, “The Telephone” (My Courses)
    - Short text that gives you a sense of the anxieties surrounding new sound technology at the turn of the 20th century
  - Lilya Kaganovsky, *The Voice of Technology*, “The Long Transition: Soviet Cinema and the Coming of Sound” (My Courses)
    - Historical and theoretical context on the transition to sound.

- **Non-Required Reading**
  - Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, “The Purges, the Second World War, and the Cold War” (Ch. 3)
    - Historical context
    - Historical context on the transition from Revolutionary to Stalinist cinema.
  - Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, “Introduction” (My Courses)
    - One of the most famous writers to consider the role of sound in cinema. Theoretical text.

### Week Five: Socialist Realism, The Musical
- **Film:** Grigori Aleksandrov, *Circus* (1936)
  - In class: clips from *Chepays*, *The Thirteen*
- **Assignment Three:** In groups, write an extra scene for Grigori Aleksandrov’s *Circus*. Make sure to note when this scene will occur in the film. When writing your scene, keep in mind that you’re writing for Comrade Stalin and that you do not wish to spend the rest of your life in Siberia, or worse. Scripts should be no longer than three pages and should not significantly alter the trajectory of events in the film/ending. Follow script-writing guidelines here: [https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/how-to-write-a-screenplay/](https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/how-to-write-a-screenplay/)

- **Reading**
    - Analysis of Aleksandrov’s musical.
Ian Christie, “Cinema for the Millions: Soviet Socialist Realism and the Problem of Film Comedy,” (My Courses)
  - Analysis of Soviet comedy

Non-Required Reading
- Maria Belodubrovskaya, “Soviet Hollywood: The Culture Industry that Wasn’t” (My Courses)
  - Historical account of the failed attempt to create a Soviet Hollywood

Week Six: The Totalitarian Image
- Eisenstein, *Ivan the Terrible*, part I and II (1944)
- **Assignment Four**: Describe a scene from the perspective of a single character. What does this character’s point of view say about the image of Stalin? 500 words maximum.
- Reading
    - Analysis of the film
  - Jan Plamper, Ch. 3 “Stalin’s Image in Space” in *The Stalin Cult: A Study in the Alchemy of Power* (Stanford and Yale, 2012), 87-116 (ER)

Non-Required Reading
- Maria Belodubrovskaya, “Plotlessness: Soviet Cinema, Socialist Realism, and Nonclassical Storytelling” (My Courses)
  - Article engages the peculiarities of Russian plotlessness
- J.M. Coetzee, “Osip Mandelstam and the Stalin Ode” (Representations, 72-83)

Week Seven: The Thaw, Space
- Film: Mikhail Kalatozov, *The Cranes are Flying* (1957)
  - In class clips from: *Ivan’s Childhood* (Tarkovsky), *I am Cuba* (Mikhail Kalatozov)
- **Assignment Five**: Reflection: How does the depiction of space change in Soviet cinema during the Thaw, as opposed to under Stalinism? Maximum 500 words.
- Required Reading
    - Analysis of film
    - Analysis of space in Cinema after Stalin
  - Walter Benjamin, “The Imperial Panorama” (My Courses)
    - For context on Oukaderova’s article

Non-Required Reading
- Lida Oukaderova “I am Cuba and the Space of Revolution” (My Courses)
  - We’ll watch the opening scene of *I am Cuba* in class but you should be able to find it on YouTube
Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, “The Thaw – New Beginnings, New Lives” (Ch. 4)

### Historical context

**Week Eight: The Thaw, The Soviet Woman**

- **Film**: Larisa Shepitko, *Wings* (1966)
  - In class clips from: *Brief Encounters* (Kira Muratova, 1967), *The Long Farewell* (Muratova, 1971)

**Assignment Six**: Describe a scene from the perspective of the camera. Make sure to place the camera in the subject position of the majority of your sentences – e.g. the camera sees..., the camera focuses on..., the camera pans..., the camera lurches..., the camera zooms. How do the actions of the camera embody the subjectivity of a Soviet woman? Maximum 500 words.

**Required Reading**

  - Analysis of film
- Lilya Kaganovsky, “Ways of Seeing: On Kira Muratova’s *Brief Encounters* and Larisa Shepit’ko’s *Wings*” (My Courses)
  - Article places the works of Soviet women directors in the context of films by European women.

**Non-Required Reading**

- Lida Oukaderova *The Cinema of the Soviet Thaw: Space, Materiality, Movement*, “A Walk through the Ruins: Larisa Shepitko’s *Wings*” (My Courses)
  - Analysis of film

**Week Nine: Stagnation, Tarkovsky**

- **Film**: *Solaris* (1972)
  - In class: clips from *You and I* (Shepitko) and *The Diamond Arm* (Gaidai)

**Assignment Seven**: In groups, write an extra scene for Tarkovsky’s *Solaris*. This time you are not writing for Comrade Stalin, so you have some leeway, but don’t take things too far! Otherwise, follow the instructions for assignment three.

**Oct. 29**

  - Historical context
- Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time* (Selections, My Courses)
  - Tarkovsky in his own words.
- Deleuze
- Auteur Cinema

**Oct. 31**

  - Analysis of the film by one of the world’s leading Tarkovsky scholars.

**Week Ten: Parajanov**

- **Film**: Sergei Parajanov, *The Color of Pomegranates* (1968)
**Assignment Eight:** Pick a color that plays a significant role in Parajanov’s film. What does it symbolize? What objects is it associated with? Does the value of the color change over the course of the film? 500 words maximum.

**Required Reading**
- James Steffen, *The Cinema of Sergei Parajanov*, “Chapter One” (My Courses)
  - Context on Parajanov’s life
- James Steffen, *The Cinema of Sergei Parajanov*, Chapter 4 (My Courses)
  - Analysis of the film

**Non-Required Reading**
  - Helps to understand the film’s underlying ethnic issues.

Week Eleven: Perestroika, Nostalgia

**Film:** Aleksei German, *My Friend, Ivan Lapshin* (1985)

**Assignment Nine:** What are the two types of nostalgia according to Svetlana Boym? How does the camerawork or editing of *My Friend, Ivan Lapshin* evoke these forms of nostalgia? 500 words maximum.

**Required Reading**
  - Theoretical and historical account of nostalgia as a concept.

**Non-Required Reading**
- Alexander Graham, “‘Immersion in time’: history, memory and the question of readability in the films of Aleksei German,” (My Courses)
  - Analysis of German’s films
- Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, “Glasnost and Before” (Ch. 6)
  - Historical context on films of the Perestroika era.

Week Twelve: The Return of the Stalinist Repressed

**Film:** Tengiz Abuladze, *Repentance* (1984)

**Assignment Ten:** Describe a scene from the perspective of a single character. What does this character’s point of view say about the image of Stalin during Perestroika? 500 words maximum.

**Required Reading**
  - Analysis of film
- Masha Gessen, *The Future is History*, Part 2 (My Courses)
- Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, Chapter 1 (My Courses)

Week Thirteen: Post-Soviet and Putin Era

**Film:** Andrei Zvyagintsev, *The Return* (2003)
**No Assignment:** Begin work on final paper if you haven’t already.

**Question of the Film:** What is the significance of the father’s death in *The Return?*

**Required Reading**
- Birgit Beumers, “Tarkovsky’s Return, or Zviagintsev’s *Vozvrashchenie,* Russian Cinema Reader Vol. 2 (My Courses)
- Meghan Vicks, “Arrested Returns,” Russian Cinema Reader, Vol. 2 (My Courses)

**Nov. 28**

**Week Fourteen:**
- No Film or readings; work on final papers.