

**History of Russian Film**  
**Cross-listed: MASS 212 / LNGS 212**

*No knowledge of Russian is required:  
All films shown in this class are subtitled in English.*

**Professor: Dr. Benjamin Rifkin**  
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### **Course Description**

Study of Russian cinema in the context of larger trends of Russian political, social, cultural, and economic history. Focus both on Russian innovations in filmmaking that are critical for modern world film, and on how Russian films have played a role not only in reflecting the experience of their audiences, but also in teaching audiences how to interpret their experiences. Special attention paid to geniuses of Russian film history, including Eisenstein and Tarkovsky. This course is cross-listed with MASS 212; students cannot receive credit for both LNGS 212 and MASS 212. Prerequisite: sophomore standing. 3 credits. (IRR)

In this course we will focus on how all the filmmakers considered have used the aesthetic systems of film art to create meanings and engage audiences in a particular worldview, often in accordance with state-sanctioned political goals (propaganda).

It is impossible to view every Russian film and it is expected that students in this course may have favorite films that we will not be able to screen this semester. It is important for all of us to remember that our goal is to see the big picture of the history of Russian cinema and to that end we have to make sometimes difficult choices to include one or another director or film rather than others. Russia has gone through enormous political, social and economic transformations in the period of our concern, from the days of the Russian Empire, the First World War and Revolution, the Civil War, the early days of the Bolshevik State, the imposition of tight cultural controls and, ultimately state terror, the Second World War (“Great Patriotic War”), the Thaw, the Brezhnev Era (“Stagnation”), the Perestroika or Gorbachev Era, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of post-Soviet Russia. Film played an enormous role in Soviet and Russian culture and we will conduct our analysis of the film texts in the context of these larger cultural phenomena.

Students will develop critical analysis skills to evaluate films as cinematographic and cultural texts. This course satisfies ICC Themes Requirements for Identities and World of Systems Humanities and ICC Perspective Requirements for Humanities and Creative Arts.

**Fulfillment of ICC Requirements:** Effective Spring 2017, this class has been approved by IC’s *Committee for College-Wide Requirements* for meeting the qualifications of the *Integrative Core Curriculum*. Contingent upon successful completion of all course requirements and the uploading of required learning outcome artifacts onto *Taskstream*

(indicated elsewhere on this syllabus), this class meets and satisfies the ICC **Identities** and **World of System** themes and **Creative Arts** and **Humanities** perspective designations. *It is your responsibility to select essays from the exams and/or your analysis paper to TaskStream.*

### **Course Goals**

Students will come to understand the richness of the Russian cinema, including its innovations that have become critical for modern world film, such as vertical montage, and will demonstrate appreciation for the leading filmmakers, landmark films, and aesthetic trends in the history of Russian film. They will demonstrate understanding of the ways in which filmmakers construct meaning and elicit emotions, attitudes or beliefs among their viewers and thereby articulate the role of film in helping Russian viewers interpret their own history. Special attention will be paid to the geniuses of Russian film, including Eisenstein and Tarkovsky, as well as films that had a significant impact on the development of the broader canvas of Russian culture. Students will develop critical analysis skills to evaluate films as cinematographic and cultural texts: analyzing these texts through the lens of the humanities, constructing arguments about the texts, and describing and interpreting the cultural values and beliefs embedded in them.

One of the goals of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures are to prepare students to live and work in the global environment by enabling them to to]] develop an awareness and appreciation of different cultures. Anchored in the foundations of the humanities, the department fosters critical thinking, creativity and synthesis. Its focus is inherently multi-disciplinary and thus encourages interdisciplinary thinking. By focusing on texts of different world cultures, the department is an agent of cultural diversity. In addition, the department remains strongly committed to the Teacher Education Program. This course will further the mission of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures and the World Readiness for Language Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century by providing students frequent opportunities to develop and enhance their awareness and appreciation for Russian culture, cultural perspectives, cultural practices, and to analyze texts developed by Russians for Russian audiences to convey meanings with a larger Russian historical context. Furthermore, the course will help students better understand their own cultures and cultural perspectives and practices by comparing Russian culture, perspectives and practices with their own native culture, perspectives and practices.

### **Student Learning Outcomes and Their Assessment**

In this course students will:

1. Identify and use in their analyses the major systems of meaning manipulated by filmmakers (e.g., sound, light, color, etc.) to convey meaning to their audiences; this will be assessed in the midterm and final examinations as well as in the graded paper
2. Learn to identify the major trends, filmmakers, and landmark films in the history of Russian cinema from before the Russian Revolution of 1917 through the

- collapse of the Soviet Union and to the present day; this will be assessed in the midterm and final examinations as well as in the graded paper
3. Improve their skills in using library and Internet resources to locate and evaluate information about the Russian cinema industry and to use that information in constructing arguments relevant to the analysis of works of film; achievement of this goal will be demonstrated in the graded paper.
  4. Appreciate the ways in which film conveys cultural values, sometimes in service of state-approved political purposes and sometimes in opposition to those political purposes; this will be assessed in the midterm and final examinations as well as in the graded paper
  5. Understand the ways in which Russian films defines and shapes viewers' ideas of "Russianness" in different ways through the history of Russian film and how we, as non-Russians, define ourselves similarly or differently; this will be assessed in the midterm and final examinations as well as in the graded paper
  6. Understand the ways in which Russian film shapes Russians' understanding of their own history and place in the world and, by comparison, understand the ways in which the American film industry shapes our understanding of our history and place in the world; this will be assessed in the midterm and final examinations as well as in the graded paper

### **Learning Activities**

This course meets twice a week, once for pre-screening lectures and screenings and once again for post-screening discussions. In preparation for class meetings, students will be assigned to read relevant works of criticism or history.

In class we will view and discuss films in the context of Russian history, politics, and society. Prior to each discussion class meeting (small class sessions), students will take a short quiz, described below, to demonstrate that they have read the assigned texts and viewed the film (shown at that week's screening). Students will be expected to share their ideas and reactions with classmates in whole-class and small group discussions, as well as in brainstorming sessions conducted in class. Students will also be asked to react to segments of the texts they have read or films they have watched, to compare a scene from one work to a scene in another work, and/or to analyze cinematic texts in the context of historical, sociological, anthropological or other disciplinary frameworks.

### **Assessment of Student Learning**

Students' work will be assessed in the following ways:

Quizzes (administered weekly in discussion sessions)	15%
Class Participation (in discussion sessions)	10%
Mid-Term Exam (take home / open note)	25%
Analysis Paper	25%
Final Exam (take home / open note)	25%

Quizzes: short quizzes consisting of a few questions (mostly multiple choice, true/false, or fill in the blank), with some questions based on the reading assigned for that class session, some on the film screened earlier in the week, and some on the lecture and/or discussion from the previous class session. These quizzes are administered *open-note* to encourage thoughtful reading and viewing and careful note-taking on readings and during class lectures and discussions. Quizzes are graded on a credit/no-credit basis: students must correctly answer two thirds of the questions to earn credit on a quiz. The quiz grade for the semester is calculated as the percentage of the quizzes for which a given student earned credit. (15% of course grade)

Exams: the midterm and final exams will consist of identification questions, an essay prompt on the aesthetics of Russian film, an essay prompt on the history of Russian film and its connections to the larger cultural context of people living in Russia and the former Soviet Union, and an essay providing textual analysis (based on a film similar to those studied in the course, but not one of those studied in the course). The final exam will be constructed along the same lines. (The midterm exam and final exam are each worth 25% of the course grade.) Both these exams will be take-home and open book and open note; however, students are strictly forbidden to collaborate with anyone and must write their exams independently.

Analysis Paper: students will write one 2400-word paper analyzing a film not viewed in class, selected from a number of films uploaded to Sakai. In their paper, students must cite at least two critics who have analyzed the given film. Students will analyze the film they choose for this project using critical frameworks practiced in class. Papers will be graded according to this rubric:

Thesis/Treatment of Formal Element:

- complex, nuanced grasp of element (A-4)
- clear, complex grasp of element (B-3)
- correct but unsophisticated grasp of element (C-2)
- unclear reference to element (D-1)
- does not refer to element, or is incorrect (F-0)

Range, Quality, and Use of Secondary Source Material:

- persuasive reasoning and effective quotation (A-4)
- appropriate evidence, clear major points (B-3)
- generalizations, unsupported claims (C-2)
- simplistic summary (D-1)
- no quotations, no sources (F-0)

Argumentation/Organization of Paper:

- strong, complex analysis with thorough support (A-4)
- analytical with convincing support (B-3)
- argument suggested with some support (C-2)
- somewhat argumentative, little support (D-1)
- no argument (F-0)

Academic Writing Style:

- clear and memorable, with controlled stylistic flourishes (A-4)
- effective, readable, and precise (B-3)
- competent, simple, relatively free of errors (C-2)
- several errors, unclear (D-1)
- numerous errors, thoroughly unclear (F-0)

Mechanics/Bibliographic Information:

- correct citation format, proofread, on time (A-4)
- some errors in citation or syntax, on time (B-3)
- several errors in citation or syntax, on time (C-2)
- rife with errors, not proofread, on time (D-1)
- rife with errors, not proofread, not on time (F-0)

TOTAL/CORRESPONDING GRADE:

A	=	18 – 20 POINTS
A-	=	16 – 17 POINTS
B+	=	15 POINTS
B	=	13 – 14 POINTS
B -	=	11 – 12 POINTS
C+	=	10 POINTS
C	=	8 – 9 POINTS
C-	=	6 – 7 POINTS
D+	=	5 POINTS
D	=	3 – 4 POINTS
D-	=	1 – 2 POINTS
F	=	0 POINTS

Students must use the APA style of documentation for these papers.

Late papers will be penalized 3 points for each calendar day late for each deadline.

The grade for the paper will be calculated as 25% of the course grade.

Class Participation: class participation will be graded in discussion class meetings on the following 7-point scale:

Present, on time, fully prepared, participating thoughtfully	7 points
Present, partially prepared, participating well	5 points
Present, unprepared, participating sporadically	3 points
Absent	0 points

Students lose one point from their class participation grade for every 10 minutes late to a given class session. One or more points may be deducted from a class participation grade for a behavior that impedes the learning of other students in the class. The course grade for class participation is the percentage of class participation points earned of the total class participation points available. Class participation in the discussion sessions will be worth 10% of the total course grade.

**Course Grades:** *Letter grades* for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

95% and higher = A	80 – 82% = B-	67 – 69% = D+
90 – 94% = A-	77 – 80% = C+	65 – 66% = D
87 – 89% = B+	73 – 76% = C	64% and lower = F
83 – 86% = B	70 – 72% = C-	

## RELEVANT COLLEGE POLICIES

### Academic Integrity

This course will adhere to the Ithaca College policy regarding academic dishonesty and plagiarism. The midterm exam and final exam are both take home exams and must be done without any contribution from others. In addition, the graded paper must be completed individually, with the input only of your peer editor and the instructor. If I suspect you have violated these norms, I reserve the right and responsibility to report academic misconduct. Such instances may be reported to another faculty member (generally, the Chair), the dean of the school involved, or the director of judicial affairs. For more details regarding such incidents, please see <http://catalog.ithaca.edu/undergrad/academic-information/academic-affairs/>

### Midterm and Final Exam Policy

The College's policy on midterm and final examinations may be found here: <http://catalog.ithaca.edu/undergrad/academic-information/registration-course/> (scroll down to "Course Examinations")

### Attendance Policy

Attendance in classes is mandatory as per Ithaca College policy: <http://catalog.ithaca.edu/undergrad/academic-information/registration-course/> (scroll down to "Attendance Policy"). In addition, students who miss the discussion classes lose points for class participation.

### Accessibility Policy

In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, reasonable accommodations will be provided to qualified students with documented disabilities. Students seeking accommodations must register with Student Accessibility Services and provide appropriate documentation before any accommodations can be provided. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive so timely contact with Student Accessibility Services is encouraged. For more information, contact Student Accessibility Services in Rothschild Hall or on the web at [Ithaca.edu/sas](http://Ithaca.edu/sas).

**Course Textbooks and Additional Readings On Sakai**

Primary Textbooks

Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2009).

Freeze, ed., *Russia: A History* (Oxford U. Press, 2002) – references to this volume in the schedule of readings will be marked as “Freeze,” with the name of the author in parentheses

Additional Readings will be available on Sakai (excerpts from the following):

Clark, *The Soviet Novel*

Condee, *The Imperial Trace*

Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film*

And others to be determined

## Schedule of Readings and Film Screenings

**(subject to change with notice)**

### Week 1, Introduction to the Course

#### Systems of Meaning in Film

Beumers, Chapter 1 “The Beginnings of Russian Cinema (1908-1919)

Freeze, Chapter 8 “Revolutionary Russia from 1890-1914” (Zelnik)

1a) Romashkov, *Stenka Razin* (1908) (only 10 minutes long):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lza5vEWXAtY>

1b) Chardynin, *Queen of Spades* (1910):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZ1plrGngml>

2) Bauer, *Child of the Big City* (1914):

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

For discussion class: Review the handout on systems of meaning in film (distributed in class and posted to Sakai) and read the chapters in Beumers and Service assigned for this week. Remember, we will have a quiz at the beginning of every discussion class meeting! The quizzes are open-note so take notes on your reading to do your very best on the quizzes. Watch some American films from the same period (e.g., youtube) and be ready to discuss cultural differences between the Russian and American films. Bring to class (and submit) the names of three short films you’ve screened, their directors, dates when they were made, and the URL at which you found the film online. Consider how the filmmakers of the American films you screened and the filmmakers of the Russian films we watched together deployed one or another of the systems of meaning in film (e.g., filmstock; camera operation; patterns of color, darkness and light; backgrounds; positions of actors in frame; facial expressions; movement or non-movement of actors; appearance of actors, including costume; set design or backgrounds; discourse of characters and off-screen narrator or titles; diegetic sound; non-diegetic sound; correlation between image-track and soundtrack; among others) that were presented and discussed in lecture before this week’s screening.

### Week 2, Revolutionary Soviet Cinema 1920s

Beumers, Chapter 2 “Revolutionary Cinema, or Cinema for the Masses (1919-1929)”

Freeze, Chapter 9 “Russia in War & Revolution 1914-1921” (Orlovsky)

3) Vertov, *Kino-Pravda* (1919) (only 10 minutes long)

4) Eisenstein, *Battleship Potemkin* (1925)

5) Pudovkin, *Mother* (1926) (excerpts)

For discussion class: As always, read the assigned chapters for this week and prepare for the quiz. How do these films elicit viewers’ emotions and change or reinforce their beliefs or attitudes about Russian history? Consider what American or other films you know that have reinterpreted history in ways to manipulate viewers’ emotions or beliefs

and how those filmmakers achieved those goals. Once again, consider how the filmmakers for this week's films r deployed one or another of the systems of meaning in film (e.g., filmstock; camera operation; patterns of color, darkness and light; backgrounds; positions of actors in frame; facial expressions; movement or non-movement of actors; appearance of actors, including costume; set design or backgrounds; discourse of characters and off-screen narrator or titles; diegetic sound; non-diegetic sound; correlation between image-track and soundtrack; among others) that were presented and discussed in lecture before this week's screening. *This last question will be a standard discussion question for each week's discussion class for the rest of the semester.*

Week 3, Soviet Cinema of the 1930s

Beumers, Chapter 3: "The Purges, the Second World War, and the Cold War, or How Stalin Entertained the People" pp. 75-100.

Freeze, "Building Stalinism 1929-1941" (Siegelbaum)

Clark, The Soviet Novel (excerpt on Sakai)

- 6) Aleksandrov, *Volga Volga* (1938)
- 7) German, *My Friend Ivan Lapshin* (1983)

For discussion: As always, read the assigned chapters for this week and prepare for the quiz. Consider what formulaic film genres you know and what films conform to and what films violate those formulas? Consider how the filmmakers deployed systems of meaning in film and to what purpose(s).

Week 4, Films of the War Years (1940s)

Beumers, Chapter 3: "The Purges, the Second World War, and the Cold War, or How Stalin Entertained the People (1930-1953)" pp. 100-112

Freeze, "The Great Fatherland War and Late Stalinism 1941-1953" (Fuller)

- 8) Chiaureli, *Fall of Berlin* (1949)

For discussion: As always, read the assigned chapters for this week and prepare for the quiz. Consider American warm films and how do they compare to Chiaureli's film? Consider how the filmmakers deployed systems of meaning in film and to what purpose(s).

Week 5, Post-War Cinema 1950s (The Thaw)

Beumers, Chapter 4 "The Thaw – New Beginnings, New Lives (1954-1966)"

Freeze, "From Stalinism to Stagnation 1953-1985," pp. 347-368 only (Freeze)

9) Kalatozov, *The Cranes Are Flying* (1957)

For discussion: As always, read the assigned chapters for this week and prepare for the quiz. How does this film conform to the socialist realist conventions and how does it defy them? How does the film depict gender relations? In addition, in this class we will host a **representative of the library** who will discuss research strategies for the history of Russian film, relevant for both your paper as well as the midterm and final examinations. Consider how the filmmakers deployed systems of meaning in film and to what purpose(s).

**Paper Task 1:** Prepare prospectus for film analysis paper, choosing one of the following films for your analysis (view the film, read some reviews on the internet, and draw up a draft thesis statement about the film, beginning to make an argument about the place of the film in the history of Russian cinema and in Russian history). Create a bibliography of at least three sources (reviews or critical essays) you will read for your paper, using APA format. You may find interesting reviews and essays in *Kino-Kultura* (on line scholarly journal) and articles in *Slavic and East European Journal*, accessible through J-STOR, as well as other scholarly articles from film journals and journals dedicated to the review and analysis of Russian cultural texts, including film, such as *Slavic Review* and *Russian Review*.

1. Askoldov, *Kommissar* (completed in 1967, released in 1988)
2. Shepitko, *The Ascent* (1977)
3. Klimov, *Come and See* (1985)
4. Chukhrai, *Thief* (1997)
5. Todorovsky, *Hipsters* (2007)
6. Tarkovsky, *Ivan's Childhood* (1968)

Week 6, Film of the Era of Stagnation

Beumers, Chapter 5, "The Stagnation: Mainstream and *Auteur* Cinema (1967-1982)"  
Freeze, Chapter 9 "From Stalinism to Stagnation 1953-1985," pp. 368 to end of chapter"  
(Freeze)

10) Gaidai, *Diamond Arm* (1968)

For discussion: As always, read the assigned chapters for this week and prepare for the quiz. What is the Russianness of the humor in this film? How does the filmmaker poke fun at older Russian film traditions and cultural norms? How does the film depict gender relations? How does it depict non-Russians and non-Russian cultures? Consider how the filmmakers deployed systems of meaning in film and to what purpose(s).

**Take-Home Midterm Exam Will Require Analysis of One of These Films (in addition to other tasks):**

1. Eisenstein, *Strike* (1925)
2. Aleksandrov, *Circus* (1936)
3. Shepitko, *Wings* (1968)
4. Chukhrai, *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959)

**Pick one of the films and begin to study it in advance of the midterm.**

Week 7: Tarkovsky

Excerpt from Gillespie, "Autobiography, memory and identity: the films of Andrei Tarkovskii"

Article to be assigned on Russian Orthodoxy (to be posted on Sakai)

- 11) Tarkovsky, *Andrei Rublev* (1969)

For discussion: As always, read the assigned chapters for this week and prepare for the quiz. How is this film similar to or different from other films you've seen that take place in the middle ages? How does the filmmaker convey Russianness? How does the focus on religion square with socialist realist norms? Consider how the filmmakers deployed systems of meaning in film and to what purpose(s).

***Take-Home Midterm Due Submitted through Sakai on Week 8***

Week 8: Comedy of the Stagnation Period

Article to be assigned (on Sakai)

- 12) Riazanov, *Irony of Fate* (1975)

For discussion: As always, read the assigned chapters for this week and prepare for the quiz. How could a similar film plot be created for American viewers? How does the filmmaker convey humor within the constraints of Soviet cultural control? Why do you think this film has become a Russian classic (shown every year on New Year's Eve on Russian tv), the way that *The Wizard of Oz* is for American viewers. Consider how the filmmakers deployed systems of meaning in film and to what purpose(s).

**Paper Task 2:** Complete first polished draft of paper and submit in two hard copies (one to the paper's author and one to the instructor) in discussion class meeting in Week 9.

Week 9, Commercial Film in the Stagnation Period

Article to be assigned

13) Menshov, *Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears* (1980)

For discussion: As always, read the assigned chapters for this week and prepare for the quiz. Why do you think this film won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film. If you were a voting member of the Motion Picture Academy, would you have voted for it or not? What are the indicators of “Russianness” in this film? Consider how the filmmakers deployed systems of meaning in film and to what purpose(s).

Week 10, Cinema and Perestroika

Beumers, Chapter 6 “Glasnost and Before (1983-1992)”

Freeze, Chapter 14 “From Perestroika to a New Order 1985-1995” (McCauley)

14) Pitchul, *Little Vera* (1988)

For discussion: As always, read the assigned chapters for this week and prepare for the quiz. How does this film play with and violate the norms of socialist realism? What is the role of ugliness in this film? How does the depiction of gender relations in the film compare with that in *Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears*? How are non-Russians depicted in the film? Consider how the filmmakers deployed systems of meaning in film and to what purpose(s).

Week 11, Post-Soviet Cinema I

Beumers, Chapter 7 “Post-Soviet Russian cinema (1992-2000)”, pp. 214-228

Freeze, Chapter 15 “Meltdown, Rebuilding, Reform 1996-2001” (Freeze)

Article to be posted on Sakai

15) Mikhalkov: *Burnt by the Sun* (1994)

For discussion: As always, read the assigned chapters for this week and prepare for the quiz. How does this film conform to and violate socialist realist norms? How is history reinterpreted? What is the role of the bright yellow spot that appears in the film? Describe the relationships between the characters and how their perspectives are informed by their generation’s historical experience. Are there any American films that are as challenging to viewers? How so? Consider how the filmmakers deployed systems of meaning in film and to what purpose(s).

Week 12, Post-Soviet Cinema II: Russia and Chechnya

Beumers, Chapter 7 “Post-Soviet Russian cinema (1992-2000)”, pp. 228-241

Article to be assigned on Russian policy in the Caucasus

16) Bodrov, *Prisoner of the Mountains* (1996)

For discussion: As always, read the assigned chapters for this week and prepare for the quiz. How does this film depict Russianness and non-Russianness? What does the film say about the conflict in the Caucasus and what does it say about intercultural communication? Consider how the filmmakers deployed systems of meaning in film and to what purpose(s).

**Paper Task 3: Submit final paper this week.**

Week 13, Cinema in the Putin Era I

Beumers, Chapter 8 “Cinema in the Putin Era (2001-2008)”

17) Sokurov, *Russian Ark* (2002)

For discussion: As always, read the assigned chapters for this week and prepare for the quiz. What is the filmmaker saying about Russian culture through this film? How does Sokurov reinterpret Russian history? What Russian historical and cultural figures can you identify in the film? What are the important innovations in Sokurov’s film technique? Consider how the filmmakers deployed systems of meaning in film and to what purpose(s). **Final version of paper due in discussion class today.**

Week 14, Cinema in the Putin Era II

Article about the Putin era to be assigned

18) Zvyagintsev, *Leviathan* (2015)

For discussion: As always, read the assigned chapters for this week and prepare for the quiz. Is this an optimistic or pessimistic view of Russian culture? How does this film compare with the other films we’ve seen this semester? Is it a fitting end to our course? Consider how Zvyagintsev deployed systems of meaning in film and to what purpose(s).

**Take-Home Final Exam (due as per registrar-scheduled finale exam date), submitted in hard copy to Dr. Rifkin’s office by the designated end of the final exam period for this course.**

The take-home final exam includes analysis of one of the following films among other tasks, so pick the film you want to use and begin to study it.

1. Balabanov, *Brother* (1997)
2. Uchitel, *The Stroll* (2003)

3. Kravchuk, *The Italian* (2005)
4. Lungin, *The Island* (2006)
5. Sokurov, *Aleksandra* (2007)
6. Veledinsky, *Alive* (2006)
7. Muratova, *The Piano Tuner* (2004)