

HIST / RUSS 261
Making History:
Russian Cinema as Testimony, Propaganda, and Art



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Course Description

Throughout history, we have turned to storytelling to make sense of our world. We tell stories about the past to document and explain phenomena, to justify our political and social agendas, to create connections and continuity, and to give life meaning. In the twentieth century, Russia helped introduce the world to a spectacular new form of storytelling – film – and used it to alter previous narratives in the hope of reshaping the future. In this course, we will look at written and cinematic representations of Russian history, from medieval times to the post-Soviet era. The films that we will study, by directors including Eisenstein, Vertov, Tarkovsky, and Sokurov, are among the essential Russian contributions to world cinema. One task of the course will be to articulate how storytelling in film differs from historiography and fiction. Another will be to show how cinematic depictions of key historical events were shaped by politics, power relations, technology, and aesthetics. We will use readings in cultural history and film theory to create a conceptual framework for analyzing the films as documents of real events, as vehicles of propaganda, and as imaginative, entertaining works of art.

Learning objectives

It is our hope that in this course you will learn...

- about key events, periods, and personalities in Russian history, and about their significance for Russia today
- about the artistic trends, intellectual currents, and political forces that have shaped Russian film, and about the unique ways in which Russian filmmakers have contributed to world cinema
- to analyze film, literary works, and historical documents
- to read and critically engage with scholarly texts
- to present your ideas in writing, and to respond to the ideas of others

Requirements

■ **Weekly film screenings:** Sunday, 7-10 pm in Humanities 401. Film screenings are an integral part of this course, and attendance is required. One of the instructors will introduce the film, and the screening will be followed by a discussion. If you are unable to attend a screening, you are responsible for watching the film in Media Services before Tuesday's class meeting. As you watch each film, take note of what strikes you in terms of style as well as content. Carefully analyze these films as forms of artistic expression, representations of historical reality, and illustrations of cultural context.

Reading assignments: You will read primary sources (including chronicles, diaries, letters, witness accounts, memoirs, and fiction) corresponding to the films assigned for the week; selections from our history textbook to get you situated in the period in which the film's story takes place; and scholarly articles that will provide valuable contexts and conceptual frameworks for analyzing the films. Please take notes as you read, and come to class prepared to discuss the assigned texts.

Writing assignments You will write **two papers** this semester. These papers provide an opportunity to sharpen your research and analytical skills as well as to express yourself clearly and persuasively in writing. The first paper (4 pp.), an analysis of a film of your choice, is due on Friday, March 9, to be submitted in hard copy to both instructors. We encourage you to revise this paper after receiving feedback from us. The second paper (8-10 pp.), a comparative analysis of two films OR a film and a written text is due at the end of the semester. Students will exchange paper proposals with one another for peer review. Late papers will automatically be graded down.

Participation Each class meeting will include film clips, lecture, and **discussion**. In evaluating your participation, we will appreciate thoughtful, substantive contributions and consider the extent to which you listen carefully and respond to others.

Our **Moodle course page** will provide another forum for discussion. You are required to submit a **provocative discussion question, express a strong opinion, or offer an interpretation** in response to the film(s) and/or assigned readings, due at 9 pm on the Wednesday of each given week. Please read the discussion forum each week and post at least **three responses** to your classmates' posts over the course of the semester. The purpose of these assignments is to help focus your reading, to sharpen your critical thinking skills, to provide ways for you to respond to the assigned material, and to create a dialogue with your classmates.

You will sign up for one 15 minute **class presentation** on a specific topic and/or film. These talks will help the class get a more complete picture of the historical period covered that week. You will not be required to contribute to the Moodle forum during the week of your presentation, although you may do so for extra credit.

There will be **several short quizzes** (announced ahead of time) in which you will be asked to identify images from the films and key terms from the readings and lectures.

Attendance is mandatory. Please come to class on time. Students who miss class are responsible for obtaining class notes for the day, as some of the material presented in lecture will not be covered in the readings and is certain to appear on quizzes. Repeated unexcused absences will result in a reduced final grade.

We will expect you to attend at least one of the events that will take place at the **Russian House** (1668 Vernon Street) over the course of the semester. These events will provide an invaluable opportunity to learn about Russia and to interact with others who have an interest and an expertise in the culture, politics, and history of this part of the world.

Grading: In calculating your final grade, we will take into account your overall effort, conscientiousness, engagement with the material, and interest in improving your critical thinking, writing, and viewing skills. The components of the final grade are weighted as follows:

First paper: 20%

Second paper: 30%

Quizzes: 20%

Class participation, including oral presentation and Moodle forum: 30%

Course Materials

Our history textbook, Nicholas Riasanovsky's *A History of Russia*, may be purchased at the Macalester Book Store (earlier editions are fine). All other required texts will be available on our Moodle course page (go to <http://moodle.macalester.edu/> and choose RUSS 261). Here you will also find recommended articles and a list of books on reserve at the library, including works on Russian film and cultural history, such as *Natasha's Dance* by Orlando Figes; reference books including David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's *Film Art*—essential reading for anyone interested the language of cinema; and texts exploring the broader question of how history is represented on film, such as Robert Rosenstone's *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History*. Our Moodle page will also include links to film websites including KinoKultura, a journal devoted to contemporary Russian cinema, and the international journal *Sight & Sound*.

These films are on reserve at Media Services:

Required:	Recommended:
<p>Eisenstein, <i>Alexander Nevsky</i>; <i>Ivan the Terrible I and II</i> Tarkovsky, <i>Andrei Rublev</i>; <i>Ivan's Childhood</i> Von Sternberg, <i>The Scarlet Empress</i> Motyl, <i>White Sun of the Desert</i> Room, <i>Bed and Sofa</i> Vertov, <i>Man with a Movie Camera</i> Dovzhenko, <i>Earth</i> Abuladze, <i>Repentance</i> Mikhalkov, <i>Burnt by the Sun</i> Sokurov, <i>Russian Ark</i> Bodrov, <i>Prisoner of the Mountain</i></p>	<p>Bondarchuk, <i>War and Peace</i> Eisenstein, <i>October</i>; <i>The Old and the New</i> Vasiliev and Vasiliev, <i>Chapaev</i> Alexandrov, <i>The Circus</i> Medvedkin, <i>Happiness</i> Chiuareli, <i>The Fall of Berlin</i> Kalatozov, <i>The Cranes are Flying</i> Balabanov, <i>Brother</i> Konchalovsky, <i>House of Fools</i> Sokurov, <i>Alexandra</i> Bekmambetov, <i>Night Watch</i> Mikhalkov, <i>12</i></p>

Schedule of Screenings, Readings, and Assignments

Week 1 - January 24 and 26

Introductions. History-making film. Terms: testimony, propaganda, art.
Discussion of sequences from Eisenstein's *October* and Kalatozov's *The Cranes are Flying*, and a selection from Kerensky's memoir.

📖 For Thursday, read Rosenstone, "The Historical Film: Looking at the Past in a Post-Literate Age"

For Sunday, read selection from Kolker, *The Film Text and Film Form*; and Riasanovsky, Chapter IX

🎬 Sunday, January 29: Eisenstein, *Alexander Nevsky* (1938)

Week 2 - January 31 and February 2

History: Russia from Its Beginnings to the Mongol Invasion

Film: Eisenstein, *Alexander Nevsky*

📖 For Tuesday, read "A Tale of the Life and Courage of... Prince Alexander [Nevsky]," (late 13th-early 14th centuries) and Solov'ev, *History of Russia*, vol. 4 [c. 1870], pp. 32-38

For Thursday, read Eisenstein, "Alexander Nevsky and the Rout of the Germans" and Taylor, selection from *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*

For Sunday, read Riasanovsky, Chapters VIII and XIII

🎬 Sunday, February 5: Tarkovsky, *Andrei Rublev* (1965)

Week 3 - February 7 and 9

History: Appanage (Disunited) Russia and the Mongols

Film: Tarkovsky, *Andrei Rublev*

📖 For Tuesday, read selections from *Nikonian Chronicle* and from Pokrovsky's history

For Thursday, read selection from Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky*

Recommended: selection from Billington, *The Icon and the Axe* and Williams, "Looking at the Middle Ages in the Cinema: An Overview"

For Sunday, read Riasanovsky, Chapter XV

🎬 Sunday, February 12: Eisenstein, *Ivan the Terrible I and II* (1944/1946)

Week 4 - February 14 and 16

History: Gathering the Russian Lands and Ivan IV (the Terrible) (ruled 1533-84)

Film: Eisenstein, *Ivan the Terrible I and II*

📖 For Tuesday, read: [The Oprichnina] *Source Book for Russian History*, ed. Vernadsky, vol. 1, pp. 142-45; Solov'ev, *History of Russia*, Vol. 11 [c. 1870], pp. 108-23

For Thursday, read Bordwell, "Ivan the Terrible"

Recommended: selection from Thompson, *Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible: A Neoformalist Analysis*; and Brandenberger and Platt, "Terribly Pragmatic: Rewriting the History of Ivan IV's Reign, 1937-1956"

For Sunday, read Riasanovsky, Chapter XXII

🎬 Sunday, February 19: von Sternberg, *The Scarlet Empress* (1934)

Week 5 - February 21 and 23

History: Catherine II, ruled 1762-1796

Film: von Sternberg, *The Scarlet Empress* (in class, clip from Bondarchuk, *War and Peace*)

📖 For Tuesday, read: Catherine's description of the coup

For Thursday, read Landy, "Folklore, the Biopic, and *The Scarlet Empress*"

For Sunday, read Riasanovsky, Chapters XXXI and XXXIV

🎬 Sunday, February 26: Motyl, *White Sun of the Desert* (1969)

Week 6 - February 28 and March 1

History: The Bolshevik Revolution and Civil War (1917-1923)

Film: Motyl, *White Sun of the Desert* (in class, clip from Vasiliev, *Chapaev*)

📖 For Tuesday, read Northrop, "With Friends Like These," which is Ch. 6 from his book, *Veiled Empire*, pp. 209-241. For Thursday, read Menashe, "Chapayev and Company: Films of the Russian Civil War"

★ This Thursday we will **visit the library** (we will meet in the Library Instruction Room on the 2nd floor) and learn about the resources available to us for researching your presentations and the final paper. Our librarian, Johan Oberg, will lead the discussion with an emphasis on the interdisciplinary aspects of our course.

For Sunday, read Riasanovsky, Chapter XXXVI

🎬 Sunday, March 4: Room, *Bed and Sofa* (1927)

Week 7 - March 6 and 8

History: NEP (The New Economic Policy)

Film: Room, *Bed and Sofa* (in class, clip from Protazanov, *Aelita*)

📖 For Tuesday, read Zoshchenko, "Nervous People," and "The Crisis"

For Thursday, read Trotsky, "Vodka, the Church, and the Cinema"; and Graffy, "*Bed and Sofa: An Analysis*"

Recommended: Burns, "A NEP Moscow Address: Abram Room's *Third Meshchanskaia* (*Bed and Sofa*) in Historical Context"

Friday, March 9: First Paper Due at 4 pm!

SPRING BREAK: MARCH 10 - MARCH 18

📺 Sunday, March 18: Vertov, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). Before the screening, read Vertov, "Cine-Eye Manifesto"

Week 8 - March 20 and 22

History: From NEP to the First Five-Year Plan

Film: Vertov, *Man with a Movie Camera*

📖 For Tuesday, read selections from Scott, *Behind the Urals*, pp. 55-92 ("The Story of Magnitogorsk"), and pp. 55-92 ("The Battle of Iron and Steel").

For Thursday, read Kirby, "From Marinetti to Vertov: Woman on the Track of Avant-Garde Representation"

For Sunday, read Riasanovsky XXXVII

📺 Sunday, March 25: Dovzhenko, *Earth* (1930)

Week 9 - March 27 and 29

History: Collectivization

Film: Dovzhenko, *Earth* (in class, clips from Medvedkin, *Happiness* (and Eisenstein, *The Old and the New*)

📖 For Tuesday, read Pasha Angelina, "The Most Important Thing" and a selection from Maurice Hindus, *Red Bread*

Recommended: Fitzpatrick, "How the Mice Buried the Cat"

For Thursday, read Cavendish, "Earth"

Recommended reading for Sunday: Solzhenitsyn, "History of Our Sewage Disposal System" in *The Gulag Archipelago*

📺 Sunday, April 1: Abuladze, *Repentance* (1984)

Week 10 - April 3 and 5

History: The Great Terror

Film: Abuladze, *Repentance* (in class, clip from Alexandrov, *The Circus*)

📖 For Tuesday, read Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago* vol. 1, "The Interrogation"

For Thursday, read Youngblood, "Stalinist Terror and the Realism of Surrealism"

For Sunday, re-read Riasanovsky XXXVII, and read K. McDermott, "Stalinism 'From Below': Social Preconditions of, and Popular Responses to, the Great Terror," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, vol. 8, no. 3-4 (Sept.-Dec., 2007).

📺 Sunday, April 8: Mikhalkov, *Burnt by the Sun* (1994)

Week 11 - April 10 and 12

History: The Great Terror, continued

Film: *Burnt by the Sun*

📖 For Tuesday, read Shikheeva-Gaister, "A Family Chronicle" and "The Stalin in Us" from Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost. Russians Remember Stalin* (1994)

For Thursday, read Larsen, "National Identity, Cultural Authority, and the Post-Soviet Blockbuster: Nikita Mikhalkov and Aleksei Balabanov"

Recommended: Boym, "Nostalgia and Post-Communist Memory"

For Sunday, read Riasanovsky, Chapter XXXVIII

📺 Sunday, April 15: Tarkovsky, *Ivan's Childhood* (1962)

Week 12 - April 17 and 19

History: World War II

Film: Tarkovsky, *Ivan's Childhood*

📖 For Tuesday, read Tumarkin, "No One is Forgotten. Nothing is Forgotten" in *The Living and the Dead* (in class, clips from Chiureli, *The Fall of Berlin*)

For Thursday, read selection from Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005*

For Sunday, read Riasanovsky, Chapter XLII

📺 Sunday, April 22: Bodrov, *Prisoner of the Mountain* (1996)

Week 13 - April 24 and 26

History: The War in Chechnya

Film: Bodrov, *Prisoner of the Mountain* (in class, clip from Konchalovsky's *House of Fools*)

📖 For Tuesday, read selection from Politkovskaya, *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*: pp. 1-25 (Derluguian, "Whose Truth?"), 47-54 ("Makhkety"), 57-64 ("Call Putin"), 83-89 ("A Lawless Enclave"), 161-66 ("Who Wants This War? An Oligarchy of Generals"), and 173-77 ("Boys and Girls").

For Thursday, read Beumers, "Myth-Making and Myth-Taking: Lost Ideals and the War in Contemporary Russian Cinema"

For Sunday, read Riasanovsky, Chapter XLIII

📺 Sunday, April 29: Sokurov, *Russian Ark* (2002)

Week 14 - May 1

History: Post-Soviet Russia

Film: Sokurov, *Russian Ark* (in class, clips from Sokurov, *Alexandra* and Bekmambetov, *Night Watch*)

📖 For Tuesday, read Christie, "*Russian Ark*"