

RUSSIAN CINEMA

Course Description:

This course will introduce students to Russian cinema and provide them with a critical understanding of the Russian film industry from the pre-revolutionary to the post-Soviet era. It will examine key periods, films, genres and directors through historical, cultural, political and social perspectives. The course is designed to engage students with the major cultural periods of twentieth-century Russia (pre-1917, NEP, Stalinism, Thaw, Stagnation, Perestroika, and the post-Soviet period) and enable them to locate cinema in the appropriate position as a dynamic cultural artefact uniquely able to reflect the cultural and political attitudes of the time in which it was produced.

One might argue that more than other national cinemas, film in Russia has played an integral role in the evolution of Russian society. The course largely adopts a chronological approach to Russian cinema beginning in the pre-revolutionary era and ending in 2013.

Please note that a knowledge of the Russian language is not required for this course as all films chosen are available in subtitled versions, the writings are in English or are offered in versions translated from the original Russian sources.

Aims:

1. To examine the development of Russian cinema since from pre- to post-Soviet era.
2. To analyse in detail many Russian films and film-makers in this period.
3. To gain experience in the study of Russian film.

Key Reading:

- Birgit Beumers. (2009). *A History of Russian Cinema*, New York: Berg.
- David Gillespie. (2003). *Russian Cinema*, Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

About the Professor:

Dr. Terence McSweeney is currently a Lecturer in Film and Television Studies at Southampton Solent University. His publications include *9/11 Frames per Second: The "War on Terror" and American Cinema*, and numerous book chapters and articles. He serves on the Advisory Board for the *International Journal of Russian Studies*. His research interests include Russian, South Korean, and American cinema, as well as film theory.

Course Schedule

- Week 1 Introduction to Russian cinema, history and culture
- Week 2 Pre-Revolutionary Film
- Week 3 Russian Film and the Revolution: Part One
- Week 4 Russian Film and the Revolution: Part Two
- Week 5 The Genius of Sergei Eisenstein
- Week 6 Soviet Cinema and the Thaw (1954-1966)
- Week 7 The Incomparable Andrei Tarkovsky
- Week 8 The Stagnation (1967-1982)
- Week 9 Glasnost and Before (1983-1992)
- Week 10 Post-Soviet Russian Cinema (1992-2000)
- Week 11 New Russian Cinema: Part One – The Multiplex
- Week 12 New Russian Cinema: Part Two – A Return to the Past
- Week 13 Women and Russian Film
- Week 14 Russian Film Comedy
- Week 15 Russian Cinema and Russian History

Week 1 **Introduction to Russian cinema, history and culture**

Historical Overview

Russia underwent momentous political changes during the twentieth century and this week attempts to place these significant transformations in context. How far is film able to record and reflect the social and political climate of the era in which it is made? Vladimir Lenin, the first Premier of the Soviet Union, argued that cinema was the most important of all the arts and we take a look at why this might be true before, during and after the emergence of the communist regime in Russia. Like most national cinemas it is clear that film emerges as a dynamic cultural artefact and invaluable tool for studies of national history. In this week we attempt to place Russian cinema in context and shine a light on several themes which will be key to the course: national identity and the role of cinema in society.

Reading

- Beumers, B. (2009). *A History of Russian Cinema*, New York: Berg, pp.1-4.
- Selianov, S. (1997). 'Cinema and Life,' in Beumers, B (ed) (1999). *Russia on Reels*, London: I.B. Tauris, pp. 43-46.
- Dondurei, D. (1997). 'The State of the National Cinema,' in Beumers, B (ed) (1999). *Russia on Reels*, London: I.B. Tauris, pp.46-50.
- Mikhalkov, S. (1998). 'The Function of National Cinema,' in Beumers, B (ed) (1999). *Russia on Reels*, London: I.B. Tauris, pp.50-53.

Key Screening

Burnt By the Sun (Mikhalkov, 1994)

Supplementary Screening

Ivan's Childhood (Tarkovsky, 1962)

Essay Questions

- What is the role of a national cinema?
- How might the turbulent political and social climate of twentieth century Russia be reflected in the films produced?
- What are the key political changes which took place in Russia during the twentieth century?
- In this week's reading Dondurei, Selianov and Mikhalkov suggest very different ideas about what Russian cinema is. Consider the differences and similarities between their claims.
- In this week's key screening Mikhalkov presents a vivid depiction of Stalinist Russia made in 1994? How does the film represent this period and engage with both official and personal history?

Week 2 **Pre-Revolutionary Film**

Historical Review

Although many histories of Russian cinema begin with the films made during the revolutionary period, prior to this Russia had a thriving and critically acclaimed film industry which was highly regarded all around the world. This week we study pre-revolutionary Russian cinema which in many ways defines the decadence of the Tsarist regime and offers an insight into a society that was about to change so drastically almost overnight. These films are remarkable artefacts of the time and certainly the equal of many produced in the United States, Great Britain and Germany at the same time. We take a look at two of the greatest Russian film-makers in this period Yankov Protazanov and Yevgeni Bauer.

Film-makers Studied

- Yankov Protazanov is often regarded as one of the founding fathers of Russian cinema. He directed more than eighty features but only a small percentage are in existence today. His work reveals him as a gifted artist and one of the forgotten voices of silent cinema.
- Yevgeni Bauer was another leading light in pre-revolutionary Russian cinema. He worked in both the theatre and film and was a great influence on the evolution of early film language in Russia.

Reading

- Beumers, B. (2009). *A History of Russian Cinema*, New York: Berg, pp.5-38.
- Tsvian, Y. (2004). *Early Cinema in Russia and Its Cultural Reception*, London: Routledge, pp.1-12.
- Cavendish, P. (2004). "The Hand That Turns the Handle: Camera Operators and the Poetics of the Camera in Pre-Revolutionary Russian Film" *The Slavonic and East European Review*. Vol. 82, No. 2 (Apr., 2004), pp. 201-245 (Available at JSTOR).

Key Screenings

The Queen of Spades (Protazanov, 1916)
Twilight of a Woman's Soul (Bauer, 1913)

Supplementary Screening

After Death (Bauer, 1915)
Father Sergius (Protazanov, 1917)

Essay Questions

- How would you describe the style and narrative of these pre-Soviet Cinema films?
- In what ways might we consider that they reflect the last years of the Tsarist Regime?
- Beumer calls Bauer "without doubt one of the best directors of the era" (2009: 22) what about *Twilight of a Woman's Soul* supports this assertion?
- Discuss the representation of women in these early Russian films.

Week 3 **Russian Film and the Revolution: Part One**

Historical Overview

Russia's transformation into the Soviet Union marks one of the most sweeping political changes in the history of the twentieth century. In this week we see the impact of the revolution on the film industry and how a new style of film emerges. The film industry in this period is quickly harnessed by the state as a tool to educate the masses about the values of the new communist regime. The films produced depart drastically from those studied in Week 2 in matters of style, methodology and theme. The early years of Soviet film are regarded by many as key to the evolution of film language, especially in the use and development of techniques which come to be known as montage. In this week we look at two of the defining voices of the era and consider both their films and their contribution to film theory.

Film-makers Studied

- Dziga Vertov was a pioneering Soviet film-maker known for both his documentaries and his development of film theory. His 1929 film, studied this week, *Man With a Movie Camera* is still regularly included in polls for best film ever made.
- Lev Kuleshov is another film-maker and theorist who developed what has come to be known as Soviet Montage theory. He was a considerable influence on Sergei Eisenstein who we will study in coming weeks. His theories of editing, known as the Kuleshov effect suggest that the key aspect of film language lies not in the shot but in the relationship between shots

Readings

- Beumers, B. (2009). *A History of Russian Cinema*, New York: Berg, pp. 38-74.
- Thompson, K. And Bordwell, D. (1994). *Film History an Introduction*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, pp.128-133.
- Petric, V. (1978). "Dziga Vertov as Theorist", *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Autumn, 1978), pp. 29-44 (Available at JSTOR).

Key Screenings

Man With a Movie Camera (Vertov, 1929)

The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks (Kuleshov, 1924)

Supplementary Screening

The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty (Shub, 1927)

Essay Questions

- What was the impact of the Revolution on the film industry?
- Why did Lenin suggest that film was the most important of the arts?
- How did the Communist party attempt to use the film industry in order to achieve its ideological goals?
- Choose one director from this week's screenings and explore the evolution of their career. How does their work embody the period?
- What new cinematic devices can be seen in Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera*? To what end are they being used.

Week 4 **Russian Film and the Revolution: Part Two**

Historical Overview

In this week we continue to study the films which emerged in the early years of the Soviet Union and consider how their construction is intimately connected to the values of the Communist party. Film-makers in the Soviet era were bound to the state and unable to make films without the approval of the authorities at all stages of production from funding, through screenwriting and even final cut. Therefore all films produced become, in several senses, palpable manifestations of communist ideology. We consider the impact of this system on the films produced and the growing influence of Joseph Stalin himself not just on the films produced but the state as a whole.

Film-makers Studied

- Alexander Dovzhenko is certainly one of the pioneering director/theorists of the Soviet era. His film *Earth*, which is one of the primary screenings for the week, was both praised by the authorities for its visual poeticism and criticised for its ambiguous political message.
- Vsevolod Pudovkin created a range of films and his own montage theories. His *Mother*, which we also screen this week, has become an enduring and influential text and one of the definitive Soviet films.

Reading

- Thompson, K. And Bordwell, D. (1994). *Film History an Introduction*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, pp.134-155.
- Kepley, V. (1995-96). "Pudovkin, Socialist Realism, and the Classical Hollywood Style" *Journal of Film and Video*, Vol. 47, No. 4, International Film and Television (Winter 1995-96), pp. 3-16 (Available at JSTOR).
- Perez, G. (1975). "All in the Foreground: A Study of Dovzhenko's *Earth*", *The Hudson Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring, 1975), pp. 68-86 (Available at JSTOR).

Key Screenings

Earth (Dovzhenko, 1930)

Mother (Pudovkin, 1926)

Supplementary Screening

Arsenal (Dovzhenko, 1928)

Storm Over Asia (Pudovkin, 1928)

Essay Questions

1. Describe the conditions of filmmaking and film exhibition in the early years of the Soviet period.
2. What is montage theory and how do the film-makers you have studied in the last two weeks offer different variations of it?
3. In this week's reading Kepley compares and contrasts Soviet films to films produced in the Classical Hollywood film. What are the similarities and differences between the two? Provide detailed textual analysis of your examples.
4. Choose one of the films studied this week and connect it to Soviet film theory of this period.

Week 5 **The Genius of Sergei Eisenstein**

Historical Overview

Sergei Eisenstein is widely regarded as one of the greatest film-makers of all time. This week we take a closer look at his body of work and his film theory and consider how he came to be so influential and highly regarded. Like many Soviet film-makers he was both supported by the regime at times in his career and struggled when those in power felt that he had deviated too far from the party line. We look at his film theory and especially his development of film language this week which will give us an insight into both his art and world view. His films undoubtedly became the defining works of the early Soviet era because of their emotional and affective resonance and power.

Film-makers Studied

Sergei Eisenstein is often regarded as the 'Father of Montage'. Like Lev Kuleshov he claimed that the relationship between the shots not the shots themselves was the key aspect of film language. This week the primary screenings are *Battleship Potemkin* (Eisenstein, 1925) and *Strike* (Eisenstein, 1925) films which have lost none of their power despite being made nearly ninety years ago.

Reading

- Bordwell, D. (1993). *The Cinema of Eisenstein*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press pp.163-198.
- Robertson, R. (2009). *Eisenstein on the Audiovisual: The Montage of Music, Image and Sound in Cinema*. London: I.B. Tauris, pp.47-79.
- Goodwin, J. (1993) *Eisenstein, Cinema, and History*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press, pp.57 -78.
- Newcomb, J. (1974). "Eisenstein's Aesthetics", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Summer, 1974), pp. 471-476 (Available at JSTOR).

Key Screenings

Battleship Potemkin (Eisenstein, 1925)

Strike (Eisenstein, 1925)

Supplementary Screening

October (Eisenstein, 1927)

Ivan the Terrible: Parts One and Two (Eisenstein, 44 and 45)

Essay Questions

- What was Eisenstein's contribution to the language of film?
- How important was *Battleship Potemkin* to the evolution of film in the Soviet Union?
- Why did Eisenstein's works sometimes meet disapproval from the state?
- In what way did montage theory attempt to embody the ideology of the communist regime?
- Take a closer look at the Odessa Steps sequence in *Battleship Potemkin*. Can you identify the different types of Eisenstein's Montage theory on display?

Week 6 **Soviet Cinema and the Thaw (1954-1966)**

Historical Overview

After the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 many wondered about the future direction of the regime. Stalin's replacement, Nikita Khrushchev, oversaw a brief but palpable relaxation of censorship which enabled writers, poets and film-makers more freedom to express themselves than they had been able to for decades. This week we study this remarkable period which has become known as 'The Thaw' and some of the films which were made. These texts emerge as a valuable commentary on life in the Soviet Union in ways which would have been thought impossible just a decade before.

Film-makers Studied

- Mikhail Kalatozov was a documentarian turned feature film director who is most famous for his film *The Cranes are Flying* which we are screening this week. The film caused a stir because of its depiction of the Second World War (known as the Great Patriotic War in Russia) which marked a profound departure from the propaganda films made prior to it which had all portrayed the war as a unifying, ideologically driven conflict fought by virtuous Soviet heroes. As you will see Kalatozov's film is a much more nuanced, poetic and human affair.
- Grigori Chukrai was a veteran of the Second World War and the director of the tragic war film *Ballad of a Soldier* which received international acclaim and prizes in Russia and abroad. In Cannes in 1960 the film was given a special jury prize for "high humanism and outstanding quality."

Reading

Beumers, B. (2009). *A History of Russian Cinema*, New York: Berg, pp 112-145.
Woll, J. (2003). *The Cranes are Flying Companion*, London: I.B. Tauris.

Key Screenings

The Cranes are Flying (Kalatozov, 1957)
Ballad of a Soldier (Chukrai, 1959)

Supplementary Screening

The House Where I Live (Kulidzhyanov, 1957)
Welcome, Or No trespassing (Klimov, 1964)

Essay Questions

- How much freedom did 'The Thaw' afford film-makers in the Soviet Union?
- How far do films like *The Cranes are Flying* depart from the Soviet films we have studied so far in this unit both artistically and ideologically?
- Why did 'The Thaw' emerge and why did it end so quickly?

Week 7 **The Incomparable Andrei Tarkovsky**

Historical Overview

Like Sergei Eisenstein, Andrei Tarkovsky is a name which has become synonymous with Russian cinema. Although he only made seven films in his career it is hard to overestimate the importance of the Russian intellectual film-maker and film-poet. His films are at once intensely personal documents yet equally concerned with issues of national identity and history. Like many he struggled to finance his films and was often bullied and chastised by those in charge of the Soviet film industry despite his great international success and acclaim. His dissatisfaction with the Communist party and how it treated him was so profound that he fled into exile and his final two films were made abroad, first in Italy then in Sweden. He never returned home to Russia again.

Film-makers Studied

Andrei Tarkovsky's films are characterised by particular stylistic devices and thematic concerns. They are deeply spiritual texts which deviate profoundly from the norms of Soviet cinema of the time and mainstream films in general.

Reading

- Gillespie, D. (2003). *Russian Cinema*, Essex: Pearson Education Limited, pp.167-184.
- Synessios, N. (2001). *Mirror*. New York: IB Tauris.
- Johnson, V. and Petrie, G. (1994) *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press, pp. 3-26.
- Tarkovsky, A. (1987). *Sculpting in Time*, Austin: University of Texas Press, pp.57-81.
- Vasudevan, R. (1994). "Time, Memory and History in the Work of Andrei Tarkovsky," *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 2/3, (SUMMER-MONSOON 1994), pp. 163-184 (Available at JSTOR).

Key Screenings

Mirror (Tarkovsky, 1975)
Solyaris (Tarkovsky, 1972)

Supplementary Screening

Andrei Rublev (Tarkovsky, 1966)
Stalker (Tarkovsky, 1979)

Essay Questions

- What stylistic and narrative motifs define Tarkovsky's work?
- How does Tarkovsky merge personal and national histories in his films?
- Look at how Tarkovsky struggled in his career to make his films. How can we argue that the Soviet System hindered but in some ways helped artists?
- Read Tarkovsky's film theory in *Sculpting in Time*. How did he define the purpose of cinema and how can we see this reflected in the films he made?
- Choose one of Tarkovsky's films and discuss how he deviated from the conventions of Soviet film style and ideology in the era.

Week 8 **The Stagnation (1967-1982)**

Historical Overview

After the brief period of 'The Thaw' there was certainly a tightening of censorship in the Soviet Union and this period has become known as 'The Stagnation'. Despite the largely repressive atmosphere of this period some films began to more and more engage with reality and reflect the growing disenchantment with the regime. These films are somehow able to reveal what one might call 'cracks in the system' despite the film industry still being controlled entirely by the state. This period was presided over by Leonid Brezhnev who reversed many of Khrushchev's decisions and ushered in a much more conservative and regressive era which lasted until his death in 1982.

Film-makers Studied

- Alexander Askoldov directed just one film in his career as a film-maker, *The Commissar* (1967), which was regarded as so controversial by those in power that he was not allowed to direct another film and was expelled from the Communist party. The film was banned for twenty years before being allowed to be screened again in 1988 when it won multiple international prizes.
- Sergei Parajanov was a Georgian born director of poetic and expressionistic films which were very different to those desired by the state. He was imprisoned and many of his films were banned in the Soviet Union but now he is widely recognised as a cinematic genius.

Reading

- Beumers, B. (2009). *A History of Russian Cinema*, New York: Berg, pp.146-183.
- Monastireva-Ansdell, E. (2006). "Redressing the Commissar: Thaw Cinema Revises Soviet Structuring Myths," *Russian Review*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (Apr., 2006), pp. 230-249 (Available at JSTOR).
- Oeler, K. (2006). "A Collective Interior Monologue: Sergei Parajanov and Eisenstein's Joyce-Inspired Vision of Cinema," *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 101, No. 2 (Apr., 2006), pp. 472-487 (Available at JSTOR).

Key Screenings

The Commissar (Askoldov, 1967)

The Colour of Pomegranates (Parajanov, 1968)

Supplementary Screening

Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears (Menshov, 1980)

Mum Got Married (Melnikov, 1970)

Essay Questions

- What do the films screened this week reveal to us about the Brezhnev era?
- What about *The Commissar* proved so difficult for the authorities that it was banned for twenty years?
- Parajanov is regarded as a cine-poet and frequently compared to Andrei Tarkovsky our auteur from last week. What about their themes and styles connect the two film-makers?

Week 9 **Glasnost and Before (1983-1991)**

Historical Review

This week we study the ten years before the collapse of the Soviet Union and see how some films were able to reflect a growing dissatisfaction with the regime. We look at the policy of Glasnost which sought more open and transparent policies in government. Most of the films studied this week were made under Mikhail Gorbachev who ushered in an era of comparatively less censorship than there had been under Brezhnev and we see this reflected in the films produced which dare to begin to reflect on the past in much more direct ways. We conclude this week by looking at the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a regime that had lasted for more than sixty years.

Film-makers Studied

- Elem Klimov was best known for his devastatingly powerful war film *Come and See* which portrays the Second World War like none had done perhaps either before or since.
- Vassily Pichul is known for his film *Little Vera*, the most successful film in the Soviet Union in 1988. It was the first Soviet film to feature sexually explicit (for the time) scenes.

Reading

- Beumers, B. (2009). *A History of Russian Cinema*, New York: Berg, pp. 184-213.
- Horton, A. (1989), "Review," *Film Quarterly* Vol. 42, No. 4 (Summer, 1989), pp. 18-21 (Available at JSTOR).
- Menashe, L. (2001). "Buttons, Buttons, Who's Got the Workers? A Note on the (Missing) Working Class in Late- and Post-Soviet Russian Cinema" *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 59, Workers and Film: As Subject and Audience (Spring, 2001), pp. 52-59 (Available at JSTOR).

Key Screenings

Come and See (Klimov, 1985)

Little Vera (Pichul, 1988)

Supplementary Screening

Repentance (Abuladze, 1984)

My Friend Ivan Lapshin (Gherman, 1984)

Essay Questions

- *Come and See* and *The Cranes are Flying* are both about the Second World War and both were praised at the time of their release. What are the differences between the two and what do they reveal about changing attitudes to the war and what Soviet Cinema was allowed to show in the 1980s?
- Is it possible to see the films produced changing during this period? How far do they change ideologically, thematically or stylistically?
- How far are the films produced in the 1980s reflecting anxieties with the Soviet regime?
- *Little Vera* is regarded as a landmark film for its depiction of the realities of life in the Soviet Union at this time. What does it say about Soviet life in 1988?

Week 10 **Post-Soviet Russian Cinema (1992-2000)**

Historical Overview

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian cinema was thrown into a state of disarray. How could the film industry function without the support of the state? How would films find financing in an open market? This week we explore the changes which the industry underwent and the kind of films which were made in the decade after the fall of communism and how this new found freedom allowed artists to explore a much wider range of subject matters. We consider how these changes impacted on what we regard as Russian national cinema. While it is clear that the films begin to interrogate concepts of Russian identity in diverse and challenging ways as they reconcile themselves to the changing political realities, it is also true that the demands of the marketplace in Russia also have a profound effect on the type of films made which introduce another set of very powerful concerns.

Film-makers Studied

- Sergei Bodrov directed a range of important films in the post-Soviet era, films which were able to achieve critical and commercial success at home and abroad.
- Alexei Balabanov was one of a diverse range of young film-makers who emerged from this period who combined distinctly Russian themes with a love of American pop culture and film. His film *Brother* (1997) was extremely successful and entered Russian cultural history with its soundtrack and humanistic portrayal of a young hit man struggling with the realities of the post- Soviet regime.

Reading

- Beumers, B. (2009). *A History of Russian Cinema*, New York: Berg, pp. 214-241.
- Taylor, R. "Now that the Party's Over: Soviet Cinema and Its Legacy," Beumers, B (ed) (1999). *Russia on Reels*, London: I.B. Tauris pp. 24-43.
- Faraday, G. (2000). *Revolt of the Filmmakers. The Struggle for Artistic Autonomy and the Fall of the Soviet Film Industry*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, pp.159-93.
- Gaffy, J. (2000). (Review), *Sight and Sound*, vol. 10, no. 5, May 2000, p. 44.
- Hashamova, Y. (2007) "Aleksi Balabanov's Russian Hero: Fantasies of Wounded National Pride," *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 2, Special Forum Issue: Resent, Reassess, and Reinvent: The Three R's of Post-Soviet Cinema (Summer, 2007), pp. 295-311 (Available at JSTOR).

Key Screenings

Brother (Balabanov, 1998)
The Prisoner of the Mountains (Bodrov, 1996)

Supplementary Screening

Of Freaks and Men (Balabanov, 1998)
The Thief (Chukrai, 1997)

Essay Questions

- What was the impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union on the Russian film industry?
- Why could films like *Brother* and *The Thief* perhaps not have been made just ten years before?

- What does *Brat* tell us about the anxieties of post-Soviet Russia?
- How far do the films you have seen made in the post-Soviet era depart from those made before? Consider them from a variety of perspectives: thematic, ideological, stylistic and industrial.
- This transitional period for Russian cinema was a difficult one. Choose a film made in this era and discuss how it explores concepts of national identity and history.

Week 11 **New Russian Cinema: Part One – The Multiplex**

Historical Overview

This week we move into the arena of contemporary Russian cinema for the first of two lessons. Firstly, we analyse the popular Russian film blockbuster and cinema-going practices in the early 21st century. We ask the question "What does it mean to be a Russian film-maker in the new millennium?" As audiences returned to the cinemas in large numbers after having largely stayed at home for the previous decade watching pirate videos and DVDs, audiences were faced with the choice of whether to see American blockbusters or home grown Russian films. What might these Russian produced blockbusters reveal about contemporary Russian attitudes and identity? How does contemporary Russian cinema struggle to define itself with the threat from the Hollywood, and how is it connected to contemporary political realities in the Putin era? In 2012 the top ten box office successes were all films made in the US but Russian films are becoming progressively bigger and more successful.

Film-makers Studied

- Timur Bekmambetov is a writer, producer and director who has found great commercial success in Russia and also in the United States with his brand of visceral, highly stylised fantasy films like *Nightwatch* (2004) and *Wanted* (2008).
- Fedor Bondarchuk is a Russian film director, actor and producer. He is the son of famous Sergei Bondarchuk, director of *War and Peace*. Fedor has crafted an identity for himself in contemporary Russian cinema through the creation of popular blockbusters and knowledge of the tastes of the Russian public. His *9th Company* one of the biggest financial successes in Russian cinema history

Reading

- Beumers, B. (2009). *A History of Russian Cinema*, New York: Berg, pp. 256-259.
- **Beumers, B. (2003) "Soviet and Russian Blockbusters: A Question of Genre?" *Slavic Review*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (Autumn, 2003), pp. 441-454 (Available at JSTOR).**

Key Screenings

Nightwatch (Bekmambetov, 2004)
9th Company (Bondarchuk, 2005)

Supplementary Screening

Mongol (Bodrov, 2007)

Essay Questions

- How far are the Russian blockbuster films made in this period influenced by Hollywood cinema?
- Why was *9th Company* such a huge commercial success in Russia?
- Perform an analysis of Russian box office statistics in the last decade. How far have Russian films been able to fight the domination of the domestic box office by Hollywood films? Use case studies in your answer.

Week 12 **New Russian Cinema: Part Two – A Return to the Past**

Historical Overview

In the second lesson on contemporary Russian cinema we take a look at the emergence of another type of Russian film very different to the blockbusters we discussed in the previous week. These films are more influenced by the likes of Tarkovsky and Tolstoy than Tarantino and Scorsese. Many have suggested that a new wave of Russian cinema emerged in the first decade of the new millennium and the films produced certainly have achieved considerable acclaim in international film-festivals and have heralded the return of Russian cinema to international prominence. They are quintessentially Russian in their preoccupation with national identity, masculinity and spirituality. They engage in a contemplative dialogue with Russia's past in stories where character, mood and atmosphere take preference over plot and action.

Film-makers Studied

- Andrei ZvaginsteV achieved huge critical success for his cinematic debut, *The Return*, which saw him heralded as the new Tarkovsky due to his preference for poetic images and slow burning narratives.
- Alexander Sokhurov has been a major voice in Russian cinema for many decades with his unique brand of contemplative narratives. His films continue to deviate from the norms of mainstream narratives and offer compelling almost hypnotic disquisitions on identity.

Reading

- Beumers, B. (2009). *A History of Russian Cinema*, New York: Berg, pp. 247-256.
- Larsen, S. "Melodramatic masculinity, national identity and the Stalinist past in Post-Soviet cinema", *Studies in 20th Century Literature*, 24, 2000, 1, pp. 85-120 (Available at JSTOR).
- Ravetto-Biagioli, K. (2005). "Floating on the Borders of Europe: Sokurov's *Russian Ark*," *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Fall 2005), pp. 18-26 (Available at JSTOR).

Key Screenings

The Return (Zvyagintsev, 2003)

Russian Ark (Sokhurov, 2003)

Supplementary Screening

The Island (Lungin, 2006)

Koktbel (Khlebnikov and Popogrebsky, 2003)

Essay Questions

- How far do the films of this new wave of Russian cinema evoke the works of Andrei Tarkovsky?
- How might we argue that these films are quintessentially Russian?
- *The Return* is simultaneously a realistic drama and a deeply allegorical tale. What issues about contemporary Russia and its past is it attempting to explore?
- What do Alexander Sokhurov's films share with Art Cinema narratively and stylistically?

Week 13 **Women and Russian Film**

Historical Overview

For the final three weeks of the course we step out of the largely chronological structure we have followed to take a look at three topics which have been largely neglected in studies of Russian film. In the first week we consider women film-makers and the largely unsung contribution they have made to national cinema. During the Soviet era there were few opportunities for women in the film industry, even so some emerged as brilliant and distinctive film-makers. This week we take a look at two of the most notable, Kira Muratova and Larissa Shepitko.

Film-makers Studied

- Kira Muratova, like many Russian film-makers, suffered censorship when her films deviated from the party line. Despite this she won prestigious prizes in Russia through the 1990s and the 2000s.
- Larissa Shepitko directed a number of films focussing on the experience of women during the Soviet era, many of them were criticised by the regime for daring to take a critical view of contemporary Russian life. Her films *Wings* and *The Ascent* would be remarkable achievements in any national cinema and help us to recognize her as a director of rare talent and sensitivity.

Reading

- Roberts, G. (1999). "The Meaning of Death: Kira Muratova's Cinema of the Absurd." Beumers, B (ed) *Russia on Reels*, London: I.B. Tauris, pp.144-160.
- Gillespie, D. (2003). *Russian Cinema*, Pearson Education Limited, Essex "Women and Russian Film," pp.82-102
- Taubman, J. (1993). "The Cinema of Kira Muratova," *Russian Review*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (Jul., 1993), pp. 367-381 (Available at JSTOR).

Key Screenings

Wings (Shepitko, 1966)

Brief Encounters (Muratova, 1967)

Supplementary Screening

The Ascent (Shepitko, 1976)

A Bitter Taste of Freedom (Goldovskya, 2011)

Essay Questions

- Are the films of Shepitko and Muratova able to explore women's issues with greater sensitivity than the other films we have screened on this course?
- Beumers describes Muratova's films as a "cinema of the absurd". Based on the films you have seen of hers and those you have read about how far might this be true?
- Research the representation of women in the history of Russian cinema. Explore what stereotypes emerge using examples from films you have seen and consider if any films offer a deconstruction of these stereotypes.

Week 14 **Russian Comedies**

Historical Overview

It is a truism to suggest that the comedy of any nation can be revealing about its hopes and dreams, fears and anxieties. In this week we present an overview of Russian comedic films through the Soviet era into New Russian cinema and beyond. We look at how comedic films are able to reflect cultural issues through a comedic lens, but at the same time reveal many quintessential truths about Russian politics and society. Russia has a great history of comedy which has been largely ignored by the West which prefers to revel in the Cold War stereotypes of Russians as dour and serious people. This week we hope to dispel this myth with some of the most interesting comedy films ever produced in Russia and witness how they emerge as telling cultural artefacts.

Film-makers Studied

- Leonid Iovich Gaidai was one of the most popular Soviet comedy directors. His films are regarded as classics by many generations of Russians who still return to them more than twenty years after his death.
- Georgiy Daneliya made one of Russia's enduring comedy classics the parodic sci fi *Kin-dza-dza!* His 1979 film *Autumn Marathon* has become an enduring classic for Russians and shows how comedic films can be intensely revealing about issues of class and identity.
- Grigori Vasilyevich Aleksandrov or Alexandrov was a famous Soviet film director of musical comedies and the director of one of Stalin's favourite films. He was awarded the Stalin Prize twice in 1941 and 1950.

Reading

- Gillespie, D (2003) *Russian Cinema*, Pearson Education Limited, Essex "The Russian Film Comedy," pp34-58
- Lauchlan, I. (2009) "Laughter in the Dark: Humour under Stalin," in Alastair Duncan (ed.), *European Laughter* (Perpignan University Press, 2009). Available at [<https://dspace.stir.ac.uk/bitstream/1893/2730/1/laughter.pdf>]

Key Screenings

The Diamond Arm (Gaidai, 1968)

Kin-dza-dza! (Daneliya, 1986)

Autumn Marathon (Daneliya, 1979)

Supplementary Screening

Circus (Alexandrov, 1936)

Jolly Fellows (Alexandrov, 1934)

Peculiarities of Russian Hunting (Rogozhkin, 1995)

Essay Questions

- What do the comedy films you have watched and read about this week reveal about Russia?
- How do the comedy films made in the Soviet Union differ to those made after the collapse of communism?

- Watch both *Kin-dza-dza!* and *Autumn Marathon* both directed by Georgiy Daneliya. While on the surface they are very different texts what is it that connects them? What might they suggest about Russian humour and the director's particular interests?

Week 15 **Russian Cinema and Russian History**

Historical Overview

In the final week of the course we reflect on the last century and beyond and attempt to answer many questions we posed in the first week. What has been the role of the cinema in this most turbulent of centuries? Was Lenin right to regard film as the most important of all the arts? This course contends that he may well have been, but perhaps for very different reasons than he expected. The pressures on Russian directors have changed throughout the decades, where once they were forced to produce films which endorsed the state, now they must engage with the vicissitudes of the free market economy. Contemporary films engage with Russia's past in very different but just as complicated fashions. We return to perhaps the most internationally admired Russian film-maker of the last twenty years, Nikita Mikhalkov, a man who has bestrode the Russian film industry through the Soviet era and beyond.

Film-makers Studied

- Nikita Mikhalkov's father Sergei wrote lyrics to both the Soviet and Russian national anthems. Nikita made his film debut in 1974 and has enjoyed almost unprecedented critical and commercial success at home and abroad. His film *The Barber of Siberia* which we study this week was one of the most expensive Russian films ever made and presents with us a startling document concerning Russian identity and its cultural heritage. Mikhalkov is a tremendously influential figure in the Russian film industry even now thirty years after his debut. He was President of the Russian Society of Cinematographers and was once rumoured to have had presidential ambitions
- Sergei Bondarchuk, was the youngest Soviet actor ever to receive the People's Artist of the USSR. He became one of Soviet Union's most high profile and favoured directors. He directed the epic adaptation of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* which took more than five years to make.

Reading

- Gillespie, D (2003) *Russian Cinema*, Essex: Pearson Education Limited, pp.59-81.
- Baraban, E. (2007). "The Fate of a Man by Sergei Bondarchuk and the Soviet Cinema of Trauma," *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (Fall, 2007), pp. 514-534 (Available at JSTOR).
- Hashamova, Y. (2006) "Two Visions of a Usable Past in (Op)position to the West: Mikhalkov's *The Barber of Siberia* and Sokurov's *Russian Ark*," *Russian Review*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (Apr., 2006), pp. 250-266 (Available at JSTOR).

Key Screenings

The Barber of Siberia (Mikhalkov, 1998)
The Fate of a Man (Bondarchuk, ?)

Supplementary Screening

The Admiral (Kravchuk, 2008)
War and Peace (Bondarchuk, 1966-67)

Essay Questions

- How important has film been as a cultural artefact in reflecting Russian culture in the last one hundred years?
- Consider the work of Nikita Mikhalkov. Why has he become the face of Russian cinema for the last twenty years? And what is his very particular vision of Russian history and culture?
- What vision of the past does *The Barber of Siberia* offer both contemporary Russian and non-Russian audiences?
- *War and Peace* is one of many film adaptations of great Russian works of literature. Choose one Russian film that you have seen based on a classic novel and explore a) how the themes of the film are connected to both the original novel and the era in which the film was produced, AND b) the changes undergone in the adaptation from novel to film.