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FILM 308.80: Russian Cinema and Culture

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Russian Cinema and Culture
FILM 308
Mon and Wed, 2-4:20pm, NAC 009

Office Hours: M 10-11am, 12-1pm and by appointment in LA 330

Russian Cinema and Culture

LEARNING OUTCOMES and OBJECTIVES:

This course provides students with a thematic-centered introduction to Russian and Soviet Cinema. Rather than organizing the material chronologically, I have opted to arrange the films in thematic clusters. Thematic units include: Responses to Stalinism in Russian Cinema; Identity and Otherness in Russian Cinema; Women, Gender, and Sexuality in Russian Cinema; Exploring Genres in Russian Cinema. Within each thematic unit, the films are arranged chronologically to allow us to trace the progression of the theme and its exploration and depiction via the cinematic medium in various cultural epochs. My main learning objective in this class is thus twofold: to acquaint you with several thematic clusters that play a major role in the development of Russian cinema; to provide you with enough cultural background to enable you to appreciate more fully how the exploration of these themes evolved and changed through various historical and cultural periods. In addition, students in the class will come to understand more fully the crucial ties between the evolution of form and content in specific cultural and historical epochs. Students will likewise learn the substantial role that cultural and historical knowledge can provide in enriching one's appreciation of foreign cinema. Cultural knowledge will thus help frame and augment our arguments in analytical papers. Although this class is not a writing course per se, we will also work on strategies for structuring and supporting arguments in analytical papers and of course on productive ways to polish our writing.

Students taking this class will:

- 1) develop greater proficiency in writing about, analyzing and discussing Russian cinema in the style of the discipline;
- 2) learn to select and apply various research methods and theoretical approaches to explore specific questions pertaining to Russian and Soviet cinema;
- 3) acquire a foundational understanding of several key phases in the development of Russian and Soviet cinema;
- 4) acquire basic familiarity with key genres important in the development of Russian and Soviet cinema;
- 5) learn to use various theoretical frameworks and methods of close analysis effectively to interpret Russian cinema in vastly different historical and cultural periods;
- 6) develop the ability to compare and contrast how key themes in Russian and Soviet cinema are reflected and explored in different historical and cultural periods.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:

- Regular class attendance and active participation in class discussions!! Yes, attendance in this class WILL count towards your final grade. You are allowed three unexcused absences without adversely affecting your grade. Responsibility for making up any missed screenings lies with the student, not the instructor. All films but one will be shown in class and will be followed by discussion. My personal copies are generally NOT for loan, so plan accordingly. Be aware that this class meets for 2 hours 20 minutes and may go over a few times during the semester. I will make every effort to end some of the classes early to compensate for any that do go over. Furthermore, as compensation for the extended class meeting times, there is considerably less homework than in a typical 300-level course.
- Timely reading of any assignments from the coursepack. I may also distribute handouts from time to time to help you get more out of the films.
- Two response papers (3-4 pages, typed and double-spaced)
- One in-class response paper on «Exploring Genres in Russian Cinema»
- One 8-10 page paper* (with a minimum of two outside sources)

DHC (Honor's College) ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS:

In addition to the GENERAL REQUIREMENTS listed above, students taking the course for DHC Honors credit are required to sign up to introduce one of the feature-length films or one animated film for one class period (either individually or in groups, depending on the number of DHC students enrolled in the course). Each class presentation will: 1) introduce the film assigned for the day; 2) familiarize the class with one key secondary source or piece of scholarship related to the assigned film; 3) lead part of class discussion during the discussion day when that film is set to be discussed in more depth (see the syllabus for class discussion days, which are organized according to thematic clusters). As part of preparation for leading part of class discussion, DHC students are expected to meet with the instructor during an office hour one week prior to the date of the presentation in order to go over expectations.

Finally, within a period of one week after making this presentation, DHC students are expected to turn in a two-page typed self-evaluation of their presentation exercise. The evaluation should address three main questions: 1) what did you learn from this presentation experience? 2) what do you feel you did especially well? 3) where do you feel you could improve in future presentations of material and/or in acting as a facilitator of classroom discussion?

RECOMMENDED SUPPLEMENTARY TEXT to consult (but NOT required):

A History of Russian Cinema by Birgit Beumers (2009)

REQUIRED CLASS MATERIALS: Four DVDs & a coursepack (available from your instructor)

GRADING:

30% Regular Attendance and Class Participation (including any in-class writing and your level of participation during class discussion days)

30% Two Short Response Papers (3-4 pages, typed and double-spaced)

40% Long Paper* (8-10 pages)

*An outline and bibliography will constitute 10% of your grade for the long paper.

GRADING SCALE

A = 93-100	C+ = 78-79	F = 63 and below
A- = 90-92	C = 73-77	
B+ = 88-89	C- = 70-72	
B = 83-87	D+ = 68-69	
B- = 80-82	D = 64-67	

PAPER GUIDELINES for the 3-4 pp. Short Response Papers and the LONG PAPER:

All papers should be done on a computer. Respect your work—give each paper a title and include your name and the date! Use a standard 12 point font and double-space. Proofread assignments for typos, poor wording, mechanics, etc. Late work will be penalized one letter grade per day except in the case of an emergency. Plagiarism will not be tolerated in any form. Please ask if you have a question about what constitutes plagiarism, but on the whole, if you consult another work for ideas, copy or paraphrase from another source, etc., then you need to acknowledge the source (including the work you consulted, the publication information, and the page number/s) in your paper with a footnote.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE:

It is essential to the learning process that students treat each other and the instructor with respect. Under the Student Conduct Code, students who are found to be disruptive may be asked to leave the classroom. Disruptive behaviors may include but are not limited to:

- Using electronic communication devices, including cell phones and laptops for purposes unrelated to ongoing class activities.
- Carrying on side conversations that are distracting to the instructor and other students.
- Verbally interrupting the class with comments or questions not relevant to the course or to the current discussion.
- Failure to participate in assigned group activities.
- Significantly interfering with instructor's work activities during or outside of class.

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance and you have not already registered with DSS, please contact DSS in Lommasson 154. I will be glad to work with you and DSS to provide an appropriate accommodation.

Syllabus

August

Mon 27 Introduction, Discussion of Syllabus, Course Overview
The Russian Revolution and the Era of Experiment (1920s)

Learning from the Masters: Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Vertov

Battleship Potemkin (1925), ***October*** (1927), ***The End of St. Petersburg*** (1927),
Man with a Movie Camera (1929)

[We will watch a few fragments and discuss them.]

Film Theory and the Semiotics of Culture

Analysis of an Animated Short: ***Mountain of Dinosaurs***
(The Importance of Cultural Context for Analyzing Cinema)

Wed 29 Intro to Soviet Culture: What was the USSR & why is it still with us?
Anna from 6-18 (Nikita Mikhalkov)

September

Mon 3 **LABOR DAY – No Class**

Wed 5 Shift Toward State Control of Cinema: Film as Propaganda (1930s-1950)
The Great Soviet Family & the Soviet Musical: **Circus** (G. Aleksandrov, 1936)
Ivan the Terrible (Sergei Eisenstein; Part I, 1944; Part II, 1958)
Stalin and the Personality Cult: **Fall of Berlin** (Mikhail Chiaureli, 1950)

[We will watch a few fragments and discuss them]

Responses to Stalinism: Families, Fathers and Fear

Mon 10 Post-Stalin Era and The Thaw: **Ballad of a Soldier** (Grigory Chukhrai, 1959)

Wed 12 Treating a National Epidemic: What is the Best Medicine for a Sick Psyche?
Laughter & Lunacy in the 1960s: **Prisoner of the Caucasus** (L. Gaidai, 1967)

Mon 17 **Burnt by the Sun** (Cannes Grand Prix, 1994; Oscar - Best Foreign Film, 1994)

Wed 19 Conmen and False Fathers: **The Thief** (Pavel Chukhrai, 1997)
NB -- Directed by the son of Grigory Chukhrai (director of *Ballad of a Soldier*)

Mon 24 General Discussion of the Films and Readings: Responses to Stalinism

HW: **RESPONSE PAPER ONE is due in class** on Wed, Sept 26 (see below)

Response Paper Topic: Write a 3-4 pp. response paper (typed) on the topic:

***Burnt by the Sun* OR *The Thief* as a Response to Stalinism**

(choose only 1 film and analyze it in detail as a cinematic response to Stalinism)

Wed 26 **Response Paper ONE Due today at the start of class!**

Special Class Devoted to the Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky
The Steamroller and the Violin (1961) and excerpts from several films
[possibly ***Andrei Rublev*** (1973), ***The Mirror*** (1975), ***Stalker*** (1979)]

October

Identity and “Otherness” in Russian and Soviet Cinema

Mon 1 Identity & Otherness in the Soviet 1960s: **Diamond Arm** (Leonid Gaidai, 1968)

Wed 3 Identity and Otherness in the Early 1990s: **Window to Paris** (Yuri Mamin, 1993)

Mon 8 Identity and Otherness in the Late 1990s: **Brother** (A. Balabanov, 1997)

Wed 10 Identity and Otherness in Russian History: **Russian Ark** (Alek. Sokurov, 2002)

Mon 15 Identity and Otherness in Putin's Russia: **The Italian** (Andrei Kravchuk, 2006)

Note that Response Paper Two is due in class on Mon, Oct 22 (see below)

Wed 17 General Discussion of the Films: Identity and Otherness

Response Paper TWO Due Mon Oct 22 Write your paper (3-4 pp) on the topic:

Identity and Otherness in Window to Paris, Brother, Russian Ark, or The Italian
(Choose only 1 film and analyze the theme of personal and national identity.
You may also want to consider the themes of "otherness" and/or alienation.)

Mon 22 **RESPONSE PAPER TWO due today in class!!**

Special Class Devoted to Russian and Soviet Animated Film

- 1) **Animated Soviet Propaganda**
- 2) **Hedgehog in the Fog OR Tale of Tales by Yuri Norstein**
- 3) **Cheburashka**
- 4) **We Can't Live Without Cosmos**

Women, Gender and Sexuality in Russian Cinema

Wed 24 Sex, Gender and the Russian Revolution: **The Commissar** (A. Askoldov, 1967; the film was first released in the USSR in 1988 under the policy of *glasnost*)

Mon 29 Women, Sex and Gender in Post-Yeltsin Russia: **Mars** (Anna Melikyan, 2004)

Wed 31 Moscow as the Land Where Wishes Come True: **Mermaid** (A. Melikyan, 2007)

November

Mon 5 General Discussion of the Films: Women, Gender and Sexuality

NOTE: HW for next class – You should prepare a rough 1-2 page **OUTLINE** of your long paper for the next class (on Wed, Nov. 7).

Exploring Genres in Russian Cinema

Wed 7 **LONG PAPER OUTLINES** due today in class!

Screen and Discuss **City Zero** (K. Shakhnazarov, 1988) in class

NOTE: HW for next class on Wed, Nov 14 – You are required to watch the cult film classic **The Testament of Professor Dowell** on DVD on your own before the next class. We will use class time to discuss the film and sci-fi as a genre in Russian and Soviet cinema.

Mon 12 **VETERAN'S DAY - No Class**

Wed 14 Brief discussion of **The Testament of Professor Dowell** (L. Menaker, 1984)
Set up and begin watching **12** (Nikita Mikhalkov, 2007) in class.

Mon 19 Finish **12** (N. Mikhalkov, 2007) in class and discuss briefly

Wed 21 **THANKSGIVING BREAK**

Mon 26 **Piter FM** (Oksana Bychkova, 2006) in class

Wed 28 **Loveless** (Andrey Zvyaginstev, 2017) and discuss briefly.

NOTE: HW for next class – Sometime over the weekend you may want to watch the film **Spiderman** with Tobey Maquire and Kirsten Dunst, but this is not required for the class. We will discuss *Spiderman* and superhero flicks in relation to our last film of the semester, *Black Lightning*, which we will watch in class on Monday, Dec 3.

December

Mon 3 Russia Goes Superhero: **Black Lightning** (Timur Bekmambetov, 2009)
Discussion of the Russian adaptation of the superhero genre and
the success of Timur Bekmambetov as an internationally recognized filmmaker

Wed 5 Course Wrap-up

**Long Paper (8-10 pp.) Due on Tues., Dec. 11
at 5pm in LA 330**

