REES-0280-401/ CIMS-2501-401: Andrei Tarkovsky: Cinema, Spirit, and the Art of the Long Take

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Course Description:

Andrei Tarkovsky is universally acknowledged to be the greatest Soviet filmmaker of the last half of the twentieth century. Kurosawa claimed that Tarkovsky had "no equal among film directors alive now." Bergman called his work "a miracle." His films are beautiful, intellectually challenging, and spiritually profound. They also represent a prolonged exploration of the potential of the long take — unusually extended, continuous shots. Tarkovsky's works range from *Ivan's Childhood*, a study of wartime experience through the eyes of a child; to *Solaris*, a philosophical essay in the form of a science-fiction thriller; to *Andrei Rublev*, an investigation of the power of art and spirituality. In this course, we will study Tarkovsky's films and life, with attention to his formal and artistic accomplishments, his thought and writings, and the cultural and political contexts of his work. Each student will learn to analyze film form and content and write two short papers and one longer paper on some longstanding aspect of Tarkovsky's work of the student's choice.

"Andrei Tarkovsky: Cinema, Spirit, and the Art of the Long Take" is a Benjamin Franklin Seminar, cross-listed between the Russian and East European Studies Department and the Cinema Studies Program. Tarkovsky's films are beautiful and profound works of art, yet for this reason, they demand a patient, contemplative attention from the viewer. We will also read a number of complex works of cultural theory and philosophy, which will require careful study. Do not come to our readings or films expecting to be passively entertained. Instead, expect to be challenged, but also uplifted and inspired. No prior knowledge of Russian or Soviet history, culture or society is required, nor is specialized knowledge of film history or film analysis. However, the course is designed for students with well-developed analytical and writing skills, in general. If you are not confident in your abilities in these areas, this course may not be right for you. All readings will be in English and all films will be subtitled in English.

Course Materials:

Textbooks to Purchase (many other texts will be provided as pdfs):

Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).

Stanislaw Lem, *Solaris* (New York: Harcourt, 1970).

This course has two primary learning goals:

1) To study and critically assess the films of Andrei Tarkovsky, in their social historical and philosophical context.

2) To analyze and write about film as a means to hone critical thinking, writing, and speaking skills. These skills are portable: they will be useful to you in the future in any analytical undertaking.

General Procedures and Policies:

Class Attendance:

All class meetings are mandatory, and they will not be recorded. Please arrive promptly class meetings. If class conflicts with a religious holiday, please let me know and you will be excused. More than three unexplained absences will affect your final grade, taking it down a grading notch for each additional missed session (from A to A-, from A- to B+, etc.).

However, I understand that everyone may face unexpected challenges and complexities. If some turn of events makes it impossible for you to attend class for a full week (or more), you should communicate, preferably prior to the relevant classes, with the instructor. You will be excused from class attendance for those sessions, and will instead be responsible:

- To complete the Panopto assignments for any film(s) you miss, adding at least five extensive comments to each of the five clips (a total of 25 comments).
- Either to write a two-page (minimum 600 words) informal reflection, responding to the assigned materials of the week;
- Or to create a 10-minute video podcast accomplishing the same task.
- These reflections, whether written or recorded, will be due on the Sunday of the relevant week at 10pm.
- The instructor will provide comments on reflections, but will not assign grades to them. Because this exercise is in lieu of class participation, it will be taken into account in assigning participation grades (see below).

Readings, Viewings, Lectures, and Assessments:

Preparation for each class will include readings and/or screenings. You should read and view these materials intensively, whatever this means for you personally: make annotations, note down questions, stop and ask yourself "What did I just see/read and what does it mean?" Come to class with clear ideas about what you understand, and formulated questions about what you do not. For the first two class meetings devoted to each film you are required to complete Panopto assignments in which you and your peers will exchange comments on the formal features of a short clip from the film and on the functions and meanings of those features. In class, you will have the opportunity to present your ideas about the clip to the class as a whole.

Discussions:

In class, we will discuss the assigned materials. Classes will last 85 minutes. Note that participation in discussions is important for your grades (see **Grading** below). Additionally, part of some class days will be devoted to informal presentation and discussion of one or two student essays (see below)—each student will present one essay in the course of the semester.

Course Work:

In addition to the Panopto assignments, participants in the course will generate one very short close-analysis paper, two slightly longer analytical essays, an oral presentation based on one of these essays, and a longer final paper, in part derived from these earlier assignments, due on the last day of classes. All of your papers should be double-spaced, in 12-pt. font, with one-inch margins on all sides, and submitted electronically in Word (or .rtf) via the Canvas utility (not via email).

Ivan's Childhood **Close Analysis Assignment**—The first paper is a three-page (900-1000 words) close analysis of a short sequence that we will choose together from Tarkovsky's first feature-length film, *Ivan's Childhood*. This assignment will allow you to hone your film analysis skills. It will be due at the end of the third full week of the semester.

Analytic Essays #1 and #2—These two short papers are four-page (1200-1300 words) analytical responses to any two of Tarkovsky's major films. In our discussions, we will be generating a list of key terms and topics of perennial interest for Tarkovsky. Each student will focus their essays on one or two terms, with the aim of sustaining a degree of continuity in their writing over the course of the semester (although if you wish to switch, modify or add to your topic, this will be fine). Each essay should take one or at most two concrete examples, in the form of short sequences from the films, and analyze them closely and in terms of their filmic qualities—i.e., these are not to be loose essays about the plot or the characters alone (although you can discuss these elements of the film).

Final Paper—The final exercise is an eight-page (2400 words, minimum) analytical essay in which you will draw on, rewrite and revise your thinking from your previous papers into a single work. Your paper can take the form either of a discussion of the development of a specific trope or concern over the course of Tarkovsky's career, or a more focused analytical comparison of two or three films.

Oral Presentation—Each student will make an informal presentation and discussion of one of the two analytic essays in the course of the semester. Your presentation should include a demonstration of the sequences you analyze, with the addition of a 10-minutes explanation of your analysis. Each student should coordinate with the instructor about the timing of their presentation.

Grading:

Your final grade will be calculated according to the following weights:
- o Participation: 20%
- o VoiceThread Assignments: 10%
- o Ivan's Childhood Close Analysis Assignment: 10%
- o Analytical Essay #1: 15%
- o Analytical Essay #2: 15%
- o Oral Presentation: 10%
- o Final Paper: 20%

Note that all grades will be recorded as percentages. Regardless of the Canvas grade calculation matrix, in converting from percentage to letter grades at the end of the semester I will count: 80% and higher as B-; 83.6% and higher as B; 87.6% and higher as B+; 93.6% and higher as A; and 98% and higher as A+ (the 60% and 70% ranges work on the analogy of the 80% range).

Late work will lose grade points. If you extenuating circumstances make it impossible for you to submit work on time, it is important to communicate with the instructor about this before the deadline and secure an extension, if this is appropriate.

Note on Participation Grading:

One third of the way through the semester, two thirds of the way through, and after the end of the semester you will receive a grade for class participation. The first of these grades you will assign to yourself, and I will report to you what grade I would have assigned had it been my decision. The second grade will be the average of a grade assigned by you and one assigned by the instructor. And I will decide on the last participation grade at the end of the semester. The final grade for participation will be the average of these three marks.