The course introduces students to the history and poetics of Soviet and Russian film. The history of communist and post-communist Russia is unthinkable without film. Moreover, the aesthetics and the theoretical contributions of Russian film shaped the visual language of 20th-century film worldwide. We will be watching popular classics as well as acclaimed masterpieces of Russian film in order to engage questions of history, theory, and aesthetics within broader cultural currents. Historical themes to be engaged include: Soviet revolutionary culture, film theory, and propaganda (Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Vsevolod Pudovkin); the Stalin era and the meaning of entertainment (“Soviet Hollywood”) in a socialist society; film as carrier of, as well as a form of critical engagement with, the Stalin cult (starting with Eisenstein’s *Ivan the Terrible*); and the subject of war, from WWII documentaries like *Stalingrad* to complex postwar treatments, such as *Ballad of a Soldier*, *The Cranes are Flying*. Turning to popular classics of the 1960s and 1970s we will seek to understand which films moved Soviet audiences, and how they did so. By considering Andrei Tarkovsky’s film *Stalker*, we will also deal with the creative language and possibilities of film in a setting which, unlike Hollywood, ranked commercial interests far below political and philosophical aims. Film was instrumental in cementing Communist Russia, but the bold and critical visual language of film during Gorbachev’s perestroika also helped to bring down the Soviet order. Russian filmmakers continue to produce remarkable aesthetic and philosophical commentaries to this day, as several films concluding the class will show (*Brother 2, Island*).

No prior knowledge of modern Russian or Soviet history, film theory, or film history is required. Requirements: attendance of all film screenings and discussion sections; extensive reading, focusing on Russian/Soviet cultural history, film history, and film theory; three short papers (3 pages each) and a final paper (10 pages); in-class presentations.