

Nancy Condee, Alexander Prokhorov, and Elena Prokhorova, eds.,
Cinemasaurus: Russian Film in Contemporary Context (Film and Media Studies)
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An edited volume of essays, *Cinemasaurus* discusses post-Soviet Russian cinema from a variety of perspectives. As the editors state in the introduction, the collection is derived from three major platforms: the Kinotavr Film Festival (the title of the volume is an analog of the name of the festival), the online journal KinoKultura, and the Pittsburgh Russian Film Symposium. The Kinotavr Film Festival, which is the world's largest regional film festival, has been in existence since 1989 (However, this year, 2022, the festival was cancelled due to the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian forces); KinoKultura, launched in 2003, provides information on Kinotavr; and the Pittsburgh Russian Film Symposium, which has existed for over 20 years, brings various scholars together to exchange ideas. In this context, *Cinemasaurus* is one pleasing outcome of and a valuable new addition to these interconnected undertakings. Their dynamism is conveyed through the interviews with festival organizers, journal editors, and symposium founders included in Part 5, at the end of the volume. The book, which includes authors of diverse ages, proves that the inheritance and development of long-standing research activities on "contemporary" Russian cinema has been realized in an ideal way.

The book consists of five parts. Apart from Part 5, which comprises the interviews and a timeline titled "Kino-Grafik," Parts 1 to 4 open with framing essays by senior researchers, and the essays that follow are written by 12 young researchers with unique perspectives, the former contextualizing the latter.

Part 1, titled "Borders of Imperial Desire," depicts the expansion, collapse, instability, and permanence of the "empire" and discusses the characteristics of contemporary Russian cinema that capture the contradictions arising from such spatial and temporal processes. Olga Kim discusses Vadim Abdrashitov's *Time of the Dancer* (1997), Aleksandr Veledinskii's *Alive* (2006), and Andrei Zviagintsev's *Leviathan* (2014), and demonstrates the alienation of the individual in the house/home, revealing the problems of the individual's ruination and the state's expansion of power. Justin Wilmes analyzes the tendency toward neo-imperialism in recent ("Putin-era") Russian cinema through Fedor Bondarchuk's *Stalingrad* (2013), Andrei Kravchuk's *Viking* (2016), and Roman Prygunov's *Dukhless* duology (2012/2015). Ellina Sattarova uses two films featuring silence, Dmitrii Mamuliia's *Another Sky* (2010) and Aleksandr Kott's *The Test* (2014), to examine the convergence of imperial and biopolitical narratives in cinema and highlight the problems involved.

Part 2, "Hilarity and Horror," examines neo-noir films in Russia, which pessimistically objectify Soviet collectivity through violence and comedy, and discusses several films from the perspective of the individual and the state in the post-Soviet era. Using the term "social thriller" as a key, Daria Ezerova focuses on Aleksei Balabanov's *Cargo 200* (2007) and Vasilii Sigarev's *The Land of Oz* (2015), describing the "monster within" (a social issue, a sentiment, or an ideology) that they mirror and highlighting historical transformations. Robert Crane picks out contemporary Russian films that can be described as "eccentric," including Ivan Vyrypaev's *Oxygen* (2000) and Sergei Loban's *Chapiteau Show* (2011), and interprets the unique position of these films, independent of the prevailing trends in Russian filmmaking, and their challenge to the relation-

ship between cinema as medium and reality. Considering Petr Buslov's *Bimmer* (2003), Aleksei Uchitel's *Break Loose* (2013), and others, Danis Saltykov interprets their representations of violence as communication.

Part 3, "Evropsk or Russia?" discusses the uncertain Russian identity in post-Soviet cinema that carries Otherness within itself. Using the concept of the heartland, Zhanna Budenkova highlights the use of documentary elements in post-Soviet cinema and the instability of imperial representations that appear in depictions of "internal colonization." Taking up Iurii Mamin's *Window to Paris* (1993), Aleksandr Rogozhkin's *Peculiarities of the National Hunt* (1995), and others, Tatyana Shlikhar discusses the dynamics and evolution of Russian imperial imaginaries in post-Soviet cinema from a geopolitical perspective. Trevor Wilson uses works such as Olga Stolpovskaia and Dmitrii Troitskii's *You I Love* (2004) and Feliks Mikhailov's *Jolly Fellows* (2009) to discuss Otherness in Russia in relation to LGBTQ issues in film.

The title of Part 4, "The Ideological Occult," is an allusion to the "moral occult" used in Peter Brooks's *The Melodramatic Imagination*. This expression of desire for the lost highlights how the state is trying to reconstruct features of the official ideology (such as, patriarchy) that were lost in post-Soviet Russia. Theodora Trimble focuses on two film clusters—sports films and disaster films (or what she calls emergency films)—and highlights the patriarchal lineage reproduced in state-sponsored contemporary Russian cinema. In terms of auteurism, Olga Mukhortova focuses on Mikhalkov and Bekmambetov as auteurs in the new market-driven Russia, noting how they superimpose their ideology on that of the Russian state in the "neo-imperial" era. Through the *Elki* series of films, Beach Gray painstakingly illustrates how state-funded contemporary Russian cinema contributed to the formation of the nation's self-image as the New Russia.

By reading this book, it is possible to realize how enormous the image of "state/empire" is in contemporary Russian cinema. The authors of each essay are also sincere in confronting this enormity. In addition, it demonstrates the fruitful acceptance of post-Soviet Russian cinema in the Anglophone world. Above all, this volume is a fruit of the continuous accumulation of academic activities and education with regard to the film industry.

Contemporary Russia (like the rest of the world) faces numerous contradictions. We need to continue dialog with *Cinemasaurus*, which presents such contradictions without simple solutions.

MASARU ITO