

Friday, October 3

Decentring the Archive

eikones, Rheinsprung 11, 4051 Basel

11:00–11.30

Opening

11:30–12:00

Introduction

Olexii Kuchanskyi, Clea Wanner, Philip Widmann

12:00–13.30

Session One

Carolien Damiens

Far from Moscow: relocating and indigenizing Soviet cinema history

Nino Dzandzava

Tracing the Archives of Mikheil Chiaureli

Moderation: Clea Wanner

13.30–15:00

Lunch

15:00–16:30

Session Two

Oksana Sarkisova

Cine/Map Rules: Revisiting Early Soviet Travelogues

Matthew Vollgraff

Antireligious Propaganda and the Ethnographic Museum in Soviet Cinema, 1928–1932

Moderation: Olexii Kuchanskyi

Saturday, October 4

Reapproaching the Archive

eikones, Rheinsprung 11, 4051 Basel

10:00–11:30

Session Three

Philip Widmann

Methods of Intervention

11:30–12:00

Coffee Break

12:00–13:30

Session Four

Boško Prostran (Doplgenger)

What are these old rags still good for?

13:30–14:30

Lunch

14.30–15:30

Closing Discussion

Decentring the Archive: Screenings and Conversations

neues kino, Klybeckstrasse 247, 4057 Basel

17:30–19:00

Where Russia Ends, Oleksiy Radynski, UA 2024, 25', OV/en

Whose Voice is This?, Dana Iskakova, GER/UZB 2024, 14', OV/en
with Dana Iskakova, Lyuba Knorozok and Olexii Kuchanskyi

19:30–20:30

Miraculous Accident, Assaf Gruber, DE/AT 2025, 29', OV/en
with Assaf Gruber and Philip Widmann

Caroline Damiens

Far from Moscow: relocating and indigenizing Soviet cinema history

This paper delves into the notion of cinefication and its historical and epistemological dimensions through the case of travelling cinema and Indigenous projectionists in Soviet Siberia, with a particular focus on Sakha (Yakutia). Mobile cinema was the main form of film screening in rural areas during the Soviet era, and itinerant projectionists were among the most numerous workers of cinefication. More often than not considered a mere piece of machinery, their input is vastly ignored in scholarly historical accounts. Yet, as narrated in the short film *Cinema Has Arrived!* (Kiine kelle, 2017), they were active and vital agents of cinema circulation and dissemination, and must be taken into account in order to write a pluricultural history of Soviet screen culture. This paper seeks to investigate in which ways the study of cinefication can contribute to decentre, relocate and indigenise Soviet cinema history.

Caroline Damiens is an associate professor in film studies at the University of Paris Nanterre. She is the author of the monograph *Fabriquer la Sibérie soviétique à l'écran: Une histoire filmique des peuples autochtones du Nord* (2023), *A Siberian History of Soviet Film: Manufacturing Visions of the Indigenous Peoples of the North* (2024). She edited the volume *Ciné-expéditions: Une zone de contact cinématographique* (2022) and co-edited (with Csaba Mészáros) the *KinoKultura* special issue on Sakha (Yakutia) cinema (2022). Her current work looks at itinerant cinema in Soviet Siberia and in rural France in the mid-twentieth century.

Nino Dzandzava

Tracing the Archives of Mikheil Chiaureli

Mikheil Chiaureli, a distinguished director in Soviet cinema, whose films are recognised for aligning with the ideological and aesthetic directives of Stalin's regime, was one of the Georgian filmmakers whose works generated the most discussion in the Soviet press. However, his contributions to the development of Soviet film have yet to be thoroughly analysed by scholars. In the process of reassessing Chiaureli's legacy, the archives accumulated around his productions play a crucial role.

Focusing on "peripheral" archives, the presentation will suggest a closer look at the rich archival material collected in Tbilisi. Archives kept in Georgia are often unappreciated and / or understudied among scholars examining Soviet film histories. By exploring a broad range of primary sources related to Chiaureli's film *The Vow* (1946), the presentation will showcase the importance of grounding research in previously unexplored paper archives—an approach that enriches the theoretical framework and allows for a deeper analysis of films within their broader socio-political context.

Nino Dzandzava is a researcher specialising in film and early photography as well as an artist. Her scholarly interests focus on the history of Georgian cinema and photography, as well as Georgia's colonial visual cultural legacy. After acquiring both theoretical and practical knowledge in film conservation at the L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation in Rochester, New York, she has centred her research on primary source materials, including paper collections, film, video, printed media, and photographs. Nino has undertaken several film preservation and publication projects and is the author and editor of several books. She is currently pursuing a doctoral degree at the University of Potsdam, with a thesis focusing on the legacy of Mikheil Chiaureli. Her mixed-media works are rooted in research and often combine personal experiences with cultural and political contexts and issues of memory politics.

Matthew Vollgraff

Antireligious Propaganda and the Ethnographic Museum in Soviet Cinema, 1928–1932

The brief “Gods” sequence in Sergei Eisenstein’s *October* (1928) is often cited as “the locus classicus of Eisenstein’s ‘intellectual cinema’” (Annette Michelson). Rapidly cross-cutting shots of Orthodox Christian icons with religious artifacts from Asia, Africa, and Oceania, the sequence constructs a comparative visual argument aimed at undermining the concept of “god” and equating religious belief as such with fetishism. While film scholars have long discussed this montage as ideological indoctrination or “film as philosophy,” they have largely taken Eisenstein’s own framing of the scene—and attributions of the artifacts—at face value.

This paper shifts the focus from formalist readings to the neglected material history of the objects onscreen, which have never been systematically identified until now. Nearly all of these artifacts still reside in the Museums of Anthropology and Ethnology in St. Petersburg, where they were originally filmed *in situ*. Few can be called ‘gods’ or ‘idols’ without serious qualification. The sequence’s visual logic reproduces the evolutionist frameworks of early Soviet anthropology and museology that enabled such cross-cultural equivalences and their antireligious application. Restored to their historical and cultural contexts, these sculptures emerge not merely as semiotic ciphers or ideological props, but as testimonies to ongoing processes of colonization and cultural dispossession at the margins of Soviet empire.

By recentring the material artifacts, the paper recovers other forgotten legacies of Eisenstein’s experiment in “comparative idolatry.” Not only was footage excised from *October* later repurposed in several (now-scarce) antireligious compilation films of the late 1920s and early 1930s; Eisenstein’s montage also prefigures the comparative displays of new atheist museums—most notably the Museum of the History of Religion and Atheism in Leningrad, which would come to house some of the very same objects he filmed. Circulating between the movie-house and the museum, these ethnographic artifacts continued to manifest silenced histories and Indigenous presences that unsettled both the narratives of militant atheism and the Soviet state’s avowed commitments to internationalism and universalism.

Matthew Vollgraff is Senior Research Fellow in the History of Art at the University of California, Berkeley, where he is a core collaborator on the Depicted Worlds Project. From 2023–2024 he was a NOMIS Fellow at eikones—Center for the Theory and History of the Image, University of Basel. He is the author of two forthcoming books: *The Imperial Childhood of World Art* (Bard Graduate Center) and *The Science of Expression: Gesture and Knowledge in German Modernity* (Zone Books).

Oksana Sarkisova

Cine/Map Rules: Revisiting Early Soviet Travelogues

Cinema empowered the human desire to visually explore the world with new technical and conceptual capabilities. By the 1910s, films featuring distant lands and peoples were a standard element of composite programmes distributed by all major film companies. Travel films were often seen by the makers and viewers as edifying, stirred by the urgency of capturing on film the “disappearing” cultures and practices. But along with an intention of “capturing” and “preserving” cultures and communities, travelogues helped to unleash phantasies and nourished the illusion of knowing. Furthermore, they created a powerful sense of immersion, supported by the indexical nature of cinematic records. These films can thus be seen as an ambiguous tool of governability which, as David Henry Slavin put it, “reinforced the machinery of cultural hegemony, non-coercive social control, and the underlying politics of privilege.” The idea of exploring and mapping the world by cinematic means constructed and naturalized both territorial boundaries and ideological discourses that underlie them.

From the 1920s, new, state-controlled film studios commissioned filmmakers to make travelogues about various parts of the Soviet Union, calling for developing new, “ideologically correct” ways of filming the culturally heterogeneous state. The resulting films relied on the mapping, structuring, and appropriating capacity of cinema. My presentation will explore several examples in which the use of graphic maps as well as a strategy of cultural “mapping” by cinematic means mutually reinforce each other and discusses how these strategies make cinematographic recordings an instrument of epistemic control.

Oksana Sarkisova is Senior Research Fellow at Blinken OSA Archivum at Central European University and co-founder and Steering Committee member of [Visual Studies Platform](#). Her fields of research are cultural and visual history, experimental cinema and the use of found footage, memory and representation, film history, and amateur photography. She authored *[In Visible Presence: Soviet Afterlives in Family Photos](#)* (with Olga Shevchenko, 2023), *[Screening Soviet Nationalities: Kulturfilms from the Far North to Central Asia](#)* (2017), co-edited *[Past for the Eyes: East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989](#)* (2008), and has published on film history, nationality politics, contemporary Russian and Eastern European cinema, and amateur photography. She currently participates as co-PI and Executive Board Member in the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Staff Exchange project [Activate](#), which explores novel collaborative strategies of transnational research, archiving, and exhibiting social and political dissent in Europe (19th-21st centuries).

Philip Widmann

Methods of Intervention

Starting out from the notion of 'melting the iceberg', this session looks at ways of approaching films below the water surface: prevented from being made at all or as intended, turned invisible by hierarchical criteria of artistic quality, national significance or economic promise, and thus likely to be missing from repositories of filmic material and knowledge about cinema. The unknowability of this presumed majority of films defies coherent categorisation and displaces some of the common ideas about the constitution of cinema and the significance of the film as its central object. Drawing on individual cases, the session proposes research with non-film sources as a means for interventions into material and epistemic absences.

Philip Widmann currently works as a postdoctoral researcher in the SNSF-funded project *Paranational Cinema – Legacies and Practices* at the Department of Film Studies, University of Zurich. His research is dedicated to the appropriation and remediation of generic images, sounds, identities, and narratives in an attempt to establish a national cinema of Lebanon during the 1930s. Tracing past conduits of circulation entails an inquiry into today's absences in (and of) film archives, the dispersal of related non-film sources, and adapted methodological approaches. Similar questions of method were addressed with *Film Undone – Elements of a Latent Cinema*, a collective examination of unmade and unfinished film projects. A book by the same title was published in 2024.

Boško Prostran (Doplgenger)

What are these old rags still good for?

The presentation by Doplgenger, entitled *What are these old rags still good for?*, will represent their artistic practice, which largely involves working with archival film and video materials from the post-Yugoslav space. Doplgenger's methodologies and dispositives for working with archival material have been changing depending on the type of archive, medium, and format, but primarily based on the socio-political context in which they've been invoking a specific "image of the past" into the present moment. Through formats of found footage détournements, film-essays, and lecture-performances, Doplgenger attempt to map and establish "visual bonds" between the images and sounds of socialist Yugoslavia putting them in wider geo-historical contexts. They seek to critically read the "discarded" fragments of the past scattered across the territory of the capitalist periphery, such as the Balkans today. Relying on Godard's well-known saying that a documentary should be viewed as fiction, and fiction as a documentary, Doplgenger, while "reading" the images, carry out a transfer of knowledge, social critique, and finally a critique of the ideology inherent to archival film practice within the dominant system of material and cultural production.

The work of **Doplgenger** (Isidora Ilić and Boško Prostran) deals with the relation between art and politics by exploring the regimes of moving images and the modes of their reception. They rely on the tradition of experimental and avant-garde film, and through some of the actions of these traditions intervene on the existing media products or work in expanded cinema forms. Although their main media is moving image, their work is realised through the text, installations, performances, lectures and discussions. All of these media are treated in their materiality and in relation to other media, and as carriers of meaning structures through which the social and political reality is structured.