

USSR 30

CINEMA AFTER THE COLLAPSE

NOVEMBER 4-6, 2021

Ray Stark Family Theatre
& Norris Cinema Theatre
University of Southern California

USC Visions & Voices
The Arts and Humanities Initiative

USC Dornsife
Institute of Armenian Studies

USC Dornsife
Department of Political Science
and International Relations

USC Dornsife
Department of Slavic
Languages and Literatures

USC Cinematic Arts

USC Armenian
Students Association

Thursday, November 4 Ray Stark Family Theatre

7 p.m. | *The Event*

(Directed by Sergei Loznitsa, Russia, 2015)

8:40 p.m. | Conversation with Director Sergei Loznitsa, Atom Egoyan, and Dr. Robert English

Friday, November 5 Norris Cinema Theatre

6 p.m. | Reception

7 p.m. | *Should the Wind Drop*

(Directed by Nora Martirosyan, Armenia/France/Belgium, 2020)

8:40 p.m. | Conversation with Director Nora Martirosyan, Dr. Nancy Condee, and Susanna Harutyunyan

Saturday, November 6 Norris Cinema Theatre

1 p.m. | *At the Ends of the Earth*

(Directed by Konstantin Bronzit, Russia, 1999)

1:10 p.m. | *And Then We Danced*

(Directed by Levan Akin, Georgia/Sweden, 2019)

3:25 p.m. | *Last Chance for Justice*

(Directed by Marina Shupac, Moldova/Kyrgyzstan, 2021)

3:50 p.m. | Conversation with Director Marina Shupac

4:45 p.m. | *Leviathan*

(Directed by Andrey Zvyagintsev, Russia, 2014)

7:10 p.m. | Panel conversation with Dr. Aniko Imre, Dr. Nancy Condee, Susanna Harutyunyan, Dr. Thomas Seifried, and Dr. Shushan Karapetian

8 p.m. | *JAZZ: Fool Around*

(Directed by David Babayan, Armenia, 2019)

8:15 p.m. | Reception with live music from USC Thornton School of Music students



Dismantling of a statue of Lenin in the square named after him in Yerevan.
Photo: Zaven Khachikyan

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. This three-day program marks the 30th anniversary of the fall of the USSR with film screenings and discussions reflecting on life, culture, and cinema in the post-Soviet world.
- Each of the films screened in this program addresses some aspect of the immense social and political changes brought on by the collapse of the USSR. Although each film is specific to a time and place, the films address themes that are relevant for all the societies and countries within the former Soviet space—from individual to state corruption; from ethnic conflict to separation and self-determination; from questions of sexual and gender identity to ethnic and linguistic identity. These were and continue to be issues that rock the lives of the peoples of the former USSR.

TIMELINE

1917: Bolshevik Revolution. Collapse of the Russian Empire and Romanov dynasty.

1918–1921: The Bolshevik “Reds” defeat the “Whites” in a brutal civil war, and the brief independence of Georgia, Armenia, and Ukraine is snuffed out as a new Soviet empire is born.

1922: The USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) is established from the four “socialist republics” of Russia, Belorussia, Ukraine, and Transcaucasia (the latter including Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan). Other republics would be added later, for an eventual total of 15.

1928–1953: The Stalin era. Officially celebrated for victory over the Nazis in World War II, but also marked by the Stalinist terror which killed millions. A generation of totalitarian cruelty and Stalin’s “cult of the personality” leaves the country economically and psychologically scarred.

1956–1985: From the Post-Stalin “thaw era” to the “era of stagnation” of its final decades, the USSR swings from reform to reaction—falling ever further behind the West. Corruption, cynicism, and alcoholism grow while some non-Russian republics dream of secession and independence.

1985–1991: The *perestroika* (restructuring) era. Even as the economy falters, Gorbachev’s *glasnost* (openness) permits political mobilization that soon leads to secession movements in many non-Russian republics.

August 1991: Senior hardliners stage a coup against Gorbachev. The attempted coup by the “Old Guard” of the Communist Party aims to keep the existing structure in the Soviet Union and prevent Gorbachev’s proposed new Union treaty, which would give the Soviet republics more control and equality with the central government. The coup attempt, or *putsch*, fails after a few days, discrediting the moderate Gorbachev and boosting the populist Boris Yeltsin.

December 1991: This month begins with a Ukrainian vote for independence, and ends with the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus declaring the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

THE AUGUST 1991 PUTSCH

The Event (dir. Sergei Loznitsa, 2015, Russia) contains found footage of the attempted coup of August 1991. Famously, during the putsch all scheduled television programming was replaced by a loop of the ballet *Swan Lake*. Protestors showed up by the thousands to oppose the coup, and it ultimately failed after three days.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Should the Wind Drop (dir. Nora Martirosyan, 2020, Armenia/France/Belgium) is set, and was shot on location, in Nagorno-Karabakh—a disputed region that was the site of a war between Azerbaijan and Armenia from 1988 to 1994 and that again erupted into violent conflict in 2020. When the film was set to screen at festivals last year, including Cannes, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan denounced it. However, the screenings went forward.

Nagorno-Karabakh is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, but most of it is governed by the unrecognized Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. The area, which is home to an Armenian community, has been the subject of disputes between the republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan since their modern establishment in the years just after the Bolshevik Revolution, and the roots of the conflict go back centuries. In the early 1920s, the new Soviet rulers established the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region, with a majority Armenian population, within the Republic of Azerbaijan. Conflict was mostly dormant while the region was under Soviet control, but re-emerged with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with tensions rising in the late 1980s and war breaking out in 1991. A ceasefire was achieved in 1994, but it has been fragile. Clashes occurred throughout the 2010s, and violence broke out again in 2020.

LGBTQ RIGHTS IN GEORGIA

And Then We Danced (dir. Levan Akin, 2019, Georgia/Sweden) won awards at the Odessa International Film Festival and the Sarajevo Film Festival. It also sparked protests by ultra-conservative groups in Georgia because of its depiction of a gay relationship.

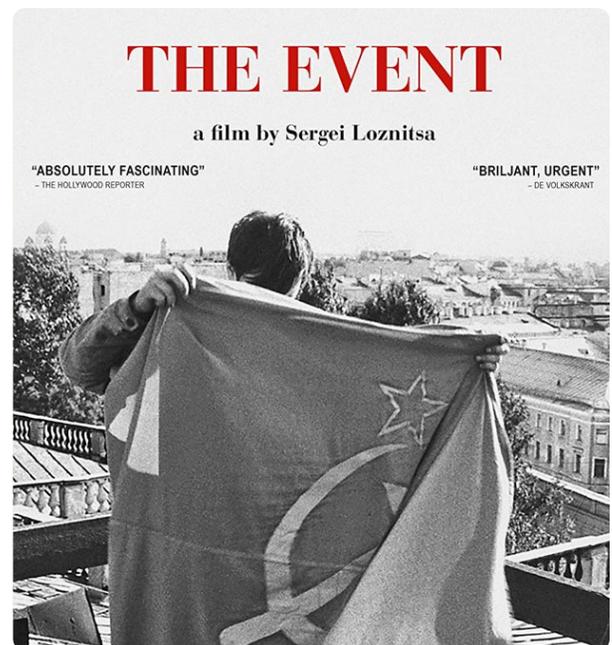
ILGA Europe (the European regional arm of the International Lesbian and Gay Association) sent a fact-finding mission to



PRESENT-DAY NATIONS THAT WERE IN THE USSR

- Armenia
- Azerbaijan
- Belarus (then Belorussia)
- Estonia
- Georgia
- Kazakhstan
- Kyrgyzstan (then Kirgiziya)
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Moldova (then Moldavia)
- Russia
- Tajikistan
- Turkmenistan
- Ukraine
- Uzbekistan

The larger Eastern Bloc (also known as the Soviet Bloc, Socialist Bloc, or Communist Bloc) included socialist states that were allied with and/or considered satellite states of the Soviet Union (e.g., Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria).



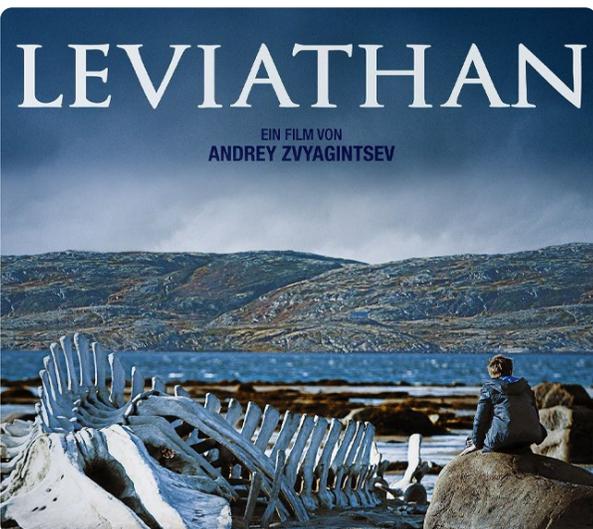
The Event (dir. Sergei Loznitsa, 2015, Russia)



Should the Wind Drop (dir. Nora Martirosyan, 2020, Armenia/France/Belgium)



And Then We Danced (dir. Levan Akin, 2019, Georgia/Sweden)



Leviathan (dir. Andrey Zvyagintsev, 2014, Russia)

Georgia in 2006 that found that, while there was a significant gay community in the city of Tbilisi, it was largely an underground subculture, and “a high level of hostility toward homosexuality prevails in virtually every level of Georgian society.”

More recently, a March for Dignity that was planned as part of the second annual Pride celebrations in Tbilisi in 2021 was canceled after far-right protestors attacked participants and journalists. One of the organizers of the canceled march, Giorgi Tabagari, perceived the attacks as coming from extremist elements of the society, saying, “We feel growing solidarity from Georgian society and from politicians, but there are still violent homophobic groups.” Thousands of people responded to the attacks by gathering outside parliament in a show of solidarity with the LGBTQ community. Tabagari said, “It was an important eye-opening for a lot of people who were not previously so supportive of LGBT+ rights.”

As of October 2021, Tabagari is in the midst of court proceedings, threatened with 15 days of prison time for swearing at a police officer while the Tbilisi Pride group was under attack this summer. Tabagari told Reuters: “The community is getting empowered. More and more people are speaking out for their rights and their liberties—and this is exactly what is going to bring changes in the end.”

FILM AND GEOPOLITICS

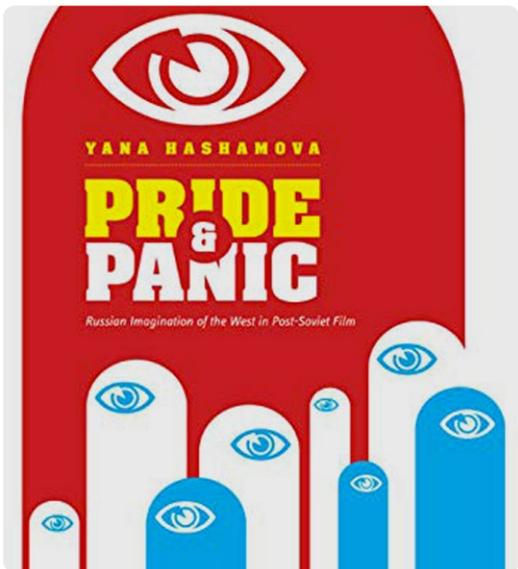
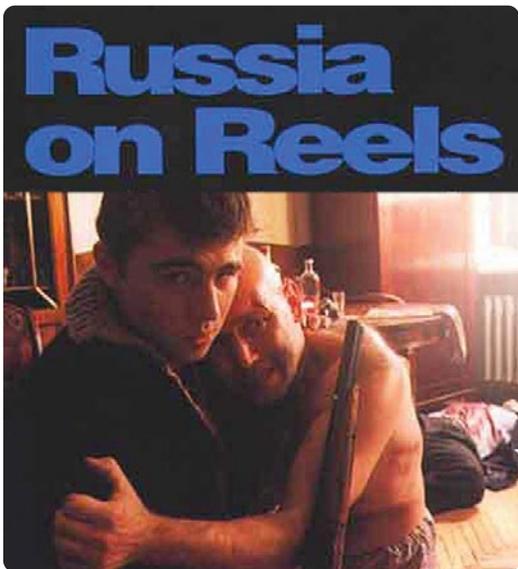
Leviathan (dir. Andrey Zvyagintsev, 2014, Russia) is a tale of a corrupt mayor in a small Russian town. It won acclaim from European and American film festivals and critics, but displeased the Russian Minister of Culture, whose office provided part of the funding for the film. A spokesman for the Russian Orthodox Church said the film “is obviously made for a Western audience, to be more precise, for the Western elites” (as reported in *The New Yorker*). It is an illustrative example of how a current geopolitical struggle is being waged in the cultural sphere, with Western critics celebrating what they perceive as a depiction of abusive power under Putin and conservative Russian figures condemning the film with phrases like “an odious slander of the Russian Church and the Russian State,” a take *The New Yorker* attributes to a conservative group that describes itself as an “association of Christian Orthodox experts.”

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- ◉ What are some of the impacts of large-scale societal shifts on individual lives?
- ◉ Why are political or geopolitical struggles sometimes fought in the realm of culture? Can you think of other (historical or current) examples of this?
- ◉ Given the very different perceptions of *Leviathan* described above, what did you make of the film?
- ◉ How do political views shape the reception and interpretation of works of art? Is it possible to interpret art without a political viewpoint?
- ◉ Did these films shift or expand your perspective in any way? How so?



11/15/21 at USC: *Midnight Traveler*



IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- ◉ The Wende Museum in Culver City, which houses a collection of art and artifacts from Cold War–era Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union wendemuseum.org
- ◉ The works of Svetlana Alexievich, a Belarusian journalist and oral historian alexievich.info/en
- ◉ 11/12/21 at USC: [Unsilenced: A Call to Action with Afghan Human Rights Activist Crystal Bayat & Syrian Refugee Olympian Yusra Mardini](#)
- ◉ 11/15/21 at USC: [Midnight Traveler: Capturing the Global Refugee Crisis on Film](#)
- ◉ 1/25/22: [The Soldier's Tale](#)
- ◉ 4/22/22: [All the Truths We Cannot See: A Chernobyl Story](#)

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

Stephen Hanson of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

BOOKS

- ◉ Birgit Beumers, [Russia on Reels: The Russian Idea in Post-Soviet Cinema](#) (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999).
- ◉ Yana Hashamova, [Pride and Panic: Russian Imagination of the West in Post-Soviet Film](#) (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007).

ARTICLES

- ◉ Julian Graffy, “[Private Lives of Russian Cinema](#),” *Sight and Sound* 3, no. 3 (March 1993): 26–29.
- ◉ Johanna Lindblad, “[Representations of the Chernobyl Catastrophe in Soviet and Post-Soviet Cinema: The Narratives of Apocalypse](#),” *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 10, no. 3 (November 2019): 240–56.
- ◉ Jason Merrill, “[Brothers and Others: Brotherhood, the Caucasus, and National Identity in Post-Soviet Film](#),” *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 6, no. 1 (2012): 93–111.
- ◉ Elena Monastireva-Ansdell, “[Renegotiating the ‘Communal Apartment’: Migration and Identity in Soviet and Contemporary Eurasian Cinema](#),” *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 11, no. 3 (November 2017): 228–49.
- ◉ Eva Narapaea and Dirk Hoyer, “[Tales of a Lost Decade: Estonian Film Noir in the 1990s](#),” *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 9, no. 2 (July 2018): 163–78.
- ◉ Daniel Schwartz, “[Documentary without Borders: Salomé Lamas’s Extinction and the Orientalism of Post-Soviet Borders and Space](#),” *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 12, no. 3 (2021): 237–59.
- ◉ Boris Stepanov, “[If I Forget Anything at All, It’s Unlikely the Stars Will Accept Us’: Sci-fi Fan Communities, Post-Soviet Nostalgia and Contemporary Cinematic Experience](#),” *Studies in Russian & Soviet Cinema* 15, no. 1 (March 2021): 70–90.
- ◉ Jasmijn Van Gorys, “[Inverting Film Policy: Film as a Nation Builder in Post-Soviet Russia](#),” *Media, Culture & Society* 33, no. 2 (March 2011): 243–58.
- ◉ Jeanne Whalen, “[From Red to Noir: Russian Film Stages a Gritty Comeback](#),” *Wall Street Journal Eastern Edition* (October 14, 2003): A1–A6.