

Presenter: Dustin Condren, Stanford University

Title: "Is This Reality or a Dream?": Eisenstein's Precariously Comedic *MMM*

Abstract:

On an early winter morning, Soviet bureaucrat Maxim Maximovich Maximov is disturbed in his marital bed by a delegation of figures from Russian history and myth who have crowded into his bedroom. Unlucky Maxim groggily recalls that he had stumbled into a church the night before and—Don Juan-like—had challenged the frescoes to step down and enlist at the local Komsomol.

So begins Sergei Eisenstein's *MMM*, an absurd comic fantasia that he began writing in 1932, shortly after returning from two years in the West. The sprawling script, written entirely in verse, is Eisenstein's attempt to probe an increasingly unstable Soviet reality and his idiosyncratic answer to the State's call for ideologically sound Soviet comedies. Here, in *MMM*, he crafts a cinematic chronotope that collapses multiple national epochs into an uncomfortable present, setting off tactile collisions between elements as divergent as a Moscow streetcar and a *bogatyr's* shield. Despite formal eccentricities, the script was approved for production in 1933. Castings were held, test shots were made, but the project stalled. Like so many of the director's projects, the film was never produced.

What prevented this script from being filmed and why has it not received the same scholarly attention as some of the filmmaker's other unmade projects? This paper employs archival sources, including numerous script drafts and director's notes, to examine the verbally ambitious and densely allusive screenplay text and to situate it within the uncertain cultural circumstances of the early 1930s. Using Eisenstein's notion of *pars pro toto* as a theoretical basis from which to address the unfinished—and often overlooked—undertaking, the paper establishes the project's dialogue with formally adjacent theatrical works by Mayakovsky and Erdman and its anticipation of the stylistic innovations of Eisenstein's later films, ultimately demonstrating *MMM's* vital place in Eisenstein's cinematic oeuvre.