

**Title:** Conflict, Solitude, and GrowingUp in Russia: Docufictional Serialization of School Life in Valeriia Gai Germanika's "Shkola"

**Author:** Olga Mesropova, Iowa State University

The 69-episode television series *Shkola* (School) by young Russian auteur Valeriia Gai Germanika appeared on Russia's Chanel One in 2010, receiving a response ranging from passionate outrage to fervent support from critics, viewers, educators, and government officials. While sharing the narrative and aesthetic tonalities of Germanika's earlier film *Everybody Dies But Me* (2008), the series is set in the ninth grade of an "average" Russian secondary school. Using the school as the locus of an ongoing generational conflict, Germanika places the troubled teenagers, their ineffective teachers, and incompetent parents in the midst of volatile situations that include rape, skinhead violence, racism, drug and alcohol abuse, and teenage suicide. To further enhance the impact of these trenchant subjects, the director has also opted for a Dogme '95-inspired documentary approach. The use of handheld camera, shooting on location, and improvised dialogues, all present the chernukhaesque fictional narrative as an authentic snapshot of contemporary Russian society (perceived by many viewers as a direct attack on Russian educational system).

My analysis of this docustyle television series will examine *Shkola's* narrative structure, use of documentary techniques, the series' reception by Russian critics, and its place in the context of Germanika's oeuvre. While exploring the series as a "renaissance" of the Soviet genre of "school cinema" (shkol'noe kino) and contrasting it to other recent Russian series featuring teenagers, I argue that *Shkola* is neither didactic nor overtly critical of Russian society as a whole. While sharing the aesthetics of recent Russian cinematic docufiction, Germanika does not suggest that the characters' problems can or will be resolved. By merely "documenting life as it is," *Shkola* deliberately leaves the viewers with a sense of powerlessness akin to that experienced by the series' protagonists.

olgamesropova@gmail.com