

Title: A Guided Tour: The Narrator of Alexander Sokurov's *Russian Ark*  
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Upon its release in 2002, Alexander Sokurov's *Russian Ark* was immediately recognized as a major event in 21<sup>st</sup> century cinema. A dazzling technological feat, the entire film consists of a single 86 minute shot which takes the viewer through the Hermitage Museum and several centuries of Russian history. Despite the unusual amount of critical interest the film has received, relatively little attention has yet been given to the voice leading the viewer through the museum and carrying on an intermittent dialogue with the Marquis de Custine. Indeed, existing studies of the film differ on how to characterize this figure.

Using Seymour Chatman's ideas on cinematic narration as a theoretical foundation, this paper takes a closer look at the voice behind the camera. Though the title may seem to take for granted that this is the film's narrator, the first stage of analysis will examine if this could really be the case. Chatman's theory provides for a narrative agency controlling everything presented to the viewer but insists that the task of narration is carried out on a discourse level several steps removed from the diegesis. One of the many theoretical problems this paper examines arising from the narrative presentation of the film is that everything we see and hear is mediated by the consciousness of this character on the diegetic plane the moment it is experienced. The first images appear on the screen as the character opens his eyes, and it is through this perceptual filter that the entirety of the *siuzhet* is represented. *Russian Ark* may in fact necessitate a new theoretical approach to cinematic narration, one which allows for a type of first-person narrator functioning simultaneously on a discourse level and within the story.