Week 1

DAY 1:  Mon.  Feb 5

Introductions.  Syllabus.  The components of the course (who lived when, did what, and how it will come together).

The website:  http://silvertone/princeton.edu/boris/project.html

The regnant myths:  Boris Godunov, Dmitry the Pretender, the Romanov dynasty, Pushkin, Meyerhold, Prokofiev, Stalin.

The themes:  
- Legitimacy vs. illegitimacy  (in rulers)
- Poet vs. Tsar  (in art)
- Human vs. machine  (in 20th–century Russian theater)

DAY 2:  Wed.  Feb. 7

“Pretendership”  [Самозванство / самозванчество] and the problem of portraying it in historical-musical drama

What it means, in a political sense, to “pretend.”  Russia has had more pretenders to the throne than any other nation, and up until more recently;  as soon as a royal figure failed or died, somewhere a challenger or a miraculous reincarnation would appear, promising to restore grace to the orphaned land.  But the Pretender who toppled Boris Godunov under the name of Dmitri son of Ivan the Terrible, was the first, the most authoritative, most charismatic, and ultimately the most calamitous.

READING:

- B. A. Uspenskij, “Tsar and Pretender:  Samozvančestvo  or Royal Imposture in Russia as a Cultural-Historical Phenomenon”  [1982]

  Russian original also available as «Царь и самозванец:  самозванчество в России как культурно-исторический феномен»  [1982]

Uspensky’s essay is half meticulous footnotes and full of a huge amount of precise historical detail, which need not concern us;  crucial are the first 5 pages, pp. 259-64, on the religious foundations of pretendership and why it flourished in Russian time, space, modes of government and explanations of causality.  Note also p. 274 ff on the False Dmitry.

We will also view the Coronation Scene from Musorgsky’s opera Boris Godunov (1874).