How to Preserve an Experiment?
Soviet Avant-Garde Architecture 1917-1933;

Description

This lecture course considers the phenomenon of the Soviet Architectural Avant-Garde as part of a broader cultural history. The response of architectural thought to the machine, as well as the intersection of political and social propaganda, literature, art and cinematography will be examined. Special attention will be paid to the legacy of the fading heritage of experimental practices, such as paper architecture, oral history, temporary projects for International Exhibitions, Stage Design, and the projects for National Soviet Competitions, as well as the conceptual and philosophical backgrounds of “Suprematism,” “Constructivism,” and “Rationalism,” and the ongoing dialog with the Bauhaus Dessau.

The chronological span of the course corresponds to the establishment of the radical language of the Great October Revolution and the end of the first “Five-Year Plan” of Soviet economy in 1933, a moment that marked the total supremacy of Stalin’s neoclassicism in Soviet Architecture and the final stage of the most ambitious competition of the Soviet Empire, “The Palace of the Soviets.”
**Course Format:**

Weekly lectures provide the framework of the course. The Powerpoint for each lecture will be made available on Blackboard. A portion of some class will be devoted to discussion of contemporary rethinking of the Soviet architectural heritage. What are the contemporary tools necessary to preserve the *tangible* and *intangible* heritage of one of the greatest architectural experiments of the twentieth century? There will be one session held outside of class at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), where we will explore the Soviet Avant-Garde architectural drawings as well as the architectural experiments in Soviet cinematography that relate to material in the course.

**Requirements/Assignments**

12-15 pages mid term paper (40%). Paper abstract and bibliography (15 %). Class attendance, participation in discussions and visit to MoMA (45%). Attendance is expected at each class. Please note that requirements, assignments and readings might change during the semester.

**General Bibliography**

Most of the readings will be scanned and eventually available on Coursework.


Kiaer, Christina, *Imagine No Possessions*.
Boris Groys, “The Birth of Socialist Realism from the Spirit of the Russian Avant-Garde”.

**CALENDAR**

Friday September 6, 11.00-1.00
1. *Introduction.*

Friday September 13, 11.00 –1.00
Lenin’s Plan of "Monumental Propaganda."

Friday September 20, 11.00-1.00
3. *Between Art and Architecture.*  
El Lissitzky, from the PROUNy to the Wolkenbügel.

Friday, September 27, 11.00-1.00  
and the establishment of the new language of architecture.

Friday, October 4, 11.00-1.00  
5. *East –West Migration of Ideas.*  
Progressive Schools of Design: Vitebsk, Vkhutemas, Bauhaus.

Friday, October 11, 11.00-1.00  
Cinematography and Architecture. (Dziga Vertov, Sergei Eisenstein)

Friday, October 18, 11.00-1.00  
7. 6. *Engineers of the Avant-Garde. How to preserve structural innovations?*  

Friday, October 25, 11.00 -1.00  
8. *Preserving the legend.*  
The idiosyncratic architecture of Konstantin Melnikov.

Friday, November 2, 11.00 -1.00  
Friday, November 8, 11.00 -1.00
10. Behind the theories of Constructivism: Alexei Gan, Brothers Vesniny, and Moisei Ginzburg. The Vhutemas, OSA and Ladovsky’s ASNOVA.

Friday, November 15, 11.00-1.00
11. Late Constructivism. “Flying houses” of Georgy Krutikov, “Galactic design” of Ivan Leonidov and the architectural fantasies of Iakov Chernikhov

Friday, November 22 – Thanksgiving weekend, No class.

Friday, November 29, 11.00 -1.00
12. The Legacy of Paper architecture.  

Friday, December 6, 11.00-1.00
13. The End of the first “Five-year Plan” and the Establishment of Stalin’s Style in Architecture. Conclusion.

Date and details on the visit to the MoMa will be provided as soon as possible during the semester.