Summary
The seminar frames the saga of the Soviet avant-garde in the broad historical perspective traced by the modernization of Russia’s architectural and urban cultures. The contribution of Western architects and the worldwide reception of its main concepts and designs will be given particular attention.

Content
The theoretical and architectural production of the radical movements which emerged in 20th century Russia can no longer be interpreted as the sole effect of the 1917 Revolution. The connections of the new culture with pre-revolutionary Russia have been reestablished, and the intellectual and international context from which Constructivism is created need to be explored. A better understanding of the radical theories and a more in-depth analysis of the designed and built works will be sought for in the seminar. The exact meaning of the transgressions they introduced will be measured against the historical space in which they were inserted, from the abolition of Serfdom in 1861 to the rejection of ‘Socialist’ Realism by Nikita Khrushchev in 1954. Between these dates, the response of architectural culture to the machine, the question of the monument, and the relationship of architectural design to historical tropes will be discussed, as well as the uses of the buildings by the political factions and the conflicting groups of intellectuals. From Bruno Taut’s and Le Corbusier’s early discussions of avant-garde projects in the 1920s to Rem Koolhaas investigations of Leonidov and the instrumentalization of Russian radical designs in the discourse of ‘Deconstructivism,’ Western architectural culture has never stopped watching the chronicle of events in the now defunct USSR. In parallel to the consideration of developments in Russia, the seminar will analyze the reciprocal effects of this troubled interplay.

Keywords
Architecture Urbanisme Histoire Constructivisme Avant-garde Utopie Russie

Learning Prerequisites

Recommended courses

Important concepts to start the course
Elementary knowledge of 20th century architectural history
Awareness of the interaction between art, architecture and politics
Ability to grasp the relationship between theory and design
Ability to communicate ideas in a written form

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the course, the student must be able to:

• Take into consideration the history of Modern Russia
• Distinguish the different trends of the Avant-garde
• Contrast Western and Russian architecture and urbanism
• Interpret the design strategies of the Russian avant-garde
• Formulate an original vision of modern architecture in Russia
• Theorize the relationship between program and form
• Critique the use of constructivism by contemporary architects
• Create original visual representations of the projects considered
• Contextualise Russian architecture within the global scene

Teaching methods
lectures with slides

Expected student activities
discussion in the class; delivery of a final research paper

Assessment methods
Participation to the discussion: 30%
Final paper: 70%

Supervision
Office hours Yes
Assistants Yes