The goal of the seminar is an in-depth exploration of the many facets of this unique phenomenon in the history of architecture, art and film while trying to draw some lessons for our own architectural moment. Careful attention will be given to new material recording the demise and survival of Modernism under Stalin in the 1930s, including unknown work by Moses Ginzburg.

Viktor Sklovskij, the Russian linguist of the Formalist School, wrote in 1923 that Tatlin's Tower was a monument made out of "Steel, Glass, and Revolution."

It could be said that this short sentence expresses the drama of the Soviet architectural discourse of the 1920-30's. The statement points to the persistent tension between, on the one hand, a "Revolution" accepted only in so far as it gained sufficient "distance" from itself and became, in the way of glass and steel, a mere linguistic material; and on the other hand, a "Revolution" where the work of the artist was to resemble a type of laboratory research conducted by "workers responding to a social demand."

Accordingly, the new Soviet architecture oscillated since its inception between a production that tended to distance itself from "everyday life" (such were Malevich's experiments) and a production that tended to establish a positive dialogue with it (such was the work of Ginzburg, Burov, or Vesnin.) The fatal compromise reached between the two conceptions--causing eventually the eradication of both--was contained in the belief that the analysis of the morphological development of language pertained to the science of the structure of signs, while the decision about their function was to be left to the Party.

The Soviet artistic avant-garde was meanwhile doing its best in theater and cinema productions, mass performances and "urban propaganda." The Art and Architecture School, the famous VHUTEMAS, open to competing architectural theories, surpassed by far a school such as the BAUHAUS, both in its innovative power and in the number of students, counted in the thousands.

In the course of more than a decade, the Soviet Union was not just a place where young protagonists of modern architecture carried on, with much intelligence and enthusiasm, a parochial, peripheral debate on the "New Architecture." In many ways the Soviet Union was the mirror in which the unfolding of the entire Modern Movement was reflected and magnified.
The goal of the seminar is an in-depth exploration of the many facets of this unique phenomenon in the history of architecture, art and film while trying to draw some lessons for our own architectural moment. Careful attention will be given to new material recording the demise and survival of Modernism under Stalin in the 1930s, including unknown work by Moses Ginzburg.