



Image by Alexander Rodchenko, 1924.

Serguei Oushakine

WORLDS OF FORM:
Russian Formalism and Constructivism

SLA 547

Monday @ 1:30 pm - 4:20 pm

By reading key texts written by Russian formalists and constructivists, we will trace how these thinkers and practitioners of art and literature problematized the role and importance of form in their writing. The seminar is structured as a combination of three main blocs: first, we explore systemic views, paying especial attention to the role of structure (and deconstruction). Then, we investigate the links between materiality and form. And, finally, we will see how these three components – form, texture, and system – are localized in particular artistic and/or historical contexts.

This is an interdisciplinary seminar, and during the semester we will move back and forth from literature to cinema, and from architecture to painting. Texts will be supplemented with films (available on BB).

No Russian language skills are required.

Requirements:

Class Participation and one in-class presentation - 40%

Weekly Position Paper (no more than 250 words) - 20%

Final Paper (3000-3500 words) - 40%

Week 0. **INTRODUCTION**

Victor Shklovsky, The Trumpet of the Martians; Just a Few Last Words –From Myself. In: *A Hunt for Optimism*, trans. Shushan Avagyan, Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2009, pp.1-3, 93-135; 166-168.

Leon Trotsky, The Formalist School of Poetry and Marxism. In: Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution (1924)*. New York: *Russell & Russell*, 1957.
http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lit_revo/ch05.htm

Mark Wigley, Deconstructive Architecture. In: *Deconstructive Architecture*, ed. by Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley. New York: MOMA, 1988, pp.10-21.

Week One. **DEVICES & CONSTRUCTIONS**

Victor Shklovsky, Resurrecting the Word (63-72); Art as Device (73-96). In: *Viktor Shklovsky: A Reader*. Ed. and trans. Alexandra Berlina. London: Bloomsbury, 2017.

Victor Shklovsky, The Relationship between Devices of Plot Construction and General Devices of Style (15-51); The Structure of Fiction (52-71); The Novel as Parody: Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (147-170); Literature without a Plot: Rozanov (189-205). In: Victor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose* (1929), trans. Benjamin Sher, Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990.

Victor Shklovsky, Regarding Art and Revolution (21-53); Parallels in Tolstoy (73-79); The Art of the Circus (86-88); The Old and New (pp.96-97); Regarding Merezhkovsky (98-100); Eating Fish by Cutting it With Knife (111); A Thousand Herrings (112-114). In: Victor Shklovsky, *Knight's Move* (1923), trans. Richard Sheldon, Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2005.

Week Two. **PLOTLESS PROSE**

Victor Shklovsky, On Conventions (103-144); On the Function of Plot (227-277). In: Victor Shklovsky, *Bowstring: On the Dissimilarity of the Similar*, trans. Shushan Avagyan. Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2011.

Victor Shklovsky, Plot, Reversal and Story: Parody and Reinvention of Plot (110-151); Another Note on the Beginning and Ending of Works – Compositions (398-428). In: Victor Shklovsky, *Energy of Delusion: A Book on Plot*, trans. Shushan Avagyan. Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2007.

Richard Sheldon, "Viktor Shklovsky and the Device of Ostensible Surrender," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (1975), pp. 86-108.

Victor Erlich, "On Being Fair to Viktor Shklovsky or the Act of Hedged Surrender," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (1976), pp. 111-118

Richard Sheldon. "Reply to Victor Erlich." *Slavic Review*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (1976), pp. 119-121.

Week Three. **GRAMMAR OF POETRY**

Roman Jakobson, The Dominant (41-46); Problems in the Study of Language and Literature (with Jurij Tynianov) (47-49); Linguistics and Poetics (62-94); Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry (121-144); Marginal Notes on the Prose of the Poet Pasternak (301-317). In: Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, ed. by Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.

Jonathan Culler, Jakobson's Poetic Analysis (55-74). In: Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics, Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975.

Roman Jakobson, The Path Toward Poetics (1-12); Poetry and Grammar (110-124); Similarity and Contiguity in Language, and Literature, in the Cinema and in Aphasia (125-134). In: Roman Jakobson and Krystyna Pomorska. *Dialogues*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988.

Optional:

Richard Bradford, "The Unwelcoming Context" (75-142). In: Richard Bradford, *Roman Jakobson: Life, Language, Art*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Week Four. **TEXT-MAKERS**

Boris Eikhenbaum, The Structure of Gogol's "*The Overcoat*". *The Russian Review*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Oct., 1963), pp. 377-399.

Boris Eikhenbaum, *The Young Tolstoy* (Chapter 1: Diaries (1847-1952)). Trans. Gary Kern. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1972, pp. 1-47.

Boris Eikhenbaum, *Letmontov: A Study in Literary-Historical Evaluation*. Trans. Ray Parrott and Harry Weber. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1981 (excerpts).

Boris Eikhenbaum, The Theory of the Formal Method. In: *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*. Ed. by Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska. The MIT Press, 1971, pp.3-38.

Carol Any Boris, Eikhenbaum in OPOIAZ: Testing the Limits of the Work-Centered Poetics. *Slavic Review*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Autumn, 1990), pp. 409-426.

Optional:

Harold K. Schefski, The Changing Focus of Eikhenbaum's Tolstoy Criticism. *The Russian Review*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Jul., 1978), pp. 298-307

Alyson Tapp, Boris Eikhenbaum's Response to the Crisis of the Novel in the 1920s, *Slavonica*, 15:1 (2009), pp. 32-47.

Week Five. **RHYTHM & ANALYSIS**

Moisei Ginzburg, *Rhythm in Architecture*. Trans. John Nicolson. London: Ginzburg Design Limited, 2016. (Excerpts)

- Osip Brik**, Contributions to the Study of Verse Language. In: *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*. Ed. by Ladislav Matejaka and Krystyna Pomorska. The MIT Press, 1971, 117-125.
- Yuri Tynianov**, Rhythm as the Constructive Factor of Verse. In: *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*. Ed. by Ladislav Matejaka and Krystyna Pomorska. The MIT Press, 1971, 126-135.
- Henri Lefebvre**. *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*. Trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore. London: Continuum, 2004 (Excerpts).

Week Six.**TECTONIC SHIFTS**

- Anonymous (Alexei Gan)**. “The First Working Group of Constructivists” (Moscow, 1924). In: *Russian Art of the Avant Garde. Theory and Criticism*. Ed. and trans. John E. Bowlt. London: Thames and Hudson, 1976, pp. 241-3.
- Alexei Gan**, Constructivism in the Cinema. In: *The Tradition of Constructivism*, ed. Stephen Bann. New York: Viking Press, 1974, p.130.
- Alexei Gan**, The Cinematograph and Cinema (pp. 67-8); The ‘Left Front’ and Cinema (75-77); The Thirteenth Experiment (78-80); Two Paths (83); Recognition for the Cine-Eyes (105-7) In: *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents*. Ed. and trans. Richard Taylor. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Alexei Gan**, The Tenth Kinopravda. In: Yuri Tsivian, *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, trans. Julian Graffy. Gemona, Udine: Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, 2004, p.55.
- Alexei Gan**, *Constructivism*. Trans. Christina Lodder. Barcelona: Tenov, 2013.
- Christina Lodder**. Alexei Gan: A Pivotal Figure in Russian Constructivism. In: Alexei Gan, *Constructivism*. Trans. Christina Lodder. Barcelona: Tenov, 2013. pp.xv-xci.
- Films**: Selected issues of *Kinopravda*.

Week Seven.**FROM NON-OBJECTIVITY TO REAL THINGS**

- Aleksandr Rodchenko**, Ch.2. “Russia Has Given Birth to its Own Creative Work, and Its Name is – Non-Objectivity, 1916-1921” (71-138); Ch.3. “Working for Life, 1921 – 1939” (139-279). In: Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Experiments for the Future: Diaries, Essays, Letters, and Other Writings*. Ed. by Alexander N. Lavrentiev, 2005.
- Selim O. Khan-Magomedov**, “The Sources of Constructivism” (83-116). In: Selim O. Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko: The Complete Work*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985.
- Christina Kiaer**, “The Socialist Object” (1-41); “Rodchenko in Paris” (199-243). In: Christina Kiaer, *Imagine no Possession: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005.
- Film**: *Rodchenko and the Russian Avant-garde*. Written and directed by Micheal Craig. S.l. : Copernicus Films, 2000.

Optional:

Alexander N. Lavrentyev, Ch.8. “We should produce and Love Real Things” (176-213); Ch.13. “In VKhUTEMAS They Started Seriously Training Future Engineers of Household Things” (295-314); Ch.14. “It Is Interesting to Do Experimental Photography...” (315-340). In: Alexander N. Lavrentyev, *Alexander Rodchenko*, Moscow: Sergey A. Gordeev, 2011.

Week Eight.**THE CULTURE OF THE THING**

Boris Arvatov, *Art and Production*. Ed. by John Roberts and Alexei Penzin. London: Pluto Press, 2017.

Boris Arvatov, The Proletariat and Leftist Art (1922). In: *Russian Art of the Avant Garde. Theory and Criticism*. Ed. and trans. John E. Bowlt. London: Thames and Hudson, 1976, pp. 225-230.

Boris Arvatov, Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing (Toward the Formulation of the Question). *October*, Vol. 81 (Summer 1997), pp. 119-128

Boris Arvatov, Materialized Utopia. In: *The Traditions of Constructivism*. Ed. Stephen Bann. New York: The Viking Press, 1974, pp. 85-89.

Optional:

Christina Kiaer. Boris Arvatov's Socialist Objects. *October*, Vol. 81 (Summer, 1997), pp. 105-118.

Nicholas Thoburn. Communist Objects and the Values of Printed Matter. *Social Text* Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer 2010).

Week Nine.**KINO-PRAVDA & KINO-THINGS**

Dziga Vertov, *Writings* (5-157). In: *Kino-Eye: the Writings of Dziga Vertov*. Ed. by Annette Michelson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

Public debates about Vertov's films in the 1920s (excerpts). In: *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, ed. by Yuri Tsivian, 2004.

Jeremy Hicks, Ch.1. The Birth of Documentary from the Spirit of Journalism: Cine-Pravda, Cine-Eye (5-21); Ch.2. Vertov and Documentary Theory: The Goal Was Truth, the Means Cine-Eye (22-28). In: Jeremy Hicks, *Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film*. London: I.B. Taurus, 2007.

Films: TBC.

Optional:

Vlada Petrić, Ch.1. “Dziga Vertov and the Soviet Avant-garde Movement” (1-70). In: Vlada Petrić.

Constructivism in Film: The Man with the Movie Camera. A Cinematic Analysis. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987.

Week Ten. **PLASTIC ELEMENTS**

El Lissitzky, Texts (329-379). In: *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts*. Ed. by Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers. London: Thames and Hudson, 1980.

El Lissitzky, Letters (201-225). In: Margarita Tupitsyn. *El Lissitzky: Beyond the Abstract Cabinet: Photography, Design, Collaboration*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1999.

Yve-Alain Bois. El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility. In: *Art in America*. April 1988, pp. 161-181.

Peter Nisbet, El Lissitzky circa 1935: Two Propaganda Projects Reconsidered, (199-211). In: *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow*. Ed. by Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed. Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2003.

Victor Margolin, Ch.1. Visions of the Future: Rodchenko and Lissitzky, 1917-1921, (9-44). In: Victor Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, 1917-1946*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Optional:

Victor Margolin, Ch.5. Representing the Regime: Lissitzky and Rodchenko 1931-1940 (163-214). In: Victor Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, 1917-1946*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Week Eleven. **MAN, OBJECT, & REVOLUTION**

Vladimir Tatlin, Writings (181-268; 309-329). In: *Tatlin*, ed. by Larisa Zhadova, New York: Rizzoli, 1984.

Victor Shklovsky, Regarding Texture and Counter-Reliefs (65-68); The Monument to the Third International (69-71). In: Victor Shklovsky, *Knight's Move* (1923), trans. Richard Sheldon, Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2005.

Julia Vaingurt, The Incredible Heights of Organic Architecture: Tatlin, Khlebnikov, and the Technological Sublime (101-132). In: Julia Vaingurt, *Wonderlands of the Avant-Garde: Technology and the Arts in Russia in the 1920s*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2013.

Svetlana Boym, *Architecture of the Off-Modern*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008.

Optional:

Norbert Lynton, Ch.7. "Form and the Figure" (133-155); Ch.8. "Constructivism in Inverted Commas" (156-190). In: Norbert Lynton, *Tatlin's Tower: Monument to Revolution*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2009.