

MOSCOW x DETROIT: Transnational Modernity in the Built Environment

Fall Symposium: October 11-12, 2019

Department of the History of Art, The University of Michigan

University of Michigan Museum of Art and Horace H. Rackham Building, University of Michigan

In conjunction with ***Amerikanizm: Russian Architecture in Search of a New New World***, The Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal

Organizers:

Claire Zimmerman, University of Michigan

Christina Crawford, Emory University

Jean-Louis Cohen, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University

Between 1928 and 1932 a group of American architects and engineers, many of them affiliated with Albert Kahn Associates, migrated from Detroit to Moscow to build factory campuses as part of Josef Stalin's First Five Year Plan (FFYP). They set in motion over 500 construction projects and trained over 300 Soviet designers, technicians, and draftsmen in American methods of design and implementation. During the very years in which architects from Detroit helped build Soviet factories (in notable cases with prefabricated components imported from the US), urban theories on linear city morphology as a fitting mode for industrialization blossomed in the USSR. English-language publications such as *USSR in Construction* featured compelling images of these monumental achievements, depicting Soviet progress in culture as well as technology. "Soviet Detroit," as the industrial capital Nizhny-Novgorod would be called, was only one of many America-inspired cities developed during the first Five-Year Plan, which also included "Sibirsky Chicago" (Novosibirsk) and "Soviet Gary" (Magnitogorsk).

By the end of 1932, most of the American experts had returned, both to Detroit and to sites spread across the country. Over the years of their stay, American journalists had celebrated their work on a regular basis. As the US economy recovered from the Great Depression and moved inexorably toward war, a small number of architects and engineers who participated in Soviet industrialization performed comparable tasks back in the United States. Linear urbanism grew up around American metropolises, particularly in the Midwest, in new communities such as Livonia, Michigan, strung alongside massive new factory complexes. The impact of Soviet urbanism on these communities remains to be assessed.

Only recently has the complex of industrial developments that unfolded between Moscow and Detroit begun to receive notice in architectural and urban studies scholarship. Groundbreaking research has focused new attention on the larger ramifications of this massive transfer of knowledge in both directions. Looking further into these developments, the symposium is scheduled to coincide with the opening of an exhibition at The Canadian Centre for Architecture, *Building a New New World: Amerikanizm in Russian Architecture*, in November 2019 (curator: Jean-Louis Cohen).

Moscow x Detroit: Transnational Modernity in the Built Environment will bring together historians of art, architecture, urbanism, and social history, to consider a critical moment in twentieth-century history, one that ramifies outward from the late 1920s to ripple through the later industrialization of the US and the USSR, affecting culture, global politics, and the built environment for decades after. Its focus will be transnational exchange in both directions (initially toward the USSR, but also back to the USA), infrastructure development, and the impact of built environments (factories, housing, green zones) on cities built to serve industry, but surviving long after its evacuation. Participants, including specialists in both the American and the Soviet situation, will consider specific spatial questions, as well as broader analyses of the hidden effects of the "Second Industrial Revolution" on culture, social organization, and the built environment on two continents.

Schedule

October 11, 2019 5:00 p.m.

Keynote: "Americanized Bolshevism and its *new* New Worlds," Jean-Louis Cohen, New York University
UMMA Auditorium

Dinner for participants and selected guests

October 12, 2019

Symposium, Rackham Amphitheater

8:30-9:00 Coffee + tea

9:00-11:00 Session I: SURVEYING

1. "Improve the Roads': Valerian Osinsky, the American Automobile, and the Campaign to Overcome Russian Roadlessness in the 1920s-30s," Lewis Siegelbaum, Michigan State University
2. "The Art of the Standard: Andrei Burov discovers America," Richard Anderson, Edinburgh University
3. "Foreign Specialists in Soviet Industry in the 1920 and 1930s: Forgotten History or Soviet Ideology? The case of Eastern Ukraine," Oksana Chabanyuk, Kharkiv National University of Civil Engineering and Architecture
4. "A Monument to the First Five-Year Plan: Moscow's Palace of Soviets and the Afterlife of *Amerikanizm* through the 1930s," Katherine Zubovich, Ryerson University

11:30-1:00 Session II: EMBEDDING

5. "Rationalization, Typification, Unification: New Strategies in the Planning of the Socialist City' during the First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932)," Evgenia Konyshcheva, South Urals State University
6. "Citizen Kahn: Moritz and the Soviet Experience, 1929-39," Claire Zimmerman, University of Michigan
7. "African-*amerikanizm* and Soviet Anti-Racism: Detroit Worker Robert Robinson in the USSR," Christina Kiaer, Northwestern University

1:00-2:00 Lunch

2:00-4:00 Session III: ADJUSTING

8. "People Making Things, Things Making People: Americanism in Soviet Genre Cinema, 1927," Robert Bird, University of Chicago
9. "The searchlight of exact and impartial investigation: Soviet memoirs of American technical consultants," Christina Crawford, Emory University
10. "On the Line: Workers in the linear city," Robert Fishman, University of Michigan
11. "To Eradicate the Vestiges': Ivan Nikolaev and the Reconstruction of Soviet Factories, 1933-1938," Maria Taylor, University of Washington

Break 4:00-4:30

4:30 Closing discussion

Howard Brick, University of Michigan

Ron Suny, University of Michigan

5:30 Reception