

## Behind the Nylon Curtain Cold War Architecture



In 1945 a powerful and nearly invisible nuclear wave penetrated every building, leaving its imprint on stonewalls, tattooing Kimono patterns on victims' bodies. Architecture across the continents would embody this traumatic *catharsis*, reflecting the irreversible, translucent nature of the new weapon of mass destruction, as well as its counter forces – bunkers, shelters and military camps.

This seminar explores architecture of the Cold War, as well as, wartime exhibitions, politics and media and in a bi-polarized world with special emphasis on preservation issues, curatorial practices, and object-based learning. In addition to classroom lectures and discussion, students will engage with current exhibitions, archival materials, films, and primary documents and objects at The Museum of Modern Art and Rare Book Collection at Columbia University. The course is an attempt to engage unexamined histories or “shadow modernisms” that operate on the margins of conventional narratives about design of the atomic age. Concepts to be discussed: camouflage architecture, adaptive re-use, neglected histories, secret cities, extraterritoriality, dissident practices, representation and censorship, migration of military aesthetics, metaphors, instruments and tropes.

**Course Format:**

Weekly lectures provide the framework of the course. The PowerPoint for each lecture will be made available on Coursework's. A portion of some classes will be devoted to discussion of contemporary discourse of the re-thinking the Cold War Phenomenon, strategies of representation and preservation of architectural heritage, grey zones and negative histories. There will be several sessions held outside of class at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and in Avery Library, exhibition catalogues and urban plans, as well as the architectural experiments in cinematography that relate to material in the course. Guest speakers throughout the semester will contribute additional perspectives on preservation practices, curatorial strategies, and new scholarship.

**Requirements/Assignments**

Final project 40%

Presentations 15%

Participation 45%

Students are expected to attend all classes. In addition to regular classroom sessions, there will be visits to The Museum of Modern Art and to Avery Library Rare Books in order to engage with exhibitions, primary documents, and artistic objects, as well as a movie screening and three guest lectures. Each student will make one 10-15 minute presentation during the semester. The final assignment is a creative project of your choosing, e.g. seminar paper, preservation fiche, a piece of criticism or an exhibition proposal.

**I. Metanarratives**

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**Week 1:**

**Introduction: Theory of Cold War,  
Aesthetics of New Danger/ Bio politics/Media/ Romatismism.**

**Week 2:**

**From Bunker - to Immaterial;  
Mutation of Architectural Concepts in  
Bi-Polarized World.**

**Week 3:**

**The Docudrama;  
Camouflage/Architecture and Fake Cartographies/Situations and Simulations.**

**Week 4:**

**Screen Memories of Atomic Age;  
Cinematic War, Architecture, Print and Counterculture of the 60s.**

## ***II. Case Studies***

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### **Week 5:**

**Wartime exhibitions (East);**

**Guest speaker professor Vladimir Paperny**

**Hot and Cold War in Architecture of Soviet Pavilions (1937-1959).**

### **Week 6: (@ Avery Rare Books)**

**Guest speaker: Senior Curator of Architecture MAXXI, Pippo Ciorra**

**Wartime Exhibitions (West).**

### **Week 7: (@ MoMA)**

**Monuments vs. Everyday Architecture, the USSR radical experience.**

**Domesticating Atomic Power: Spaces of Everyday Transformation in United States. Co-taught with Jennifer Grey.**

### **Week 8: (@ Avery Rare Books)**

**The Military-Industrial-Architectural Complex: from Totalitarianism to *New Building for 195X* Co-taught with Jennifer Grey.**

### **Week 9:**

**NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK**

### **Week 10:**

**Architecture, Symbolism, and Preservation.**

**Adaptive Re-use of Politically Charged Objects: from Shelter - to Museum.**

### **Week 11:**

**Parallel Modernisms/Military Urbanisms/Space Program.**

**Secret Cities, Neglected Histories of the Cold War.**

### **Week 12:**

**Material Culture of the Cold War, Aesthetic of synthetic,**

**From Military Labs - to Architecture; Migration of Instruments, Metaphors and Tropes. Presentations.**

### **Week 13:**

***Building Superpowers; Comparative Analysis of Nuclear Shields***

***/ USSR/ Cuba/ USA. Presentations.***

## ***III. Aftermath of Cold War***

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### **Week 14:**

**Post Utopian Architecture: From Myth - to Mythology/**

**Architecture in the Age of Neoliberalism: Commodity, Race, and Place in the Experience Economy, Presentations.**

## **General Bibliography**

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- Anselm Franke and Eyal Weizman, *"The Geography of Extraterritoriality"* (ca. 2003)
- Eyal Weizman, *"Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth"*, 2014.
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- Felicity D. Scott, *"Architecture or Techno-utopia: Politics after Modernism"*, MIT Press, 2010.