

AGIT-PROP

- Maiakovsky, “An Open Letter to Workers,” 1918:
- “Comrades!
- The twin fires of war and revolution have devastated both our souls and our cities. The palaces of yesterday’s grandeur stand as burnt-out skeletons. The ruined cities await new builders[...]
- To you who accept the legacy of Russia, to you who will (I believe!) tomorrow become masters of the whole world, I address the question: with what fantastic structures will you cover the fires of yesterday?” ...
- “No-one knows what huge suns will illuminate the life of the future. Perhaps artists will transform the gray dust of the cities into a hundred-coloured rainbow...For us one thing is clear: we have inaugurated the first country in the modern history of the arts”

REVOLUTIONARY ART 1918-1928

- Trends before the actual revolution: Futurism, Suprematism (both emphasizing machines, motion, progress, and involving an interest in abstract elements like lines and geometrical forms)
- Trends developed immediately with and after the revolution: Constructivism, Productivism, Agit-Prop (Agitation-Propaganda). Productivism stems from Constructivism. Both are employed *for the purposes of* “Agit-Prop.”

Suprematism: Malevich 1919



Kandinsky—the first director of the Vkhutemas...
eventually removed... interested in synesthesia
and resonances of color with psychology



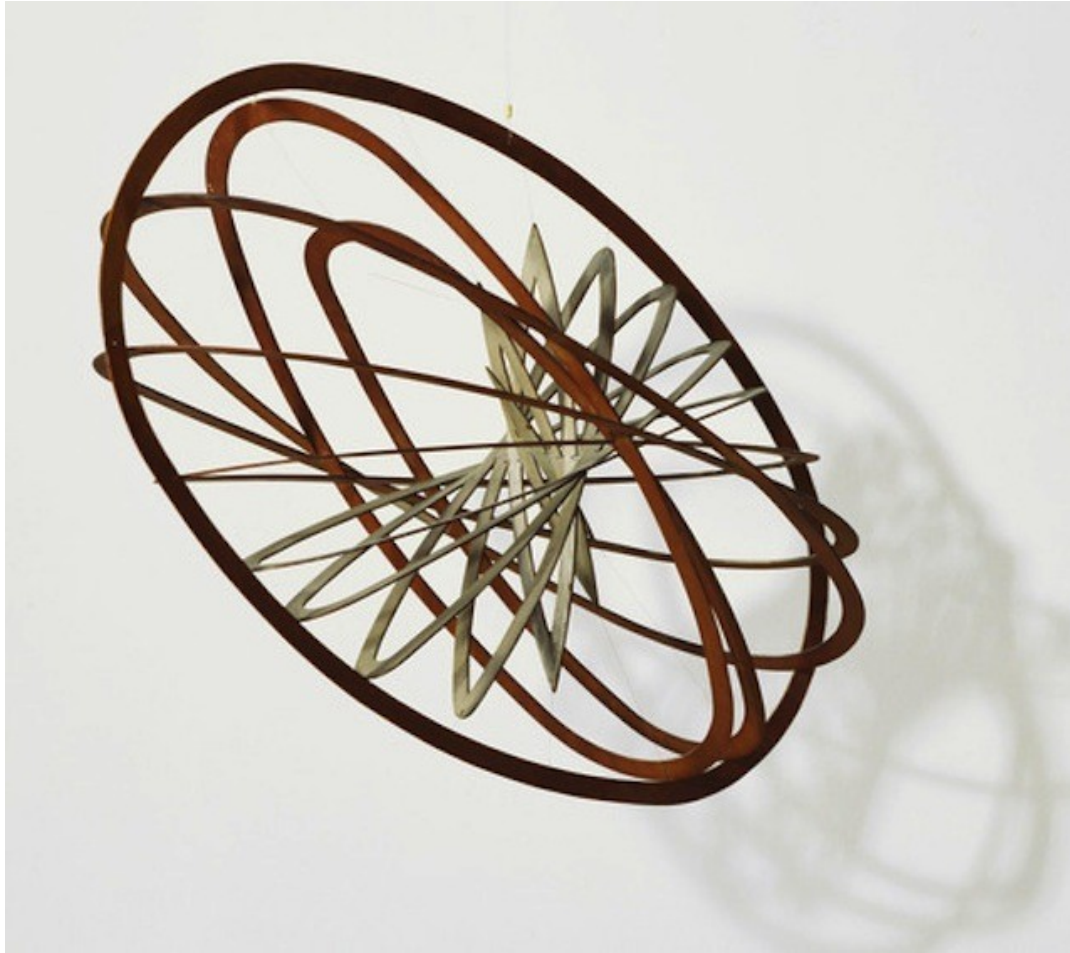
CONSTRUCTIVISM AND PRODUCTIVISM

- Abstractly or formally: a movement emphasizing the most basic elements of visual/sculptural art (line, basic geometry, color). Eventually these elements are studied scientifically, with special attention given to their impact upon the senses and on behavior.
- In terms of the job of the artist: the artist is no longer to be thought of as an individual thinker, but as an “art worker,” a “constructor” of art objects, which increasingly are envisioned as integrated into the everyday world of objects.
- Productivism develops as a re-emphasis upon this practical application.

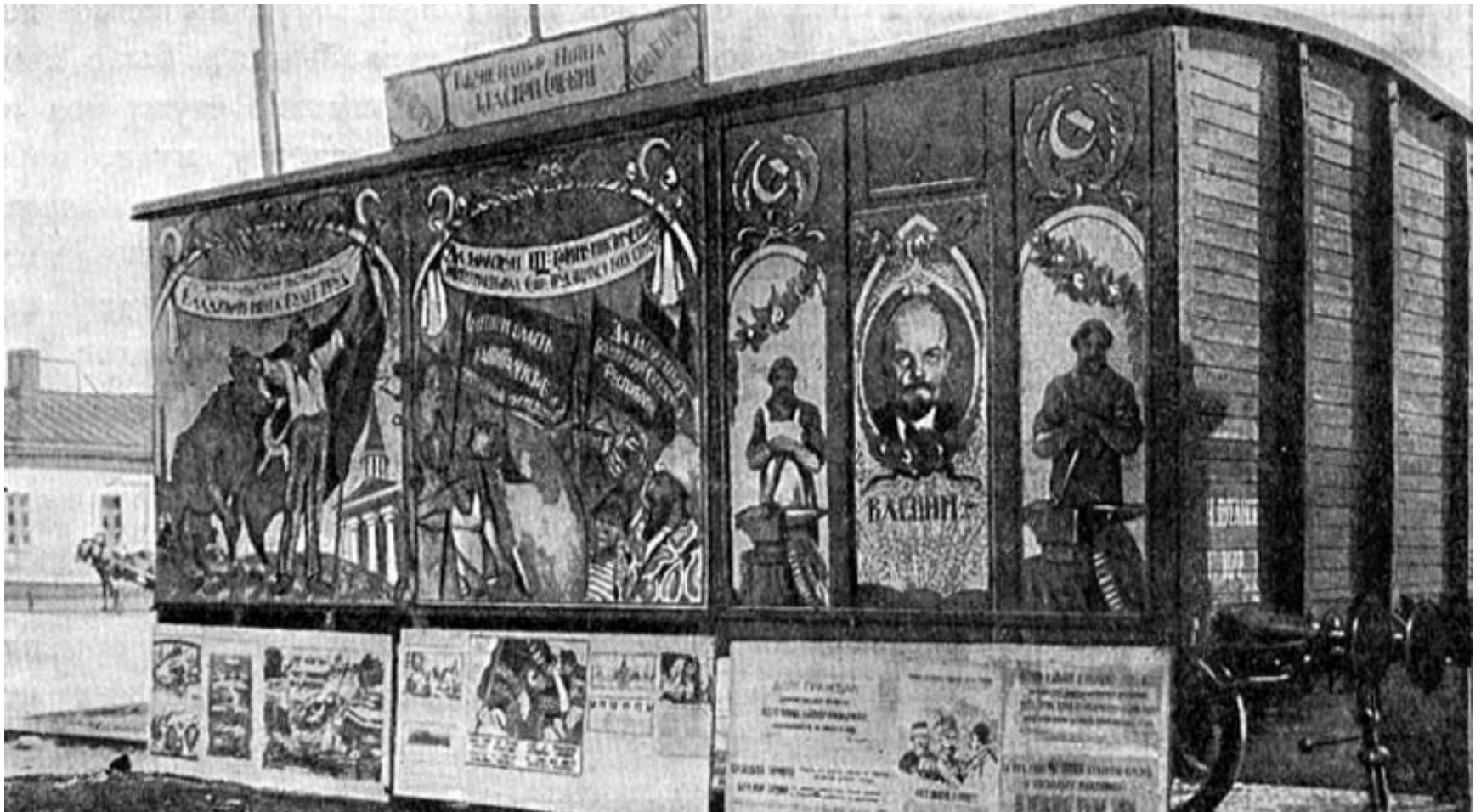
Constructivism: Tatlin, *Monument to the 3rd International*



Rodchenko, *Spatial Object*



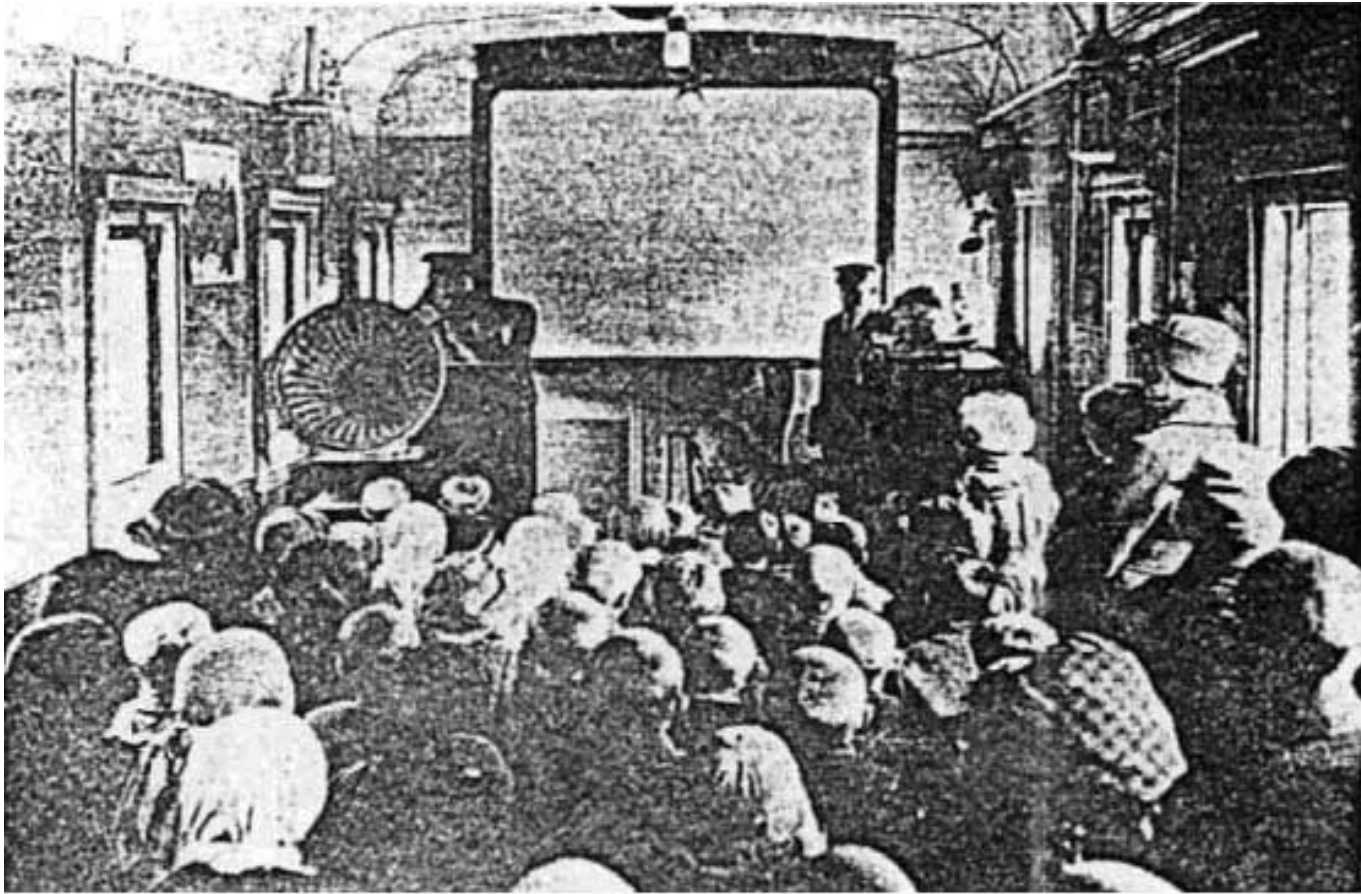
AGIT-PROP: the problem, remember, is to
“generate political consciousness”



Agit-train



Interior of agit-train



Interior of agit-train.

“Rosta Windows” (propaganda posters)





And constructivism/agitation in film:

- Eisenstein-Potemkin – funded by govt to commemorate the 1925 25 yr anniversary of the 1905 revolts. Maybe call this “film as propaganda?” Or is it more? Just about every film historian considers this one of the greatest films in history.
- Vertov – Man with the Movie Camera – what about using film to depict “objective reality”... no actors, no drama, no fantasy-scenario. Just the real world of facts, carefully selected to generate a “communist” consciousness...

So what questions/applications does this raise for us?

- *** Agit-Prop transforms social/city space into a “symbolic space.” It probably looks kind of funny and transparent to us. But, with constructivism’s and productivism’s emphasis on the design of daily life, continued in the Bauhaus in Germany and De Stijl in Holland, Agit-Prop and its techniques historically continue directly into ADVERTISING.
- The Russian architect Ladovsky, for example, is interested in “rational design” —the construction of spaces most efficient/conducive to work. He uses applied psychology, from Munsterberg, and pursues the same course as Frederick Taylor (“Taylorism” —the rationalization of labor). Strangely, social and work space in the Capitalist and the Communist countries become very similar. Early Soviet art, which Stalin mistrusted, dovetails immediately with Western design...