

Title: Un-framing the Earth: “Ecotones” and The Art of Elena Guro and Liubov Popova
Author: Juliette Stapanian-Apkarian, Emory University

Abstract:

The topic of organicist or bio-centric trends within Russian avant-gardism has drawn increasing attention from scholars, and their studies have done much to widen and deepen our views of modernist dynamics. To help further understanding of these dynamics, this paper investigates organicism in avant-garde ideas and artistic experiments through the analytical and theoretical lens of “ecotone.” A term from ecology studies, an ecotone is a liminal space where differing ecosystems overlap. As such, an ecotone offers a space of both competition and opportunity, of disorderings and new orderings, of territorialization and de-territorialization, and of difference and transformation. While “ecotone” can be used analogically to address inter-art sensibilities of Russian avant-gardists working at the overlap between visual and verbal domains, it can be used productively too to help interpret forms and forces in complex systems and to address questions of organic development and growth. As demonstrated in this paper, the notion of ecotone reveals important intricacies in the writing and painting of Elena Guro (1877-1913)—an early figure in the organicist movement and closely tied to the natural world. In different but related ways, the concept of “ecotone” also provides insight into works by constructivist/objectivists like Liubov Popova (1889-1924) and may aid our understandings of their calls for “new organisms,” organic unity” and “organization.”*

*This study draws on the scholarship of A. Povelikhina, I. Wünsche, N. Gurianova, M. Banjanin, M. Gough, and others.