

Title: “Eye-Tunes” of the Avantgarde: Early Futurist “Writing” as Audio-Video Montage
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Abstract:

While acknowledging both audial and visual qualities, much scholarship on zaum’ and Russian Futurist verbal texts has tended to emphasize either the nature of these works as “sound poems” or as literary “hybrids” with the visual arts. Yet because the notion of boundary-crossing and movement or “shift”/sdvig was central to early Futurist aesthetics, it is important too to consider dialogical interrelationships among conventional writing, sound-writing (zvukopis’), and color-writing (tsvetopis’) in terms of dynamic, and even “anarchic” (N. Gurianova) or conflicting “voices.” To this end, consideration of modes of avantgarde “writing” with parallels in the development of early Soviet cinema—the newest synthetic art of the time—may offer useful insights. Earlier studies like M. Tupitsyn’s on Malevich, for example, suggest that the cinematic may help us better discern dynamic or performative potentials in the “still” frames of the artistic page or canvas. Expanding on this perspective while recognizing differences among media, this paper juxtaposes Futurist writing with cinematic issues specifically at the contested intersections of the silent era with the sound era, and with the subsequent emergence of color film. At these key—and richly nuanced—junctures in film history, issues, eg., of “synchrony” and “asynchrony” among the senses were intensely explored by Soviet cinematographers like Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov. Aspects of such debates can be shown to have valuable resonance with earlier Futurist writing. Discussions in cinema too of the role of inter-titles versus sound, or of the “chromophonic” in “moving pictures” can offer productive scaffolding from which to reconsider select aspects of Futurist literary texts and painted images. Although invention and innovation traditionally have been associated with men, this study of artistic analogues includes works by women avant-gardists, with particular focus on select works of Esfir Shub, Elena Guro, Olga Rozanova, and Varvara Stepanova.