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Constructivist Form under Media Constraint

Abstract: This article examines how constructivist visual form operated beyond the institutional and ideological conditions of its Soviet origin. Focusing on Chinese left-wing print culture and Yugoslav Zenithism publishing, it treats constructivism not as a stylistic influence or artistic doctrine, but as a set of formal operations, including geometric organization and typographic integration. Through comparative analysis of printed visual materials, the study shows how these operations were selectively extracted and recombined within constrained, extra-institutional publishing practices. Under conditions of limited resources, censorship, and unstable circulation, constructivist strategies organized attention and structured perception in print. The article argues that through this process of operational compression, constructivist form shifted from an avant-garde artistic program into a transferable mode of visual communication, offering a framework for reconsidering cross-regional aesthetic exchange beyond stylistic influence or direct transmission.

Keywords: Constructivism; Visual Communication; Print Media; Chinese Left-Wing Print Culture; Zenithism.

Introduction

Constructivism is often discussed in relation to the political and cultural transformations of the early Soviet period, including the revolutionary ideology and reorganization of artistic labor. Its emphasis on structure, materiality, and production has typically been examined within institutional frameworks, particularly in studies of architecture and productivist programs connected to state initiatives and industrial development. Within this historiography, constructivist form is generally situated within a broader context of ideological mobilization and emerging design institutions such as VKhUTEMAS, a framing that tends to link the constructivist form closely to the institutionalized artistic production. As a result, the constructivist form is

often interpreted primarily through the institutional and ideological structures that sustained it in the Soviet context, leaving less attention to how its visual logic might operate when detached from those structures. Situated within scholarship on transnational avant-gardes, global modernisms, and print culture, this study examines how constructivist form came to function as a flexible visual resource under distinct historical and media pressures.¹

This institutional framing, however, leaves unresolved a recurring phenomenon: the reappearance of constructivist visual forms in contexts where such institutional and industrial frameworks were limited or absent. In environments without integrated design training systems or centralized production structures, visual elements associated with constructivism—such as geometric composition, axial organization, strong contrast, and functional typography—reappeared across periodicals, posters, woodcuts, book covers, magazine pages, and other reproducible media. They did not create local replicas of Soviet Constructivism as a unified artistic program, but they reshaped printed visual practice through adaptable principles of layout, image construction, and typographic organization. The question, then, is why constructivist visual form remained operational after becoming detached from the ideological, institutional, and industrial conditions under which it was originally theorized, and what kinds of visual work its formal elements performed under conditions of material constraint and communicative pressure.

This question makes a cross-context comparison of Chinese left-wing visual practice and Yugoslav Zenithist publishing especially revealing. Juxtaposing these two contexts brings into view a structural problem that might remain less apparent within the historiography of any single regional tradition. Although emerging from different political and cultural settings, both developed largely outside stable state or academic institutions, operating instead within extra- or para-institutional media environments. Neither functioned as an official state cultural institution. Both were subject to censorship, intermittent prohibition, and restricted circulation, relying heavily on periodicals, printed images, and other small-scale publications to sustain communication. In such settings, visual forms are needed to operate immediately and efficiently organizing attention, guiding reading, and condensing ideas within limited material space. Taken together, these conditions form the media constraint named in the title: the material, technical, economic, and perceptual pressures of print that shaped how visual form could be produced, reproduced, and read.

On this basis, Chinese left-wing visual practice and Yugoslav Zenithist publishing are examined as comparable print-cultural formations in which constructivist operations manifest through specific practices of layout, image construction, and visual organization. Methodologically, the analysis proceeds through a cross-context

¹ For discussions of decentered and global modernisms, see Partha Mitter, “Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery,” *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (December 2008): 531–48; Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time* (Columbia University Press, 2015); Peter Brooker, Sascha Bru, Andrew Thacker, and Christian Weikop, eds., *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Volume III: Europe 1880–1940* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

comparative visual reading of printed materials, including book covers, woodcuts, journal pages, and typographic layouts. These materials are selected because they register constructivist visual principles in the organization of the printed surface, especially through spatial arrangement, typographic integration, geometric ordering, and relations between image and text. The argument moves from the constraints of print to the formal operations activated under those constraints, and finally to the communicative functions these operations acquired. Through this approach, the article argues that constructivist visual form could operate beyond its original institutional context as a set of transferable visual procedures adapted to constrained publishing environments.

Constructivist visual principles and their circulation

Visual Logic of Constructivism

From its inception, Constructivism defined artistic practice through the principle of construction, understood not as the production of aesthetic objects but as a mode of operation grounded in the purposeful organization of material and visual relations in real space. This definition was articulated most clearly in the early INKhUK debates, where artistic practice was redefined in terms of organization, necessity, and structural coherence. In this article, “constructivist form” refers to the visual organization of elements according to the principles of construction articulated in the early constructivist theory. Rather than treating these ideas primarily as historical doctrine, the discussion below identifies several operative principles of constructivist visual logic that inform the analysis of publishing practices that follows. The concern here is therefore not the historical meaning of constructivism itself, but how its formal principles operate as a mode of visual organization.

“There is only one kind of construction”,² Rodchenko insisted, defining it as “the organization of a work’s elements according to a purpose or goal (tsel).”³ Construction, in this sense, does not operate as a stylistic category or compositional choice but as a principle governing the purposeful organization of elements within a work. It must therefore be carried out “in such a way that there is nothing superfluous”,⁴ and it is “not just putting parts together”,⁵ allowing for “nothing accidental, nothing not accounted for.”⁶ These formulations present construction as a mode of organization in which each element derives its significance from its necessary role within an internally structured system. Taken together, these statements frame constructivist form

² Maria Gough, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (University of California Press, 2005), 39.

³ Gough, *The Artist as Producer*, 39.

⁴ Sergey Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko: The Complete Work* (MIT Press, 1987), 94.

⁵ Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko*, 87.

⁶ Gough, *The Artist as Producer*, 50.

as a principle of purposeful visual organization, in which meaning emerges from the structured relations among elements rather than from the representational content.

While Rodchenko emphasized purposeful organization, Varvara Stepanova further elaborated the structural coherence of such constructions. Instead of defining construction through external criteria or stylistic effects, she described it as a condition of organic interdependence among elements: “A mark of constructiveness is the organic way in which constituent parts are linked together. Even the most insignificant change in any of the parts leads to the destruction of the entire construction.”⁷ Stepanova’s formulation complements Rodchenko’s insistence on eliminating the superfluous by presenting construction as a self-consistent system in which meaning and structural integrity depend on the interdependence of elements. Here the constructivist form appears not as an expressive style but as a relational structure in which visual elements acquire significance through their position within an organized system.

Similarly, the writings of El Lissitzky and Ilya Ehrenburg reflect an orientation toward structural rationality. Rather than treating historical models as sources of stylistic authority, they argue that what can be retained from classical art are “the eternal laws of clarity, economy, and proportion.”⁸ In this sense, classical art is understood as a historical source of formal rationality, from which structural principles may be abstracted independently of representation or subject matter. On this basis, they define the task of constructive art not as ornamentation but as organization: “the task of constructive art is not to adorn life but to organize it.”⁹ As they further state, “Every organized work—whether it be a house, a poem, or a picture—is an ‘object’ directed toward a particular end, which is calculated not to turn people away from life, but to summon them to make their contribution toward life’s organization.”¹⁰

These theoretical principles find clear visual articulation in the constructivist practice. One of the most widely discussed examples is El Lissitzky’s *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* (Figure 1). In this composition, political meaning is produced without recourse to representational imagery. The composition relies entirely on geometric opposition and directional force: a red wedge penetrates a white circular field, generating significance through spatial tension rather than depicted action. Perception is organized along the wedge’s axis, guiding the viewer toward its point of impact and transforming interpretation into a process of spatial alignment.

In this way, *Red Wedge* demonstrates how constructivist form operates as a perceptual mechanism rather than a representational medium. Meaning is not conveyed through symbolic reference but arises directly from formal relations of contrast, direction, and spatial pressure. Taken together, these theoretical formulations and visual

⁷ Varvara Stepanova, “Construction,” in *Varvara Stepanova: The Complete Work*, ed. Alexander Lavrent’ev, trans. John E. Bowlt (MIT Press, 1988), 172.

⁸ El Lissitzky and Ilya Ehrenburg, “The Blockade of Russia Is Coming to an End,” in *The Tradition of Constructivism*, ed. Stephen Bann (Thames and Hudson, 1974), 56.

⁹ Lissitzky and Ehrenburg, “The Blockade of Russia Is Coming to an End,” 55.

¹⁰ Lissitzky and Ehrenburg, “The Blockade of Russia Is Coming to an End,” 56.

practices suggest three operative principles of constructivist visual logic: the geometric organization of visual elements, the relational coherence of structural components, and the directional structuring of perception. These principles provide a framework for analyzing the operation of constructivist visual forms.

Circulation in Yugoslavia: *Zenit*

Constructivist visual forms entered the Yugoslav avant-garde context most visibly through the magazine *Zenit* (1921–1926), founded and edited by Ljubomir Micić in Zagreb and later in Belgrade. As part of a wider European avant-garde periodical network, *Zenit* served as a site where Russian Constructivist imagery, European modernist experimentation, and Zenithism's Balkan self-positioning intersected.¹¹

Zenithism embraced Tatlin's Constructivist ideas, and the sketch of the *Monument to the Third International* was published multiple times—including in *Zenit* issue #11 (twice), the double issue #17–18, Micić's book *Damn Your Hundred Gods / Rescue Car* (1922), and on the poster for the *Great Zenithist Evening*—establishing it as a recurring visual reference within the magazine.¹² This repeated publication reinforced the Monument's status as a core visual reference within *Zenit* and imbued it with symbolic significance as a marker of internationalism and modernity, highlighting the journal's role in circulating Russian Constructivist imagery and its formal principles within the Yugoslav avant-garde context.

A more concentrated presentation of Russian avant-garde art followed in the double issue #17–18 (1922) of *Zenit*, titled “New Russian Art”. Guest-edited by Lissitzky and Ehrenburg, the issue brought together visual works and texts associated with the emerging avant-garde. As indicated in the issue's table of contents (Figure 2), the visual reproductions included Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, Rodchenko's *Constructive Form in Space*, and Lissitzky's *Construction*. Together, these reproductions formed an identifiable corpus of Constructivist visual material within the pages of *Zenit*. The issue also included theoretical and literary materials such as Malevich's *The Laws of the New Art*, poems by Khlebnikov and Mayakovsky, and essays by Ehrenburg and Lissitzky on Russian new art. These materials made the issue an early European journal publication, bringing together visual, theoretical, and literary works of the Russian avant-garde within a single issue.

As Subotić observes, *Zenit* “sought to operate within an international cultural context and participate in the new artistic spirit of the period.”¹³ Another study similarly notes that “it is difficult to find a person among the 1920s elite of the European

¹¹ Ljubomir Micić, “Zenithism as the Balkan Totalizer of New Life and New Art,” in *Zenithism (1921–1927): A Yugoslav Avant-Garde Anthology*, ed. Aleksandar Bošković and Steven Teref (Academic Studies Press, 2022), 110–11.

¹² Aleksandar Bošković and Steven Teref, eds., *Zenithism (1921–1927): A Yugoslav Avant-Garde Anthology* (Academic Studies Press, 2022), 47.

¹³ Irina Subotić, “Avant-Garde Tendencies in Yugoslavia,” *Art Journal* 49, 1 (1990): 21–27.

avant-garde whose name could not be found on the pages of *Zenit*.”¹⁴ Issue #43 (1926) of *Zenit* provides a visual record of this network through a page titled “Collaborators of *Zenit* 1921–1926” (Figure 3), where figures such as Tatlin, Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Malevich, Mayakovsky, Kandinsky, Gropius, and Picasso appear together on a single page of the magazine, among many others. The list registers the transnational network of avant-garde contributors whose works circulated through the magazine during its publication. An editorial notice printed above the list of collaborators further describes *Zenit* as the first Balkan magazine—and among the earliest European publications—devoted to Constructivist artistic tendencies.

Circulation in China: Leftist print culture

On March 2, 1930, the Chinese Left-Wing Writers’ League was established in Shanghai and adopted the Program of the Chinese Left-Wing Writers’ League, which explicitly declared literature and art to be “weapons of the liberation struggle.”¹⁵ The League founded or edited a series of influential periodicals—including *Mengya Monthly*, *Beidou*, *Dazhong Wenyi*, *Wenxue Yuebao*, and *Qianshao* (later renamed *Wenxue Dao-bao*)—which served as central platforms for both theoretical discourse and creative production. During this period, other leftist cultural organizations, such as the Left-Wing Drama League and the Left-Wing Artists’ League, also emerged, collectively forming a leftist cultural front centered on revolutionary literature, drama, and visual arts. The movement sought to unify leftist forces within the literary and intellectual spheres, employing artistic practice to propagate revolutionary ideas, critique the existing social order, and mobilize public participation in revolutionary struggle.

In the early 1920s, Russian avant-garde art appeared in Chinese-language texts primarily as part of broader discussions on modern art, emphasizing abstraction and spiritual experimentation rather than operational systems. Tatlin and his *Monument to the Third International* were repeatedly invoked as emblematic references to the Soviet artistic innovation. Works such as Feng Zikai’s *History of Western Art* (1928) and translated surveys like *An Overview of New Soviet Art* (1930) introduced these images and ideas to Chinese audiences. Through their recurrent appearance across art history, architectural commentary, and cultural journalism, these motifs gradually stabilized as recognizable visual markers of Constructivism. Despite this increasing visibility, Constructivism at this stage remained largely symbolic and discursive, lacking clear operational form within artistic practice.

In the 1930s, Lu Xun played a pivotal role in transforming Constructivist principles from symbolic references into operational visual strategies. As a writer, translator, and designer, he compiled and published *New Russian Prints* (1930) and *Yinyu Collection* (1934), which included woodcuts by several Soviet printmakers, some of

¹⁴ Bošković and Teref, *Zenithism (1921–1927)*, 95.

¹⁵ Zhongguo Zuoyi Zuoia Lianmeng, 中国左翼作家联盟, “中国左翼作家联盟的理论纲领” [The theoretical program of the Chinese Left-Wing Writers’ League], 拓荒者 [*Pioneers*] 1, no. 3 (1930): 1129–32.

whom had studied or taught at VKhUTEMAS, the Moscow-based state art and technical school where Constructivist principles were systematically taught and applied in artistic practice. In the preface to *New Russian Prints*, Lu Xun distinguished “construction” from “composition”, emphasizing that Constructivism is “not in depiction, but in organization; not in creation in the aesthetic sense, but in structural building”.¹⁶ This definition clarified the meaning of “construction” as a structural principle in the Chinese context, so that Constructivism was no longer understood merely as a general expression of “new art”, but as a practical approach emphasizing relational organization.

In 1931, Lu Xun organized China’s first modern woodcut workshop in Shanghai, inviting Japanese art educator Uchiyama Kakichi to teach woodcut techniques. The workshop trained a generation of core practitioners and directly catalyzed the rise of China’s New Woodcut Movement. These initiatives provided the technical infrastructure through which modern graphic principles, including those associated with Constructivist visual logic, could be materialized in woodcut print culture.

Lu Xun’s engagement with Soviet and European graphic materials reflected a concern with how modern art could move beyond elite circles and become visually accessible to a wider public through woodcut, image, and publication. This concern extended beyond individual practice: his editorial and publishing projects were reinforced by exhibitions and international collaboration. In 1933, he organized the German-Russian and Russian-French Book Illustration Shows in Shanghai, exposing Chinese artists not only to Soviet graphic practice but also to broader European modernist book illustration and avant-garde visual languages. In 1936, he compiled *Soviet Prints*, based on a touring exhibition by the Soviet Society for Cultural Relations. Many featured artists, such as V. Favorsky, a former rector of VKhUTEMAS, embodied Constructivist principles of formal discipline, abstraction, and pedagogical clarity. The cover of *Yinyu Collection* (Figure 4), designed by Lu Xun himself, demonstrates this logic: its rectangular framing, red-black palette, and grid-like typography evoke Constructivist concerns with clarity, contrast, and modular organization. Through these editorial, educational, and exhibition networks, Constructivist visual principles gradually acquired operational presence within Chinese leftist woodcut culture.

Constructivist form in practice

Constructivist layout as spatial organization

Constructivist layout practice did not constitute a unified stylistic system. Instead, it was selectively integrated into the broader formation of Chinese left-wing publishing and Zenithist production through geometric construction, typographic embedding, and proportional contrast. In each context, these operations functioned as practical methods for structuring printed surfaces under material limitations and non-institutional production conditions.

¹⁶Lu Xun 鲁迅, “〈新俄画选〉小引” [Preface to *New Russian Prints*], in 鲁迅全集 [Complete Works of Lu Xun], vol. 7 (人民文学出版社, 2005), 362.

Two Chinese book covers—*Destruction* (Figure 5) and *Soviet Literary Debates* (Fig. 6)—illustrate this selective appropriation within the Chinese print context. The cover of *Destruction* is organized around a central diamond, with radiating triangular fields extending toward the page edges. Figurative imagery is entirely absent. Geometric elements dominate the surface, structuring it through spatial configuration rather than pictorial representation. The title characters are embedded within the central diamond, functioning as integral structural elements within the composition.

A related logic appears in *Soviet Literary Debates*, for which Lu Xun wrote a preface affirming the book's value for understanding Soviet literature. The vertically elongated “PLEKANOV” operates not simply as a textual heading but as a structural anchor for the composition. Dense red linear patterns occupy the left portion of the cover, serving as a visual anchor. Although these marks are not legible as characters, they evoke calligraphic rhythm within a Chinese visual context, generating an intermediate effect between abstract graphic texture and script-based visibility. On the right, the vertically arranged Chinese title is rendered in black type for legibility, standing in visual tension with the expansive red field. The composition juxtaposes typographic structure with rhythmic graphic density, organizing the page through contrast and alignment rather than narrative imagery.

Zenithist publishing employed comparable strategies in a more explicit geometric register. The front cover of Ljubomir Micić's *Antievropa* (Figure 7) positions a rising black triangular mass against a red circular field. The composition achieves visual emphasis through proportional contrast and directional force, without relying on representational imagery. The title is integrated into this geometric configuration, participating in the compositional balance and reinforcing spatial primacy. Its bilingual presentation—ANTIEUROPE in Latin script and Антиевропа in Cyrillic—creates a layered reading experience, situating the publication within both an international avant-garde circuit and a South Slavic linguistic context.

The back cover of *Antievropa* (Figure 8) demonstrates how layout strategies extend beyond expressive composition into an information organization. Bibliographic data and publication chronology are arranged in aligned typographic blocks and rhythmic horizontal bars, transforming the page into a visual grid that structures reading through spacing, repetition, and alignment. Here, layout functions as a practical mechanism to manage informational density, rather than as mere decorative display.

Across both Chinese and Yugoslav examples, constructivist layout operates as a transferable method of visual organization, rather than a fixed aesthetic doctrine. Both contexts employ a chromatic palette dominated by red and black. Geometric construction replaces representational imagery, typography becomes spatially embedded, and compositional coherence is achieved through proportional contrast and alignment. These cases demonstrate how selectively extracted constructivist operations enabled designers to reorganize printed surfaces into structured visual fields capable of sustaining communication within non-institutional publishing contexts.

From individual expression to collective visual arrangement

If constructivist layout reorganizes the printed surface as a spatial system, it also transforms the perceptual logic through which that system is experienced. Within this organizational framework, constructivist discourse and practice displaced personal expression by rejecting art as a vehicle of individual style and subjective aesthetic experience. As Aleksei Gan, a Russian Constructivist theorist, argued in *Constructivism* (1922), “all so-called art is permeated with the most reactionary idealism, a product of extreme individualism.”¹⁷ This individualism pushes art toward unnecessary experiments in refining subjective beauty.

Gan rejected art understood as individualized, subjective expression and instead reconceived visual practice as an organized mode of production. He called for the task “to formulate new phenomena of artistic labor within the new historic environment,”¹⁸ redefining artistic activity as “intellectual-material production” rather than expressive creation.¹⁹ Under this formulation, form no longer functions as a carrier of personal emotion or stylistic identity but operates as a structured method grounded in organization and construction. Meaning is thus no longer anchored in an individual artistic idiom, but reorganized through compositional logic—prioritizing relational structure, functional alignment, and systemic coherence over personal gesture.

This tendency can be observed in the Chinese left-wing visual practice of the early 1930s, particularly in the woodcut production. In the *Mu Ling Woodcut Album* (Figure 9), figures are not treated as individualized subjects but rendered through repeated, simplified bodily forms. Facial features are reduced, gestures standardized, and bodies aligned along shared axes. Rather than privileging singular identity, the image organizes figures as compositional units. These units are coordinated through rhythm, repetition, and directional alignment, subordinating individual presence to the overall visual structure.

This structural absorption of the figure is articulated more forcefully in *Massacre* (Figure 10). Here, bodies are arranged in dense alignment, their positions determined by directional forces within the composition rather than by narrative sequencing or expressive emphasis. Gestures converge, orientations repeat, and distinctions between individual bodies become visually unstable. The image does not construct meaning through individualized scenes of violence or victimhood; instead, bodies function as elements within a coherent spatial system. Corpse-like forms interrupt alignment not as individualized tragedies, but as structural breaks. These breaks intensify the compositional tension of the overall spatial system. In this operation, the figure no longer signifies primarily as an expressive subject but participates as a component within an organized visual field.

¹⁷ John E. Bowlt, ed. and trans., *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902–1934*, rev. and enl. ed. (Thames and Hudson, 1988), 221.

¹⁸ Bowlt, *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde*, 221.

¹⁹ Bowlt, *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde*, 225.

A comparable process unfolds in Yugoslav Zenithist publishing, though it operates through language rather than figuration. In visual poetry published in *Zenit* (Figure 11), words are treated not as carriers of authorial voice or linear semantic continuity but as graphic units distributed across the page. Linear reading is disrupted by spatial dispersion, shifts in scale, and non-hierarchical alignment. Language enters the domain of visual perception. Words are geometrized, semantics are subordinated to layout and reading proceeds as a process of spatial traversal. Meaning tends to emerge through visual rhythm and relational positioning rather than through syntactic progression.

In these compositions, the primacy of authorship as a source of meaning is weakened by layout. The poetic voice does not cohere around a stable speaking subject; instead, it is dispersed within a spatial system that organizes perception through contrast, repetition, and interval. Words no longer function primarily as expressions of interiority but as elements within a visual arrangement. As in the Chinese woodcuts, individual expression is overridden by compositional force.

Taken together, these practices reveal consistent operational logic across media. Figures are absorbed into alignment; language is spatialized; meaning is generated through relational structure rather than individual expression. Through these formal operations, visual organization no longer relies on an individual subject as the exclusive anchor of meaning. Perception can therefore be understood as relational rather than individual-centered, structured by formal relations rather than expressive intent.

Under such conditions, the constructivist form establishes a shared perceptual arrangement—one that viewers or readers can enter without anchoring perception in a single subjective viewpoint. In this sense, constructivism does not become collective primarily by addressing a mass audience or by explicitly invoking social unity. Rather, it achieves collectivity at the level of perceptual structure by weakening individual-centered representation and reorganizing perception as a shared structural field. Once form is detached from individual expression, it can be reorganized across publishing practices and transferred across different media environments and cultural contexts.

From avant-garde form to communication technology

The preceding analyses show that the constructivist form was mobilized in the Chinese left-wing visual practice and Yugoslav Zenithist publishing not as a stable style but as visual operations that could be reconfigured under different print-cultural conditions. In the Chinese materials, these operations were directed toward book design, woodcut imagery, and public visual legibility; in the Zenithist publishing, toward editorial experimentation, bilingual typography, and the spatial reorganization of language within an international avant-garde periodical network. These divergent uses nevertheless point to a shared transformation: detached from the institutional frameworks that had sustained the Soviet Constructivism, constructivist visual logic

no longer functioned as a systemic artistic program but became a practical means of organizing printed perception under constrained publishing conditions.

This shift cannot be adequately explained through stylistic influence or ideological continuity. Rather, it is more accurately understood as a process of operational compression, through which a broader avant-garde project was condensed into transferable visual procedures. What remained operative were its internal formal principles: the prioritization of structural relations over representational depiction, the activation of perception through contrast and directional composition, and the integration of text and image into unified visual fields. This compression process is the central mechanism examined in this article.

Within publishing contexts shaped by limited resources and unstable circulation, these principles were translated into functional devices. Axial organization, geometric opposition, and typographic hierarchy came to operate less as expressions of artistic theory than as means of organizing attention, guiding reading patterns, and producing immediate perceptual impact. Understood in this operational sense, the constructivist form functioned as a rudimentary communication technology: its “technology” lay in repeatable visual procedures that converted formal organization into communicative efficiency in print.

This shift depended on the disassembly of constructivism as a systemic artistic project. In its original Soviet articulation, constructivism relied on a dense network of educational institutions, production facilities, exhibitions, and industrially oriented design initiatives. Once constructivist practices moved into extra-institutional publishing environments, this systemic coherence dissolved. What persisted instead were discrete operational elements—diagonals, modular layouts, contrasting color blocks, typographic fragmentation, and the spatial integration of image and text—which could be selectively extracted and recombined without adherence to a unified doctrinal framework.

This fragmentation increased rather than diminished constructivism’s adaptability. Reduced to operational units, constructivist techniques became deployable across diverse publishing formats, from journal layouts to book covers and woodcut compositions. Their effectiveness depended less on theoretical fidelity than on their capacity to structure perception under communicative pressure. In both Chinese and Zenithist contexts, constructivist form functioned less as a stylistic marker than as a repertoire of visual tools.

The persistence of these operations was reinforced by the material conditions of reproducible media. Printed formats impose standardized dimensions, limited chromatic range, mechanical reproduction, and repeated circulation. Within such constraints, visual strategies grounded in structural clarity rather than material refinement gain particular advantage. Constructivist compositions, relying on geometric simplification, spatial contrast, and typographic emphasis, retained legibility across multiple reproductions while minimizing dependence on specialized craftsmanship. Through repeated application, these forms stabilized within print culture, circulating

independently of the industrial and institutional structures that originally supported their development.

The parallel emergence of similar visual strategies in Chinese left-wing and Zenithist publishing does not necessarily indicate direct transmission. Rather, it reflects the activation of comparable formal logics under historically specific pressures. In both contexts, publishing operated under censorship, restricted circulation, and material scarcity—conditions that rendered the organizational capacity of constructivist form particularly visible. These pressures revealed, rather than constrained, the operational potential of the constructivist visual logic.

Through this process, the constructivist form became detached from the avant-garde experimentation and revolutionary production systems and was reorganized as a mode of visual communication embedded in the everyday publishing practice. This reorganization did not produce a new stylistic domain; instead, it clarified constructivism's underlying operational logic: the capacity to structure perception through spatial relations, typographic integration, and formal economy.

Once this operational logic was made explicit through concrete publishing practices, constructivist form became available for redeployment across a broad spectrum of visual cultures, including commercial graphic design and postwar visual communication. In this reconfigured state, constructivist form functioned as a transferable communication technology—not because the original historical pressures were reproduced, but because the formal mechanisms consolidated under those pressures proved capable of operating beyond them, structuring perception and condensing meaning across heterogeneous media environments.

Conclusion

Within the context of aesthetic dialogue between China and the Yugoslav cultural sphere, this study argues that constructivist form functioned less as a transmitted stylistic model and more as a flexible visual resource that could be reactivated under distinct historical pressures. By approaching constructivism as a set of formal operations rather than a coherent artistic doctrine, the analysis demonstrates how geometric organization, typographic integration, and spatial structuring could be selectively extracted and recomposed within constrained publishing environments. Through this process of operational compression, constructivist visual logic no longer operated as a unified avant-garde program but as a repertoire of practical visual procedures capable of organizing attention and structuring perception across different media conditions. From this perspective, the comparison between the Chinese left-wing print culture and the Yugoslav Zenithist publishing highlights how avant-garde visual form could continue to function beyond the institutional frameworks that originally sustained it.

By focusing on formal and spatial operations in the domain of printed visual materials, this article clarifies how constructivist visual organization shaped possible modes of looking and reading. Questions of readership and spectatorship therefore

emerge at the level of the printed page itself: printed layouts did not simply present visual forms, but directed attention, structured reading, and organized visual emphasis. Future research could extend this inquiry by examining how such strategies were interpreted through circulation, criticism, and reader response.



Figure 1. El Lissitzky, Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge, 1919. Lithographic poster. Wikimedia Commons; Original Source: Library of Congress.



Figure 2. Table of contents page, Zenit, issues # 17–18 (September–October 1922), “New Russian Art” issue. Source: Library of Congress, World Digital Library.

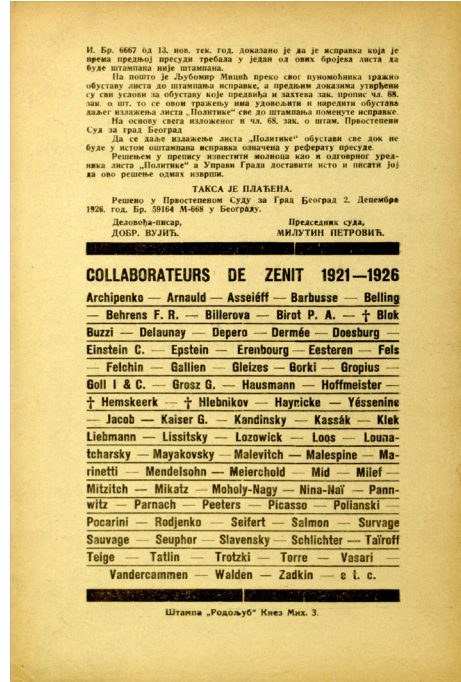


Figure 3. “Collaborators of Zenit 1921–1926,” Zenit, issue # 43 (February 1926). Source: Library of Congress, World Digital Library.

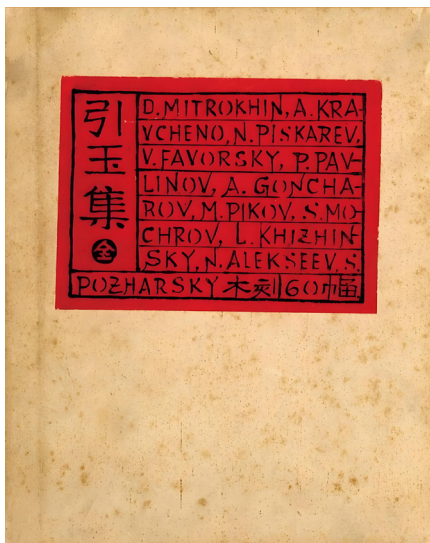


Figure 4. Cover of Yinyu ji (引玉集), edited and designed by Lu Xun, 1934. Courtesy of Shanghai Lu Xun Memorial Hall.



Figure 5. Cover of Destruction (毁灭), 1931. Courtesy of Lu Xun Library (luxunlib.com).

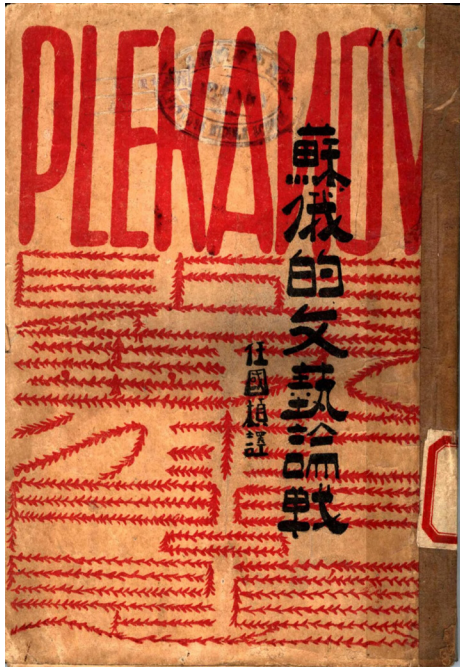


Figure 6. Cover of *Soviet Literary Debates* (苏俄的文艺论战), 1927. Source: Wikimedia Commons; original source record: CADAL no. 07015833, Fudan University. Public domain.



Figure 7. Front cover of Ljubomir Micić, *Antievropa*, 1926. Courtesy of Gallery RIMA.



Figure 8. Back cover of Ljubomir Micić, *Antievropa*, 1926. Courtesy of Gallery RIMA.



Figure 9. Cover of Mu Ling Woodcut Album (木铃木刻集), edited by the Mu Ling Woodcut Society, 1933. Courtesy of Shanghai Lu Xun Memorial Hall.

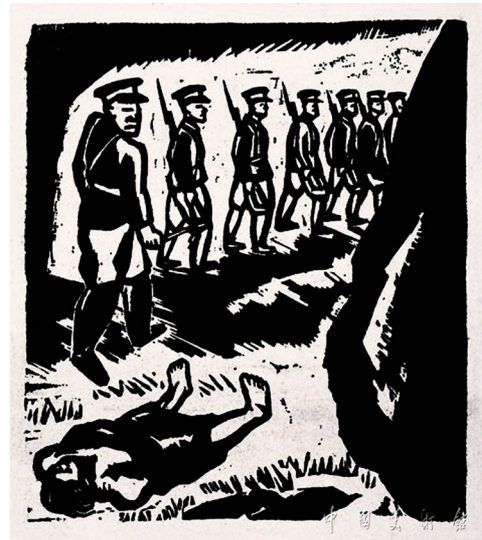


Figure 10. Chen Tiegeng (陈铁耕), Massacre (屠杀), Chinese woodcut print, 1933. Source: National Art Museum of China.

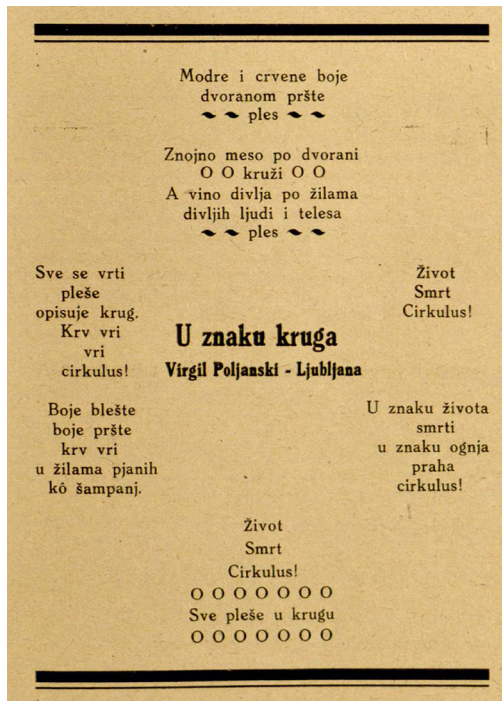


Figure 11. Virgil Poljanski (Branko Ve Poljanski), “U znaku kruga” (Under the Sign of the Circle), *Zenit*, issue # 1 (February 1921). Source: Library of Congress, World Digital Library.

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