Rhetoric's Avant-Garde

This seminar will consider a number of “post-linguistic” turns (“visual,” “new media,” “nonhuman,” “digital”) in rhetorical theory in terms of and in conversation with the idea of an avant-garde. Borrowing the concept from modernist understandings of politically and formally experimental art, this seminar will explore what it would mean to think about the recent history of rhetoric within a framework of vanguard-led experimentation. As it happens, new terrain for rhetorical study—fields such as the digital or the visual—have often been introduced into the critical conversation via experimental scholarly practices that conform to prior notions of avant-garde art. To this end, we will read work from rhetoricians whose critical practice draws from an avant-garde legacy including Geoffrey Sirc, Victor Vitanza, Gregory L Ulmer, and Jody Shipka. Additionally, we will look closely at the rise of the webtext as a rhetorical phenomenon in journals such as Kairos and Enculturation. We will also engage with the avant-garde methods these practitioners outline.