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**Mental Eyes and Literate Spectators: Making an Optical Turn in Early Soviet Russia**

The end of the Civil War and the beginning of the NEP in Russia marked a major sociocultural development that is often overlooked: a turn toward the optical. Within a short period, the country became a site of significant experimentation with different media and regimes of visibility. Suddenly, the profound mediatization of politics and daily life became the norm. The talk addresses only one aspect of this optical turn: the production of the first Soviet generation of “literate spectators.” Using illustrated children’s books of the 1920s as my main source, it reconstructs the process through which these spectators’ “mental eyes” were sharpened and a specific type of literacy was popularized. Depicted objects, processes, and people were presented as generalized representations—as abbreviated summaries that could visually convey a condensed graphic statement about a trend, a class, or a system.