
II.9 Structuralism and Semiotics

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Transfer as the Key: Understanding the Intellectual History of the Relationship between Formalism and Structuralism from the Perspective of the Prague Linguistic Circle

Formalism became established in Russia in the second half of the 1910s as a branch of learning within the study of literature (partially overspilling into other kinds of art), but with no firm ‘membership list’. It ran parallel to Avant-garde aesthetics and was associated institutionally with two societies committed to developing a philology critical of the methodology then employed in the humanities: the Moscow Linguistic Circle and The Society for the Study of Poetic Language (Obshchestvo izucheniia poeticheskogo iazyka, OPOIaZ) (for more on this see Glanc and Pil’shchikov 2017). Prague structuralism is examined in the context of the Prague Linguistic Circle (Pražský lingvistický kroužek, PLK), founded in 1926 (a fine assemblage of archive materials has become available in the outstanding compilation by Čermák et al., 2012). At issue is the extent to which these two intellectual formations were connected.

1 Cross-regional reception and appropriation

Key to the *transfer* of ideas is the individual input by the participants in the process; in the case in question one quite remarkable contributor was the distinctive personality of Roman Jakobson, who played a major part in both the above societies and in the theoretical debates that went on within them. In pre-revolutionary Russia he had acquired an elite education and had, from an early age, engaged in the artistic and intellectual life of the times as a follower of the latest trends in scholarship and aesthetics (occasionally in the role of a Futurist poet under the pseudonym ‘Aliagrov’ [see, for example, Kruchenykh and Aliagrov 1915–1916]), and between 1920 and 1939 he lived in Czechoslovakia. There he attended university, engaged in research on the language of poetry and theorised on linguistics – notable are his theories on the Russian verb and the case system of Russian (Jakobson 1932), he was employed at the Soviet diplomatic mission, and in the 1930s became a professor at the University of Brno. In the late 1930s, because of the persecution of Jews, he emigrated via Scandinavia to

the United States, where he held positions at both Columbia and Harvard, and, in his declining years, also at MIT. With his career at prominent, world-renowned universities, the keen insights and cogency of his philological thinking, and his ambitions relating to social policy (without regard to politics as such, on which he never offered any opinion), Jakobson was the very man to ‘transfer’ many ideas and stimuli of East-European provenance into the context of ‘worldwide literary scholarship’. Obviously, any construct of the cross-regional reception and appropriation of intellectual ideas or theses is controversial, or dependent on sundry assumptions and patterns of interpretation, and it invariably calls for additional substantiation and verification against period sources and interpretational intentions.

In the case of Jakobson (as with such other ‘prime movers’ behind the Prague Linguistic Circle as Jan Mukařovský or the Circle’s founder, Vilém Mathesius), the sheer breadth, scope, of their role in ‘intellectual transfer’ was extraordinary, impacting on a whole range of disciplines within the arts and humanities, including philosophy. However, it was linguistics which stood at the forefront of his research and which he viewed as, in a sense, a ‘universal science’. The concepts that he adapted and updated to meet the demands of his own scholarly discourse in the interwar period were coloured by a wide range of disparate synchronic and diachronic influences, whether he construed them critically or with approval, ranging from (to mention but some of them) Baudouin de Courtenay, Alexander Potebnia, Mikołaj Kruszewski, Alexander Veselovskii, Johann Friedrich Herbart, George Vernadsky, Nikolai Trubetzkoi, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and Gustav Shpet through Viktor Shklovski, Iurii Tynianov, Boris Eikhenbaum, the poetics of Vladimir Maiakovskii and Velimir Khlebnikov all the way to the psychologist and logician Georgii Chelpanov or the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl.

After Jakobson emigrated to the USA, this unique intellectual base widened to include the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss, while later on he gradually took into his philological concept, *inter alia*, also Bakhtin (Voloshinov 1973), Einstein (Jakobson 1982, 129–144) and Jan Patočka (Jakobson 1977, 26–28).

2 The relationship between formalist and structuralist theses

Our present purpose, however, is not to glamorize this impressive panoply, but to take a close, critical look at the phenomenon of transfer and seek out, via the attributes or manifest tokens of transfer, those aspects that might otherwise not be immediately apparent.

Every textbook on literary theory and criticism has, for the past hundred years – actually slightly fewer in the case of formalism and structuralism – sought to define both these theoretical concepts, naming their major exponents and listing the most influential texts in which they formulated the foundations of their methodologies and the specific ways in which they handled the object of their enquiry. Especially the last half-century has seen the emergence of various strategies that have developed sequels to both trends (perhaps best-known has been new criticism, on which see Ewa Thompson's classic work [Thompson 1971]). With that has come, understandably, a string of polemical commentaries on both, whether from a post-structuralist standpoint – such tendencies as new historicism and cultural materialism – or from various positions that erect, on new foundations that take criticism of positivist determinism into account, a concept of *authorship* that has been attacked, or rather called into question, often one-sidedly, within both Modernist lines of enquiry.

Attempting to summarise the definitions, characteristics and interrelations of formalism and structuralism may appear unrealistic given the countless existing works on the subject, with some overlapping and each one setting out from its own author's specific assumptions and objectives depending on who that was, when or on what occasion it was, and what they had in mind as they were formulating it.

With respect to the central theme of the present volume, the challenge, the spur to further enquiry, and the suggestion of how issues that have never gone away (because both movements have left indelible imprints throughout the humanities) might be approached, arise from just how questions as to the relationship between formalist and structuralist theses, terms and propositions should be put.

What has taken root as absolutely standard is a phenomenon deemed universally valid and simply not requiring any critical reflection, namely *influence* (see, for example, Karstens 2019, 115–139). Influence is, of course, a heterogeneous set of processes and effects – not inspiration, quotation or polemic, but the simple assertion of a correlation with no further instantiation. Influence is mediated by texts and personalities. The thinking and the articulation of it by some influences others. Of the justifiability and power of this concept there can be no doubt. All ideas are, whether affirmatively, critically, comparatively or in some other way, influenced by other ideas.

A certain constraint or disquieting doubt is contained in the very etymology of the word: what it amounts to is a one-way, irreversible process that also, if handled without due consideration, often tends towards simplification. *Influentia* (Lat.) – *influence* (Eng.) – *Einfluss* (Ger.) – *влияние* (Rus.) – *vliv* (Cze.) literally means that a 'transmitting element' brings about an alteration, that's to say, has an influence on, a target element, inflowing, debouching, into it. The nature of the image has, then, to do with a liquid or fluid. One water source pours into another, a stream

into a river, a river into the sea. There it influences the target liquid and by some means or other dissolves within it. The dictionary (“Influence”, *Oxfordify Dictionary*) advises that, as used originally, the word had a specific application, in astrology, to ethereal fluids that somehow affected human destiny. An echo of the powerful hand of destiny remains in ‘influence’ to this day; it provides a format and is in a sense a fateful and irrevocable invasion. Influence may be treated as a special example of the continuity of power. A phenomenon persists, influenced by something external to it, whether on the plane of ‘synchrony’ (the influence of a neighbouring phenomenon) or of ‘diachrony’ (influence of a phenomenon from the past). The ‘influencing element’ is manifested by the power that informs it. In the target environment it is accepted, evinces its agency and continues to modify (Karcz 2002). Within historiography, the theory of influence has, from as far back as the 1980s, evoked doubts (see, for example, Werner and Zimmermann 2002) that have been critical to the study of formalism, structuralism and their reception.

No less influential than the theory of influence is the model of ‘confrontation’, ‘difference’, ‘exclusion’, or ‘surpassing’: basically, these are various nuances of contrasting, whether on the synchronic or diachronic plane. In the given instance, structuralism cancels out or devalues formalism as a higher stage in the evolution of knowledge, battling against it and winning that battle: it overcomes its weaker, less developed forerunner. Such patterns of thought format not only the strands of our own thinking, but also the material that we study through their medium but which we could obviously tackle in any number of other ways. A further determiner of how we handle our intellectual heritage and the ways in which we are driven by it is the actual manner in which those people thought whose thinking we are seeking to map and gain an adequate hold on. The language of the object is projected into the language of the subject. In this regard, Jakobson maintained that formalism, in the ‘history’ of which he himself played a part, preceded structuralism as a lower, ‘mechanical’ stage in the latter’s development. There is even a clue to the terms in which he expressed himself, in an allusion to a famous paper by Lenin (1920), to the effect that formalism was an ‘infantile disorder’ of structuralism (Pomorska 1985, 169).

3 ‘Transfer’ as an alternative to ‘influence’

We may take ‘transfer’ as an alternative to ‘influence’. It is a ‘transferring’ that describes a linkage which indeed exists unequivocally, but is defined in less insistent terms as regards its nature and outcomes. Even with regard to its etymological connotations it is a less ‘fateful’ process: these are not about the permanent

penetration of some irrevocable force, but simply about a ‘transfer of property’. After all, “[t]he earliest use of the noun, late 17th century, was as a legal term in the sense ‘conveyance of property’” (“transfer”, *Oxfordify Dictionary*). As yet, such shifts say nothing about the ‘influence’ of this or that operation. In economics, transfer means a payment which, according to one dictionary of economics, the payer (e.g. a government) makes “without goods or services being received in return” (Lampman 1987, 1). This is the case of, for example, the payment of pensions or unemployment benefit. It is not ‘something for something’ (an exchange), ‘something into something’ (influence) or ‘something against something’ (opposition), but a redistribution, a kind of looser contractual relocation of something to somewhere different with results that can be many and various and have no clear-cut vector. It is more a ‘metaphorical’ transfer akin to that made by a traveller if such is required by his train or plane timetable.

In the 1980s, Michel Espagne and Michael Werner (Espagne and Werner 1985) used the term ‘transfer’ to refer to processes of a shifting of cultural and intellectual phenomena, knowledge and expository procedures which are not primarily colonisational and which initiate, as they proceed, significant transformations (Bal 2002). The assets of meanings that are projected into the concept of transfer reside in how they operate with the phenomenon known as *permeability*. That is also how ‘transfer’ works in the humanities, in part through ‘permeation’, in part through ‘resistance’, according to the particular constellation of politics and scholarship under which it comes about. Phenomena that spring from transfer are ultimately ‘hybrid’ and lack any solid framework, but are more a kind of ‘modus operandi’, a way of proceeding.

Doubtless any speaker of certain languages, e.g. Czech, will spot a link between *trans*- and *trans* = ‘trance’. However, let’s leave this pleasing word-play aside and be content with the matter-of-fact semantic assertion that *trans*- implies movement across something and *-fer* is from the Latin verb *ferre* meaning to convey, bear, carry.

With regard to the present topic, the transporting-conveying phenomenon has a specific feature that concerns time, territorial destinations, selection and manipulation.

4 ‘One’s own – alien’

The relationship between Russian formalism and the intellectual milieu of Prague structuralism has something of the organic and authentic about it, because it was played out as a single thread in time from the mid-1910s to the mid-1940s

(after 1948 the Prague Linguistic Circle essentially dissolved itself under pressure from the new regime and its ideology), and the 1920s in particular stand out as idyllic. Both adherents and informed critics of formalism (Viktor Shklovskii, Iurii Tynianov, Viktor Vinogradov) met with understanding and interest on the part of their Prague colleagues, the more so that many were colleagues, or even friends of Roman Jakobson, who was a Prague resident and personification of the phenomenon known in the theory of transfer as an ‘intermediary’, in German *Vermittlungsinstanz* (Jakobson 1996, 17). Some came to Prague in person.

Added to this, the reception of formalism had begun to be politicised, and so radicalised, since the first half of the 1920s. Above all, attacks on formalism grew in strength and extent, and, basically, no one had a programme by which to stave them off; the formalists themselves began to relativise formalism or even forswear it altogether (for negative [self-]reflections on formalism penned by such of its representatives as Boris Ėikhenbaum or Viktor Zhirmunskii, see Glanc and Pil’shchikov 2017, 87–100), while its opponents attacked it from various ideological angles – one obvious basis of criticism was Czech Marxism (Konrad, Václavek, Mencák; see, for example, Mencák 1934); a creditable account of these polemics is to be found in Kříž’s monograph (2012). One influential polemic was the remarkable discussion led by Bakhtin from the point of view of general systematic aesthetics, as he explains in the introduction to his treatise entitled “The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art” (Bakhtin 1975), though in the context of the transnational transfer of ideas this only began to circulate when Bakhtin was beginning to be ‘rediscovered’ after World War II.

With the passage of time, however, the impact of this criticism changed, especially in the Soviet Union. Initially, the relations among formalism, Marxism and psychoanalysis were not yet damaged by fear, censorship or persecution. While the 1920s were marked by open political polemics on an intellectual plane, despite being shaped in part by such a powerful politician as Leon Trotsky (Trotskii 1923; 1991), the People’s Commissar for the Army and Navy and, at the time, one of the most influential Bolsheviks in the Soviet state, by the 1930s any charge of formalism became a signal for persecution and sometimes liquidation, which was tantamount to a legal sentence (with no chance of defence). It was particularly after the first congress of Soviet writers, at which Socialist Realism was declared the Soviet state’s official aesthetic programme, formalism became, in the USSR, a sweepingly pejorative label with potentially negative consequences for expressions of it and subscribers to it (*Protiv formalizma i naturalizma v iskusstve*, 1937). Participants in the crusade to liquidate it were not only Party censors, but even such influential writers as Maksim Gor’kii (Gor’kii 1936).

With this diversification of forces it is unsurprising that the transfer of formalism to the environment of the Prague Linguistic Circle, however critical or sceptic-

tical or even rejectionist its reception, was a one-way matter, given that perhaps the first public discussion of the Prague Linguistic Circle within the USSR did not come until the 1960s, at the Tartu School; it was then that a group of scholars, with Juri Lotman at their centre, emerged in Estonia (though many of them were based primarily in Moscow or Leningrad), engaging in semiotics and a motley of versions of late structuralism.

Although from the start of his life abroad Jakobson had sought to preserve and cultivate relations with his Soviet colleagues, indeed right after Stalin's death he was able to make regular trips to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, one can speak of any transfer of Prague structuralist ideas to Russia – and so of a Russian reflexion of any connection between the two research frameworks – only after a considerable lapse of time.

Apart from some individuals and solitary and fragmentary channels, the intellectual heritage of the Prague Linguistic Circle was probably relevant only to the generation of Soviet scholars in the humanities who had been born in the 1920s (Iurii Lotman, Viacheslav Ivanov, Alexandr Piatigorskii and others).

The transfer of formalism beyond Russia's frontiers, presented here through the example of Czechoslovakia, unfolded in the spirit of the opposition 'one's own – alien'. Thus, Jan Mukařovský required that the roots and wellsprings of structuralism be appraised with prime regard to its 'native' origins. In his 1940 genealogy of structuralism, the overall account accords Russian formalism a place if not marginal, then certainly in no way pivotal. Above all, he states that this 'contact' was surpassed (overstepped), and he orders it only after Durdík, Hostinský and Zich, listing it alongside modern German aesthetics and a string of linguistic, artistic and philosophical insights headed by Hegel and Husserl. The summary winds up quite categorically: "Structuralist aesthetics is a phenomenon of Czech scholarship" and the formalist concept is but one of its numerous "stimulants" (Mukařovský 2007, 21; see also Peter Steiner's polemical view of the subject in that same volume).

5 A proper telling of the story

The reception of formalism, its prehistory and connections with later theoretical concepts only comes after several decades have elapsed, basically not until the mid-1950s, which saw the appearance of Victor Erlich's respectable monograph and the clearer idea it afforded of the authors considered to be 'formalists' (Erlich 1955).

Erlich was born into an important Jewish family in Petrograd in 1914, just a few years before the 1917 October Revolution. He grew up in Poland and Lithuania

and in the early 1940s made his way, like Jakobson, to New York, where, shortly after the war, he studied under Jakobson at Columbia University.

For another ten years or so there is little to warrant reference to any 'mass reception' or canonisation of formalism. Those processes can first be dated to the second half of the 1960s following certain translations into French and German, which caused quite a stir in academic circles. A wide-ranging anthology of texts selected and translated by Tzvetan Todorov was published in France, with a preface by Roman Jakobson (Todorov 1965), and in English as *Russian Formalist Criticism* (Lemon and Reis 1965). Shklovskii was the first to be published in Germany (1964, 1965, 1966), quickly followed by Boris Ėikhenbaum in 1965 (Ėikhenbaum 1965) and Iurii Tynianov in 1967 (Tynianov 1967), but most important for the German-speaking and -reading audience were the two volumes by Jurij Striedter (1971).

It is worth noting that it was just at this time that the chief Czechoslovak dogmatist of Socialist Realism published his version of a critique of both formalism and structuralism (Štoll 1966). This composite critical analysis and interpretation of the evolution of the Russian formalist school and of the Czech structural theory of literature is, on the one hand, a polemic against Victor Erlich's book and the approach taken by René Wellek, and on the other, a historical analysis of the failure of Czech structuralist thinking (Kříž 2012, 130).

What may be deemed a specific instance of what the appropriation of formalism by Western literary theory might lead to is a project that attempted a thorough reconstruction of the terminology employed in formalist circles, but including conjectures as to those parts of the theory that had been left unelaborated by the theorists of formalism themselves. This was the voluminous work by Aage A. Hansen-Löve (1978).

It is, then, fair to say that formalism enjoyed something of a 'boom' only as late as the 1960s, a period when texts of the kind deemed poststructuralist were already taking shape. Derrida published his crucial *L'écriture et la différence* (1967a, *Writing and Difference*) and *De la grammatologie* (1967b, *Of Grammatology*) in 1967, while it was only then that the translations of the formalists into French and German were appearing.

Seriously relevant to the situation in the USA was obviously the presence there of Roman Jakobson and another émigré from Czechoslovakia, René Wellek, co-author of the most influential academic textbook of literary theory in the USA (Wellek and Warren 1949). Twenty years later, Jakobson's wife Krystyna Pomorska published a book on formalism (Pomorska 1968), and Wellek himself returned to the subject of the Prague school with a separate monograph (Wellek 1969).

Such a time lag is not merely a fact of political and intellectual history, but also a factor that affects how connections are perceived. It obviously calls for a generalisation *and* proper telling of the story of how theoretical ideas evolve. Our

own case involves the array of ‘influences’ leading from Russian formalism via the Prague school to French structuralism, which is becoming canonical in Western intellectual practice. One part of this grand narrative is ‘invalid transfer’ – the underappreciated role and the shortfall in the reception of the Prague Linguistic Circle and its contribution to theory (see Irina Wutsdorff’s chapter in this volume). This lingered in the shadows of reception because of the marginalisation or even elimination of structural methodology in Czechoslovak and Soviet scholarship after World War II and also because of the language barrier – most notably the absence of any decent translations of works by Jan Mukařovský (on ‘invalid transfer’ see Volek 2006; Matějka 2014).

6 Macrotransfer and microtransfer

Thus far our subject has been ‘transfer’ as a type of ‘transmission’ and ‘mediation’. It is no coincidence that ‘transfer’ finds itself in terminological proximity to ‘translation’, the rudimentary form of transfer as a carrying-over from one (linguistic and cultural) context into another. In this respect, translation is a telling example of the ‘transcribing’ of a text from the sphere of one set of users onto the account of the sphere of different users. It is the ‘transposition’ of a feature of one language community into another with *no* implications to do with power or hierarchy (unlike the case of ‘influence’).

We also need to distinguish what is actually the ‘subject’ of the operation and so, too, its ‘content’. To give the matter a schema and dichotomy, we might, within the framework of a but crudely conceived working division, think in terms of *macrotransfer* and *microtransfer* as two drifts that are similar, but differ in their scope.

Under ‘macrotransfer’ we might subsume the treatment of such concepts as formalism and structuralism (and countless other analogous phenomena such as positivism, psychologism or, say, phenomenology, Marxism or psychoanalysis). These are ‘frames of reference’ that provide a multiplicity of authorial viewpoints or heterogeneous texts with a common denominator, a group identity within the context of science.

No less important, though of a different order, is the plane of ‘microtransfer’, which applies not to a school of thought, a programme or scholarly creed, but to ‘individual’ components and manifestations of such, different authors’ theses, individual conceptions or particular acts of interpretation. This focus on single entities is on the one hand ‘complementary’ to macrotransfer, while, on the other hand, it may call those entities into question or even ‘undermine’ them. A good instance of this is provided by the core differences in the approaches taken by two

influential literary scholars who had been part of the Russian formalist circuit, Viktor Shklovskii and Roman Jakobson.

If in the macrostory of formalism they are complementary actors within the same programme, in the microperspective they personify divergent, if not opposite standpoints: the almost anarchically frivolous intuitions of Shklovskii's essays are a counterpoint to Jakobson's systematic scientism.

If we set about an elementary microanalysis of the connection between formalism and (Prague) structuralism as a kind of macrotransfer, it will transpire that continuity, worship of the heritage, and influence were certainly not the main thread of the story – nor was it a case of structuralism's merely refining, 'improving' formalism or 'following it through'.

A great opportunity to recapitulate the first decade of structuralist scholarship came with the tenth anniversary of the Prague Linguistic Circle in 1936. The humanities have no great tradition of celebrating anniversaries of such groupings; that kind of attention is more reserved for universities, their constituent parts, and other academic institutions or individuals on the occasion of their round-number anniversaries. It is distinctly unusual to celebrate the first ten years of a learned society that had begun quite informally: it originally used to meet in members' offices at the university or in coffee houses, and up until 1930 it had been just a 'loose assemblage', and it was only on the first of December in that year that it met to constitute itself formally as a 'society' (see Čermák 2012). Six years later, the Circle's leadership initiated a show of their achievements in the style of a self-celebratory recapitulation of all the good work done. A whole succession of well-wishers from many countries sent – clearly pre-arranged – expressions of support and commendation. The Circle's journal, *Slovo a slovesnost*, published a detailed essay by the chairman, Vilém Mathesius (Mathesius 1936), and numerous other contributions. Arrangements for the anniversary dinners are unknown, but their splendour should by no means suggest that the influential, and in many respects trailblazing, works by the Circle's members do not deserve attention, recognition and celebration. Nevertheless, the ideologisation of their own work and the results it had produced and the theatrical nature of their public display is evidence that the Circle's members were keen not only to advertise their work in linguistics, literary studies and other branches of the humanities, but reflectively to put it into context both synchronically and diachronically. This fact also has a bearing on questions of transfer: things said regarding connections with previous or competing methodologies were integral to the deliberate self-definition by means of which the Circle meant to spell out what made them different and identify the specifics. The 'synchronic' angle may have had most to do with the period linguistic debates which were being played out within Czechoslovakia, though their reach in terms of methodology went further afield. The main issue was 'the

debate on language correctness', in which connection the Prague Linguistic Circle instituted a 'commission for matters of language teaching and culture' in 1931. The 'diachronic' angle related, *inter alia*, precisely to the transfer of ideas and conceptions, including those of Russian provenance. In his 1936 annual report, Mathesius described the preparations that had preceded the founding of the Prague Linguistic Circle and had taken eighteen months – from the spring of 1925 to the autumn of 1926; besides the Czech membership there were also two Russians: Roman Jakobson and Sergei Kartsevski. Mathesius put “new currents” at the heart of his strategy, the setting-up of a centre:

My notes remind me that on 13 March 1925 I invited Jakobson and Trnka to come and see me along with Kartsevski, who later became Reader in Russian at the University of Geneva, but at the time was still teaching at the Russian grammar school in Prague, and that on 14 October in that same year I summoned Jakobson, Trnka and Kartsevski again, and also Bohuslav Havránek, who was about to complete his higher doctorate in Slavonic Studies. Those present recall the agenda of that second meeting: I had produced a paper on the new currents and latest trends in linguistic research, which I later, on 9 November 1925, delivered as a lecture at the Royal Bohemian Learned Society, eventually publishing it in 1926, in English, in a special volume dedicated to Prof. [Josef] Zubatý. We had a thorough discussion of the central theses of the paper, which effectively constituted a programme of the new linguistics, taking them as the ideological foundation of the centre for linguistics that we were by then fully determined to set up in Prague by our own devices. (Mathesius 1936, 138)

The international character of the Prague Linguistic Circle as constituted in its first period, and as emphasised by the strong Russian component, was even quantified in Mathesius's report, including a list of names:

From October 1926 to June 1928 lectures were given (in some cases two or even three) by eight Czechs (Havránek, Ilek, Trnka, Oberpfalcer, Mukařovský, Mathesius, Rypka, Buben), five Russians (Jakobson, Kartsevski, Trubetzkoi, Tomashevski, Bogatyrev), two Frenchmen (Tesnière and Brun) and one German (Becker). (Mathesius 1936, 139)

The report is interesting for not emphasising structuralism as a doctrine, mentioning it only once: “the functional and structural analysis of the phonic aspect of speech” (Mathesius 1936, 141). And the anniversary résumé says not one single word on the Russian participants' attitude to formalism or even on the idea of continuity (but then no one could describe the semiotically minded Bogatyrev or the phonologist Trubetzkoi as formalists).

It might even be said that the opposite is true: the ‘continuity’ thesis was ascribed by Mathesius to hostile elements, “foes” (Mathesius 1936, 145; referring in all likelihood to attacks on the Prague Linguistic Circle in the 1930s by the linguist, literary historian and byzantologist Miloš Weingart, who left the Prague Linguistic Circle in 1934, or the philologist Jan Vojtěch Sedlák):

Our working symbiosis with the young Russian scholars is sometimes held up, by those who have a grudge against us, as evidence for the assertion that what we are doing is merely a Czech application of Russian trends in linguistic and literary research. (Mathesius 1936, 145)

With his narrower pejorative name for it – “merely a Czech application” – ‘transfer’ is rejected in his version of things with a reference to the dumbed-down formulation, “a simple process of bringing-over” (Mathesius 1936, 145), so offensive to the Prague Linguistic Circle (Mathesius doesn’t identify the sources of such disparaging comments): “[...] our foes’ assertion of the simple bringing of Russian models over to us is not right” (Mathesius 1936, 145).

If not from Russian models, whence, then, did the inspiration come? Mathesius does not call into question the actual idea of takeover and amplification. However, the models he deems positive, as opposed to the Russian, are ‘native’ to us:

Long before I met the young Russians, I had been sailing staunchly against the Neogrammarian tide, and as for literary studies, Mukařovský’s *A Contribution on the Aesthetics of Czech Verse* (1923) suffices to provide assurance that there, too, the roots of the new scholarship spring from our native soil. (Mathesius 1936, 145)

This might seem at variance with the Circle’s avowed international character, given all its foreign members and guests. But it was precisely this ‘native soil’ that was attractive as transfer terrain, a point frequently stressed. And then what may seem even more remarkable than Mathesius’s formulations is the vehement stress on this ‘native’, that is, Czech, soil that recurs in the thinking of Roman Jakobson, whose biography might have led us to expect an indulgent attitude to the link between formalism and the Prague Linguistic Circle, which, after all, he himself personified. Yet it is he who ardently emphasises the influence of Durdík, Hostinský, Zich or Masaryk (see, for example, Jakobson 1931).

In his lectures on the formal school in the mid-1930s Jakobson never placed any emphasis on the tie between Prague structuralism and Russian formalism (Jakobson 1935; 2005; 2011), presenting his subject in fairly critical terms – as something *passé*, while proceeding exactly like Mathesius *vis-à-vis* the Prague Linguistic Circle, pursuing furiously the search for ‘native roots’ and leaving right at the margins the German analogues picked up by the Russian Rosalia Shor (1927) in her appraisal of formalism, or by the Czech Karel Svoboda (1934).

Karel Svoboda was taken to task on the pages of *Slovo a slovesnost* by Frank Wollman, for whom the power of the ‘native tradition’ was also irrefutable:

West-European works that affected, or might have affected, the emergence of Russian Formalism were grouped together by Karel Svoboda, in considerable detail in his article ‘On the so-called formal method in literary scholarship’ (Svoboda 1934, 37). Yet Svoboda does

not substantiate these influences (I doubt the young Formalists would have known about it all anyway), and quite underestimates the significance of earlier Russian scholarship, most notably the titanic presence of Veselovskii, but also [Alexandr] Potebnia, [Volodimir Mykolaiovych] Perets, [Fedor Yevgen'evich] Korsh and others. He omitted Jiří Polívka, so the beginnings of Czech Structuralism and its relationship to Russian scholarship also fell by the wayside, which is the best evidence of his failure to appreciate the growth of the most important Slavonic tradition in the scholarly treatment of literature. (Wollman 1935, 202)

Jakobson's fervency is all the more remarkable for how it reaches back to mediaeval literary landmarks while also embracing the most canonical representatives of the Russian literary canon such as Pushkin or Tolstoi. It is as if by some particular axiological value transfer was marked out as immanent, whether Russian in the case of formalism or Czech in the case of the Prague Linguistic Circle. In a lecture he gave at the Prague Linguistic Circle on 30 March 1935 (published that same year in *Slovo a slovesnost*) Wollmann also stressed 'native sources': "that foreign influences also made themselves felt is only natural, yet Russian Formalism grows out of the native scholarly tradition" (Wollmann 1935, 197) – and at the same time he uses two remarkable metaphors to define the tie between the two trends: first there is 'bridge', the bridge to the Russian tradition constructed by Alexandr Veselovskii's disciple Polívka. As a thesis it matches the genealogy of formalism as conceived by Jakobson – in his history of the formalist method he likewise ascribes a major role both to the folklorist Polívka (1858–1933) and to Veselovskii, who counts as a forerunner or prophet (he died in 1906). The second term is 'offshoot', which is a powerful botanical metaphor that assumes a very direct and predetermined connection, an offshoot being an element of vegetative propagation, part of a plant growing from a so-called parent plant before separating from it in due course and continuing to grow alone, producing in time its own offshoots, and so on and on.

Wollman's sentence using 'bridge' and 'offshoot' reads as follows:

It is that tradition to which a bridge was put in place for the benefit of Czechoslovakian scholarship by Veselovskii's oldest disciple, only recently deceased, Jiří Polívka. The offshoot of Russian Formalism on Czech soil had found the soil prepared by Polívka, for some of his students had already worked their way towards a structuralist method. (Wollmann 1935, 197)

The 'bridge' and 'offshoot' conceit thus constructs a connection – transfer – that mentions none of the active formalists or structuralists, but only their forerunners, who, while playing no explicit part in the Prague Linguistic Circle's agenda, do figure in Jakobson's thinking on formalist methodology:

[I]t was Viktor Shklovskii's thinking about folklore (Shklovskii 1929) and that of other Russian Formalists that led to the studies of the form of Russian folk tales in which Polívka engaged (Polívka 1932, see also Jakobson 2005, 14), or: and insofar as Veselovskii is given among the pioneers of the Formalist school, the assumptions underlying this pioneering role in his case are completely different from those that apply in Potebnia's [...]. (Jakobson 2005, 46)

Perhaps the most telling terms in which the later construct of formalism–structuralism macrotransfer was, as it were, anticipated, came in Jan Mukařovský's response, on 10 December 1934, to the discussion of the methodological issues arising from his study “Polákova Vznešenost přírody” (1934, “Polák's The Nobility of Nature”). It is symptomatic that Mukařovský's formulation came not in an article or programmatic statement, but in an oral and apparently off-the-cuff contribution to a discussion which was documented internally by the Prague Linguistic Circle and published only much later:

The term ‘formalism’ applies historically. It is the name given to that school of Russian scholarship which for the first time in modern literary studies focussed its research on questions of the artistic structuring of a work of poetry and made an estimable job of it. In matters of literary scholarship, the trend represented by the Prague Linguistic Circle sprang, on the one hand, from native sources and, on the other, from stimuli originating in Formalism; it itself gave itself the label of structuralism, its core concept being structure, a dynamic entity. (Mukařovský 1935, 190)

The wording “sprang [...] from stimuli originating in Formalism” clearly suggests a strong link, formalism standing here for the starting point, foundation, basis, of the speaker's own scholarly leanings. However, at the same time in 1934, Mukařovský could be quite harsh on formalism, not, though, in some impromptu comment within a debate, but in the published foreword to the thoroughly programmatic work that Shklovskii's *Theory of Prose* undeniably was; it came out in a Czech translation by Bohumil Mathesius (Shklovskii 1933) – with Mukařovský's foreword. Mukařovský (2007, 501) speaks of the “considerable delay” in the translation's appearance, which was exactly nine years, though in Western Europe Shklovskii had to wait several decades longer for a thoroughgoing reception.

In his foreword the author, paradoxically as it might seem, but typically in terms of the discourse of the period, strips Shklovskii of his formalist identity, or, more precisely, asserts that formalism was not his method, but merely the run-up to his thinking:

However, the chief principle presently blocking our way to a proper appreciation of Shklovskii's book is its ‘formalism’, or, rather, its phantom formalism. We cannot forget that this label had been the battle cry when the group to which Shklovskii belonged was on

the rise and that it therefore merits the respect accorded to battalions who have seen action. But if its one-sidedness does an injustice to the cause itself – especially in the eyes of our [Czech] public, for whom the association of the word ‘formalism’ with Herbartian aesthetics is still alive – it has to be unmasked as a mere word: it has to be demonstrated that even at the time of its reception it did not tally with the reality. (Mukařovský 2007, 503)

Besides the main provocation – that of ridding the Shklovskii of the 1910s and 1920s of any close association with formalism – two other symptomatic facts stand out here: for one, Mukařovský links ‘formalism’ primarily with Herbart, hence with ‘native roots’, and, for the other, this identification is an injustice and also something false, something masked by a ‘mere word’ that should be ‘unmasked’. If we do strip the ‘mask’ of formalism from Shklovskii’s exposition, if we clear away this ‘phantom’ (i.e., delusion, apparition, vision, fantasy, a semblance or artificial creation of something real, a morbid figment of the imagination), which is even in Mukařovský’s words “vulgarised” and a little further on described as a “superstition” (Mukařovský 2007, 504 – be it recalled that a ‘superstition’ is a ‘false’ faith that is inconsistent with rational thought, meaning that, without rhyme or reason, it ascribes to phenomena and actions a supernatural ability to influence reality), it will be seen that Shklovskii does have something to say. According to Mukařovský, he represents “the first step in the natural progression towards overcoming the opposition between form and content as bases for understanding art” (Mukařovský 2007, 505). Then the author continues with his plea on behalf of structuralism.

7 Transmission, diffusion

A few insights in fine: the methodology of transfer is found to be appropriate at the very least because ‘influence’ had become, in particular, a simplifying and retrospectively constructed doctrine which even those involved in the process were at pains to deny.

A readily digestible thesis on import and export, influence and heritage gained world-wide popularity thanks to Terry Eagleton, whose book *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983), sold in excess of three quarters of a million copies and was translated into dozens of languages, including Arabic and Sanskrit. At the start of the 1980s, the Irish neo-Marxist, frustrated by the needless complexity of the humanities, decided to deal with literary theory in an easily accessible way and enjoyed phenomenal success with his project. When Lubomír Doležel came later to appraise Eagleton’s conception of the Prague school as a period of transition, a kind of footbridge from Russian formalism to structuralism, a conception that

was ignorant of subject and was based on de Saussure, his assessment contained the phrase “ludicrous blindness” (Doležel 2006).

A second merit of transfer as the key to understanding the process we have been describing is that it is well suited to describing processes that are not entirely unidirectional and unequivocal, but ambivalent and multilateral. Macro-transfer emphasises discontinuity — the discontinuity formulated by Jakobson, Mukařovský, and Wollmann. In 1935 the latter even produced a charming instance of formulation transfer, turning Jakobson’s Leninist rhetoric of ‘infantile disorder’ into the poetic ‘baby clothes’:

[...] the Czech (or rather Czecho-Russian) Structuralists, ex-Formalists, looked upon the original Formalism as an evolutionary phase that was now passé, as ‘baby clothes that they had outgrown’ (Jakobson), and so did the Russian Formalists themselves, not one of whom was still flying their original colours [...] (Wollman 1935, 197)

Microtransfer simultaneously makes possible an unlimited amount of relevant, mostly explicitly named lines of transfer that get composed into a kind of – productively cacophonous – symphony of manifold theoretical inspirations and irritations. This would embrace all Russian and Czech native ‘roots’ – and a vast range of non-native impulses – German researchers into form (Heymann Steintal, Eduard Sievers and many others), French theorists (such as Ferdinand Brunetière’s *Évolution des genres dans l’histoire de la littérature, 1890, Evolution of genres in the history of literature* [Wollman 1935, 196]), de Saussure of course, phenomenologists (Holenstein 1975) and others.

Transfer as a transmission or diffusion, in our case of values, says nothing as to either the outcome or the quality and intensity of the process that it describes. And therein lies its challenge.

Translated from Czech by David Short

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