

Epokha "ostraneniia": Russkii formalizm i sovremennoe gumanitarnoe znanie.

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It has been just over one hundred years since Viktor Shklovskii delivered a talk on the place of futurism in the history of language (*Mesto futurizma v istorii iazyka*) at Petrograd's *Brodiachaia sobaka* (Stray Dog) poetic cabaret in 1913. This event, together with the announcement of Shklovskii's 1914 essay-cum-manifesto *Voskreshenie slova* (The Resurrection of the Word), is now regarded as one of the founding moments of the Russian formalist movement. Yet, few could then have imagined that the ripples of Russian formalism would be felt throughout the intellectual world, defining a whole epoch in the development of modern humanities. This *epokha "ostraneniia"* (epoch of "estrangement") as Ian Levchenko and Igor' Pil'shchikov have recently described it, is marked not only by the spectacular success of the Russian literary-theoretical avant-garde movement and its flagship concept in various critical discourses in the humanities, but also by the fact that estrangement constitutes the core of modern humanities' attitude towards the research paradigm that emerged in the mid-1910s. Passionately re-read and reassessed in ways that have reflected the shifting theoretical languages and various scholarly cultures of its readers, Russian formalism is continuously being renewed in contexts completely different from those in which it originated. The most distant among these tend also to be the most energetic: western European Translation Studies and Polysystem Theory, deconstructionist literary criticism, cognitive narratology, empirical reception studies, and cultural studies. As proliferating target contexts encroach upon Russian formalism, and formalist theory encroaches upon them, the problem of its genealogy and heritage threatens to grow unmanageable. Yet, as Levchenko and Pil'shchikov successfully demonstrate, it can still be subjected to a comprehensive and systematic review.

The collective monograph *Epokha "ostraneniia": Russkii formalizm i sovremennoe gumanitarnoe znanie*, published by the Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie (New Literary Review), contains the proceedings of the International Congress that marked the centenary of the Russian formalist school (1913–2013), hosted by the National Research University Higher School of Economics and The Russian State University for the Humanities in Moscow. The predominantly Russian-language contributions have been selected so as to provide as much plurality in terms of the genetic, historical, theoretical and cultural frameworks of Russian formalist theory as possible. Specifically, the selected texts cover as many as eight thematic areas. Contributors to the first area deal primarily with the relevance of the Russian literary theory "archive" to twentieth- and twenty-first-century sciences and humanities. Together, they make a convincing case that, as Aage A. Hansen-Löve contends, "Formalism not only became the foundation of the avant-garde, if not of modernism as a whole, but in the most decisive manner prepared the ground for postmodern pan-semiotics and pan-textualism" (38). From this perspective, poststructuralist theory, with its particular focus on questions such as the autonomy of signifiers, the self-reflexivity of aesthetic and poetic functions, pan-culturism, and the blurring of boundaries between theoretical/philosophical and literary texts, appears to be, in fact, a not-so-distant heir to the "analytical logocentrism" of the Russian formalists. As for the relations between formalist theory and modern natural sciences, an innovative approach is proposed by Sergei Zenkin, who scrupulously traces the formalist notions of "energy" and

“dynamics” in their vital but largely underestimated native contexts of the twentieth-century energy theories from Wilhelm Ostwald’s energetics to Aleksei Ukhtomskii’s physiology.

The second broad area distinguished by the editors is the dissemination of formalist ideas across the European intellectual field of the first half of the twentieth century, with a particular focus on German formalism (examined by Serge Tchougounnikov and Ekaterina Dmitrieva) and the transfer of Russian formalist ideas to western and east central European scholarly cultures, such as the Polish formalist school (Danuta Ulicka and Michał Mrugalski) and Czech structuralism (Michal Kříž).

The third research area addresses the still under-researched yet crucial topic of the symbolist aesthetic-philosophical heritage of Andrei Belyi in Russian formalist works. The next section, “Formalism as Avant-garde/Avant-garde as Formalism,” covers a wide range of theoretical and interpretive topics related to Russian theatrical experiments in the 1920s and 1930s, and to the artistic experiments of the Moscow Choreological Laboratory and the “Association for Real Art” (Oberiu) in their engagement with the “Formal method.” This avant-garde section corresponds closely with the fifth research area, which extends from Wassily Kandinsky’s theory of visual art to Aleksandr Gabrichevsky’s “morphology of art.”

The sixth section covers the most influential applications of the “Formal method” in folklore studies, with the works of Petr Bogatyrev and Vladimir Propp in the main focus. The seventh area of research, entitled “The Formalists as Such and in Juxtaposition,” comprises an account of the intellectual development of individual Russian formalists (Boris Eikhenbaum, Iurii Tynianov) in relation to each other and to their contemporaries. These are either reconstructed from archival materials or inferred from theoretical, metapoetic, and critical writings (in Elena Kapinos’ paper on Henri Bergson’s and Semen Frank’s philosophical ideas regarding historical time in comparison with Eikhenbaum’s and Tynianov’s concepts of historicity; in Oleg Fedotov’s contribution concerning the echoes of formalism in Vladimir Nabokov’s metapoetics and in Irina Popova’s study of the convergence between Mikhail Bakhtin’s aesthetic theory and formalist poetics). The final research area distinguished in the volume concerns the formalist poetics of verse and prose, including in the context of Lev Pumpianski’s literary theory (Giuseppina Larocca’s contribution).

The contributors’ marathon run through the various contexts of Russian formalism, vividly illustrated by the reproduction of the “Sportsman” (1913) by Kazimir Malevich on the cover, abundantly shows the pervasiveness of this research paradigm in the humanities throughout the twentieth century. What the editors of the volume have managed to achieve through their kaleidoscopic combination of research perspectives and explanatory contexts is a genuine “cubist historiography” of Russian formalism, as once envisaged by Wendy Steiner (1982).

This informative and engaging collective monograph will surely become required reading in courses on literary theory, the history of modern art, comparative literature, and comparative cultural studies. It will provide a fresh and stimulating platform for further rethinking the intellectual history of east European modernism, as well as for subsequent perceptual renewals (“estrangements”) of Russian formalist theory.

TAMARA BRZOSTOWSKA-TERESZKIEWICZ
Institute of Literary Research Polish Academy of Sciences