The Word is Not Enough: Thinking Russian Formalism Beyond Literary Theory

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Abstract

Building on a review of Galin Tihanov's *The Birth and Death of Literary Theory* (2019) and Jessica Merrill's *The Origins of Russian Literary Theory* (2022), the paper examines how the widespread characterisation of Russian Formalism as the originator of modern literary theory has constrained our assessment of its role in 20th Century intellectual history, both by marginalising literary theory itself and by distorting the crucial notion of the autonomy of form. In response, a double shift in perspective is explored. Firstly, the Formalists' focus on literary autonomy is framed as a specific but nonetheless integrally co-dependant facet of the multilateral, dialogical intellectual context usefully designated as "Russian Theory" by Zenkin (2004). Secondly, the function of Russian emigration as a *transversal* vector of the historical transmission of the *entire, entangled* context of Russian Theory to interwar Central and post-war Western Europe is highlighted. As a result, Russian Formalism and its defence of the autonomy of form appear not as an ultimately failed attempt to ground a specific type of discourse on literature, but as an essential contribution to a broad process of intellectual transfer—from 19th Century Germany through Russian Theory to French Theory—that conditioned the development of the whole breadth of the European human sciences and was predicated on the in- and outflows of Russian emigration.

Keywords: Literary Theory; French Theory; Structuralism; Russian Emigration; Hegel

Introduction

It is something of a truism to say that Russian Formalism laid the foundations of modern literary theory. Yet this mundane affirmation also involves a no less obvious double paradox. On the one hand, the Formalists' signal contribution to literary theory—their embrace of the Futurists'

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"self-sufficient word" (*samovitoe slovo*) and resulting promulgation of the autotelic qualities and autonomous form of poetic language as the specific object of literary studies—has also always constituted one of the most vehemently disputed aspects of their legacy. Even for structuralism and reader-response theory, two discourses that were nominally most sympathetic to Formalism and central to the development of literary theory, claiming the autonomy of the word was not enough to found a science of literature. On the other hand, literary theory itself never fulfilled its promises and never consolidated into a structured, institutionalised discipline, spilling over instead repeatedly into semiotics, anthropology, cultural studies, critical theory or, more recently, performance and media studies. The crucial questions of exactly *what* the Formalists contributed to found, and of *how* or *to what extent* they did so, thus remain essentially open.

The problematic nature of the ties between Russian Formalism and literary theory have of course been noted and extensively discussed before, be it from the perspective of Formalism's coherence as a theory of literature, or of literary theory's ambivalent relation to the Formalist legacy and its own doubtful unity as a new discourse competing with other theories of langage, culture or society. Countless debates, many as old as Russian Formalism itself, have been conducted over the very possibility of grounding the study of poetic language as a distinct scientific practice (Brik 1923, Trockij 1924, Eichenbaum 1927, Šor 1927, Medvedev 1928; Eagleton 1983), over the scope of Formalism's role in the development of literary theory (Todorov 1965, Čyževs'kyj 1966, Jameson 1973, Striedter 1989, Doležel 1990), over the implications of the Formalists' initial theoretical aims beyond literary theory (Šklovskij 1930, Jakobson 1965; 1971, Hansen-Löve 1978, Levčenko 2012), or over the necessity of overcoming literary theory itself (Culler 1976, Easthope 1991, Birns 2010, Lobsien 2010, Renfrew & Tihanov 2010). All these often very polemical and contradictory discussions, however, share one thing in common: the firm anchoring of Russian Formalism as the starting point of the genealogy of modern literary theory.

In other words, for all the doubts and criticisms that have been raised over the possibility, scope and inherent merits of literary theory, one has tended to at least accept it as an identifiable, distinct project, whose genealogy, however contested and problematic, has provided the unquestioned frame and point of reference to Formalism's significance, namely as its originator.

As legitimate as this inscription of Russian Formalism at the start of the genealogy of literary theory might be, I contend, it nonetheless constitutes a non-neutral historiographical choice, which has remained a critical blind spot of sorts and whose hegemony strongly invites its questioning and examination as a potentially constraining factor on our interpretation of the Formalists' legacy (or of literary theory itself). And indeed, as the case of the fruitful and productive recent attempts made by Tihanov (2019) and Merrill (2022) to address the two striking, above-mentioned paradoxes linked with Formalism's role as the originator of modern literary theory clearly indicate, an insufficiently critical recourse to "literary theory" as a distinct, particular discursive formation has itself been the direct source of some the most fundamental problems in our understanding of Formalism.

Russian Formalism and its "regimes of relevance"

Let us turn first to the more general of the two fundamental issues with the historiography of Russian Formalism as literary theory, namely the fragility and alleged failure of that discourse itself. This particular problem has been addressed in great detail by Galin Tihanov in his book *The Birth and Death of Literary Theory* (2019), where he pointedly and eloquently formulates the questions it raises with specific regard to Russian Formalism:

> The significance of Russian Formalism and our continuous fascination with it derive in large measure from the fact that Formalism initiated modern literary theory [...]. Has this importance diminished, now that we have come to see the limitations of literary theory as a historically circumscribed mode of reflecting on literature? Or are we rather facing the need to rediscover Russian Formalism by contemplating its legacy beyond literary theory *per se*, attending to the more substantive underlying principles that align Formalism with other modern epistemes? Is it not the case that, historically speaking, literary theory is only the by-product of a larger articulation of interest in specificity and autonomy, through deliberate neglect of subjective agency [...]? By giving Formalism a pride of place as the originator of modern literary theory, are we not at the same time concealing its immersion in a much wider—and more consequential—agenda that sought to redefine the status of human agency beyond the crumbling foundations of humanism? (Tihanov 2019: 27)

It would be very easy to interpret these remarks as a call to simply emancipate Russian Formalism from the prism of the failed project of literary theory and go straight to its "more consequential agenda" and "substantive underlying principles". That is not, however, the path trodden by Tihanov in his book. His much subtler aim, rather, is to explore the broad historical conditions of what he sees as the radically situated historical "moment" of literary theory and "to tell the multiple story of emergence, disappearance, and trace that focuses on [that] particular time-limited episteme" (Tihanov 2019: 6). In this sense, his questions are not so much an invitation to contest or discard Russian Formalism's inscription in the genealogy of literary theory than to rethink that inscription in terms of the historical conditions and situatedness of literary theory itself.

To capture the radical historicity of modern literary theory, Tihanov proposes to define it as "the product of a regime of relevance that validates literature for its presumed artistic uniqueness and originality". By "regime of relevance", a Foucaldian term of his coining, Tihanov means

> a historically available constellation of social and cultural parameters that shape the predominant understanding and *use* of literature for the duration of that particular constellation. I submit that literary theory is the product of one specific phase in the evolution of one particular regime of relevance (Tihanov 2019: 2).

In this specific phase and particular regime of relevance, which according to Tihanov "emerged as primary in interwar Russia and Eastern Europe because historical conditions happened to be most propitious there and then" (Tihanov 2019: 24), "literature—for the first time—began to matter not because of what it can do for society or the individual, but because of what it was: a discourse taken to be original and different from other discourses, essentially because of the self-sufficient way language works in it" (Tihanov 2019: 21). In his earlier work, Tihanov had identified the social and cultural status of literature in Central and Eastern Europe, especially in the moments of high modernism and exile literature, as the most important factor conditioning the emergence of literary theory (cf. Tihanov 2004). Without abandoning his hypothesis of the "exceptional respect for literature as a social tribune and national voice in Eastern Europe" (Tihanov 2019: 21), Tihanov's emphasis now lies on three further aspects:

1. the weak domestic tradition of philosophy in Russia, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia that enabled a "process of creatively transforming the various mainstreams of [German-Austrian] philosophy (phenomenology; neo-Kantianism; Marxism) in the direction of literary theory, via divorce (at times incomplete) from aesthetics" (Tihanov 2019: 24).
2. the fact that "each of the four countries was a natural locus of polyglossia and heterotopia" (*Ibid.*), conditioned in particular by the specific dynamics of exile and emigration.
3. the active processes of nation-building and post-revolutionary political reorganisation after momentous historical changes, which "released fresh energy" and "enabled the negotiation between inherited and new regimes of relevance" (*Ibid.*).

There is no doubting the appeal of Tihanov's radically historicist approach to literary theory. Amongst the important new insights on which Tihanov builds his situated image of literary theory, one can mention: his emphasis on the underrated importance of WWI in the work of Šklovskij, his vigorous defence of the productive nature of the early phase of the polemics between Formalists and Marxists, his studies of Špet and Bachtin as participating in a "force field" of shared theoretical interests, his integration of Marrist semantic palaeontology as a full participant in discourses on literature, and finally his emphasis on the role of Russian émigré communities in Berlin and Prague in the process of transmission of ideas out of Russia. Conversely, the signification of each of these components of the Russian and early Soviet intellectual context, not least Russian Formalism, gain in clarity thanks to Tihanov's effort to consider them *together*, as the interrelated parts or effects of a plural response to a regime of relevance that foregrounded the question of the specific autonomy of cultural, literary or linguistic forms.

Tihanov's approach has been taken up in recent research (Merrill 2022, Mrugalski et al. 2023, also Babak & Dmitriev 2021) and sits well with the contemporary emphasis on cultural entanglements and the spatio-temporal situatedness of intellectual movements. Its greatest strength, I believe, is its insistence on the heterogeneous, dialogical dimension of the relevant contexts of literary theory, as well as on their fundamental dependency on constitutive processes of translation, reception and appropriation. Tihanov's emphasis on the productive dimensions of exile both as a historical force and a heuristic frame of reference is also

crucial. The framing of literary theory as part of a broad reconfiguration of disciplines and traditions out of 19th Century German thought, finally, is undoubtedly correct and again concords with significant interpretations of the emergence of the human sciences (cf. Dortier 2012, Goldsmith & Laks 2019, Samain & Testenoire 2022).

For all its success in enriching our image of the *birth* of literary theory, Tihanov's foregrounding of literature's changing regimes of relevance as a heuristic, explanatory factor is however much less convincing when it comes to taking stock of the *subsequent* processes of literary theory's growth, death and aftermath. Tihanov has in fact little to say about either of these stages. Worse, the somewhat deterministic, pessimistic tone of the pronouncements he does make (e.g. literary theory's demise was "an inevitable offshoot of one particular regime of literature's relevance coming to an end" (Tihanov 2019: 5); literary theory's "spectral" legacy fails nowadays to assume "reliably material form", and is "available solely relationally" (Tihanov 2019: 6)) seems to shut off rather than open new perspectives on both Formalism's and literary theory's own legacies. This, in my view, points to the presence of at least two problematic assumptions or limitations at the heart of his approach.

Firstly, Tihanov's clear emphasis on the social and cultural parameters of the concept of "regime of relevance", along with his characterisation of literary theory as a "moment" or "instrument" (Tihanov 2019: 23) of the long development of the regime of relevance of German Romanticism, make him run the risk of committing a Popperian/Reichenbachian fallacy, namely confusing literary theory's "context of discovery" with its "context of justification". And indeed, Tihanov's analyses are not particularly attentive to the question of the general, "justifiable" validity or to the substantial achievements (the "reliably material form") of Russian Formalism and early Soviet thought. In particular, they mostly fail to consider whether and how ideas resulting from the specific regime of relevance of literature in the early 20th Century—in particular the discovery of the autonomy of literary form—might transcend, persist and be valid beyond the circumstances of that regime's passing moment of dominance and the disciplinary success of literary theory.

This failure to deal with the possibly "verifiable" or "general" aspects of literary theory is evident from the absence of a whole array of questions from Tihanov's analyses. In regard specifically to Russian Formalism, Tihanov omits to address the classic accounts (Erlich 1955, Hansen-Löve 1978,

Steiner 1984, Ehlers 1992) that reconstruct how the Formalists succeeded in transcending their early, "futurist" attachment to a certain conception of literature by correcting and developing the systematic coherence of their initial insights. He is too prompt to present the persistence of literary theory as an effect of "the eruptive sway of literature in activist social and political debates on campuses in Paris, Prague, and Berkeley" (Tihanov 2019: 24) and thus of the continuity of its underlying regime of relevance (rather than its intrinsic conceptual worth). Similarly, Tihanov offers no account of the mechanics of literary theory's demise beyond pointing to the abandonment of its claim to disciplinary autonomy in the works of Barthes and Iser (cf. Tihanov 2019: 29-30), failing to note, for example, that as late as the 1980s, as historicist a figure as Eagleton was still defending literary theory as a "little known discourse" that was necessary precisely because of the variegating definitions and uses (or regimes of relevance) of "literature" (Eagleton 1983, 1-14).

Another symptom of Tihanov's lack of faith in the achievements of literary theory beyond its historical inscription in a specific regime of relevance is his caution regarding its contemporary impact. Where Pechlivanos et al. (1995), Lobsien (2010), or Leitch (2014) underscore its deep, ubiquitous influence, Tihanov sees its legacy as "dispersed, dissipated, and often fittingly elusive" (Tihanov 2019: 5). Ignoring multiple counterclaims highlighting continuities with practices such as distant reading or quantitative methods (Kelih 2013, Pilščikov 2015, Fischer et al. 2019), he voices his scepticism of direct lineages with recent attempts to reinvigorate formalism. The only significant trace he seems ready to accept is in the tradition of World Literature, but then more as a subterranean presence (Tihanov 2019: 185). Tihanov also discards too quickly the obvious signs of life of literary theory provided by the vigorous subdisciplines of narratology and versification theory (which, it could be argued, form literary theory's actual, continuous "core"; cf. Schmid 2010; Ibrahim et. al 2013); and he omits to consider the impact and legacy of literary theory in the disciplines with which it successively competed (anthropology, semiotics, cultural studies, critical theory, performance studies and media theory).

Even if Tihanov is perhaps too quick in declaring its death, I hurry to add, all this is not to say that he is not acutely aware of the question of the continued impact and legacy of literary theory beyond its own demise or the conditions of its historical situatedness, nor that his approach

necessarily precludes the discussion and inclusion of all the above-mentioned questions. Indeed, he addresses this issue head on:

> When we thus talk of the demise of literary theory, an inevitable offshoot of one particular regime of literature's relevance coming to an end by the late 1980s, we do so not in order to indulge in the art of composing its obituary (undoubtedly a morbid business), nor even to sound an elegiac note of nostalgic appreciation, much as this might itself be an act of intellectual gallantry, but in order to pose—with due sanguinity, cultivated by the resilient practice of radical historicism—the important question of its legacy. (Tihanov 2019: 5).

The fact of the matter, however, is that the problem of literary theory's persistence, systematicity and legacy constitute literally but the *epilogue* of Tihanov's book, which as he himself notes, is mostly concerned with the momentary circumstances of literary theory's birth in the Russian and early Soviet context.

It is of course perfectly acceptable to argue that the imbalance in Tihanov's approach in favour of literary theory's birth and context of discovery is the result of a justified choice of perspective and constitutes a sound reaction and necessary course correction against the general neglect of the radical historicity of literary theory up to now. As Tihanov puts it, "I would even submit that our understanding of literary theory has been greatly skewed and impoverished by our reluctance to historicize it" (Tihanov 2019: 5). Implied here is the view that the questions of the general, systematic or conceptual validity of literary theory need first to be reframed in term of their radical historicity. As Tihanov suggests:

> My book, then, is perhaps best read not simply as an account of various exfoliations of literary theory in Russia during the interwar decades of the twentieth century [...]. Ideally, it ought to be read as a narrative that selectively highlights versions of literary theory that help us understand its work and multiple impacts at the cusp of intersecting, often competing, regimes of relevance (Tihanov 2019: 6).

In this sense, the litany of objections enumerated above can be understood, rather than as critiques for sins of omission, as a wish-list

of open questions that are beyond the scope of Tihanov's book and are simply awaiting to be relitigated in light of the radically historicist turn given to literary theory by Tihanov as the product "of intersecting, often competing, regimes of relevance" (Ibid.). It is not *a priori* excluded, in other words, that Tihanov's approach be broadened and complemented by a more thorough discussion of the persisting elements of literary theory, or that it be generalised and successfully applied to literary theory's successor contexts in Prague, Paris and Konstanz, or in other disciplines—thereby answering the questions left open by Tihanov concerning its growth and death, and enriching further his view of literary theory as a continuous renegotiation of the changing regimes of relevance of literature.

While I see some promise in extending and broadening Tihanov's approach in such a way, it is still threatened, however, by another, more insidious problem : his insufficiently critical stance towards the methodological implications of his own invocation of literary theory's radical historicity. In effect, if one commits to the idea (as I, for one, am perfectly willing to do) that literary theory was a radically situated, historical moment or instrument, then one must also accept its limitations as a unique and stable *historiographical* point of reference. The prism of "literary theory", in this context, cannot be considered as more than one specific, opinionated way of retrospectively approaching the contexts and traditions (such as Russian Formalism) which, while undoubtedly partaking in literary theory's genealogy, were also inscribed in a multiplicity of other horizons that might well (and in fact clearly and repeatedly did) transcend it.

Instead of following the vicissitudes of literary theory's precarious status in changing regimes of relevance, a much better way of taking stock of its radical historicity, of the respective significance of its birth, maturity and death, and of the traditions and thinkers engaged in its fragile, contested development, is thus to accept and consider that at any moment in time, literary theory was always but *one structuring horizon amongst others* for the theories that contributed to its development. One cannot take it for granted *at any time* as a clearly identifiable, mostly closed discipline, discourse or practice. Rather, one must find a way of either reconceptualising its genealogy in terms of its competing relations with other discourses, or of placing it in a framework that accounts for its transformations not as the stages of a clear, linear development (a "continuous presence"), but as a configuration whose own horizon and meaning all remain radically open

to other genealogies—including in the very moment of their strongest historical relevance as the presumed foundational ideas of a given discipline or discourse.

To be clear, this does not mean that one can or should simply try to switch disciplinary frameworks—for example by suggesting that literary theory was always part of cultural studies or by presenting the Formalists as participating directly in a general discourse on culture or Theory (Cole 2004). While interesting, such a gesture would not address the own radical historicity of these other discourses and their own future susceptibility to being contested as constraining or inadequate frames of reference. What is required, much more—and that is the path trodden e.g. by Mrugalski et al. (2023) or Goldsmith & Laks (2021)—is a transdisciplinary confrontation of the self-instituting genealogies and self-representations of various traditions, disciplines and discourses, that can highlight both intra-disciplinary, institutionalising logics, *and* their dependency on the broader, often agonistic contexts in which they were deployed.

Interestingly, I would argue that this is *de facto* very much the perspective Tihanov does take in his own discussions of Russian Formalism, Špet, Bachtin and Marr. In all these cases, he retraces not the triumphant trajectory of literary theory, but its hesitations, polemics, and often failed efforts to establish itself in confrontation with other points of view. If he is perhaps too assertive on some points (such as the movement of literary theory as an emancipation away from aesthetics—a complex issue which I partially address in Flack 2023; cf. also Clark 2000), he is on the whole successful in showing how that process was both fraught and depended on a confrontation with the entire fields of philosophy, philology, modernist culture, and revolutionary politics.

That said, there are also a number of ways in which Tihanov remains much too closely wedded to the specific prism of literary theory. For example, his discussions of Bachtin and Špet frame them as "aborted" attempts towards literary theory ; he is too sanguine in the Russian Formalists' success in establishing literary theory as a distinct discourse; crucially, he signally fails to carry over his open, heterotopic angle on the Russian intellectual milieu to its successor contexts (Prague structuralism, French structuralism), often presenting the *instituted discipline of literary theory* as what is actually transmitted from the Russian context (rather, for example, than a series of notions and debates). Generally, Tihanov's analyses are characterised by a progressive *narrowing* of the relevant

historical scope: while he embraces the whole field of culture, politics, philosophy and the arts in his discussions of the Russian and Soviet contexts, he focuses almost exclusively on *literary* aspects in Prague and Paris, discounting the possibility that the dialogical situation of literary theory vis-à-vis other fields and disciplines is a factor that was just as important to its maturation and decline than to its emergence.

In summary, it surfaces from Tihanov's analyses that while recognising the radical historicity of literary theory is without doubt a necessary, essential step towards a better understanding of both its own and Formalism's position in the broader, entangled context of the early 20th century, it is not sufficient. As we have seen, Tihanov's approach runs the risks both of isolating and marginalising literary theory itself (as a momentary discourse that was the effect of specific circumstances and that has left only diffuse traces) and of narrowing down the impact of Russian Formalism to that marginalised, localised episteme. To avert these dangers, it would seem one needs to radicalise Tihanov's own historicist, contextualising gesture, and focus even more sharply on the dynamics, entanglements and contested conditions of the emergence of new discourses about language, culture, society or literature both within and beyond the Russian intellectual context. Crucially, that approach must not presume from the get go of their inscription in and subsumption to the genealogy of a single, specific discipline, be it literary theory, aesthetics or cultural studies. Instead, it must centre the very processes and modalities of their recombinations, transfers and transformations in new dialogical networks, regimes of relevance, and intellectual horizons.

Russian Formalism and the "philological paradigm"

Before turning to what such a transversal approach to the entangled, interdisciplinary dynamics of Russian Formalism and its historical context might look like, I wish to strengthen this first, quite general diagnosis of the potential limitations imposed on its interpretation by the prism of literary theory by discussing Jessica Merrill's excellent monograph *The Origins of Russian Literary Theory : Folklore, Philology, Form* (2022). Merrill's book, indeed, is doubly useful. Firstly, because she seeks to reassess the legacy of Formalism and to retrieve its "lost", "obscured" potential "for novel approaches to the concept of form within literary studies" (Merrill 2022:

4), her book directly addresses the second of the core paradoxes of the classical historiography of Formalism, namely the problem of the reception of the Formalist's conception of autonomous poetic form in the context of literary theory (and in particular, for Merrill, of structuralist literary theory). Secondly, Merrill thereby also provides a concrete demonstration of the dead-end to which the straitjacket of literary theory can lead in the *conceptual* assessment of the Formalists' legacy.

The basic proposition of Merrill's book is to revisit the genealogy of literary theory by contesting the supremacy of the account that sees both Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism as precursors to post-World War II French structuralism. Without contesting the "basic truth of this accepted genealogy", Merrill emphasises that this historical filiation is neither unique nor "strictly linear", and that it should be complemented by a parallel strand in literary studies that goes from 19th Century Humboldtian philosophy of language through Russian Formalism to "movements such as new formalism, historical poetics, quantitative formalism, and cognitive poetics" (Merrill 2022: 3). Crucially (and problematically, as we shall discover), Merrill suggests that this alternative strand is directly opposed, or at least clearly distinct from the dominant, structuralist, branch of literary theory : "What is being sought, apparently, is a concept of form, and a rationale for studying literary form, that does not presuppose a structuralist philosophy of language" (Merrill 2022: 4).

Merrill's strategy to recover the legacy of Russian Formalism for contemporary literary theory is to frame it within what she calls the "philological paradigm", a loose theoretical context formed by the intersection of comparative philology (Bopp, Rask and in particular Grimm), Humboldtian philosophy of language and associationist psychology (Herbart, *Völkerpsychologie*). Merrill does not present these traditions as forming a coherent movement, but considers them rather as a set of exemplary scientific practices in the Kuhnian sense, whose interactions created a productive space whose conceptual asperities spurred on further inquiries: "The meeting between the Humboldtian philosophy of language and the comparative method was a particularly important moment in the history that I am tracing. This is because there was an incomplete fit between them, and because scholars consequently attempted to reconcile them in different ways" (Merrill 2022: 14).

As Merrill argues, "one of the contentions of this book is that situating Russian Formalism with respect to the philological paradigm reveals

logical, straightforward explanations for aspects of Russian Formalism that otherwise appear ironic or paradoxical" (Merrill 2022: 19). In particular, she states, "one of the ideas I want to recontextualize is the view that Russian Formalism sought to establish the 'autonomy of literature'" (Merrill 2022: 33). Merrill's aim, thereby, is not at all to *contest* the notion of poetic autonomy, but to defend and refine it, away from the stereotypical dual opposition between poetic and prosaic language canonised by its subsequent interpretations in French structuralism (Lévi-Strauss) and the Anglo-Saxon context (Pratt, Eagleton, Jameson), and towards a more complex understanding of the socio-historical and psychological origins and implications of literary form (Merrill 2022: 35-36).

Having defined the general framework of her inquiry, Merrill develops her argument through four persuasive reconstructions of the Russian Formalists' dense ties with the philological paradigm. She starts by retracing and bringing more details to the historical continuity between Grimm, Humboldt and the Formalists (through Buslaev, Veselovskij and Potebnja), underlining the importance of the Russian notion of *slovesnost'*; she provides an original take on the notion of authorship in the Russian and early Soviet context, highlighting how much the Formalists' conception of poetic form owes to the idea of oral performance ; rehearsing the psychological pre-history of Formalism, she takes up the Formalists' specific debt to *associationist* psychology and highlights how the notion of parallelism, through the mediation of Veselovskij, allowed the Formalists to link formal and psychological properties ; finally, she provides a deep-dive in the records of the Moscow Linguistic Circle to demonstrate how profoundly the early Jakobson was inspired by a dialectological conception of poetic language, which emphasised the social and geographical dimensions of language and led him to develop a *sociolinguistic* poetics in his early work. Merrill summarises her perspective as follows :

> In order to reveal the aspects of Russian Formalism which speak to current concerns in twenty-first-century literary studies, the movement needs to be uncoupled from structuralism. I have sought to do this by reconstructing the premises of the philological paradigm : the adherence to a Humboldtian philosophy of language, to the comparative historical method, and to the assumption that the patterning observed in language is caused by language-external, sociopolitical, and psychological forces. I have demonstrated that different paths within Russian Formalism adopted these

> premises—albeit to different degrees—and that the theoretical core of Formalism was not structuralist, but derived from the concept of psychological parallelism (Merrill 2022: 221).

Merrill's arguments and overall reconstruction are important and convincing in several ways. For one, they usefully consolidate the picture of Russian Formalism's conception of the autonomy of literature not as an iconoclastic, binary and untenable provocation, but as the result of a careful negotiation of the social, psychological, cultural and formal elements of literature (or *slovesnost'*). They also demonstrate both how such a negotiation was ongoing before the Formalists and how they concretely and decisively contributed to its development. Perhaps Merrill's most important insight is her postulation of a "philological paradigm", which helps her frame Russian Formalism as being indebted not simply to an array of individual German "sources", but to a whole discursive context, in which its members all participated multilaterally. In so doing, she brings a decisive and convincing answer to the doubts expressed for example by Depretto (2010) as to the possibility of coherently reconstructing the diversity of sources and influences of Russian Formalism.

Where Merrill's strategy is very much successful (though far from exhaustive, I shall return to this point shortly) in restoring the complexity of the logic of the development of Russian Formalism's concept of autonomous form in its "philological" context, it breaks down however—approximately at the same venture as Tihanov's and, as I shall argue, for rather the same reason—in its attempt to situate and defend the Formalists' subsequent impact and legacy, in her case more specifically with regard (or rather in opposition) to Prague and French structuralism.

As we have seen, Merrill's argument is not only to insist that the "theoretical core of Formalism was not structuralist", but also, crucially, that its original conception of the autonomy of poetic form *was mostly lost on structuralism itself*. To make this point, she devotes the last chapter of her book to depicting the development of structuralism, in particular in Roman Jakobson's work, as a triple movement of dissociation from the Formalist legacy: first in Prague under the "systematic" influence of Saussure and Gestalt psychology, then in the USA and the abstract models of the information theory of Wiener, and Shannon & Weaver, and finally in the universalist anthropology of Lévi-Strauss and French structuralism. Because of these successive influences, each gradually more remote

from Russian Formalism and the philological paradigm, Merrill argues, structuralism involved a consistent drift away from the latter's rich notion of socially and culturally embedded historical forms, towards an abstract conception of structure as the formal or logical expression of universal, systematic, underlying principles. In this process, the initial definition of form as an autonomous psychological, cultural and social artefact was completely lost and thus needs to be disentangled and retrieved.

Prima facie, there is nothing particularly wrong with Merrill's characterisations of structuralism and Jakobson. The general image of structuralism she conveys is certainly not unconventional (it fits with the canonical accounts proposed by Culler 1975, Dosse 1991-92, Cusset 2003). Her analyses of Jakobson's re-framing of his early formalist ideas under the successive influence of information theory and French structuralism also constitute solid, worthy research. One cannot but note, however, that Merrill's reading leads to a rather extreme position, where the single most important contribution of Russian Formalism, namely its discovery and exploration of the autonomy of form, not only needs to be disentangled from structuralist interpretations, but appears to have had little to no positive impact on structuralist literary theory (because structuralism is seen as a series of worsening misreadings and weakening of this new conception of form). Structuralism and post-structuralism themselves, as a result, appear as fundamentally misguided moments of theoretical lapse between Russian Formalism and the contemporary revivals of formalism in literary studies, which it is therefore high time to discard or overcome.

Whatever the shortcomings of structuralism and post-structuralism may well have been, I do not believe that trying to sideline them in this way is an advisable or sustainable position. And indeed, it is not difficult to show that the strong contrast which Merrill draws between Russian Formalism and structuralism on the question of form actually relies on a selective, narrow reading of structuralism's own genealogy, which over-emphasises the importance of one of its specific strands over other alternatives and which thus, ironically, echoes the reductionism and excessive "linearity" that Merrill herself had denounced in the established accounts of Russian Formalism.

The selectiveness of Merrill's account of structuralism (and in particular its reception of Formalist ideas) is quite obvious: where she emphasises the importance of Saussure, Gestalt psychology and information theory for Jakobson, she forgets his ties with Husserl (Holenstein 1975), and the Eurasianist movement (Sériot 1999); she presents Gestalt psychology

disconnected from its roots in Brentanian psychology, thus erasing the mediating function in Prague of the Brentanians' concepts of intentionality, unity or value (Marty, Kraus, Utitz*);* the complex background of neo-Kantian influences and interpretations of structuralism (Christiansen, Pos, Rickert) is reduced to a brief (and one-sided) mention of Cassirer; Saussure is presented as a figure of discontinuity, without mention of his own profound links to the philological paradigm (cf. Joseph 2012, Samain 2014, Maniglier 2023); alternatives to the Lévi-Straussian reception of structuralism in France, in particular the cases of Martinet, Benveniste, Merleau-Ponty (Stawarska 2015) or Tran Duc Thao (D'Alonzo & Féron 2022) are left out of the picture.

It is of course not the place here to expound upon this alternative, plural genealogy of structuralism, but to simply point to its existence (cf. also Puech 2013, Flack 2016, Hoskovec 2019, Cigana et al. 2022) and to highlight the fact that it frontally contradicts what is Merrill's depiction of structuralism as a *holism* based on a thorough *rejection of comparativism*. Rather than claiming and imposing the notion of systemic whole against the concept of socio-cultural forms, indeed, most of the traditions sidelined in Merrill's account were involved, each in their own way, in a passionate, multilateral debate with German idealism and German organicism, contesting both their notions of totality and of form with a diverse array of new concepts (Gestalt, value, function, intentionality, symbolic forms, etc.). Further, both Aurora (2019, 2022) and Maniglier (2003, 2023) have made the point that structuralism is much more a *mereology* than a holism. It does not emphasise underlying systematic wholes or structures over concrete parts or forms, but is interested rather in combinatorial, transformative operations: "The most fundamental category of authentic structuralism is not totality but transformation, or more precisely, variation" (Maniglier 2023, 14). Maniglier, in this sense, forcefully interprets the origins of structuralism's transformational approach as a radicalisation (not a rejection) of historical comparativism (Maniglier 2023, 20), an interpretation that chimes further with a solidifying picture that sees the emergence of structuralism not as a rupture with 19th Century psychology and philology, but as their logical development (Sériot 1999, Samain 2007, Puech 2013, Goldsmith & Laks 2019).

All this, of course, does not demonstrate that structuralism did adequately take up the legacy of Russian Formalism and the philological paradigm, even in this other perspective. Nor does it invalidate Merrill's diagnosis that at least one (indeed, the most) influential strand of

structuralism corrupted or weakened its conception of form. Indeed, Merrill is fully justified in identifying the question of the reception of the autonomy of form as a historiographical point of contention and in calling for a problematisation of the relation between Russian Formalism and structuralism. It is quite clear, however, that such a problematisation should not be framed as the obfuscation of a historical, socio-cultural concept of form in favour of an abstract, holistic concept of structure. By adopting such an approach, as Merrill does, one not only betrays the conceptual diversity of structuralism, but one ends up dismissing *a priori* any of the ways in which structuralism might have constituted an adequate, powerful continuation and exploration of the notion of autonomous form bequeathed by Formalism. Instead of decoupling the Formalist legacy from structuralism, what is required is thus both a deepening of the problem of Russian Formalism's multiple, often contradictory and partial receptions in structuralism, and a re-framing of structuralism itself—in the historical continuity of the philological paradigm—as a complex entanglement of competing, dialoguing strands about form and structure.

Crucially, as was the case for Tihanov, extending and correcting Merrill's approach in this way means adopting an interdisciplinary perspective and abandoning the framework of literary theory. Most of the relevant debates highlighted above over questions of form or structure, indeed, were not of a specifically or primarily literary nature, but happened on the terrain (or rather at the intersection) of anthropology, philosophy, psychology, linguistics or sociology. As such, it is obvious that the traces of Russian Formalism's legacy (and more generally of the philological paradigm) within structuralism are not to be sought or found directly and exclusively in Jakobson's poetics or structuralist literary theories, but in the whole breadth of the entangled dialogues about form, function, structure, value, etc. that characterised structuralism's general development especially in the interwar period.

In this sense, it is certainly tempting to interpret the reductionism of Merrill's interpretation of structuralism as deriving not from her neglect of its plural history, but from her focus on *structuralist literary theory* and on structuralism as a "moment" in literary studies (rather than as a general paradigm). Indeed, while Merrill certainly takes into account non-literary sources of structuralism (Saussure's linguistics, Gestalt psychology, cybernetics), she is almost exclusively interested in their impact on structuralist discourses about poetic form and literature, in particular in the context of the Prague Linguistic Circle and in the evolution of Jakobson's work. Revealingly,

both Merrill's literary focus and its potential limitations are also already discernible in her discussion of the influence of Humboldt, Veselovskij and Potebnja in Russia: she discusses their importance to the Russian Formalists at length, but brackets out their well-known relevance to other (less obviously literary-minded) theorists such as Špet, Vygotskij, Marr, etc.

In conclusion, I venture that in both Tihanov's and Merrill's cases, one witnesses a progressive narrowing and ultimately fatal implosion of the context that is mobilised and deemed relevant to the historiography of Russian Formalism and its legacy, an implosion occasioned above all by the too rapid inscription of Formalism in the genealogy of literary theory as a distinct, unique discourse or episteme. It is generally where Tihanov and Merrill are capable of grasping Russian Formalism (and literary theory itself) as part of an open, heterogeneous, interdisciplinary and dialogical context that their analyses are strongest and yield the most insights, and where they fall back on the closed, disciplinary framework of literary theory—e.g. when discussing Formalism's legacy in post-war French structuralism or contemporary literary studies—that they are weaker.

Russian Theory and Russian Emigration

In answer to the challenges and limits faced by Tihanov's and Merrill's approaches, I now wish to put forward a two-fold programmatic proposal, which tackles the need to grasp Russian Formalism beyond its disciplinary inscription in literary theory and to account more transversally for the mechanisms of its later reception, particularly in Prague and Paris, without collapsing it with the genealogy of either literary theory or structuralism (or indeed, collapsing the genealogies of both theses discourses). My first proposal in this sense is to reconceptualise the Russian and early Soviet context of the 1910-30s much more explicitly as a coherent or at least entangled moment of cohesive dialogue, identified by the etiquette "Russian Theory" [*Russkaja Teorija*] proposed by Zenkin (2004)[1].

1 This recourse to *Russian* Theory – and in particular the inclusion under that banner of numerous Ukrainian, Jewish, Georgian and other scholars – is of course not uncontroversial in today's climate of justified suspicion towards tendencies to subsume or amalgamate different traditions too quickly and uncritically into Russian culture and history. As necessary as the debate over the imperial, colonial, or hegemonic traits either of Russian culture itself or of our interpretations of it within Slavic Studies might well be, I have chosen here however to forego a longer discussion of this issue for two

My second proposal, in turn, is to recentre the importance of Russian emigration as a broad vector of the transfer of ideas to Central and Western Europe, and in particular to foreground the *entire context* of entanglements, communities, dialogues and transfers involved in Russian emigration, rather than singling out the most prominent cases (Jakobson, Šklovskij, etc.) and trends (structuralism, eurasianism, etc.).

Russian Theory

As suggested in conclusion of my review of Tihanov's book, the most promising way to decouple Russian Formalism from the prism of literary theory is to try to apprehend it as exhaustively as possible against the background of the complex transdisciplinary context in which it was inscribed and which it contributed to shape. As I duly noted, Tihanov's own analyses have done much of the ground work in that direction by reconsidering the Formalists' ties with Marxism and by constructing a discourse about literary theory that includes the entangled relations of the Bachtin Circle, Špet and the GAChN, as well as Nikolaj Marr and palaeontological semantics. The key, it appears, is thus to consider the Russian/Soviet context of the 1910–30s not in terms of sterile confrontations and competing efforts at disciplinary delimitation or segregation, but as entangled and enmeshed "force fields" of interests, in which concepts and theories overlapped and merged as often as they differed from and rebounded off one another.

Further corroboration of the plausibility of this approach can be drawn from at least four other sources. Firstly, of course, Merrill's notion of a

essential reasons. Firstly, because my point here is *precisely* to highlight the structuring, centralising role of the socio-cultural spaces of late imperial Russia and the early Soviet Union on the production of a unified (if polyphonic, agonistic, open, etc.) intellectual and cultural discourse. Secondly, because I consider my approach–very obviously rooted as it is in a historicist emphasis on entanglement, hybridity, dialogue and intercultural transfers over essentialist national cultures–to constitute *itself* a direct challenge to tropes such as "Russian Soul", "Russian World", or even "Russian Thought", and thus to be an invitation to rethink Russian intellectual history in terms of its coexistence with, embeddedness in or indeed dependency upon or domination over other contexts and fields. Arguably, avoiding a more neutral characterisation ("East European" or "Slavic" Studies) makes it easier, not harder, to identify and conceptualise other "centres" of theory ("Czech", "Estonian", "Ukrainian") and their own entanglements and distinct contributions to European intellectual history.

"philological paradigm", which clearly hints at how Russian Formalism was inscribed in a general German background that it shared with other participants of the Russian intellectual context. Secondly, Craig Brandist's work on the institutional aspects of Russian and early Soviet thought (Brandist 2006; 2007; 2016; 2023), which deals with the institutional connections of Bachtin, the Formalists, Marr, and notably adds Vygotskij and his circle as a fundamental component. Thirdly, the contributions of Depretto (2010), Umnova (2013), Glanc (2015) or Pilščikov (2023) on the non-linear, decentered structure of Russian Formalism itself as a set of fluid poles rather than solid blocks. And finally, and most importantly, Zenkin's attempt to synthesise all these insights and to think of all these discourses (Russian Formalism, GAChN, Bachtin, Vygotskij, Marr, and Marxism) as constituting a loose movement, parallel in its inner tensions and paradoxes to French Theory, namely as *Russian Theory* (Zenkin 2003; 2004; 2006; 2011).

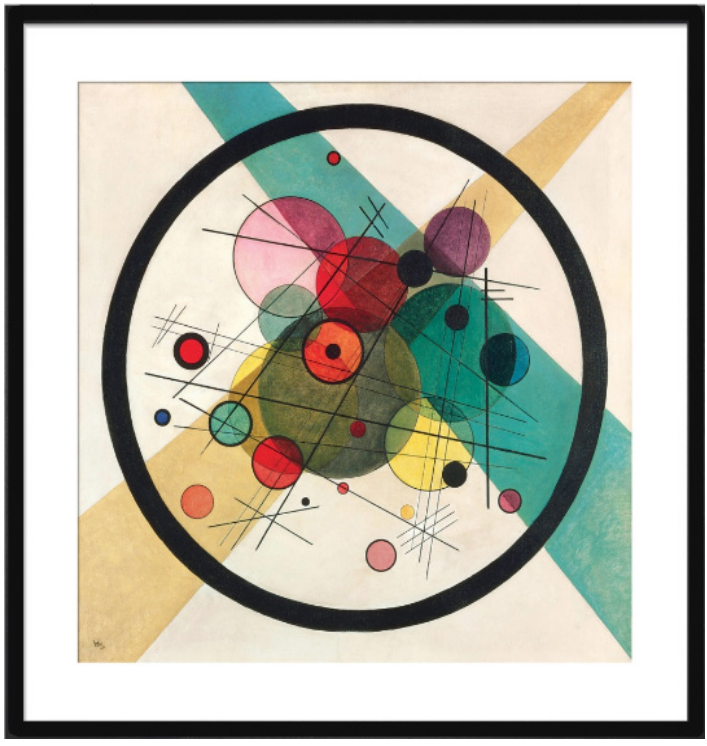
Zenkin's idea, unfortunately, has not received a large echo. Neither the term "Russian Theory", nor the perspective that it implies have been broadly accepted or used (the only notable exceptions are Pilščikov (2019) and Tamm & Kull (2020), but the latter use it only to apply it to Estonian Theory[2]). It is for example not thematised by Tihanov, who, despite obvious convergences, does not see it either as a corroboration or a challenge to his own approach. This neglect is probably in large part due to the fact that Zenkin does not really present Russian Theory as anything more than a convenient label playing on the analogy with French Theory as its justification. Typically, the eponymous volume of 2004 is not a programmatic, methodologically ambitious manifesto, but the collected acts of a workshop. Further, while he does repeatedly use the term, Zenkin himself does not seem entirely committed to it: in a more recent publication on the Russian-Soviet context of the 1910–30s, he foregoes the "Russian Theory" label and uses instead the more neutral title *Russian Intellectual Revolutions* (Zenkin 2016).

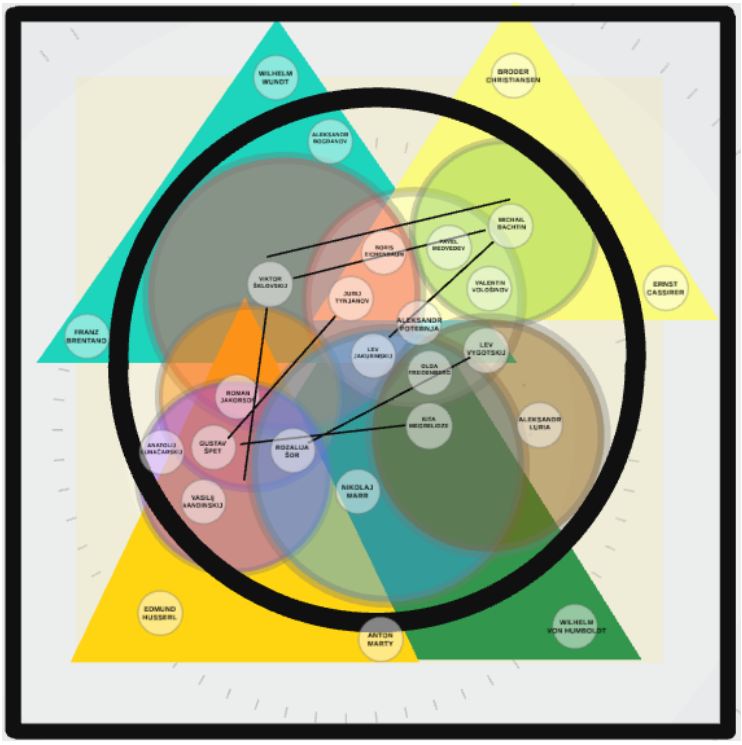
Following Pilščikov, Tamm and Kull's use and more substantial interpretation of national "Theory" (Russian, Estonian, etc.) as "a local episteme—a territorialised web of epistemological associations" (Tamm & Kull 2020), I would like here to make the case that it is time to take Zenkin's suggestion to the letter, to foreground the network of dialogues, interactions, confrontations and encroachments described by Tihanov,

2 This proliferation of "national" theories is also discernable in the proposition of a "Brazilian Theory" in anthropology (Precht 2022).

Brandist, Pilščikov, etc. as a *bona fide* object of study and to thus frame Russian Formalism as an integral part of Russian Theory.

Obviously, I will not be able here to offer a detailed reconstruction of Russian Theory. The need for a transversal, entangled approach to Russian Formalism revealed by my reviews of Tihanov's and Merrill's books, along with the existing research just mentioned will have to suffice here as a justification. My objective at this point will thus be purely programmatic and seek only to outline the *availability* and *potential* of Russian Theory as a historiographical frame of reference that can meet our need to bypass literary theory. As such, playfully using *Zirkel in einem Zirkel,* a 1923 painting by Vasilij Kandinskij—himself an (émigré) actor of Russian Theory—, I will now try to provide a simple but striking *visualisation* or *aesthetic demonstration* of Russian Theory's entangled cohesiveness, namely as a pure composition of intersecting circles penetrated by straight lines of dialogue and caught in the rays of external influences.





"Russian Theory" itself, in the above image, is equal to the whole frame. The inner, coloured circles express real "*kružki*" or schools (OPOJAZ, Moscow Linguistic Circle, GAChN, Bachtin Circle, Vygotskij Circle, Marrist linguistics). The outer, black circle expresses Marxism (in its philosophical, rather than political form). The thin straight lines express the direct exchanges and dialogues between members of non-intersecting circles (e.g. the Formalist – Bachtin polemics, the Frejdenberg – Vygotskij collaborations, etc.). The yellow and green background rays express the external, here mostly German, sources or influences (Humboldtian linguistics, phenomenology, neo-Kantianism, German psychology, etc.) that traverse the whole web of entanglements.

Needless to say, this visual reconstruction does not "demonstrate" the existence of Russian Theory or effectively "represent" its historical structure. In truth, this image is not even descriptive, as it does not aim to render exact relations: a serious data-based model or network visualisation of the relations of the included figures and traditions would certainly not take this exact form, at least not without serious manipulations. What it does however do, I contend, is forcefully express the density of relations between the represented actors and make visible the organising principle

of those relations: that principle was not an overarching institutional or disciplinary order, but a pure, Kandinskian *compositional* entanglement of circles and force fields. In a way, my intention here in using Kandinskij's painting to express or make visible the inner logic and coherence of Russian Theory, is not unlike Foucault's reference to and description of Velazquez's *Las Meninas* at the beginning of *The Order of Things,* which he uses to reveal the underlying *episteme* of the "order of representation" (Foucault 2002 [1966]). Arguably, what is intimated in this case is an "order of dialogue", or "order of composition", which expresses all at once the aesthetic principle followed by Kandinskij in his painting, the way in which Russian Theory was structured (as force fields of interactions and dialogues between heterogeneous circles), *and* the underlying logic of many of its key concepts (dialogue, dominant, composition, constructive factors, estrangement, energy, etc.).

Further, despite its very obvious, explicit artificiality and lack of descriptiveness, the visualisation proposed here does very much force us to think about the historical reality of Russian Theory as a coherent phenomenon. In a way, it does validate quite simply and effectively the fact that these traditions and theories were enmeshed in such a way that they constituted a real, operative network of exchanges which, at the very least, historiography would henceforth be very unwise to ignore or overlook. But it does so, moreover, in a specific way, that highlights how the perspective materialised here is selective and strongly opinionated—insistently reminding us that there are other possible approaches to these entanglements, for example away from their "Russian" centering. That gesture itself, is not ironic or self-deconstructing, pointing to the inherent superficiality of taking the perspective of "Russian Theory" on the intellectual context of the 1910-30s. It is more Latourian in spirit, clearly exposing its own positionality and making explicit its frame of reference, goals and preferences. This Kandinskian image of Russian Theory, in this sense, is an attempt to constitute both itself and its object as manipulable affordances and heuristic tools for approaching the Russian context of the 1910-30s from a new, non-disciplinary angle.

Russian Emigration

As we saw, perhaps the greater problem with Tihanov's and Merrill's approaches was not their contextualisation of Russian Formalism itself, but the progressive collapse of the historiographical prism through which its impact and legacy was assessed. As such, the suggested recourse to Russian Theory needs to be complemented by a similar correction and broadening of the framework used to consider the reception of the Russian and early Soviet intellectual context in Central and Western Europe. Such a correction and broadening, I contend, can be accomplished most effectively and fruitfully through a systematic recourse to Russian emigration.

The case for considering Russian emigration as an important factor of the reception of Russian Formalism and the early Soviet intellectual context has again already been made decisively by Tihanov. What I wish therefore to emphasise here, in contrast to him, is that one should have recourse to Russian emigration not only to retrace the individual trajectories of distinct figures or discourses (e.g. literary theory), or to highlight prominent episodes in isolation (e.g. the Russian presence in the Prague Linguistic Circle, the Jakobson – Lévi-Strauss exchanges, the Todorov – Kristeva reintroduction of Formalism and Bachtin) but as a dense, continuous field of relations and interactions between persons, institutions and places without which these individual trajectories and episodes would not have been possible and thus remain largely incomprehensible. As in the case of Russian Theory, the very web of transfers and entanglements involved by the historical reality of Russian emigration should itself be centred as a heuristic and explanatory factor. Only against this general background should one then try to single out and justify the genealogies of separate discourses, disciplines or traditions or interpret the meaning of individual episodes or exchanges.

To outline in a bit more detail how such an approach can be useful, both generally and specifically in the case of the reception of Russian Formalism, I turn here to two examples, the situation of the Prague Linguistic Circle in interwar Prague, and that of Kojève in Paris. To be clear, my point here is not to make a contribution to the historiography of either the Prague Linguistic Circle or Kojève, but simply to show how a broad, "framing" recourse to the context of Russian emigration can bring up new perspectives, help us make better sense of the reception of the Russian and early Soviet intellectual context in Central and Western

Europe, and, crucially, help us avoid the contextual narrowing or collapse we diagnosed in Tihanov's and Merrill's approaches.

The Prague Linguistic Circle is classically seen as a streamlined, centralised institution, whose strength was to bring a number of participants from various disciplinary and national backgrounds to express a shared, collective programme, formulated in the famous *Thèses* (1929). This centralised *ductus* is highlighted for example by Steiner as a strong contrast to the chaotic, anarchic practices of Russian Formalism (Steiner 1984, 9). The Prague Linguistic Circle's ability to bring together and unify various perspectives in a magical "common language" is also the main hypothesis of its reconstruction by Toman (1995). Further, the Prague Linguistic Circle has generally been the only Russian-connected scholarly institution of interwar Prague to have received sustained attention. More often than not, it is presented as the only relevant platform in the meeting of Russian and Czechoslovak scholars in Prague, and thus in the reception of ideas from Russia, in particular formalist ones. Both Tihanov and Merrill, typically, focus almost exclusively on the Prague Linguistic Circle and its actors (Jakobson, Trubeckoj, Karcevskij, Bem, etc.)

As Christian Zehnder and myself have recently argued, however, this privileged image of the Prague Linguistic Circle as a unique, tightly knit and highly coherent institution is hard to sustain when one solicits the history of the Russian emigration in Prague. In effect,

> surpassing even Berlin and Paris [...], Prague became the effective academic capital of "Russia Abroad" (cf. Raeff 1990, 64; Andreyev & Savický 2004, 80ss) [...]. Russian émigrés succeeded through a concerted effort to establish a thriving intellectual community in Prague, a "Russian Oxford", which saw the creation of significant institutions of higher education such as the *Seminarium Kondakovianum* [1925-1945], the Russian National University [1923-1949], or the Russian Historical Archive Abroad [Russkij zagraničnyj istoričeskij archiv, 1924-1945]). (Flack & Zehnder 2023)

Many of the institutions of Russian émigrés in Prague, moreover, "involved a strong participation of Czech and German intellectuals (Brod in the Dostoevskij Society; Masaryk and Patočka as interlocutors of Losskij, Čyževs'kyj, or Gessen ; Czech and German scholars in the Prague Linguistic Circle)" and often "organised in informal 'circles' [*kružki*] that closely resembled the Central European tradition of *the* cafés and circles, [...] thereby

integrating in typical fashion in the Prague context", that is, as an integral part of a series of exchanges and multilateral dialogue that let "the apparently segregated intellectual (and artistic) milieus of modernist Prague appear as a single network of mutual, criss-crossed exchanges" (Flack & Zehnder 2023).

Against this background, the Prague Linguistic Circle clearly does not appear as an exception, but rather as one of the most significant embodiments of the entanglements of Czech, German, Russian and Ukrainian scholars and institutions in interwar, modernist Prague. Similarly, instead of being an organisation sustained by its own hierarchies and structures, one of "two discursive formations", along with Eurasianism, which "remained estranged in their cohabitation" (Tihanov 2019: 157) it was traversed by many centrifugal currents and conditioned by the participation of most of its members in other intersecting traditions, movements and institutions, such as the neo-Kantian Philosophical Society of the Russian University, Bem's Dostoevskij Society, the Prague Philosophical Circle, the journal *Der russische Gedanke,* etc. Instead of a dual landscape in which "Jakobson, who participated in both discourses, was rather exceptional" (Tihanov 2019: 157), our straightforward invocation of the Russian émigrés in Prague reveals a multilateral configuration of dense exchanges that opens the perspective for a very different historical account of the reception pathways of Russian Formalism. Moving beyond the Prague Linguistic Circle, that account can be attentive to the complex entanglements of Brentanian and Herbartian psychology, neo-Kantianism, phenomenology, and various approaches to literary studies which, as we mentioned in our review of Merrill, were decisive for the development of Prague structuralism.

The solicitation of the broader context of Russian emigration can have similarly potent effects in the case of Alexandre Kojève. Kojève is of course known as the figure who almost single-handedly spurred the rediscovery and reception of Hegel in France in the 1930s, through his famous lectures, attended by the likes of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, de Beauvoir, Bataille, Queneau, Lacan and many others, at the Collège de France (Love 2018, 1). For a long time, encouraged by Kojève's own declarations, he was considered strictly in that role, as the transmitter of Hegel, a lone, somewhat enigmatic figure in the intellectual shadow of the great German master, whose work he conveyed mostly faithfully and adequately. In this he is not unlike Roman Jakobson and the Prague Linguistic Circle, who have often been considered as a mere intermediary stage of structural linguistics, and whose contributions have systematically been cast in the long shadow of Saussure.

In the wake of prospective work by Auffret (1990) and Filoni (2021), a new image of Kojève, more sensitive to his originality and thus to his non-Hegelian sources, has now emerged and crystallised. In particular, his ties to Russian thought and philosophy have been rediscovered. Jeff Love, for one, has outlined in detail the importance of Vladimir Solov'ev, Fedor Dostoevskij and Nikolaj Fedorov in Kojève's "anthropological" reading of Hegel and his idiosyncratic (and hugely influential) emphasis on the end of history. While Love's reconstruction has been sharply criticised from some quarters (Weslati 2020), Kojève's overall debt to Russian Hegelianism has been highlighted by others (Wilson 2019, Jacobs 2023,), along with his intensive relations with other contemporary Soviet or Russian émigré thinkers influenced by Hegel such as Il'yn, Špet, Losskij, Losev (Jacobs 2023), Meyerson, Koyré or Berdjaev (Espagne 2014).

As was the case above with the Prague Linguistic Circle, one sees here emerging a constellation of dialogues and exchanges, which indicate that far from being isolated, Kojève was but one node in an intense Russian discussion of Hegel, which Russian émigrés brought directly to Paris. The evocative title of Jacobs' article on Kojève, "Thinking in circle" neatly underlines the echoes with the communicational structures of interwar Prague. One can add, moreover, that this debate was not solely focussed on Hegel, but was deeply enmeshed with Russian religious thought (Arjakovski 2013), the existentialism of Berdjaev or Šestov (cf. Clément 1991, Piron 2010), symbolist art and literature (Livak 2003,) and of course the reception and emerging cult of Dostoevskij both by Russian émigrés such as Merežkovskij, or French thinkers such as Camus, Gide or Bataille (cf. Camus 1962, Niqueux 2021). In this context, it is tempting to see the strange success of Kojève's reading of Hegel in term of this wider dissemination, in Paris, of the Russian intellectual sources (Solov'ev, Dostoevskij, Russian Hegelianism) that inspired and underpinned it. Perhaps more importantly to us here, the suggestion that Russian emigration and émigré thought played a major role in the reception of Hegel in France through Kojève also alerts us to the fact that they certainly had that role in Prague, this time through Losskij, Čyževs'kyj, Boris Jakovenko as well as Jakobson, pointing therefore to the existence of yet another forgotten and overlooked Russian context of the Prague Linguistic Circle[3].

3 The importance of Hegel in the Prague Linguistic Circle has of course been noted before e.g. by Wellek (1955, 584) but, tellingly, he sees it as a source of difference between its Czech and Russian members, only the Czechs having read Hegel, according

Conclusion

Having arrived in this way to Hegel and Russian philosophy, one might reasonably want to ask at this point whether the double framework of Russian Theory and Russian emigration I have put forward might not be taking us too far away from the historiography of Russian Formalism and misleading us into casting our contextual net a bit too wide. I would like to suggest that the precise reverse is true, and that this perhaps surprising outcome has in fact brought us full circle, directly back to the questions left open by Tihanov's and Merrill's approaches, but with new insights and possible answers.

Turning first to Merrill, we can recall that the key argument of her book, namely that Russian Formalism's conception of poetic autonomy needed to be disentangled from structuralist philosophy of language, resulted in a strange paradox. We found that it relied on a characterisation of structuralism as a theory of holistic abstract systems which at once conformed perfectly with the image found in canonical accounts, but which also systematically overlooked or misrepresented the actual diversity and complexity of structuralism's development, not least its reception of ideas from Russia. While we could not fault Merrill for strongly contrasting (a certain) French structuralism with Russian Formalism, her argument seemed to misconceive the precise mechanism of structuralism's shift away from Formalism's legacy.

By bringing Hegel and the reception of Hegelianism (in Russian, Czechoslovakia and France) into the picture, the prism of Russian Theory and Russian emigration, I contend, can help us make sense of this paradox and cast a different light on the reception of Russian Formalism in structuralism. While there is, to my knowledge, not much evidence of a direct Hegelian influence on Russian Formalism, Hegel's influence is indeed widespread across Russian Theory. He is a key source for Špet, Vygotskij, Bachtin and of course (although not as straightforwardly as one might think) for Marxist discourses. Moreover, as illustrated by Špet's case in particular, Hegel is often closely associated with the "philological paradigm" (Humboldt in particular) and as such can easily be considered part of the background of German sources of Russian Theory. This is all the more true because, more than any other (Goethe, Humboldt, Grimm,

to him. Sládek (2017) links the reception of Hegel by Mukařovský with Russian and Ukrainian emigration, but names only Jakobson and Čyževs'kyj.

Herder, etc.), Hegel is the thinker of the historicity and dialectic nature of social, cultural and intellectual forms.

Having evoked Hegel's importance to the "philological paradigm", to the Russian intellectual context, as well as the contexts of interwar Russian emigration in Paris and Prague, we can thus pinpoint him as an obvious factor of *continuity* between the contexts of Russian Formalism and early structuralism, precisely on the all important notion of historically, culturally and socially embedded forms. But just as importantly, he also appears as a decisive element of *discontinuity,* namely in the distinct *anti-hegelianism* of many of the French thinkers of the 1960s (Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze): "Ce que je détestais avant tout, c'était l'Hégelianisme, la dialectique" (Deleuze 1990: 14; cf. also Descombes 1979: 60ss). Arguably, it is *this* break (rather than the successive solicitations of Saussure, Gestalt psychology, etc.), in particular the structuralists' and post-structuralists' rereading of the assimilation by Hegel of cultural forms to a closed, totalising philosophy of history, that marks the point of rupture with the legacies of the philological paradigm, Russian Formalism, and interwar structuralism.

Of course, this reaction was not primarily oriented against Russian Formalism, but the entire post-war legacy of Kojève: instead of a slow shift away from formalist literary theory occasioned by the recourse to other paradigms, it was a direct, polemical confrontation with the Hegelian heritage precisely on the key themes of totality, subjectivity, history and form. As Derrida realised better than most, moreover, the structuralist/post-structuralist anti-Hegelian reaction was mostly a failure, since there was no coming out of the "shadow of the Eagle" (Derrida 1974)—a fact bourn out by the subsequent return to Hegel by contemporary inheritors of post-structuralism such as Butler or Žižek. In other words, rather than a resolute turn away from the historical notion of form towards the systematic determinations of structure, French structuralism and post-structuralism was a terrain where their relation was polemically problematised, in terms of genesis and structure (Derrida), openness and totality (Eco, Barthes), autonomous subjectivity and auto-poetic system (cf. Balibar 2005) or, most spectacularly, individual performance and social norms (Butler).

While powerfully bridging the apparently distant relation between Hegel and the historiography of Russian Formalism by casting light on the conditions of the latter's reception in structuralist discourse, these considerations of course still run the not negligible risk of separating

Formalism too brusquely from literary theory, and diluting its express and specific efforts to formulate a theory of literature in a general philosophy of culture. But this problem, in turn, brings us back to the dilemma voiced by Tihanov over the scope of literary theory itself.

To recall, Tihanov briefly considered the possibility that "literary theory is only the by-product of a larger articulation of interest in specificity and autonomy, through deliberate neglect of subjective agency" and that Russian Formalism was thus immersed "in a much wider—and more consequential—agenda that sought to redefine the status of human agency beyond the crumbling foundations of humanism" (Tihanov 2019: 27). He was however also clearly reticent to the idea of subsuming the moment of relevance of literary theory to the broader discourses I have just evoked and which Tihanov refers to as "French Theory" (Cusset 2008) and "Theory" (Cole 2014). As Tihanov warned, his project is "demonstrably different from recent attempts to locate the birth of Theory" (Tihanov 2019: 6). Rather than to seek to inscribe Russian Formalism and literary theory in the broader genealogies of French Theory or Theory, he wanted "to tell the multiple story of emergence, disappearance, and trace that focuses on a particular time-limited episteme" (Ibid).

While laudable and justified in its intent, Tihanov's own strategy of ring-fencing literary theory, as I showed, ends up marginalising both Russian Formalism and literary theory itself and failing to address the persistent thematic continuities between the German, Russian and French intellectual contexts outlined above. By contrast, the focus on Russian Theory I have proposed here offers a neat solution to the tension between Formalism's specifically literary orientation and its inscription in a broader movement. On the one hand, it takes fully into account the specific, if ephemeral "literary" focus of the Russian context and its regime of relevance. In the perspective of Russian Theory, the specifically *literary* theories of Russian Formalism, as well as those of figures such as Špet, Bachtin, etc. are still considered as such, without being diluted *a priori* into general semiotics, anthropologies, theories of culture or Hegelian dialectics. At the same time, these literary debates are naturally and immediately inscribed in the wider context of the profound, interdisciplinary and transversal dialogues and disputes over cultural forms and their implications for new concepts of sociality and subjectivity that were initiated in Germany and later continued in Russia, Czechoslovakia, or France. As such, the distinctly literary-theoretical contribution of Russian Formalism can find its rightful

place and meaning, through Russian Theory, as a crucial historical moment or instrument, not only of literary theory as the product of a regime of relevance, but also in a momentous process of dialogue and intellectual transfer which both harnessed and conditioned that momentary product and which, predicated on the in- and outflows of Russian emigration, linked Hegel and the "philological paradigm" (or Theory) with their further transformations in Central Europe, France and finally the USA (French Theory).

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