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The Prague School on a global scale: a Coup d'œil from the East¹

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ABSTRACT: This essay compares the evolution of the “Prague doctrine” described in Ondřej Sládek’s *The Metamorphoses of Prague School Structural Poetics* (2015) with similar developments in literary theory in Eastern Europe (from Russian formalism to the Tartu-Moscow School of Semiotics). The author proposes a transnational approach to the study of the typology and history of literary theories and outlines, in partial agreement with Sládek, several cross-cultural transfers of theoretical concepts and research tools from linguistics to literary theory and structural anthropology and further to semiotics and cultural studies. As an addition to Sládek’s overview of the evolution of structural poetics, this essay points to facts that serve as evidence for a parallel, sometimes interrelated, development of structural poetics and cultural semiotics in the former Czechoslovakia and the former Soviet Union. The author also addresses the issue of the (inter)national character of academic work and the ontological status of terms such as the “French”, “Russian”, “Estonian” and “Czech theories”.

Key words: poetics, Prague structuralism, French structuralism and poststructuralism, Russian formalism, Tartu-Moscow School of Semiotics

It is not unusual today to describe French structuralism and poststructuralism as the “French theory” (Appignanesi 1989; Murray 1992; Lotringer & Cohen 2001; Cusset 2003, 2008; Davis 2004; Geoghegan 2011; Kauppi 2016; Demers 2018 and others), although it has been argued that “French theory” is, ironically, “a peculiarly American construct that can only be understood as the product of the blinkered enthusiasm of Anglo-Saxon academics for a range of thought they have not properly understood” (Baring 2011: 1). The early ancestors of the “French theory” — Russian formalism and the Bakhtin circle — as well as their continuation in the Tartu-Moscow version of structuralism and semiotics have sometimes been called

¹ My work on this essay was supported by the Estonian Research Council (grant nr PRG319). I am grateful to Lydia Roberts, Peter Steiner and the anonymous reviewers of SaS for their comments and suggestions.

the “Russian theory” (Zenkin 2004; Zenkine 2006; Depretto 2010; Maslov 2016: 124, 128; Torop 2017: 317–320, 326–327) despite this theory’s evidently German roots (Romand & Tchougounnikov 2009; Dmitrieva, Zemskov & Espagne 2009; Dmitriev 2010). A unique combination of cultural semiotics and biosemiotics developed in Tartu has been referred to as the “Estonian theory” (Tamm & Kull 2015, 2016) despite its mixed German-Russian origins (Torop 2000; Kull, Salupere, Torop & Lotman 2011; Deely 2012; Kull, Peng 2013). Furthermore, an attempt has been made to introduce the term “German theory” to designate a set of philosophical approaches to cultural and social issues (Steinmetz 2006). Similarly, the research program developed by the Prague Linguistic Circle in the 1920s and 1930s, and its extension, the Prague School, earned the name of the “Czech theory” (Gvoždiak 2016; Velmezova 2016).

At first glance, postulating the existence of national theories seems to contradict the thesis on the international nature of human knowledge. However, the aforementioned terms have gained a foothold in the history of the humanities for describing “a particular historico-geographical crystallization” of a wider methodology (Steiner 1982a: xi) or a specific culturally and geographically located “condensation of theories within the heterogeneous network of cultural communication and of the evolution of certain local peculiarities which then lend support to the thinkers’ pursuits and form a mental atmosphere, powerfully shaping the ideas and questions raised by those participating in it” (Tamm & Kull 2016: 76). Therefore, such definitions should be understood as descriptions of open systems of ideas favored in particular cultures and societies, rather than generated by those cultures and societies “independently” from others.

A “school” can thus be considered an emergent property of certain persons interacting with each other (Sutrop 2015). This also involves places of interaction (countries and cities, universities, research institutes, private homes, etc.) and means of interaction (correspondence, conferences, collaboration, and so on). Although all interactions are embedded in a cultural and historical context, a school’s borders cannot be clear-cut: as the Estonian philosopher Margus Ott remarked,² every “school” extends to infinity. At the same time, this infinity is not homogeneous, and interactions between its heterogeneous parts (“crystallizations” or “condensations”) are important stages in the development of human knowledge. Therefore different theories “can easily have some parts in common, and many scholars may well belong to both, or several, at once” (Tamm & Kull 2016: 77). In particular, the Prague Linguistic Circle (PLC) was a multicultural and international phenomenon, unifying Czech, Slovak, Russian, and German scholars, all of whom made important contributions to its formation and development (see, in particular, Pilshchikov 2015). Some of these scholars, such as Roman Jakobson and Pëtr Bogatyrëv, were founding figures in both the “Russian theory” and the “Czech theory”.

Ondřej Sládek’s recent book titled *The Metamorphoses of Prague School Structural Poetics* (Sládek 2015) is a concise description of the transformations that the “Czech theory” experienced over a century.³ My article is not a review of Sládek’s book but an essay comparing and contrasting the parallel histories of cognate theories that are discussed or at least mentioned in Sládek’s study of the Prague School. As an addition to

² Private communication (22.03.2018).

³ All further references to this book are given by page numbers only.

Sládek's overview of the evolution of structural poetics, this essay points to facts that serve as evidence for a similar, sometimes interrelated, development of structural poetics and cultural semiotics in the former Czechoslovakia and the former Soviet Union.

As Sládek describes it, his view of the evolution of the "Prague doctrine" combines the perspectives of a literary theoretician and a historian of literary theory. To justify this claim, he presents both a systematic and a historical outline of the evolution of the Prague School's structural poetics. The time span for his study is large: it begins with the forerunners of the PLC and ends with what the author calls "Czech post-structural structuralism". The scholar also adds a comparative and typological perspective, confronting the system of poetics developed by the Praguers with the approaches of their predecessors and contemporaries, from Czech romanticism and Russian formalism to German hermeneutics and French deconstruction.

This relatively short book (196 pp.) is the first study that embraces all stages of the metamorphoses of the "Czech theory" in its changing intellectual context. Sládek chooses a few representative figures to describe each stage. Two members of the PLC, Jan Mukařovský and Felix Vodička, represent the first and the second generation of Czech structuralists. Czech post-war structuralist revival is discussed only in passing; it is represented by Mukařovský's disciples (Miroslav Červenka, Milan Jankovič, Zdeněk Pešat and others) who continued in their teacher's work after his renunciation of structuralism in the 1950s. The first generation of the Prague School in exile is represented by René Wellek and Roman Jakobson, who emigrated in 1939. The representatives of the post-WWII wave of emigration, whose work is described in *The Metamorphoses*, include Jakobson's disciple Ladislav

Matějka, who was forced into exile after the Communist coup d'état in Czechoslovakia in 1948, and three scholars who left their homeland after the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops in 1968 — Mojmír Grygar, Květoslav Chvatík, and Lubomír Doležel.

Sládek begins with a necessary correction of a historical injustice that led to an incomplete and one-sided identification of “the age of structuralism” with a post-WWII French intellectual movement from Claude Lévi-Strauss to Michel Foucault (as it is presented in Kurzweil 1980 and most of Anglo-American criticism). Indeed, Roman Jakobson borrowed the term “structuralism” from contemporary psychology and coined it as a programmatic self-description as early as 1929 in a newspaper note on the First International Congress of Slavists in Prague, where the celebrated “Thèses du Cercle linguistique de Prague” were presented (see Percival 2011). He wrote it in Czech (Jakobson 1929) and much later reproduced the passage about “structuralism” in English in the “Retrospect” to the second volume of his *Selected Writings* (Jakobson 1971a: 711). At that time — the early 1970s — the term discussed here was already strongly associated with the “French theory”.

It is no surprise, then, that Sládek devotes the first chapter of his book to the comparison between Czech and French structuralism. French structuralists used linguistically-oriented methods in disciplines such as anthropology (Lévi-Strauss), psychology (Jacques Lacan), history (Jean-Pierre Vernant) and other fields of humanistic inquiry. From this point of view, Sládek’s statement that “the basis of structuralism is the universalization of the linguistic model” (27) can be applied to both Czech and French versions of structuralist theory. The author outlines several transfers of theoretical

concepts and research tools: from linguistics to literary theory/criticism and further to structural anthropology and cultural studies (30). It should be added, however, that both schools were characterized by their striving for an even more universalist model of cultural communication and found this model in semiotics that, as they aspired, could help to build bridges between various disciplines in social and human sciences. This does not contradict the initial impetus received by both schools from F. de Saussure, who envisaged linguistics as a branch of semiology.⁴ Later in his book Sládek scrupulously analyses Jan Mukařovský's programmatic talk titled "Art as a Semiological Fact", which was delivered to the Eighth International Congress of Philosophers in Prague in 1934. In Chapter Six he also considers how Mojmír Grygar elaborated on the semiotics of art of the Prague School. Surprisingly, Sládek does not mention Jakobson's impact on the development of the semiotics of literature and art. Besides Umberto Eco's well-known essay (Eco 1977, 1987), a detailed treatment of this topic, specifically in the context of the Prague School, may be found in T. G. Winner's papers on Mukařovský's and Jakobson's "semiotic aesthetics / aesthetic semiotics" (Winner 1976, 1987) and in a chapter titled "The Semiotic Reformulation" in F. W. Galan's monograph on the "Prague School Project" (Galan 1985: 82–140). The latter book is — also surprisingly — quite rarely referred to in Sládek's analysis.⁵

Chapter Two begins with the outlines of the evolutions of the views of Mukařovský and Vodička. In Sládek's opinion, two main branches of Czech structuralist inquiry were linguistics and aesthetics, and it was not until later that Vodička complemented these two basic disciplines with a third, the

⁴ "Linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology; the laws discovered by semiology will be applicable to linguistics, and the latter will circumscribe a well-defined area within the mass of anthropological facts" (Saussure 1916 [1959]: 16).

⁵ Of the two papers of T. G. Winner cited above, only the first one, devoted to Mukařovský, is included in Sládek's bibliography.

history of literature (25, 43).⁶ A similar shift was also characteristic of Russian formalism, in whose course of development Viktor Shklovsky's aesthetics and Roman Jakobson's linguistics were soon complemented by Yuri Tynjanov's theory of literary evolution. This parallelism is quite telling: a literary work as a sum/system of devices (as formulated by the formalists) or a literary structure (as reformulated by the structuralists) functions differently for different recipients. An important dissimilarity between the two schools was that the formalist history of literature was focused more on contemporaneous responses to literary works and less on subsequent reinterpretations produced by younger generations of readers, whereas the structuralist history of literature, as conceived by Vodička and developed by Chvatík, focused on the history of interpretations and had a formative influence on German *Rezeptionsästhetik* and *Rezeptionsgeschichte* (the accepted English term, "reader-response criticism", veils the historicist nature of this approach).

Sládek opposes Mukařovský's concept of an open and dynamic literary structure to Lévi-Strauss's "structure as a closed system of differences" and compares it to the "dynamic concept of structure", which was later developed by Juri Lotman and the Tartu-Moscow School of Semiotics (40, 42). It is important to add in this context that Lotman was fascinated with Mukařovský's ideas as early as the mid-1960s, when he started working on a two-volume Russian edition of Mukařovský together with his friend Oleg Malevič, a prominent Russian Bohemist, and Malevič's wife Viktorija Kamenskaja, a leading Russian translator from Czech and Slovak. The Russian edition was suppressed after the Prague Spring of 1968, and two

⁶ To be sure, Mukařovský became interested in history of literature before Vodička's innovations (Steiner 2017).

volumes edited by Malevič and Lotman saw the light of day only after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Lotman's death (see Mukařovský 1994, 1996).⁷ In an unpublished article written in the early 1970s, Lotman emphasized the fact that Mukařovský described both a single literary text and the entire culture as a complex, dynamic, and semiotic whole: "From Jan Mukařovský's point of view, every culture is a hierarchically organized structure of functions. The structure of functions is a realization of the social structure of a given society. Cultural functions are performed by texts. [...] This approach presents culture not as a sum-total of mechanically connected texts, but as a dialectical unity" (Lotman 1971: 9–10).⁸

Lotman implicitly opposed Mukařovský's functionalist structuralism to Shklovsky's "mechanicist" formalism, as a comparison of the above-quoted passage from Lotman 1971 with Lotman's *Lectures on Structural Poetics* reveals. In his *Lectures*, Lotman wrote: "The principal flaw of the so-called 'formalist method' was [...] the view of literature as a sum-total of devices, a mechanical conglomeration. A genuine study of the artistic work is only possible if we approach the work as a unified, multifaceted, and functioning structure" (Lotman 1964: 13). Lotman follows Jakobson and Tynjanov's critique of the early Opoyaz,⁹ and immediately adds that "it is not possible to say that this view is principally new in [Soviet] literary theory. It has already been outlined in the studies of Ju. N. Tynjanov, G. A. Gukovsky, V. Ja. Propp

⁷ Miroslav Červenka told Peter Steiner that the Russian edition of Mukařovský was banned at the suit of Ladislav Štoll, "the Party watchdog for ideological purity in Czech letters" (Steiner 1982b: 176). Štoll was well-connected in the Soviet censorship organs (personal communication with Peter Steiner, 06.01.2017). The Juri Lotman Semiotics Repository at Tallinn University in Estonia has acquired the papers of Oleg Malevič related to his and Lotman's relationship with Czech structuralists. Some of these documents have recently been published (Pilshchikov & Trunin 2018).

⁸ Quoted in Pilshchikov & Trunin 2016: 380. Translations from Russian are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁹ Cf.: "The idea of a mechanical agglomeration of material [has] been replaced by the concept of system or structure [...]" (Tynjanov & Jakobson 1928: 36; English translation: 1971: 79).

and other scholars” (Lotman 1964: 13). Indeed, for Tynjanov, dynamism is, on the one hand, a synchronic dynamism of the artistic text, in which a dynamic instability of the deformed material is opposed to the stability of the non-deformed (and therefore aesthetically neutral) material; on the other hand, Tynjanov’s dynamism is a diachronic dynamism of literary evolution (Toddes, Čudakov & Čudakova 1977: 509–510). As Tynjanov himself put it in regards to a single text: “The unity of the work is not a closed symmetrical whole, but an unfolding, dynamic, integration; between its elements we find not the static sign of equality or addition, but always the dynamic sign of correlation and integration” (Tynjanov 1924: 10; quoted in O’Toole & Shukman 1977: 20).

For Mukařovský, “the dynamicity of the whole is guaranteed by the inequality of its components; one of them always dominates the others and is referred to as the dominant” (41). I must correct what is perhaps another historical injustice and point to the fact that the concept of the dominant was earlier introduced by Eichenbaum and Tynjanov, who borrowed this concept from Broder Christiansen and reinterpreted it (see Erlich 1955 [1965]: 199–200, 212–215; Hansen-Löve 1978: 314–319; Hansen-Löve 1986; Steiner 1984: 104–106; Pilshchikov 2016: 213–216). They could have read Christiansen’s *Philosophie der Kunst* either in the German original (1909) or in the Russian translation (1911) by the philosopher Georgij Fedotov. According to Christiansen, the aesthetic object is created thanks to the perceptual synthesis of various impressions of the artifact. Four factors [*Faktoren*] participate in this synthesis: the subject matter [*Gegenstand*], form [*Form*], material [*Stoff*], and techniques [*Methode/Hantierung*]. Not all the four factors are equal — one of them or a group of them usually

predominates, i.e. “advances to the foreground and takes the lead” [“...sich in den Vordergrund schiebt und die Führung übernimmt”]. It is called “die Dominante” (Christiansen 1909: 241–251, 1911: 203–211).

According to Tynianov’s *The Problem of Verse Language* (1924), all factors involved in the creation of an artistic work are formal, and their interplay creates poetical semantics. The dominant — also called “the constructive factor” — subordinates other factors. However, it does not harmonize them, as Christiansen thought, but “deforms” them. In his course of lectures on Russian formalism, which he delivered at the University of Brno in 1935, Jakobson devoted an entire lecture to “the dominant” and later published it in English (1971), French (1973) and Russian (1976) under the eponymous title. Jakobson described the dominant as “one of the most crucial, elaborated and productive concepts in Russian formalist theory” (Jakobson 1971b: 82; for the same words in Czech see Jakobson 1935 [2005]: 87).

Just as Mukařovský after him, Tynjanov linked the concept of the “dominant” to the concept of “dynamics”. For him, “the form of the literary work must be recognized as a dynamic phenomenon”: “dynamism” emerges as a result of interaction between the factors and “the foregrounding of one group of factors at the expense of others,” so that “the foregrounded factor deforms the subordinate ones” (Tynjanov 1924: 10). Mukařovský’s concept of “foregrounding” (*aktualisace*) also leans on Tynjanov, who described the constructive function of the dominant thusly: “[...] one feature may be foregrounded [*vydvinut*] at the expense of the others, so that they are deformed and sometimes degraded to the level of neutral props” (Tynjanov 1924: 7). Compare Tynjanov’s “On Literary Evolution” (1927): “[...] a system

is not an equal interaction of all elements but places a group of elements in the foreground [*predpolagaet vydvinnost' gryppy elementov*] — the 'dominant' — and thus involves the deformation of the remaining elements [...]” (Tynjanov 1929: 41; English translation: Tynjanov 1971: 72).¹⁰ Paul Garvin’s glossing translation of *aktualisace* (literally: “actualization”) as “foregrounding” (Garvin 1964: 43–44) is now widely accepted. Accidentally or intentionally, the translation revived Tynjanov’s original spatial metaphor instead of the purely temporal meaning that Mukařovský’s term implies (compare the French *actualisation*). This formative relation, which persists despite the difference between the spatial metaphor and the temporal one, is not mentioned in the important section of Chapter Two titled “Searching for links: Jan Mukařovský and Russian formalism” (56–63). To summarize, Tynjanov’s influence on Mukařovský — as well as the overall influence of Russian formalism on Czech structuralism — is often overestimated (Steiner 1982b: 175–176), but in the book under discussion, it sometimes seems undervalued, in at least a few aspects.

Sládek emphasizes the impact of previously unknown works of Mukařovský, which were published with his tacit permission by the scholars of the “new wave” of Czech structuralism in the 1960s and early 1970s. He also points out the importance of Vodička’s personality — in addition to his research — for the participants in the structuralist revival (40). It is interesting to note in this context that the revival and recalibration of formalist theories by Tartu-Moscow structuralists were also personally facilitated by Roman Jakobson and Pětr Bogatyrëv. Both of them were among

¹⁰ According to Jakobson’s later account, Tynjanov’s talk based on his “On Literary Evolution” and given to the PLC on 16 December 1928 was followed by “a lively exchange of opinions” with Mukařovský (Jakobson 1974 [1979]: 560–561).

the founders of the Moscow Linguistic Circle (the first president of which was Jakobson) and active members of the PLC (of which Jakobson was also a co-founder and vice-president). In the 1960s they participated in the Tartu Summer School of Semiotics. In his obituary of Bogatyřev, Lotman wrote: "P. G. Bogatyřev seemed to personify the living history of semiotic research. A member of the Moscow Linguistic Circle, a member of the Prague Linguistic Circle, he actively contributed with his cooperation to the rise of semiotic research, which became noticeable in our scholarship since the early 1960s. In 1962 he took part in the Moscow symposium on the structural study of sign systems, and later became an active participant in the semiotic meetings in Tartu. [...] The participants of the Second School (1966) recall a memorable evening by the fireplace, during which P. G. Bogatyřev and R. O. Jakobson shared their memories of the Moscow Linguistic Circle and the first steps of semiotic research in Moscow, Petrograd and Prague" (Lotman 1975: 5-6; quoted in Pilshchikov & Trunin 2016: 380).

A section of Chapter Two discusses the similarities and differences between Mukařovský's and Saussure's theories of sign. Analyzing Mukařovský's "Art as a Semiological Fact", Sládek questions what the Prague scholar inherited from the Genevan, what he borrowed but transformed, and what he ignored, rejected or criticized. Although "the whole oeuvre of Jan Mukařovský contains no explicit criticism of Ferdinand de Saussure" (55), the author of *The Metamorphoses* argues that Mukařovský did not accept Saussure's semiological doctrine. In fact, Mukařovský's triad "an artifact — an aesthetic object — external reality to which it refers" conforms better to I. A. Richards and C. K. Ogden's "triangle of meaning" than to Saussure's sign as a bilateral entity (51). A comparison with Charles W. Morris's later

triad “sign — designatum — denotatum” (see Mayenowa 1976 and Steiner 1977) and, even more significantly, with the earlier, Humboldtian triad “outer form — inner form — content” would also be useful. In the context of formalist/structuralist genealogy, it is noteworthy that Jakobson devoted one of the lectures in his Brno course on Russian formalism and its predecessors to the Russian-Ukrainian Humboldtian linguist Aleksandr Potebnja’s theory of the “inner form of the word” (for more detail see Zenkine 2006; Pilshchikov 2017).

Chapter Three introduces the Prague School in exile. The concept of “Pražská škola v exilu” seems to originate with Lubomír Doležel (1996). The issue goes far beyond the fate of the Prague School. Galin Tihanov — referring to Edward Said’s concept of “travelling theory”¹¹ — emphasizes “the enormous importance of exile and emigration for the birth of modern literary theory in Eastern and Central Europe” (Tihanov 2004: 68). Tellingly, of the six representative biographies he mentions (the lives of Lukács, Shklovsky, Jakobson, Trubetzkoy, Bogatyrëv, and Wellek) four are those of the former members of the PLC. An emphasis on the émigré scholars who represented Prague in Western Europe and North America is a trademark of Sládek’s book. I should add that a similar digest of the evolution of the former members of the Tartu-Moscow School, many of whom continued to work in emigration in the 1970s and later, has not yet been written.

An extensive excursus included in this chapter analyzes René Wellek’s relationship with the PLC. Sládek focuses on three review articles that Wellek published in 1934: a review of the Czech edition of Shklovsky’s *Theory of*

¹¹ “[T]he point of theory [...] is to travel, always to move beyond its confinements, to emigrate, to remain in a sense in exile. [...] This movement suggests the possibility of actively different locales, sites, situations for theory, without facile universalism or over-general totalizing” (Said 2000: 451-452).

Prose, notes from the Eighth International Congress of Philosophers in Prague with special attention paid to Mukařovský's "Art as a Semiological Fact", and a review of Jakobson's and Mukařovský's entries on the history of Czech verse published in a volume of *Československá vlastivěda* devoted to language issues. Sládek is first and foremost interested in Wellek's understanding and interpretation of Mukařovský's literary and aesthetic theory. Although Wellek highly praised Jakobson's and Mukařovský's pioneering studies, he spoke against the aesthetics of novelty that Mukařovský inherited from the Russian formalists. For Shklovsky, a work of art has an aesthetic value if and only if it is perceived as new and unusual. The functioning of the literary canon, Wellek argues, is not based on the rule of path-breakers and discoverers, otherwise "it would be necessary to place superlative writers (such as Goethe and Shakespeare) lower than initiators and revolutionaries (such as Lenze and Marlowe)" (Wellek 1934: 442, quoted in Sládek 2015: 75).

Ironically, some Russian formalists would partly agree with Wellek. As early as 1921 Boris Eichenbaum wrote of Pushkin, indisputably the most canonical Russian author, as "an accomplisher, rather than initiator" [*Pushkin — zavershitel', a ne nachinatel'*]. Although, as Eichenbaum argues, "art creates a canon so as to supersede it", the canon does not lose its aesthetic value for later generations (Eichenbaum 1921 [1924]: 158; English translation: Eichenbaum 1976: 136). Later Wellek cited Eichenbaum's article, but only as evidence to the fact that "recent Russian literary scholarship excludes [Pushkin] from the Romantic movement" (Wellek 1949: 170), which is not particularly true.

As regards Wellek's later works, Sládek draws the reader's attention to the telling fact that Wellek considered Mukařovský's self-criticism in 1950 as a "distasteful" act of "public harakiri" (Wellek 1969: 25), and did not change this view till the end of his life (see, e.g., Wellek 1991: 423). Another interesting fact is that Wellek's introduction to John Burbank and Peter Steiner's Anglophone edition of Mukařovský's selected essays, *Word and Verbal Art* (Yale UP, 1977), was published in an abridged version, as Mukařovský's daughter (owner of his copyright) did not wish the text to include any mentions about his activities after 1948 (Mukařovský 1977: xiii; Sládek 2015: 76). Yet another intriguing and, to my thinking, hardly explainable fact, also noted by Sládek, is Wellek's lack of interest in either the Czechoslovakian anti-structuralist campaigns of 1951 and 1966 or the Czech and Slovak neo-structuralist revival of the 1960s. Jakobson's active support of the structuralist and semiotic movement in Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Soviet Union (Głowiński 1999; Ivanov 1999, 2010; Zavacká 2018) forms a distinct contrast to Wellek's indifference.

Sládek's description of the geography of Czech structuralist emigration is complemented by a discussion of the journals of Slavic Studies that promoted the works of both the émigré Czech theorists and those who stayed in Czechoslovakia but were prohibited to publish. Sládek singles out two periodicals published in the former capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire — *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* and *Wiener Slawistisches Jahrbuch* — as well as the series of *Michigan Slavic Publications* run by Ladislav Matějka in Ann Arbor, MI (83–86). These venues are also well-known to the readers of Russian formalism and "Soviet" structuralism.¹² It was not by

¹² I use scare quotes here because the Tartu-Moscow School was never fully accepted by the official academic authorities in the USSR. Its organizational center was forced to move to the

chance, for example, that after my graduation from the University of Tartu in 1991 (the last year of Soviet rule in the Baltic countries), one of my first articles appeared in *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*. To these publications I would add the Amsterdam-based journal *Russian Literature*, which has always paid serious attention to other Slavic literatures and Slavic literary theories — to the extent that, as early as 1980, its full title was changed to *Russian, Croatian and Serbian, Czech and Slovak, Polish Literature*. It has featured important publications by Doležel, Grygar, Chvatík, Červenka and other representatives of the third generation of the Prague School, including articles on the aesthetic and semiotic theories of Mukařovský and Jakobson.

By describing exile as “a meeting place” where important transfers and encounters happen, Sládek makes a contribution to cultural mobility studies. Interwar Prague was itself one of the places open for transcultural contact, “the ‘free market of ideas’” (Steiner 1982b: 179) or “a ‘contact zone’ where cultural goods were exchanged” (Greenblatt 2009: 251). Prague — the remnant of the collapsed Austrian-Hungarian Empire, the nexus of the construction of the new cultural and political Central European identity, and an asylum for émigrés from the collapsed Russian empire — gave a new life to literary and cultural theory that “developed at the intersection between national enthusiasms and a cultural cosmopolitanism that transcended local encapsulation and monoglossia” (Tihanov 2004: 67).

In an article titled “About the premises of the Prague Linguistic School”, Roman Jakobson pointed out that “Czechoslovakia lay at the crossroads of various cultures” (Jakobson 1934: 8; quoted in Galan 1985: xii).

Jakobson’s encounter with his Czech colleagues in 1926 led to the

University of Tartu in Estonia after semiotics was persecuted and largely suppressed in Moscow. Moreover, in the 1970s many of its representatives had to emigrate to Israel, Western Europe, and North America.

establishment of the PLC. Later, precisely by means of involuntary cultural mobility, the Prague School created several other places of this kind in emigration. One of them was New York, where an encounter between Roman Jakobson and Claude Lévi-Strauss in 1942 resulted in Lévi-Strauss's transfer of phonological methods to anthropology. Lévi-Strauss's subsequent return to France gave an impetus to the formation and development of French structuralism. Chvatík's instrumental role in the formation of the Konstanz school's reader-oriented "reception theory", as well as Doležel's invention of narratology and his contribution to the study of fictional and narrative semantics are next steps in the Prague response to and impact on the evolution of "Western" cultural theory and literary criticism. We can probably describe the mainstream of this process as (1) the transfer and transfiguration of formalist ideas (the "Russian theory") from Russia to Europe with the formation of Prague structuralism; (2) export of Central European structuralist and semiotic concepts ("Czech theory") to the United States and then to France; (3) their re-import back to USSR ("Soviet literary structuralism and semiotics"); (4) the subsequent poststructuralist reaction in France — exported soon to the U.S. as the "French theory"; and (5) the post-Soviet elaboration on the legacy of classical structuralism and semiotics ("Estonian theory").

I hope these complementary observations will be of use for readers of *The Metamorphoses of Prague School Structural Poetics*. I am also glad to have the opportunity to draw attention to Ondřej Sládek's book. It makes a significant contribution not only to the history of Czech poetics, but also to the study of the development of structuralist and poststructuralist literary theories worldwide.

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