

Russian Formalism vs Germanic Formalism: exploring the concept of European Formalism

Original Study

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Abstract: This comparative reading of two conceptual corpora, Russian formalism and Germano-Austrian or Germanic formalism, begins with the idea that the European formalism presents a coherent unit. The continuity of this program authorizes such a comparative reading. The comparative analysis of formalisms in Europe could be a research program aimed at an epistemological reading of the phenomenon of European formalism at the turn of the 20th century. This program deals with a rereading of two conceptual fields—Russian formalism and Germanic (Germano-Austrian) formalism. This study seeks to contextualise the formalist project within the knowledge of its time by showing its genetic links with the disciplines of this period and by introducing it as an epistemological fact. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the growth of psychologism in aesthetic theories, constitutes a reaction against the dominant scientific positivism in the “humanities” of this period. Stemming from the tensions between “aesthetics from below” and “aesthetics from above,” European formalism expresses and achieves a heterogeneous aesthetic program, halfway between “experimental science” and the “science of lived experience.”

Keywords: European Formalism; Russian formalism; Germanic (Germano-Austrian) formalism; formality; essential form; Grundbegriffe (fundamental notions); visibility; literarity; new psychologism

This comparative reading of two conceptual corpora, Russian formalism and Germano-Austrian or Germanic formalism, begins with the idea that the European formalism presents a coherent unit. The continuity of this program authorizes such a comparative reading. The comparative analysis of formalisms in Europe could be a research program aimed at an epistemological reading of the phenomenon of European formalism at the turn of the 20th century. This program deals with a rereading of two conceptual fields—Russian formalism and Germanic (Germano-Austrian) formalism. The first encompasses the classic core of the Russian formalist circle: Roman Jakobson (1896–1982), Boris Eikhenbaum (1886–1959), Viktor Shklovsky (1893–1984), Lev Jakoubinski (1892–1945), Boris Tomashevsky [Tomaševskij] (1890–1957), Jouri Tynianov (1894–1943), and Viktor Jirmounski (1891–1971). The second concerns the formalist trend within Austria and Germany between 1850 and 1900 in various disciplines. In Austria, the field is

the history of art, with the Vienna School of Art History, founded by Alois Riegl (1858–1905). In Germany, the formalist counterpart in aesthetics is composed of the painter Hans von Marées and his circle, Adolf von Hildebrand (1847–1921) and Konrad Fiedler (1841–1895), and independent theorists, such as Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945), or Wilhelm Worringer (1881–1965). Within the field of literary studies (e.g. history of literature, poetics, and stylistics), this trend is represented by theorists such as Wilhelm Dibelius (1876–1931), Otmar Schissel von Fleschenberg (1884–1943), Bernhard Seuffert (1853–1938), and Oskar Walzel (1864–1944).

The most frequent perspective poses formalism as a simple forerunner of structuralism. This study seeks to contextualise the formalist project within the knowledge of its time by showing its genetic links with the disciplines of this period. It deals with psychology, “characterology,” art history, and aspects of the language sciences characteristic of that time, such as “psychological

linguistics," "listening philology" (*Ohrenphilologie*), "speech arts" (*Sprechkunde*), and "new rhetoric," conceived as the foundation of poetics and public speaking. It is only then the formalist project can be perceived in its complexity and heterogeneity, as an experimental science founded at the crossroads of many disciplines, and nourished by their contributions, that is to say, as an epistemological fact.

A comparative systematic reading of the two formalisms is essential in understanding the phenomenon of European formalism and its epistemological challenges at the turn of the 20th century. The relationship between these two types of formalism is far from simple and has not yet been completely elucidated.

CURRENT RESEARCH

At diverse stages of formalist studies, these relationships were evaluated in rather different ways. In his pioneering study of 1928, Pavel Medvedev used these two types of formalism to create a radical opposition between a "sterile" Russian formalism and a "productive" Western formalism (Medvedev [Bakhtine], 1998 [1928]). Medvedev needs this somewhat ideal opposition to optimize his criticism of the Russian formal approach; consequently, his comparison is built from contrasts and oppositions. Medvedev refuses any direct genetic connection between these two formalisms (Erlich 1996 [1955], 150). On the question of the relationships between them, Medvedev remains ambiguous. On the one hand, he regrets a lack of comparative analysis of this phenomenon; on the other, he postulates that Russian formalism belongs to the larger European formalist current.

In his 1955 study, Victor Erlich considered the formalist approach an intrinsically Russian phenomenon. Noting the interest of Western science during this period in questions of form, Erlich warns against overestimating the influence of Western theories on the positions of Russian formalism. He considers that Russian formalism, like Russian futurism, has developed almost exclusively in its national context (Erlich 1996 [1955], 58). Erlich's observation on the possible Western substratum of Russian formalism provoked a negative reaction from a philosopher Dmitrij Tchižewskij (Čizjevskij) who contests any search for antecedents of Russian formalism, both in Russia and abroad. He considers that such a quest would lead to a "pseudo-genealogy of Russian formalism" (Tschizewskij 1966, 298).

Aage Hansen-Löve evokes the parallels between these two currents. He underlines the fact that the works of German-speaking theorists were well known in Russia, particularly through translations and reports. Without undertaking a detailed comparative analysis of the two formalist currents, Hansen-Löve suggests its utility (using the term *Forschungdesiderat*) (Hansen-Löve 1978, 264).

According to Jurij Striedter, despite some superficial affinities, there are fundamental differences between these two currents. Both traditions examine form, but from different points of view—that of language and that

of evolution. German-speaking theorists divide literature into traditional genres, following Goethe's idea of natural or organic growth. Russian theorists, who distinguish between only prose and poetry, confront this "organic" evolutionary model with their own model, based on "non-organic" mutation-based growth proceeding through "leaps" and "broken lineages." Russian formalism thus proposes a mutation-oriented model of evolution in opposition to the evolutionary model of the organic approach (Striedter 1989, 52–53).

According to Lubomír Doležel (in: *Occidental Poetics. Traditions and Progress*, 1990), Germanic (German and Austrian) formalism anticipates the studies of Russian formalisms and builds a matrix for the formal approach, it concerns more particularly the study of the morphology and composition of a narrative. As Russian theorists were aware of the works of their German-speaking counterparts, Doležel concludes that this Germanic "proto-formalism" must have essentially influenced the development of formalism in Russia (Doležel calls them the "rhetoric school") (Doležel 1990). Doležel noted probably Victor Žirmunskij's resume "Novejšie tečenija istoriko-literaturnoj mysli v Germanii" from 1926 (Žirmunskij 1926), the study of Rosalia Šor from 1927 (Šor 1927, 127–143) also Žirmunskij's edition of Oskar Walzel's study *Problema formy v poezii* from 1923 (Walzel 1923) and a collective work *Problemy literaturnoj formy* published by Žirmunskij in 1928 (with contributions by Walzel, Dibelius, Karl Vossler, and Leo Spitzer) (Žirmunskij 1928). One can also note that German formal studies in poetics are earlier than the Russian ones (Riemann 1902; Seuffert 1909; 1911; Walzel 1910; Schissel von Fleschenberg 1910; 1912; 1913; Dibelius 1910; 1916).

In her contribution from 1997, Christiane Schulz challenges Doležel's causal relationship between Germanic studies on story composition and story technique and Russian studies in this field. She observes that Doležel's conclusion is founded on the nearly simultaneous publishing of these works (Schulz 1997, 215). Looking beyond some superficial coincidences, Schulz underlines the vast distance between Germanic and Russian formal principles. As the observations of Germanic formalism were too limited and sporadic, they could not have given a decisive impulse to the field or to the development of the formal current in Germany (Schulz 1997, 235).

The pioneering study by Karl Clausberg in 1983 proposes a direct relationship between, on the one hand, Russian and Czech formalism and structuralism, and, on the other hand, Austrian aesthetic formalism (Alois Riegl's Vienna School). The merit of this study is that it clearly indicates that the two formalist approaches share a common substrate: Johannes Herbart's psychology and psychological aesthetics (Clausberg 1983, 55–76; see also: Clausberg 2011, 55–76).

In 1997, Lambert Wiesing established a correlation between Germanic formalism and Russian formalism (with reference to B. Eikhenbaum, V. Shklovsky, and J. Tynianov). Expressing a similar idea to that of Clausberg,

Wiesing states that both formalisms share the same psychological substratum, that of Herbartian psychological and relationist aesthetics. Both formalisms also converge in the “neo-Kantian” perspective. To show this, Wiesing refers to Eikhenbaum’s developments in *The Theory of the Formal Method* (1925), where the formalist approach is posed as an analysis of “form understood as background in itself.” Indeed, Eikhenbaum opposes his “form as background” to any dualism (form-symbol) of symbolist theories in which “something fundamental necessarily transpires through form” (Wiesing 1997, 166).

In spite of these pioneering suggestions, it was not until the 21st century that systematic, international, cross-disciplinary studies began to explore the genealogy of European formalism. The Germanic substratum of Russian formalism is nowadays well established. It was also in the early 2000s that the relationships between Germanic and Russian formalisms became an object of study (see for example: Dmitriev 2002, 423–440; Maigné 2009, 55–76; Trautmann-Waller and Maigné 2009). This modification within formalism as an object of study reflects a tendency in current research; this study follows the same orientation within the epistemology of European formalism.

WHAT IS FORMALISM?

Traditionally, formalism or any formal approach is defined through the concept of “form” which would dominate over the concept of “content.” This definition encounters a difficulty; various formalist currents have proposed very different definitions of form. Indeed, one could wonder if the notion of form within Russian formalism is compatible with the same notion within Germanic formalism, for instance as expressed by A. Riegl or O. Walzel. This discord over the fundamental definition of form makes it problematic to define formalism in this way.

Another possibility would be to define formalism in accordance with David Whitney’s proposal. Whitney tries to define formalism with regard to painting and largely with reference to visual culture. According to this author, all formalist approaches have to do with sensual configurations of artefacts and works of art (we believe it possible to add language phenomena to this list). All formalisms deal with the “formal aspects” of these objects, the latter being designated by Whitney through the concept of “*formality* or *apparent configuredness*” (Whitney 2011, 45).

Whitney’s distinction between a formalist approach to “style” and a properly “stylistic” analysis is grounded in this fact. A stylistic analysis does not take into account “stylisticity” (Whitney 2011, 46). What is “formed” or “configured” from the formalist point of view would appear (from a stylistic point of view) as a fact “stylised” by a particular agent apt to be identified through this “style.” According to Whitney, the notion of “essential form,” introduced as *Grundform* by Giovanni Morelli (Morelli 1880) and by Heinrich Wölfflin (Wölfflin 1983 [1915]), dissociates definitively

formalist analysis from stylistic analysis. The notion of “essential form” designates a stylistic phenomenon that was not configured intentionally by an agent: the origin of this phenomenon would be situated beyond the conscience of the author (Whitney 2011, 46). Any formalist approach would deal with “sensual configurations” of the work of art, dependent on the above-mentioned “essential forms” (*Grundformen*) and translatable by the term “formality.” Whitney also underlines an interactive or “dialogical” element constitutive for any formalist approach. Indeed, in his opinion, such an approach is based on a “psychophysical” communication between two subjects to whom the same object is presented: the object created by the first agent in the past, and the object perceived by another agent in the present. Consequently, a dialogical relationship is established between the two subjects—between the creator of the form and its perceiver (Whitney 2011, 53–54). One should note that the formalist-oriented Anglo-Saxon “new criticism” formulates the same “dialogical” or “interactive” vision of the perception of works of art; this vision is known as *reader-response theory*. According to this concept, a reader is brought to react to signals objectively contained within the literary text. A relevant answer to these signals conditions the effective understanding of this text (Todd, Womak 2003, 154–155). Indeed, a well-known interpretation of the history of Russian formalism presents its genesis as a transposition of the Germanic concept of “essential form” (*Grundform*) from the history of art to the domain of language sciences and literary studies.

But what would be the equivalent of these “essential forms” in the field of linguistics and poetics? It seems that the late formalist tendency, represented in particular by Roman Jakobson, has assimilated “essential forms” to a linguistic phenomenon designated by a term “phonosymbolism.” Thus, for Jakobson and Waugh, any description of the phono-symbolic level is accomplished through the empowerment of minimum formal units. These authors define a phono-symbolic object as an autonomous, immediate meaning of the constituents of the phonetic form of language (Jakobson, Waugh 1980, 217–218).

This comparison of “essential forms” with phono-symbolic elements may seem shocking. It is much less so when we consider that these elements are usually described in their relation to synaesthesia, defined as the phenomenal interconnection of the senses. Thus, the comparison of “essential forms” with synaesthetic properties takes on its full meaning. The “essential forms” in this case would be universal fundamental relationships, such as contrasts like clear—dark, light—heavy, or small—large. For Jakobson, these contrasts belong to the elementary structures required for perceptual differentiation. Consequently, for Jakobson, it is not surprising that these contrasts maintain universal and constant (or quasi-constant) links with the elementary features underlying human languages (Jakobson, Waugh 1980, 230).

PROTOTYPICAL POLEMICS SURROUNDING FORMALISM

Certain debates accompanying the emergence of the formal approach seem to constitute a “proto-discussion” characteristic of the formalist method itself. Discussed below are some prototypical polemics consubstantial with formalism, such as the controversy between Alois Riegl and Gottfried Semper in the early 1890s, and the controversy between the Bakhtin circle (P. Medvedev) and the formalist circle in the late 1920s.

By attacking the positions of the architect Gottfried Semper, professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Dresden, Riegl criticizes not so much Semper himself, but rather the “Semperians” (*die Semperianer*) for whom artistic form resulted from constraints related to materials and technique (Riegl 1977 [1893], VII). For Riegl, “Semperism” is a trend in which interest in materials and technique replaces interest in art. Within this trend, “technique” becomes the key term, perceived as the equivalent of the term “art.” Riegl speaks ironically about the “so-called expert tone” appearing in this assimilation of art with technique (Riegl 1977 [1893], VII).

In the Russian context, the idea of “technicality” in the production of a work of art is especially emphasized in the early formalism, during the 1910s. The work of art is perceived as “made” or “manufactured,” and the artist is considered above all as a “technician.” The aim of formalist criticism therefore consists in showing this technical aspect by dismantling the artistic product (this vision is especially characteristic of the positions held by Shklovsky, see: Shklovsky 1990, 58–72) and Eikhenbaum (Eikhenbaum 1969 [1918], 128–156). Much of Pavel Medvedev’s criticism of Russian formalism is that, for formalists, the artist is only a technician and art is simply a technique (Medvedev [Bakhtine] 1998 [1928], 162–163). Drawing upon “Western formalism,” Medvedev seeks to demonstrate that art and works of art go far beyond their material and “manufactured” aspect. This debate is ultimately about the mode of existence of the artistic object (Medvedev [Bakhtine] 1998 [1928], 150–164). Other issues in the discussion between Riegl and Semper are shaping of a work of art, as well as the definition of artistic styles. Thus, in his 1927 study, Riegl criticizes Semper’s idea that art is a mechanical product made up of three elements: “practical utility,” “raw material,” and “technique” (Riegl 1973 [1927], 8). Riegl’s target is a vision of art defined as a set of constraints imposed by the material. This criticism of the “Semperian” approach once again recalls the principles on the basis of which Medvedev attacks Russian formalism. Indeed, we find in this discussion entire sections that appear later in the debates between Russian formalism and the Bakhtin circle (represented by Medvedev).

We can therefore speak of the “re-debate” of the same problem that fuelled the discussion between Riegl and Semper, at a distance of thirty-five years. The typological analysis of this controversy should make it possible to identify the methodological issues and strategies intrinsic to the formal approach.

FORMAL AESTHETICS AS AN “APPERCEPTIVE AESTHETIC”

The apperceptive aesthetic formulated by these two formalist currents is dependent on the clarity of representations and is closely linked to attention—the mental phenomenon that the psychology of this period defined as “apperception.”

Konrad Fiedler’s conception poses the clarity of representations as the goal of the artist’s work. The “essence of art,” according to Fiedler, is realized in this transition from an obscure mental state, limited by the usual processes of daily consciousness, to a new state of “determination and clarity” (Majetschak 2009, 172).

The same requirement for “clarity of representations” is emphasized in the aesthetics of Riegl and his school. These Germanic formalists were inspired by Herbart’s psychological aesthetics, based on the clarity of representations presided over by the principle of the integration and coherence of mental elements. This psychological substrate is the foundation for this aesthetics of coherence and clarity, which seems to point towards the classical ideal (the path taken by Adolf Hildebrand in *The Problem of Form and Figurative Arts*, 1893 (Hildebrand 1969 [1909])).

Various developments introduced by Russian formalists reveal the “clear” mental state, or access to “clarity of consciousness,” as an aim of artistic activity. Indeed, this “clear” conscious state is opposed to an automatized unconscious state, which functions in accordance with behavioural stereotypes and unconscious conventions. This “clear” mental state is dependent on the particular effect produced by an artistic work, an effect that formalism defines as *ostranenie* (defamiliarization).

The well-known principle of “defamiliarization,” formulated by Russian formalism, finds a conceptual antecedent in Germanic aesthetic formalism: the principle of *Abweiche* (“deviation” or “dissonance”), defined by Riegl and by Wölfflin as the constructive element of ornament. The phenomenon of “dissonance” is explained by the background of the aesthetics of the “easy” object, an object dependent on many parallelisms, testifying to its integration into an aesthetic whole. “Dissonance” then appears as a symptom of the non-integration of an element into a whole. The aesthetic effect of “dissonance” would be purely psychological; it comes from a break in the multiple integration of an element into a whole.

Riegl’s arguments relating to ornament confirm his positive vision of dissonance. The success of the ornament is based on the exhaustive integration of the elements into the design as a whole. Riegl also postulates that rigorous adherence to the principles of design deprives the ornament of aesthetic values. Deviations from strict organizational laws as well as “natural” imperfections make the final result more interesting. In *Questions of Style*, Riegl attributes constructive value to the *Abweiche* (deviations) rather than to “abstract geometric laws” (Riegl 1977 [1893], 3). Wölfflin underlines the positive effects of the difficulties of the gaze, which

the eye seeks to overcome. He also poses the need for dissonances for art, in both the field of painting and the field of music (in his report of Hans Cornelius' study *Elementargesetz der Bildendenkunst* in the journal *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, 1909, quoted in: Iversen 1993, 67). The very idea of periodic and necessary change in the evolution of styles, an essential idea in Wölfflin's conception, seems to contain the premises of the formalist notion of "defamiliarization." Thus, comparative analysis reveals the analogous device at the centre of the aesthetic systems of both formalisms.

FROM "VISIBILITY" TO "LITERARITY"

In his 1997 study, Lambert Wiesing, cartographer and genealogist of today's "iconic turn," refers to its sources, the formal aesthetics of the German language (in Germany and Austria) of the 19th and 20th centuries. Wiesing traces the emergence of the formal aesthetic model (with the *oeuvre* of the philosopher Robert Zimmermann (1824–1898), its development in the works of Alois Riegl and Heinrich Wölfflin, and finally, its radicalization in the conception of "visibility" proposed by Konrad Fiedler). This study constitutes an invaluable contribution to the conceptual genealogy of Russian formalism. Indeed, this text helps to further elucidate the relationships between Western aesthetic formalism (in particular, Herbart's psychological and formal aesthetics) and Russian formalism. Wiesing's book strongly emphasizes the place of the visual dimension in the Western formalist approach; the fact that the main object of this current, stemming from art history, was originally conceived as the "art of seeing" and as "visibility" (Wiesing 2014).

The "visibilist" theories seek to envisage the visible aspects of pictorial art and, more generally, of the visual arts, as a form of language. The goal of the approach in art history is to develop a "grammar" of "visual language." Roberto Salvini mentions the aesthetics and psychology of Johann Herbart (1776–1841) as the main source of "visibilist theories," emphasizing the relational definition of the aesthetic form understood as the "coherence of formal relationships" (Salvini 1988, 11).

This definition also implies a clear exhortation to focus attention on the formal elements specific to each of the arts, therefore on the visual elements in the case of the visual arts. In Zimmermann's work, Herbart's formalism gives rise to a project of "general aesthetics as a science of form" (1865), where the latter is understood as a "relationship of elements." The aesthetic object is defined according to the qualities and modes of these relationships, thus implying its "specificity" and its "autonomy." This definition leads to the idea of differentiation between art forms, in the perspective of the sensory aesthetic based on the non-compatibility of different organs of sense: a tactile art (sculpture and architecture); an optical art (painting); an acoustic art (all the arts of speech—poetry—and sound—music) (Salvini 1988, 11–12).

Starting from this suggestion, later theorists radicalized this sensory specificity of individual art forms: Hanslik's "musical beauty," Hildebrand's "palpatory activity of the eye," the distinction between tactile and optical in Riegl, "eye productivity" in Fiedler. In this approach, the artistic form is entirely dependent on the sense organ receptive to it.

At first glance, when compared to Russian formalism, the "visibilist" approach, which aims to isolate the "visible series" from the other "series" constituting "reality," would seem to widen the gap between the two formalist projects. Indeed, Russian formalism is traditionally associated with the "verbal" or "literary object," and particularly with the "sound object," and therefore with the "acoustic series," completely in the spirit of the German "philology of listening." However, this juxtaposition recalls the role of the "pictorial object" (from art history) in the conceptualization of the "verbal object" undertaken by Russian formalists (see: Tchougounnikov 2002).

The explanation of the genesis of formalism in poetics by conceptual borrowing from the works of German art historians (in particular, H. Wölfflin and W. Worringer) goes back to the "formalist" approach of Oskar Walzel, philologist and poetician at the University of Bonn. Walzel effectively seeks to apply the principles developed within the history of art to the analysis of literary text (*Kunstgeschichte*) (Walzel 1923). The "pictorial" perspective adapted by Walzel does not exclude the acoustic aspect. Indeed, Walzel, from the very beginning, enthusiastically adhered to the "auditory" or "listening philology" (*Öhrenphilologie*) of Eduard Sievers, and to the psychophysical typologies of expression developed in this field (Walzel 1923, 96–97).

The typology of expression of Joseph Rutz (1834–1895) and Ottmar Rutz (1881–1952) is based on the experience of any "interpretive artist" (*nachschaffender Künstler*), such as the declaimer or the singer. Artists of this type would feel in their personal interpretations of the works of art a type of residue that they would render inaccurately or incorrectly. This typology is based on a bodily attitude; first of all, on the continuous contractions of the muscle groups of the abdomen, which usually change the tone of the voice. Rutz's typology has been taken up and particularly developed in two areas: in Germanic studies, where it contributed to the "philology of listening" (*Ohrenphilologie*) of Eduard Siever and Franz Saran, and in musicology, with Gustav Becking (1894–1945). This typology of expression has also inspired the theoreticians of pedagogy and didactics, who related these typologies to different "worldviews" (*Weltanschauung*): Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), Eduard Spranger (1882–1963), Herman Nohl (1879–1960), Richard Müller-Freienfels (1882–1949), and Erich Drach (1885–1935) (see: Tchougounnikov 2016, 153–167).

Walzel therefore participates directly in the Sievers effect, an effect that proved to be very significant, exerting great influence on the development of the formalist current both in Germany and in Russia, as though "formalist"

theorists identified with the positions of “sound analysis” (*Schallanalyse*), which deliberately intended to be “a new experimental science” of language. The experience of expressive typologies led him to the idea that, in literature, *Weltanschauung* can be defined as a structure (*Gestalt*), insofar as the effects of oppositions between these types are manifested at the level of the technical particularities of the works. Walzel’s goal was then to relate the transitions between types to definable formal criteria [39, 96]. Sievers’ “vocal types” seems an appropriate concept to establish the links between the “type” and the “technical realization” of the work of art. Walzel found confirmation in experiments from “sound analysis” which claimed that individual intellectual characteristics inevitably result from an initial physical type (Walzel 1923, 55). For Walzel, as well as for the theorists of “sound analysis,” works of art include impulses to specific muscle positions, according to the laws imposed by the psychophysical types and subtypes on which these works are based (Walzel 1923, 99).

Russian formalists are very familiar with Sievers’ and Walzel’s conceptions. These typologies are attractive to both the German and Russian formalist currents because both “sound analysis” and formalism seek to establish a strong empirical relationship between a psychophysical signal integrated into a text and the reaction to this signal by the reader (receiver) of the text. It seems that this psychophysical response, codified in a work of art and elicited by it, constitutes a strong temptation for the formalist approach of this period. It is precisely the level of involuntary physiological reactions that can be conceived as the key to an objective analysis and, consequently, to an objectification of aesthetic perception.

Wiesing’s contribution resolves the uncertainty concerning the real contributions of the history of art and aesthetics of this period to the formalist approach. There is indeed a genetic link between the “formalist” approach to the text object and the “formalist” approach to the pictorial object. This link is to be sought in the concept of “essential form” (*Grundform*).

The conception of the visual object in Russian formalism (proposed in formalist essays on the “poetics of cinema” in 1925) reaffirms the affinity between these two research programs. The particular interest of formalist contributions is that they apply concepts originally developed for the literary text to the visual object (film). Indeed, Boris Eikhenbaum’s approach to film reveals the classic formalist dichotomy. For Eikhenbaum, the relationship between photography and cinema is the same as that between practical language and poetic language. As practical language and photography are static, they do not possess “style properties” (Eikhenbaum 2001 [1927], 14). It is the revitalization or dynamization of practical language by poetic language or of a photograph by the flow of film that transforms them into stylistic phenomena. Perceived during their progression, both the dynamic moving image and poetic language reveal the same tendency towards autonomy of the “transrational” type. This tendency, according to Eikhenbaum, constitutes the

“biological basis” of all art, and forms its “organic ferment” (Eikhenbaum 2001 [1927], 14–15).

Tynianov also underlines the dynamic dimension that unites film and verse: the “leap character” (*skačkovyj kharakter*) of cinema, the role played by the unity of the plane, the semantic transformation of everyday objects (from the word in verse and from the object in cinema) connect cinema and verse (Tynianov 2001 [1927], 53). Thus, Russian formalists transposed the concept of “essential form,” developed by art historians for the history of art and aesthetics, into the field of language and literature. This transposition has led to a very particular effect, which can be defined as “visible language” or “visibility of language” within the formalist program.

CONCLUSION: EUROPEAN FORMALISM, A “NEW PSYCHOLOGISM”

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the growth of psychologism in aesthetic theories, as manifested, in particular, in the aesthetics of empathy (*Einfühlung*), constitutes a reaction against the dominant scientific positivism in the “humanities” of this period (see: Paulsen 1912). Such is the psychological approach like that of Lipps who completely assimilates aesthetics to the underlying perceptual mechanism which constitutes as much of the individual’s immanent faculty (Lipps 1908, 351–390). The “thought psychology” of the Würzburg school seems to manifest this same tendency, where descriptive and globalist psychology is opposed to the analytical and “atomistic” approach. The phenomenon of formalism seems to be dependent in both Germany and Russia on this “new psychologism” (Schneider 1996, 135). While maintaining the psychophysical principle, this new psychologism sought to approach the functioning of the psyche differently. This tendency attempted to reconnect with the program of the philosophy of life (*Lebensphilosophie*) as it was posed by W. Dilthey: this approach consists in interpreting a work of art as “an immediate expression” of “lived” and “feeling of life” (*Lebensgefühl*) (Dilthey 1906).

The formalist approach remains genetically linked to the study of perceptions and therefore to the original definition of the aesthetic object as it was given by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1750). Similar to the major aesthetic orientation of this period, this current poses the empirical study of aesthetic perception as its research program. In this respect, Russian formalism shares the positions of empirical aesthetics expressed in particular in Fechner’s Preparatory School for Aesthetics (1876) which seeks to introduce “aesthetics from below” (*Ästhetik von unten*) to replace “aesthetics from above” (*Ästhetik von oben*) (Fechner 1876).

The formalist definition of the aesthetic object includes this component, conditioned by “sensory qualities,” which leads, in Russian formalism, to the idea of an aesthetic object as being “subrational” or “transmental” or “subliminal.” Formal theorists feel challenged by the “density” of the “concrete” elements of the work of art. This is

how the dynamic concept of "form" emerges within this current, defined as a mental object (and thus related to entities of consciousness, such as ideas and feelings), which is however not ideal, insofar as it remains "sensual" or "palpable." From the beginning, formalism defined the aesthetic object as one that possessed a particular "quality." The program of this formalism is the quest for a method that would make it possible to grasp this quality inherent in "aesthetic fact," and to find a method of analysis for this "qualitative dimension." It is a question of rationalizing the phenomenon that the reader or the spectator intuitively grasps: this "quality" or "density" of the "poetic word" or "artistic image." The formalist approach aims to rehabilitate sensory experience by constructing conceptual tools for its objectification. This tension between the "concrete" and "abstract" constituents of the "aesthetic fact" leads to the opposition between "form" and "material."

The phenomenon of "Russian formalism" takes shape in the context of the debates on the future program of a future aesthetics at the turn of the 20th century. The philosophers and psychologists are on one side of the debate (the conflict between "aesthetics from above" and "aesthetics from below"). In particular, it concerns the competition between two research programs in aesthetics: the empirical or experimental approach, and the theoretical or philosophical approach (Allesch 2006, 35–36). In addition, there was a conflict of interest in the German University during the 1910s linked to the delimitation of disciplines and the allocation of professorial chairs, a conflict between philosophers and psychologists (Lück 2002, 62–63).

On the other side there are various trends within the mainstream of psychological aesthetics. Thus, the theories of empathy (*Einfühlung*) are in opposition both to the line of rationalist aesthetic formalism as practiced by the Austrian disciples of Herbart (R. Zimmermann, E. Hanslick, in part by the Viennese aesthetic school), and to the line of theorists of "artistic activity" and "pure visibility" (developed by the "Circle of Hans von Marées," see: A. von Hildebrand and K. Fiedler).

In the aesthetic field, the situation became even more tense at the start of the 20th century, with the founding of Max Dessoir's review (*Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 1906) and the creation of the Alliance for Aesthetic Research (Vereinigung für ästhetische Forschung, 1912). The programs of the first and second Congress of Aesthetics and Art History held in Berlin in 1913 and 1924 reflect these tensions and divergences. One nevertheless observes the triumph of the line of psychological aesthetics (Allesch 2006, 38).

Stemming from these tensions, which accompany "the fight for aesthetics," Russian formalism—as well as European formalist trend in general—expresses and achieves a heterogeneous aesthetic program, halfway between "experimental science" and the "science of lived experience." This dualism seems to explain the "phenomenological track" in formalist thought and, particularly, in the thought of Jakobson (see: Holenstein 1974).

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