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REVISTA DE LITERATURA E CULTURA RUSSA

# Jan Mukařovský in France

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## *Jan Mukařovský na França*

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# Jan Mukařovský in France

John Pier\*

**Abstract:** Although structuralism originated in the late 1920s in Czechoslovakia, the important breakthroughs by the scholars of the Prague Linguistic Circle remained largely unknown to the practitioners of French structuralism. This paper identifies some of the areas where Czech and French structuralism diverge. Nevertheless, some of the principles of Czech structuralism were to find their way into French research such as Roman Jakobson's functional model of verbal communication. A number of points of comparison between the two structuralisms including Roland Barthes' "activité structuraliste" or Gérard Genette's aesthetics are briefly discussed. Greater historiographic knowledge of the two research traditions has the potential to enrich our understanding of issues that have so far been insufficiently explored and to open new perspectives.

**Resumo:** Embora o estruturalismo tenha se originado no final dos anos de 1920 na Tchecoslováquia, avanços importantes de acadêmicos do Círculo Linguístico de Praga permaneceram amplamente desconhecidos dos praticantes do estruturalismo francês. Este artigo identifica algumas das áreas em que os estruturalismos tcheco e francês divergem. No entanto, alguns princípios do estruturalismo tcheco encontraram lugar no âmbito da pesquisa francesa, como o modelo funcional de comunicação de Roman Jakobson. Alguns pontos de comparação entre os dois estruturalismos, incluindo a "atividade estruturalista" de Roland Barthes ou a estética de Gérard Genette, são brevemente discutidos. Um conhecimento historiográfico mais amplo das duas tradições tem o potencial de enriquecer nossa compreensão de questões que até agora foram insuficientemente exploradas e de abrir novas perspectivas.

**Keywords:** Mukařovský; Prague Linguistic Circle; Function; Semiotics; Aesthetics  
**Palavras-chave:** Mukařovský; Círculo Linguístico de Praga; Função; Semiótica; Estética



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**A**s a narratologist working for many years in France, I have long been perplexed by how infrequent are the references to the work of the Prague Linguistic Circle in France. French structuralism gained currency starting in the 1960s and was quick to gain international recognition. While it was proclaimed in some quarters that structural linguistics might serve as a "master science" for the social sciences generally, this ideal was never achieved. The notion of structure itself, having undergone a number of changes over time, covers several domains: a scientific methodology, a research paradigm for the arts and the social sciences, a certain kind of philosophy, a noetical standpoint as well as, more restrictively, Saussurean linguistics and (particularly in Western scholarship) French structuralism. Noting that a single term is employed to designate very different conceptions (e.g., the structuralism of the Prague School and that of French structuralism), Ondřej Sládek (2015, p. 23) has pointed to the difficulty of finding a common denominator between them, lest it be a method of analysis and its various applications.

It is this situation that led me to the idea that French structuralism may have missed something by not taking more fully into account the foundational work of the Prague Linguistic School (PLC). It is mainly in the field of linguistics that the Prague School is known in France, thanks in part to Émile Benveniste and particularly to André Martinet, but also to Roman Jakobson, notably his *Essais de linguistique générale* (1963). Jakobson's collaboration with Claude Lévi-Strauss starting in the early 1940s led to a structural approach in anthropology based on the Prague School's breakthroughs in the field of phonology. The functional linguistics initiated by the PLC has been widely influential internationally. It is notable that the

journal of the International Society for Functional Linguistics, *La Linguistique*, published in Paris, devoted two volumes of its 2014 issue to the PLC.

Beyond the field of linguistics, however, the PLC is known in France in name but very little in substance. The principal reason for this situation is obvious: lack of translations of the Czech structuralists into French. It is for this reason that I decided to publish *Jan Mukařovský: Écrits 1928-1946*, a selection of eighteen essays by the principal representative of that school, published in 2018 under the editorship of Laurent Vallance, Petr A. Bílek, Tomáš Kubíček and myself with translations from the Czech by Jean Boutan, Xavier Galmiche, Krystýna Matysová and Laurent Vallance.<sup>1</sup> Of the fourteen articles by Mukařovský published in French, nine appeared in the 1930s (five of which are included in the new collection). Extracts from “L’art comme fait sémiologique” and “La denomination poétique et la fonction esthétique de la langue” appeared in the journal *Poétique* in 1970 while extracts from a few other articles and interviews, translated into French, appeared in two issues of the journal *Change* in 1969 and three radio lectures dating from the 1940s were translated into French for *Acta Universitatis Carolinae. Philosophica et historica* in 1969. Curiously – but nonetheless indicative of the situation – a volume of translations of Mukařovský’s essays into French was prepared in the 1980s but was never published. The 2018 edition of Mukařovský’s essays thus seeks to provide present-day French readers with an entryway to Prague School structuralism, hopefully followed up with translations of other works by Mukařovský (notably his important book *Estetická funkce, norma a hodnota jako sociální fakty*, 1936) as well as of works by other members of that School. This would be an occasion to re-examine some aspects of French structuralism within a broad historiographical and epistemological perspective and, possibly, to take stock of the implications of such a re-examination in the light of current scientific research. This program would entail, among other things, a systematic bibliographi-

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<sup>1</sup> The book is available in open access at <https://eac.ac/books/9782813002488> where orders for a hard copy can be placed.

cal search in French publications of references, explicit and indirect, to the PLC so as to provide a basis for more comprehensive research.

However, even leaving aside the lack of translations, it seems to me that French structuralism developed in ways that are quite different from Czech structuralism (for recent historical overviews of the PLC, see DOLEŽEL, 2015; SLÁDEK, 2015). Although diverse in its orientations, French structuralism, particularly as it entered the fields of poetics and narratology during the 1960s and 70s, took Russian formalism as one of its sources, a result, in part, of the considerable success of Tzvetan Todorov's translations of the formalists in *Théorie de la littérature* which appeared in 1965.<sup>2</sup> To simplify matters, the French, for reasons that are probably as much ideological as they are scientific, opted for the Russian formalists over the Czech structuralists, and in doing so they adopted a conceptual framework that led in a direction different from one that might have developed had the questions debated by the members of the PLC been taken into consideration.<sup>3</sup> When French poetics became critical of Russian formalism, it was to Mikhail Bakhtin that they turned (*La poétique de Dostoïevski*, 1970; *L'œuvre de François Rabelais*, 1970; *Esthétique et théorie du roman*, 1978; *Esthétique de la création verbale*, 1984). It was the selfsame Tzvetan Todorov who encouraged this movement with his book on Bakhtin's dialogical principle (1981). In order to have a better idea of these divergences, I propose to look at some of the characteristics of Mukařovský's work (and by implication the work of the PLC generally) that set it off from French structuralism before concluding with a few informal observations on the common points between Czech and French structuralism.

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2 In 2015 an international conference, "Le formalisme russe cent ans après," took place in Paris that sought to reassess Russian formalism in the French context fifty years after the publication of Todorov's anthology. The proceedings were published in the review *Communications* n°103 (2018), edited by Catherine Depretto, John Pier and Philippe Roussin.

3 The preface to Todorov's anthology was penned by Jakobson, who is known in France for his association with the formalists rather than with the PLC.

One of the ways to approach the differences between Czech structuralism and French structuralism is to look at the crucial role of *function* for the Czech scholars. The first to speak of structure were Jakobson, Karcevskij and Trubetzkoy, in 1928, when they called for a “structural and functional linguistics.” This proposal not only introduced the word “structure” where Saussure used “system,” but it also associated “structural” with “functional” – a step not taken by Saussure. Czech functional linguistics received its first important expression in an article by Vilém Mathesius titled “On the Potentiality of Linguistic Phenomena,” published in 1911, five years before *Saussure’s Course in General Linguistics*. Mathesius insisted on the idea that linguistic material is organized around the phenomenon of communication between sender and receiver. For Saussure, by contrast, the subject of linguistic study is *la langue* or the “system of signs” which governs a language, that is to say a code governed by rules and constraints which are external to the individual. Consequently, *la langue* is not concerned with communication, leaving this question to *la parole* which, however, lies outside the scope of linguistics. These matters are of course much more complicated than this simple explanation suggests, but the point is that by introducing function into the equation, the Czechs modified the Saussurean concepts in a significant way. This perspective was reiterated in the 1929 *Theses* of the PLC, where language is defined as a “functional system”: “language is a system of means of expression [which are] appropriate to a goal.” Carrying the definition of language as a functional system a step farther, the Czech structuralists incorporated Karl Bühler’s *Organonmodell* into their reflections by breaking the principle of function down into three: *Darstellung* (representation), *Ausdruck* (expression) and *Appell* (appeal or vocative function). Mukařovský was to add to these functions a fourth: the *aesthetic* function.<sup>4</sup>

Now, the French approach to these issues is somewhat different for at least two reasons. On the one hand, French struc-

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<sup>4</sup> For more commentary on these topics, see Bílek and Kubíček’s introduction in the French edition of Mukařovský’s essays; also, STEINER, 1976, pp. 359-369. On the Prague School’s structural and functional linguistics, see DOLEŽEL, 2015, pp. 46-49.

turalism, particularly in its formative stage, stuck closer to the Saussurean principles than the Czechs; on the other hand, a number of concepts coming from Czech structuralism did work their way the French structuralists, although in an indirect if not to say unacknowledged and perhaps even unconscious way.

With regard to the first point, the binary oppositions that dominate Saussurean linguistics are omnipresent in French structuralism, *langue* vs. *parole*, signifier vs. signified and synchrony vs. diachrony being the most important among them. These and other binary oppositions are prominent in the semiotics of Algirdas Greimas and his school (*l'École de Paris*), where the binary principles of Trubetzkoy's phonology play a fundamental role: in fact, the semiotic square is largely derived from the binary oppositions that underlie the science of phonology. Function as it is employed by Greimas is close to the logical and mathematical meaning of "the relation between two variables" developed by the Danish semiotician Louis Hjelmslev in his theory of glossematics, a highly refined and formalized version of Saussurean principles that was influential in the elaboration of Greimassian semiotics. The axiomatic and deductive nature of this semiotics differs starkly from the semiotics of the Prague School.

Now, there are other theoretical models with ties to the PLC that have been influential among the French structuralists. One example is Roman Jakobson's model of verbal communication with its six functions: referential, emotive, conative, poetic, phatic and metalingual or metalinguistic. This well-known model, drawn from various sources including Bühler, Mukařovský and Malinowski (the latter for the phatic function), as well as from information theory, has been widely employed in practical analysis and commented on extensively, so I will limit myself to just few points.

The referential, emotive and conative functions, coming from Bühler's *Organonmodell*, have no equivalent in Saussurean linguistics. They were incorporated into the Czech brand of structuralism to meet the needs of functional linguis-



tics as well as those of the semiotic poetics and aesthetics of Mukařovský in particular. French structuralism, by contrast, adhered more closely to Saussurean principles. This can be seen in a variety of ways, for example in the numerous narratological models that identify the narrative text with the signifier and the narrative content or story with the signified, as in the narratology of Gérard Genette, for example. The referent, or the referential function, in the sense that it was used by the PLC, plays no role here. This can be explained by that fact that in French structuralism, as in Saussurean linguistics, the subject of study is *la langue*, where the emphasis falls on the signified and the signifier and on the arbitrary as opposed to motivated relations between them. This results in the downgrading or even the exclusion of questions relating to the referent. As is well known, the referent was the *bête noire* of French structuralism and was even described by Roland Barthes as a “referential illusion,” a qualification that applies even more to poststructuralist and deconstructionist treatments of reference. It is for this reason, among others, that the incorporation of Jakobson’s model of verbal communication into French structuralism is somewhat incongruous. The various functions of this model are inspired by Czech structuralism, but they are not fully integrated into the more Saussurean brand of French structuralism.

This brings me to a significant matter as regards the place of Saussurean linguistics and semiology in Mukařovský’s writings and in the PLC more generally. The centrality of Saussure, alongside the Russian formalists, has often been stressed. Yet, the Czech reception of Saussure during the 1930s was anything but straightforward (see for example Mukařovský’s “Sur la traduction en tchèque de Chklovski, *Théorie de la prose*”). The system laid out by the *Course in General Linguistics* was not accepted by all, and Saussure’s concepts were interpreted in various and sometimes conflicting ways. As noted by several authors, including Petr Bílek and Tomáš Kubíček in the introduction to the French collection of Mukařovský’s essays, terms such as *langue* and *parole*, signified and signifier, synchrony and diachrony, etc. were given meanings that

sometimes diverged from the ways they were used by Saussure. At the same time, the treatment of these concepts by the Czechs differs markedly from the way they are generally understood by the French structuralists. This can be illustrated in many ways, but for present purposes, mention can be made of Mukařovský's 1934 flagship article, "L'art comme fait sémiologique" (published 1936). In this article, the art work is regarded as a complex sign in which the autonomous function prevails over the communicative function. The art work consists of a "work-thing," comparable to the signifier and containing the structure proper; the "aesthetic object," comparable to the signified or "meaning" lodged in the social consciousness; and "relation to the thing signified – a relation that refers to the entire context of social phenomena," in other words the referent. As we know from this and various other essays, Mukařovský considered the Saussurean concept of the sign inadequate to account for the aesthetic work, and for this reason he introduced several important amendments, two of which I will briefly mention here.

The first addition is that of function which, as already indicated, has no equivalent in Saussure. Concerned here are not only Bühler's three functions, but also the aesthetic function, a semiotic reformulation of what Jakobson, in reference to the Russian formalists, called the "dominant," defined in a 1935 lecture as the focal element of a work of art that governs, determines and transforms the other elements (JAKOBSON, 1971).<sup>5</sup> The aesthetic function is present not only in art works, however, but is a social fact which interacts with social norms and values. Mukařovský's 1936 book devoted to this subject marks an important moment in the semiotic aesthetics of the PLC, and it also sets Czech structuralism off from French structuralism.

The other point I wish to make is that Mukařovský's semiotic model, though it employs Saussurean terminology, is not ultimately a dyadic system, but rather adopts a triadic model of the sign. As a number of commentators have observed, Peter

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<sup>5</sup> Jakobson remains better known in France for his connection with the Russian formalists than with Czech structuralism.

Steiner (1977a) being one, this model thus reveals several affinities, no doubt unconscious, with Charles Morris's semiotic theory of art which privileges division of the semiotic field into semantics, syntactics and pragmatics. Notable in this regard is the pragmatic dimension, for in the Prague School's semiotic conception of the literary work, with its emphasis on functions, the conditions on which subject (author, receiver), object (work-thing) and (extra-)aesthetic context are dependent are those of relation rather than content. In this way, argues Doležel (2015, p. 54), while the literary work is a totally semanticized structure, all forms of pragmatic determinism are ruled out. As explained by Kubíček, commenting on the Prague School's system of mereology in his presentation of Mukařovský's aesthetics of the work of art, the tensions arising out of this relation are governed by aesthetic norm and aesthetic value.

The contrast between Mukařovský's semiotic aesthetics and Roland Barthes' "Elements of Semiology" (1964) is striking. The four sections follow a dichotomy which is in close accord with the binary classification of general concepts taken over directly from structural linguistics: *langue* and *parole*; signified and signifier; system and syntagm; denotation and connotation. Indeed, we can see in Barthes' semiology the "mechanical" nature of Saussure's system critiqued by the Prague scholars. This contrasts with one of the most broadly shared themes of the Czech school, namely the focus on mereology, or the relations between the whole and its parts (DOLEŽEL, 1990, pp. 155-158).

As even these few references suggest, Saussure served as an essential inspiration for the members of the PLC rather than as a *maître d'école* (for an overview of Mukařovský's adaptations of Saussure, see SLÁDEK, 2015, pp. 49-56). He was, as one author put it, a "catalyst" for the Czech scholars. It is important to remember that, as Bílek and Kubíček point out in their introduction, where Saussure elaborated a theory of linguistic systems that can be characterized as static, the Czechs worked out a more dynamic theory of linguistic structure. By addressing the multiple facets of the sign, it is somewhat iron-

ic that it was Mukařovský who was to fulfill Saussure's call for a future "science that studies the life of signs in social life," thus making him one of the first to pioneer the way to structural semiology. It is equally significant that, as Doležel, quoting Miroslav Červenka ("Structuralism [...] is not a philosophy, but a methodological trend in certain sciences, especially those concerned with sign systems and their concrete uses"), has observed,

Prague structuralism was able to avoid the postpositivist split between nomothetic sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) and idiosyncratic human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). Some French structuralists restricted literary theory (poetics) to the nomothetic study of literary categories and regularities, but the Prague epistemology combines, in the spirit of Wilhelm von Humboldt, the abstract poetics of universal categories and general laws with analytical poetics of individual literary works.<sup>6</sup>

To bring structural semiology or semiotics as practiced by the PLC into clearer focus as it relates to French structuralism, it is instructive to take a look at how structure is conceived in the two cases. In his lecture "On Structuralism," delivered in Czech at the Institut d'études slaves in Paris in 1946 (translated into French for the first time in the 2018 French collection), Mukařovský states that "[s]tructure is usually defined as a whole, the parts of which acquire a special character by entering it. [...] a whole is more than the sum of the parts of which it is composed." Insisting, however, that "with the concept of artistic structure we stress a sign more special than the mere correlation of a whole and its parts. [...] According to our conception," he continues,

we can consider as a structure only such a set of elements, the internal equilibrium of which is constantly disturbed and restored anew and the unity of which thus appears to us as a set of dialectic contradictions. That which endures is only the identity of a structure in the course of time, whereas its internal composition – the correlation of its components – changes continuously. In their interrelations individual components constantly strive to dominate one another;

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<sup>6</sup> DOLEŽEL, 2015, pp. 49-50

each of them makes an effort to assert itself to the detriment of the others. In other words, the hierarchy – the mutual subordination and superordination of components (which is only the expression of the internal unity of a work) – is in a state of constant regrouping. In the process those components which temporarily come to the fore have a decisive significance for the total meaning of the artistic structure, which constantly changes as a result of their regrouping.<sup>7</sup>

For Mukařovský, and for the PLC scholars generally, structure functions as an *energeia*, a dynamic whole in constant motion whose parts are functionally bound thereto, reflecting the particular nature of a core principle in Czech structuralism: mereology.

Consider, now, how Greimas and Courtés define structure in their dictionary of the theory of language. Taking structural linguistics as their starting point, they adopt the formulation of Hjelmslev who considers structure to be “an autonomous entity of internal relations, constituted into hierarchies.” Structure is further characterized in four ways: (1) it is a network of relations; (2) this relation of networks is a hierarchy which can be broken down into parts which, interconnected, maintain relations with the whole they constitute; (3) as an autonomous entity, a structure has relations of dependence and interdependence with a larger whole to which it belongs and at the same time has its own internal organization; (4) “Structure is an entity, in other words a magnitude [in the mathematical sense], whose ontological status need not be called into question and must thus be put within brackets in order for the concept to become operational” (GREIMAS; COURTÈS, 1979, p. 361). The entry continues with a list of various types of structures: actantial and actorial; narrative and discursive; deep structures and surface structures; etc. Here is no place to comment on these two contrasting conceptions of structure, except to point to the dynamic and dialectic nature of one as compared to the static nature of the other.

With the exception of Gérard Genette, the French structuralists devoted little attention to aesthetics. No longer writing

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7 MUKAŘOVSKÝ, 1978, pp. 3-4

about narrative theory in the early 1990s, but continuing to work in the spirit of his open “tabular” poetics, Genette published an important two-volume study titled *L’Œuvre de l’art. Immanence et transcendance* (1994) and *La relation esthétique* (1997). While his work in narratology can be characterized as focusing on textual immanence, Genette later evolved toward the “textual transcendence of the text” or “transtextuality,” defined as “everything that puts it [the text] in relation, open or secret, with other texts” (1982, p. 7). His aim was not to define beauty or to outline the system of the arts, but to expand his inquiry from “literariness” to “artistry” (from *littérarité* to *artacité*), and beyond that to the aesthetic relation. Genette’s principal sources for his aesthetics are no longer structuralism but analytical philosophy, particularly the works of John Goodman and Arthur Danto. His working definition: “a work of art is an intentional object, or, what comes to the same thing, a work of art is an artifact (or human product) with an aesthetic function” (GENETTE, 1994, p. 10 original emphasis). Where Goodman supplants the question “What is art?” with the question “When is art?,” Genette asks: “When is there an aesthetic relation?” (For commentary, see PIER, 2010; for a synthetic overview of Genette’s corpus, see CHARLES, 2019.)

Mukařovský’s semiotic aesthetics, as it emerges beginning with his “L’art comme fait sémiologique,” also represents a step away from immanentism, but as an aesthetics grounded in a general science of signs. This novel orientation among the members of the PLC marks a major transition away from the Goethe-inspired morphological model that had long dominated in the cultural sciences to a broad interdisciplinary semiotic model (DOLEŽEL, 1990, p. 158; 2015, p. 52). Mukařovský’s aesthetics in fact unfolded in three interrelated stages from 1928 to 1948 in which (1) emphasis was laid on the internal organization of the work of art, (2) the set of norms of a community in which the work of art circulates was delineated and (3) the subject – author and receptor – was seen as an active and creative force interacting with and changing structures. These three phases are laid out in detail and commented on by Peter Steiner (1977b; see also DOLEŽEL, 1990. On the evo-

lution of semantic gesture, see Kubíček's introduction to the third part of the French collection of Mukařovský's essays). It is within the framework of the third phase that the concept of "semantic gesture" was introduced, a notion corresponding to the semantic energy and unification of the work of art. According to Peter Steiner, semantic gesture passes from the formalist question "How is this work of art organized?" to the structuralist question "What does this particular organization signify?" The dominant in Russian formalism points to the unity of the work's signifiers whereas semantic gesture projects this unity onto meaning and semantic structure (STEINER, 1976, p. 375).

To my knowledge, no comparative study of the aesthetics of Genette and Mukařovský has been undertaken. But as even this brief review suggests, such a study has considerable potential for achieving a fuller understanding of significant historiographical and methodological issues in the vast and varied field of structuralism.

In the comments above I have attempted to identify in an informal way some of the relations, compatibilities and divergences between Czech and French structuralism that call for more detailed and in-depth examination. The path not chosen by French structuralism is of course due to the lack of translations, among an array of other factors. One important consideration is the widespread failure among those (particularly narrative theorists) in Western countries who have not studied the question to distinguish sufficiently between Russian formalism and Czech structuralism. Thus Terry Eagleton speaks for more than just the Anglo-American world when he asserts that "[t]he Prague school of linguistics – Jakobson, Jan Mukařovský, Felix Vodička and others – represent [*sic*] a kind of transition from Formalism and modern structuralism. They elaborated the ideas of the Formalists, but systematized them more firmly within the framework of Saussurean linguistics" (EAGLETON, 1996, p. 86). Similarly, Jonathan Culler maintains that "structuralism [...] remains, in its most distinctive and characterizable form, a French movement" (CULLER,

1974, p. 983).<sup>8</sup> More enlightening with regard to the transition from the Russian to the Czech schools is Jurij Striedter's analysis of the evolution in three phases: (1) the work of art considered as an aggregate of devices (*přiem*) characterized by the slowing down of perception and defamiliarization (*ostrane-nie*) (particularly early formalism); (2) work of art conceived as a system of devices in their syntagmatic and diachronic functions (common to formalists and structuralists, 1920 to 1930); (3) the work of art considered as a sign in its aesthetic function. (Prague structuralists from 1934) (STRIEDTER, 1989, pp. 89–119. For a critical assessment of these and other views on the relations between formalism and structuralism, see STEINER, 1982; SLÁDEK, 2015, pp. 56-63).

Despite the various obstacles to greater knowledge of Czech structuralism in the French-speaking countries, there are a number of openings in French scholarship that point the way to a potentially fertile reassessment of the situation. One example is Roland Barthes' 1963 essay "L'activité structuraliste" in which an "open" structuralism is laid out, a structuralism much unlike the "closed" or "formalistic" system that has so often been decried. Barthes observes that structuralism breaks with other modes of thought thanks to couples such as signified/signifier and synchrony/diachrony. As an "activity," he says, structuralism is "the regulated succession of a number of mental operations" that contributes to a "structuralist vision," and thus to the emergence of "structuralist man." For him,

structuralism is essentially an activity of imitation, and it is for this that there is, properly speaking, no *technical* difference between learned structuralism on the one hand and literature in particular, art in general, on the other hand: both arise out of a *mimesis*, based not on the analogy of substances (as in so-called realist art), but on that of functions (which Lévi-Straus calls *homology*).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This view of structuralism persists in mainstream narratological circles with the division into "classical" as opposed to "postclassical" narratology. In an article devoted to the history of narrative theories from structuralism to the present, Monika Fludernik (2005) includes a section titled "Structuralist Narratology: The Rage for Binary Opposition, Categorization, and Typology." For an alternative view, see Pier (2011, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> BARTHES, 1964, p. 215.



There is no reference here to Czech structuralism, lest it be indirectly, through Lévi-Strauss whose encounter with Jakobson was to result in structural anthropology. Yet one cannot fail to be struck by the relative affinity between Barthes' "structuralist activity" and Mukařovský's position that structuralism is neither a theory nor a method, neither "a fixed body of knowledge [nor] an equally unified and unchangeable set of working rules," but an

epistemological stance, from which particular methodological rules and particular knowledge follow, but which exists independently of them and is therefore capable of development in both these directions.<sup>10</sup>

It is ironic, at first sight, that poststructuralism should offer a space for dialogue between Czech structuralism and French scholarship, given that poststructuralism is frequently associated with the rejection of binary oppositions, etc. that are characteristic of structuralism. In a penetrating article on the subject titled "Poststructuralism: A View from Charles Bridge," Doležel diagnoses the misperceptions of Czech structuralism in Western scholarship before going on to demonstrate the relevance of Prague School research to poststructuralism – poststructuralism not as an offshoot of French structuralism, but in the broad sense of "revising structuralist assumptions, theories, and analytical results and cultivating themata neglected by the structuralists" (DOLEŽEL, 2000, p. 634). He draws attention, firstly, to the deconstructionist philosophy of Jacques Derrida and his followers whose philosophy of language is in the final analysis a theory of poetic language. This, observes Doležel, connects with Mukařovský's contention that poetic language transforms communicative language, the "material" of literature, through procedures of organized deformation, and also that in poetic language the question of truthfulness does not pertain.<sup>11</sup> Paul Ricoeur's "poststructuralist hermeneutics" is another area that shares some features

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<sup>10</sup> MUKAŘOVSKÝ apud STEINER, 1977b, p. x.

<sup>11</sup> See also P. Steiner's (1981) critique of Derrida's philosophy of language from the perspective of Serge Karcevskij's (1929) asymmetric semiotics of language, a partial revision of Saussure that was highly influential among the members of the PLC. For a study of Karcevskij's theory of language as process, see W. Steiner (1976).

with Prague School structuralism. In particular is the epistemological endeavor to create “a science of the individual.” This is made possible by the French philosopher’s contestation of the universalism of French structuralism, on the one hand, and by the dismantling of the epistemological barrier between the sciences of nature (where explanation prevails) and the human sciences (where the goal is understanding), on the other. In a parallel development, the Prague school’s practice of literary analysis sought to combine nomothetic universal tools (concepts, methods) with close analysis of particular ideographic literary phenomena.<sup>12</sup>

These pages present but a few of the areas that, with access to the writings to Mukařovský, French scholarship might wish to investigate in greater breadth and detail. Further translations of key studies by the members of the Prague Linguistic Circle would surely foster further initiatives in this direction.

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<sup>12</sup> For further reflections on Czech post-structural structuralism, see Sládek (2015, pp. 28-33, 147-155).

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