

Call for papers

MODERNITAS (MSH - ULB)

<https://msh.ulb.ac.be/fr/team/modernitas>

invites paper-proposal abstracts for consideration in the international workshop:

New Readings on Russian Formalism at the Crossroads of Slavic Cultural History: Primary Insights and Perspectives for Future Research

Université libre de Bruxelles

21-22 October 2024

Exposé

The critical reception of Russian Formalism can be divided into three large, differentiated periods. The first period extends from 1914 to 1939 and consists, within Russia, of a bitter polemical discussion for and against the theses of the school and, outside the country, in its enriching transfer to other national theoretical systems, especially Czechoslovakia and Poland. The second period extends from 1939 to the mid-eighties and is marked by an impoverishing interpretation of formalism as a mere precedent of dogmatic structuralism that entails the critical neutralization of a large part of the movement's most relevant theoretical contributions. Some key dates within this second stage are the lecture by Roman Jakobson at the Masaryk University in Brno entitled *The Formal School and Contemporary Literary Science in Russia* (1934), the monographs by V. Erlich (1955) and P. Steiner (1984), or the anthology prepared by T. Todorov (1966). The third period, which lasts until today, is characterized on the one hand by the inertial continuity of many ideas coined in the previous stage and on the other by a surprising variety of new interpretations and reading perspectives. If in the second period of reception the formalist tradition was considered as essentially closed, in the third one (with a leading role of Russian authors) it is observed as a fundamentally conflictive, problematic and open-ended heritage.

The question of the theoretical precedents and intellectual context of formalism has been thoroughly scrutinized: Husserl, Bergson, Nietzsche, Romanticism, the German formal aesthetics of the 19th century, Veselovsky, the symbolist theory of verse, Darwinism or even the psychology of Wundt have been proposed as a conceptual framework from which to understand the emergence and significance of formalist theses. The accusation of supposed isolationism and unilateralism has been convincingly demolished, emphasizing the transgressive historicity and sociological openness inherent to the systematic conception of the school. In the field of novel theory, attention has been paid to the terms of *siuzhet* and *skaz*, and in the theory of verse, new approaches to the poetic semantics conveyed by the transrational poetry of the futurists have appeared. The key concepts of estrangement, construction, parody, procedure, interval, phonic orchestration, dynamic archaeology, dominant, textual equivalents, literary life (*literaturny byt*), literariness, among many others, have been reevaluated and correlated with current burning issues. Film theory and the intersections between formal theory and proposals in painting, theatre, architecture, among others, have been examined. The intertwining between the biographies of the members of the Opojaz and the turbulent historical times in which they had to live has been an object of interest, especially with regard to their positions on the national canon and the Soviet imperial project.

The eventful reception of formalist ideas during the 20th century has also been reconsidered, and in the context of this workshop special emphasis is placed on the topic of the relationships between Russian formalism and Czech structuralism, to which a specific panel will be dedicated. Finally, a separate subject is that of the coincidences and prefigurations between Russian formalism

and contemporary trends such as poststructuralism, polysystem theory, translation theory, postcolonialism or the methodology of quantitative formalism used by digital studies. For many authors, formalism has the potential to play an enormous role in the overcoming and balancing of the unbridled heteronomism of contemporary literary studies, which again considers literature, to a large extent like the philological historicism of the 19th century, as a mere passive reflection of identity struggles that take place and develop outside of it. In this sense, the literary theory of formalism integrates critical-ideological lucidity and the anti-idealist conception of literature ("all essentialist definitions of literature are swept away by the fact of evolution", Y. Tynyanov), while providing at the same time a set of sophisticated tools for analyzing literary facts as a specific series of human activity with its own evolutionary laws.

Research problem

How new readings on Russian formalism have affected a specific field of study and what impact can it bring forth in the upcoming years?

Potential topics for panels include but are not limited to

- Influences and theoretical contexts (positivism, Nietzscheanism, philology, psychology, Moscow Linguistic Circle, romanticism, formal aesthetics, symbolism, futurism, phenomenology, Marxism, Bakhtin's Circle, etc.)
- Poetics of the novel
- Sound and theory of verse
- Sociology of the literary form
- Relationship between Russian formalism and Czech structuralism
- Evolution and historical poetics of Russian formalism
- Formalism and art theory. Estrangement and the relationships between arts
- Russian formalism and contemporary translation studies
- Reevaluation of key terms: estrangement, *sdvig*, parody, *siuzhet*, construction, equivalent, evolution, literariness, *zaum'* poetry, procedure, *skaz*, phonic orchestration, dynamic archeology, and others.
- The influence of Russian formalism during the 20th century in Central-Eastern Europe and in the West. A comparison.
- Russian Formalism and current trends in literary studies: Quantitative Formalism and Digital Studies; formalism, new trends in comparatism and Global Modernism; Cultural Studies; Canon and Trauma Studies; formalism and new trends in literary history, formalism and deconstruction, formalism and postcolonial readings, and others.
- Formalism from the point of view of economics and sociopolitical geography of Modernism

Submission

Scholars are invited to submit their abstracts 300 words in length.

Panel proposals as well as individual proposals are welcome. In case of panel proposals a minimum of three abstracts are required to be sent in one single application.

Doctoral students and scholars in early stages are especially encouraged to submit contributions. The conference might be able to contribute towards accommodation costs of a limited number of participants.

All inquiries should be directed to the attention of: **Dr Cristian CÁMARA OUTES**
<cristian.camara.outes@ulb.be>