

EXPERIENCE AS DEVICE: TRACES OF RUSSIAN FORMALISM IN THE LJUBLJANA SCHOOL OF THE 1970S

In the introduction to *Slavic Review*'s Winter 2013 Special Issue on Slavoj Žižek, Dušan Bjelić limned the provocation inherent in the publication's topic; on the one hand, he cites "Žižek's total disinterest in the 'discursive particularism' of specialized area studies" and, on the other, he points to "Slavic studies' equal disinterest in high theory."¹ From this perspective, it may appear somewhat scandalous to consider Russian Formalism, a longstanding fixture of Slavic studies, alongside the Ljubljana School, the intellectual movement to which Žižek belongs. As proverbial bookends of the short twentieth century's interdisciplinary groundswell of critical theory, the two schools seem to stand at both an historical and a theoretical remove from one another. As it turns out, however, Russian Formalism contributed significantly to the development of the Ljubljana School, the theoretical platform of which can, in turn, facilitate new contributions to the legacy of Russian Formalism.

In order to reveal the influence of Russian Formalism on the Ljubljana School, we will begin by tracing the reception of Russian Formalism in Slovene thought up until the early 1970s, broadly at first, and then with a particular focus on the discourse community that would become the Ljubljana School—functionally in the late 1970s and officially in the early 1980s.² For the most part, the Ljubljana School encountered a fractured Formalism that had been filtered through Semiotics and Structuralism, and in many cases, translated from French rather than Russian. However, towards the end of the 1970s, the burgeoning Ljubljana School's early flirtation with the *Tel Quel* crowd cooled; members of the School developed critiques of Kristeva and Derrida that would go on to define their theoretical platform and establish their affinity for Lacan. In addition to constituting a critical moment in the intellectual history of the Ljubljana School, these critiques act as a coda to the traces

¹ Dušan Bjelić, "An Introduction," *Slavic Review* 72, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 701.

² By the "official" start date of the Ljubljana School, I am referring to the symposium that marked the founding of the "Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis," which took place on October 11-12, 1982. This event is chronicled in: *Problemi—Razprave* 4-5 (1983).

of Russian Formalism found in the Ljubljana School's early work. Finally, we will demonstrate how one of the Ljubljana School's early critiques of Kristeva can be applied—and offer a compelling resolution—to the well-established impasse between Shklovsky's concept of *ostranenie* (estrangement) and the rest of the Formalist project. In this mode, we set off to identify not only the Ljubljana School's debt to Russian Formalism, but also its requital.

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Although translations of (and commentaries on) key French Structuralist texts had been creating a buzz in *Problemi* since the late 1960s, the first Slovene-language book devoted to a comprehensive account of the Structuralist movement appeared only in 1971. *Strukturalizem: poskus filozofske kritike*³ (*Structuralism: An Attempt at Philosophical Criticism*) was written by Boris Majer, who had recently become a professor in the Philosophy Department at the University of Ljubljana and would go on to become president of the Marxist Center in Ljubljana as well as an influential member of the League of Communists of Slovenia.⁴ For Majer, Structuralism was a monolith without unity; in the introduction, he complained that it was swallowing up indiscriminate corners of the academy and yet could not be “treated as an independent philosophical movement and even less as a unified philosophical direction, as it lacked the very theoretical and philosophical foundation which alone enables a new direction of thought to receive the status of a philosophical theory.”⁵ He was also suspicious of Structuralism's bourgeois sensibilities. Still, Majer admitted that “certain structuralist theses” would open up some new possibilities for development in contemporary philosophy, and the text that followed was to provide an introduction to the basic tenets of

³ Boris Majer, *Strukturalizem: poskus filozofske kritike*, (Ljubljana: ČZP “Komunist”, 1971).

⁴ More specifically, according to Majer's entry on the SAZU website, Majer “was a member of the Presidency of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Slovenia responsible for the department of science and culture,” accessed December 14, 2015, <http://www.sazu.si/o-sazu/clani/boris-majer.html>.

⁵ Majer, *Strukturalizem*, 5: “Iz vsega tega izhaja, da strukturalizma—vsaj doslej—ni mogoče obravnavati kot somostojno filozofsko gibanje in še manj kot enotno filozofsko smer, ki ji manjka prav tista teoretična filozofska utemeljitev, ki šele omogoča, da dobi kaka nova miselna smer status filozofske teorije.”

Structuralism for Slovene-speaking audiences. The text itself was organized in brief (usually 1-3 page) entries on the various dimensions of structuralism.⁶

Given the encyclopedia-style format, and compared with the book's other entries, the entry on Russian Formalism is fairly inclusive. Majer documents a relatively broad conception of the Formalist movement and emphasizes certain developments of Formalist thought (namely, the evolution of the concept of evolution).⁷ Certainly, this account still reduces the complexity of Formalist propositions, but this is most likely attributable to the format, as well as to the fact that throughout the entry, Formalist thought is cited exclusively in French translation, mainly from *Théorie de la littérature: Textes des formalistes russes* (Theory of Literature: Texts of the Russian Formalists), which was collected, translated and edited by Tzvetan Todorov. In any case, despite the abbreviation and mediation of this account, this entry does better by the Formalists than other entries in the book. By comparison, the entry on Jacques Lacan is less than a page and a half long, and the main take-away contorts Lacan's axiom that there is no subject *without language* into: "the human, the subject, is no more."⁸

Perhaps it was this problematic distillation, or perhaps another, that irked the young Slavoj Žižek. In any case, in 1975, while still a graduate student, Žižek wrote a Master's Thesis that was largely an implicit critique of Majer's reading of Structuralism. At the defense, Majer (who was on Žižek's committee) blocked the thesis from passing, due to its "problematic relationship to Marxism,"⁹ and requested an elaboration on this point.¹⁰ Žižek provided an additional chapter in

⁶ Certain philosophical problems received their own entry ("Language as a system of signs," "The problem of communication," "Semantic structure," etc.), while some entries were organized by intellectual movements (Russian Formalists, Czech Structuralists, Tel Quel, etc.) and others were devoted to the individual leading figures in Structuralist thought (Levi-Strauss, Lacan, Althusser, Foucault, Derrida).

⁷ Ibid., 68.

⁸ Ibid., 106: "Človeka, subjekta ni več."

⁹ Mladen Dolar, in an interview published in *Žižek and his Contemporaries: on the Emergence of the Slovene Lacan*, by Jones Irwin and Helena Motoh (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 98.

¹⁰ In an interview with the author, Žižek stated that Majer didn't really object to his thesis but was concerned that if Žižek became a dissident in the future, it would reflect poorly upon him (Majer) that he granted Žižek an MA. According to Žižek, the entire drama of refusing the degree and requiring the additional chapter on Marxism was

which he linked the Structuralist signifying process to Engel's concept of the 'production of people,' and with this addition, Majer allowed the thesis to pass.¹¹ He then solicited Žižek's comments of *Strukturalizem*, and incorporated his critiques into the heavily redacted second edition, which came out in 1978.¹² So, despite this initial apparatchik-styled roadblock, Majer went on to tacitly endorse the theoretical activities of the Ljubljana School,¹³ and in any event, his 1971 text served as a catalyst against which young members of the Ljubljana School defined their conception of Structuralism. However, before transitioning to the history of the Ljubljana School itself, there is one final thinker in the early Slovene-language reception of Russian Formalism who deserves mention.

Dušan Pirjevec is a storied figure. A partisan war hero, he subsequently served as a communist political commissar and member of "agitprop" before he was arrested for committing war crimes (the veracity of which is hotly debated)¹⁴ in 1948, spent six months in prison, and then began an academic career that would culminate in immensely popular lectures on world literature in the 1970s.¹⁵ In the legends that surround Pirjevec, these two facets of his public persona—war hero and professor—are conspicuously intertwined. Throughout his entire academic career, he was referred to by his partisan nom-de-guerre, *Ahac*, a relic which stuck perhaps due to the tenor of his lectures; as Nadežda Čačinovič recalled, "Pirjevec turned lectures from comparative literature into a battlefield;

purely a proverbial insurance policy for Majer, such that he would be politically absolved if things got heated later. Although it is virtually impossible to verify this version of events, it does seem plausible. Regardless of his motivations, Majer's actions did create obstacles for Žižek's academic career, in this incident and others.

¹¹ The added chapter in question was entitled, "Teorija pisanja: materijalistička teorija 'produkcije ljudi'" ("Theory of Writing— The Materialist Theory of the 'Production of People,>"). The entire thesis was published in Serbo-Croatian the next year under the title *Znak, oznacitelj, pismo (Sign, Signifier, Letter)* (Belgrade: NIP "Mladost", 1976).

¹² Interview with Slavoj Žižek conducted by the author, August 24, 2014.

¹³ That is to say, he let them get away with things that he could have prohibited due to his position in the party.

¹⁴ Some accounts describe this event as a patently manufactured communist show trial, while others assert that Pirjevec was in fact guilty of gruesome war crimes.

¹⁵ For greater detail on many aspects of Pirjevec's (political and intellectual) biography, see the collected volume: *Dušan Pirjevec: slovenska kultura in literarna veda*, ed. Seta Knop (Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske Fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani, 2011).

even [in literature], it was a matter of life and death.”¹⁶ It is also likely that his role as a hero of the Second World War (despite his ever fluctuating status within the Yugoslav communist party) granted him a certain immunity to the political implications of Heidegger, who figured prominently in his work. In any case, Pirjevec was by all accounts a charismatic and imposing speaker. His lectures assembled a generation of comparative literature students in Ljubljana, and, as we will see, reached some members of the Ljubljana School as well.

Pirjevec engaged with Russian Formalism on several occasions. Most pertinent to our inquiry is an article that was published in *Problemi* in 1972, on “The Question of Structural Poetics,”¹⁷ where he discussed the relationship of science to art in the era of formalization. A substantial portion of the paper is devoted to sparring with Majer’s political condemnation of Lotman, and, by extension, the Russian Formalists. In the book cited above, Majer had claimed that although Soviet Structuralism (like all structuralisms, in his view) had opened up new paths of study, it also “strengthens the positivist tendency in the humanities, robs them of their philosophical dimension, and pushes them into the role of ‘the silent tool of capital’ or at least the silent tool of existing social positivity.”¹⁸ Against this point, Pirjevec argued that only a strictly mimetic definition of art could act as the “silent tool of existing positivity,” whereas Lotman’s structural poetics, like Hegelian aesthetics, affirm ambiguity:

The work of art is of course the sensible realization of the spirit, and at the same time, it also isn’t. This is the essential “message” of Hegel’s aesthetics and it means precisely the same [thing] as Lotman’s claim that the “formula of art” reads as follows: “the known unknown; x and simultaneously not-x.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Nadežda Čačinovič, “Efekt Pirjevec,” in *Dušan Pirjevec: Slovenska Kultura in Literarna Veda*, op. cit., 264: “Efekt, o katerem pišem, je bil v tem, da je Pirjevec predavanja iz primerjalne književnosti spremenil v bojišče, da je šlo tako rekoč za življenje in smrt tudi tam.”

¹⁷ Dušan Pirjevec, “Vprašanje strukturalne poetike (teze in gradivo),” *Problemi—Razprave* 116-117 (1972): 1-19.

¹⁸ Majer, *Strukturalizem*, 98: “[Strukturalizem] krepi pozitivistične tendence v humanističnih znanostih, odvzema jim njihovo filozofsko razsežnost in jih tako potiska v vlogo ‘molčečega orodja kapitala’ ali vsaj molčečega orodja obstoječe družbene pozitivitete.”

¹⁹ Pirjevec, “Vprašanje strukturalne poetike, 9: “Umetnina je vsekakor čutna realizacija duha, a hkrati to tudi ni. To je bistveno ‘sporočilo’ Heglove estetike in pomeni natanko isto kot Lotmanova ugotovitev, da se ‘formula umetnosti glasi’: ‘znani neznane; to, vendar ne to.’”

It is, Pirjevec continued, “the very difference, the dichotomy, the contradiction, which always and in advance enable the ‘exit’ from every positivity, present and future.”²⁰ Pirjevec takes this argument so far as to claim that Heideggerian “ontological difference is actually the source of [Shklovsky’s] *ostranenie*, and also the ‘end’ of the fetishism of commodities.”²¹ To round out this rangy theoretical critique of Majer, Pirjevec also throws an historical (if not explicitly *ad hominem*) punch: “And finally: is there not some kind of relationship between Russian Formalism and the October Revolution? Has not real history shown that its only alternative in socialism is Zhdanovism?”²²

Today, Pirjevec is not frequently associated with the Ljubljana School. His banner is carried by comparative literature scholars as well as Heideggerian philosophers, the latter of which broke rancorously with the Ljubljana School in the early 1980s. Throughout the 1970s both groups had contributed to the main alternative journal in Ljubljana, *Problemi*, but towards the end of that decade, the Heideggerian contingent split with the increasingly Lacanian-oriented Ljubljana School to create their own journal, *Nova revija*, in 1982. This theoretical schism of the early 1980s was reinforced with an explicitly political clash of the late 1980s, with rather acrimonious results. It is for this reason that, from today’s perspective, it would seem odd to link Pirjevec, a forefather of Heideggerian discourse in Ljubljana, to the Ljubljana School. However, texts from before the split of the two groups suggest otherwise: Pirjevec’s lectures make conspicuous appearances in the early texts of several members of the early Ljubljana School. In the first article he published in *Problemi*, Rastko Močnik cited Pirjevec’s lectures from the 1964-1965 school year.²³ More than a decade later, Zoja Skušek-Močnik wrote that “in his lectures on structuralism Dušan Pirjevec developed the thesis that

²⁰ Ibid., 15: “Vendar strukturalizem proti obstoječi družbeni pozitiviteti ne postavlja neko novo, drugačno in še neobstoječo pozitiviteto, marveč samo razliko, dihotomijo, protislovje, ki že vnaprej in vselej omogočajo ‘izstop’ iz sleherne pozitivitete, sedanje in prihodnje.”

²¹ Ibid., 18: “Da je ontološka diferenca pravzaprav tudi izvor deavtomatizacije in s tem tudi ‘konec’ fetišizma robe.”

²² Ibid., 15: “In navsezadnje: ali ni ruski formalizem vendarle v neki zvezi z oktobrsko revolucijo; in realno zgodovinsko se je tudi že pokazalo, da je njegova alternativa v socializmu samo še ždanovizem.”

²³ Rastko Močnik, “Pesmi 1854: Levstikovo utemeljevanje literature,” *Problemi* 69-70 (1968): 243.

phenomenology is the *hidden source* of structuralism,” a point she buttressed by drawing attention to Derrida’s simultaneous reading of Husserl and Saussure in *Of Grammatology*.²⁴ Perhaps most tellingly, shortly after Pirjevec passed away at the age of fifty-six in 1977, Slavoj Žižek eulogized:

As is known, an enigmatic void defined Pirjevec’s lectures in the final years. Almost every year the announced lectures on “structural poetics” usually ended with Taine; they never reached a fundamental reckoning with the basic theoretical complexes: Derrida, Lacan, etc. However, this void served him well—in this way at least the place remained open, in contrast to the crowd of hasty critiques that tried to fill the gap that “structuralism” had brought.²⁵

Although a comprehensive discussion of all the influences on the early Ljubljana School is clearly beyond the scope of this paper, the impression left by Dušan Pirjevec upon the Ljubljana School, as testified by these remarks, is pertinent to our inquiry for two reasons. Firstly, by revealing the connection between members of the Ljubljana School and an individual who would later be ascribed to an opposing camp, this example challenges the veracity of the historical narrative that superimposes the current configuration of the Ljubljana School upon the contours of its past.²⁶ Secondly, one could ask if Pirjevec’s take on Formalism introduces a certain impulse that gained traction in the Ljubljana School; if the negativity that he saw in *ostranenie*—“the difference, the dichotomy, the contradiction”—is a prototype (articulated in a different theoretical register) of “the split, the rift, the break” that has become a pillar of the Ljubljana School’s theoretical platform.²⁷

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²⁴ Zoja Skušek-Močnik “Konstitucija estetskega objekta,” *Problemi* 192-193 (1979), 105: “V svojih predavanjih o strukturalizmu je Dušan Pirjevec razvil tezo, da je fenomenologija *prikriti vir* strukturalizma. Tu lahko opustimo morebitno pravdo o genealogijah, saj je pač očitno, da sta oba projekta ‘komplementarna’; sodita v isti horizont, pač v horizont nekega določenega momenta zahodne metafizike; zato lahko rečemo celo, da si temeljno ‘pripadata’ prav, kolikor sta zavezana istim metafizičnim postavkam: naj samo opozorimo na Derridajevo Gramatologijo, ki se začenja ravno s ‘hkratnim’ branjem Husserlovega in Saussurovega teksta.”

²⁵ Slavoj Žižek, “Dva sspekta,” *Problemi* 177-180 (1978): 208: “Kot je znano, je tudi Pirjevecova predavanja zadnjih let v temelju opredelila ta enigmatska praznina: skoraj vsako leto najavljena predavanja iz ‘strukturalne poetike’ so se običajno končala pri Tainu, nikoli ni prišlo do temeljnega spoprijema z osnovnimi teoretskimi sklopi: Derrida, Lacan itd. To praznino mu je kajpada šteti v dobro — tako je vsaj prostor ostal odprt, za razliko od kopice prehitrih kritik, ki so skušale zapolniti razpoko, ki jo je prinesel ‘strukturalizem.’”

²⁶ For a recent example of this trend, see footnote 4 above.

²⁷ The quotation is taken from an interview with Mladen Dolar, published in *Mladina* on December 31, 2014, where he cites “the split, the rift, the break” (“razcep, razkol, razdor”) as the red thread that defines his work on multiple levels.

It has become clear that the very term “Ljubljana School” needs definition. Since the 1970s, almost every decade saw this discourse community assemble a different group of thinkers with varying degrees of theoretical congruity, such that the Ljubljana School of the 1970s is markedly different from that of the 1980s, the 1990s, or today. Although one certainly could debate whether these diverse groupings should even be bracketed under the same title, such an inquiry would devolve into a polemic that would lead us quite astray, and so will be put aside for the time being. For the purpose of determining the relationship between Russian Formalism and the Ljubljana School, it suffices to say that we will be focusing on the discourse community of the 1970s. We will not be discussing the very first essays published by members of the school, which appeared in 1968, nor the texts which accompanied the official establishment of the *Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis* in 1982. Rather, we will be looking at several texts by the central figures of the early Ljubljana School—dating from 1971 to 1979—which serve as some of the first indications of the emergence of a shared theoretical agenda and announce the de facto functioning of the Ljubljana School as such. We will be focusing on the ways in which these texts highlight the Ljubljana School’s engagement with—and in the final instance, contribution to—the Formalist legacy, both of which are intertwined with the early Ljubljana School’s relation to French semiotics.²⁸

The texts that arguably heralded the discourse community of the Ljubljana School were Rastko Močnik’s 1971 essay “Mesčevo Zlato” (“Moon’s Gold”) and Slavoj Žižek’s response, “Temna stran meseca” (“The Dark Side of the Moon”), which was published in three installments in 1972. Both texts, which might be collectively dubbed the ‘Lunar Debate,’ invoke the moon as a metaphor in the course of arguments about the function of semiotic signifying processes, and initially

²⁸ This early chapter in the Ljubljana School’s intellectual history has generally received little scholarly attention. One exception is Marko Juvan’s study on the concept of Intertextuality, which discusses the relationship between French semiotics and the burgeoning Ljubljana School in order to provide a history of the Slovene reception of Kristeva’s term: Marko Juvan, *Intertekstualnost* (Ljubljana: DZS, 2000): 209-225.

appeared in *Problemi*, although versions of both arguments later made their way into books.²⁹ These texts manifest the original exchange of the original founders of the Ljubljana School, and as such their many theoretical dimensions all deserve attention; however, for our purposes, we will focus on their engagements with Formalist thought.

“Moon’s Gold” begins with a discussion of the implications of the epistemological rupture of linguistic Structuralism for the practice of literary interpretation. Acutely technical and buoyantly lyrical by turns, this essay explores the role of the subject/reader in linguistic Structuralism through an investigation of France Prešeren’s sonnet, “In the clear sky the gentle moon shines.”³⁰ Močnik opens his critique by following Jakobson’s criticism of Saussure in “The Quest for the Essence of Language,” citing Jakobson’s complaint that “the ‘system of diagrammatization’ ... invalidates Saussure’s dogma of arbitrariness, while the other of his two ‘general principles’—the linearity of signifier—has been shaken by the dissociation of phonemes into distinctive features.”³¹ He then goes on to discuss the relationship between the individual subject and metalanguage, arguing that “metalinguistic deferral is the function of the subject—it is exactly this operation with which the subject, excluding itself from the signifying chain as the always missing signifier, is constituted as a linguistic speaking subject, to whom language (always already as meta-language)... gives power over the signifier.”³² Močnik extends this analysis of the place of the subject in the signifying chain with a rather radical reading of Trubetskoy’s statement that “Language is neither produced nor

²⁹ Slavoj Žižek’s three essays were compiled into a *separat* (that is to say, cut from extra copies of the journal and stapled together) in 1972, while Močnik published a substantially reorganized version of his essay a decade later, in *Mesčevo zlato: Prešeren v označevalcu* (Ljubljana: DDU Univerzum, 1981).

³⁰ “Na jasnim nébi mila luna sveti”

³¹ Močnik obviously provides this citation in Slovene, but I have chosen to quote the English edition of Jakobson’s *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 426, with the following exception: ‘signans’ is rendered here as ‘signifier,’ in order to be consistent with the terminology of the Ljubljana School.

³² Močnik, “Mesčevo Zlato,” *Problemi* 106-107 (1971): 53: “Iz tega lahko sklepamo, da je metalingvistično prelaganje funkcija subjekta — ravno tista operacija, s katero se subjekt, izključevan-izključujoč se iz označevalne verige kot vselej manjkajoči označevalec, konstituira kot lingvistični govoreči subjekt, kateremu jezik kot zmerom že metajezik (vendar ne kot tisto, kar je ‘prek’ nekega drugega jezika, temveč kot prehajanje, preseganje označevalca) daje moč nad označevalcem.”

perceived. It must be there in advance (it must pre-exist), which is why the speaker and the listener rely on it.”³³ Drawing on the non-sensory character of this exchange, Močnik extrapolates that “the subject is the subject by virtue of the voice, but that voice is mute: only the mute subject is composed.”³⁴ He adds that, according to this reading, “language is simultaneously a product and a condition for production,”³⁵ thereby sketching a formula of causality that members of the Ljubljana School would later develop and tailor to a variety of contexts, one of which we will discuss in closing.

In addition to drawing on Jakobson and Trubetskoy, Močnik’s essay also engages several figures in French Structuralist thought. The essay is framed by Althusser’s concept of the epistemological rupture and references Barthes, Kristeva and Greimas.³⁶ Although never mentioned by name, Derrida’s *trace* is present throughout, as well as his concept of *différance*. From a biographical standpoint, this influence is not surprising: Močnik had studied in Paris in 1969-1970 (immediately preceding the publication of “Moon’s Gold”) and would return to Paris to complete a PhD under the direction of Greimas in 1975. Furthermore, Močnik brought certain French Structuralist and semiotic texts to Slovenia³⁷ and certain Slovene thinkers to Paris. (Most notably, Močnik introduced Žižek to Derrida, an event which in itself comprised another critical moment in the history of the Ljubljana School.) Given this context, it is fitting that the final point of Močnik’s essay, and the element which Žižek picks up on in his counterpoint, pursues a line of thought marked by French Structuralism:

In the sign, the signified is the representative of the tracing of signifiers in its reductions; it is the representative of the pushed-out differentiation of other signifiers. That is to say that the very signifier, which the signified always already is, belongs to another signifying chain,

³³ As quoted in Močnik, 57: “Jezik ni ne proizveden ne dojet: biti mora že poprej (mora preeksistirati), zakaj tako tisti, ki govori, kakor oni, ki poslušajo, se opirata nanj.”

³⁴ Ibid.: “Subjekt je subjekt po glasu, a ta glas je nem: le nemi subjekt je priseben.”

³⁵ Ibid.: “Čeprav je jezik, kakor razberemo iz Trubeckoja, hkrati produkt in pogoj za produkcijo.”

³⁶ Ibid., 51: Močnik includes a quotation from Barthes’ *Elements of Semiology* in the discussion of metalanguage mentioned above.

³⁷ Močnik was not the only factor here; there were other individuals who were also involved in this exchange.

neither parallel nor homogenous to this one, but which—by virtue of being signifying—slides through it and into which this signifier (to which we ascribe a signified) is nevertheless inscribed, because, as we claim, *it carries its trace in the signified...*³⁸

A footnote to this passage elaborates that the matter at hand is “about the way in which that other signifying chain in its fundamental otherness is however nothing other than the conscious chain, and about the difficulty for us to think that otherness is exemplified by all the metaphors which Freud makes use of to describe the ‘other scene’...”³⁹ In the first installment of “The Dark Side of the Moon,” Žižek extends many of the lines of thought presented in Močnik’s essay, but this footnote is the only point that he explicitly cites. While engaging the “difficulty for us to think that otherness,” Žižek writes: “The structural matrix is simultaneously ‘ideal’ (in the sense of a ‘formal-rational’ construct without empirical additions) *and unconscious*.”⁴⁰ He presents the Lacanian concept of double inscription as the only solution to this difficulty, a solution which, he claims, “surpasses the field of Structuralism.”⁴¹ However, it is important to note that in the third installment of this article, it becomes clear that Lacan’s ‘surpassing of Structuralism’ is not meant as an unconditional achievement; the text concludes by questioning whether “we have too quickly patched Heidegger’s gap with Lacanian thought,” and turning instead to Kristeva and Derrida.

Like “Moon’s Gold,” “The Dark Side of the Moon” is a dense and demanding text that encompasses many theoretical dimensions, many of which we will have to overlook at present.

³⁸ Močnik, 87: “Označenec je v znaku predstavnik sledenja označevalcev v njegovi redukciji; predstavnik izrinjenega razločevanja drugih označevalcev. S tem povemo, da tisti označevalec, kateri označenec zmerom že je, spada v drugo označevalno verigo, ne paralelno ne homogeno tej, ki prek nje kot označevalna drsi, v katero pa se ta označevalec, ki mu pripisujemo označenec, vendarle vključuje, saj, kakor pravimo, v označencu nosi njeno sled.”

³⁹ Ibid.: “O tem, kako ta druga označevalna veriga v svoji temeljiti drugačnosti ni vendarle nič drugega od zavestne verige, in o težavnosti, da to drugost mislimo, gl. npr. vse metafore, is katerimi Freud opisuje ‘drugo prizorišče.’”

⁴⁰ Slavoj Žižek, “Temna stran meseca I,” *Problemi* 113-114 (172): 93: “Strukturalna matrica je hkrati ‘idealna’ v pomenu ‘formalno-racionalnega’ konstrukta brez empiričnih primesi **in ne-zavedna**.”

⁴¹ Ibid., 109: “Gre za vprašanje ‘o tem, kako ta druga označevalna veriga (na našem nivoju berimo namesto druge verige le še ‘nezavedno’ — op. S. Z.) v svoji temeljiti drugačnosti ni vendarle nič drugega od zavestne verige, o težavnosti, da to drugost mislimo’ (R. Močnik, *Mesčevo zlato*), in katerega rešitev se nakaže šele v Lacanovi misli o ‘dvojnem vpisu,’ ki seveda že presega polje ‘strukturalizma.’” Of course, later Žižek would claim that Lacan is in fact one of the only Structuralists not to give in to the post-Structuralist impulse.

However, this piece does feature a critique of Propp that reveals Žižek's perception of Formalism, and in so doing, throws his early conception of Structuralism into stark relief.

Žižek's critique of Propp is largely inspired by Lévi-Strauss, whose influence on Žižek's early work is fairly pervasive in general. As such, Žižek begins by citing Lévi-Strauss's comparison of Formalism and Structuralism:

Contrary to Formalism, Structuralism refuses to set the concrete against the abstract and to ascribe greater significance to the latter. *Form* is defined by opposition to content, an entity in its own right, but *structure* has no distinct content: it is content itself, and the logical organization in which it is arrested is conceived as property of the real.⁴²

Although Žižek would later substantially revise many of the arguments and affiliations present in this early text (none more drastically than the assessment of Lacan previously discussed), this analysis of form-versus-structure endures. The entire section is repeated verbatim in the “research assignment” *Znanstvenost in filozofičnost strukturalizma* (The Scientific and Philosophical [Character] of Structuralism), which was completed in 1973, and appears in a more developed form in the monograph, *Hegel in označevalec* (Hegel and the Signifier), published in 1980.⁴³

Throughout the 1970s, a new publication practice began to mobilize the early Ljubljana School. In addition to the full-length articles, *Problemi* began including debates that consisted of four to five short pieces on a fairly limited topic.⁴⁴ At this time, neither publication in *Problemi* nor participation in these mini-debates were limited to individuals who (when the battle lines were officially drawn in the early 1980s) would identify, or be identified, as members of the Ljubljana

⁴² Of course, Žižek provides a Slovene translation of Lévi-Strauss's original quotation; given here is the English translation by Monique Layton, cited in Propp's *Theory and History of Folklore*, ed. Anatoly Liberman, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984), 167, which includes Lévi-Strauss's essay as a supplement.

⁴³ *Hegel in označevalec* contains a critique of Lotman on similar grounds. Interestingly, this critique of Lotman had been published anonymously in *Problemi* 147-149 (1975), five years before Žižek included it in *Hegel in označevalec* (1980).

⁴⁴ For example, one debate published in *Problemi* in 1978 focuses on Martin Krpan, a Slovene folk hero created by the 19th-century author Fran Levstik, and features short pieces by Rastko Močnik, Zoja Skušek-Močnik, Slavoj Žižek, Mladen Dolar and Jože Vogrinc.

School. At this point, structuralists published side-by-side with phenomenologists and existentialists, and even with some people who didn't exist—pseudonyms were fairly common.⁴⁵

It is not a coincidence that this fluid discourse community calcified at precisely the moment in which the Structuralist contingent (the early Ljubljana School) forsook Kristeva and Derrida in favor of Lacan. From this point on, the Heideggerians, who had been fairly compatible with the Derridean influence but were markedly less tolerant of Lacan, definitively split from what we can now without reservations call the Ljubljana School, which was formally established as the Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis in 1982. Therefore it is worth examining, in closing, one of the critiques that marked this turn away from *Tel Quel* Structuralism and which, furthermore, carries implications for the Ljubljana School's treatment of Formalism.

Mladen Dolar's essay "O nekaterih stranpoteh semiotične analize" ("On Certain Deviations of Semiotic Analysis") was published in a 1979 issue of *Problemi* as part of one of the featured debates on the topic of "'Umetnost' in rob" ("Art' and the Margin"). That same year, Dolar had won a fellowship to study in Paris, and the argument presented in this article was part of his B.A. thesis in French Literature. The essay analyzes the poetry of Comte de Lautréamont (the pseudonym of Isidore Ducasse) in order to motivate a critique of Kristeva's foundational theoretical division between the realms of the semiotic and the symbolic. Dolar writes:

The fundamental difference between the semiotic and the symbolic is itself only symbolic, such that Ducasse's path is not subversive in so far as it points to the transgression of the law, to what is beyond it and what is repressed, but rather exactly in so far as it identifies the scandalous and unexpected nature of the law itself... As soon as he experienced the paradoxical and crazy nature of the law, Ducasse himself set about writing [his own definitive formula of poetry].⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Two of Slavoj Žižek's pseudonyms—Zdenka Veselič and Stanislav Žerjav—were in charge of the tongue-in-cheek "agitprop" section of *Problemi* in the late 1970s. Judging by subsequent hyphenations of their last names (into "Veselič-Žerjav," which, in true mock socialist realist fashion, translates as "Happy-Crane"), these pseudonyms were 'married' in 1981. This episode evinces the complicated and inconsistent nature of Titoist cultural politics at this time.

⁴⁶ Mladen Dolar, "O nekaterih stranpoteh semiotične analize" ("On certain deviations of semiotic analysis"), *Problemi* 184-186 (1979): 100. "Glede na Kristevino teoretsko osnovo bi to pomenilo, izraženo v kratki formuli, da je temeljna razlika med semiotičnim in simbolnim le sama simbolna, da Ducassova pot torej ni subverzivna v tisti meri, kolikor je naperjena na prekoračitev zakona, na njegov onstran in njegovo potlačeno, temveč prav v meri,

This passage represents two critical moments in the development of the Ljubljana School: namely, the rejection of Kristeva's category of the semiotic and the formulation of the inconsistent character of the law. The former metonymically represents the collection of critiques in which members of the Ljubljana School distanced themselves from *Tel Quel*, thereby inaugurating the Ljubljana School's own theoretical identity. The latter—the “scandalous and unexpected,” “paradoxical and mad” nature of the law—is perhaps the first rendition of a principle that would become something of an axiom for the Ljubljana School. It is a point which, in the book that would catapult him to international fame a decade later, Žižek would employ in a slightly modified form in his reading of the “‘traumatic,’ ‘irrational’ character” of the Law in Kafka.⁴⁷ It is also a point at which the theoretical platform of the Ljubljana School can be employed in order to provide a new answer to an old problem in Formalism.

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In the seminal essay “Art as Device” (1917) Shklovsky wrote: “The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.”⁴⁸ Fifty-three years later, in *Bowstring: On the Dissimilarity of the Similar* (1970), Shklovsky addressed the incongruity of this concept of *ostranenie* with the rest of the Formalist project. From the sage and subdued position of a septuagenarian, he reflects upon his youthful contradictions and issues the following apologia:

kolikor pripoznava škandalozni in nepričakovani značaj zakona samega... Ko je izkusil paradoksalno in noro naravo zakona, se je Ducasse zdaj sam lotil pisanja zakonov.” (It should be noted in the context of this article, this final ‘zakonov’ is a figural reference to this citation from Ducasse: “Mislim, da sem po nekaj tavanjih končno našel svojo dokončno formulo,” a formula which Dolar describes as having crystalized in poetry. Given this context, we have translated it thusly and not as ‘laws,’ which—out of context—would be misleading.)

⁴⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London: Verso, 1989), 38.

⁴⁸ Viktor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. and with an introduction by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 12.

On the one hand, I asserted that art is devoid of emotion, that it is only a collision of elements, that it is geometrical. And on the other hand, I spoke of *ostranenie* (estrangement), that is to say—the renewal of sensation. In that case I should have asked myself: what exactly are you going to estrange if art doesn't express the conditions of reality? Sterne, Tolstoy were trying to return to the sensation of *what?*⁴⁹

Rendered thus, the impasse between the world of bloodless geometry and the world of sensory reawakening seems unbreachable. Arguably the two most influential legacies of the Formalist movement seem to be at direct odds with one another; how can the *stony stone* fit in any kind of formal, structural system?

However, if we return to Dolar's formulation about the experience of the inconsistent character of the law, we can see that in this paradigm, a type of estrangement occurs too, but on a different level. In the Ljubljana School's theoretical apparatus, it is not an aesthetic *object* that is revealed to have an 'unexpected nature,' but rather a *structure*, the law. Shklovsky had claimed that "habitualization devours objects, clothes, furniture, one's wife and fear of war," but it would seem that in the Ljubljana School's theoretical platform, habitualization devours structure itself.⁵⁰

Estrangement, then, occurs not when we encounter unexpected content but rather when we encounter unexpected form. It is the *experience of the irrational nature of the law*, of structure itself—the experience of bloody geometry—that, in the Ljubljana School's idiom, constitutes the subject, or in that of Shklovsky, helps us recover the sensation of life. To Shklovsky's anguished question—"Sterne, Tolstoy were trying to return to the sensation of *what?*"—the Ljubljana School would answer: the sensation of structure. With this small but radical shift in perspective, the impasse Shklovsky had

⁴⁹ Viktor Shklovsky, *Bowstring: On the Dissimilarity of the Similar*, trans. by Shushan Avagyan (Champaign, Dublin and London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2011), 442-443.

⁵⁰ Viktor Shklovsky, "Iskusstvo kak priem," accessed December 19, 2015, <http://www.opozaz.ru/manifests/kakpriem.html>. "Автоматизация съедает вещи, платье, мебель, жену и страх войны." Perhaps even in 1917 Shklovsky was aware of this problem of investing objects as the bearers of *ostranenie*. One could interpret his enigmatic and emphatic proclamation that "*Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.*" ("Искусство есть способ пережить деланье вещи, а сделанное в искусстве не важно.") as a way of distancing himself from the conspicuously psychological and metaphysical objects ('one's wife and fear of war') which he listed as fodder for habitualization.

described between the Formalist project's literary 'geometry' and the concept of *ostranenie* is overcome.

To be clear, this is an intervention that must be articulated in the subjunctive; Dolar's 1979 critique is aimed at Kristeva, not Shklovsky, and the estrangement he describes is never identified as Shklovsky's *ostranenie*. It is only by applying the Ljubljana School's theoretical apparatus to this particular problem that we can offer a resolution—a resolution that is but one manifestation of Ljubljana School's potential contributions to the legacy of Russian Formalism. However, we would not be able to conclude without noting that Dolar did in fact briefly mention Shklovsky in that essay. In the introduction, in order to provide the groundwork for Marcelin Pleynet's description of Lautréamont as an "ancestor of his own source," Dolar quotes Pleynet's citation of one line from "Art as Device": "The more you understand an age, the more convinced you become that the images a given poet used and which you thought his own were taken almost unchanged from another poet."⁵¹

The history of poetic images is not all that different from the history of theoretical concepts; in both cases, a small shift in perspective—an image or a theory "almost unchanged"—can produce a radically different end. It is worth lingering over this latter, elusory phrase, *almost unchanged*, and the simultaneously miniscule but noticeable, infinitesimal yet perceptible difference it evokes. In the case of the Ljubljana School and Russian Formalism's notion of estrangement, it is a change that can be measured in two letters: the difference between the Russian word *iskusstvo* ("art") and the Slovene word *izkustvo* ("experience"). For it is precisely the *experience* of the inconsistency of structure that allows the Ljubljana School to reconcile Shklovsky's impasse between *ostranenie* and Formalist literary facts, that allows us in the end to think of that *experience as device*.

⁵¹ (Rather than translating Dolar's Slovene translation of the French translation of Shklovsky's original, I've provided the quote here in a canonical English translation.) Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. and with an introduction by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 7.