## Linguistic Frontiers



## Workshop on European formalisms (Germanic countries and Eastern Europe) Formalism' as an epistemological fact.

Editorial

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This thematic issue is the result of the colloquium Workshop on European formalisms (Germanic countries and Eastern Europe) held at the University of Burgundy in June 2022. This meeting brought together international experts in the field to examine what is now perceived as a major epistemological fact of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. This meeting was a continuation of other scientific events stemming from the same line of research (for example, the international colloquium "Between psychologism and formalism: psychological aesthetics between Germany and Russia (1860-1930)", Free University of Berlin, Berlin, 10-11 June 2016; the international colloquium "FORME(S) / FORMALISME(S)", University of Lausanne, 20-21 March 2019).

The initial aim of this colloquium was to compare various "formalist" trends as they developed in Western and Eastern Europe between the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, both in the sciences of language and literature and art history and aesthetics.

In this context, we might mention the formalist currents that emerged in the Germanic area (Germany and Austria) towards the end of the 19th century in various disciplines, mainly in poetics and literary studies (W. Dibelius; O. Schissel von Fleschenberg; B. Seuffert; O. Walzel), and for art history (A. Riegl and Austrian aesthetic formalism, as well as German "formalist" theorists such as A. von Hildebrand, K. Fiedler, H. Wölfflin and W. Worringer); we will also mention its Eastern counterpart, primarily the Russian formalist circle and Czech formalism. Received: April 2023, Accepted: May 2023

The starting point is the idea that the European formalist movement presents a constitutive unity, and that it is precisely the continuity of its program that allows us to make comparisons. Formalism is to examine first and foremost as an epistemological fact. By abandoning the traditional perspective, which posits formalism as a simple precursor of structuralism, we have sought to situate the formalist project in the context of the knowledge of its time, by showing its genetic links with various disciplines of the period. We endeavored to restore the European formalist project in all its complexity and heterogeneity, as an experimental science founded at the crossroads of numerous disciplines and nourished by their contributions. The aim of this conference was to initiate a comparative analysis of European formalisms, a program of work designed to provide an epistemological rereading of the formalist phenomenon in Europe at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A comparative and systematic reading of the various formalist currents has not yet been carried out: yet this approach seems essential for understanding the phenomenon of formalism and its epistemological issues.

## THE "PICTORIAL OBJECT" AND THE "VERBAL OBJECT": THE FORMALIST APPROACH AND ART HISTORY

The explanation of the genesis of formalism through conceptual borrowings from the work of German art historians (especially Wölfflin, Worringer) goes back to the

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"formalist" approach of O. Walzel, who effectively seeks to apply the principles developed within art history (Kunstgeschichte) to the analysis of literary texts (Walzel 1923). However, Alois Riehl seems to be the first to have applied the spatial model of A. von Hildebrand to the form of the poetic text (see: Riehl 1897, 283-306). In his study of the genesis of formalism, V. Erlich, in examining the German context, links the growth of interest in formal analysis to the existence of the neighboring academic discipline of art history. According to Erlich, it is art history that is at the origin of a new orientation in the science of literature. Erlich mentions the musicologist Hanslick, the sculptor A. Hildebrand, and art historians such as W. Worringer and H. Wölfflin among the first German formalists. Erlich devotes an entire passage to Wölfflin's contribution, citing his famous principle of "art history without names". In Erlich's opinion, Walzel, described as "the most important representative of the 'pseudo-formalist school in German literary studies'", was strongly influenced by art historians, and Walzel's work is defined as an application of Wölfflin's stylistic categories to literary analysis. Erlich points out that the Russian situation was quite different and that the pioneers of formal studies had to look for their own ways. In his opinion, these studies remained limited to the verbal object and the processes of poetic language (Erlich 1996[1955], 59-60).

In 1968, K. Pomorska added Wilhelm Dibelius to the list of German precursors of Russian formalism (Pomorska 1968, 20). Hansen-Löve's (1978) study includes the German painting and art theorists mentioned in the chapter "Formalism and the Painting of the 1910s Avant-Garde" in the context of a wide-ranging comparative discussion of the principles of abstraction and avant-garde painting at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (Hansen-Löve 2001[1978]. See about Fiedler: ibid., 70, 176, 182, 255; about Hildebrand: ibid., 70, 182, 255; about Riegl: ibid., 255; about Wollflin: ibid., 70, 182, 255, 286, 361; about Worringer: ibid., 70, 71, 76, 80). C. Schulz (1997) takes the position that the common ground of the two formalisms, the ground that allows for comparison, is that both currents initially orient themselves towards new trends within the art history of their time. From this area, new impulses for the "new vision" and interaction with verbal art can be seen at the turn of the centuries. Schulz subsequently points out a change in tendencies: in Germany, literary scholars, borrowing concepts from art historians, sought to establish the science of literature as a science of art. In Russia, on the other hand, the formalist-inspired literary scholars turned to the verbal work of art as a verbal form and founded a new, autonomous science whose "specific object" is literarity (Schulz 1997, 236).

Thus, based on cross-studies of German art historians' texts and formalist analyses of literary texts, we try to re-examine the hypothesis of a genetic link between the "formalist" approach to the textual object and the "formalist" approach to the pictorial object. The aim is to elucidate the nature of the presumed borrowings of the formalist authors from the work of Germanic art historians, and to evaluate the applicability of these principles to the "verbal object", conceived from a literary as well as a linguistic perspective.

## AESTHETIC FORMALISM AND LINGUISTICS: THE MEANING OF THEIR INTERACTION

The interaction between linguistics and aesthetics at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is worth to be made explicit. Austrian art historians have recourse to the linguistics of their time to relate their own approach to the approach of linguists. For example, these aesthetics and art history specialists refer to historical and comparative linguistics. Thus, the architect and art theorist Gottfried Semper (1873-1879), refers to the linguistics of Franz Bopp; he sees the dimension of original forms (Ur-formen) as one in which his own approach as an aesthetician meets the approach of comparative linguistics (quoted in: Iversen 1993, 55–56).

On the other hand, the art historian Alois Riegl (1858-1905) establishes an analogy between the study of art and the study of language: he refers, especially to the experience of comparative grammar. In order to establish his own approach, Riegl also refers to the methodology of neo-grammatical linguistics (Riegl 1966, 210-211). The principle of the "arbitrariness of the sign" also arises in the Germanic aesthetics of formalist inspiration. Riegl anticipates on Saussure's ideas, in particular comparing onomatopoeia to ornament. According to Riegl, the development of ornamental elements shows the increasing de-motivation of the initially motivated elements. Thus, in Stilfragen (1893), Riegl emphasises the phenomenon of "dissipation" of the "plastic character" in the course of the development of the ornamental system (Riegl 1977[1893], 20). The principle of the 'arbitrary' marks the growth of psychic progress. The loss of motivation, the becoming arbitrary of a sign, coincides with the liberation of the imagination or imaginative faculty: the departure from nature itself allows the discovery of abstract types (ibid., 2). For Riegl, this rejection of corporeality results in the growth of an "unlimited faculty of representation" in art as well as a great facility in the combination of originally natural elements. The result is the emancipation of the ornamental line. Freed from all motivation, from all corporeality, the line becomes the basis for artistic forms that are no longer founded in natural patterns (ibid., 2).

These theses of the art historians are naturally to be related to the postulates of Russian formalism, which links the loss of motivation by the linguistic sign to the effect of its "wear and tear" (Shklovsky) and to the mechanism of psychic "automatism", as well as to the principles of elaboration of an "autonomous science" (Eikhenbaum, Tynianov). It is instructive to systematize the borrowings of formalist authors from the work of linguists to examine the parallel conceptual evolution of these two disciplines and to follow the transfer of linguistic concepts to the aesthetic object.

Let us note in this respect the importance of the common psychological substratum shared by "psychological

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linguistics" and psychological aesthetics (late 19th—early 20th century). In order to examine this filiation, a good track is to follow the deep conceptual link that unites one of the key concepts of "psychological linguistics", the "feeling of language" (Sprachgefühl), to the crucial concept of "psychological aesthetics", the "feeling of the form" (Formgefühl) (see various uses of this concept: Gabelentz 1972 [1891, 1901], 205); Ginneken 1907, 53–55; Paul 1970[1920], 29, 30, 31; Mauthner 1912, 521–523; Bühler 1982[1934], 338–339). A detailed analysis of these two notions within each of the respective disciplines demonstrates a profound convergence of these two concepts, a convergence which poses as a consequence the equivalent delimitation of the object of study of the two sciences in question.

## THE AESTHETICS OF EMPATHY AND THE FORMALIST APPROACH

A common misconception is that the approach developed by Russian formalism is opposed to any psychological interpretation and, particularly, to any recourse to the device of empathy (Einfühlung). However, as early as 1978, A. Hansen-Löve, commenting on the theorisation of the pictorial object by Russian formalism, notes the importance of the contribution of psychological aesthetics and, of W. Worringer (1908). In his view, the opposition emphasised by Worringer between a tendency towards abstraction and a tendency towards empathy corresponds surprisingly well with the role of abstraction in the aesthetic model of Russian formalism, where abstraction fulfills both the function of decontextualisation and "defamiliarisation" (Hansen-Löve 2001[1978], 70).

This tendency towards "defamiliarisation", which results in a geometrisation of the elements of artistic expression, is posited by the formalist authors as intrinsic to every poetic text. Thus, the abstract scheme of aesthetic formalism, fixed by the opposition "abstraction—empathy", allows, it seems, to make explicit another methodological opposition, the one posed by Russian formalism between "poetic language" and "prosaic language". Formalist 'defamiliarisation' would then be the mechanism whose aim is to eliminate empathetic elements and to render abstract the elements initially motivated, i.e. attached to reality.

Jakobson's famous definition of poetic function, which is considered "formal", is based on the analysis of the functioning of rhythmic forms (see in particular the concept of ustanovka ("orientation" or "aiming"), introduced by J. Tynianov (in his article "The ode as an oratory genre" (Oda kak oratorskij žanr, 1925), see :Tynjanov [1925], in Stempel 1972, 272–274) which Jakobson uses directly in its German version (i.e., as *Einstellung*) (in his article "Linguistics and Poetics" [1960], see: Jakobson 1963, 118) and which is at the origin of R. Jakobson's notion of "function" in the famous scheme of communication elaborated towards the end of the 1950s. This reminds us that the study of rhythm (insofar as it is opposed to 'abstract' meter) was the object of infatuation of early formalism (and the studies it developed in the field of poetic language). Jakobson's poetic function (understood as a projection of "the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to the axis of combination") seems to take up the same principle that Lipps, in his psychological perspective, defined as the two rhythmic principles at the basis of empathy (*Einfühlung*):

- The principle of the return of the same (*das Prinzip der Wiederkehr des Gleichen*);
- the principle of immanent differentiation (*das Prinzip der immanenten Differenzierung*).

(quoted in: Meumann 1912, 65; see also: Lipps 1908, 352).

This "formalist" redefinition of the "psychological" principle makes it possible to understand to what extent the epistemology of the humanities is dependent on redefinitions. Indeed, in his "aesthetics of time" (Zeitästhetik), Lipps tries to explain the influence of rhythm and the combination of rhythmic elements with the help of his notion of empathy (Einfühlung) (ibid., 360-361). The "objective analysis" of rhythmic forms advocated by the formalists is an attempt to redefine the empathic mechanism conceived by Lipps' aesthetics as the basis of the aesthetic effect. It is an attempt to redefine on a quantifiable basis the two "qualitative" principles of empathic aesthetics mentioned above. In the empathic mechanism, these two principles are related ("like any rhythmic principle") to the physiological and mechanical laws of "the emergence of rhythmic impressions" (ibid., 366).

Transposed to the rhythmic level, the empathic mechanism (*Einfühlung*) leads directly back to the domain of expressive movements, and more broadly, to the underlying mimetic devices of language. We are not trying to prove that Jakobson—when creating his model of communication—would have read Lipps or Wundt. It is a question of affirming the influence of the psychological model in the human sciences of the first half of the 20th century. The role of psychology in the conceptual construction of the human sciences was such that, when Jakobson considered the specificity of the aesthetic object, he was led to think it within the pre-established framework provided by psychology.

Thus, the term "aiming" (*Einstellung*) hesitates between the socio-psychological interpretation (where it approaches the notion of evaluation) and the psychosomatic and motor interpretation (where it designates the psychic or neurophysiological disposition of the organism to act in such and such a direction, or a flexible reaction of the motor apparatus to accomplish a precise movement). Consequently, the aiming or internal regulation conceptualized by formalism is linked to rhythmics, the starting point of formalist research in the field of poetic language.

This specific analysis of Jakobson's notion of "poetic function" in the light of the aesthetics of empathy is only

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one example of the re-examination of the basic concepts of Russian formalism that we try to carry out.

A systematic comparison of the positions of psychological aesthetics, and in particular, of the aesthetics of empathy (*Enfühlung*) (it concerns especially the conceptions, elaborated in the field of psychological aesthetics by the German theorists such as Friedrich Theodor Vischer, Robert Vischer, Johannes Volkelt, Theodor Lipps at the turn of the 19th and the 20th century) with the conceptual core of the Russian formalist current allows to extract some important theoretical convergences within the European formalism.

### FORMALISM AND "PHILOLOGY OF LISTENING" (OHRENPHILOLOGIE): THE MEETING OF TWO «NEW LANGUAGE SCIENCES

The "analysis of sound" of Eduard Sievers (1850–1932), a linguist and phonetician close to the neo-grammatical current, founded the current known as "listening philology", Ohrenphilologie, whose best-known representative is undoubtedly the Germanist and poet Franz Saran (1866–1931), a disciple of Sievers, who was a professor at the University of Erlangen from 1913. This trend was opposed to traditional philology, Augenphilologie, which was subordinated to silent reading. This trend posited the "sound realization" of the poetic text as an indispensable element of its understanding (see: Tchougounnikov 2007).

In Germany as in Russia, the principles laid down by the "philology of listening" formed a powerful unifying axis for the European formalist movement at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. In Germany, it was mainly Oskar Walzel (1864–1944), a professor at the University of Bonn, who was enthusiastic about this approach. In Russia, the ideas of the "philology of listening" were at the origin of various "formalist" researches. Among the researchers who were influenced to varying degrees by "listening philology" were Roman Jakobson (1896–1982); Boris Eikhenbaum (1886-1959); Victor Shklovsky (1893–1984); Lev Jakubinskij (1892-1945); Boris Tomaševskij, (1890–1957); Jurij Tynianov (1894–1943); Viktor Žirmunskij (1891–1971); Serguei Bernstein [Bernštein] (1892-1970), and many others.

The positions of the theorists of "sound analysis" in both Germany and Russia are linked to a characteristic trend of this period: the creation of psychophysical typologies of expression. Indeed, it was during this period that many typologies of expression were developed, based on the idea of psychophysical predispositions that manifest themselves in the form of essential morphological types. The starting point for the typology of Joseph Rutz (1834-1895) and Ottmar Rutz (1881–1952) is the experience of any "reproductive artist" (nachschaffender Künstler) such as the declaimer or singer. Artists of this type have a different relationship to the works of various poets or composers (Rutz 1911, 282). In particular, they often feel a kind of residue in their personal interpretations of the works that they would render inaccurately or falsely. First of all, it takes into consideration a bodily attitude, primarily the continuous contractions of the muscle groups of the abdomen that usually change the sound of the voice. The muscles of the rib cage, which manifest the set of respiratory movements, move in correspondence with these body movements (see: Rutz 1908, 12–51; Rutz 1921, 9–18; see also: Walzel 1923, 97; Winkler 1954, 68–77).

Rutz's typology has been taken up and developed in two areas in particular: in Germanic studies, where it formed the basis of the philology of listening (Ohrenphilologie) of Eduard Sievers and Franz Saran, and in musicology-Gustav Becking (1894-1945) (Becking 1928, 20-53). This typology of expression also inspired theorists of pedagogy and didactics who linked these typologies to different "world views": Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) (in his study Kultur der Gegenwart, 1880, quoted in: Walzel 1923, 81–82). Further "world views" typologies were developed by Eduard Spranger (1882-1963) (Spranger 1914; Spranger 1921); Herman Nohl (1879-1960) (Nohl 1908, 18-17; Nohl 1920 94, 34-41); Richard Müller--Freienfels (1882-1949) (Müller-Freienfels 1912, 85-181; Müller-Freienfels 1919, 10-17); Erich Drach (1885-1935) (Drach 1932; Drach, 1934; Drach 1963[1939]).

Historians of Russian formalism have mainly retained the formalist critique of this purely acoustic approach, which ignores the meaning of the text under examination. Nevertheless, it seems that the 'Sievers effect' was very influential in the development of the formalist movement in Russia and Germany, as if the formalist-inspired theorists had recognised themselves in the positions of "sound analysis" (*Schallanalyse*), which deliberately aimed to be a 'new science' of language.

In the context of formalism's relationship to psychophysical typologies of expression, the case of the poet O. Walzel (1864-1944) seems particularly interesting. His experience with expressive typologies led him to the idea that in literature the Weltanschauung can be defined as a structure (the Gestalt) insofar as the effects of oppositions between these types are manifested in the technical features of the works. Walzel's aim is now to link the transitions between types to definable formal criteria (Walzel 1923, 96). Especially, Sievers' idea of "vocal types" seems to him to be appropriate for establishing the links between the 'type' and the 'technical realisation' of the work (ibid., 55). Walzel finds confirmation in the experiences of "sound analysis" those individual intellectual characteristics are inevitably the result of a physical type. For Walzel, as for the theorists of "sound analysis", works of art contain incentives for specific muscular positions according to the laws imposed by the types and subtypes on which these works are based (Walzel 1923, 99).

One can probably think that the attraction of these psychophysical typologies for German and Russian formalism is explained by the fact that both currents—"sound analysis" and formalism—try to pose a strong empirical relation between a psychophysical signal embedded in the text and the response to this signal on the part of the reader (receiver) of the text in question. Indeed, it seems that this psychophysical response, codified in and solicited by a work of art, constitutes a strong temptation for the formal approach of this period. For it is precisely the level of involuntary physiological reactions that can be conceived as the key to objective analysis and, consequently, to an objectification of aesthetic perception.

# WALZEL AND JAKOBSON: "LOOKING AT A POEM AS ONE LOOKS AT A PAINTING"

The contribution of formalism to the sciences of literature consists in having discovered the spatiality of the literary text, in positing the literary text and especially the poetic text as a spatial object. In formalist literary and poetic studies, it is the contribution of Oskar Walzel (1864–1944), a German formalist poetician, that is decisive. After distinguishing between successive works of art (works of poetry or music) and contiguous works of art (works of painting or sculpture and architecture), Walzel sought to define the principle of reversibility of space and time within an aesthetic object and, in particular, within the literary or poetic text. To ground his formal approach to literature, Walzel proposes to access the dimension that can be described as "visibility" of the literary or poetic text.

Carole Magné summarizes Walzel's approach as follows: "To the problem of opposition between saying and seeing, between spatial contiguity and temporal succession, Walzel responds with reversibility of space and time [...] This space/time reversibility stems from the process of the visual seizure of a continuous aesthetic object (pictorial, sculptural or architectural). This visual seizure is done in succession, the eye runs from bottom to top or top to bottom. This relationship to space generates a temporality, succession can become contiguity, discourse can become the image and vice versa" (Maigné 2020, 38).

Indeed, Walzel's conception is based on the relation of succession and contiguity of works of art and makes their fusion / transmutation the main process. Walzel writes: "Contemplating succession (Nacheinander) in works of art is like the human disposition to grasp works of poetry or music as a soothing contiguity (Nebeneinander). What each attempt presupposes in its own right and decisively is the application of concepts of the arts of succession to the arts of contiguity, concepts of the arts of contiguity to the arts of succession. Depending on the circumstances, we may see a piece of music or a poem spread out in front of us in paint; conversely, we experience images, statues and constructions as if they were works of transitory art, and we enjoy them in a succession of impressions" (Walzel, Wechselseitige Erhellung der Künste [1917] (quoted in: ibid., 38). See also: Walzel2020[1923], 160-161).

In other words, it is a question of apprehending this fusion as a spatial dimension, of accessing the visibility

of the literary text thus conceived. The latter becomes visible through the play of the double axis of the literary object (which is also the double axis of language): horizontality and verticality, or the axis of syntagms and the axis of paradigms. It is this intuition of Walzel from 1917, based on the psychology of perception of Johannes Herbart (1776–1841) and the psychology of form of Christian Ehrenfels (1859–1932), that R. Jakobson summarized some thirty years later with his famous formula, according to which the "poetic function [...] projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection onto the axis of combination" (Jakobson 1963).

The poem is a conversion of the successivity that is the discursive chain into contiguity: it is through this transposition that the poem acquires pictorial characteristics, comparable to those of a painting, and it is thus that language gains visibility. In what follows, we will try to show some of the consequences that formalism has been able to draw from this reversibility of space and time, and in particular on the example of poetic language, that object of formalist research par excellence. After Walzel, it is R. Jakobson who emerges as a theorist of the reversibility of space and time. In his reminiscences and conversations, Jakobson repeatedly stressed the importance of the poetic context of the Russian avant-garde of the early 20th century for his theoretical work (Jakobson 1976, 293-294). The radicalism and futurism of Jakobson's linguistics and poetics emerged from this intellectual atmosphere and must be analysed in this context. The young Jakobson published essays on avant-garde art: futurism, expressionism, and Dadaism (see: Tchougounnikov 2002, 145-155). Jakobson found in Cubism the justification for his own vision of the aesthetic object, a vision that can be described as "relational". He writes: "To bring to life the inner and outer relations of visual signs, one must, as Picasso said, 'break, make a revolution and start from zero" (quoted in: Hollenstein 1974, 33).

In his essay on Futurism, published in 1919, Jakobson underlines the master effect of the Cubist painting: the fragmentation of objects whose power is linked to the correlation between colour and coloured spatial form (Vallier 1975, 10). Jakobson writes: "Quality participates in the transformation of extent. When the extent of a surface changes, so does its quality. Quality and extent are by nature inseparable from each other and cannot be imagined without each other. This necessary connection is in contrast to the empirical connection of two parts, which is not binding, such as the head and the trunk. It is possible to imagine these parts separately [...]. The emancipation of painting from simplistic illusionism leads to the intense elaboration of the various areas of pictorial expression. The correlation of volumes, constructive asymmetry, chromatic contrast, and facture emerge clearly in the artist's consciousness" (ibid., 10).

Like Cubism, which "canonized" certain pictorial "processes" and "denuded" the act of painting, Jakobson in

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his formalist period posited "process" and "literarity" as the only relevant objects of research. This cubist interpretation of the formalist approach is necessary insofar as the formalist aim is to access the visibility of language and to analyse its "tactile" or "palpable" dimension, i.e. to apprehend the "proximate state" of the language fact. Thus, the study of poetic language in Russian formalism is achieved through its visualisation. In this regard, we recall Jakobson's references to the experience of cubist painting, that of George Braque, whose aphorism Jakobson so readily quotes: "I don't believe in things, I only believe in their relations" (quoted in: Hollenstein 1974, 32).

It is time to evoke here this reversibility between spatial contiguity and temporal succession within the aesthetic object, outlined by O. Walzel, which was the starting point of this development. Indeed, this principle makes it possible to understand certain positions taken by the later Jakobson, such as, for example, his aphorism "one must look at a poem as one looks at a painting" (Nakov 1985, 49). In fact, R. Jakobson's famous formula, according to which the "poetic function [...] projects the principle of equivalence of the axis of selection onto the axis of combination" (Jakobson 1963) echoes some thirty years later the principle of reversibility of space and time within an aesthetic object posited by O. Walzel. The poetic text elaborates this particular relationship to space which generates this singular fusion of spatiality and temporality where succession can become contiguity and where literarity (the word, the poem) ends up being metamorphosed into visibility (the image, the painting). The poem converts the successivity that is the discursive chain into a contiguity: it is through this transposition that the poem acquires pictorial characteristics, comparable to those of a painting, and thus language gains visibility. The effect of this was the first formalism defined as the "palpability" or "sensitivity" of poetic language. This is why the "poetic function" replaces the axis of selection with the axis of combination, and why the poem consequently calls for a "pictorial" gaze. The latter reinforces the effect of simultaneity of the constituents of the poetic object in order to achieve this agreement of the parallels by visualization (or by spatialization) of the verbal object that is the poem.

#### CONCLUSION

It has to be said that formalism as an object of research has changed. The object of "formalism" today—whether Russian or Germanic formalism—is no longer the same as it was in the 1980s or, even more so, in the 1960s and 1970s. In recent times, the interest of researchers has shifted from formalism "in and of itself" to the genealogy and epistemology of this phenomenon. Recent research in this area has helped to change the configuration and perception of this object. We have been able to demonstrate the extreme complexity of the phenomenon of formalism, and its close links with disciplines that were previously perceived as not very "formalist" (psychology, philosophy, general aesthetics and psychological aesthetics). In this way, we have been able to highlight a common theoretical substratum which has made it possible to think of various national formalist currents as a fairly homogeneous European movement, and to apply to it the term "European formalism". This special issue devoted to formalism is part of this current research trend.

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