sciendo

Linguistic **Frontiers**

Ornament as a formalist object

Serge Tchougounnikov
University Burgundy/Franche-Comté, Dijon (Serguei.Tchougounnikov@u-bourgogne.fr)

Abstract: This study deals with folkloric research object within Germanic and Russian Formalism, it shows why folklore and ornament have become an ideal research object of the European formalist current in Germanic and Slavic areas.

Keywords: Formalism; folklore; ornament; subliminal structures; transrational language.

In 1890, when Alois Riegl taught a course on ornamental history, he felt that the answer to such questions lay in ahistorical human nature and, like many students of human nature at that time, he thought that isolated or "primitive" peoples provided examples of this in its purest state (Riegl 1977[1893]; Iversen 1993, 48−69; Olin 1992, 50−58). Riegl's positions regarding the study of ornament have become prototypical for any formalist approach. Ornament as a purely formalist object of study—as founded by Germanic-Slavic formalist currents—is perceived as both a folk art object and a manufactured object.

1. ORNAMENT AS A FOLK ART OBJECT
The emergence of ornament as a research object in the Austrian context is connected to a growing interest in the culture and art of different ethnic minorities (which occupied such an important place in the Austro-Hungarian Empire). According to M. Barasch, there was also some interest in the "lower" arts, that is, the crafts of different periods and cultures, which were usually excluded from the world of art, in the aristocratic tradition. The products of ethnic cultures were only discussed under the heading of "folk art" or "tribal art". Both these transformations were expressed in Riegl's work, and both became permanent elements in the formalist approach to ornament. The first and most obvious feature of folk art is that it is anonymous. Unlike "high art", the work of folk art never has an author, and is never created by an individual artist. To this extent, it resembles language: just as language does not have a single author, so folktales do not have identified authors (Barasch 1998, 13−23).

2. ORNAMENT AS A MANUFACTURED OBJECT
The other distinctive feature of folk art that differs from the aesthetics of high art is its practical nature: the works of folk art objects are of some practical use. Thus, from the 1860s, the ornament is related to the problems of crafts and their products (in 1862, the Victoria and Albert Museum opened in London, while the Vienna Museum for Arts and Crafts (Museum für Kunstgewerbe) opened in 1863. Thus, according to M. Olin, this new appreciation of crafts indicated importance in intellectual orientation: "high art" production ("great" painting, or great sculptural monuments) became less exclusively the subject matter of the History of Art. Another aspect is a scholarly appreciation for the value of skills, and the display of skill in itself, which was fostered by the study of craft products. The background to this re-evaluation of artistic skill was the Arts and Crafts movement that began in England in the 1850s, to combat the effects of the industrial revolution (with contributions from John Ruskin, William Morris, Owen Jones, Augustus Pugin, and the German architect, Gottfried Semper) (Olin 1992, 24−25).

Within this type of discourse, Riegl's *Stilfragen* contained a message for applied artists, and contributed significantly to an artistic controversy of the time, in that it was based on the laws of ornamentation from observation of folk textiles: weaving, embroidery, and lace. Before Riegl, Semper, who regarded textiles as an elementary art form, placed emphasis upon such elementary principles as knotting, braiding, and stitching (Olin 1992, 67–90).

Within Russian formalism, this industrial metaphor gave birth to the concept of a manufactured or a hand-made literary object, considering the artist as a craftsman. This Arts and Crafts vision of artistic objects, is particularly underlined by Shklovsky [Šklovskij] 1990 [1916]), and by Eikhenbaum (in his essay, "How Gogol's "Overcoat" Was Made") (Ejxenbaum, 1969 [1918]). This textile imagery played an important role in the representational ideas of the early formalist movement.

In his formalist study of 1928, Pavel Medvedev underlined the role of "exotic" or "alien art" in the emergence of the Western formalist movement. This role is perceived as a contrast between European "artistic volition" and "alien artistic volitions:

"Such were the preconditions of the formalist movement, which were prepared by the development of European art itself and strengthened and deepened as the European consciousness grew accustomed to the forms of "alien art." Simultaneous with these changes there occurred within the newest European art a widening of both the artistic horizon of the expert and connoisseur and the horizon of the scholar. Whole worlds of the new forms of Eastern art were opened to the European artistic consciousness. This extraordinary expansion of the concrete world of art was certain to reveal the extremely narrow and one-sided nature of the concepts and definitions developed by art scholarship on the basis of European art, which was primarily realistic. In the process of assimilating these new and extremely varied forms of "alien art," it was precisely the constructive aims of art that grew more and more clear. The difficulty was not in the assimilation of new content, but in the very principles and methods of representation. It was not what was seen that was new, but the forms of seeing themselves" [...] Against the background of these "alien artistic volitions," the European "artistic volition," with its particular relationship to the reality being represented, appeared to be only one of the possible constructive modes of a work of art, and its realistic dominant (the reflection of extraliterary reality as it is) appeared as only one of the possible constructive dominants. "Alien art" opened ways toward a new understanding of such familiar phenomena as gothic. For instance, Worringer, in his book *Formprobleme der Gotik*, discovers the individuality of gothic volition in a completely new way. "Alien art" led to a reexamination of previous opinions of ancient art." (Medvedev [1928] 1978 43).

Within the Russian and Czech context, the study of folklore played a crucial role in the rise of formalist and structuralist literary theory by serving as a mediating field between language and "high" literature. Indeed, folkloristics, which traditionally approached its subject matter through linguistic theory, understood verbal art to behave like language. The transfer of ideas from the field of folkloristics to literary theory was the product of scholarly training, personal intellectual exchange, and institutional affiliations (*cf.* Viktor Shklovsky's use of A. N. Veselovsky's writings for his *Theory of Prose*; Jakobson's early poetic borrowings from V. F. Miller's studies; Piotr Bogatyrev's structural ethnography). Within the Czech field, the theorists of the Prague School followed this theoretical orientation (see, for example, Jan Mukařovský's *Aesthetic founded on Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts*) (Jessica Evans Merrill 2012).

Jakobson's poetics is also influenced by this folkloric perspective. For him :

"Folklore provides us with particularly eloquent examples of a verbal structure heavily loaded and highly efficient despite its habitual freedom from any control of abstract reasoning. Even such compulsory constituents as the number of syllables in a syllabic line, the constant position of the break or the regular distribution of prosodic features are not educed and recognized per se by a carrier of oral tradition. When he is faced with two versions of a line, one of which disregards the metrical standard, this narrator or listener may qualify the deviating variant as less suitable or totally unacceptable, but he usually shows no capacity for defining the crux of a given deviation. A few specimens picked up among the short forms of Russian folklore show us tight figures of sound and grammar in close unity with a definitely subliminal method of patterning" (Jakobson 1985, 59–60).

Thus, on the psychological level, Jakobson's "Subliminal Verbal Patterning" in Poetry conceived as a product of subconscious activity is genetically related to the morphology of folk art. Both objects share the following features: strict symmetry; the distribution of numerous features by parallel segments; grammar-like correspondences; clusters of alliterations, parallelisms, equivalences, and various paranomasia; repetitive, pervasive structures.

3. ORNAMENT AND ORNAMENTAL PROSE

In what follows we seek to identify parallelisms in the definition of two objects of study defined by these two formalisms: "ornament" and "ornamental prose". Alois Riegl's object of study in *Stilfragen* is the history of ornamentation placed from a monogenetic perspective. The ornament would evolve from a simple series, that of the Egyptians, to an elaborate system, represented by models in late antiquity. Russian formalism has also developed an object of study similar to the "ornament" of Viennese formalism. It is a particular type of prose, which formalist authors (in particular, V. Shklovsky) describe as "ornamental prose" (Shklovsky 1973 [1929], 245–269).

Ornament as a formalist object

"Ornamental prose" is characterized by an abundance of thematic and formal equivalences. It includes stylistic features, such as elements specific to oral narration and "writing by sounds" (A. Biélyi). The massive presence of these elements leads to a growth in the "palpability" or "sensitive aspect" of the text (Schmidt 2003, 262).

Ornamental prose combines these stylistic features with structural elements; in addition, the many correlations between its phonic and thematic elements and "phonic orchestration" are characteristic of this object (ibid.). "Ornamental prose" is also characterized by the mobilization of various processes specific to the poetic text, such as, for example, phonic symbolism (ibid., 262). This is why "ornamental prose" is defined as the effect of an organization of poetic type applied to a text of narrative or prosaic type. Among the specific features of prose of this type, is the reiteration of formal and thematic elements, which manifests itself in the form of a chain of leitmotifs and equivalences. This feature results in the rhythmization of this prose, with frequent phonic repetitions (ibid., 265). Researchers have also underlined the growth of motivation in the constitutive signs of ornamental prose and, consequently, its "iconic" character (ibid., 265; See also Kornienko 2008; Kornienko 2009). Thus, the way of approaching ornament as a research object seems to constitute an additional bridge between these two formalisms. For Viennese formalism, the "ornament" is associated with a combination of patterns. Indeed, if the "ornament" is a weaving of patterns, the study of ornament should explain the logic behind this weaving. In this respect, the comparison of ornament with the formalist theory of composition and the literary subject should be enlightening, or even essential. Viktor Shklovsky, following the Russian philologist, Aleksandr Veselovski, defines the motif as an immediate psychological reality that reflects the real experiences of "primitive" communities; the literary subject is defined as a variable combination of the same "original" motives (Shklovsky 1973 [1929], 29–79). For Veselovski, patterns coincide with the original representations: they are directly linked to the "primitive" experience. The conception of prose elaborated by Shklovsky seeks to link these motifs—"representations"—in a system. Shklovsky seems to be inspired by the principles of Herbartian psychology where clarity of consciousness is defined as dependent on the connections between representations. This approach is characteristic of the positions of the psychology of the consciousness at this time, in both its Herbartian and Wundtian versions (Romand, Tchougounnikov 2010).

These two formalist conceptions follow a parallel articulation. Indeed, for Riegl, the psyche, by realizing its intrinsic tendency, constructs a formal logical system. The history of ornament illustrates this psychic mechanism: ornament appears in the beginning as a set of incompatible and discontinuous elements until the Greeks manage to unite them in a coherent and systematic unity (Riegl 1977[1893], 111–112, 208–232). The conception of the literary subject understood as a weaving of the motifs proposed by Shklovsky seeks to unite chaotic discontinuous motifs into finished subjects. According to this conception, narrative art would consist of a progressive articulation of textual elements.

The two objects of formal study—ornament and "ornamental prose" -have well-identified similarities. They are characterized by a growth of symmetry and parallelisms, which results in the transformation of the constituents of the system. They are determined by an integrating force, which appears as an emerging quality. These two objects also include a principle of deviation from this integrative force. Both are characterized by the growth of a dimension that can be defined as an "abstraction" or an abstractive tendency, which leads to clear mental states. These similarities are conditioned by the initial model, which comes from the field of psychology. Let us note the analogous vision of the mechanism of language in Wundt's psychological approach: for him, the morphological evolution of languages follows the psychological law of the growth of analytism in the psyche. Consequently, if amorphous or isolating languages mobilize representations, which remain isolated and not connected by grammatical tools, one meets at the stage of inflectional languages representations that are "worked out" and connected through inflection. Syntactic phenomena (coordination and subordination) are interpreted in the same way (Wundt 1863, 369–376; Wundt 1900, 559–563].

Approached in this manner, these two objects reveal characteristics that bring them closer to the techniques of analysis of consciousness developed by the mentalist psychology of that time: in both cases, it is in fact a transposition of a psychological model onto an ornamental or literary object.

"TRANSMENTAL LANGUAGE" (*ZAUM*) AND "VISIBILITY"(*SICHTBARKEIT*)

One of the well-known contributions of Russian formalism is the notion of "transmental language" or "transmental poetry". Originally coined by Russian futurist poets to designate a-semantic futurist poetry, this concept inspired in formalism the methodological distinction between poetic language and the language of communication (the functions of language model proposed by Jakobson in the 1950s represents the most recent modification of this principle).

In German aesthetic formalism, a similar idea was developed by the theorists of the circle of Hans von Marée (Konrad Fiedler and Adolf von Hildebrand), related to the "construction of the gaze" during the artist's activity. There is a methodological parallelism between the verbal opposition "language of communication" / "poetic (transmental) language" and the optical opposition "the everyday practical gaze" / "the gaze constructed by the artist through pictorial production". Indeed, for German formalists, the artist's activity consists in establishing the conditions of the activity of the eye: the artist creates the conditions of this activity (Quoted in

Majetschak 2009, 167–170). German theorists of the form emphasize the difference between the everyday gaze (understood as a set of unconscious conventions constituting the gaze) and the gaze constructed according to the artist's indications.

On the one hand, we are dealing with the gaze that obeys the principles formulated by Helmholtz for vision, the gaze that proceeds by applying traditional diagrams and formulas, or even "unconscious conclusions" (Helmholtz 1896, 581; Helmholtz 1998, 162).

On the other, we have a gaze that includes a "new vision" or new experience of the world, a gaze assimilated to a new unconventional thought. For Fiedler, the artist's activity consists in changing the modalities of "sensual intuition" (*Anschauung*) (Quoted in Majetschak, 2009, 172)

In both cases—as much for Russian formalism as for Germanic formalism—it deals with developing a "sensual intuition" of a new type. That is why the formalist program is anthropological. In this sense, the conceptualization of gaze activity by German theorists for pictorial art is very similar to the experimentation with the word or verbal object carried out by formal theorists in Russia. In these two formalist projects, the pictorial object is subjected to the same type of development as the verbal object.

There is also a parallelism linking the formalist dichotomy for language and visual perception (poetic language / prosaic language, and artistic gaze / purely optical gaze) to another important dichotomy, that which Russian formalism applies to the analysis of composition: story / plot (*fabula / sjuzet*). In the formalist theory of prose, this conceptual pair introduced by Shklovsky (Shklovsky [Šklovskij] 1929, 256) designates the opposition between the natural sequence of events (storyline or *fabula*), and the deformation (or even "defamiliarization") of this natural order by the shaping of the story carried out by the artist (plot or *sjužet*). There is a similar distinction for Seuffert (Seuffert 1909, 632) and for Schissel von Fleschenberg, who establishes an opposition between the logical articulation (*Dispositio*) and the artistic articulation (*Kompositio*) of the story (Schissel von Fleschenberg 1910; Schissel von Fleschenberg 1912, V–VI). Schissel von Fleschenberg therefore renews the categories of classical rhetoric: *compositio* and *dispositio*. This modification of classical terms is part of the renovation of classical rhetoric, a program formulated by Schissel in terms of "the description of rhetoric from the point of view of art history". He proposes an analogy between rhetoric and the description of a work of art. (ibid.)

The artistic effect is inevitably opposed either to the "usual", "prosaic" organization, or to the "logical" organization. Thus, deformation or "defamiliarization" intervenes at both levels, proving to be an essential mechanism for artistic work to function within the formalist perspective.

REFERENCES

Barasch, M., 1998. *Modern Theories of Art, 2. From Impressionisme to Kandinsky*. New York & London: New York University Press. Shklovsky [Šklovskij], V., 1990 [1916]. Iskustvo kak priëm In Chklovski [Šklovskij] V., *Gamburgskij sčët*. Moscow: Sovetskij pisatel', pp. 58–72.

Ejxenbaum, B., 1969 [1918]. Kak sdelana sinel' Gogolja. In Striedter, J. (Ed.), *Texte der russischen Formalisten*, Vol. 1. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, pp. 128–156.

Helmholtz, H. von, 1896. *Handbuch der Physiologischen Optik*. Hamburg, Leipzig.

Helmholtz, H. von, 1998[1921]. *Schriften zur Erkenntnistheorie*. Wien, New York, Berlin.

Iversen, M., 1993. *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The MIT Press.

Jakobson, R., 1985. *Verbal Art, Verbal Sign, Verbal Time*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Kornienko, O., 2008. Ritmičeskaja paradigma ornamental'noj prozy Borisa Pil'njaka (Golyj god). *Russkaja literatura*, No. XII, 43–64, available at: < http://www.nbuv.gov.ua/portal/Soc_Gum/Rli/2008_12/kornienko.pdf >.

Kornienko, O., 2009. Ritmičeskaja paradigma ornamental'noj prozy Borisa Pil'njaka (Golyj god). *Russkaja literatura*. No. XIII, available at : < http://www.nbuv.gov.ua/portal/Soc_Gum/Rli/2009_13/kornienko.pdf >.

Majetschak, S., 2009. Die Sichtbarkeit des Bildes und der Anblick der Welt, über einige Anregungen Konrad Fiedlers für die Bild- und Kunsttheorie. In Sachs-Hombach, K. (Ed.), *Bildtheorien, Anthropologische und kulturelle Grundlagen des Visualistic Turn*. Suhrkamp, pp. 167–170.

Medvedev, P., (Bakhtin, M.), 1978 [1928]. *The Formal Method in European Art Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Merrill, J. E., 2012. *The Role of Folklore Study in the Rise of Russian Formalist and Czech Structuralist Literary Theory*. A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Slavic Languages and Literatures in the Graduate Division of the University of California, Berkeley.

Olin, M., 1992. *Form of representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Riegl, A., 1977 [1893]. *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*. Mittenwald, Mäanderkunst Verlag.

Riegl, A., 1966. *Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste*. Graz: Böhlaus. See also Riegl, A., 1978. *Grammaire historique des arts plastiques*. Paris: Klincksieck.

Riegl, A., 1973 [1927]. *Die spätrömische Kunstindustrie nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

Seuffert, B., 1909. Beobachtungen über dichterische Komposition. In *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*. Heidelberg, Carl Winter, pp. 599–617.

Shklovsky [Šklovskij], V., 1929. *O teorii prozy* (On the theory of prose). Moscow: Federacija.

Shklovsky [Šklovskij], V., 1973 [1929]. La prose ornementale. In Chklovski V., *Sur la théorie de la prose*. Lausanne: Editions L'âge d'homme, pp. 245–269.

Shklovsky [Šklovskij], V., 1990 [1916]. Iskustvo kak priëm In Chklovski [Šklovskij] V., *Gamburgskij sčët*. Moscow: Sovetskij pisatel', pp. 58–72

Schissel von Fleschenberg, O., 1910. Novellenkomposition in E. T. A. Hoffmans Elixieren des Teufels'. Ein prinzipieller Versuch. In Schissel von Fleschenberg, O., Glonar, J., *Rhetorische Forschungen*, Vol. 1. Halle: Max Niemeyer.

Schissel von Fleschenberg, O., 1912. In Schissel von Fleschenberg, O., Glonar, J., *Rhetorische Forschungen*, Vol. 1. Schissel von Fleschenberg, O., Novellenkränze Lukians. Halle: Max Niemeyer

Romand, D., Tchougounnikov, S., 2009. Aux origines allemandes du cognitivisme, introduction. In Romand, D., Tchougounnikov S., *Psychologie allemande et sciences humaines en Russie: anatomie d'un transfert culturel (1860-1930). Revue d'Histoire des Sciences Humaines 21*. Paris: EHESS, pp. 3–27.

Romand, D., Tchougounnikov, S., 2010. Le formalisme russe, une séduction cognitiviste. *Cahiers du Monde russe*, In Berelowitch, W., Espagne M. (Eds.), *Sciences humaines et sociales en Russie à l'Âge d'argent: quelques figures de transferts*, pp. 521–546.

Schmidt, W., 2003. *Narratologija* [Narratologie]. Moscow: Jazyki slavjanskoj kul'tury.

Wundt, W., 1863. *Vorlesungen über die Menschen- und Thierseele*, Vol. 2. Leipzig: Leopold Voss.

Wundt, W., 1900. *Völkerpsychologie. Die Sprache*, Vol. 1. Leipzig: Engelmann.