comprehension of literal language. Yet, in arguing against the principled distinction between literal and figurative language, and against the primacy of the former, I have repeatedly referred to the notions of literal and figurative meaning. This should not be taken as a contradiction. The distinction between literal and figurative is still useful when recognized as context-dependent and functional, rather than absolute. It simply indicates a difference in the manner of use: often what is classified as a figurative expression is more automatic and salient than a literal one. Figurative language, as all language, appears forever poised between the wager of novelty and comprehensibility. As this entry attests, intensive multidisciplinary research since the 1970s has accumulated convincing evidence that figurative language is best described as a vital and unique aspect of how human beings reason about their worlds. As creativity and conventionality are the indispensable poles of that thinking process, it is easy to see how and why figurality partakes of both.

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First Novel, The *see* Definitions of the Novel
Focalization *see* Narration; Narrative Technique
Formal Realism *see* History of the Novel

Formalism

DEVIN FORE

The Russian formalists were an eclectic constellation of figures from a variety of fields, including literary criticism, LINGUISTICS, philology, and ethnology who from 1915 through 1930 produced a diverse corpus of scholarship on aesthetic form and cultural value. Although their principal objects of study were literary texts, the formalists also wrote on other modes of cultural expression such as film, oratory, JOURNALISM, and LIFE WRITING.

The two centers of formalist activity were OPOIaZ, the Petersburg Society for the Study of Poetic Language (founded 1916),

and the Moscow Linguistic Circle (or MLK, founded 1915). While OPOIaZ comprised chiefly literary historians—Viktor Shklovsky (1893–1984), Boris Eikhenbaum (1886–1959), Osip Brik (1888–1945), and Boris Tomashevsky (1890–1957)—and consequently had a more empirical orientation than their Moscow counterparts, at the core of the MLK was a group of linguists—Roman Jakobson (1896–1982) and Grigorii Vinokur (1896–1947)—whose interest in language led them to poetry and literature as privileged discourses for theorizing general processes of signification. The diversity of their approaches notwithstanding, a symbiosis between the two groups emerged, giving rise to a shared program that remains a methodological exemplum of rigorous, immanent literary criticism. For the most part, the theories of the formalists remained closely bound to the forms of contemporary avant-garde literature that constituted both the context and object of their investigations (e.g., Futurist poetry, experimental prose, factography; see SURREALISM). As a result, it becomes difficult to separate the critical project of the formalists from a general poetics of MODERNISM.

MEDIUM SPECIFICITY AND THE MATERIALITY OF ART

Formalist inquiry was initially motivated by the desire to specify literature by scientific means. Reacting against contemporary methods of literary analysis, an unsystematic admixture of psychobiographical narrative, sociological determinism, and philosophical speculation, the formalists investigated the autonomous laws and components of literary systems. In Jakobson's famous words, "The object of study in literary science is not literature but 'literariness' [*literaturnost*], that is, what makes a given work a *literary* work" (1921, "On Realism in Art"). This project to identify the immanent laws of the aesthetic object required isolating the distinctive features of the given artwork from those of all other forms of cultural production. Thus, the first move of any formalist analysis is to establish the inherent structural qualities of the medium under consideration. On the one hand such autonomization did much to define the study of art on its own terms; on the other, the isolation of the work of art from other factors tended, at formalism's most extravagant polemical moments, to absolutize the aesthetic object as an autotelic value.

While their emphasis on the materiality of the signifier prompted accusations that the formalists ignored the ideological and semantic dimensions of the work of art, it is not true that they neglected the content or meaning of the aesthetic work. On the contrary, their contributions enlarge the ambit of semantic analysis by addressing somatic and perceptual dimensions of the poetic text (e.g., rhythmic, intonational, and phonic elements) that are otherwise neglected by traditional methods of literary hermeneutics.

DEVICES OF DEFAMILIARIZATION AND TRANSFORMATION

In his programmatic text from 1917, "Art as Device," Shklovsky declared that art's vocation was to combat the natural human tendency toward the automatization of perception (in Lemon and Reis). Shklovsky identified *ostranenie* ("defamiliarization") as a technique for restoring the vividness and tangibility of everyday experiences that otherwise fall below the threshold of consciousness: through distortion and exaggeration, defamiliarization draws attention to the construction and conventionality of the work and increases the reader or auditor's awareness of the material support of the

aesthetic object. Rather than looking *through* a defamiliarized text or object, the reader is thereby prompted to look *at* it, to contemplate the raw stuff, or facture, of the work itself. In Shklovsky's famous phrasing, defamiliarization makes the stone *stony* once again.

The formalists defined the aesthetic *priem* ("device") as a mechanism for defamiliarizing habituated perception, and the artwork, by extension, as the sum of these devices. It is important to note that the formalists conceived of the "device" not substantively, but operationally. For them, the "device" was not a static, hypostatizable thing, but a dynamic activity. (*Priem* can also be translated as "method" or "technique.") "Device" thus designates an action carried out on the pre-aesthetic material available to the artist, while "form" is the result of this transformation, this act of removing material from one discursive system and integrating it into the new system of relationships that are constituted by the artwork as an integral totality. Through the concept of the "device," the formalists reconceived the aesthetic object as an aesthetic operation, or function. As Eikhenbaum wrote in a resumé of the formalists' achievements, "We set out with the general concept of the form in its new currency, and came by way of the concept of the device to the new concept of function" (in Matejka and Pomorska, 34). As the titles of a number of their studies would suggest—e.g., Eikhenbaum's "How Gogol's *Overcoat* Is Made" (1919) or Shklovsky's "How *Don Quixote* Is Made" (1921)—the formalists wanted to understand not the content of the artwork but how it operates.

Since the formalists found the distinction between subject matter and formal organization to be analytically untenable, they substituted for the familiar dualism of *content* and *form* the operational distinction between (extra-aesthetic) *material* and (aes-thetic) *device*. The formalists initially articulated the latter binary as the difference between practical and poetic language, between the communicative language of quotidian life and this language in its transformed and defamiliarized state. In their studies of narrative forms, specifically, this difference was reformulated as the distinction between the *fabula*—the "story," or pre-literary found material—and the *siuzhet*, or "plot," which was conceived as the sum of all of the deviations from this original material, for example in the transformation and repetition of motifs or the retardation or diversion of the expected course of the narrative. For this reason, Pavel Medvedev rightly suggested in *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (1928) that the formalists followed what was essentially an *apophatic* conception of art: they believed that artistic production was a subtractive process and that the aesthetic object was the result of an act of negation. Defined as the distortion of everyday speech or the defamiliarization of habitual perception, the work of art was perforce parasitic.

Conceived, then, as a distorted version of everyday codes and conventions of communication, the aesthetic object was not the result of creation ex nihilo. As the formalists explained, artistic production was a process of decontextualization and recontextualization, the extraction of language from the setting of everyday discourse and its reinsertion into the new semantic field established by the artwork. The aesthetic function was realized in this act of transposition from one discursive register into another. This understanding of the aesthetic act as a *mnozhestvennaia perekodirovka sistem* ("multiple recoding of systems"), as Tartu semiotician Iurii Lotman called it, legitimated what was essentially a poetics of montage and of the readymade. Despite the manifest partiality that this model of the aesthetic process

exhibited toward modernist works of literature, the formalists found it on occasion to be equally applicable to readings of more traditional literary forms such as the realist novel (see REALISM). In fact, one of the most impressive scholarly artifacts of this method was Shklovsky's study *Material and Style in Tolstoy's Novel 'War and Peace'* (1928), which described the aesthetic devices at work in Tolstoy's classic through a juxtaposition of passages from *War and Peace* (1865–69) with coeval source material.

THE EVOLUTION OF AESTHETIC SYSTEMS

Whereas the first phase of formalism (1916–21), exemplified by the work of critics such as Shklovsky and Eikhenbaum, foregrounded the phenomenological qualities of the artwork using a critical method that was synchronic in nature, the second phase (1921–30) enhanced the initial forays into aesthetic structure with disquisitions into the laws of literary evolution. The later studies focused on the relationship between literature and other social systems of an economic, political, or technological nature. The scholar spearheading this shift in emphasis from structure to evolution was Iurii Tynianov (1894–1943). This development was ultimately not a reorientation of or correction to the original trajectory of the formalists, as critics of formalism were eager to insinuate, for Shklovsky's initial model of "art as device" had already defined literature as a transformation of material taken from other nonliterary systems. Indeed, from the very beginning formalist analysis of literature presumed the dialectical interdependence of aesthetic and extra-aesthetic systems. Although these notions were present in Shklovsky's early work, it was Tynianov who first tried to theorize systematically the mechanisms of this exchange, in "On

Literary Evolution" (1927). Explaining that "the study of isolated genres outside the features characteristic of the genre system with which they are related is impossible," Tynianov identified two aspects of the literary construction: one was the *auto-function*, which designated the relationship of a single element to other elements within the structural totality of the aesthetic object; the other was the *syn-function*, which designated the relationship of an element to isomorphically comparable elements within other aesthetic objects (in Matejka and Pomorska, 70–71). According to the formalists, all of the components of the aesthetic object were, moreover, functionally subordinated to a single distinctive feature that they called the "dominant." At certain points in history, rhyme, for example, is the "dominant" of poetry. By organizing the work of art into a hierarchically ordered system, the "dominant" feature secures the integrality of the work of art as an aesthetic gestalt.

Through their proto-structuralist studies of literature as a "system of systems," the formalists arrived at the question of literary history. According to the formalists, the dynamics of literary evolution were driven by the constant interaction between literature and extraneous, nonliterary systems. To understand literary history it thus becomes necessary to investigate those neighboring social systems which were the sources of literature, as well as those which, conversely, literature influenced. For example, Tynianov noted that, while private letters and documents had once been of no literary value, in the nineteenth century these minor domestic forms were relocated to the center of literary production. He discerned a law at work in this exchange between the nonliterary and the *literaturnyi fakt* ("literary fact"): "At a period when a GENRE is disintegrating, it shifts from the center to the periphery, and a new phenomenon floats in to take its place in the

center, coming up from among the trivia, out of the backyards and low haunts of literature" (33). Published at a moment when formalist research was keenly interested in excavating the minor genres, hack authors, and forgotten epigones of Russian literary history, Tynianov's collection of essays entitled *Archaists and Innovators* (1929) presented the work of art as an effect of the ceaseless metabolism between a culturally valued aesthetic order and the reservoir of unrecognized devices available in everyday life.

Through their inquiry into the evolutionary laws of literature the formalists discovered a cultural dynamic that derives aesthetic value from the interchanges between the sacred and the profane, the valorized and the quotidian, the innovator and the epigone. What they discovered, in other words, was the basic logic of aesthetic modernity (see MODERNISM). First explored by Tynianov in "The Literary Fact" and elaborated much later by Lotman and Boris Uspenskii in their "Binary Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture" (in A. Nakhimovsky and A.S. Nakhimovsky, eds., 1985, *Semiotics of Russian Cultural History*), the cultural economy posited by the formalists contradicted modernity's celebrated apotheosis of the new. In true structuralist fashion Tynianov demonstrated that there is no authentic novelty or invention, only the constant relocation of readymade features and devices from one system to another, the endless recycling of elements that have been moved to the periphery (automatized) and then reinstated (defamiliarized). Investigating the laws of literary evolution, the formalists arrived at the ultimate identity of *Archaists and Innovators*.

AFTERLIFE OF FORMALISM

The techniques and approaches of Russian formalism influenced a number of later movements within poetics and literary crit-

icism. While this influence was more oblique in certain instances (e.g., New Criticism and French STRUCTURALISM), in others these filiations were quite explicit. Such was the case with the Prague Linguistic Circle and the Tartu School of Semiotics. The former, commonly called the Prague School, was established in 1926 by Vilém Mathesius (1882–1945) and included members from the Russian formalist circles such as Petr Bogatyrev (1893–1971), Boris Tomashevsky, and, most importantly, Roman Jakobson, who had moved to Prague in 1920. In 1929 Jakobson coined the term STRUCTURALISM to designate their shared method, which emphasized the synchronic analysis of the artwork. Recognizing the arbitrary nature of the sign, whose value and meaning, as Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) had discovered, emerge differentially vis-à-vis other signs within the same system, Prague Structuralists such as Jan Mukařovský (1891–1975) viewed the artwork from a purely functionalist perspective, namely, as the aggregate of relations established among a work's constituent signs. But in contrast to the Russian formalists, whose conceptualization of the work of art was in most cases derived from and restricted by a model of signification that was exclusively linguistic in nature, the Prague Structuralists expanded their studies to a variety of semiotic systems. And so, for example, the Prague School succeeded in analyzing a number of dramatic works, which are semiotically heterogenous compounds of gestural, linguistic, and plastic signs.

Founded in 1964 at the University of Tartu in Estonia, the Tartu School of Semiotics revived the formalist impulse while incorporating new scientific developments from the fields of information processing, machine translation, and mathematical modeling. Iurii Lotman (1922–93), the most prominent scholar in the Tartu School, characterized art as a "modeling

system," which he defined as "a structure of elements and of rules for combining them that is in a state of fixed analogy to the entire sphere of an object of knowledge, insight or regulation. Therefore a modeling system can be regarded as a language" (qtd. in Lucid, 7). Lotman's definition reveals the predominance of the linguistic model in the thought of the Tartu School, which defined not just literature but also visual art, cinema, and music as "secondary modeling systems." Despite the shortcomings of this linguistic maximalism, the initial conjunction of formalism and cybernetic theory developed by the Tartu School in the 1960s proved to be highly productive in the next decade, when the Tartu scholars turned away from the institutions of art and began to develop a general semiotics of social behavior. Reiterating the evolution of formalism in the mid-1920s, when it abandoned the immanent analysis of artworks and began investigating instead laws that regulate the interactions of literature with other social systems, in the 1970s the Tartu School shifted its focus to the dynamics between forms of cultural production and their social context. The result was a type of cultural ANTHROPOLOGY that, in many cases, was conceptually more capacious and versatile than the work of the original formalists.

SEE ALSO: Fiction, Mikhail Bakhtin, Novel Theory (20th Century).

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Foucault, Michel *see* Authorship

Frame

BRONWEN THOMAS

The term *frame* is used in a metaphorical sense when applied to the novel. It borrows from the idea of a frame to a painting and is primarily used to denote borders and levels within the narrative, or how the actions and words of the fictional characters are shaped and presented to the reader. In theory, therefore, the metaphor suggests that a novel has stable and clearly defined boundaries. It also intrinsically implies a clear dichotomy between "outer" and "inner" worlds. This is most clearly the case where the frame narrator's account of events is portrayed as objective, in contrast to the subjectivity of the inset narratives. The extent to which this framing is foregrounded and overt may vary considerably, but the device typically serves to remind readers that the story world is separate from their own and draws attention

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