

# Stanisław Brzozowski as Harbinger and Enabler of Modern Literary Theory in Poland and the West

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Michał Mrugalski

Since the 1970s, a great deal of effort has been invested into making Stanisław Brzozowski a key figure in Polish “continental” philosophy, on a par with his analytical contemporaries from the Lvov-Warsaw School.<sup>1</sup> This reassessment of the philosopher’s output entailed that Brzozowski, having ceased to be merely a speculative literary critic, gifted public speaker, and ideologist without a party, became a thinker in his own right and a patron saint<sup>2</sup> of contemporary Polish left-wing intellectuals. After the rise and fall of the Soviet Union—which, though not directly Karl Marx’s fault, did, nevertheless, shake faith in his infallibility—Brzozowski’s unfaithfulness to Marx, whom he abandoned after a four to

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- 1 Andrzej Walicki, *Stanisław Brzozowski and the Polish Beginnings of ‘Western Marxism’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Andrzej Mencwel, *Stanisław Brzozowski. Kształtowanie myśli krytycznej* [Stanisław Brzozowski. The formation of critical thought] (Warszawa: Czytelnik 1976); Andrzej Mencwel, *Stanisław Brzozowski. Postawa krytyczna. Wiek XX* [Stanisław Brzozowski. The critical attitude. The twentieth century] (Warszawa: Krytyka Polityczna, 2014).
- 2 Czesław Miłosz, *Człowiek wśród skorpionów. Studium o Stanisławie Brzozowskim* [A man among scorpions: A study on Stanisław Brzozowski] (Warszawa: Krytyka Polityczna, 2011), 212: “[...] prosty ksiądz, wychodząc z pokoju, gdzie odbywała się spowiedź, był czemuś wzruszony, miał łzy w oczach i podobno powiedział do obecnych: Mówcie się, tu umiera święty” (the simple priest, when leaving the room where the confession took place, was somehow touched, had tears in his eyes and allegedly said to those present: “Pray, there is a saint dying here”).

five year period of fascination,<sup>3</sup> stopped hindering the acknowledgement of his social and literary theory. His stylistic mannerisms also have become so alien to us that we no longer feel embarrassed for the author. Brzozowski's dissidence and, alas!, susceptibility to ridicule have made it difficult to assess his impact on the Polish humanities.

The measure of a philosopher in the eyes of the leftist intelligentsia ceased to be how far she goes along with the current interpretation of Marx. In pre-war Poland the Left either rejected Brzozowski altogether (Andrzej Stawar, Jerzy Borejsza, Ignacy Fik),<sup>4</sup> or, as in the case of young Wiktor Erlich, redeemed veneration for Brzozowski's literary criticism with condemnation of his unorthodox philosophy of culture.<sup>5</sup> While the liberal weekly magazine *Wiadomości Literackie* (Literary News) paid lip service to Brzozowski as a stand-in for democratic and modern Poland,<sup>6</sup> without embracing his or any other specific critical program, Brzozowski became the main source of inspiration for personalist-oriented critics such as Stanisław Adamczewski, Stefan Kołaczkowski, Kazimierz Wyka, Ludwik Fryde, and Józef Spytkowski.<sup>7</sup> With time, the personalist kind of literary criticism wore out, giving way to a less existentially engaged critical discourse shaped to a decisive degree by modern, text-and-structure-oriented professional literary theory. But this does not in the slightest mean that Brzozowski's legacy disappeared from literary criticism in the broad sense of the word, including also university-based literary studies, leaving him as the object of study exclusively by philosophers who came eventually to appreciate his intellectual self-government or, if you like, inconsequence. Brzozowski was and is still present in literary criticism, albeit mostly anonymously for reasons of a chiefly political nature (as well as those having to do with fashion and style).

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3 Andrzej Walicki, *Stanisław Brzozowski – drogi myśli* [Stanisław Brzozowski—paths of thought] (Kraków: Universitas, 2011), 142–151.

4 Ignacy Fik, *Rodowód społeczny literatury polskiej I* [The social genesis of Polish literature I] (Kraków: Czytelnik, 1938), 133–135; Marian Stępień, *Spór o spuściznę po Stanisławie Brzozowskim w latach 1918–1939* [The controversy about St. Brzozowski's legacy in the years 1918–1939] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1979), 17–36.

5 Wiktor Erlich, “Stanisław Brzozowski,” *Myśl Socjalistyczna* 11 (1937): quoted after <http://lewickow.pl/stanislaw-brzozowski/>; Wiktor Erlich, “Brzozowski a socjalizm” [Brzozowski and socialism], *Sygnały* 65 (1939).

6 Małgorzata Szpkowska, “*Wiadomości Literackie*” prawie dla wszystkich [“Literary news”: almost for everyone] (Warszawa: WAB, 2012), 262–265.

7 Stępień, *Spór o spuściznę po Stanisławie Brzozowskim*, 110–172.

The thesis, which I propose to discuss below, is that Brzozowski had prepared the ground for Polish literary studies in such a way that students of literature in the interwar period were able to adapt Russian Formalism and Czechoslovak Structuralism with less effort and more resourcefully. Moreover, owing to the ease and ingenuity of the reception, due in large measure to their knowledge of Brzozowski's output, the Polish Formalist-Structural School contributed importantly to modern literary theory, first and foremost by becoming a vital part of so-called Slavic Formalism which emerged in the 1930s. Thanks to Slavic Formalism vital elements of Brzozowski's literary criticism and philosophy entered into the global discourse of the postwar Humanities of which the center was the literary theoretical discourse (such that that the Humanities then and now are often called just "theory").

### **Brzozowski and Formalism: Marx avec Avenarius**

The extent to which Brzozowski enabled the new discourse demands careful reconstruction as his influence was systematically downplayed. He was regarded neither as a reliable Marxist, nor as someone who could be confined to the 'prison-house of language' (as Formalism is still regarded by those who have little idea of its historical nature). This is why it is hard to believe that he could have exerted any influence whatsoever on the works of the Polish representatives of the formal movement in 1930s who were mostly Communists (Dawid Hopensztand was a member of the Polish Communist Party as of 1933, Stefan Żólkiewski joined the party during the war; Wiktor Weintraub relates how Franciszek Siedlecki defended the Moscow show trials while on a scholarship in Paris).<sup>8</sup> Stanisław Brzozowski, a "Nationalist" and "Catholic," was no hero during the time of the impending clash of totalitarian regimes. And yet, I argue that Brzozowski played a prominent role not only in the emergence of modern literary theory in Poland in the 1930s, but also, due to the significance of Polish scholars (notably Manfred Kridl and, to a much greater degree, Wiktor/Victor Erlich) in the transfer of Eastern and Central European theory to the West.

That the importance of Brzozowski for the evolution of modern literary theory remains largely unknown by contemporary students of intellectual history is a circumstance explained by a fatal misunderstanding. An instance of that is also to be found in the first monograph of the Polish Formalist School. In Andrzej

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8 Wiktor Weintraub, "A Political Gloss to the History of the Polish Formalist Movement," in *Russian Formalism: A Retrospective Glance. A Festschrift in Honor of Victor Erlich*, ed. by Robert Louis Jackson, Stephen Rudy (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1985), 7.

Karcz's otherwise seminal work, Brzozowski is depicted not even as a literary critic, but as a “social thinker” focused on “the issues of ethics, patriotism, rebuilding the nation and various other social problems.” His postulates “often, if not always, recalled the methods of positivist literary criticism.”<sup>9</sup> Contrast this with Kazimierz Wyka's crackdown, as early as 1933,<sup>10</sup> on the persistent legend according to which Brzozowski was indifferent to aesthetic qualities of the literary work! Victor Erlich felt obliged, by the way, to dismiss a corresponding rumor on the part of Russian critics.<sup>11</sup>

Even if one disregards this legend, the question remains: How can Brzozowski, the ‘social thinker’, be regarded as an enabler of the Formalist-Structural approach, even if its champions stood up for social justice? The solution of the riddle lies perhaps in Waclaw Borowy’s claim from the late 1930s, which at first seems to speak against my thesis.<sup>12</sup> Borowy spoke for a considerable number of students of literature of his time when he claimed that the Russian Formalists had invented hardly any new tools or methods of literary studies; the elements of theory had been worked out earlier, mostly in German-speaking academia (Russian contemporaries of Borowy, Viktor Zhirmunskii, or Rozalia Shor were equally decisive in declaring the dependence of Russian Formalism on German invention as was Manfred Kridl).<sup>13</sup> What the Russians did invent, Borowy

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- 9 Andrzej Karcz, *The Polish Formalist School and Russian Formalism* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 37.
- 10 Kazimierz Wyka, “Brzozowskiego krytyka krytyki” [Brzozowski’s critique of criticism], in “*Kartografowie dziwnych podróży*”: wypisy z polskiej krytyki literackiej XX wieku, ed. Marta Wyka (Kraków: Universitas 2004), 47: “Nie spodziewał się, że sam stanie się materiałem legend jeszcze liczniejszych niż Młoda Polska. Jedną z nich, najdokuczliwszą, jest legenda o niewrażliwości estetycznej Brzozowskiego jako krytyka. Legenda, że nie miał on zupełnie zrozumienia dla sztuki samej w sobie, że istniała ona dlań tylko jako materiał do naświetleń społecznych bądź filozoficznych” (He did not expect to become the object of yet even more legends than “Young Poland.” One of these legends, the most annoying one, is about Brzozowski lacking aesthetic sensitivity in his critical writings. A legend saying that he did not understand art at all, that it existed for him only as a material for social or philosophical insights).
- 11 Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History—Doctrine* (Hague: Mouton, 1965), 19f.
- 12 Waclaw Borowy, “Szkoła krytyków” [The school of critics], in *Studia i szkice literackie*, ed. Zofia Stefanowska and Andrzej Paluchowski (Warszawa, PIW, 1983).
- 13 Viktor Zhirmunskii, “Vokrug ‘Poëtiki’ OPOIaZa” [Around the “Poëtika” collections of OPOIaZ], *Zhizn’ iskusstva* 12 (1919). <http://www.opojaz.ru/zhirmunsky/vokrug.html>; Viktor Zhirmunskii, “K voprosu o formal’nom metode” [On the question of the formal method], in Oskar Walzel, *Problema formy v poëzii* [The problem of form in po-

claims, was, first, a specific arrangement of those methods; second, the Formalists adopted a completely new attitude to literary studies that marked the direction and specific style of their investigations. In their works they prescind from evaluating literary phenomena according to extra-literary factors and attempt to create value-free literary studies. This was truly a revolution, especially in Slavic countries where literature had been more often than not entangled in issues of social life by virtue of being a compensation for various deficits.<sup>14</sup> It was also a seemingly deadly blow to a critic like the Fichtean Brzozowski who, having devoured the Russian *raznochintsy* and *narodniki*, made “morals” or “morality” the pillar and club of literary criticism. Nevertheless, in his writings there were a great number of elements of importance for modern scholars less openly but perhaps equally engaged in answering the social questions.

Brzozowski was in no way the one who could instill such a value-free attitude into the Polish Formalists. Yet his role in the emergence of modern Polish literary theory cannot be reduced to that of a purveyor of tools as in the case of the international (mostly German and Polish) forerunners of Russian Formalism. Not only are there intersections between the sets of properties associated with Brzozowski’s and Formalist-Structuralism’s poetics, but equally Brzozowski’s aesthetics, first and foremost his attempt to constitute a theory of the novel, promises a solution to the pivotal problem of the Polish Formalist movement, which was both politically engaged and focused on detecting the literariness of literary works. The Polish formalists adopted namely Brzozowski’s ideal of welding social interest and *aesthesia* as well as his program for carrying out the task by merging “Marx’s theory of the development of humanity” with Richard Avenarius’s “descriptive and formal” method of Empirio-criticism “that was

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etry] (Leningrad: Academia, 1923), <http://www.opojaz.ru/walzel/preface.html>; Rozalia Shor, “‘Formal’nyi metod’ na zapade. Shkola Zeiferta i ‘ritoricheskoe’ napravlenie” [The formal method in the West], *Ars Poetica* 1 (1927), 127–143, <http://www.sdvigpress.org/pub-100150>; Manfred Kridl, “Poetyka Žirmunkiego” [Zhirmunkii’s Poetics], *Wiadomości Literackie* 19 (546) 1934: 4.

14 Chernyshevskii relates the all-encompassing character of literature in Russia (of which the Kingdom of Poland was a part) to the backwardness of the Russian economy and the ensuing lack of the division of labor: Whereas a British writer can write fiction and only fiction, leaving politics and, say, sport to specialists in their respective fields, a Slavic novelist has to be a philosopher, an activist, etc. See Nikolai Chernyshevskii, “Ocherki gogolevskogo perioda russkoi literatury” [Sketches on the Gogolian period in Russian literature], in vol. 3 of *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moskva: Goslitizdat, 1947), 303–306.

developed in such a monumental way with regard to forms of cognition.”<sup>15</sup> I will argue that Brzozowski’s “regulative idea” (regulatyw)<sup>16</sup> of fusing Avenarius and Marx was in harmony with the assumed goal of interwar Formalist-Structuralist research. It is one of many paradoxes involving Brzozowski: the same features of Brzozowski’s philosophy that caused the Polish Formalists to leave unsaid the impulses they shared with or had obtained from him, made him indispensable to fulfill their ambitions to combine Marxism with an advanced aesthetic analysis. It is as if Brzozowski, by exceeding both Marxism and Formalism, had been all too successful in specifying the task for modern literary critics for which reason he had to be officially ignored by the Marxists and Formalists alike.

### **The Morality of the Estrangement Device**

Brzozowski formulated the concepts that are most akin to Formalist premises in his 1905 study on Żeromski,<sup>17</sup> who was committed, remarkably, to questions of morality and mores. Even had they been suppressed, with such forerunners as Brzozowski and Żeromski, value-free Formalism could not be *that* cynical, and seemed bound to look for ways of combining aesthetics with critical social philosophy. The preoccupation with moral and social issues was passed on by Polish intermediaries to the West as an intrinsic quality of the Formalist-Structural school or at least as a signpost pointing in the direction in which post-Formalist literary theory should develop. But the signpost pointed as well to the past. The Brzozowski-Żeromski complex of Slavic Formalism brings to light certain moral qualities characteristic of Russian Formalism—even in its earliest, militant and nihilist, phase. When Shklovskii introduced his famous technique of “estrangement” (defamiliarization), he used as an example Lev Tolstoy’s description of whipping as corporal punishment. Shklovskii comments on his own example: “Please excuse my somewhat ponderous example, but it is typical of how Tolstoy appeals to conscience. A plain whipping was estranged both by description and a proposal to change its form without changing its substance.”<sup>18</sup> The point of resorting to the device of estrangement is, then, to appeal to conscience in a way analogous to Żeromski’s recourse to all possible poetical devices in order to tear open the Polish wound so that it would not be scarred by a

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15 Brzozowski, *Współczesna powieść i krytyka*, 64.

16 Ibid.

17 Stanisław Brzozowski, *O Stefanie Żeromskim. Studyum* [On Stefan Żeromski: a study] (Warszawa: Centnerszwer i Ska, 1905).

18 Viktor Shklovskii, “Iskusstvo kak priem” [Art as device], in *O teorii prozy* (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1929), 14.

layer of baseness.<sup>19</sup> Consent to evil stems from becoming accustomed to evil, which therefore has to be estranged. Equating evil and routine found expression already in the most influential work in Polish literary history—Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady III* (Forefathers' Eve III)—which begins with the hero's gnostic<sup>20</sup> grieving over the slumber of indifference veiling humanity—“nie dziwi słońca dziwna, lecz codzienna głowa”<sup>21</sup>—and ends with a comparison: those among my Russian friends who object to my message of freedom resemble a dog so used to his collar that he bites the hand trying to set it free.<sup>22</sup> Brzozowski's fascination with Polish romanticism<sup>23</sup> must have made him very sensitive to the sinister power of habit. Pitting poetry against habit, which overpowers the liveliness of life, was of course also a legacy of German and British romanticism. This romantic tradition—claim Omry Ronen and Ilona Svetlikova in unison—had a direct impact on Russian formalism in general and the concept of estrangement in particular. For example, in some of his formulations Shklovskii repeated entire phrases from Shelley's “A Defence of Poetry,” which had been translated by Konstantin Bal'mont in 1911.<sup>24</sup>

In his 1905 booklet *O Stefanie Żeromskim. Studyum* (*On Stefan Żeromski: A Study*) Brzozowski eloquently defended the principle of estrangement or defamiliarisation as central to moral and aesthetic experience(s): “His mystery is

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19 Stefan Żeromski, *Sulkowski. Tragedia* [Sulkowski: a tragedy] (Kraków: Książka), 145.

20 Stanisław Pieróg, “Mistyka i gnoza w myśli filozoficznej polskiego romantyzmu (Mickiewicz, Trentowski i Libelt)” [Mysticism and gnosticism in the philosophy of Polish romanticism (Mickiewicz, Trentowski, and Libelt)]. <https://www.filozofiapolska.pl/spory/files/mistyka-i-gnoza.pdf>

21 Adam Mickiewicz, vol. 3 of *Dzieła* [Works], ed. Julian Krzyżanowski et al. (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1955), 129: “No one is struck by the sun's strange, and yet daily head.”

22 Mickiewicz, *Dzieła*, 308. Maria Janion claims that the recurring Polish uprisings (1830 and 1863 against Russia, 1846/48 against Prussia and Austria) aimed principally to wake the nation from its habituation to bondage. This aim was more important than victory, in which the leaders nevertheless believed. Maria Janion, “Vorwort” [Foreword], in *Polnische Romantik – Ein literarisches Lesebuch*, ed. Hans Peter Hoel scher-Obermaier (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 10.

23 Stanisław Brzozowski, “Filozofia romantyzmu polskiego” [The philosophy of Polish romanticism], *Kultura i życie*; Brzozowski, *Głosy wśród nocy*.

24 Omri Ronen, *Serebrianyi vek kak umysel i vymysel* [The fallacy of the Silver Age] (Moskva: OGI, 2000), 127f. Ilona Svetlikova, *Istoki russkogo formalizma. Traditsii psichologizma i formal'naia shkola* [The origins of Russian formalism: the traditions of psychologism and the formal school] (Moskva: NLO, 2005), 75–77, 81f.

mysteriousness itself”—Brzozowski writes of Żeromski.<sup>25</sup> This mysteriousness of Żeromski’s person and world is a function of form, because form means—according to the study on the contemporary Polish novel published a year later—finding a right perspective on the experience of the world:

Świat ten [świat Żeromskiego] wydaje się nam głęboko znany, ale jakąś dziwną, niedostępną świadomości i odmienną od niej wiedzą [...] gdy dostrzegamy jakąś dobrze nam znaną rzecz, drzewo, krajobraz ze strony całkowicie nam obcej, i gdy nagle zdajemy sobie sprawę, żeśmy rzeczy tej nigdy nie widzieli, że oto teraz dopiero ujawniła się nam jej treść istotna, którą pełni nienasytnego zdumienia chłoniemy jak gdyby innym, niecodziennym, głębszym, przenikliwym wzrokiem.<sup>26</sup>

This world [i.e., Żeromski’s] seems to us to be profoundly familiar, but familiar to some strange, inaccessible consciousness and to a knowledge distinct from this consciousness [...]. It is as if we notice a thing familiar to us—a tree, a landscape—from a perspective completely alien to us and realize that we have never seen the thing before, that only just now its essential content has been revealed to us, a content which we, full of insatiable amazement, absorb with a somewhat different, out of ordinary, keen sight.

Much like Shklovskii quoting Tolstoy, who could not remember whether or not he had mindlessly dusted a sofa and in whose morality Shklovskii was more interested than the history of ideas has been willing to admit, Brzozowski claims eleven years earlier than Shklovskii that defamiliarization is the only adequate moral and artistic reaction to the life we live in forgetfulness and mechanically.

Brzozowski’s description of estrangement may be perceived as an attempt to fuse the social dimension, so dear to him and his hero Żeromski, with Avenarius’s philosophy of experience. Shklovskii’s principle of estrangement is apparently dependent on Avenarius’s philosophy in that it simply inverts the Empirio-criticist or, more generally, post-Kantian,<sup>27</sup> basic principle of austere economy in

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25 Brzozowski, *O Stefanie Żeromskim*, 8: “... zagadką jego jest właśnie zagadkowość sama.” Cf. 29.

26 Brzozowski, *O Stefanie Żeromskim*, 9.

27 This was at least the way in which the Kantian aesthetical legacy was perceived at the time when Brzozowski’s ideas emerged: Cf. Witold Barewicz, “[Recenzja:] Les Problèmes de l’Esthétique Contemporaine par M. Guyau. – Paris: F. Alcan, 1904” *Pa-miętnik Literacki* 4 (1905): 110: “Dlatego zapatrywania ewolucjonistów, jak H. Spencer, Grant Allena i Groosa, którzy wznowili teorię Kanta i Schillera, że sztuka niczym innym jest jak igraszką niezajętej energii wyższych władz umysłowych człowieka, musiały w nim [Guyau] wywołać pewnego rodzaju oburzenie” (This is why

aesthetics. Whereas in Avenarius's theory of apperception pleasure stems from economizing energy and displeasure from an experience of something new, strange, unusual,<sup>28</sup> which forces the apparatus to exceptional activity, Shklovskii makes aesthetic appreciation proportional to the time needed to acquaint oneself with the estranged object, so that the quality of being new acquires the value of pleasure-giving. Whereas in Avenarius's habit, *Gewohnheit*, steers everything—the choice of the object, the construction of its 'idea', acts of will, movements<sup>29</sup>—Shklovskii, following the Romantics, sets art against its worst enemy, habit. In retrospect, the passages from Avenarius's *Philosophie als Denken der Welt gemäss dem Princip des kleinsten Kraftmasses. Prolegomena zu einer Kritik der reinen Erfahrung* (1876, Philosophy as Thinking of the World According to the Principle of the Smallest Expenditure of Effort: Prolegomena to a Critique of Pure Experience) appear to defy the Formalist-Futurist theory of art based on the principle of estrangement:

Ich glaube kaum, dass Jemand die Vorstellung "Ungewohntes" denkt, ohne einen wenn auch noch so leisen Anklang von Unlust in sich zu fühlen; jedenfalls fühlte er diese Unlust, wenn er Ungewohntes wirklich denken soll. Einfach, weil Ungewohntes denken ein ungewohntes Denken, d. h. ein das Gewohnheitsmass überschreitendes Denken ist. Eine jede Vorstellung, welche nicht in dem System unserer bereits erworbenen, unter sich fest verbundenen Vorstellungen enthalten ist [...] lässt uns deutlich die Scheu oder Abneigung der Seele vor dem Ungewohnten empfinden, vor dem Zwang, neben dem Alten ein Neues zu denken. Ein solches Denken, eine solche Vorstellung ist uns "unbequem" und wir reagieren darauf mit Unlust.<sup>30</sup>

I do not believe that anyone is capable of thinking of the idea of "unusual" without feeling the slightest touch of reluctance; as a matter of fact, he would feel this reluctance if he would actually think the uncommon. This is simply because thinking the uncommon is uncommon thinking, i.e., thinking that exceeds the limits of the usual. Every representation, which is not yet a part of our already acquired representations [...] lets us clearly feel our soul's awe or dislike with reference to the uncommon, with reference to the constraint

the approach of the evolutionists—like H. Spencer, Grant Allen, and Groos, who revived Kant's and Schiller's theory that art is but a play of free energy pertaining to the higher mental faculties of man—must have incensed Guyau to a degree).

28 Richard Avenarius, *Philosophie als Denken der Welt gemäss dem Princip des kleinsten Kraftmasses. Prolegomena zu einer Kritik der reinen Erfahrung* (Leipzig: Fues, 1876), § 7.

29 Avenarius, *Philosophie als Denken*, § 714.

30 Ibid., § 18, 8f.

to think something new apart from the old. This kind of thinking, this kind of representation, is disagreeable to us and we react to it with reluctance.

Empirio-criticism, as the latest vogue of Positivism that presented itself as an heir to Kantianism (“Kritik der reinen Erfahrung...”), was the proper other (one of the most proper others, taking into consideration the complexity of the intellectual field at the time), against which Formalism could define its stance—not only with regard to defamiliarization but also literary history. By literary history I mean both the autonomous development of literary devices as well as its interplay with the institutional framework. On the basis of Aleksandr Bogdanov’s philosophy of “living experience” (живой опыт), which combined Avenarius’s pure experience with an anti-determinist understanding of Marxism,<sup>31</sup> a version of literary history could have been developed that would have been strikingly similar to the concept of literary criticism Brzozowski upheld at the time he was a Marxian philosopher of life and experience and wrote his books on Żeromski, the Polish novel, and literary criticism in Poland.

### **Brzozowski’s Ideas between East and West**

It is an already established opinion that the social and in particular historical approach to literature was at the center of Russian Formalism, which, even before Shklovskii undertook what Jakobson called “defeatist attempts at a compromise with vulgar sociologism,”<sup>32</sup> produced such classical studies as Tynianov’s “Literary Fact,” “Literary Evolution,” “Archaists and Innovators,” Tynianov’s and Jakobson’s “Problems of the Study of Literature and Language,” Éikhenebaum’s “Literature and Literary Environment,” “My Diary,” and Shklovskii’s

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31 Aleksandr Bogdanov, *Filosofija zhivogo opyta. Populiarnye ocherki. Materializm, empiriokrititsizm, dialekticheskii materializm, empiromonizm, nauka budushchego* [The Philosophy of living experience. Popular sketches. Materialism, empirio-criticism, the science of future] (Sankt-Peterburg: Pechatnyi trud, 1912).

32 Quoted in: Aleksandr Galushkin, “I tak, stavshi na kostiakh, budem trubit’ sbor... K istorii nesostoiavshegosia vozrozhdeniya Opoiaza v 1928–1930 gg.” [Stepping on bones, we will call the roll... On the history of the failed revival of Opoiaz in 1928–1930], *NLO* 44 (2000), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2000/44/galush.html>; Jakobson refers to Shklovskii’s works *Material i stil’ v romane L’va Tolstogo “Vojna i mir”* [Material and style in Lev Tolstoy’s novel “War and Peace”], *Matvei Komarov, zhitel’ goroda Moskvy* [Matvei Komarov, inhabitant of Moscow].

“In Defense of the Sociological Method.”<sup>33</sup> Many Formalists got involved politically, Shklovskii and Brik being central figures of “Levyi Front Iskusstv” (Left Front of the Arts) where they met the leading critics who adhered to Aleksandr Bogdanov’s “Proletkul’t” that was rooted in the idea of fusing Marxism with Empiro-criticism. On the other hand, Jakobson and Nikolai Trubetzkoy enthused over the Eurasian Ideology, which was also a kind of political commitment.<sup>34</sup>

In Russia, the founder of “Proletkul’t,” Aleksandr Bogdanov and his fellow traveler Anatolii Lunacharskii, the first Soviet People’s Commissar of Education, campaigned for combining Marxism with Empiro-criticism. (While reading Lunacharskii’s 1924 pamphlet on Formalism in which he criticized Formalism’s sterile analyses in the name of emotional intensity charging them with the bourgeois mentality of a spectator,<sup>35</sup> one can imagine how Brzozowski’s protest against the one-sidedness of early Formalism would have looked, had he been alive at the time of the Formalist surge. It was usual for Brzozowski to lay the charge of the spectator mentality.)<sup>36</sup> Andrzej Walicki has described in detail Bogdanov’s and Lunacharskii’s personal acquaintance and intellectual ex-

33 English titles after William Mills Todd, III, “Literature as an Institution. Fragments of a Formalist Theory,” in *Russian Formalism: A Retrospective Glance*, 16. Cf. also Liah Greenfeld, “Russian Formalist Sociology of Literature: A Sociologist’s Perspective,” *Slavic Review* 46 (1987).

34 Nikolaj Trubetzkoy, *Russland, Europa, Eurasien. Ausgewählte Schriften zur Kulturwissenschaft* [Russia, Europe, Eurasia: selected writings on cultural studies], ed. Heinz Miklas (Wien: ÖAW, 2005), Roman Jakobson, *Formalistická škola a dnešní literární věda ruská* [The Formal School and contemporary Russian literary criticism], ed. Tomáš Glanc (Brno: Academia, 2005), 122f. and passim; Tomáš Glanc, “Structuralism Forever / Jakobson 1935,” in *Prague Structuralism. Methodological Fundamentals*, ed. Marek Nekula (Heidelberg: Winter, 2003). Roman Jakobson and Petr Šavitskii, *Evraziia v svete iazykoznaniiia* [Eurasia in the light of linguistics] (Praha: Izdanie Evraziitsev, 1931).

35 I am using a German translation of “Formalizm v nauke o iskusstve” (Formalism in art criticism): Anatolii Lunačarskij, “Der Formalismus in der Kunsthissenschaft” [Formalism in art history], in *Marxismus und Formalismus. Dokumente einer literaturtheoretischen Kontroverse*, ed. Hans Günther and Karla Hielscher (München: Hanser, 1973).

36 Cf. Michał Mrugalski, “Vers une stylistique de l’acte. La querelle de Karol Irzykowski et Stanisław Brzozowski à propos du *Trésor* de Leopold Staff dans le contexte des philosophies polonaise et allemande,” trans. Katia Vandenborre, *Slavistica Bruxellensis* 11 (2015). <http://slavica.revues.org/1715>

changes with Stanisław Brzozowski, whom they met in Florence.<sup>37</sup> Contrary to Lenin, who argued in his famous book that materialism and Empirio-criticism are incompatible, a consideration of the role of Empirio-criticism for the Formalist aesthetics demonstrates not the incompatibility of Marxism and Empirio-criticism, but of Formalism and Phenomenology. Roman Jakobson hoped to merge the two mismatched traditions in what was later called “phenomenological Structuralism.”<sup>38</sup> In his last letter to Jakobson, written in 1941, the Polish Formalist-Structuralist Franciszek Siedlecki, terminally ill and stranded in occupied Warsaw, warns Jakobson against Phenomenology and envisions a salvation of the OPOIAZ legacy by means of establishing a new union of “materialism” and “Empirio-criticism.”<sup>39</sup> Uniting Marxism and Empirio-criticism, i.e., Materialism with a positivist, anti-metaphysical philosophy of experience, was exactly the program Brzozowski laid down in 1906 to study the succession of artistic forms without falling into the soulless “mechanicism” characteristic of Ferdinand Brunetière’s notion of literary evolution.

Siedlecki’s message did not reach Western academia, as his letter was published only in Polish in 1966. But two Polish literary critics managed to escape Poland and settle in the USA, Manfred Kridl and Victor Erlich. Although the age difference between them was thirty-two years, they were both under the compar-

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37 Andrzej Walicki, “Stanisław Brzozowski i rosyjscy ‘neomarkiści’ początku XX wieku” [Stanisław Brzozowski and the Russian “neo-Marxists” at the beginning of the twentieth century], *Wokół myśli Stanisława Brzozowskiego*, ed. Andrzej Walicki, Roman Zimand (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1974), Walicki, *Stanisław Brzozowski. Drogi myśli*, 101–108.

38 Cf. Elmar Holenstein, *Roman Jakobsons phänomenologischer Strukturalismus* [Roman Jakobson’s phenomenological structuralism] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975); the most important contribution to the topic, in my opinion, is Dieter Münch, “Roman Jakobson und die Tradition der neuaristotelischen Phänomenologie” [Roman Jakobson and the tradition of neo-aristotelian phenomenology], *Prague Structuralism. Methodological Fundaments*, ed. Marek Nekula (Heidelberg: Winter, 2003).

39 Roman Jakobson, “List badacza polskiego” [A letter from a Polish researcher], in *Literatura, komparatystyka, folklor. Księga poświęcona Julianowi Krzyżanowskiemu*, ed. Maria Bokszczanin, Stanisław Frybes, Edmund Jankowski (Warszawa: PIW, 1968), 664–674 (first publication in *Kultura i społeczeństwo*, 9, 1, 1965, 13–21). The passage from the letter is so intricate that it may mean the opposite of what I said. Siedlecki may have meant that Phenomenology was in his day what Empiro-criticism had been in Lenin’s day: an unacceptable idealistic stance. Either way, the relationship between Marxism and Empirio-criticism was still an urgent problem for the Polish scholar in the 1940s.

atively strong influence of Brzozowski's philosophy of culture and literary criticism. Their reception of Slavic Formalism, in its Russian and Czech varieties, had been preceded and most likely prepared by their intensive preoccupation with Brzozowski, in advance of becoming propagators of modern Eastern and Central European literary theory in the USA and Western Europe.

The position and age of Manfred Kridl, professor of Polish Literature in Vilnius,<sup>40</sup> predestined him to become a central figure of the Polish Formalist movement, in that he gathered a group of gifted youths from Vilnius, Warsaw (the aforementioned Siedlecki, Hopensztand, Żółkiewski, Budzyk), and Poznań around him. Kridl assimilated a large part of Russian Formalism's output into his "integral method" that consisted in combining, *in nuce*, a phenomenological theory of fictionality as a hallmark of literariness with the Formalist dynamic approach to aesthetics.<sup>41</sup> The "integral" method also took into consideration the social aspects of literature, although these were to be dealt with from a specifically literary perspective. As far as I know, Kridl was the first writer to inform American audiences in 1944 of the main features of Russian Formalism.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, Kridl's interest in the Russian formalist approach dates back no earlier than the mid-1930s, whereas, already a decade and a half earlier, he had written about Brzozowski in a spirit presaging the theses of his "integral method." First of all, he did not fall prey to the "legend" of Brzozowski's hostility toward aesthetic values. No *horror litterarum* in the author of *Współczesna powieść w Polsce*. On the contrary, Brzozowski strived, driven by "the love of art," to "substantiate art's value, to interlock art with the totality of life, to make it a self-

40 Teresa Dalecka, *Dzieje polonistyki wileńskiej 1919–1939* [The history of Polish studies in Vilnius] (Kraków: Societas Vistulana, 2003), 75–101; *Tradycje polskiej nauki o literaturze: Warszawskie Koło Polonistów po 70 latach* [The traditions of Polish literary studies: The Warsaw circle of Polonists 70 years later], ed. Marcin Adamiak and Danuta Ulicka (Warszawa: Wydział Polonistyki UW, 2008); Adam Kola, "Zwrot dokonany niedopełniony. Z dziejów nowoczesnego literaturoznanstwa polskiego okresu międzywojennego" [The turn accomplished not-fulfilled: The history of modern Polish literary studies in the interwar Period], in "Zwroty" badawcze w humanistyce. *Konteksty poznawcze, kulturowe i społeczno-instytucjonalne*, ed. Jacek Kowalewski, Wojciech Piasek (Olsztyn: Colloquia Humaniorum, 2010).

41 Manfred Kridl, *Wstęp do badań nad dziełem literackim* [Introduction to the study of the literary work] (Wilno: Dom Książki Polskiej, 1936), 44–46, 57–63, 151–152, 181–186.

42 Manfred Kridl, "Russian Formalism," *The American Bookman. A Quarterly of Criticism and Theory of the Public Arts* 1 (1944).

aware organ of life.”<sup>43</sup> These words may be read as a lofty pre-formulation of the “integral method”: To avoid the restrictions the early Russian Formalists imposed on themselves to concentrate solely on the relationships between forms and devices, on the one hand, and the aesthesis, on the other. The scope of literary studies needs to be expanded without forgetting, however, that the aesthetic lies at the core of the discipline. Kridl therefore adhered to the program Brzozowski set down in his book on the Polish novel and in return became something of a Brzozowski expert in the eyes of the liberal intelligentsia. I have already mentioned that the weekly *Wiadomości Literackie*—a liberal magazine attracting the attention of the younger generation of literary scholars equally drawn to Kridl<sup>44</sup>—often referred to Brzozowski’s legacy in order to legitimize its progressive stance. When Bogdan Suchodolski’s<sup>45</sup> seminal work, *Stanisław Brzozowski. Rozwój ideologii* (Stanisław Brzozowski: The development of an ideology), appeared in 1933, *Wiadomości Literackie* asked none other than Manfred Kridl to write a review.<sup>46</sup>

By enlarging Formalism so that it became (a crucial part of) the integral method, Kridl followed the example of the critic who, according to Stanisław

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43 Manfred Kridl, *Krytyka i krytycy* [Criticism and critics] (Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff, 1923), 81: “Z tego ukochania [sztuki, M. M.] właśnie płynęła [Brzozowskiego, M. M.] dąźń do uzasadnienia jej wartości, do związania jej z całokształtem życia, uczynienia świadomym siebie organem życia.”

44 Only 5 out of altogether 27 works that the leading figure of Polish Structuralism Franciszek Siedlecki published during his lifetime and that were eventually republished in *Pisma zebrane* (Warszawa: PIW, 1989) were not published in *Wiadomości Literackie* or *Skamander*, two press organs of the Skamander Group.

45 Another platform where the young Warsaw literary scholars could immerse themselves in Stanisław Brzozowski’s methodological thought was the interdisciplinary Circle of Science Studies (Koło Naukoznawcze), which met in Warsaw as of 1928. Although the leading thinkers of the Circle of Science Studies were connected to the so-called Lvov-Warsaw School (Jan Łukasiewicz, Stanisław Ossowski, Maria Ossowska, marginally Tadeusz Kotarbiński), Suchodolski held a lecture on the role of the notion of science in Stanisław Brzozowski’s development as a thinker; a summary of the lecture and the subsequent discussions were published in a magazine closely connected to the Circle, cf. Bogdan Suchodolski, “Rola pojęcia nauki w rozwoju myśli Stanisława Brzozowskiego (streszczenie referatu)” [The role of the notion of science in the development of Stanisław Brzozowski’s thought (abstract of a paper)], *Nauka Polska. Jej Potrzeby, Organizacja i Rozwój* 19 (1934).

46 Manfred Kridl, “Książka o Brzozowskim” [A book on Brzozowski], *Wiadomości Literackie* 8 (1934).

Baczyński, “attacked the narrow-mindedness that ensued from the art for the art’s sake ideology, because he saw in it a separation from the most important issues of the time and the artist’s most exciting experiences.”<sup>47</sup> In this spirit Kridl worked on a model in which art acquired the substantiality of the social, while, as fictional, the autonomous area of *Dichtung* conversely became a laboratory where social forms were only scrutinized and modeled as forms. The art for art’s sake ideology, at least in its Polish variety, did not strive for the autonomy of art, but for its subjugation to a vague Platonism; Brzozowski waged his anti-Miriam campaign against subsuming art under something as unchangeable as the Platonic Idea. Instead, art has to have a substantive basis in the dynamic realm of social activity.<sup>48</sup>

In contrast to the somewhat obscure Manfred Kridl, who, although named to a professorship at Columbia University, never achieved the standing that he had enjoyed in pre-war Poland, Victor Erlich is, next to Roman Jakobson and René Wellek, the most important figure in the transition of Slavic Formalism for the West. Erlich’s biography is contained in his memoirs.<sup>49</sup> He was born in 1914 in Petrograd to a Jewish family with strong intellectual traditions: his grandfather was the legendary Jewish historian Simon Dubnov; his mother wrote Russian poetry which was praised, among others, by the Russian poet Kornei Chukovskii; and his father was a leader of the Jewish “Bund,” first in Russia and then in Poland where the family moved to soon after the outbreak of the October Revolution. At the start of World War Two, Victor escaped the Germans through Lithuania, Russia, Japan, and Canada, and landed in the U.S. Army fighting in Germany. After the war, he wrote a dissertation at Columbia on Russian Formalism which was inspired by, and mostly devoted to Roman Jakobson. It be-

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47 I quote after Stępień, *Spór o spuściznę po Stanisławie Brzozowskim*, 51: “Brzozowski atakował ciasność horyzontów, wynikającą z hasła ‘sztuki czystej,’ widząc w niej odseparowanie się od najważniejszych zagadnień czasu i najbardziej emocjonujących artystę przeżyć.” The narrow-mindedness of the art for art’s sake approach will be further criticized by Jakobson.

48 Czepiel [Stanisław Brzozowski], “Scherz, Ironie und tiefere Bedeutung [fragmente]” [Comedy, irony, and deeper meaning (fragments)], “W odpowiedzi na protest” [Responding to a protest], “Miriam – zagadnienie kultury [fragmente]” [Miriam—the problem of culture (fragments)], in *Programy i dyskusje literackie okresu Młodej Polski*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 2000). This is supposed to be a more brutal version of the press campaign in comparison to the one republished later with alterations in Brzozowski’s *Kultura i życie*.

49 Victor Erlich, *Child of a Turbulent Century* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2006).

came the first and probably the most influential monograph of the movement. All subsequent major contributions had to take into account Erlich's work: Peter Steiner, who wrote his *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics* in Yale where Erlich taught, Krystyna Pomorska, and Aage A. Hansen-Löve, all had to take a stance on Erlich's *Russian Formalism: History—Doctrine*.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the fact that Erlich did not hold Kridl in high esteem as a person (he once recounted how, during the defense of his dissertation on Formalism, Lionel Trilling "took a brief nap while Manfred Kridl, professor of Polish literature, spoke at inordinate length"),<sup>51</sup> he made Kridl's "integral method" pivotal for the acceptance of Russian Formalism in the West. Not only did Kridl become the main hero of the chapter of *Russian Formalism* devoted to the redefinition of Formalism in Poland, Erlich also included his ideas (along with those of other members of the Vilnius-Warsaw School) in his systematic reconstruction of the Formalist output. Needless to say, Erlich described the reformulations of Russian Formalism in Czechoslovakia and Poland as having transformed the initial Russian impulse into the most mature approach to the literary to date.

Erlich follows Kridl when he speaks about the inadequacy of the Formalist's initial premises and expresses dissatisfaction with their "last-minute attempt to combine rigorous formal analysis with some hasty sociologizing."<sup>52</sup> The Warsaw Formalists, it will be remembered, promised that they would find a blueprint for a more rigorous and revealing combination of aesthetic analysis with sociology in accordance with Brzozowski's idea of uniting Marxism, as a theory of collective creativity, with Empirio-criticism's theory of experience. In numerous passages of his *Russian Formalism* Erlich shows his aversion to Viktor Shklovskii's extravagances. Thus he does not accept Shklovskii's claim that a new form appears not in order to express a new content, but in order to replace an earlier, worn-out form. This aversion was instilled into Erlich not exclusively by Roman Jakobson,<sup>53</sup> but also by his own early preoccupation with Brzozowski's attempt at substantiating the value of artistic forms. Granting that Erlich, the author of *Russian Formalism* was under the nearly hypnotic influence of Jakobson and

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50 Krystyna Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory and Its Poetic Ambience* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), 39. Aage A. Hansen-Löve, *Der russische Formalismus. Methodologische Rekonstruktion seiner Entwicklung aus dem Prinzip der Verfremdung* [Russian Formalism: A methodological reconstruction of its development out of the principle of estrangement] (Wien, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1978); Peter Steiner, *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics* (Lausanne: sdvig, 2014), 25–29.

51 Erlich, *Child of a Turbulent Century*, 135.

52 Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, 130.

53 Erlich, *Child of a Turbulent Century*, 133

took for granted some of Jakobson's most controversial appraisals (above all regarding the indigenous character of Russian Formalism and the formative role of Husserl's Phenomenology on structural linguistics),<sup>54</sup> one gets the impression that Brzozowski's aesthetic philosophy of collective and creative work, about which Erlich enthused in his Polish years, found its prolongation not only in Erlich's sympathy toward the integrity of Western Slavic Formalism, but also in his later development. In the years after *Russian Formalism*, he began to shift or expand<sup>55</sup> his interests in the direction which he himself described with Stanisław Barańczak's phrase "Poetics and Ethics."<sup>56</sup> Barańczak, for his part, was a brilliant representative of Polish Structuralism, before he moved to Harvard. It had been Brzozowski's program for literary criticism to make morality and form two focal points of the great ellipse. Thanks to Erlich's early preoccupation with Brzozowski, he was susceptible to Jakobson's notion of Slavic Structuralism and he came to treat structures ever more in ethical and sociological terms.

### Brzozowski's Social Kantianism and Slavic Structuralism

Victor Erlich left Poland as an ardent follower of Brzozowski's literary criticism—as ardent as his Marxist creed allowed him to be. He devoted his Master's thesis defended in 1937 at the Wolna Wszechnica Polska in Warsaw to Brzozowski, the more liberal of the two universities in Warsaw at the time. In two magazine articles concerned with Brzozowski, the second of which marked symbolically the end of an era as it appeared in Spring 1939 in the Lvov based *Sygnaly* (Signals) magazine,<sup>57</sup> Erlich struggled to defend the substance of Brzozowski's literary criticism while at the same time condemning his 'nationalist' political positions and mysticism that obscured his general philosophy of culture. (In *Russian Formalism* Erlich mentions neither Brzozowski nor his own Polish publications.) One may say that he had the same problem with Brzozowski as the Warsaw Formalists who could not simply set aside Brzozowski's program for literary criticism, but were not willing to follow him in his unorthodox Marxism and his later turn to Catholicism. This struggle was formative for Erlich, impacting his vision of Formalism, because while he was still in Warsaw,

54 Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, 58, 62.

55 Which is discernable already in the "Foreword to the Second Edition," in Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, 7: "still more critical than I was a decade ago of the excesses of 'pure' Formalism."

56 Erlich, *Child of a Turbulent Century*, 161.

57 Wiktor Erlich, "Stanisław Brzozowski," *Myśl Socjalistyczna* 11 (1937); Erlich, "Brzozowski a socjalizm."

he made contact with Russian Formalism. The pages in *Russian Formalism* devoted to the Polish Formal School that consisted of Manfred Kridl's Vilnius Group and the Warsaw Circle are concise and scholarly. At the beginning of the monograph, Erlich mentions *en passant* his original idea for a book describing the entire spectrum of Slavic Formalism (Structuralism) and subsequently the need to narrow the scope of the material so that only those aspects of Prague and Polish Structuralism are covered which had a direct correspondence with the Russian School.<sup>58</sup> Erlich's memoirs give, alternatively, a livelier picture of the Warsaw group:

Already back in Warsaw I began to move away from the Marxian approach to literature in search of what a New Critic would call a more “intrinsic” perspective on imaginative literature.

Note that it was a period when he dealt predominantly with Brzozowski:

[...] sometime in 1937 I attended a couple of meetings of the vital Polish Literary Club at the University of Warsaw, which was demonstratively drawn to structural analysis of verse and of artistic prose. I was especially impressed by the brilliant young scholar of versification Franciszek Siedlecki, author of the innovative *Studies in Polish Metrics*, as well as the sophisticated if somewhat Talmudic David [sic!] Hopensztand and his discussion of point of view in the prose of an influential contemporary Polish writer [Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, M. M.<sup>59</sup>]. Siedlecki and Hopensztand were to perish during the war. The only surviving key member of the circle whom I met again in Warsaw in 1960 was the articulate Stefan Zółkiewski [sic!], who was to play a visible role in postwar Poland's cultural life as a cross between an influential—and relatively open-minded—“official” literary critic and an establishment *bon vivant*.

The political ambience in the circle was decidedly leftist. Yet its dominant methodology was not Marxist. Both Siedlecki and Hopensztand were taking their cues from a remarkable school of Russian literary scholarship which originated in the second decade of the twentieth century, a school of which Roman Jakobson was one of the architects and which became the subject of my dissertation and my first book, so-called Russian Formalism.<sup>60</sup>

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58 Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, 12.

59 Dawid Hopensztand, “Mowa pozornie zalezna w kontekście *Czarnych skrzydeł*” [Free indirect speech in the context of *Black Wings*], in *Prace ofiarowane Kazimierzowi Wóycickiemu* (Wilno: Dom Książki Polskiej, 1937).

60 Erlich, *Child of a Turbulent Century*, 127f.

Before becoming a spokesman for Roman Jakobson, whose version of the Formalists' history he tried to recount, Wiktor Erlich received his cues from the Warsaw Circle and Manfred Kridl, a group whose members were prepared, to various degrees by Brzozowski, for their reaction to Russian Formalism. They undoubtedly influenced the reception of what Erlich had learned from Jakobson and from written sources in New York libraries after the war. Here is how they did it: According to Erlich's *Russian Formalism*, in order to remain prolific, Formalism had to cease to be just Formalism and become instead an integral method. The Polish scholars agreed with Jakobson and his colleagues from Czechoslovakia as to the integrity and the scope of the method, but whereas Jakobson looked rather to Phenomenology as the vehicle of expansion, Polish Structuralists, although not totally deaf to the siren song of Phenomenology, held rather to Empiricism and Positivism which they wanted to marry with Marxism. (In Brzozowski's time Emprio-circicism was the most advanced Empiricist stance, whereas in the 1930s the position was occupied by the Vienna Circle, whose output Źolkiewski tried to implement in literary studies). In this respect, the Warsaw group seems to have been more decided than Kridl's Vilnius circle.

Prague Structuralism and the Polish Integral Method, Erlich claimed, managed to "reopen the problem of 'literariness' and place it in a proper perspective."<sup>61</sup> This is the perspective of aesthesis involved in life, 'mores', or 'environment', as the Russian Formalist notion '*byt*' is translated. It may serve as an indication of the influence of Brzozowski's moralist world-view on Erlich that he chose the ethically loaded notion of 'mores' to render '*byt*', which is probably a pendant to Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*, and not, say, 'environment'. Once the one-sidedness of Russian Formalism has been corrected in the Western Slavic country's world-views and morality, even if entangled in multidimensional mores, are seen as a part of art. Ethos is no longer "a camouflage element of the esthetic structure,"<sup>62</sup> its presence in the work is not an effect of a projection on the part of the critic.<sup>63</sup> Erlich, in the chapter devoted to the relationships of literature and life, sounds almost like Brzozowski. And it is not only the presence of sublated elements of social life in the artwork or that the literary partakes in social experience which exhaust the presence of life in literature and its theory. Theory, just as Brzozowski postulated, has to resemble life, it needs to be organic in its structure; this crucial principle guides endeavors to weld the social and the aesthetic. This is why the trickster of Russian Formalism Viktor Shklovskii failed in his attempt to combine the social and the formal analyses of Tolstoy's *War and*

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61 Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, 198.

62 Ibid., 199.

63 Ibid., 197f.

*Peace*. Shklovskii's "categories [were] mechanically superimposed on each other rather than integrated,"<sup>64</sup> Erlich writes, thus amplifying the *topos* referred to even by present-day Russian critics: "The enclosure of the Prague theses and 'formal-sociological' premises in the Marxist framework (even if Marxism were purely ornamental here) was made too superficially, and even in a *mechanical* fashion."<sup>65</sup> It was a strange accusation, by the way, directed at the critic who was a professional driver and borrowed his metaphors from the mechanical rather than the organic.<sup>66</sup>

Erlich's critique of the mechanical character of Shklovskii's version of Russian Formalism is isomorphic with Brzozowski's put-down of Brunetière's literary evolution, which he described in his work on the contemporary Polish novel as a mechanical succession of abstract forms paralleling a soulless, because deterministic, development of societies.<sup>67</sup> Already at the stage marked by *Kultura i życie* (Culture and Life, 1907), a book which testifies to his initially hesitant turn to Marxism, Brzozowski tried to combine art criticism with a radical anti-determinism resembling the Kantian teleology of art. The social and the aesthetic were to meet in teleological anti-determinism so that the sphere of art appeared as a Kantian utopia of disinterestedness freed from economic needs.<sup>68</sup> Brzozowski, it seems, pleaded during the later stages of his career for the liberation of, rather than the liberation from, labor so that labor, like creation and aesthetic play, could be unconditionally free. Brzozowski's pathos kindled Erlich's double-edged attack on both the anti-social attitude of early Formalism and "vulgar sociologism," to which Shklovskii turned in his later Formalist works. But what repelled Erlich in Shklovskii's book on *War and Peace* was also the determinism of form, exactly like that severely criticized by Brzozowski in his rejection of Brunetière's literary evolution. The history, recounted by Shklovskii in his book on Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, is a model treatise in the style of the Marxist 'despitists' (*voprekisty*), as opposed to the camp of "thankists" (*blagodaristy*).<sup>69</sup> This was an allegedly more dialectical stance than the

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64 Ibid., 124

65 Galushkin, "I tak, stavshi na kostiakh, budem trubit' sbor..." (emphasis mine, M. M.).

66 An example: Shklovskii writes in an open letter to Jakobson "You and I were like two pistons in the same cylinder. That's a fact in the life of steamships. You have been unscrewed and kept in Prague as an implement." Viktor Shklovskii, *Third Factory*, trans. Richard Sheldon (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1977), 39.

67 Brzozowski, *Współczesna powieść i krytyka*, 62–64.

68 Brzozowski, *Kultura i życie*.

69 Cf. Katerina Clark and Galin Tihanov "Soviet Literary Theory in the 1930s: Battles over Genre and the Boundaries of Modernity," in *A History of Russian Russian Literature*

vulgar determinism of the ‘thankists’ who reduced the message of a work to its author’s class origin that prompted her to write in a way corresponding to her class origin. The supporters of ‘despitism’ invoked Engels’s opinion on Balzac, who, in accordance with his social origin and world-view, wanted to write reactionary novels, but his qualities as a writer made him do otherwise.<sup>70</sup> Literary form as such is progressive and changes itself because it cannot stay the same. The history of Balzac repeated itself in the case of Shklovskii’s Tolstoy who had planned to write an apologia of the nobility, but the form he chose carried him into modern polyphony. The determinism of Tolstoy’s class world-view was derailed by the history of literature, i.e., the history of literary forms working of its own accord. Shklovskii’s approach seems to be dialectical and modern, and yet Erlich deems this procedure mechanical. This assessment can be understood in the light of Brzozowski’s radically anti-determinist theory: the formal causality postulated by Shklovskii is still a causality which cannot be brought in correspondence with the freedom of creation. Brzozowski was probably the most resolute anti-determinist philosopher of his time. According to his ardent reader, Erlich, not until Western Slavic Structuralism adopted teleology in lieu of determinism was it able to rid itself of the obsolete and extravagant elements in Russian Formalism. As every other reader of Brzozowski may easily foresee, the new anti-determinist and multidimensional stance on literariness boiled down to (social) Kantianism.

Just because art is not primarily a call for action or a source of information, but a disinterested contemplation of the medium, “purposiveness without purpose” (Kant), can it bring within its orbit so many, often discordant, elements and become involved with so many interests and endeavors.<sup>71</sup>

Brzozowski along with Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz and Edward Abramowski worked on an anti-metaphysical “social Kantianism,” based in part on an anti-determinist reading of Marx’s doctrine of embodied praxis.<sup>72</sup> The social Kantians of the beginning of the twentieth century perceived social reality as the domain of free creation; even determinist processes both in the base and super-

ary Theory and Criticism. *The Soviet Age and Beyond*, ed. Evgeny Dobrenko and Galin Tihanov (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 117.

70 This opinion was expressed in a letter to Margaret Harkness in early April 1888. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke* [Works] (Berlin: Dietz, 1967), vol. 37, 42–44.

71 Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, 210.

72 Andrzej Walicki, *Polska, Rosja, Marksizm* [Poland, Russia, Marxism] (Kraków: Universitas, 2011), 286–292.

structure were rooted in the spontaneity of the subject.<sup>73</sup> Kantianism adopted in West Slavic Structuralism and Integral Method—its main aspects were the theological approach to human reality and bracketing purpose in the teleology of the aesthetic function—salvaged “the healthy core” of Russian Formalism. It literally brought Formalism to life without having it renounce the aesthetic core: “Structuralism, the final result of Formalist theorizing, points the way toward a conception of literature that would do full justice to both the uniqueness and the relevance of literary art.”<sup>74</sup>

The social Kantianism professed by the Polish Marxists (Brzozowski, Kelles-Krauz, Abramowski) that, according to Jakobson and Erlich, became the mature form of the Formalist project, which started in Russia and came to realization in West Slavic cultures, is quite conspicuous, for example, in the notion of the dominant. I would like to close this paper with a short analysis of the notion. It aims to demonstrate that Brzozowski’s program of introducing Avenarius’s description of aesthesia to literary criticism, which would be integral and social and pay justice to both uniqueness and the relevance of literary art, was perfectly in accord with the later developments of structuralism.

### **The Case of Dominant**

*Dominante* was a term that Richard Avenarius used in his *Kritik der reinen Erfahrung* to designate that among many the “*Vitalreihen*” (life series) competing with one another in the framework of the central nerve system (the system C) which subsumes other series and thus determines the general direction of an individual’s behaviour. Excitations that do not fall in the scope of dominant are repressed, their energy absorbed and transferred to the dominant series.<sup>75</sup> The functioning of the “dominant” described by Avenarius tallies with Broder Christiansen and Aleksei Ukhtomskii’s<sup>76</sup> usages of exactly the same term, which

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73 Edward Abramowski, “Zagadnienia socjalizmu” [Questions of socialism], in *Zagadnienia socjalizmu. Wybór pism*, ed. Krzysztof Mazur (Kraków: Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej, 2012). Abramowski was a personal friend and mentor of Żeromski.

74 Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, 211.

75 Richard Avenarius, vol. 2 of *Kritik der reinen Erfahrung* [Critique of pure Experience] (Leipzig: Fues, 1890), 275–277.

76 Broder Christiansen, *Philosophie der Kunst* [Philosophy of Art] (Hanau: Clauss & Feddersen, 1909); Alexej Uchomskij, “Die Dominante als Arbeitsprinzip der Nervenzentren,” *Mitteilungen der Luria-Gesellschaft* 11, (2004): 25–38; Aleksei Ukhtomskii, *Dominanta. Stat'i raznykh let. 1887–1939* [The Dominant: Collected Articles, 1887–1939] (Sankt-Peterburg: Piter, 2002), 126. See Igal Halfin, *Terror in My Soul*:

exerted a direct influence on Formalisms in Eastern and Central Europe (beginning with Eikhenbaum and Shklovskii<sup>77</sup>). The transfer of energy between the dominant and the subjugated elements of the system foreshadows the functionalistic structuralism of the mature Roman Jakobson.<sup>78</sup>

The role of the dominant consists namely in securing the dynamic character of an achieved balance amounting to the system's ability to develop.<sup>79</sup> The system must remain in the state of a dynamic equilibrium of contradicting forces in order to be able to adapt to the ever-changing environment, but, at the same time a hierarchy of elements has to be assured for the system to remain organised. According to Mukarovsky, the inner contradiction sets structure apart from a mere aggregate of elements.<sup>80</sup> In order for inner tension to dynamize but not blow up the whole, one of the system's aspects has to come to the fore and become its dominant. In Averarius, the dominant subsumes other series, absorbs their energies and gives a general direction to the system. The system may thus become dynamic and historical, as already Roman Jakobson stressed in his 1935 Czech essay on the dominant (in which he does not mention Avenarius nor refer to Christiansen or any other champion of the term). The dominant is for Jakobson not only historically changeable (his definition of the dominant is ostensive as it consists in an enumeration of different dominants of Czech poetry).<sup>81</sup> The

*Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2003), 155. Special thanks to Erik Martin who pointed out to me that the notion of the dominant was initially used by Avenarius.

77 Boris Eikhenbaum, *Melodika russkogo liricheskogo stikha* [Melodics of Russian lyrical verse] (Peterburg: OPOIAZ, 1922), 9; Viktor Shklovskii, "Sviaz' priemov siuzhetoslozheniia s obshchimi priemami stilia / Der Zusammenhang zwischen dem Verfahren der Sujetfügung und den allgemeinen Stilverfahren" [The relation between the technique of the subject addition and the general techniques of style] in *Texte der Russischen Formalisten. Band I: Texte zur allgemeinen Literaturtheorie und zur Theorie der Prosa*, ed. Jurij Striedter (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1969), 50–53, 118f., 120f.; Jurij Tynjanov, "O literaturnoi èvoliutsii / Über literarische Evolution" [On literary evolution], ibid., 440f., 450f.

78 Roman Jakobson, "Dominant," in *Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry*, vol. 3 of *Selected Writings*, ed. Stephen Rudy (The Hague: Mouton, 1981).

79 Balance is truly very important also for Jakobson's mature structuralism. See: Holenstein, *Roman Jakobsons phänomenologischer Strukturalismus*, 42.

80 Jan Mukarovsky, "Über Strukturalismus" [On structuralism], in *Formalismus, Strukturalismus und Geschichte*, ed. Aleksandar Flaker and Viktor Žmegač (Kronberg/Tau-nus: Scriptor, 1974), 86f.

81 Jakobson, "Dominant," 751f.

dominant is the notion through which—according to Jakobson who was already exchanging with his Polish colleagues in 1935—the aesthetic may and should be connected to the social:

[...] the definition of an artistic work as compared to other sets of cultural values substantially changes, as soon as the concept of the dominant becomes our point of departure. For example, the relationship between a poetic work and other verbal messages acquires a more exact determination. Equating a poetic work with an aesthetic, or more precisely with a poetic, function, as far as we deal with verbal material, is characteristic of those epochs which proclaim self-sufficient, pure art, *l'art pour l'art*. In the early steps of the Formalist school, it was still possible to observe distinct traces of such an equation. However, this equation is unquestionably erroneous: a poetic work is not confined to aesthetic function alone, but has in addition many other functions. Actually, the intentions of a poetic work are often closely related to philosophy, social didactics, etc.<sup>82</sup>

In a manner which does not surprise at this stage of the present exposition, Jakobson's positing of the dominant harmonizes with Brzozowski's aversion to mechanicism as well to the narrow-minded ideology *l'art pour l'art*, in opposition to which he proposed the program of welding Marxism together with Empirio-criticism, from where the notion of the dominant began its expansion in sciences and the humanities. Needless to say, Erlich expressed the same aversion, given his adherence to Brzozowski and Jakobson at different stages of his life. Jakobson pointed out that the dominant connects the aesthetic to the social and stands in opposition to the mechanical character of pure sociologism as well the monistic stance of aestheticism:

In direct opposition to the straight monistic point of view is the mechanistic standpoint, which recognizes the multiplicity of functions of a poetic work and judges that work, either knowingly or unintentionally, as a mechanical agglomeration of functions. Because a poetic work also has a referential function, it is sometimes considered by adherents of the latter point of view as a straightforward document of cultural history, social relations or biography. In contrast to one-sided monism and one-sided pluralism, there exists a point of view which combines an awareness of the multiple functions of a poetic work with a comprehension of its integrity, that is to say, that function which unites and determines the poetic work. [...] a poetic work is defined as a verbal message whose aesthetic function is its dominant.<sup>83</sup>

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82 Ibid., 752.

83 Ibid., 753.

The echo of Jakobson's "integral method"—reinforced by Brzozowski's fervent anti-determinism—was clearly discernable in Erlich's condemnation of Shklovskii's "vulgar sociologism" and his praise of the social Kantianism of West Slavic structuralisms.

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