

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Structure and the Whole: East, West and Non-Darwinian Biology in the Origins of Structural Linguistics by Patrick Sériot and Amy Jacobs-Colas

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for the Oscars. Malykhina characterizes the final result as alternative discourse with a carnivalistic orientation “manifested in its use of such prefab elements of official public discourse as formulaic phrases, slogans, characters of popular fiction, and quotations from mass literature” (165). It goes beyond postmodernist play to a very palpable moralistic message that requires the uninterrupted attention of the audience to identify.

The conclusion is a very lucid summary of the significance and subtleties of the problem of allusion in the context of the post-Soviet political and cultural regime. The reader would even perhaps benefit from reading it first in preparation for the rigorosity of the main body of the book.

*Renaissance of Classical Allusions in Contemporary Russian Media* is a much-appreciated effort to apprehend a phenomenon that, in its playfulness and studied vacuity, evades serious discussion. Its own readerly orientation is occasionally less toward a general academic audience than such an analysis deserves, taking instead a more defensive posture perceptible in the walls of names in the literature section and abundance of jargon. The book also would have benefited from an additional editorial pass to clarify the language, which reflects traces of non-native English, and to correct typesetting errors along the lines of “research, and” (xi). Nevertheless, while these stylistic qualities made have made the work slightly less accessible, it remains a valuable guide to the use of allusions in Russian media, adding nuanced shades of gray to a field which is all too easy to perceive in ideological chiaroscuro.

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Patrick Sériot. *Structure and the Whole: East, West and Non-Darwinian Biology in the Origins of Structural Linguistics*. Trans. Amy Jacobs-Colas. Berlin; Boston: Walter de Gruyter/Mouton, 2014. Charts. Bibliography. Indexes. xiv + 294 pp. €93.41 (cloth).

Despite its long and arguably less than transparent title, this book, in essence, is a discussion of the emergence of the model of *structuralism* associated with the *Linguistic School of Prague* through an examination of the philosophies of two of its main Russian proponents, Roman O. Jakobson and Nikolai S. Trubetzkoy. In the words of one of the editors of the series to which this book belongs (Semiotics, Communication and Cognition), it is a book on the history of ideas, treating, in part, the emergence of Russian-Praguian structural linguistics and semiotics in the 1920s and 1930s, and focusing on the Prague Linguistic Circle, demonstrating the “inter-twining of ideas in linguistics, geography, and biology” (ix). Thus it goes well beyond Vachek 1966 (*The Linguistic School of Prague*, Indiana UP) and several papers in Vachek 1964 (*A Prague School Reader in Linguistics*, Indiana UP), which, although valuable, especially the introduction of the former and its appendix comprising a 1936 paper by Mathesius, do not contextualize Prague structuralism intellectually. Ultimately, Sériot argues against the claim of Jakobson and Trubetzkoy that the Russian-Praguian view of structuralism was new, and specifically Russian in origin (1). The book comprises several parts including Introduction, Background, Closure, Nature, and Science, each divided into chapters. It concludes with an appendix, a bibliography, and indices. The subject matter is not linguistics, although the title makes reference to *structural linguistics*, so much as it is *language* and the Praguian, via Russian, structuralist understanding of it. Linguistics as a discipline and its theoretical tenets do play a role, but structuralism as a concept is not dependent on them, and in fact is logically prior to them. Without this distinction, readers with an interest in linguistics may find themselves perplexed. There is no discussion of the concepts linguists associate with Praguian structuralism in its everyday application to data (e.g., hierarchies, features, markedness). The focus is structuralism itself, the origin of its Russian instantiation, and, by extension, the role of this instantiation in the Praguian conception of language (251).

The ideational complexity of this book precludes a simple summary. As background, however, it will be helpful for readers to bear in mind that Praguian structuralism was one of several early twentieth-century reactions to the neo-grammarians and Saussurian models of language, with the Saussurian model itself being an early reaction to the neo-grammarians. Within this framework, Sériot justifiably wishes to see Praguian structuralism as an outgrowth of three interactive components: (1.) the existing views of language, especially the Saussurian view of language as a system (250); (2.) the views of Jakobson and Trubetzkoy relating to language as a system and to general issues relevant at the time in scientific inquiry, especially biology (e.g., *naturalism, positivism, organicism*, etc.); and (3.) the *Eurasianist* controversy, in which Jakobson and Trubetzkoy were very much involved. The last, concerning Russia's areal, or geographical, affiliation, was of paramount importance in Sériot's view. Jakobson and Trubetzkoy accepted *Eurasianist* doctrine, which originated in the view that Russia belonged neither to Europe nor to Asia, but reflected a collaboration among Slavic, Finno-Ugric, and Turkic peoples (30), described by Sériot as "a conception of culture in *areal* terms" (40; emphasis mine, MJE). Justification of the *Eurasianist* view was sought in, and in turn influenced, thinking about language, specifically the notions of *whole, system, and structure*. Sériot argues that it was against the geolinguistic backdrop (i.e., the relationship between language and territory) of the controversy generated by this view regarding, in particular, the existence of *language unions*, that Jakobson and Trubetzkoy consolidated their understanding of structuralism, and formulated their theory of phonology, the goal being to support the existence of Eurasia through phonology. These views naturally found their way into the Prague School, then in its infancy, and played a role in sculpting the emerging Praguian version of structuralism (112). *Eurasianist* linguistics, writes Sériot, is a "missing link in the history of structuralism" (63), and it is the link which permitted Jakobson and Trubetzkoy to argue that Praguian structuralism, by virtue of its Russian (hence *Eurasian*) origin, was unique with respect to other versions of structuralism in the Western (i.e., Romano-Germanic) world (41), and opposed in its positions on language to the *Marrist* view (115). However, Sériot concludes that "nothing Russian was *essentially different* [...]" (253), the mistaken view of Jakobson and Trubetzkoy to the contrary being the result of various factors such as "the refusal to accept modernity; [...] the simultaneous or delayed reception of 'Western' knowledge" (253), adding that *Eurasianist* theories relating to areally-defined cultures, for the most part, came from Europe, mainly from Germany (254).

This book is one of substantial erudition and interest. Specialists in the history of ideas, and that of structuralism in particular, will be in the best position to evaluate the details and cogency of its arguments. Others, i.e., those of us with an interest in the Prague School arising in their education and research in Slavic Languages and Literatures, and specifically in linguistics, will find it fascinating intellectual history, taking them, potentially, to a far deeper understanding of the views, and their origin, of Jakobson and Trubetzkoy, views which originated not only in an interest in language per se, but also as it pertained to culture and nationhood. I know of no other book that does this. However, given the complexity of the subject matter, the reading experience for linguists, even Slavists, may be more difficult than it need have been in the absence of more iconic chapter and section headings suggesting the author's progression of thought and topic, and a much-needed index of relevant concepts (e.g., *positivism, organicism*) with definitions, as well as an equally needed index of relevant philosophers and scholars with summaries of their role in the emergence of Praguian structuralism. Readers can, nevertheless, assemble this information as they progress, and will be rewarded for the effort in the understanding of Praguian structuralism it yields, skillfully and persuasively contextualized in the intellectual spirit of the times by Sériot.

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