

## MUKAŘOVSKÝ'S STRUCTURALISM AND SEMIOTICS

ONDŘEJ SLÁDEK

### I. THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JAN MUKAŘOVSKÝ

A Czech aesthetician, literary historian, theorist, and leading proponent of Czech structuralism, Jan Mukařovský (1891–1975) received his doctorate from Charles University, Prague, in 1922, for the thesis 'A Contribution to the Aesthetics of Czech Verse'.<sup>1</sup> In its methodology this is the immediate forerunner of his structuralist analyses. In 1926 Mukařovský began to attend the meetings of the Prague Linguistic Circle (also known in English as the Prague School), and actively contributed. In 1929 he was made a Docent of Aesthetics at Charles University, habilitating with 'Mácha's *Máj*: An Essay in Aesthetics'.<sup>2</sup>

The principal aim of the essay on Mácha was to explain the causes of the aesthetic effect of the contemplative epic *Máj* (May, 1836),<sup>3</sup> written by the influential Czech Romantic poet Karel Hynek Mácha (1810–36). In this work, Mukařovský first demonstrated the possibilities of structural analysis of a work of belles-lettres. Beginning in 1930 he lectured on poetics and stylistics at Charles University, and beginning in 1931 he also led an aesthetics seminar at Comenius University, Bratislava. In 1937, he was made Professor of Aesthetics *extraordinarius* (that is, without a chair) at Prague. Because of the German occupation (1939–45) and the closing down of Czech universities, he was not made a full professor until after the liberation.

The height of Mukařovský's academic career is generally considered to be the period from 1928 to 1948. Those are the years when he was already an acknowledged and, in essence, fully developed scholar, though he continuously adjusted his own structuralist system and added to it. In that period he was very active in the Prague Linguistic Circle, was involved in a wide variety of exchanges with critics of formalism and structuralism, lectured at universities, was in touch

<sup>1</sup> Jan Mukařovský, *Příspěvek k estetice českého verše* (Prague: Filosofická fakulta, 1923).

<sup>2</sup> Jan Mukařovský, *Máchův 'Máj': Estetická studie* (Prague: Filosofická fakulta, 1928).

<sup>3</sup> *Máj* has been translated to English several times, the most recent translation being Karel Hynek Mácha, *May*, trans. Marcela Sulak (Prague: Twisted Spoon, 2005).

with artists and theorists of the Czech Avant-garde, and helped to edit *Slovo a slovesnost* (The word and verbal art), the quarterly of the Prague Linguistic Circle, established in 1935. In addition he contributed to and edited a number of multi-authored volumes published by the Prague Linguistic Circle, took part in formulating their basic 'Thèses',<sup>4</sup> and participated in international conferences. His main works in the fields of aesthetics, semiotics, literature, verse theory, theatre, and film date from this period.

The year 1934 is generally considered of key importance in Mukařovský's career. It was when he changed a number of the starting points in his methodology. He linked the original impetuses of Russian formalism (particularly from the works of Boris Tomashevsky, Viktor Shklovsky, and Roman Jakobson) to the Czech tradition of poetics and aesthetics (namely, the works of Josef Durdík, Otakar Hostinský, and Otakar Zich),<sup>5</sup> and gave the resulting combination a structuralist and semiotic orientation. He gradually expanded his research on poetic language by considering questions of the sign and meaning in works of art. A prime example of this shift towards a semiotic approach to art is the paper 'L'art comme fait sémiologique',<sup>6</sup> which he delivered at the Eighth International Congress of Philosophy, held in Prague in 1934.

<sup>4</sup> [Prague Linguistic Circle], 'Thèses présentées au Premier Congrès des philologues slaves', in *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague*, vol. 1, *Mélanges linguistiques dédiés au premier Congrès des philologues slaves* (Prague: Jednota československých matematiků a fyziků, 1929), 3–29; published in English as 'Theses Presented to the First Congress of Slavists Held in Prague in 1929', trans. Josef Vachek, in *Praguiana: Some Basic and Less Known Aspects of the Prague Linguistic School*, ed. Josef Vachek and Libuše Dušková (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1983), 77–120.

<sup>5</sup> See Peter Steiner, 'The Roots of Structuralist Esthetics', in *The Prague School: Selected Writings, 1929–1946*, ed. Peter Steiner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), 174–219; Oleg Sus, 'On the Genetic Preconditions of Czech Structuralist Semiology and Semantics: An Essay on Czech and German Thought', *Poetics* 1, no. 4 (1972): 28–54. See also Otakar Zich, 'Aesthetic and Artistic Evaluation, Part 1' (1916), trans. Derek and Marzia Paton, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 46 (2009): 189–201; 'Aesthetic and Artistic Evaluation, Parts 2 & 3' (1916), trans. Derek and Marzia Paton, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 47 (2010): 71–95; Otakar Hostinský, 'Darwin and Drama' (1873), trans. Derek and Marzia Paton, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 50 (2013): 101–11, and 'Dissonance' (1874), trans. Derek and Marzia Paton, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 50 (2013): 112–20.

<sup>6</sup> Jan Mukařovský, 'L'art comme fait sémiologique', in *Actes du huitième congrès international de philosophie* (Prague: Comité d'organisation du congrès, 1936), 1065–72; 'Umění jako sémiologický fakt', in *Studie I* (Brno: Host, 2000), 208–14; published in English as 'Art as a Semiotic Fact', in *Structure, Sign, and Function: Selected Essays by Jan Mukařovský*, ed. and trans. John Burbank and Peter Steiner (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), 82–88.

Mukařovský drew not only on linguistics and Russian formalism<sup>7</sup> but also on sociology, painting, architecture, and philosophy. His approach to research was fundamentally flexible. Throughout his academic life, he always endeavoured to think through his arguments meticulously, continuously testing them against new ideas. If the new ideas turned out to fit his views and were useful in their construction, he would incorporate them into his own inventory of theories and methods. Whereas, for example, he drew only briefly on Edmund Husserl's and Roman Ingarden's phenomenology (before completely abandoning both), Hegel's dialectics became a permanent part of his thinking.

The result of his interest in the sociological study of literature, in which he applied the principles of dialectical thinking in combination with phenomenological analysis, is *Aesthetic Function, Norm, and Value as Social Facts*.<sup>8</sup> In this volume, as is indicated by the title, Mukařovský presents the most systematic interpretation of the three fundamental aspects of the aesthetic, which he examines from the standpoint of the sociology of literature. In his view, these three aspects are central to understanding the dynamic and changing nature of the aesthetic approach to reality.

In this work, Mukařovský defines the aesthetic function with regard to its basic property, which, according to him, consists in isolating the object that was its bearer. In essence, that object could be anything. He thus abolishes the clear-cut boundary between the aesthetic and the extra-aesthetic sphere. The aesthetic function, according to him, operates differently in various phenomena. Whereas in the sphere of art it has a dominant status, outside that sphere it has only a secondary status. The special nature of the aesthetic function, according to him, consists in the fact that we can discern it only in relation to other practical, extra-artistic functions that it opposes, since it negates any intended purpose; its aim is to give aesthetic pleasure.<sup>9</sup> The stabilization of the aesthetic function, in his conception, has mainly to do with a human collective. The aesthetic function is located in collective consciousness.

The aesthetic norm is presented by Mukařovský as an important guiding or organizing force that influences the individual and society. Mukařovský does not perceive the norm as absolute, even though it approaches general applicability. Both the aesthetic function and the norm are continuously changing. Mukařovský argues that an aesthetic value is nothing but an organizing principle that

<sup>7</sup> On Russian formalism, see Peter Steiner, *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

<sup>8</sup> Jan Mukařovský, *Estetická funkce, norma a hodnota jako sociální fakty* (Prague: Borový, 1936); published in English as *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts*, trans. Mark E. Suino (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1970).

<sup>9</sup> Mukařovský, *Aesthetic Function*, 28.

unites the individual extra-aesthetic values of the work into a single, dynamic whole. Mukařovský therefore presents the work of art as a set of aesthetic and extra-aesthetic parts. His conception of structural aesthetics is based on a particular conception of the aesthetic as being an empty principle that organizes an extra-aesthetic quality.

In the 1930s and 1940s, in addition to structural aesthetics Mukařovský was intensively developing a structural poetics. He wrote many articles in which he analyses classics of Czech literature, for example, by Karel Hynek Mácha, Božena Němcová, Karel Čapek, Vladislav Vančura, and Vítězslav Nezval. He was concerned with, among other things, the stylistics and semantic structure of their writing, and with the aesthetics of language, dialogue, and monologue, the relationship between literature and the plastic arts, and the role and function of the poet and his or her personality in the development of art.<sup>10</sup>

One of his articles which is most cited in Czech literary studies is 'The Genetics of Meaning in Mácha's Poetry' (1938).<sup>11</sup> Here Mukařovský first formulated the concept of the semantic gesture. In his understanding it is an organizing and unifying principle that imbues all the components of a work. The semantic gesture is in no way specified by content; it is the creative gesture of the poet or artist, which is projected into the total dynamics of the semantic structure of the work. Since the time when the article was published, the concept of the semantic gesture has become one of the most important and thought-provoking terms in the history of Czech structuralism. Mukařovský used the concept of the semantic gesture in other essays as well.<sup>12</sup> His pupils, for example, Milan Jankovič, Miroslav Červenka, and Marie Kubínová, later developed it in greater detail.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See Jan Mukařovský, *The Word and Verbal Art: Selected Essays*, ed. and trans. John Burbank and Peter Steiner (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977).

<sup>11</sup> Jan Mukařovský, 'Genetika smyslu v Máchově poesii' [The genetics of meaning in Mácha's poetry], in *Torso a tajemství Máchova díla: Sborník pojednání Pražského lingvistického kroužku* [Fragments and enigmas of Mácha's work: An anthology of essays by the Prague Linguistic Circle], ed. Jan Mukařovský (Prague: Borový, 1938), 13–110.

<sup>12</sup> See Jan Mukařovský, 'On Poetic Language' (1940), in *Word and Verbal Art*, 1–64; 'Intentionality and Unintentionality in Art' (1943), in *Structure, Sign, and Function*, 89–128; Kees Mercks, 'Introductory Observations on the Concept of "Semantic Gesture"', *Russian Literature* 20 (1986): 381–422.

<sup>13</sup> See Milan Jankovič, 'Perspectives of Semantic Gesture', *Poetics* 1, no. 4 (1972): 16–27; Miroslav Červenka, *Der Bedeutungsaufbau des literarischen Werks*, ed. Frank Boldt and Wolf-Dieter Stempel (Munich: Fink, 1978); Marie Kubínová, 'A Work of Art as a Sign and the Problem of Its Meaning: The Causes and Consequences of the Work-Sign Double Meaning in Mukařovský's Work', in *Jan Mukařovský and the Prague School / Jan Mukařovský und die Prager Schule*, ed. Vladimír Macura and Herta Schmid (Potsdam: Universität Potsdam, 1999), 166–72; see also Herta Schmid, 'Die "semantische Geste" als Schlüsselbegriff des Prager literaturwissenschaftlichen Strukturalismus', in *Schwerpunkte der Literaturwissenschaft außerhalb des deutschen Sprachraums*, ed. Elrud Ibsch (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1982), 209–61; Wolfgang F. Schwarz,

Mukařovský's two-volume *Chapters in Czech Poetics* is, in a sense, a balance sheet of his research on literature and aesthetics.<sup>14</sup> Whereas the first volume is devoted to general topics and questions of aesthetics and literary theory, the second includes case studies related to the development of Czech poetry and prose fiction. The articles date from 1925 to 1940. Thanks both to its being clearly rooted in structural poetics and aesthetics and to the individual analyses, the book has become one of the key works of twentieth-century Czech literary studies.

During the German occupation Mukařovský gave several lectures in the Prague Linguistic Circle (for example, on intentionality and nonintentionality in art, the relationship between the individual and literary development, and the personality in art).<sup>15</sup> These were not published until much later, in a collection entitled *Essays on Aesthetics*.<sup>16</sup>

With the end of the Second World War, in May 1945, Mukařovský immediately became involved in teaching, research, and politics. In 1948, when the Communists took power in Czechoslovakia and a new, pro-Soviet orientation was instituted also for Czech literary studies and aesthetics, Mukařovský was appointed Rector of Charles University. The new academic orientation, based on Marxism and dialectical materialism, led him to the conclusion that it was necessary to rebuild his version of structuralism from its foundations. He found the key link between structuralism and Marxism in the dialectic, or in dialectical materialism. Considering that he had defended the principles of dialectical thinking earlier, his transition from structuralism to Marxism seems to have truly been a gradual, systematic transformation of his starting points in theory and method. Prime examples of this are his works from the late 1940s, particularly 'Where Is the Contemporary Theory of Art Heading?';<sup>17</sup> the second edition of *Chapters in Czech Poetics*,<sup>18</sup> and *Partisanship in the Arts and Sciences*.<sup>19</sup>

---

'Die "Semantische Geste" – ein brauchbares analytisches Instrument? Zur Entwicklung und Kritik eines Kernbegriffs in Mukařovskýs Literaturästhetik', in *Prager Schule: Kontinuität und Wandel: Arbeiten zur Literaturästhetik und Poetik der Narration*, ed. Wolfgang F. Schwarz (Frankfurt: Vervuert, 1997), 197–222.

<sup>14</sup> Jan Mukařovský, *Kapitoly z české poetiky* [Essays on Czech poetics], vol. 1, *Obecné věci básnictví* [General matters of poetry] (Prague: Melantrich, 1941); *Kapitoly z české poetiky*, vol. 2, *K vývoji české poesie a prózy* [On the development of Czech poetry and prose] (Prague: Melantrich, 1941).

<sup>15</sup> Mukařovský, 'Intentionality and Unintentionality'; Jan Mukařovský, 'The Individual and Literary Development' (1943–45), in *Word and Verbal Art*, 161–79; 'Personality in Art' (1944), in *Structure, Sign, and Function*, 150–68.

<sup>16</sup> Jan Mukařovský, *Studie z estetiky* [Essays on aesthetics] (Prague: Odeon, 1966).

<sup>17</sup> Jan Mukařovský, 'Kam směřuje dnešní teorie umění?', *Slovo a slovesnost* 11 (1948–49): 49–59.

<sup>18</sup> Jan Mukařovský, *Kapitoly z české poetiky*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Prague: Svoboda, 1948).

<sup>19</sup> Jan Mukařovský, *Stranickost ve vědě a v umění* (Prague: Orbis, 1949).

In the subsequent years of his life Mukařovský found little time for academic work. Beginning in the early 1950s he devoted himself to the preparation and organization of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences (established in 1952). From 1952 to 1962 he was the director of the Institute of Czech Literature, which became part of the Academy. He was also involved in politics, for example, giving speeches at many Communist Party congresses and sitting on the board of the World Peace Council and the jury of the International Peace Prize. In the early 1950s the long-running Party campaign against all 'idealistic' and 'bourgeois' trends in science and scholarship was stepped up (including, in particular, attacks on structuralism and formalism in linguistics and in literary studies). This resulted in several public declarations of atonement and the recanting of previously held views. Mukařovský too was forced to take this step. In autumn 1951 he published the article 'Towards a Critique of Structuralism in Czechoslovak Literary Studies', in which he publicly renounced structuralism.<sup>20</sup>

Though a strenuous effort was made to eliminate structuralism in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s, its principles and impetuses, particularly its analytical and critical approach to literature, survived in some of Mukařovský's works and in the works of some of his pupils – though buried deep beneath the sops made to the régime and Marxist-Leninist jargon.

The early 1960s saw the beginning of a political thaw in Czechoslovakia, which was reflected also in a new approach to, and assessment of, Czech structuralism and Russian formalism. But what contributed most strikingly to the revived interest in structuralism and influenced the further development of structuralist thought in Czechoslovakia was the publication of *Studies in Aesthetics*, that collection of earlier works by Mukařovský.<sup>21</sup> Part of this 'new wave' in Czech structuralism (amongst whose leading proponents were Miroslav Červenka, Milan Jankovič, Květoslav Chvatík, and Mojmír Grygar)<sup>22</sup> comprised attempts to establish contact with scholars of literature abroad – particularly, French, for whom structuralism remained the dominant approach.

Some critics – particularly Ladislav Štoll – came out against these efforts to rehabilitate Czech structuralism.<sup>23</sup> The dispute about structuralism re-emerged,

<sup>20</sup> Jan Mukařovský, 'Ke kritice strukturalismu v naší literární vědě', *Tvorba* 20, no. 40 (1951): 964–66.

<sup>21</sup> Mukařovský, *Studie z estetiky*.

<sup>22</sup> See Červenka, *Der Bedeutungsaufbau des literarischen Werks*; Květoslav Chvatík, *Strukturalismus und Avantgarde* (Munich: Hanser, 1970); See also *Poetics* 1, no. 4 (1972) devoted to Czechoslovak structuralism with essays by Felix Vodička, Milan Jankovič, Oleg Sus, Lubomír Doležel, Miroslav Červenka, and Mojmír Grygar.

<sup>23</sup> Ladislav Štoll, *O tvar a strukturu v slovesném umění: K metodologii a světonázorovým východiskům ruské formální školy a pražského literárního strukturalismu* [The search for form and structure in literature: On the method and ideological starting points of Russian formalism and Prague literary structuralism] (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1966).

but Mukařovský no longer participated in it. After the Soviet-led military intervention of 1968 had put a halt to the reforms of the Prague Spring, politics in Czechoslovakia changed again, and structuralism was rejected once more. Nevertheless, a couple of years later, two volumes of Mukařovský's collected essays were published: *Down the Paths of Poetics and Aesthetics* and *Essays on Poetics*.<sup>24</sup> The free development of structural theory and Czech structuralism itself began only after the Changes of late 1989. Until that time, structuralist thinking could be fostered only within certain limits or only outside the country, for example, in Germany, Canada, and the United States.<sup>25</sup>

Though one can find a number of turning points and contradictions in the development of Mukařovský's scholarship, one can also find many opinions and principles that he held and promoted throughout his life. Among the main ones is the need to be critical towards the material being studied, to maintain a balanced, non-prescriptive approach, to see the work of art as a sign, and to apply the principles of dialectical thinking.<sup>26</sup>

## II. THE WORK OF ART AS A SIGN

The article that was published as 'The Work of Art as a Sign' was originally a lecture given by Mukařovský under the title 'The Semiology of Art' at Charles University in the winter semester of 1936/37. At that time, he also gave the lecture at Comenius University in Bratislava. Apart from this, however, he gave courses on aesthetics and the structural and semiotic analysis of works of art.

The autumn of 1936 was full of academic and social events, which Mukařovský participated in. In late August and early September, the International Congress of Linguists was held in Copenhagen, where he gave a paper on the relationship between the function of aesthetics and the function of communication.

<sup>24</sup> Jan Mukařovský, *Cestami poetiky a estetiky* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1971); *Studie z poetiky* (Prague: Odeon, 1982).

<sup>25</sup> Ondřej Sládek, *The Metamorphoses of Prague School Structural Poetics* (Munich: Lincom Europa, 2015). See also Lubomír Doležal, *Narrative Modes in Czech Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); Mojmír Grygar, 'Die Theorie der Kunst und der Wertung im tschechischen Strukturalismus', in *Beschreiben, Interpretieren, Werten: Das Wertungsproblem in der Literatur aus der Sicht unterschiedlicher Methoden*, ed. Bernd Lenz and Bernd Schulte-Middelich (Munich: Fink, 1982), 156–81; Jiří Veltruský, 'The Prague School Theory of Theatre', *Poetics Today* 2, no. 3 (1981), 225–35; Květoslav Chvatík, *Tschechoslowakischer Strukturalismus: Theorie und Geschichte* (Munich: Fink, 1981); František W. Galan, *Historical Structures: The Prague School Project, 1928–1946* (London: Helm, 1985); Ladislav Matejka, ed., *Sound, Sign and Meaning: Quinquagenary of the Prague Linguistic Circle* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1976); Peter Steiner, Miroslav Červenka, and Ronald Vroon, eds., *Structure of the Literary Process: Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Felix Vodička* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1982).

<sup>26</sup> Ondřej Sládek, *Jan Mukařovský: Život a dílo* [Jan Mukařovský: Life and works] (Brno: Host, 2015).

On 3 November, the Prague Linguistic Circle held a special meeting to mark the tenth anniversary of its founding, at which its Chairman, Vilém Mathesius, gave a lecture charting out the past ten years of the Prague School's work and presenting something of a balance sheet.<sup>27</sup> The year 1936 also saw the hundredth anniversary of Máchá's death. One of the highlights of the celebrations to mark the date was a lecture by a leading Czech literary critic, František Xaver Šalda, about Máchá's prose fiction, which he gave at a November meeting of the Prague Linguistic Circle. During the year Mukařovský himself published several articles about Máchá, and, in particular, gave a number of speeches and papers.<sup>28</sup>

Of the articles that Mukařovský wrote in the second half of 1936 and in early 1937, it is clear that he was constantly occupied with the relationship between aesthetic function, norm, and value, to which he devoted his most recent book.<sup>29</sup> His attention was now fixed on function, not only in language and literature, but also in film, theatre, and architecture. In a lecture at the Architects Club (Klub architektů), he wrote:

The functional view permits us to conceive things as events without denying their materiality. It shows the word simultaneously as motion and as a fixed basis of human activity. The notion of function, the basic working hypothesis of modern culture, is in the process of evolution and internal differentiation. We must therefore always have its characteristics in mind, and we must constantly review them.<sup>30</sup>

He links the concept of function with the thing and with its use, while emphasizing that it is closely connected with the notion of the sign: 'The object not only performs but also signifies its function.'<sup>31</sup> Here we would note that at this time semiotics was the common denominator of all Mukařovský's reflections on language, literature, and art. But that was actually nothing new.

<sup>27</sup> Vilém Mathesius, 'Deset let Pražského lingvistického kroužku', *Slovo a slovesnost* 2 (1936): 137–45; published in English as 'Ten Years of the Prague Linguistic Circle', trans. Wendy Steiner, in *The Linguistic School of Prague: An Introduction to Its Theory and Practice*, by Josef Vachek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), 137–51.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Jan Mukařovský, 'Příspěvek k dnešní problematice básnického zjevu Máchova' [A contribution to current discussions on Máchá the poet], *Listy pro umění a kritiku* 4, no. 2 (1936): 25–33; no. 3 (1936): 62–73; 'Protichůdci: Několik poznámek o vztahu Erbenova básnického díla k Máchovu' [Notes on Erben and Máchá as opposite poles in Czech poetry], *Slovo a slovesnost* 2 (1936): 33–43; *Příklad poezie: K otázce trvalé platnosti Máchova díla* [The example of poetry: On the question of the lasting relevance of Máchá's oeuvre], ed. Milan Jankovič (Prague: Pražská imaginace, 1991).

<sup>29</sup> Mukařovský, *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value*.

<sup>30</sup> Jan Mukařovský, 'On the Problem of Functions in Architecture' (1937–38), in *Structure, Sign, and Function*, 236.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

The concept of sign had been discussed amongst the members of the Prague Linguistic Circle since its founding. It also appears in several places in their famous 'Thèses' of 1929. For example, art itself is presented in the 'Thèses' as a semiotic structure where the essential thing is the sign itself, not what it signifies. The main subject of structuralist research in the area of literature was therefore the language of poetry. In 1935, in the introduction to the first issue of *Slovo a slovesnost*, the authors claim that the sign 'is one of the most pressing philosophical problems of the contemporary renaissance of culture'.<sup>32</sup> And immediately afterwards they state that all reality appears to people today as a vast, complex realm of signs.

Mukařovský had been concerned with the sign since the end of the 1920s. Not until 1934, however, in the lecture 'Art as a Semiotic Fact', did he formulate the view that the work of art is an autonomous sign, a sign that refers to itself, whereby it differs from other signs, whose basic function is communication. In this work, Mukařovský was responding to two important impetuses that had influenced his thinking. One was the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl; the other was the linguistics and semiotics of Ferdinand de Saussure. Unlike Saussure, Mukařovský does not work with a dichotomous, *signifié–signifiant* conception of the sign; rather, he conceives a trichotomous model. Each sign of art has, according to him, its own objective material aspect (which Saussure calls the *signifiant*, and Mukařovský calls the *dílo-věc* [work-thing], or *artefakt*) and its own semantic aspect (that is, the *signifié*, according to Saussure, and the 'aesthetic object' in Mukařovský's view), but apart from that it also has a relation to the thing signified.

Mukařovský formulates his conception as follows:

Every work of art is an *autonomous* sign composed of: (1) a 'work-thing' functioning as a sensory symbol; (2) an 'aesthetic object' lodged in the social consciousness and functioning as 'meaning'; (3) a relation to the thing signified, a relation which does not refer to a distinct existence – it is an autonomous sign – but the total context of social phenomena of the given milieu (science, philosophy, religion, politics, economy, etc.).<sup>33</sup>

It is the reference to the thing signified, which Saussure's binary model of the sign does not openly take into account (though as early as 1939, Benveniste suggested that Saussure's theory implies a third element<sup>34</sup>). In that sense, Mukařovský's conception of the artistic sign would be better suited to a triangular sign scheme.

<sup>32</sup> Bohuslav Havránek, Roman Jakobson, Vilém Mathesius, Jan Mukařovský, and Bohumil Trnka, 'Úvodem' [Introduction], *Slovo a slovesnost* 1 (1935): 5.

<sup>33</sup> Mukařovský, 'Art as a Semiotic Fact', 88.

<sup>34</sup> Émile Benveniste, 'Nature du signe linguistique', *Acta Linguistica* 1 (1939): 23–29.

In the Prague Linguistic Circle, Mukařovský's conception of the sign was in no sense the only one. Several theories existed there side by side. Apart from Saussure's proposal, the works and opinions of Edmund Husserl, Karl Bühler, Gustav Shpet, Valentin Voloshinov, and Otakar Zich were also well known. In 1929 Sergei Kartsevskij published his influential 'Du dualisme asymétrique du signe linguistique',<sup>35</sup> in which he argues that no perfect correspondence exists between the *signifié* and the *signifiant*. In linguistics the semiotic approach was advocated and developed by a number of other members of the Prague Linguistic Circle, including Vilém Mathesius, Bohuslav Havránek, and Roman Jakobson.<sup>36</sup>

Another member of the Prague Linguistic Circle, Petr Bogatyrev, used the semiotic approach as part of his research on folklore. In the essay 'Costume as a Sign', he wrote: 'Here I take the word sign in the broadest sense. Within the concept of "sign" we should differentiate the sign itself, symbol, signal.'<sup>37</sup> In another article, in which he discusses signs in theatre, he considers the idea of a 'sign of signs' – with which he describes theatre costume and stage scenery.<sup>38</sup> Jakobson had already worked with the term 'a sign of a sign', yet his conception differs from Bogatyrev's.<sup>39</sup> Karel Brušák, the author of an article about signs in Chinese theatre, worked with the sign in a completely different way.<sup>40</sup> In the late 1930s and first half of the 1940s, other scholars, particularly Jindřich Honzl and Jiří Veltruský, but also Jan Mukařovský, considered theatre as a combined sign system.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Sergej Karcevskij, 'Du dualisme asymétrique du signe linguistique', in *Travaux*, 88–93; published in English as 'The Asymmetric Dualism of the Linguistic Sign', trans. Wendy Steiner, in Steiner, *Prague School*, 47–54.

<sup>36</sup> Jindřich Toman, *The Magic of a Common Language: Jakobson, Mathesius, Trubetzkoy, and the Prague Linguistic Circle* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995); Ladislav Matejka, 'The Sociological Concerns of the Prague School', in *The Prague School and Its Legacy in Linguistics, Literature, Semiotics, Folklore, and the Arts*, ed. Yishai Tobin (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1988), 219–26; Linda R. Waugh, 'The Poetic Function in the Theory of Roman Jakobson', in 'Roman Jakobson: Language and Poetry', special issue, *Poetics Today* 2, no. 1a (1980): 57–82.

<sup>37</sup> Petr Bogatyrev, 'Costume as a Sign: The Functional and Structural Concept of Costume in Ethnography' (1936), trans. Yvonne Lockwood, in *Semiotics of Art: Prague School Contributions*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Irwin R. Titunik (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), 19.

<sup>38</sup> Petr Bogatyrev, 'Semiotics in the Folk Theater' (1938), in Matejka and Titunik, *Semiotics of Art*, 33.

<sup>39</sup> Roman Jakobson, 'The Statue in Puškin's Poetic Mythology' (1937), trans. John Burbank, in *Selected Writings*, vol. 5, *On Verse, Its Masters and Explorers* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 237–80.

<sup>40</sup> Karel Brušák, 'Signs in the Chinese Theater' (1939), in Matejka and Titunik, *Semiotics of Art*, 59–73.

<sup>41</sup> Jindřich Honzl, 'Dynamics of the Sign in the Theater' (1940), in Matejka and Titunik, *Semiotics of Art*, 74–93; Jiří Veltruský, *Drama as Literature* (Lisse: de Ridder, 1977).

If we take a closer look at these semiotic theories, we discover that although they complement each other on the surface, they differ in some details. The great number and diversity of these theories are an indication that in the Prague Linguistic Circle in the early 1930s there was no uniformly applied definition of the term 'sign'. That fact, unsurprisingly, led some scholars also to markedly eclectic understandings of the sign and a broad range of interpretations of it.<sup>42</sup> That, however, changes nothing about the fact that seeing reality as signs, that is, semiotics itself, provided Prague structuralists with a starting point from which to go beyond Russian formalism. In their view semiotics became the most suitable framework for investigating language, literature, and art of all kinds.

The lecture 'The Semiology of Art' is unique in its clear focus and overall interpretation. Its whole organization tells us that Mukařovský was seeking, probably also with regard to his students, to systematize his conception of semiotics. In the introduction he expounds on the status of the semiotics of art in aesthetics and defines his basic terms. Mukařovský presents semiotics (or semiology, the term he uses exclusively, following on from Saussure) as a theory of the sign in general. He states that a work of art cannot be understood properly except as a sign. He then defines the sign as a reality perceivable to the senses, a reality that is heading towards something and represents something. The actual realm of signs is, according to him, infinite – 'it extends as far as the human intellect extends'. Mukařovský therefore presents the work of art as a sign, but it is a sign *sui generis*; in his view, art as such is a complex sign system.

For a basic definition of the sign, Mukařovský explicitly uses the sign theories of Saussure and Bühler, but he also works with the phenomenological research of Husserl and Ingarden. He also considers their conceptions in his earlier university lectures, particularly 'A Philosophy of Poetic Language'.<sup>43</sup> Of the phenomenological terms that he uses, the most important are 'object relation' (*věcný vztah* in Czech, *Sachbezug* in German) and 'intentional object'. Whereas he uses 'object relation' to designate the relation of the work (the sign) to reality, he presents the intentional object as the meaning that is placed between the linguistic sign and reality, which he calls 'transcendent reality' (*transcendentní skutečnost*).

Following on from phenomenology, Mukařovský states that one can talk about transcendent reality or affect it only by means of signs. Concerning a work of art

<sup>42</sup> See Peter Grzybek, 'Some Remarks on the Notion of Sign in Jakobson's Semiotics and in Czech Structuralism', *Znakolog: An International Yearbook of Slavic Semiotics* 1 (1989): 113–28.

<sup>43</sup> Jan Mukařovský, 'Filozofie jazyka básnického', in *Básnická sémantika: Univerzitní přednášky Praha – Bratislava* [Poetic semantics: University lectures in Prague and Bratislava], ed. Miroslav Procházka (Prague: Karolinum, 1995), 75–122.

as a sign, the relation of the sign to transcendent reality is weakened. By contrast, its relation to intentional reality and intentional objects is strengthened.<sup>44</sup> To put it more specifically: a work of literature has only an indirect relation to transcendent reality, because reality appears in the work solely by means of the subject matter. The work of literature itself, however, depicts and represents reality that has the nature of a set of depicted objects (but also, for example, of characters, settings, actions). It is an intentional reality; it is a 'world' that is only 'as if'.

The problem is most likely connected with the question of reference. Though he considered it in many of his works, Mukařovský did not elaborate a comprehensive theory of reference. For him, a certain solution was the conception of the dual relation of the sign to intentional reality and to transcendent reality.

In this lecture Mukařovský develops his interpretation of the semiotics of art from a detailed explanation of the basic functions of the artistic sign. He emphasizes the role of the aesthetic function, which is dominant but latently and potentially contained in all the other functions of the linguistic and the artistic sign. He then defines the artistic sign as the dialectical negation of the communicative sign.

Mukařovský naturally had to include a description of the structure of the work of art and its internal construction. He presents this structure as a fact of collective consciousness, as something that is not material, as a historical fact that develops, that is continuously in motion. 'If the work of art is a sign,' Mukařovský writes, 'then the structure is also a sign.' It is remarkable with what concision and precision he presents, in only a few lines, what he means by 'structure', for behind them are concealed many years of his own work and writings in which he developed and tested his hypotheses. It is clear that he considered this problem solved, and therefore did not go into a lengthy elaboration of it, presenting his students with only his conclusions instead.

His interpretation of the work of art as a set of meanings is also presented in the form of a summary. Though he focuses on poetry and painting, he does not neglect music or architecture. Similarly, he discusses specific semantic components of a work of literature, including typography, acoustics, rhythm, metre, word choice, and composition. All the components of the work and their meanings are interconnected, and together can form a unified semantic whole. The overall semantic unification, however, is up to the perceiver.

The university lecture 'The Semiology of Art' does not represent the ultimate form of Mukařovský's views on the topic. In the 1940s he examined questions

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 118.

such as intentionality and nonintentionality in art and also the role of the individual in art, which further shifted his thinking and enriched it with other contexts. But in no sense does that suggest that he abandoned his earlier positions. Rather, it means that in the lecture he only hinted at some problems or presented them in shorthand, and then later thought them through and adjusted them. This lecture is presented here mostly as a piece of evidence, a document of a certain phase in Mukařovský's thinking about art and the semiotics of art. We should approach it also as a historical document, albeit an undoubtedly still highly thought-provoking one.

Translated by Derek and Marzia Paton

Ondřej Sládek  
Institute of Czech Literature, Czech Academy of Sciences,  
Na Florenci 3/1420, 110 00 Prague, Czech Republic  
sladek@ucl.cas.cz

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### PRIMARY SOURCES

- Benveniste, Émile. 'Nature du signe linguistique.' *Acta Linguistica* 1 (1939): 23–29.
- Bogatyrev, Petr. 'Costume as a Sign: The Functional and Structural Concept of Costume in Ethnography.' 1936. Translated by Yvonne Lockwood. In Matejka and Titunik, *Semiotics of Art*, 2–19.
- '. 'Semiotics in the Folk Theater.' 1938. In Matejka and Titunik, *Semiotics of Art*, 33–50.
- Brušák, Karel. 'Signs in the Chinese Theater.' 1939. In Matejka and Titunik, *Semiotics of Art*, 59–73.
- Havránek, Bohuslav, Roman Jakobson, Vilém Mathesius, Jan Mukařovský, and Bohumil Trnka. 'Úvodem' [Introduction]. *Slovo a slovesnost* 1 (1935): 1–7.
- Honzl, Jindřich. 'Dynamics of the Sign in the Theater.' 1940. In Matejka and Titunik, *Semiotics of Art*, 74–93.
- Hostinský, Otakar. 'Darwin and Drama.' 1873. Translated by Derek and Marzia Paton. *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 50 (2013): 101–11.
- '. 'Dissonance.' 1874. Translated by Derek and Marzia Paton. *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 50 (2013): 112–20.
- Jakobson, Roman. 'The Statue in Puškin's Poetic Mythology.' 1937. Translated by John Burbank. In *Selected Writings*, vol. 5, *On Verse, Its Masters and Explorers*, 237–80. The Hague: Mouton, 1979.
- Karcevskij, Sergej. 'The Asymmetric Dualism of the Linguistic Sign.' Translated by Wendy Steiner. In Steiner, *Prague School*, 47–54.
- '. 'Du dualisme asymétrique du signe linguistique.' In *Travaux*, 88–93.
- Mácha, Karel Hynek. *May*. Translated by Marcela Sulak. Prague: Twisted Spoon, 2005.

- Matejka, Ladislav, and Irwin R. Titunik, eds. *Semiotics of Art: Prague School Contributions*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976.
- Mathesius, Vilém. 'Deset let Pražského lingvistického kroužku' [Ten years of the Prague Linguistic Circle]. *Slovo a slovesnost* 2 (1936): 137–45.
- '. 'Ten Years of the Prague Linguistic Circle.' Translated by Wendy Steiner. In *The Linguistic School of Prague: An Introduction to Its Theory and Practice*, by Josef Vachek, 137–51. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966.
- Mukařovský, Jan. *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts*. Translated by Mark E. Suino. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1970.
- '. 'Art as a Semiotic Fact.' 1936. In *Structure, Sign, and Function*, 82–88.
- '. *Cestami poetiky a estetiky* [Down the paths of poetics and aesthetics]. Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1971.
- '. *Estetická funkce, norma a hodnota jako sociální fakty* [Aesthetic function, norm, and value as social facts]. Prague: Borový, 1936.
- '. 'Filozofie jazyka básnického' [A philosophy of poetic language]. In *Básnická sémantika: Univerzitní přednášky Praha – Bratislava* [Poetic semantics: University lectures in Prague and Bratislava], edited by Miroslav Procházka, 75–122. Prague: Karolinum, 1995.
- '. 'Genetika smyslu v Máchově poesii' [The genetics of meaning in Máchá's poetry]. In *Torso a tajemství Máchova díla: Sborník pojednání Pražského lingvistického kroužku* [Fragments and enigmas of Máchá's work: An anthology of essays by the Prague Linguistic Circle], edited by Jan Mukařovský, 13–110. Prague: Borový, 1938.
- '. 'The Individual and Literary Development.' 1943–45. In *Word and Verbal Art*, 161–79.
- '. 'Intentionality and Unintentionality in Art.' 1943. In *Structure, Sign, and Function*, 89–128.
- '. 'Kam směřuje dnešní teorie umění?' [Where is the contemporary theory of art heading?]. *Slovo a slovesnost* 11 (1948–49): 49–59.
- '. *Kapitoly z české poetiky* [Essays on Czech poetics]. Vol. 1, *Obecné věci básnictví* [General matters of poetry]. Prague: Melantrich, 1941.
- '. *Kapitoly z české poetiky*. Vol. 2, *K vývoji české poesie a prózy* [On the development of Czech poetry and prose]. Prague: Melantrich, 1941.
- '. *Kapitoly z české poetiky*. 2nd ed. 3 vols. Prague: Svoboda, 1948.
- '. 'Ke kritice strukturalismu v naší literární vědě' [Towards a critique of structuralism in Czechoslovak literary studies]. *Tvorba* 20, no. 40 (1951): 964–66.
- '. 'L'art comme fait sémiologique.' In *Actes du huitième congrès international de philosophie*, 1065–72. Prague: Comité d'organisation du congrès, 1936.
- '. *Máchův 'Máj': Estetická studie* [Máchá's *Máj*: An essay in aesthetics]. Prague: Filosofická fakulta, 1928.
- '. 'On Poetic Language.' 1940. In *Word and Verbal Art*, 1–64.
- '. 'On the Problem of Functions in Architecture.' 1937–38. In *Structure, Sign, and Function*, 236–50.
- '. 'Personality in Art.' 1944. In *Structure, Sign, and Function*, 150–68.
- '. *Příklad poezie: K otázce trvalé platnosti Máchova díla* [The example of poetry: On the question of the lasting relevance of Máchá's oeuvre]. Edited by Milan Jankovič. Prague: Pražská imaginace, 1991.
- '. 'Příspěvek k dnešní problematice básnického zjevu Máchova' [A contribution to current discussions on Máchá the poet]. *Listy pro umění a kritiku* 4, no. 2 (1936): 25–33; no. 3 (1936): 62–73.
- '. *Příspěvek k estetice českého verše* [A contribution to the aesthetics of Czech verse]. Prague: Filosofická fakulta, 1923.

- .'Protichůdci: Několik poznámek o vztahu Erbenova básnického díla k Máchovu' [Notes on Erben and Mácha as opposite poles in Czech poetry]. *Slovo a slovesnost* 2 (1936): 33–43.
- .'Stranickost ve vědě a v umění' [Partisanship in the arts and sciences]. Prague: Orbis, 1949.
- .' *Structure, Sign, and Function: Selected Essays by Jan Mukařovský*. Edited and translated by John Burbank and Peter Steiner. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978.
- .' *Studie z estetiky* [Essays on aesthetics]. Prague: Odeon, 1966.
- .' *Studie z poetiky* [Essays on poetics]. Prague: Odeon, 1982.
- .'Umění jako sémiologický fakt' [Art as a semiotic fact]. 1936. In *Studie I*, 208–14. Brno: Host, 2000.
- .' *The Word and Verbal Art: Selected Essays*. Edited and translated by John Burbank and Peter Steiner. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977.
- [Prague Linguistic Circle]. 'Theses Presented to the First Congress of Slavists Held in Prague in 1929.' Translated by Josef Vachek. In *Praguiana: Some Basic and Less Known Aspects of the Prague Linguistic School*, edited by Josef Vachek and Libuše Duřková, 77–120. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1983.
- .'Thèses présentées au Premier Congrès des philologues slaves.' In *Travaux*, 3–29. Prague: Jednota československých matematiků a fyziků, 1929.
- Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague*. Vol. 1, *Mélanges linguistiques dédiés au premier Congrès des philologues slaves*. Prague: Jednota československých matematiků a fyziků, 1929.
- Veltruský, Jiří. *Drama as Literature*. Lisse: de Ridder, 1977.
- Zich, Otakar. 'Aesthetic and Artistic Evaluation, Part 1.' 1916. Translated by Derek and Marzia Paton. *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 46 (2009): 189–201.
- .'Aesthetic and Artistic Evaluation, Parts 2 & 3.' 1916. Translated by Derek and Marzia Paton, *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 47 (2010): 71–95.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

- Červenka, Miroslav. *Der Bedeutungsaufbau des literarischen Werks*. Edited by Frank Boldt and Wolf-Dieter Stempel. Munich: Fink, 1978.
- Chvatik, Květoslav. *Strukturalismus und Avantgarde*. Munich: Hanser, 1970.
- .' *Tschechoslowakischer Strukturalismus: Theorie und Geschichte*. Munich: Fink, 1981.
- Doležel, Lubomír. *Narrative Modes in Czech Literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973.
- Galan, František W. *Historic Structures: The Prague School Project, 1928–1946*. London: Helm, 1985.
- Grygar, Mojmír. 'Die Theorie der Kunst und der Wertung im tschechischen Strukturalismus.' In *Beschreiben, Interpretieren, Werten: Das Wertungsproblem in der Literatur aus der Sicht unterschiedlicher Methoden*, edited by Bernd Lenz and Bernd Schulte-Middelich, 156–81. Munich: Fink, 1982.
- Grzybek, Peter. 'Some Remarks on the Notion of Sign in Jakobson's Semiotics and in Czech Structuralism.' *Znakolog: An International Yearbook of Slavic Semiotics* 1 (1989): 113–28.
- Jankovič, Milan. 'Perspectives of Semantic Gesture.' *Poetics* 1, no. 4 (1972): 16–27.
- Kubínová, Marie. 'A Work of Art as a Sign and the Problem of Its Meaning: The Causes and Consequences of the Work–Sign Double Meaning in Mukařovský's Work.' In *Jan Mukařovský and the Prague School / Jan Mukařovský und die Prager Schule*, edited by Vladimír Macura and Herta Schmid, 166–72. Potsdam: Universität Potsdam, 1999.

- Matejka, Ladislav. 'The Sociological Concerns of the Prague School.' In *The Prague School and Its Legacy in Linguistics, Literature, Semiotics, Folklore, and the Arts*, edited by Yishai Tobin, 219–26. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1988.
- , ed. *Sound, Sign and Meaning: Quinquagenary of the Prague Linguistic Circle*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1976.
- Mercks, Kees. 'Introductory Observations on the Concept of "Semantic Gesture".' *Russian Literature* 20 (1986): 381–422.
- Poetics* 1, no. 4 (1972).
- Schmid, Herta. 'Die "semantische Geste" als Schlüsselbegriff des Prager literaturwissenschaftlichen Strukturalismus.' In *Schwerpunkte der Literaturwissenschaft außerhalb des deutschen Sprachraums*, edited by Elrud Ibsch, 209–61. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1982.
- Schwarz, Wolfgang F. 'Die "Semantische Geste" – ein brauchbares analytisches Instrument? Zur Entwicklung und Kritik eines Kernbegriffs in Mukařovskýs Literaturästhetik.' In *Prager Schule: Kontinuität und Wandel: Arbeiten zur Literaturästhetik und Poetik der Narration*, edited by Wolfgang F. Schwarz, 197–222. Frankfurt: Vervuert, 1997.
- Sládek, Ondřej. *Jan Mukařovský: Život a dílo* [Jan Mukařovský: Life and works]. Brno: Host, 2015.
- , ed. *The Metamorphoses of Prague School Structural Poetics*. Munich: Lincom Europa, 2015.
- Steiner, Peter, ed. *The Prague School: Selected Writings, 1929–1946*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975.
- , ed. 'The Roots of Structuralist Esthetics.' In Steiner, *Prague School*, 174–219.
- , ed. *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984.
- Steiner, Peter, Miroslav Červenka, and Ronald Vroon, eds. *Structure of the Literary Process: Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Felix Vodička*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1982.
- Štoll, Ladislav. *O tvar a strukturu v slovesném umění: K metodologii a světónázorovým východiskům ruské formální školy a pražského literárního strukturalismu* [The search for form and structure in literature: On the method and ideological starting points of Russian formalism and Prague literary structuralism]. Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1966.
- Sus, Oleg. 'On the Genetic Preconditions of Czech Structuralist Semiology and Semantics: An Essay on Czech and German Thought.' *Poetics* 1, no. 4 (1972): 28–54.
- Toman, Jindřich. *The Magic of a Common Language: Jakobson, Mathesius, Trubetzkoy, and the Prague Linguistic Circle*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995.
- Veltruský, Jiří. 'The Prague School Theory of Theatre.' *Poetics Today* 2, no. 3 (1981), 225–35.
- Waugh, Linda R. 'The Poetic Function in the Theory of Roman Jakobson.' In 'Roman Jakobson: Language and Poetry', special issue, *Poetics Today* 2, no. 1a (1980): 57–82.

## JAN MUKAŘOVSKÝ: THE SEMIOLOGY OF ART

---

A THREE-HOUR LECTURE, GIVEN AT PRAGUE AND BRATISLAVA, WINTER SEMESTER, 1936/37

An explanation of the title: this is a fundamental chapter in the philosophy of art. The philosophy of art, together with other disciplines, has stripped aesthetics of its autonomy. The psychology of art was based on the conviction that it is possible to lay down laws of aesthetics. It began with mathematical experiments. Fechner, whose book is called *Vorschule der Ästhetik*,<sup>1</sup> came along with experimental aesthetics, and thus disarmed earlier aesthetics, which had tried philosophically to justify the aesthetic norm; 'aesthetics from below' was supposed to discover the aesthetic norm by experiment. It was based on experimental psychology, the experimental investigations of rhythm, which are actually research in experimental psychology. In short, aesthetics vanished.

In the same period, Dessoir published *Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*,<sup>2</sup> and thereby turned attention to aspects of art which are not truly psychological. The decisive step was taken by the Vienna School, which brought the artefact back into focus, precisely what the psychology of art had forgotten about. Individual arts may be isolated from each other, but art itself is not isolated. It is something that we might call the sphere of phenomena whose main function is to have an aesthetic effect. Every phenomenon can become the vehicle of an aesthetic function, the trigger of 'aesthetic pleasure'. For example, physical training probably has other aims, but it has its own particular, immanent aesthetic element.

The aesthetic is a matter of the whole collective, not just the individual. But such a claim did not deny the psychology of art; rather, it relegated it to a place of its own. There can also be another view, from art theory or from the sociology of art, and so forth, but it has turned out that there is a sphere of special problems that are not included in any of those fields of scholarship.

---

[An anonymous transcript of Mukařovský's lecture, deposited in National Library, Prague, under shelf number 54 C 18666. It was first published as Jan Mukařovský, 'Sémiologie umění', in *Umělecké dílo jako znak: Z univerzitních přednášek 1936–1939* [The work of art as a sign: Selected university lectures, 1936–39], ed. Marie Havránková and Milan Jankovič (Prague: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, 2008), 7–61. The present translation is of this edition. The footnotes and figures are adapted from it too. © Jan Mukařovský – heirs; edition © Marie Havránková, Milan Jankovič.]

<sup>1</sup> Gustav Theodor Fechner, *Vorschule der Aesthetik*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1876).

<sup>2</sup> Max Dessoir, *Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* (Stuttgart: Enke, 1906).

We would also touch upon the noetics of artistic value, that is, the question of the historical legitimacy of artistic value, that is, the question of the individual who creates art and perceives art. Does that individual have influence as an individual, or may we consider him or her to be incidental? That is a problem for the art historian; the history of painting will look at it differently than the history of literature and so on. Sometimes, for example, in architecture, several artists participate in the work; that happens less with painters. (We ask, for example, whether it is Titian or the Titian school.) That rarely happens with the novel.

Let's consider something else. The art historian may ponder the problem of space and time. Space and time are somehow givens; the work of art develops in them. It is clear, for example, that space plays a far more important role in the history of architecture than it does in the history of literature. And then there is the special permeation of space and time. Art is highly protean; the ratio of the category of space and time has changed in the course of the development of art. What do these categories even mean? How does such a permeation happen? And so on. A huge number of such problems arise, and are common to all the arts and yet to each art differently.

Material is a fact of art. The whole development of art is actually the violation of material (as much as one wants to use words to paint, the words still make their presence felt afterwards). From the variety of material arises the problem of the transposition of one art into another; and such an investigation requires concrete material.

We are certainly faced here with a large complex of problems, no longer of such a general nature, but transcending the confines of the psychology or sociology of art (that is why Dessoir calls his work *Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*). Today we see the pressing need to solve these problems separately.

There is the question of value. Is a lasting aesthetic value historical? The question of the philosophy of art has become complicated. It can no longer be answered using Kant's approach; Kant was a person without artistic talent, and included the critique of pure judgement in his system almost as an afterthought. Well, today we cannot acknowledge even the old trinity of logic, ethics, and aesthetics. In addition to cognition and practical concerns, there is of course the aesthetic point of view. But if we want to ask questions about aesthetics as we do about philosophy, we have to see them in their full breadth. What does that mean? It means art has an aesthetic function. But not only art has that function. We have to consider the philosophy of the aesthetic.

Let's consider the word art, and recall the tired old refrain 'Is it or isn't art?' We are people from an age that has carried out the atomization of functions.

In the Middle Ages the *artes* were divided into the *artes liberales* and the *artes serviles*. The initial struggles with this division were during the Renaissance (Leonardo da Vinci classed painting amongst the *artes liberales*, but sculpture amongst the *artes serviles*), because for the people of that time *ars* was something different. We have to think not only about art but also about the aesthetic as a whole; then there is no boundary whatsoever. An example is the sentence 'It is dark'. Though a communicative, purely practical utterance, that sentence contains everything you could want. Can we imagine it as part of a poem? We can. All functions are always potentially included. When it comes to the use and abuse of things, art is the supreme abuse. That means that although there is no clear division among functions, a thing is always used for some purpose. Yet in art a thing remains an end in itself, because Comenius's idea that a person 'gives names' to things no longer holds for us: we know that every reality is too rich to serve only one function – a function determined by a human being. In addition, every reality is capable of other functions. The aesthetic function is contained in things, and it appears during their abuse. All functions have long existed for human beings. Biological reality and material reality are extremely rich, and therefore always potentially contain everything. First of all, we have to see the world in its full breadth.

If, on the other hand, we wish to talk about the aesthetic function, we must not neglect the other functions. A work of art exists also for some other purpose (a novel, for example, has a communicative function). The aesthetic function is never isolated.

A work of theory without specific material is impossible. What Fechner did ('aesthetics from below') was important. In contrast to the old aesthetics, a new aesthetics, experimental and psychological, was called into existence. It was metaphysical; it did not have art as its point of departure. For its system, however, this philosophy also needed to be supplemented with something. Today, aesthetics cannot exist without historically situated material. Today's aesthetics takes into account the historicity of its material, which is something incomprehensible for psychological aesthetics. For practitioners of psychological aesthetics a human being always remained the same. Aesthetics until recently used to place itself outside history. The whole of aesthetics is the methodology of the history of art, which means that it needs material that has been prepared by the history of art. A theoretical result is then immediately corrected. There is between them a relationship of reciprocity in which no single discipline is placed higher than the other – that is the general position of aesthetics today.

What is the bizarre word 'semiology' (or sematology)? Semantics is concerned with language as a sign. Semiology is the study of the sign in general. We cannot

understand a work of art except as a sign. A sign is a reality perceivable by the senses, a reality that is aimed at something and represents something; let's say, it is 'meaning' something. We recall, for example, a flag (which signifies a country), signals, and the like. Facial expressions are based completely on the nature of the sign; a gesture stands for something that we do not have. It seems to us that the most natural thing in the world is when we respond to something joyful by laughing, nodding our heads, and so on. A thing can contain unforeseen signs. For example, the ordinary gesture of bending one's head while listening to music; the same gesture for a Russian means sadness (we see it in their sculptures). One must be very careful when dealing with the nature of the sign.

Seeing is only apparently a matter of our senses. If we see a thing that bears the traces of human work, and if we do not know what it is for, we see differently than if we know what it is for. A knife in a painting immediately acquires meaning. A word serves to mediate between two sides; a person most often communicates his or her perception with language. In short, the realm of the sign extends to where the mental life of human beings extends.

Money, for instance, has a sign character. Let's imagine a hand gesture that, amongst musicians in the countryside, means ordering one beer. Money has a very wide sphere of application, but remains a sign because it stands for things. Unlike language, it does not communicate (except in rare cases). Speech is a vehicle of all other semiotic groups. That means that human beings have created the most fundamental sign system – what is fixed in speech is underdeveloped in other systems. More than anything else, art is close to speech (as Benedetto Croce put it<sup>3</sup>). A work of art is also a sign; it is a distinctive sign, *sui generis*.

Why is a work of art a sign? What we have in a work of art is an artefact – but, in contrast to it, we have, say, a hammer and tongs. A hammer has its function and at the same time signifies that function. Let's place a sculpture beside it. What purpose does it serve? None outside itself. Its sign nature – if it exists – must be stronger than in other things. A viewer can perceive a painting as a message; it therefore serves some purpose after all! But a person for whom an anecdote would substitute for a painting does not perceive art as art. Art is but one of the signs in many instances of communication: herein lies its closeness to speech. Yet it differs from speech.

*The vastness of the realm of signs.* Whatever a person touches becomes a sign. There are private signs; but a sign is also a binding agent of society. Without society there would probably be no signs. The most fundamental function of

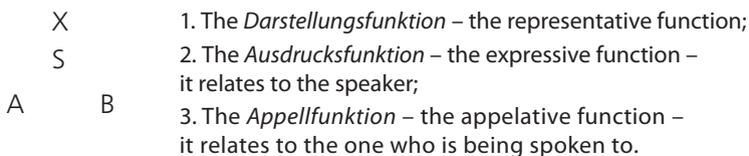
<sup>3</sup> Benedetto Croce, *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression and of the Linguistic in General*, trans. Colin Lyas (1901; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

the sign is the communicative function. A percept is in itself incommunicable, that is, it cannot be identified with the meaning of a word; and yet a percept itself contains sign elements. Anything can become a sign. A locomotive is a source of this or that, but it also means 'locomotive', and that is why it can become a symbol (of speed, technology, and so forth). For some things, the nature of the sign forms the essence of a function (for example, a sign for money). A function, although practical, has a sign value. A sign is the basis of thinking. Modern logic (for example, the logic of Husserl<sup>4</sup>) has understood that point. What is the property that always reveals that this is an artistic sign rather than some other sign? To answer the question, let us first consider structure.

*The linguistic sign.* What, then, would we call a sign? Until recently semanticists based themselves on words. They carried out analyses of what a word – like 'dog', 'chicken', or 'table' – means. 'Table', for instance, can mean a tool, a geographic name, a piece of equipment in a chemical laboratory. Everyone can therefore imagine something different. Why do they usually begin their analyses with a noun? To simplify the problem. Why in the nominative case? Because it is a neutral case. But a sentence may be a more suitable starting point for reflections on what a linguistic sign is. Simply from the lexical side of things, if the word turns out to have a dual meaning, it is then another sign; here, one is intentionally playing with the meaning of the word. The sentence, furthermore, means some action. An even better unit than the sentence is the utterance. A whole novel then actually becomes a linguistic sign; but we must not be so strict with that division. The most fundamental thing is not the monologue, but the dialogue. In a normal situation, an utterance requires someone who is speaking and someone who is being spoken to – that is, two people. That should also include what they are talking about, some fact (x). And they communicate by means of sound. This acoustic thing is the fact which has the function of a sign, that is, which signifies.

According to the model of the Vienna psychologist Karl Bühler, we can deduce three basic functions of speech:<sup>5</sup>

**Fig. 1**



<sup>4</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 2 vols., trans. J. N. Findlay (1900, 1901; London: Routledge, 2001).

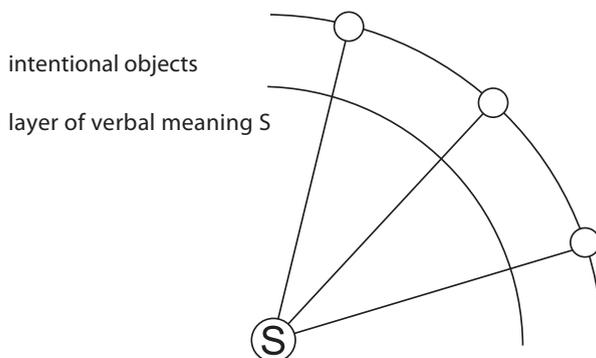
<sup>5</sup> Karl Bühler, *Theory of Language: The Representational Function of Language*, trans. Donald Fraser Goodwin (1934; Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2011).

Lastly, there is the thing that does the representing: a sound. The problem of sound, if it relates to speech, is big. For example, two people agree to something, such as 'When you see this, it means this' – it is a sign, a signal. But we cannot imagine a convention underlying speech. A signal has the advantage over a linguistic sign because one can express a complex function with it (a signal at the beginning of a mutiny, which then signifies the whole action; or the black and white sails in the myth of Theseus). A linguistic sign can of course function as a signal as well.

A linguistic sign is articulated. The individual sections are known; they constitute part of the sound system of language (different languages have different systems). What constitutes the phonological system of language, and also the systems of grammar and lexis, is present in an utterance. Each part exists only in opposition to another part: for example, 'd' seems to us to be such and such, because of its relationship to 't'. As opposed to the signal, the linguistic system complicates the matter. But we are so accustomed to dealing with a linguistic system that we do not even realize it until we lack an expression.

A linguistic sign, however, is not connected with meaning as a signal. A signal has only one object relation; with a linguistic sign, the object can continuously change:

**Fig. 2**



Each meaning has a number of possible object relations, of which, in an utterance, we use only one. But although only one meaning is being used on a particular occasion, the meaning is always complete: I therefore use the word 'dog' to mean this particular dog. We can, and at the same time cannot, say that an utterance means a fact. It is between the layer of meaning and transcendent reality (that is, intentional objects). Not recognizing the species, we can call two animals of a different species by one name. Very often, the verbal meaning and

the intentional object merge into one for us, and we have to correct this by thinking. Because of its internal structure, the linguistic sign is very complex.

A word in a sentence has many aspects. All of them influence what the word signifies. For instance, the genitive means something different in Czech from what it means in German. Something is an adjective, because it is not a noun, an adverb, and so forth. There is a whole lexical system that negatively determines each of the components of meaning. An act of linguistic meaning is extremely complicated; yet a linguistic sign is a prototype of every other sign.

What is the fact that the verbal sign points to? By the word 'pencil', for example, we denote a pencil (for children it is unclear; to them the two things are identical). The dividing line is clear: by the word we denote a thing (that is, what we see, feel with our hands). That too is already arranged into a system that we can also call semantic. Things are delineated, positioned in space (right side up, upside down, sideways); that is a semantic fact. Facts created by human beings are linked together in a semantic system, which stands in a complex relationship to linguistic meaning. This complexity would be even greater if we added the system of logic to intentional objects.

1. The *Darstellungsfunktion* is extremely important in art; with its help the sign gains its orientation to some fact.

2. The *Ausdrucksfunktion*. Let's imagine two people talking together about something, during which they feel something and want something. They do not say so in words – that would then belong to the *Darstellungsfunktion* – and that is evident from the syntax, accent, and so forth. The *Ausdrucksfunktion* of course thoroughly penetrates the *Darstellungsfunktion*.

3. The *Appellfunktion* is hard to distinguish from the *Ausdrucksfunktion*, but both exist. We will later find them in the relationship between the artist and the work of art and between the work and the consumer. This is a digression, but does suggest profound consequences.

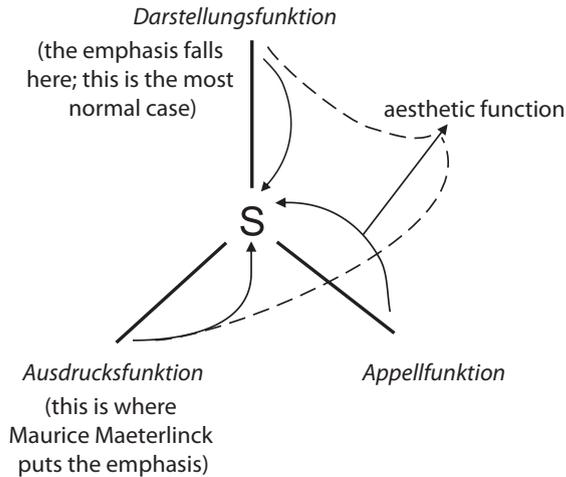
The *Darstellung* is much more systematic than the other functions; but even behind it there lurks some randomness – where does it come from? Well, it stems from the situation. Every utterance has a relationship to the 'here and now'. Let's, however, take the 'here and now' as a noetic term; concreteness would be bizarre. An example from Ertl's grammar helps us to understand the dependence on the situation:<sup>6</sup> 'Dead,' says the doctor. That could also mean something quite different, but here it has been included in a certain situation. It remains true that

<sup>6</sup> Václav Ertl (1875–1929), a Czech linguist, editor of the journal *Naše řeč* (Our language); he revised Jan Gebauer's 1890 *Mluvnice česká* (A Czech grammar): Václav Ertl, *Gebauerova Mluvnice česká pro školy střední a ústavy učitelské* [Gebauer's Czech grammar for schools and teachers' colleges], 2 vols. (Prague: Unie, 1914).

a situation – with everything random and unexpected that it brings – is a constant initiator; and in art that is true *mutatis mutandis* as well.

Whether or not a work of art is an expression of the artist is a complicated question. It neither is, nor is not. We cannot say that it has nothing to do with the artist, because we would then be unable to explain some of its components. A work of art in itself somehow stands in between.

**Fig. 3**



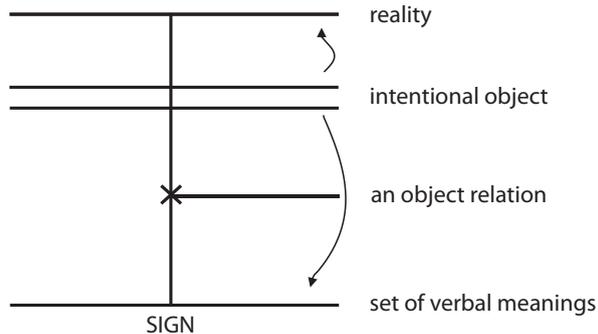
An utterance contains these three functions. The aesthetic function is always contained latently and potentially in all three. In short, what this means is that the aesthetic function is nothing that would be added from outside, but it need not be the dominant function. The functions can be interchanged, but panaestheticism overestimated the aesthetic function. The world viewed from the perspective of panaestheticism would be a wretched place. If something has an aesthetic function, the other functions can never vanish. That means that there are certain objects that have been made in order to function aesthetically; that is what art makes. A work of art can appear at a number of points of intersection, which can, but need not, be of importance to us. If the aesthetic function predominates in a work of art, that does not mean the denial of the other three basic functions. On the other hand, the aesthetic function cannot, and may not, be reduced to the other functions. A person who thinks that a novel is for instruction and a painting is only a fact of communication is not perceiving art adequately.

Art may seem especially close to the *Ausdrucksfunktion*, but cannot be identical to it. The three other chief functions remain distinctly beside it. What is

happening to them? Let's take the portrait: it will portray a person. In that case, the *Darstellungsfunktion* will be the most valuable thing for the people closest to the sitter. If the portrait ends up in a picture gallery, the *Darstellungsfunktion* will definitely no longer be at the centre of interest. A novel needs a certain distance; that distance can be fictitious; a person in the seventeenth century imagines the distance differently from a person in the twentieth century. Or, a lyric poem expresses the feelings of the poet. Though interesting for the art historian, these questions are marginal to the actual work of art.

When we talk about the sign, there are three functions plus the aesthetic one. These three functions do not vanish from art, but in some respect their relevance changes. For example, a lie. A lie can also be revealed in a work of art: then it is a matter of Baron Munchausen, a certain way of artistic presentation. Every artistic narrative is normally fiction, and yet we would distinguish between a narrative plot and a fictitious plot, and between a plot that is narrated as fiction. All the various shades of the relationship to reality remain preserved in the work of art, but they lose their practical relevance.

**Fig. 4**



Between the layer of meaning and reality stands the intentional object – we see things *sub specie* of their intentional meaning. Reality = transcendent reality.

Upon reflection we realize that the intentional object and the verbal meaning are in accord. There is something of reality in the intentional object; it is impossible to say anything about transcendent reality. For example, 'table' as an intentional object becomes a table. It is then necessary to distinguish reality (*Wirklichkeit*), which somehow has an effect (*wirkt*), from the word, which does not have a direct effect (as reality), except in a child's mind or if, as amongst the primitive peoples, it has a magical meaning. The meaning of a word is not reality.

*The intentional object.* For example, a 'hammer' is for hammering nails; but materially it can have an effect only if it is used in some function (this function

makes it a 'hammer'). In the word itself (= pure meaning) no confusion can arise. Reality is projected into the intentional objects, but the word also has a relationship to them. Thus, the special scheme of intentional objects is given.

What is the meaning of 'table'? (1) The thing called 'table', (2) the intentional object called 'table'; sometimes it is very difficult for us to tell the difference. A 'State' is reality (we are convinced of that by the workings of the institutions of State power), but we will not find the material existence fully embodied anywhere. The only exception we would find would be in the period of Absolutism ('L'État, c'est moi'). Otherwise, the head of state is the symbol of the State. The State is only in the sphere of intentional objects. It is manifested in many people; none of these people is the whole State, nor are they only the State (people are also members of families, and so forth). These functions intersect in the intentional scheme. It is possible that the State will cease to exist, but its institutions will try to continue to exist (for example, at the end of Austria-Hungary in 1918). In other words, not only transcendent reality, but also the intentional scheme has its own reality. There are real state institutions, real acts of legislation; nevertheless, the State too has its own reality; it is itself a reality. By contrast, pure meanings can also find themselves in the sphere of intentional objects. As Gogol wished, the nose in his short story 'The Nose' ended up in the sphere of intentional objects – the name Nose then becomes a reality. Why is the whole structure so complex? Because reality is supposed to coincide with the intentional object. Yet the intentional scheme is also bound to reality, and also to the semantic sphere, and that is the social sphere. Society changes; intentional objects need to be adapted, so here stands an intermediary: meanings. With language it is possible to express and link meanings in a way that would not, however, be even possible in intentional reality.

*The communicative function in art.* For a human being, speech is the fundamental sign set. If art is a sign, it is associated with this most fundamental set, which contains the human being's universe. There are theories that have directly equated the act of speaking with artistic form, that is, with aesthetics, for example, Benedetto Croce's aesthetics. That is not right. Literature, film, and dance include an element of communication; sculpture does so as well. But, in addition, there are arts to which communication is alien – music and architecture. The communication–noncommunication opposition is not so clear cut. Every art of communication can also have its own forms of noncommunication. And the whole development of art then oscillates between communication and noncommunication.

We rank literature amongst the arts of communication; the epic has a strong tendency to communicate. In the lyric the power to communicate is greatly

weakened. And we find similar tendencies in film, dance, drama, sculpture, and painting. In painting, there have been efforts to achieve absolute painting, the complete eradication of the communicative function. There have been attempts at so-called 'literature in an artificial language': all that remained were sounds. In film, there have been attempts at absolute film. Dance seeks to achieve pure plasticity, only the feeling of three-dimensionality. The slogan 'purity' in the individual arts has meant the eradication of communication.

The arts that communicate always latently contain the negation of communication, and vice versa. The noncommunicative arts cannot reasonably be said to be far from the aim to communicate. What is most visible in architecture, for example, is the thing that it serves to do, that is, its practical function; a building does not say anything; it just is. It is a theatre, a church, a house. But the communication is simply in the fact that the building functions in some particular way. The practical function calls itself the function, which is actually why it is so difficult to distinguish between a communicative function and a practical function. There was a time when furniture pretended to be something quite different from what it was. This pretended function has its own meaning. Even architecture has a symbolic function. A collective constructs a grand building, for example, which will represent something definite: it latently also has symbolic validity. This communicative function is present even if not visible at first glance.

The same is true of music. There are periods of development which have emphasized the communicative function, for example, so-called programme music. Melody is something different from the intonation of the voice, but it shares some properties with intonation; vocal music preceded instrumental music or has been developing more quickly than it. The tendency to communicate in music is given by the affinity between melody and linguistic intonation. To what extent is an agogic accent in tempo potentially communication? Communication is not absolutely alien here. Is it fair to say, 'Music is completely without communication' (as Johann Friedrich Herbart<sup>7</sup> and Eduard Hanslick<sup>8</sup> did)? Music is a 'pure musical idea', but it also contains an intention to communicate.

Art is usually divided up into thematic arts (with a tendency to communicate) and athematic arts (with a tendency to be without content). The difference is not so great; both permeate each other. In no work of art is an orientation to having a theme impossible; on the other hand, one can always deny the relevance of the theme. All the arts are to some extent the same in that respect.

<sup>7</sup> See Otakar Hostinský, *Herbarts Ästhetik* (Hamburg: Voss, 1891).

<sup>8</sup> Eduard Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music*, trans. Gustav Cohen (1854; New York: Liberal Arts, 1957).

What is the relationship of a work of art to a communicative utterance? The communicative utterance may be not only linguistic; it may also be pictorial (for example, a scientific illustration). If we have an utterance, by means of which we communicate something, then the *Darstellungsfunktion* is the main thing. One can see that the work of art oscillates between communication and its opposite. It is a sign no different from other signs of communication, but it is an autonomous sign. It is a sign of communication by which nothing is communicated. A work of art is the dialectical negation of the communicative function, as Hippolyte Taine argued. In a work of literature – in an epic – the communication component is visible: we are presented with an event. We might hear the same event as a police report. It always depends on our focus. As soon as the same event is told as a detective story, the previous interest vanishes. But its potential remains. With the change in focus the plot itself comes to the fore. Where did that change in the sign take place? A certain change in the object relation took place. Truth and untruth can have various modalities. We can understand an untruthful event as, for example, a lie, an error, an unconscious intent, or a fiction. We can place aesthetic modification (beside categorically true or possible) in this category. It depends on what artistic devices the artist chooses; that is also always the case with a work of literature (Masaryk said that one can know what a nation is like from its belles-lettres). We should not let ourselves be deceived by realism. Though a work of art can be valid as a means of communication, events in the foreground are not necessarily valid as art. Take the historical novel, for example: certain things in it have a communicative function – that is why it is a historical novel. As soon as we begin to look at the work as a fact of art, however, the work of art can be completely stripped of its validity as a means of communication.

Well, it is now a matter of clarifying the essence of the modified object relation. We again start from an epic work. It is a certain message, a certain object relation. When this object relation was severed and turned inside the work itself, did the work of art then cease to have any connection with reality? It certainly did not. The 'rule' of truthfulness is after all usually placed on the work of art. We place the requirement of 'viability' on the work of art; the work has to be in a relationship with something outside itself. In an epic, an event need not be 'truth'. What is its relationship to the reader? Quite personal experiences suddenly make themselves felt in the readers; it seems to them that they are one of the characters and are participating in the plot – this is called 'empathy'. In such a case it may happen that the work falls apart if we empathize with the work differently from how the author imagined. It is human interest that gets into the work. Or let's take painting. Many trends in modern painting intentionally leave it up to the viewers

to project their own experiences into it. Seeing such a work, we indeed often have the impression that it is about us, about our emotional and voluntary relationship to the world.

What is at issue here? There is always a possibility that the work of art establishes a relationship with the whole system of values which is valid for the perceiver. It affects the way we approach the universe. In other words, it is a matter of a relationship, not of concord, which means that the work of art need not always seamlessly coalesce with our system; indeed, it can evoke antagonism. It is a dynamic process. And concerning the system of values, everyone has his or her own private one (that is, *parole*), though it is just a shadow of the general collective system (*langage*). The special nature of the artistic sign consists in the possibility that its object relation can somehow be transformed, that is, can multiply. A work of art becomes a direct confrontation between one's self and the world as such.

A work of art places itself amongst concrete experiences of the perceiver and the artist. The work stems from some experience (and evokes some experience). That, for Wilhelm Dilthey, is the basis. His book, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*,<sup>9</sup> has been reflected in the works of various critics in Czechoslovakia; attempts have been made at its systematic transplantation to Czech literature. They are, however, of the most naive kind.

What was at issue here? To take advantage of experience as a hypothesis for the development of a work of art. Taine too says *race, milieu et moment*. The artist lives in something, in a milieu, and automatically takes on the influence of the milieu! According to Taine, we could almost figure out where the artist is from; but we can never know everything that Taine mentions, and that must have become obvious pretty soon. Dilthey realizes that a person is surrounded by a vast number of things, events – some of them leave traces (they continuously form a person, determine a change in his or her relationship to a thing), others – though important – pass by without changing anything. A flower by the road, for example, suddenly becomes a guiding influence. And Dilthey builds upon that. In order for one to come into contact with that flower, one must experience it (*erleben – Erlebnis*). The theory then continues: for the non-artist the experience will have an effect on his or her daily life, as it will on the artist's life as well. And a work is therefore interpreted from experiences that the artist had. They are

<sup>9</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung: Lessing, Goethe, Novalis, Hölderlin*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1910). Two essays from the book, 'Goethe and the Poetic Imagination' and 'Friedrich Hölderlin', are published in translation, by Christopher Rodie and Joseph Ross respectively, in *Selected Works*, vol. 5, *Poetry and Experience*, ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 235–302; 303–83.

'Erlebnisse' and they are 'Urlebnisse', experiences affecting a person's whole life. (Up to this point, Dilthey and Taine overlap.)

In what circumstances does something become an experience? The artist's personality is a bundle of tendencies. The work originates in experiences, and the experiences originate in the artist's personality. That personality, however, has to be something inexplicable for us. We thereby come to platitudes that explain nothing. If we want to explain a work of art, it has to be by means of something outside the work. But how can one recognize the personality of an artist? From the testimony of his friends? That is only fragmentary. Another thing would be an actual extra-artistic activity of the poet: his or her diary or letters. But where (as Jakobson has pointed out<sup>10</sup>) is the boundary here? Let's take Mácha's diary and his epic poem *Máj*; we find the same aspects in both. The question of documents is therefore unsolvable; what the poet touches becomes a work of art – and we are already in the sphere of poetry. Then we have the development of poetry; and now the question of experiences will look completely different. Mácha wrote about his 'dream'; the dream was the impetus to his *Krkonošská pouť* (A Wayfarer in the Giant Mountains). His experiences are here, except that while having them he was already thinking about the work. The experience from the castle at Kokořín appears in his only finished novel *Cikáni* (The Gypsies) ('through deep, wet sand'); the motif appears many times ('little lights' may mean little houses across the river, elsewhere they are the little flames of candles). The most typical is the diary entry about Bezděz castle (instead of the moon we get 'the suns of distant worlds'). Only one thing is different in the poem: the woman at the little chapel with her dead child.

A work emerges from the elements of real experiences. But what in a work of art comes from experiences is already a question of semantics. Without doubt we recognize certain experiences, but let's consider the quality of those experiences. No matter where we return to them from, we know that the work of art is a sign and that subjective experiences are something completely different: why does one person present them directly whereas another presents them veiled? Today we see efforts to change the novel into a revelation of experiences. The poet's relationship to experience (as it changes) is then no longer a subjective sign, but a sign that develops and has its own objective structure! I certainly do not wish to underrate Dilthey's discovery; he thought that the psychological subject of the poet was the direct force here. Fighting against psychology would be like fighting against the universe; one must never underrate any problem. The theory of rhythm must take into account the psychology of perception; for

<sup>10</sup> Roman Jakobson, 'What Is Poetry?' (1934), in *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, *Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry*, ed. Stephen Rudy (The Hague: Mouton, 1981), 740–50.

actors the psychology of gestures is very important, and that is also true in other fields. But modern psychology appreciates the sign character of individual elements.

For example, the psychology of a poet's colour perception. It is a matter of experience and using it in a work of art. But do the two components not exist in parallel? That is a complicated question.

Not everything a poet encounters ends up in his or her work. We are actually explaining the same thing over and over: the work of art is a sign. And what we called 'experience' also acquires the properties of a sign in a work of art. I said that not every experience ends up in the work. Simply the choice of those elements becomes firmly fixed in the work; it has a semantic function. What is contained in the work need not always be an 'experience'. For example, let's imagine a poet, specifically Mácha: we find a certain experience from one of his notebooks (the barking of dogs, the ringing of bells, the hooting of owls could be heard from a distance), which then appears in his work. But exactly the same thing appears in his poem 'Mnich' (The Monk), and 'Mnich' is definitely older than the notebook entry. That's why the 'experience' could have stemmed from a convention. The relationship between experience and its use in a work is not so direct. That's why we must be careful and cannot accept Dilthey's theory.

A person cannot have an effect on reality except by means of the sign. Signs are the means of contact and of a person's having an effect on reality. The aesthetic function is spread over the whole range of phenomena; in a work of art, it predominates. A work of art is an autonomous sign, a dialectical negation of the communicative sign. Its main task is to represent the signs of communication – the sphere of the communicative signs is its source. Art is not excluded from this sphere. The material of literature is language; that's why literature has the most direct link with communicative signs.

But the opposite 'communication' and 'noncommunication' is present in every art. That raises the problem of art as knowledge: knowledge is enabled by the signs that are here. In recent decades a theory has appeared that art is a certain kind of knowledge (Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk in his essay *Concerning the Study of Works of Literature*).<sup>11</sup> But what kind? Masaryk replies: Art is a kind of knowledge different from other kinds of knowledge. What is important for us is whether art has a relationship to knowledge. The question whether the sentence 'It is dark' is fiction recedes into the background; but what takes its place? To the fore comes the question of the relationship to the linguistic whole in which it is included. As long as we use words in forms of communication, the emphasis

---

<sup>11</sup> Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *O studiu děl básnických* (Prague: Otto, 1884).

is placed on their factual relationship, and their meaning is narrowed. As soon as it has to do with a work of literature, the work always coincides with the whole big sphere of factual relations; we sense them at least potentially. That's why figures of speech are more possible in poetry than elsewhere; those figures of speech, however, presume a relationship to the whole system. Definitions remove all randomness, but depend on our intention to conceive of something as a definition. What evokes that intention? The choice of words. In the choice of words and grammatical and other values, tendencies are applied so that the factor of selection is felt. Is the selected expression suitable? It may be. And is the whole linguistic system suitable to the whole of reality as we see it? Or does it need to be transformed? We know that new meanings are created in the aesthetic use of the words.

Language is an instrument of thought, a vehicle of ideas. That is why literature has a great and lasting influence on knowledge (science and philosophy), without itself being knowledge. One often talks, for instance, about the philosophical outlook of the poet in the works of Mácha. But we find contradictions in the so-called philosophical outlook; because the work of art is in essence not knowledge. It is difficult to extract philosophy from a work of literature; it is a dangerous experiment – and its confrontation with contemporary philosophy is dangerous too. That is as true of literature as it is of the other arts. To deduce a noetic principle, for example, of Cubism is possible, but a sign, a work of art, is something different! We can sense the contemporaneity of music and of philosophical views. There is an affinity between melody and linguistic intonation. As Eugène Delacroix claimed, the world of music is autonomous, and yet music has the power of both language and noise. Sound is in itself powerless, and is organized by speech. That means that music unites some properties of language and some properties of sound; it is close to both language and unsystematized natural sound. Music also has a certain function of depiction and expression. 'Pure music' is completely new. In ancient times instrumental music was a reflection of vocal music. The link between music and the human voice is very intimate (as Erich Jaensch pointed out<sup>12</sup>). And André Grétry<sup>13</sup> claims that music is the exaltation of the word. Even instrumental music seems to him to be music waiting for words. Recall Herbert Spencer's 'The Origin and Function of Music.'<sup>14</sup> And Richard Wallaschek argues that the music of the primitive peoples is not in a natural relationship with

<sup>12</sup> Erich Jaensch (1883–1940), a German psychologist and philosopher.

<sup>13</sup> André Ernest Modeste Grétry (1741–1813), a French composer of Belgian origin, a master of comic opera.

<sup>14</sup> Herbert Spencer, 'The Origin and Function of Music' (1857), in *Essays: Scientific, Political, and Speculative*, vol. 2 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1891), 400–51.

language.<sup>15</sup> He states that amongst them music is accompanied by words that are meaningless; the composer has to explain the words.

Music and speech are different facts. One must, however, differentiate between questions of genesis (which are today unanswerable and unnecessary) and a mutual relationship.

*Language and music* are genetically different. A distinct dividing line exists between them. Every kind of music has a tonal system (today's music uses a system based on a scale of eight notes); language does not appear to be the originator of that system. The intonation of language and musical melody are two different types (despite the fact that transitional types exist, for instance, when a composer, like Leoš Janáček, is inspired by the intonation of language). Their correlation, however, is clear: both entail rising and falling.

This is extremely important for language. The sentence is an actualized unit of communication; it does not actually have a grammatical structure, but it does have a special sound structure. And that structure is the intonation that makes a sentence a sentence. Intonation makes the dialogue seem like a duel. In short, the intonation of speech is not itself meaning; but it carries meaning. (Something is given by intonation: the possibility or necessity of signifying, but not meaning itself. But where meaning is given, intonation becomes less apparent; not every sentence has an explicitly grammatical meaning.) Intonation formulae – that is, the rising and the falling in a sentence – are quite difficult to record, but they exist.

Both kinds of intonation – intonation of speech and of music – have their own laws and development. Nevertheless, it is from here that the bridge leads from music to language, science, philosophy, and so forth. That does not contradict modern musicology. And anyway, if we talk about an idea, we always talk about a meaning-making act, even if we add the adjective 'pure'.

*Art is a permanent rebuilder of the realm of signs.* Concerning the theory that art is knowledge, I would say it is and isn't. In a certain sense it is true. We have seen, the linguistic sign has three functions and an aesthetic function on top of that. But art is also connected with everyday life. Architecture shows how art and practice cross over into each other. In other words:

**Fig. 5**

Art is knowledge .....	/	Art has very many functions,
Art is expression .....		but it cannot be reduced to
Art is communication ...		one function, nor can any function
Art is a practice .....		be denied it.
Art is art.		

<sup>15</sup> Richard Wallaschek, *Primitive Music: An Inquiry into the Origin and Development of Music* (1893; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

'Aesthetic pleasure,' however, seems like something connected with art. But art also contains aesthetic displeasure, which, however, changes nothing about aesthetic hedonism (just think of Surrealism). When we talk about aesthetic pleasure, we are moving into the field of psychology. Lalo<sup>16</sup> uses the term 'sentiment esthétique' – where a specific feeling is under discussion. But the psychological problem is sidelined. Feeling usually stems from the subject, whereas 'aesthetic pleasure' is divorced from it, without excluding the thing from the entirety of things (Kant's paradox<sup>17</sup>). By contrast, the aesthetic function conceals fatigue (consider, for example, physical training), and emphasizes the object (as in advertising). We cannot, however, acknowledge the mere hedonism that art is here for the sake of aesthetic pleasure. I reiterate: art cannot be reduced to the aesthetic.

Art is equally distant from everything, but for that very reason is able to depict the world, even though each time it springs from a different aspect. Nor is there a component of mental life which art would limit itself to or usurp for itself. There were periods that tried to identify such a component; for example, fantasy, imagination, or feelings – but none of these components is a maker of art; each of them is a maker of art and, at the same time, none of them is. Various schools have identified the sphere of the conscious mind or the sphere of the subconscious mind as the source of art, but this has always been a matter of artistic programmes, a certain tendency, and, such theories are always determined by the times. The psychology of making art cannot be determined ahistorically. There is no 'absolute' psychology of making art; rather, there are only historical psychologies. There is always a certain base, and development occurs upon that base.

A work of art signifies a whole reality (of any kind), and is addressed not to a specific individual, but to any person who represents a collective. That stems from the sign character of a work, because that is a social matter. A work of art signifies a social context, as it is given in the collective consciousness.

If art here signifies the social reality which it has been brought into a relationship with, it might seem that art is dependent on society. Then, however, art would have to die out with the society that created it as soon as that society changed its structure. Everyday we see how kinds of art that have long been inoperative become living factors. That is, again, because a work of art is a sign. A sculpture or a picture is a material reality, but a task ascribed to it does not exhaust it. The earlier task is now irrelevant to us, but

<sup>16</sup> Charles Lalo, *Les sentiments esthétiques* (Paris: Alcan, 1910).

<sup>17</sup> 'Kant's paradox' has to do with the assumption that there is such a thing as disinterested pleasure.

this reality is used again aesthetically. There is another fact that shows the bilateral relationship that the work of art has to reality, which the work of art signifies: a work of art is never alone. In our minds it is always compared with something known; there is a convention here, even if denied. Art is not a direct product, because it has its own immanent development. Art is not a fact, but an action.

Linguistics distinguishes between *langue* (that is, a set of rules and norms) and *parole* (that is, the carrying out of these norms in sound material). Both are continuously changing. The Neogrammarians<sup>18</sup> looked at language as a natural fact. The basis of modern linguistics is that language exists even without being spoken. *Langue* exists, even if there is no *parole*. *Langue* is a set of norms. What does that mean? There are languages that are grammatically codified; dialects do not have grammars for practical usage, and yet we recognize them by means of our inner sense of dialect.

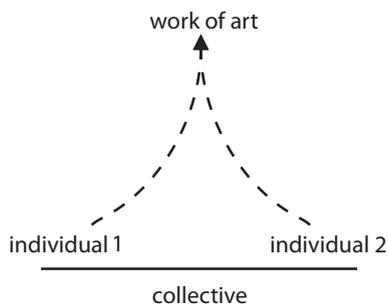
Art, too, has its own *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* is an artistic structure, that is, a set of norms: 'What looks like this is a work of art' or 'A work of art cannot look like this'. An artist carries out these norms.

We have *langue* – a system of norms valid for a certain collective – and *parole*. In language these are very important concepts, and an analogy tells us much related to art. *Langue* is energy; it is not a petrified system. *Langue* has no other linguistic existence apart from *parole*; and that's exactly how it is with structure for art. Structure becomes an implementation perceivable by the senses only in works of art. We talk about the 'immanence' of art. That means that something exists continuously in works and by means of them, and yet outside them, as their units. If several structures exist side by side in one art, then of course they also have some relationship to one another. We could call that relationship the 'superstructure'. A structure always has some objective relationship to a perceiving individual. It seems less natural to us that the structure has an objective quality also with regard to the creating individual. But there is no essential difference between the perceiving and the creating individual in art, just as there is none in language. As soon as an artist makes a work of art, he knows that he can no longer influence it.

There are individual differentiations of acts of making art and acts of perceiving it. In the history of art's development, shifts are continuously occurring. The individual nature of perception varies: a reader is more individual than a listener. In other words, an audience cannot be understood simply as a 'class'.

<sup>18</sup> The *Junggrammiker*, Young Grammarians, Neogrammarians – a linguistic school in the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly in Germany. In Bohemia, its members included Jan Gebauer, later Oldřich Hujer and Vincenc Lesný. They mainly investigated sound changes.

Fig. 6



*Parole* has a continuous influence on language. It is an influence that is intangible in its details, and finding it is a difficult task for linguistics. It is impossible to see a linguistic change being born, for that would mean capturing the moment when *langue* changes under the influence of *parole*. We can capture it in art. It is in the interest of language not to change too much, for that would be to the detriment of intelligibility. That's why there exist forces that retard linguistic change. But that is not the case in art. We know that there is art that does not seek to be clear; indeed, it hinders the clarity of perception, the facility of perceiving. Contrasts are made possible: a school for symmetry will advocate asymmetry. A mark of individuality is simply demanded, though not of course in all periods. But we will always clearly see when *langue* changes. When attention is focused on the sign itself, then *parole* will be markedly differentiated from *langue*.

The structure of a work of art is a fact of collective consciousness. Structure is of course nothing that comes from outside, nothing that would not be in the material; but material can be used in different ways – it is merely a matter of the way (*procédé*) of using it. Structure is something intangible. Structure is a historical fact, independent of every individual, and continuously developing. If a work of art is a sign, structure too is a sign. A work of art is a sign of an ideology and its organization. But structure is not a mere, mechanical by-product of social relations.

Fig. 7



According to Engels, production and trade with products mutually affect each other. In structures of art and of society that is not the case. Here it is fair to talk about the correlation of sets. The relationship between both sets cannot be called anything else. Sometimes a peak in one corresponds to a depression in the other: that too is a relationship. It is therefore not true that 'when society looks such and such a way, art looks such and such a way'. Art is produced by a certain milieu, a certain person, but not by a society.

Art is a sign of society, but not a symptom of society.

We shall therefore now turn to *the inner structure of an artistic sign*. All the components of a work of art are vehicles of semantic energy. The linking of sign and meaning is never like the linking of stem and fruit. Only in a signal is there such a connection; otherwise meaning always penetrates the sign. The sounds of the word 'dog' do not denote a dog or any other property until connected. Though we cannot find any direct relationship (for instance, between the Czech words *milý* [dear], *myli* [the males washed], *mili* [for the length of a mile], *mýlí* [they err], *myly* [the (females/children) washed]), there is an indirect one. The question is how does meaning penetrate the sign. Phonemes in connection with the linguistic sign are each *nota notae*, that is, a sign in a sign.

*Content – form*. This is an old topic, but we cannot avoid it. There is something we have to express (content), and also something by means of which we express it (form). By means of form we can express the same content more broadly or more concisely, in a more flowery way or a less flowery way, more simply or more complicatedly. The artist, however, does not understand this relationship between content and form in such simple terms (think of Tolstoy). A dividing line is not possible here either: where does form begin and where does content end? Linguistic means begin with a sentence, but here the means already go beyond form. The same thing would apply anywhere else (for example, in painting: where does 'content' begin?). In short, we do not recognize what is content and what is form. This would usually be the place to discuss the content–form dichotomy. But, implicitly, content determines form. But how? Is, then, form determined by content still 'form'? Clearly, there is a necessary connection between form and content. 'Content' has been as a matter of principle placed above 'form'. Well, in the works of Mácha everything is action. How does he express it? He uses an active verb. That is a formal matter; but it can of course also be turned round. The term 'internal form', that is, the method, the power with which a cliché is used and sets the cliché in motion, is highly dangerous. It was passed down from Aristotle, and was adopted by St Augustine and then especially by the Romantics, particularly the linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt. The metaphysics of art appears

all too easily, and with it the talk of 'powers' so indefinite that the term 'form' is useless.

Nothing compels us to accept the dominance of content over form. They are two components that together result either in content being dominant or in content being something outside the work. In a work of art, is content really, then, a kind of reality – does it comprise 'things'? No. It is only a kind of meaning; there is no reason for content to be something more important than form.

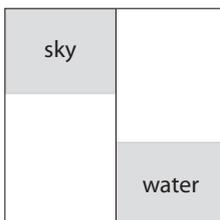
In the history of art we learn that content is determined by form. New form requires new content: typical Impressionist or Cubist themes can be interpreted outside the work, and so too can still lifes by the Netherlandish painters (the subject matter is demanded by the milieu – that is clear, for example, in painting). The claim that one is determined by the other is incorrect. Neither of them has a fundamental priority. They are just two tendencies between which the subject matter of art continuously oscillates. Sometimes, a form clearly predetermines the content, sometimes it is the other way round.

What we are dealing with is actually only an aspect of the communicative function, a matter of the fundamental antinomy of art between communication and the denial of communication. There is oscillation, and if we are looking at it from the inside, then it seems like the opposition of content and form.

In fact there are no new 'contents'. Every content is an internal matter of art. Those people who place content above form are succumbing to the illusion that content is something that penetrates the work from outside. Everything is content and form, depending on which side we are looking at the work of art from. For practical reasons, we simplify when talking. All the components are simultaneously both content and form.

Pushkin's poetry is unheroic, comic, already in its heroic tone. But what is the bear-leader in his heroic poem? Suddenly, Pushkin is reproached for it, because the content was felt to be form (the period of the blossoming of Russian formalism). There is no subject matter in which this could suddenly not happen (think of Mácha's short story 'Márinka').

**Fig. 8**



The colour blue is part of form.  
At the top of a picture it seems like the sky;  
at the bottom it seems like water.

We have to take all the elements of the work as having the same value.

The object relation has grown into all the components and also their aggregate. The problem of the content of form does not narrow down the work of art for us. Analyses are again and again divided into content and form analyses: and yet the two have coalesced!

*A work of art as a semantic aggregate.* Let's begin with literature. The book of verse in front of us is a set of marks by means of which art has been preserved. The form of the book can complicate or facilitate its content for the reader.

*The typography* is highly relevant. I have, for example, this book. It is Mallarmé, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*.<sup>19</sup> The text is irregularly laid out across the pages. The poem is arranged so that its basis (the semantic skeleton) is constituted by the sentence 'UN COUP DE DÉS JAMAIS...' (for Mallarmé, this sentence meant the tragedy of the Symbolist). Suddenly, the empty spaces on the page acquire emphasis: the blank spaces suggest that the verses demand silence for their surroundings. (That is why illustration is also a semantic factor.) The text, for Mallarmé, is only a negation of the blank spaces, which carry meaning. But it may also be the other way round, for example:

And then  
our  
hero,  
full of  
sorrow,  
descended  
the stairs

Or Apollinaire, 'La colombe poignardée et le jet d'eau', whose typographical layout illustrates a scene. These are of course little typographical games; but we know that typography too is in a certain sense a vehicle of meaning.

*The sound aspect.* Let's consider, for example, Zich's *O typech básnických*.<sup>20</sup> (Something in the sound aspect is the result of the work and something is not. I attribute intonation to the reciter.) Certain components are dependent on the reciter; but the art of reciting is another matter, and we are concerned here with the work of literature and its form.

Whether intonation is flowing or choppy depends on the poet, not on the reciter. Every human voice has three registers and it is easy to know when to

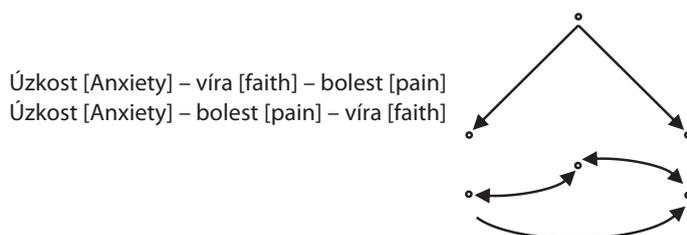
<sup>19</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, *A Roll of the Dice*, bilingual ed., trans. Robert Bononno and Jeff Clark (1897; Seattle, WA: Wave Books, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> Otakar Zich, *O typech básnických* [On types of poets] (Prague: Orbis, 1937).

use the right one. The outline of intonation is also given by the work: word order is important here.

And there is something else we must consider about the question of what part of the sound aspect is determined by the work and what depends on the reciter. We have seen that the outline of melody is directly given in the text. Changes in intonation can also be determined in the work. Karel Toman's verse is typical – the dividing lines are tangible. Every word in his verse is semantically and aurally separated, isolated. Here is an example of how intonation is given by the text:

**Fig. 9**



Were it turned round it would be forced. But, vice versa too: as soon as intonation is set in motion, the whole semantic structure of the verse is affected.

The phonemes in the text are given – nothing can be done about that. But the other signs of the sound aspect (breathing, timbre, tempo) can also be indicated by the author. Tempo is usually up to the reciter; but there is also something in the text, which can restrain or, on the other hand, demand a quicker recitation. As an example, let's look at Jan Neruda's *Balada horská* (Mountain ballad):

‘Řekněte mi, babičko má, cože rány svírá,  
 po čem člověk, těžce raněn, přece neumírá?’

[Tell me, Granny, what heals wounds  
 from which a person, though seriously wounded, still doesn't die?]

2 2 – 1 – 1 – 1

2 2 – 1 – 2

That clearly calls for a quicker tempo, whereas the whole speech of the old woman goes against the grain of dipodic division, and therefore has a slower tempo.

*The distribution of sounds.* When one is looking, for example, at the same light signals, they join together in groups when perceived. Similarly, sounds do too, as when we hear the clickety-clack of a railway, and so forth. How can a sound be put to use in a work of poetry? By means of the selection of sounds and groups of sounds. Sounds cluster together in formations, which in some way directly draw attention to themselves. (The cluster of sounds, for example, is strikingly repeated.) What is happening here is that these configured sounds associate in a 'form' (*Gestalt*). It is a form that differs from its phonetic surroundings. If we observe the intentionality of the grouping together, we talk about euphony; euphony is therefore first and foremost a value of arrangement. The regularity of speech is expressed in the regular grouping together of the same sounds (*a* is at the beginning in the first verse, and in the middle in the second, and so forth). In Czech, however, there are five different vowels, so we cannot consider this matter as, say, a tiler would, that is, paying attention only to the regularity of the repetition of one sound. By its nature, speech must repeat sounds; the same vowels often occur repeatedly in one line; but if some of them occur unusually often, it becomes immediately conspicuous. In such a case, one formerly used to talk about melodiousness. What is being repeated, one might ask. What is accumulating?

The reader treats the euphonic element (for example, the sounds *r* and *l*) as involving phonic differences. That, however, 'has nothing to do with' the content of the poem. Well, is euphony a semantic factor or is it 'only' a value of arrangement? (It is generally acknowledged that rhyme has its semantic side. And, concerning onomatopoeia, modern scholarship too, for example, the work of Maurice Grammont,<sup>21</sup> is based on the fact that certain sounds signify emotional expressiveness. For example, *u-u-u* (and at other times *i*) seem to evoke a sad mood. But this line of thought gets us nowhere. We must consider the whole!) Consider the beginning of Mácha's *Máj*, in which 'a' appears sixteen times in the group '-la, -la-, la-'. In order to know how many of them there should normally be, the comparison should be made over a wide range (one Russian scholar, for example, compared 10,000 verses). Here one cannot talk about an expressive quality of a sound; here it is a matter of the whole system of the poem. The whole of *Máj* is borne by euphony. The task of euphony here is to substitute for thematic discontinuity; phonemic continuity substitutes for semantic continuity. For Mácha, that goes very far noetically – it reflects his

---

<sup>21</sup> Maurice Grammont, *Le vers français: Ses moyens d'expression, son harmonie* (Paris: Picard, 1904).

distrust of the world! The drive towards the realization of a continuous whole thus influences word choice:

tiché jsou vlny, temný vod klín  
 [quiet are the waves, the dark wedge of the waters]  
 i é ou lny, e ý o lín

Words were tried out (as surviving manuscripts show); each word was a phonic motif, although the word stock of the poem is small (as Šalda argued). There was also a rhythm requirement. (Mácha is the creator of the Czech iambus): rhythm has to carry euphony.

What is *rhythm*? At first glance it seems that it is a matter of the organization of a phonic line; what kind of organization? In his now prehistoric work on prosody, Josef Král says: 'Rhythm is articulation into the same time segments.' Paul Verrier conceives it differently in his *Le vers français*.<sup>22</sup> Král would not succeed with his theory in this context. Verrier came up with his theory about ictus, where the distance from accent to accent, from 'emphasis to emphasis', serves to measure time; but even this theory cannot be applied to just any verse. Experimental phonetics has gone further.

There are no time segments, just as there is no ideally flat or rounded surface, but there may be a tendency to perceive time segments. As soon as we admit that, however, when will we want to perceive segments as being equal to each other? We have no answer to that question.

'What is verse (and what is not) is something we recognize by regularity,' claims Král.<sup>23</sup> Modern prosody has to rid itself of the superstition of isochronism. Poetic rhythm is a complex phenomenon. The vehicle of rhythm need not be the one officially named component; there are, in addition, two or three other components. The best work on this complexity is by Jakobson concerning Serbian decasyllable verse. It is accentual verse, trochaic. It is an iambic trimeter verse (recall Meillet's theory<sup>24</sup> – the penultimate syllable). Jakobson asked himself whether quantity did not play a role in Serbian verse, and found that the penultimate syllable is always long.<sup>25</sup> Two components at once can therefore play a role in this. This was confirmed by the Czech scholar Jan Rypka in his work

<sup>22</sup> Paul Verrier, *Le vers français: Formes primitives, développement, diffusion*, 3 vols (Paris: Didier, 1931–32).

<sup>23</sup> Josef Král, *Česká prosodie* [Czech prosody] (Prague: Otto, 1909).

<sup>24</sup> Antoine Meillet, *Aperçu d'une histoire de la langue grecque*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Hachette, 1920); *Les origines indo-européennes des mètres grecs* (Paris: Presses universitaires, 1923).

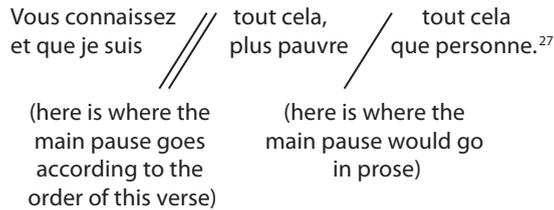
<sup>25</sup> Roman Jakobson, 'Über den Versbau der serbokroatischen Volksepen' (1933), in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, *Slavic Epic Studies* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), 51–60.

on Persian epic verse.<sup>26</sup> It turned out that there is a certain quantitative scheme, which is supported also by an accentual scheme. So, in addition to being 'officially' quantitative, the verse is also accentual. The whole structure is permeated with rhythm, and rhythm forms the semantic aspect. The verse is the basic unit of rhythm. One can find verses that are lacking everything (verses in the Bible, the freest verse of Vítězslav Nezval).

In such cases, there are not even a regular number of syllables; there is nothing except for melodic clauses of rhythm, endlessly repeating. A verse therefore acts as a unit of intonation.

Another example, this time from Paul Verlaine:

**Fig. 10**



The sentence is in two parts, and so is the verse. The alexandrine, dodecasyllable verse, has a caesura after the fourth syllable, and this is where the main syntactic pause goes; yet we sense where the pause that corresponds to the sentence should be. Both pauses are in our consciousness, and both are in tension. A verse of course need not consist of just one sentence; the intonation need not be divided in two. But even when it is not called forth by the internal organization of the verse, it is usually accompanied by it. Intonation alone is of huge importance to the content. And the whole semantic perspective of the sentence changes, if the verse imposes a different articulation.

*Metre* is somehow imposed by context. A foot is not a unit, but a verse is; it is an organized unit. This internal organization makes it a form (*Gestalt*). But even this unit is rhythmically ambiguous; it becomes so when several such units follow each other in context. It needs our subjective orientation: we understand the thing as verse. That can be evoked not only by the linguistic aspect; it can be helped by the graphic aspect. There must be a metric impulse: the scheme is given by the very first verse, and then we wait for it to repeat. That is also true of

<sup>26</sup> Jan Rypka, 'La métrique du mutaquârib épique persan', in *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague*, vol. 6, *Études dédiées au Quatrième congrès de linguistes* (Prague: Cercle Linguistique de Prague, 1936), 192–207.

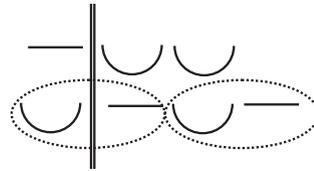
<sup>27</sup> You know all of that and that I am more wretched than anyone.

free verse. There are of course traditional schemes – iambic pentameter – here, one does not count only on statistics; for example, in the work of Langer the traditional schemes repeat, divide up.

Rhythm is a living force that in essence has much more to do with meaning than with time. During its development, the material is in constant semantic movement, which intersects with the verse: we can thus explain that the rhythm of the verse somehow soars freely, and during its development it is possible that the dominant component shifts. Intonation, the number of syllables, the distribution of accent, euphony – all of that together constitutes poetic rhythm. The rhythm is bound neither by time nor by a sound component – it is, first and foremost, semantic organization! And modern prosody has dealt with it in various ways. Rhythm is to some extent predicated by language, and itself influences the choice of words. Iamb comes in three varieties:

**Fig. 11**

1. in Czech: difficulties,  
what to start with;
2. in German: *verstehen*  
and so forth;
3. in Russian.



Zich argues that Jaroslav Durych ‘thought iambically’ (his solution was to use three-syllable words). Neruda has a trochee with an anacrusis.

In Czech a two-syllable word is ideal for a trochee; words with an even number of syllables are used, but those with three syllables are a problem. The word as a rhythmic element in a verse has to be identical with the scheme of the verse. This means that verse itself chooses from the verbal material, discards some of the words, and uses other words many times. Verbs are chosen by class. If a poet uses verbal nouns of between four and six syllables in trochaic verse, it means that the metre is veiled by long words.

Every utterance signifies something, and in all its components helps to give meaning. A thing that is only a sign is excluded from everyday life. Each word can mean many things. But if it is not a matter of art, then in an utterance all linguistic, phonetic, and lexical components are retained by a central meaning. Each word acquires its own semantic validity, and that validity is at variance with the others.

*Word choice.* We choose our words ourselves. It is a matter of finding an expression. Why do we choose words in a communicative utterance? In order that

our utterance express the state of affairs as precisely as possible. There are also aspects that transcend the communicative utterance: I choose a word for its practical effect on the listener.

The case is different in poetic utterance. Milota Zdirad Polák is well known in Czech literature, especially poetry, for the special words he used. Vlček is wrong when he claims that Polák used such odd words because he did not really know Czech.<sup>28</sup> Polák was well aware that he was using them excentrical: portmanteaux, like *mrakověnc* (cloud-wreath), words with the suffix *-ina* simply for poetic effect. His portmanteaux recall those of Homer, and Homeric poetry is the canon for grand epic verse. Polák wrote lyrical epics; his poetry is descriptive, without action, that is, it omitted the main sign of its genre. It adopted secondary signs, for example, the long verse: it was a matter of achieving an impression of epic character. Polák has verses of sixteen syllables, combining the couple 8 – 8 –

**Fig. 12**

-----  
4 / 4 / 4 / 4  
2-2 2-2

– hence the four syllable words – rhythmic motivation! Thus arose the impression of syncopation; that is the second motivation of the words Polák uses to go beyond his theme. There are of course other motivations here:

Words ending in *-ina* (*modřenina* = *modřiště nebes*, the blue ground of the sky) are created so that the quality is changed into a noun.

Portmanteaux (like *mrakověnc*) have a periodic character. They describe a thing, name a thing by its substantive qualities.

Here we see the whole motley knot of motifs, for which a verse acquires a special vocabulary that has its own independent semantic tendency. But there is not just the semantic relationship between the word choice and the subject matter; there can also be the relationship to other components, for example, sentence structure.

What is central in a communicative utterance is the meaning to which all the components aim, and that is also why they are subordinated to it. Though the sentence structure will be different, in essence it will always be a matter of the same thing: in a scholarly message, about something complicated, where one is going to deduce something, the sentence will also have long compound

<sup>28</sup> Jaroslav Vlček, *Dějiny české literatury* [A history of Czech literature] (1898–1902; Prague: Mazáč, 1931); *První novočeská škola básnická* [The first Czech school of poetry] (Prague: Bursík & Kohout, 1896).

sentences with factual content that is superordinate as well as subordinate. In everyday speech, on the other hand, the sentence structure will be as simple as possible.

In poetic language the message is not the most important thing, but its sentences will have independent roles as semantic factors. The sentence acquires a meaning, for example, precisely because it has been stripped of its function (Voskovec and Werich put vulgar content into academic clichés). The sentence type itself already indicates something, and the poet uses that, either positively or negatively. The poet uses the long compound sentences of the humanist period, and as soon as he fills it with vulgar content it begins to indicate something different, and the aesthetic function makes its presence felt.

*Paragraphs and chapters.* Academic prose seeks to go in one direction, to make it as precise and functional as possible. In artistic expression, it is a different matter; simply the length of the paragraph means something. What is a paragraph? A paragraph represents a certain concentration (most strikingly so in verse). It is a certain unit of attention, a certain semantic unit, which is to be filled. (And that is why the paragraph form also varies and the author is faced with having to choose right from the beginning.) Or it indicates a certain atmosphere of the whole work. That is certainly true of a chapter (though not quite so precisely). Here, on the other hand, the order of the chapters plays a role. Chapters are usually marked with numbers; but in a later chapter an author will often discuss something that chronologically runs ahead of even the preceding chapters, or have chapters completely out of chronological order. Then it has to do with what kind of chapter it is, whether the action is continuous or bound up into episodes, and so forth. Here again it is a matter of meaning.

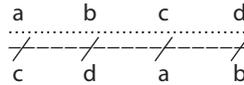
*Composition* seems to be an ancillary, decoratively 'formal' scheme. Concerning that ancillary quality, the interpretation could go very far here. But what is it about? It is about the narrative tension, the ratio of tension in the individual acts. Other things belong here as well, for instance, tempo. Every narrative has its own tempo, for instance, an epic in which it is said that it happened in such and such a year, but that does not mean that the action will move along precise and similar lengths.

**Fig. 13**



That is also connected with so-called static and dynamic motifs. In Proust, for example, what is usually in a reflection and description becomes the vehicle of the action. Every little thing enters the composition plan. Another role is played here by the sequence of motifs with regard to the real sequence. A distant action with its presumed stages, for example, is being related:

**Fig. 14**



Boileau declares the canon of the ode to be *le beau désordre*.<sup>29</sup> Another device is gradation, the anticlimax. Another example, lyric verse full of drama.

One thing is clear from this – namely, the compositional plan of the work could be abstracted as a pure scheme. And that is of course done. But we have to avoid a misunderstanding: even the most intelligent analysis of a work will run aground on the fact that the critic then sees the work only as a game of proportions; or if we cling to that, we can hope that there exists an ideal proportion that we could demand from the poet. That happens whenever we see a composition schematically; except that every scheme only makes sense when it is in relationship to the meaning of the work itself. The content – like any component of a work of literature – is of course nothing unorganized. The subject matter demands some reality, and that reality is an expression of the reality contained in the consciousness of society. Let's take, say, the struggle between a good man and a wicked man: it will be understood very differently in different contexts. And this fact is used in composition too – that is to say, composition is no idyll, nor is it the obliteration of reality; rather, it is the emphasizing of contradiction.

Understood schematically, the role of composition is to construct a unity. It need not be a unity of proportions; it may be a unity of meaning, which, by contrast, demands contradiction. Take, for instance, the composition of Mácha's *Cikáni* (The Gypsies). It displays fragmentation – and signals to the maximum the noetics of the writer's work. In other words, the composition reveals itself to be a semantic factor. Talking of form and content is a pleonastic; it means peeling the peel from the onion. Content is also form.

Let's take the epic, because in lyric verse action is more difficult to identify. Content, we would say, is *res nullius*, because the external world is a set of all possible events. Might it be a matter of 'verisimilitude'? No, because every day

<sup>29</sup> Nicolas Boileau, *L'art poétique* (1674; Paris: Flammarion, 1969).

the strangest things happen, which we learn about from the daily newspapers and so on. Except that verisimilitude is a problematic thing in general – what seems probable to one society does not seem to be probable to another and vice versa. Another matter is the ‘poet’s will’. It might seem that the poet is independent in this respect; but that is not the case. What is decisive here is the choice, which is determined by the meaning of the work. And if we compare the content with the structure, we see that there are certain direct or indirect dependencies, and that both the structure and the content come into being at the same time.

In a work of literature, then, there is no single component that would not have the character of a sign. That is why neither an analysis of form nor an analysis of content can on its own precisely describe the essence of a work. The truth exists only where both mingle, where it is taken into consideration that each component means something with regard to the other components.

*A painting.* What is a painting? We cannot assume that it is only the harmony of colours and so forth. It is at the same time a message; this is demonstrated simply by the name of the painting, the need for catalogues: what is said in the painting is said one more time in words. In the work of Josef Šíma the title is a lyrical parallel to the painting (*Suns of Other Worlds*, 1936), a certain way of perceiving.

That is one possibility: a painting and the title of the painting. Another contact point between the word and painting is illustration (in advertising, the picture is accompanied by the word – with the hierarchy reversed!). A history of illustration has yet to be written, but it should be. An interesting phenomenon is the illustrations of Viktor Oliva; they break up the text, creating visual punchlines (for example, matches on the edge of the page, or an umbrella.). There are even more complicated intimate relations between word and picture, for example, puzzles in the form of pictures. Naturally, every communication is capable of denying the communication. The difference between communicating in words and communicating in pictures is a matter of degrees. Words are less colourful than pictures. Whether we can say that a picture is unable to express action depends on continuity.

The question of painting again lies in the question of semantics. Various differences between the word and ornament are discussed. A figurative ornament is perfectly possible. An ornament clings more to the surface than a picture does, but in an ornament one can also, for example, distinguish what is close and what is far. The most fundamental difference is that a picture has a name, an ornament does not! A name is not possible where something can be created ad infinitum. The boundary between picture and ornament of course depends on our focus.

Let's imagine a hieroglyph: if it appears two or three times beside itself, it may seem like an ornament, but it may actually mean, for example, the plural. 'Modern painting is ornamental', it has been claimed. It does not have quite the focus on figuration which people are used to seeing in realistic paintings. Even a painting that denies figuration is still not an ornament until it demands repeating. We have two poles here: the picture and the ornament; an ornament has no name or message, or, if it does, it is only latent. There is no doubt that the difference is semantic. What is the case in Surrealist paintings? Surrealist paintings require several interpretations, with the proviso that one of them is the most appropriate. We can, however, insert completely different meanings into ornament.

*The elements of painting.* Let's take a coloured surface. In painting the most basic element is colour. To what extent is colour imbued with semanticity? Gustav Johannes von Allesch carried out experiments in which he showed colours to people.<sup>30</sup> First and foremost, concerning aesthetic pleasure, the preferences vary from person to person. The starting point was red, yellow, green, blue, and blue in neutral shades. When mixing colours, the subject to a certain extent considered the colour to be pure and so forth. The impression that colour evokes in an observer is not constant, nor does it correspond to the physiological impulse from, and reaction to, it (the oscillation is even more marked in aesthetic perception). In half-tones of colour the oscillation is even greater. But the primary colours are meanings: oscillation was reduced as long as the subject was provided with some system. Let's take, for example, the colour red in paintings in a museum. It depends on which colour is intended, but not on the impulse – for example, in a crumpled sateen. This was also used by the Impressionists. They used local colours, which we associate with a certain object; local experience has an influence here. Or, let's take two bands of yellow colour, one with a green shade, the other with a red. It will be clearly visible which colour the other colour runs into. Here we can see the shifting orientation directly: here there is an attempt to distinguish between two colours as two different meanings.

A physiological colour can appear in several different shades. (When we interpret the colour, however, it depends on the shade of feeling.) Two people observe the same landscape: the one who sees the trees as black sees the sky as blue. We see the colour. Without semantic factors, however, there would be no perception; there would be only sensory reaction. Interpretations show the semiotic character by suggesting associations; the colour blue, for example, suggests a river. Associations open perspectives – that is, something secondary to a phenomenon, but they do exist.

---

<sup>30</sup> Gustav Johannes von Allesch, *Die ästhetische Erscheinungsweise der Farben* (Berlin: Springer, 1925).

Understanding colour is an action in which the observer and the physical colour each plays a part. The internal structure of colour intention is not simple. The aesthetic orientation reveals the full complexity of the action by which colour is interpreted. And all of that has an immense impact on the structure of the painting. The relations amongst the colours, the arrangement of surfaces, and so forth are also semantic phenomena. Everything that is called colour is a meaning.

And the same is true about the *line*. In its relation to us, the line really means something (as theories of *Einfühlung*, or empathy, suggest) – and that again is a matter of semantics. A diagonal line can be interpreted as a falling line or a rising line, depending on what we focus on in the picture. An outline made with a closed line is an important vehicle: everything, here too, is imbued with meaning.

A semantic focus is also important for the *subject matter*, for example, in a still life. The Netherlandish painters made them because they were surrounded by them, but that is not the sole reason. Behind the still life is a whole tendency to search for shades of colour, light, and so on; that is what distinguishes Netherlandish painting from the paintings of the Italian Renaissance. But there may be another reason as well. Cézanne believed that for a painter nature is composed of cylinders, spheres, and cones. And he was able to demonstrate that in the still life. Subject matter is not random. It is not only what the painter sees and experiences. The semantic focus can also come from inside, not only from outside.

And a similar argument could be made concerning music.

In short, the work of art is a sign. It is not even a direct expression of the artist or of the life of society or a means to something that stands outside the work. Rather, the work has its own inner justification; it is a work in itself. This autonomy cannot be understood as being taken out of context or placed into thin air. Indeed, the work of art has a relation to everything, an intense and dynamic relation; it represents the world for man.

It has a relation to everything; but all the relationships are not those of cause and effect ('if it is this, then it must be that'). They are relations of a teleological character (not a causal character) – namely, a semantic character. A work of art is a sign. That is not to say, on the other hand, that a work of art as a whole means a whole. Rather, each component has its own meaning. These are complicated relationships; but a work of art is a world unto itself.

Translated by Derek and Marzia Paton

BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

- Allesch, Gustav Johannes von. *Die ästhetische Erscheinungsweise der Farben*. Berlin: Springer, 1925.
- Boileau, Nicolas. *L'art poétique*. 1674. Paris: Flammarion, 1969.
- Bühler, Karl. *Theory of Language: The Representational Function of Language*. 1934. Translated by Donald Fraser Goodwin. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2011.
- Croce, Benedetto. *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression and of the Linguistic in General*. 1901. Translated by Colin Lyas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Dessoir, Max. *Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*. Stuttgart: Enke, 1906.
- Dilthey, Wilhelm. *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung: Lessing, Goethe, Novalis, Hölderlin*. 3rd ed. Leipzig: Teubner, 1910.
- '. 'Friedrich Hölderlin.' Translated by Joseph Ross. In *Selected Works*, 303–83.
- '. 'Goethe and the Poetic Imagination.' Translated by Christopher Rodie. In *Selected Works*, 235–302.
- '. *Selected Works*. Vol. 5, *Poetry and Experience*. Edited by Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Ertl Václav. *Gebauerova Mluvnice česká pro školy střední a ústavy učitelské* [Gebauer's Czech grammar for schools and teachers' colleges]. 2 vols. Prague: Unie, 1914.
- Fechner, Gustav Theodor. *Vorschule der Aesthetik*. 2 vols. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1876.
- Grammont, Maurice. *Le vers français: Ses moyens d'expression, son harmonie*. Paris: Picard, 1904.
- Hanslick, Eduard. *The Beautiful in Music*. 1854. Translated by Gustav Cohen. New York: Liberal Arts, 1957.
- Hostinský, Otakar. *Herbarts Ästhetik*. Hamburg: Voss, 1891.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Logical Investigations*. 2 vols. 1900, 1901. Translated by J. N. Findlay. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Jakobson, Roman. 'Über den Versbau der serbokroatischen Volksepen.' 1933. In *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, *Slavic Epic Studies*, 51–60. The Hague: Mouton, 1966.
- '. 'What Is Poetry?' 1934. In *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, *Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry*, edited by Stephen Rudy, 740–50. The Hague: Mouton, 1981.
- Král, Josef. *Česká prosodie* [Czech prosody]. Prague: Otto, 1909.
- Lalo, Charles. *Les sentiments esthétiques*. Paris: Alcan, 1910.
- Mallarmé, Stéphane. *A Roll of the Dice*. 1897. Translated by Robert Bononno and Jeff Clark. Bilingual edition. Seattle, WA: Wave Books, 2015.
- Masaryk, Tomáš Garrigue. *O studiu děl básnických* [Concerning the study of works of literature]. Prague: Otto, 1884.
- Meillet, Antoine. *Aperçu d'une histoire de la langue grecque*. 2nd ed. Paris: Hachette, 1920.
- '. *Les origines indo-européennes des mètres grecs*. Paris: Presses universitaires, 1923.
- Rypka, Jan. 'La métrique du mutaquârib épique persan.' In *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague*, vol. 6, *Études dédiées au Quatrième congrès de linguistes*, 192–207. Prague: Cercle Linguistique de Prague, 1936.
- Spencer, Herbert. 'The Origin and Function of Music.' 1857. In *Essays: Scientific, Political, and Speculative*, vol. 2, 400–51. London: Williams and Norgate, 1891.
- Verrier, Paul. *Le vers français: Formes primitives, développement, diffusion*. 3 vols. Paris: Didier, 1931–32.

- Vlček, Jaroslav. *Dějiny české literatury* [A history of Czech literature]. 1898–1902. Prague: Mazáč, 1931.
- . *První novočeská škola básnická* [The first Czech school of poetry]. Prague: Bursík & Kohout, 1896.
- Wallaschek, Richard. *Primitive Music: An Inquiry into the Origin and Development of Music*. 1893. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Zich, Otakar. *O typech básnických* [On types of poets]. Prague: Orbis, 1937.