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## 1917 en Russie La philologie à l'épreuve de la Révolution



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# THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITIES IN LATE IMPERIAL AND EARLY SOVIET RUSSIA: THE CASE OF THE MOSCOW LINGUISTIC CIRCLE

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## SOCIAL EMANCIPATION, DISCIPLINE FORMATION AND THE RISE OF INSTITUTIONS IN TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY RUSSIA

Despite its relatively limited scholarly coverage, it has become increasingly evident that the problems of specification and disciplinary differentiation of knowledge in the humanities featured rather prominently on the agendas of turn-of-the-century Russian intelligentsia.<sup>1</sup> The focus on the disciplinary transformation of the humanities emerged in Russia in response to the similar processes in social sciences in German and German-speaking academic communities in the second half of the nineteenth century. The origins and the dynamics of these processes in Germanophone countries are habitually interpreted as a response to an unprecedented growth of knowledge in philosophy and related subdisciplines, as well as to the institutionalisation of scientific research in this field of study.<sup>2</sup> In the Russian historical context, the stakes in this socio-epistemological transformation were even higher. What makes the Russian articulation of the problem of disciplinary differentiation of knowledge so charged is its imbrication within a highly specific system of discourses and beliefs that configured

1. While similar processes in the European humanities have attracted attention of Western scholars at least since the 1960s and contributed to the development of the sociology of knowledge (Ben-David and Collins and onwards), in Russia the accounts of this kind have been rare until the 2000s. For a pioneering account of the institutionalization of philosophy of the Soviet era see Nikolai Plotnikov, 'Советская философия: институт и функция', *Logos*, 2001, 1, p. 106-114.

2. Cf. Joseph Ben-David, *The Scientist's Role in Society*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1971; especially p. 127-129. For an excellent discussion of the disciplinary emergence of psychology see Martin Kusch, *Psychologism. A Case Study in the Sociology of Philosophical Knowledge*, London – New York, Routledge, 1995, especially Chapters 6 and 7.

and conditioned human knowledge in late imperial years. This *épistème*<sup>3</sup> of the Russian society at the threshold of socio-political modernity was defined by a belief-system that conceived of human culture as part of a unified, cohesive conception of the world.<sup>4</sup> This epistemic field was built around generic forms of social ‘associations such as the family, the church and the peasant commune’ at the expense of civic and professional organizations – a circumstance that also informed the scarcity of civic and rational forms of social integration (economic, political, or professional) in the Russian public sphere.<sup>5</sup> In a socio-epistemological network of this kind the world emerges as a continuum, a domain that is structured as a system of logical, purposeful and interrelated processes.<sup>6</sup> Under such circumstances, what was perceived as a question of epistemology in Europe, meant the restructuring of an entire *Weltanschauung* in Russia: the new ideas about human knowledge brought the end of the old unitary picture of the world and ushered in an age of fragmentariness and discontinuity. As a consequence, the alterations in the epistemic field entailed not only a topical shift (ideas, concepts, etc.), but also a thorough reappraisal of the ways in which these ideas were produced and disseminated. Predictably, this process was as fundamental as it was tortuous. This article argues that the reconsideration of the way in which new knowledge is made possible is as important for our understanding of the advent of modern humanities as the new ideas themselves.

Although different intellectual trends in the turn of the century Russian humanities responded to the call for the ‘purification of knowledge’ and emergence of new scientific disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology, etc.) in different ways, the common denominator of these responses was a belief in a unity of different branches of human knowledge in the all-unity of human spirit.<sup>7</sup> The

3. For Foucault’s classical explication of the meaning of the concept of *épistème* cf. Michel Foucault, *Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human sciences*, London – New York, Routledge, 2005, p. xxiii-xxiv.

4. While the integralist view of the humanities is primarily associated with turn-of-the-century neo-idealist Russian intelligentsia, it has outlived the neo-idealist framework. Cf. Randall Poole, ‘Philosophy and Politics in the Russian Liberation Movement’, in *Problems of Idealism: Essays in Russian Social Philosophy*, New Haven, Yale UP, 2004, p. 35. See also Editorial Introduction, ‘The Late Imperial Epistemological Revolution of “Hybridity” vs. The Soviet Counterrevolutionary Episteme of “Simple Things”’, *Ab Imperio*, 2016, 1, p. 9-16 (14).

5. Joseph Bradley, ‘Voluntary Associations, Civic Culture and *Obshchestvennost*’ in Moscow’, In: Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow and James L. West (eds.), *Between Tsar and People. Educated Society and the Quest for public Identity in Late Imperial Russia*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 1991, p. 134. The number of civil associations in Russia began to rise after 1861, but especially after Tsar’s manifesto of October 1905 and the March 1906 Law on Social Organisations giving rise to a profound transformation of the Russian society as a whole. Cf. I. N. Il’ina, *Общественные организации России в 1920-е годы*, Moskva, IRI RAN, 2001, p. 26.

6. The most apposite manifestation of late imperial intellectual outlook can probably be found in the way in which the neo-idealist philosophers of the Vekhy group conceived of human existence, whereby the latter was not conceived of as an autonomous phenomenon, but as part of a unity of human self and the world [*vseedinsvo*]. Cf. Poole, op. cit., passim.

7. The neo-Kantian philosophy, which was the single most influential orientation of turn-of-the-century Russian intelligentsia, held disparate views over a number of important issues, but it was fairly unanimous in a belief that there is a strong unitary underpinning to Geisteswissenschaften (in today’s parlance, humanities and social sciences). On the culmination of the neo-Kantian resistance to role-purification in turn-of-the-century Germanophonic academia see Kusch, op. cit., 191-192, on the similarities and differences between neo-Kantian thinkers over the issue, see Kusch, op. cit., 170-175.

epistemological platform which crucially informed the scientific integralism of late imperial years and its reluctance to fully endorse the role-specification in the humanities is to be sought in the powerful workings of the platform of *vseedinstvo*; more precisely, in the belief that the all-unity of emerging new disciplines is provided by their assumed participation in the universal principles of *logos*. Significantly for my purposes in this article, it is the strong adherence to, and challenge of, the principle of sense that would emerge as one of the dominant features of Russian discourses on art and language in the early twentieth century. Indeed, the vicissitudes of the question of sense decisively informs the vital for this article question of the autonomy of art and language.

The appraisal of socio-epistemological conditions of disciplinary division itself was, however, made possible by a seemingly only technical, yet seismic change in the organization of knowledge production: the professionalization of knowledge and *institutional turn* in the humanities. The rapid institutionalization of scientific knowledge, the most visible manifestations of which were the professionalization of research and the expansion of the network of research institutes crucially facilitated the acceptance of the new humanities.<sup>8</sup> The professionalization of research had one important consequence: the agents of knowledge production became now not only socially immersed, but also social institutions *par excellence*. In their recent attempt to provide a synthetic account of the ways in which modern intellectual movements shape scientific knowledge, Scott Frickel and Neil Gross are taking precisely the *social* nature of modern scientific communities as the determining aspect of modern-day science. Although importantly different from other social institutions, scientific/intellectual movements ‘are constituted through collective action aimed at the institutionalization of new social forms across the sciences and humanities.’<sup>9</sup> The focal point of knowledge production shifted from the individual thinker to a professional scholar whose intellectual engagement is part of a ‘collective effort’ and is channeled through a network of other scholars and scientific institutes.<sup>10</sup> The idea that knowledge may be the product of a research collective also importantly redistributed scientific competence, from an individual researcher to a research community.<sup>11</sup> It is my argument that any comprehensive assessment of Russian

8. As suggested earlier, the institutionalization of knowledge in Russia cannot be viewed in isolation from larger processes of expansion of social organisations and general transformation of public sphere in late imperial years. After a short period of stagnation caused by the 1917 Revolution, social organizations were acknowledged by the First Soviet Constitution in 1918 and entered the golden age during NEP years 1921-1929. See Il’ina, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

9. Scott Frickel and Neil Gross, ‘A General Theory of Scientific/Intellectual Movements’, *American Sociological Review*, 2005, 70, p. 225.

10. On the ways in which this transformation impacted both the ‘thematic and structural rearrangement of knowledge’ see Maksim Demin, «Дилемма профессии: советские институты и современная университетская философия в России», *Науки о человеке: история дисциплин*, A. N Dmitriev, I. M. Savel’eva, Moskva, VShE, 2015, p. 483-507.

11. On the rise of collective competence and the process of diffusion of trustworthiness in the wake of modernisation of research see Torsten Wilholt, ‘Collaborative Research, Scientific Communities, and the

studies of art and language must address not only cognitive parameters (e.g., the inauguration of new conceptual dominants, terminological shifts and taxonomies of value), but also, and as a matter of priority, the novel modes of *social organization of research*.<sup>12</sup> To give an example of such strategy in practice, the following pages will assess both cognitive processes and a variety of extrinsic, social factors that vitally impacted knowledge production, in the pre-eminent scientific/intellectual movement in revolutionary Russia: the Moscow Linguistic Circle.

#### AUTONOMY AND SENSE: THE EPISTEMIC/COGNITIVE REVOLUTION IN THE RUSSIAN STUDIES OF ART AND LANGUAGE

The disciplinary emancipation of the Russian studies of art and language had its visible and less visible conceptual dominants. The question of form seems to emerge as a *paradigm* around which the scientific field of Russian studies of language and art developed in the second decade of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> Although much has been written about the concept of form in the context of Russian and early Soviet literary studies, hardly anything has been said about the reasons why it was precisely this concept that came to epitomize the epistemological and disciplinary transformation of the Russian studies of language and art. The complexity of this process cannot be rendered in full here, but some contextual parameters can be relayed. It was in Germany, in the mid-/late nineteenth century, that the concept of form was first used to replace the traditional systematic philosophy of art. The German aestheticians of the period attempted to break with idealist intellectual heritage of Kant and Hegel and shift scholarly emphasis from the pursuit of an idea to the scrutiny of aesthetic object or aesthetic perception.<sup>14</sup> The German psychologist and philosopher Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) was first to pronounce the artistic form as the primary object of aesthetic study and to embark on an analytic, rather than transcendental, study of the process of aesthetic perception. Herbart proposed the 'examination of harmonic relationships between intuitive elements', thereby emancipating the object of aesthetic analysis from explanatory semantic

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Social Diffusion of Trustworthiness'. *The Epistemic Life of Groups: Essays in the Epistemology of Collectives*, Michael S. Brady and Miranda Fricker (eds.), Oxford, Oxford UP, 2016, p. 218, *passim*.

12. The complete absence of adequate coverage of socio-epistemological inquiry in Soviet science, in Soviet times and in the first years of Glasnost, has first been observed in: B. G. Iudin, «Социальный генезис советской науки», *Вопросы философии*, 1990, 12, p. 16-31.

13. In Kuhn's classical (as much as contested) pronunciation, there are two important preconditions for a scientific achievement to establish itself as a paradigm: to be 'sufficiently unprecedented to attract an enduring group of adherents [...]', but also 'sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to resolve'. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Third edition. Chicago – London, The University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 10.

14. On the rise of aesthetic formalism in the nineteenth-century German art scholarship, see Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikononou, 'Introduction', in *Empathy, Form and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics*, Santa Monica, CA, Getty Centre for the History of Arts and Humanities, 1994, p. 5-17.

systems.<sup>15</sup> This cognitive revolution went hand in hand with the disciplinary diffusion of human knowledge. It is a similar inauguration of ‘non-semantic’ approach to art through the concept of form that hallmarked the disciplinary reconfiguration of the Russian studies of art and language in the early twentieth century. As if confirming Max Weber’s assessment that the arrival of modernity (or ‘intellectualist civilizations’ as he put it) is best reflected in the emphasis on uniquely aesthetic values in the arts,<sup>16</sup> revolution in the Russian studies of language and art was won on the premise that it is the objective and formal sides of art that matter, rather than its semantic content.

My use of the term ‘revolution’ to reflect on the way in which the non-semantic study of art and language came to embody the spirit of social emancipation and the new vision of human knowledge, is not accidental. In February 1920, Aleksei Buslaev, the founding member of the Moscow Linguistic Circle, the institution that is at the centre of my attention here, claimed that the task of this institution was precisely to perform a ‘methodological revolution’.<sup>17</sup> This methodological turn inwards, from external semantic systems towards the system within, is a corner-stone of the modern science of art and language in Russia; on this perspective, art and language are seen as demanding immanent explicative methodologies because they are immanent ontologies, or self-governed systems. Such a viewpoint is based on one rather unique premise, formulated by Viktor Shklovskii in 1916: according to Shklovskii, what distinguishes art is that it is a device that performs the ‘estrangement of things’ [*примем ‘остранения’ вещей*]. For its vital role in the rearrangement of Russian literary studies, the mechanism of estrangement could be termed the conceptual dominant of Russian Formalism as a scientific/intellectual movement.<sup>18</sup> With this much-quoted line the young Shklovskii ‘freed’ art from an ontologically subordinate status in relation to *reality*, espoused since Plato and his inauguration of the concept of art as mimetic representation. The concept of artistic form, which is related to the phenomenon of estrangement and which famously but erroneously lent its name to the scientific cluster made up of young linguists who were aiming to methodologically revolutionize the studies of art and language, functioned only as a secondary feature, or a conceptual metonymy of the more powerful, indeed *paradigmatic*, idea that art is an autonomous field with its own, self-governed mechanisms of emergence, growth and decline. If,

15. Mallgrave and Ikononou, op. cit., p. 10.

16. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff, London, Methuen, 1965, p. 243.

17. M. I. Sharir. ‘Вступительная заметка к статье Р. О. Якобсона «Московский лингвистический кружок»’, *Philologica*, 1996, 3, p. 363.

18. With its roots in turn of the century Gestalt philosophy, the concept of *dominant* has arrived in Russian studies of art and language through the mediation of the German aesthetician and philosopher Broder Christiansen. In Christiansen’s 1909 *Philosophie der Kunst*, which was translated into Russian in 1911, dominant was defined as ‘any formal or objective element [of a work of art] that ‘comes to the fore and takes the leading role’ in the shaping of the aesthetic object. Cf. Broder Christiansen, *Philosophie der Kunst*, Hanau, Clauss & Feddersen, 1909, p. 242.



then, the concept of form operated as a conceptual dominant of the scientific field of Russian studies of art and language in the 1910s and 1920s, the paradigm itself was constituted around the idea of non-semantic and autonomous conception of art and language.

The scientific movement known today as Russian Formalism was not the only intellectual beneficiary of the terminological and conceptual meanderings I am describing. Rather, the enquiry into and high emphasis on the concept of form was shared by other participants in the scientific field of study of art and language in early twentieth century Russia. While the different proponents of this hermeneutic revolution all adhered to the conceptual dominant, they differed in their assessment of the semantic autonomy of form. The vicissitudes of the articulation of the concept was rooted in the ambiguity of the very idea of form and its insufficiency to become the sole vehicle for paradigmatic changes that were underway in Russian studies of art and language. The battle was fought less over the issue of form as such than over what that concept of form communicates: whether the shift of emphasis towards form will absolve the fields of art and language from semantic bonds or they will remain subordinate to external explanatory systems. Thus, in the midst of the non-semantic coup and a demand for literature to be considered as an autonomous domain, an alternative conceptual dominant emerged to take on the previous one, conquer the scientific field and in fact restore the old *épistème*. Inaugurated, or rather, reintroduced by the Russian philosopher Gustav Shpet, the category of ‘inner form’ was meant to assert itself as an alternate conceptual dominant, one with the power to challenge the validity of the non-semantic conceptualisation of form and, seemingly at least, establish a bond between those new epistemological conditions and the logocentric legacy of the past.<sup>19</sup> The exploration of inner form was put forward as the epistemic framework broad enough to accommodate both inner relations and phenomenal manifestations of an artwork, or language act through a study of generative structures. This corrective aimed at ameliorating the rigid conception of formal structure by securing its ties with its projected inner core, with what we may call the *ideal* form of the form. How these transformations of paradigm content were negotiated and moulded by socio-institutional networks is the subject of the remaining part of the discussion.

19. With long history in European thought, which seizes back to the times of Plato and Aristotle, inner form was inaugurated in European intellectual legacy by the 19th century German philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt. Humboldt’s most faithful follower and the first adept of the theory of inner form on Russian soil was the nineteenth-century philologist Aleksandr Potebnia, the chief adversary of the twentieth-century modernizers of the Russian studies of art and language.

THE MOSCOW LINGUISTIC CIRCLE AND THE 'INSTITUTIONAL TURN' IN  
THE RUSSIAN STUDY OF ART AND LANGUAGE

In my discussion of Herbart, I have suggested a continuity between the turn to the non-semantic and the disciplinary differentiation of knowledge. The Russian espousal of autonomous and non-semantic study of art and language was informed by similar processes and challenges to the existing scientific field. Here I would like to cast additional methodological light on the ways in which these tectonic changes in scholarly beliefs took shape. The disciplinary and scientific revolution in the Russian humanities was vitally informed by group and institutional dynamics. In particular, the modification of paradigm in the Russian studies of art and language was an institutional affair *par excellence* and any attempt to study those changes without insight into the socio-institutional processes that made them possible would render that account partial at best.<sup>20</sup> The idea that art and language are autonomous and self-regulated domains was inaugurated in Russia around the time of the First World War in a socially ordered institutional setting. It emerged, specifically, within the context of what Frickel and Gross describe as 'collective effort[s] to pursue research programs or projects for thought in the face of resistance from others in the scientific or intellectual community.'<sup>21</sup> At the forefront of that network in the Russian humanities stood the Moscow Linguistic Circle, an institution that has recently been qualified by Maksim Shapir as the 'the single most significant assembly of Russian philologists [...]'.<sup>22</sup> In this assessment Shapir refers to the influence the Circle exerted on the subsequent development of the studies of art and language in Russia and outside its borders; according to him, the reason why the Circle failed to exert an even greater influence lies in its inner conceptual heterogeneity, which ultimately lead to its decline. But Shapir seems to overlook one important paradox: the Circle's import – its pivotal role in disseminating new ideas in Russian studies of art and language in the period 1915-1925 – stems precisely from its inner conceptual heterogeneity. The ability of the Circle to host a variety of theoretical orientations caused the irreconcilable rift within the Circle, but it also brought about the unprecedented level of dissemination of its ideas in the Russian discourse on art and language in the late

20. One observes a near complete disregard for the socio-institutional aspect of the non-semantic revolution in the scholarship on the movement, from Viktor Erlich's pioneering monograph (1955) to the present day accounts: cf. Igor' Pil'shchikov 'Наследие русской формальной школы и современная филология', *Антропология культуры*, т. 5, 2015, Moskva, p. 319-350 or Iona Svetlikova, *Истоки русского формализма. Традиция психологизма и формальная школа*, Moskva, NLO, 2005. A major exception to this practice can be found in a number of methodologically innovative works of Aleksandr Dmitriev: 'Эстетическая автономия и историческая детерминация: русская гуманитарная теория первой трети XX в. в свете проблематики секуляции', Moskva, RGGU, 2002, p. 11-48 and (with Ian Levchenko) 'Наука как прием: еще раз о методологическом наследии русского формализма', *НЛО*, 2001, 50, p. 195-246.

21. Frickel and Gross, op. cit., p. 206.

22. Shapir, op. cit., p. 361.



1910s and 1920s. At the level of conceptual productivity, it was precisely these intra-institutional group dynamics that led to the diversification of ideas in the Russian studies of art and language in the period 1915-1929; it is this fact that the accounts of Soviet humanities are still slow in taking into account. In order to give a comprehensive account of the emergence of institutional knowledge in Russia at the time of major socio-epistemological transition, I will deploy the model of scientific development proposed by the American sociologist Nicholas Mullins to elucidate the emergence of institutional scientific knowledge. Mullins's model, which takes into full account both intrinsic/cognitive and external/social aspects of the growth of knowledge identifies the following four stages of the process: the initial 'normal phase', which involves the production of innovations, the 'network' stage, in which the scholars gather in research centres around a certain scientific ideology, the 'cluster' stage, in which a group attempts to intellectually 'colonise' other groups or movements and the final, 'specialty phase', in which the dissemination of scientific influence takes place.<sup>23</sup>

Prior to this sociometric scrutiny of the intellectual growth in the Moscow Linguistic Circle, we should first pursue and explicate the specificities of its institutional emergence. The Circle was established under the auspices of the Commission for Dialectology of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in the early months of 1915.<sup>24</sup> The initiative of three young linguists, Petr Bogatyrev, Aleksei Buslaev, and Roman Jakobson, to establish a research cluster/group was endorsed by their senior peers, the chief representatives of historical linguistics and neogrammarianism, Fëdor Korsh and Aleksei Shakhmatov, many of whose postulations the methodological revolutionaries of the Moscow Linguistic Circle would subsequently rise against.<sup>25</sup> Thus, from the very outset, the revolutionary transformation of Russia's system of high learning and research was an affair that was thought out and executed from within, from the heart of the system of high learning and research it purported to challenge. This pattern of intra-institutional competition and struggle for scholarly prestige set some new parameters for the development of scientific specialty that would come to epitomise the type of intellectual dynamic within the Moscow Linguistic Circle itself. For that reason, as much as for its emphatic call for the phonetic autonomy of language and the repudiation of the dependence of language on its semantic substratum, the Moscow Linguistic Circle blazed the trail in Russia for a modern academic institution. Interestingly, the Circle's rebellion against the

23. Nicholas Mullins, *Theories and Theory Groups in Contemporary American Sociology*, New York, Harper and Row, 1973, p. 20-25.

24. The Circle also owes its name to the Commission for Dialectology, which, upon its establishment in September 1901 was initially named – the Moscow Linguistic Circle. The name was later to be changed to the Moscow Commission for Dialectology. Cf. N. N. Durnovo. 'Воспоминания о Московской диалектологической комиссии', *Русская речь*, 2001, 5, p. 2, n. 3.

25. Draft constitution of the Circle was written and signed by Korsh. As a token of respect, Korsh was named the honorary president of the Circle, but he passed away on the day when the foundation act of the Circle was received, on 16 February 1915.

traditional study of art and language embodied in the Imperial Academy of Sciences was soon to be reiterated and restaged inside the Circle itself. With the intensification of the activities of the Circle, the rapid growth of knowledge in the scientific field of art and language and the swift disciplinary specialisation in what, until only recently, had been one unitary field, led to what can be termed a counter-revolution within the revolutionary camp of non-semantic studies of art and language. As it will transpire, more thoroughly than any of the external challenges to its ideas,<sup>26</sup> the autonomous conception of art and language was to be shaken by a doctrinal dispute originating from within the institutional milieu of the movement itself.

In the early months of 1918, when the post-Revolutionary turmoil was still far from over, the Moscow Linguistic Circle resumed its activities. Owing to the scope of its scholarly expertise, but also to the centrality of its position in the emerging Soviet nomenclature of scientific institutions,<sup>27</sup> the Circle quickly reclaimed its position as an institutional nucleus of what was to become the scientific field of early Soviet studies of art and language. The fact that they acquired official recognition rather early provided the Circle with dynamic social resources for what recent scholarship in the sociology of science would call the 'micromobilization' platform, or a social context (an official, or semi-official network of similar organisations and institutions) within which the activities of scientific movements exert their outreach, increase participation, and recruit new followers.<sup>28</sup> As a result of this solidification of its social position and rising symbolic-cum-scientific prestige, the Circle began to appeal to the new generation of talented philologists of logico-semantic orientation, such as Nikolai Zhinkin and Maksim Kenigsberg, while continuing to be held as the frontline of new ideas by the established researchers of their sister institution, the Petrograd-based Society for the Study of Poetic Language' (OPOIaZ<sup>29</sup>), Viktor Shklovskii, Evgenii Polivanov, Sergei Bernshtein, and others. The Moscow and Petrograd scholars of different generations and views on the roles of phonetics and semantics in the studies of language and poetic art were soon to form two different camps. Under such institutional circumstances, the young breed of philologists,

26. I am herewith referring to the challenges posed to the autonomous conception of art and language by the official Soviet Marxism. Cf. Denis Ustinov, 'Материалы диспута "Марксизм и формальный метод" 6 марта 1927 г.', *НЛО*, 50, 2001, p. 247-278.

27. In autumn 1918 the Circle was officially registered with the Narkompros Department of Science and Research (later known as Glavnauka). Cf. Shapir. op. cit., p. 363.

28. Scott A. Hunt and Robert Bentford, 'Collective Identity, Solidarity and Commitment', In: David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, Oxford, Blackwell, p. 438.

29. Unlike the MLC, OPOIaZ did not enjoy the institutional backing of the State University at its inception stage. Yet, the lack of core 'organisational resources' was compensated by the financial support of one of its founding members, Osip Brik, owing to which the new-formed society was able to launch its periodical publication, *Сборники по теории поэтического языка*, as early as in 1916. When, in 1919, OPOIaZ was recognised by Narkompros the movement received access to crucial 'micromobilisation context' and strengthened its position in the scientific field of early-Soviet studies of art and language.

who joined the Circle in 1918, found themselves dominated by the adherents of the Circle's old, phonocentric and non-semantic agenda.<sup>30</sup> However, when, in 1919, the sessions of the Circle began to be frequented by the recently repatriated philosopher Gustav Shpet, debates over the aforementioned set of issues gradually began to take a different turn. Having studied first under the major pre-revolutionary philosopher and psychologist Georgii Chelpanov in Kiev and Moscow, and then under Edmund Husserl in Göttingen, Shpet had already made a name for himself as a philosopher with a pronounced interest in phenomenology and hermeneutics. Shpet's charismatic personality<sup>31</sup>, an image reinforced by his international education, significantly redistributed symbolic power in the Circle. The logico-semantic views on language and poetic art, which were alien to the core members of the Circle and which had therefore been on the margins of the Circle's intellectual agenda, were now being galvanised and taking a firm hold. Debates over the relationship between semantics and phonetics in poetic discourse resurfaced with force in the Circle's debates in 1920 and ultimately led to an open rift between two irreconcilably opposed factions. The minutes of the Circle's sessions, as well as the personal testimonies of various members, provide a fascinating account of the institutional polarization and, more importantly, testify to the powerful impact of institutional changes on the changes of ideas.<sup>32</sup>

The environment of contest and debate reshaped the scientific dynamics in the Circle, but what merits particular attention is the fact that this cognitive re-configuration appeared in direct relation to the differentiation within the Circle, which was initiated by the appointment of Gustav Shpet as the full-time member of the Circle.<sup>33</sup> One cannot but recall in this context Joseph Ben-David and Randall Collins's stipulation that the emergence of new scientific specialties occurs not only when 'persons become interested in the new idea, not only as intellectual content, but also as a potential means of establishing new identity and [...] new occupational role'.<sup>34</sup> With Shpet's official joining the Circle in the early months of 1920, and with Jakobson's and Bogatyrev's emigration to Czechoslovakia at about the same time, the symbolic power-balance in the Circle was changed for good. Now, with the symbolic and real authority of

30. Indeed, the minutes and proceedings from the sessions held in the Circle in 1918 and 1919, show the absence of semantic issues in practically all papers and the dominance of the issues such as 'poetics, style, *siuzhet*, poetic language'. For extracts from the discussions held in 1918 and 1919 see Galina Barankova, 'Московский лингвистический кружок', *Русская речь*, 1999, 6, *passim*.

31. Apollinariia Solov'eva, who studied under Charles Bally in Geneva in 1914-1915 and whose professional career in Russia began at MLC, wrote in her diary the following impressions of Gustav Shpet: 'Шпет—это фейерверк!'. *Личный фонд А. К. Соловьевой*, «Воспоминания о Шпете», РГБ НИО Отдел рукописей, Фонд 709, Опись 1, ед. хр. 23.

32. Boris Gornung, *Полод времени. Статьи и эссе*, Moskva, RGGU, 2001, especially p. 343-379.

33. Shpet became a full-time member of the MLC in 1920, but attended the sessions of the Circle earlier. See Boris Gornung, *op. cit.*, p. 375; also, Shapir, *op. cit.*, p. 362.

34. Joseph Ben-David and Randall Collins, 'Social Factors in the Origins of a New Science: The Case of Psychology', *American Sociological Review*, 1966, 31/4, p. 451-465 (452).

Gustav Shpet on their side and in the absence of two major advocates of the non-semantic approach to language, the scholars of the previously dominated logico-semantic orientation could conceive of and put into practice a prosperous institutional and social life for the ideas they advocated. The process in which the growth of logico-semantic sub-specialty within the studies of art and language decentred the existing field of study was equally fascinating. The shift of symbolic power not only gave voice to the formerly marginalised young researchers, but it also swayed some of the founding members to switch sides and join the opposite camp. As Boris Gornung testifies, Aleksei Buslaev, the founding member of the Circle went over to Shpet's side in early 1921, by which time Grigorii Vinokur, another senior member of the Circle, had already done the same.<sup>35</sup> The intra-institutional differentiation through which this dispute manifested itself, much like the earlier intra-institutional differentiation that had engendered the Circle itself, shows how inseparable the conceptual disputes are from power-dynamics within scientific groupings in general. This last point, which emerges in relation to the emergence and development of the Moscow Linguistic Circle, sends another important signal to the researchers of Russian humanities on the threshold of modernity, namely that of the methodological insufficiency of intellectual history and need for our approaches to be ameliorated with the apparatus of the sociology of scientific research.

The series of conceptual and personal intra-institutional disputes that erupted in the Moscow Linguistic Circle in 1920-1921 were thus generative of a bifurcation with momentous consequences for the broad range of disciplines, ranging from linguistics to literary theory. The final split of the Circle into two factions, the one that advocated a pre-eminence of phonology in the study of language and poetry (empirical approach) and the other one, which argued for the semantic/logical dependence of language and poetry, took place in the early months of 1921 in the aftermath of a fervent debate over Roman Jakobson's book *Noveishaia russkaia poeziia* (published in Prague in 1921, but written in late 1920) in which the Russian linguist famously defined poetry as 'an utterance oriented towards/on [its own] expression' (*vyskazyvanie s ustanovkoi na vyrazhenie*). Jakobson's radical advocacy of self-referentiality of poetic discourse and his equally audacious marginalization of the semantic, communicative and referential functions/capacities of language were met with disapproval by the adherents of logico-semantic approach, Shpet, Buslaev and others. Predictably enough, the staunch supporters of Jakobson's 'phonocentrism' were the formal-empiricists from OPOIaZ, Osip Brik, Viktor Shklovskii and Boris Kushner, and from the Moscow camp, the young linguist Rozaliia Shor<sup>36</sup>. In an

35. Gornung, op. cit., p. 365.

36. Although it exceeds the scope of this paper, Shor's own intellectual meanderings are worthy of a separate study. While coming of age under the spell of radical ideas originating from early OPOIaZ and Moscow Linguistic Circle, Shor was soon to become a follower and close collaborator of Shpet. In 1927, she would go on to publish a fervent renunciation of non-semantic approach to literature titled 'Формальный метод на

attempt to find a middle ground between two factions, Aleksei Buslaev, with the help of Boris Gornung and Maksim Kenigsberg, submitted for discussion a proposal entitled ‘Theses on Linguistics and Phonetics’ (‘Tezisy o lingvistike i poetike’). The debate that unfolded around Buslaev’s ‘Theses’ duly reflected the differences between two camps of what used to be a unified paradigm in the wake of specialty growth. The core members of the Circle, supported by their allies from OPOIaZ inclined to empirical, phonetic approach to language and poetry, in which language was taken as a neutral system of sounds and where the art of language emerges as a fully autonomous domain. Shpet and his followers deemed this phonocentric agenda of MLC and OPOIaZ as ‘reductionist’ and therefore in need of a methodological reconsideration: the phonetic aspects of language (physical sound, in this case) are constitutive ‘elements of linguistic structure’ and cannot be studied as self-sufficient parts, argued the advocates of logico-semantic approach within the Circle.<sup>37</sup> Phonology, as Shpet would come to argue later, can be relevant for linguistics only as part of ‘semasiology’, i.e. a general theory of meaning. In 1921, to fully implement this dictum, the advocates of logico-semantic approach summoned a rather obsolete, and, in the context of Russian modern humanities, all but notorious, concept of *inner form*.<sup>38</sup> Shpet’s revitalization of the concept of inner form as the conceptual alternative to the autonomous phonological poetics now emerges as a thorough denunciation of the epistemological foundations on which the transformative changes in the Russian studies of art and language stood. One may even go further than that and assert that Shpet’s arguments that art and language are not autonomous domains, but are phenomena that have their essence elsewhere, in the realm of ideas, amounted to a rejection of the project of intellectual modernity as a whole.

The dissociation of the Moscow Linguistic Circle along the lines of phonological poetics and semantics provides an apposite example of the cognitive evolution of institutional research in the humanities. Specialty growth, which occurred at some stage in the process, brought about a pivotal change both on level of the cognitive content and on the level of social organisation of knowledge. What Nicholas Mullins would call a ‘colonisation’ by a new subgroup and the concomitant intra-institutional differentiation in the Circle triggered a thorough reorganisation of an entire scientific field in the 1920s; in turn, this reorganisation decisively shaped the landscape of the Soviet study of art and

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западе. Школа Зейферта и «реторическое» направление», *Ars poetica*, Moskva, 1927, p. 127-143. In 1930s, Shor’s career takes another radical loop, when she joins the camp of Niko Marr’s ‘New Theory of Language’.

37. Put forward by Shpet in an attempt to ameliorate the existing, phonological conception of verbal art, the word *structure* is understood by the Russian philosopher in a loose Gestalt sense, as an assembly of inter-related parts.

38. As suggested earlier in the text, it was precisely against the understanding of language as inner form as articulated by Potebnia, that the non-semantic revolution in Russian studies of language and art broke out.

language in one of the intellectually most prolific decades in Russian history. Having defeated the adherents of phonological approach and having taken full control over the Moscow Linguistic Circle, the ‘colonising’ group/movement (Shpet’s circle) went on to disseminate their scientific ideology more efficiently by using the recently established Soviet network of scientific institutions under the aegis of Glavnauka [*Главное управление научными, научно-художественными и музейными учреждениями*]. In September 1921, Gustav Shpet joins the newly founded Russian/State Academy for Research in Arts (until 1925 RAKhN, from 1925 onwards GAKhN), which was soon to become one of the leading institutions in early Soviet arts and humanities.<sup>39</sup> The department of philosophy at RAKhN, which was set up and chaired by Shpet himself, secured research positions to a number of the Circle’s members by 1923, thereby putting into being what Mullins has described as the *cluster* stage, in which social organisation of research (arranged jobs, steady publications, etc.) was fully accomplished.<sup>40</sup> The logico-semantic enquiry into the concept of form, the victorious of the two specialties of the Circle becomes the core research programme of the Philosophy Department at RAKhN, where it is initially developed and, in the second half of the 1920s, turned into as a scholarly routine. In other words, the ‘cluster phase’ in which the logico-semantic strand of research solidifies and finds the most propitious mobilization context for its dissemination in the Philosophy Department of RAKhN, soon gives rise to the ‘specialty phase’, in which the formerly novel research is turned into a scientific dogma. Shpet’s own intellectual efforts in the 1920s continue to revolve around the semantically informed theories of art and language, which also represent a specialized growth of the type of inquiry that commenced upon his arrival in the Moscow Linguistic Circle.<sup>41</sup> In a like manner, the young newcomers to the MLC, Nikolai Zhinkin, Nikolai Volkov, Rozaliia Shor, and others, continued to disseminate the same ‘scientific ideology’ – the conception of art and language with a strong underpinning in logical enquiry and systematic philosophy.

The dynamic that was underway in the Circle in the period 1915-1921, in which the dominant orientation of phonological empiricism was first fortified, then challenged and finally institutionally colonised by the group advocating the priority of semantics in linguistics and poetics exemplifies what Mullins defined as a ‘takeover’ of a scientific cluster by another scientific-intellectual movement competing for a dominant position in the field. However, while

39. The research in GAKhN was organised into three departments, Sociology, Psychology and Philosophy. Departments were divided into four sections, which were dedicated to five art-forms, literature, spatial arts, music, theatre and applied arts. As of 1924 Shpet was the Vice-President of the Academy. With regard to the programme of activities of GAKhN, see their *Отчет 1921-1925*, Moskva, GAKhN, 1926, p. 95-158.

40. Predictably, the disciplinary purification of the Moscow Linguistic Circle meant that the non-semantic approach to art and language lost one of its two institutional strongholds and that its centre shifted to Petrograd, to OPOlaZ and its institutional extension, the State Institute of the History of Art (ГИИИ).

41. Two of Shpet’s seminal works of the 1920s, *Эстетические фрагменты* (1922) and *Внутренняя форма слова* (1927), are indicative of this assessment.



Mullins's model enables us to establish the underlying logic of scientific discovery behind the intra-institutional differentiation in the Circle, it falls short of accounting fully for the mechanisms that made the differentiation possible. The pivotal moment in which a lingering conceptual dispute in the Circle turns into an all-institutional fissure was made possible once the formerly marginalised specialty received a certain, intra- or extra- institutional form of legitimisation. As Ben-David and Collins reiterate, scientific breaks often take more than just cognitive contents to happen and take roots. Thus, although the challenge to the ideas of phonological empiricism could have emerged earlier in the Moscow Linguistic Circle, this alternative conceptualisation could not have prevailed before it has received some, real or symbolic, form of legitimacy. That legitimacy is necessary to make the prospect of adopting a new idea and receiving a new scholarly identity and/or occupational role plausible and propitious. Gustav Shpet's arrival in the Moscow Linguistic Circle brought about precisely this kind of legitimisation: simply put, the rejection of 'phonocentrism' was made possible only once the adoption of logico-semantic scientific ideology had proven itself to be able to offer similar or even more propitious prospects of professional advancement.

In summary, I should reaccentuate the key paradox underlying the process of the rise and fall of the programme for autonomous, non-semantic research in the Moscow Linguistic Circle. The institutional modernisation, fully epitomized by the Circle, first enabled the emergence of radically new epistemic contents, which were then to be challenged by an opposing scientific ideology. This opposing scientific ideology, termed herein the logico-semantic approach to art and language, emerged victorious in an intra-institutional dispute between two modern research clusters. The striking feature of the intellectual 'coloniser' of the Moscow Linguistic Circle is its resemblance with the *épistème* against which the non-semantic revolution in Russian humanities was fought. The notion that the logico-semantic research programme, which took shape in the intra-institutional competition in the Moscow Linguistic Circle, revisits the late nineteenth-century integralist agenda gives rise to a suggestion that the epistemic outcome of the differentiation within the Moscow Linguistic Circle was in fact, an asynchronous gesture. One cannot avoid recalling Weber's rational and pessimistic verdict on the inseparable link between the emergence of autonomous aesthetic values and social modernisation: in the light of Weber's assumption, the triumphant intra-institutional conquest of the Moscow Linguistic Circle by the logico-semantic programme signals the restoration of integralist epistemology, while the defeat of the idea of art as an independent system signifies the defeat of universal belief in 'individualized and subjective elements in human experience'.<sup>42</sup>

42. K. Peter Etkorn, 'Sociological Demystification of the Arts and Music: Max Weber and Beyond', in: Vatro Murvar (ed.), *Theory of Liberty, Legitimacy, and Power: New Directions in the Intellectual and Scientific Legacy of Max Weber*, London, Routledge, 2006 [1985], p. 129.